

# The Princeton Theological Review

OCTOBER, 1922

---

## YET ANOTHER CRITICISM OF THE THEORY OF EVOLUTION

Such criticisms are called for and are even demanded by the general and the lively interest in the subject. The questions as to the truth and as to the significance of evolution are no longer merely academic ones. Persons of all classes and in almost all places are thinking and even talking of it. They ought, therefore, to receive the guidance which they need and want. To give it, consequently, is the duty of all capable teachers, whether scientific or philosophical or theological. Sincere inquiry must be aided along all possible lines. Specially is this so when the matter of interest is bound to exert a mighty practical influence, and particularly if it create an atmosphere which affects even those not conscious of breathing it. Now it is thus with the "theory of evolution." Its world-view, because of its monism, is both at first so attractive and afterwards so compelling that, if yielded to, it must at last revolutionize civilization. The most serious aspect of all this is that the influence of evolution, whether for good or for ill, is strongest in the most important of all spheres, that of religion. It is bound to determine our conception of God and of man and of duty and of sin and of destiny. There are many who say that its establishment as fact means the collapse of Christianity and even of religion in general. There are others who declare that such establishment, while destructive of Christianity, will redound to the perfection of true religion. Under these conditions no honest criticism of the theory of evolution can be superfluous. The deepening interest in it, the practical significance of it, its influence on religion, and above all on Christianity, confirm this judgment.

## IS GOD ALMIGHTY?

The central question in religious philosophy today is not that of the existence of God but of the kind of God who exists and with whom we have to do. It is possible to repeat the first clause of the creed, "I believe in God," while rejecting all of its other articles and having little sympathy with Christian theism. The tendencies of modern thinking, it must be admitted, are unfavorable to a full-orbed theism, and H. G. Wells is justified in his belief that "the new thought is taking a course that will lead it far away from the moorings of Omnipotence."<sup>1</sup> Evolution, for example, has taken the place of special creation or even of creation altogether, idealism has done away with the material world and with the necessity for its creator, pluralism has assigned to God only the place of *Primus inter pares* in the society of intelligent spirits, the metaphysical attributes have been discarded as beyond mortal ken and as having no value for religion, God is no longer worshipped as creator but as father, democracy would do away with a Heavenly King as well as with earthly kings, the Divine power has been limited in the interests of human freedom or even of self-communicating Divine love, while, to cap the climax, the poignant experiences of the greatest war in history have made acute in thousands of minds the old dilemma proposed by the problem of suffering: Is God lacking in love or limited in power?

To hail the dawning of a "creedless faith" in a Deity who is finite, temporal and changeable is to take advantage both of popular currents of thought and of the situation created by the war, but it must not be overlooked that the war and the disillusionment that has followed have produced another and quite different reaction in many thoughtful minds. If men have doubted the power of God they have come to doubt even more the power of man. We are not so sure as we were formerly that Western Civilization can permanently be taken for granted. The war has proved how

---

<sup>1</sup>*God the Invisible King*, p. 158.

effectively the edged tools of invention can be used for mutual destruction, and their effectiveness will no doubt be largely increased in the event of the new Armageddon now freely predicted by responsible statesmen. Preventives of war such as commerce, finance, ease of communication, education and diplomacy have proved their inadequacy, and progress is no longer seen as something inevitable and automatic in the course of human evolution. The conviction is deepening that society cannot save itself by its own efforts, and the utterances of statesmen, economists, educators and business men show their belief that at any rate a civilization founded on selfishness is doomed to destruction. If society cannot save itself it can only be saved from outside itself, whether deliverance is to come without observation through new accessions of Divine grace and power, or, according to the hope quickened now as at the dawn of the Christian era in many hearts, by the advent of a supernatural Deliverer. Human impotence naturally makes its appeal to Omnipotence: our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth. The question of our title is not lacking in timeliness and we may find it profitable to seek for its answer in the threefold field of Scripture, of religious experience and of philosophical discussion.

### I. THE BIBLICAL DATA.

To examine the Biblical writings with the topic of the Divine omnipotence in mind is to be convinced anew of the unity of Scripture. It may be said without exaggeration that belief in the almighty power of God is assumed in every book, if not in every chapter and every verse. Even where moral limitations are suggested, as when it is said that God "interposed with an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have a strong encouragement" (Heb. vi. 17, 18), or, "in hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised before times eternal" (Tit. i. 2), or, "he abideth faithful; for he cannot deny himself" (2 Tim. ii. 13), it is significant that these

passages really contain the strongest kind of affirmation that God's promises and purposes of grace toward his people will certainly be fulfilled. It is this aspect of omnipotence in which the Scriptural writers are naturally most interested.

The Bible writers do not discuss omnipotence in the abstract, but far more impressively they describe the exercise of almighty power in the concrete spheres of creation, of providence, of history and of redemption. Naturally they do not, as in a treatise on systematic theology, deal with the attributes of God separately, but their thought passes easily from the wisdom of God in devising his plans to his power in carrying them out and to his benevolence in providing for the good of his people. Thus power and wisdom are combined in such passages as Is. xl. 28 and Amos iv. 13, and the plenitude of the Divine attributes, majesty and might and goodness and righteousness and mercy, is celebrated in Ps. cxlv.

The names of God in the Old Testament, while for the most part uncertain in their etymology, give prominence in their usage to the idea of transcendent power. By the name "I AM" (Ex. iii. 14), says W. T. Davidson, God makes himself known as "the one, true God, self-existent and self-sufficient, the cause and ground of all being."<sup>2</sup> Bavinck finds the idea of power prominent in the Divine names and summarizes his discussion by saying: "Jehovah Sabaoth is throughout the Scripture the solemn kingly name of God, full of majesty and glory. Elohim points out God as Creator and Sustainer of all things; El Shaddai makes him known as the Mighty One who puts nature at the service of grace; Jehovah describes him as one who is forever faithful in his grace; Jehovah of Hosts portrays him as surrounded by his serried hosts, ruling over the whole world as the Almighty, and in his temple receiving honor and homage from all his creatures"<sup>3</sup> It is to be noted that while the Greek translators are not uniform in their renderings of the Divine

<sup>2</sup>*Hastings' Encycl. Rel. and Ethics*, vol. vii, p. 254, col. 1.

<sup>3</sup>*Gereform. Dogmatiek*<sup>2</sup>, Pt. ii, p. 135.

names yet they clearly see in them the idea of almighty power. Thus the name El Shaddai, of whose 41 occurrences 31 are found in Job, is 16 times in Job translated παντοκράτωρ (the Almighty). Jehovah of Hosts (Sabaoth), found 193 times in the Old Testament<sup>4</sup> is sometimes rendered Κύριος τῶν δυνάμεων, or "Lord of the powers" (7 times in the Pss. and in 2 Sam. vi. 2 and 18; 1 Ki. xviii. 15; 2 Ki. iii. 14); more often by Κύριος σαβωθ (the favorite rendering in Isaiah and found also in 1 Sam. i. 3 and 11; xv. 2); and still more frequently by Κύριος ὁ παντοκράτωρ, "Lord Almighty" (almost uniformly in the 91 times of the Minor Prophets, very often in the 34 times in Jeremiah, and in 2 Sam. v. 10; vii. 8, 26, 27; 1 Ki. xix. 10; 2 Chron. xi. 9; xvii. 7 and 24).

In the New Testament the term Κύριος (Lord), used of God 120 times and of Christ 368 times,<sup>5</sup> emphasizes in its usage and its derivation the idea of supreme power. The designation παντοκράτωρ (Almighty) is used alone or in combination with other titles 10 times (2 Cor. vi. 8; Rev. i. 8; iv. 8; xi. 17; xv. 3; xvi. 7 and 14; xix. 6 and 15; xxi. 22).

The sovereign and unlimited power of God expressed or implied in the Divine names is directly asserted or unmistakably assumed in a number of passages both in the Old and the New Testaments. Some of the most striking of these are in the form of rhetorical questions, as in Gen. xviii. 14, "Is anything too hard for Jehovah?" This passage in its Greek form is apparently in mind when it is said in the annunciation to Mary, "No word from God shall be void of power" (Luke i. 37). Similar rhetorical questions are asked in Num. xi. 23, "Is Jehovah's hand waxed short?" Is. i. 2, "Is my hand shortened at all, that it cannot redeem? or have I no power to deliver?" in Jer. xxxii. 26, "Is there anything too hard for me?" Statements to similar effect are made in Is. lix. 1, "Behold, Jehovah's hand is not shortened that it cannot save," and in Jer. xxxii. 17, "Ah Lord Jehovah! Be-

<sup>4</sup>According to Professor R. D. Wilson in this REVIEW, July, 1920, p. 463.

<sup>5</sup>So again Professor R. D. Wilson in this REVIEW, July, 1921, p. 393.

hold, thou hast made the heavens and the earth by thy great power and by thine outstretched arm; there is nothing too hard for thee." Job, in the time of his enlightenment, declared, "I know that thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of thine can be restrained" (xlii. 2); and in Moses' song it is said, "See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand" (Deut. xxxii. 39). For the most solemn and repeated assertions of sole and transcendent existence and of absolute, unlimited power we turn to the later chapters of Isaiah, where we read: "I, Jehovah, the first and with the last, I am he" (xli. 3); "Before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I, even I, am Jehovah; and besides me there is no Saviour" (xliii. 10, 11); "Thus saith Jehovah that created the heavens, the God that formed the earth and made it, that established it and created it not a waste, that formed it to be inhabited: I am Jehovah; and there is none else" (xlv. 18, and cf. verses 5, 6, 12, 14, 21 and 22). The idea of God that is taught in these chapters of Isaiah has been well characterized by George Adam Smith as an absolute monotheism which finds no rival among the faiths of the world: "God has been exalted before us, in character so perfect, in dominion so universal, that neither the conscience nor the imagination of man can add to the general scope of the vision. . . . It is already as lofty an idea of the unity and sovereignty of God as the thoughts of man can follow."<sup>6</sup>

It might be thought that the New Testament writers with the Old Testament before them would ignore by tacitly assuming the doctrine of Divine omnipotence, but we find that their testimony is equally strong and even more explicit. Those who saw in the ministry of Jesus a proof of supernatural forces working among men were "astonished at the majesty of God" (Luke ix. 43) and were "amazed and

<sup>6</sup>Expositors' Bible, "*Isaiah*," vol. ii. p. 236. Certainly W. James could not have these passages in mind when he says in his *Pluralistic Universe* (p. 111) that the God of David and Isaiah, was "essentially finite."

glorified God" (Mk. ii. 12). Such control over the forces of nature and of human life suggested an unlimited reservoir of power at Jesus' command. The statements of Jesus as to the power of faith and of the prayer of faith look in the same direction. If the scene of the Transfiguration was Mount Hermon as is generally supposed, an added point is given to the saying, "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto THIS mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you" (Matt. xvii. 20).<sup>7</sup> The familiar and repeated promises made to believing prayer in all four Gospels open to the believer a realm of unlimited possibility, and certainly such promises could not fairly and truly have been made if there were only limited resources at the disposal of the Hearer and Answerer of prayer. "All things are possible to him that believeth" (Mk. ix. 23) because faith has access to Divine resources and "all things are possible with God" (Mk. x. 27; Matt. xix. 26). The words last quoted are confirmed by the solemn prayer in Gethsemane, "Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee: remove this cup from me: howbeit not what I will, but what thou wilt" (Mk. xiv. 36). The brief words of this prayer, coming from the heart of Jesus and from the heart of the situation in the hour of his deepest human need, teach us that the two conceptions of Father and Sovereign may be and must be combined in our thought of God. They show us that the omnipotence of God is the major premise expressed or implied in all true prayer, and that the wise and holy will of God prescribes the limits within which his power is to be exercised.

In the Acts and Epistles the Divine power is evidenced in the fearlessness and enthusiasm of the apostolic witnesses as they carry the gospel in triumph from Jerusalem to Rome. It is seen in signs and wonders accompanying

<sup>7</sup>An illiterate but pious man was heard to comment thus upon this passage: "You people read the Bible backward; you read it as if it said, If ye have faith as a mountain, ye can move a grain of mustard seed."

their preaching and in notable conversions such as that of Paul the persecutor and of the multitude at Pentecost. It is seen in the wonderful energy of a Paul who gives the secret of abundant labors in the words, "striving according to his working which worketh in me mightily" (Col. i. 29). It is seen in "the exceeding greatness of his power" (Eph. i. 19) working in the hearts of believers. The standpoint of the Apostle is exactly that of the Old Testament prophets in his belittling of human agency in the work of redemption and his exalting of the sovereign initiative and gracious operation of God. Thus Jeremiah's description of the new covenant, which results not from Israel's obedience but from their moral failure, is wholly in terms of the Divine initiative: "I will put my law into their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jer. xxxi. 33). In spite of (or because of) Isaiah's strenuous insistence upon moral reformation, it is clear that he regards the will and power of God as the ultimately determining factor in Israel's redemption: "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake; and I will not remember thy sins" (Is. xliii. 25). Ezekiel, who gives the most realistic description of Israel's utter moral and spiritual degradation, gives the strongest expression to the sovereign grace and power of God: "I do not this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for my holy name . . . And I will sanctify my great name . . . and the nations shall know that I am Jehovah . . ." And I will sprinkle clean water upon you . . . A new heart will I give you . . . Not for your sake do I this" (Ezek. xxxvi. 22-32). This is essentially Paul's doctrine of a salvation which excludes boasting. No recorded prayer makes larger draughts upon Divine resources than does Paul's prayer in Ephesians (iii. 14-19), but as if overwhelmed by the untold riches of the treasure house of grace and power he exclaims, "Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think according to the power that

worketh in us, unto him be the glory." "I have asked for a cupful" says J. H. Jowett, "and the ocean remains! I have asked for a sunbeam and the sun abides." Adolphe Monod comments on the passage: "Nothing can restrain or bound the power of God toward us; nothing in him, nothing even in us; no limits set to his power, for it knows no limits; not even the weakness of our prayers, and the imperfection of our knowledge, for he is able to transcend all our demands and all our conceptions."<sup>8</sup> In the prophetic parts of the New Testament it is predicted that the enemies of the Messiah will be the footstool of his feet (Mk. xii.36), and that he will put all enemies under his feet including death (1 Cor. xv. 25, 26), that he can subdue all things to himself, and that to him every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that he is Lord (Phil. iii. 21; ii. 10, 11), that the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of Christ (Rev. xi. 15), that God will take his great power and reign, and that the shout of triumph will finally be raised, "Hallelujah: for the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigneth" (xi. 17; xix. 6).

Instead of saying that God is omnipotent the Bible writers are more apt to say that he created the heaven and the earth, or that he delivered his people from Egypt, or that he raised up Jesus from the dead. God's power is shown in the three spheres of nature, history and the Incarnation, and most signally shown in the creation of the world and the absolute control of natural forces, in bringing Israel out of Egypt with a mighty hand and a stretched-out arm, and in raising the Lord Jesus from the dead.

The stupendous miracle of creation is the primary and fundamental exercise of infinite power, and the primary exercise of faith is to believe that the worlds were formed by the word of God (Heb. xi. 3). To fix the relation of God to the world as its creator is to lay the foundation of all further thought of God and to place man in right rela-

<sup>8</sup>Quoted in Moule: *Ephesian Studies*, pp. 133, 134.

tions with God. The world is God's world, the sea is his and he made it and his hands formed the dry land, science is the reading of his thoughts after him, history is his story, the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof, nations are the instruments of his providence and men are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand. When Neesima, founder of the "Dooshisha" in Japan, found as a lad a copy of the opening words of the Bible in Chinese, he read the first verse and as he says: "I put down the book and looked around me, saying, Who made me? my parents? No, my God." Then he prayed: "Oh, if you have eyes, look upon me; if you have ears, listen for me."<sup>9</sup> If God is creator men ought to worship him as the living God (Acts. xiv. 15; xvii. 25; Rom. i. 29; Dan. v. 23), and adore his power and majesty as shown in his creative works. His power is magnified in contrast with the powerlessness of other gods (Ps. xcvi. 5; Jer. x. 11, 12) with the littleness and weakness of men (Ps. viii. 3, 4), with the insignificance of nations who are as a drop in the bucket and less than nothing and vanity (Is. xl. 15, 17), and with the contingency and transitoriness of nature (Ps. cii. 25-27).

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the contemplation of his created works inspires the lofty strains of psalmist, poet and prophet. He makes light his garment; he lays the beams of his chambers in the waters; he makes the clouds his chariot; he measures the waters in the hollow of his hand; he made a decree for the rain, and a way for the lightning and the thunder. These are but parts of his ways, but the thunder of his power who can understand? (Ps. civ. 2, 3; Is. xl. 12; Job xxviii. 26; xxvi. 14). God's glory is in the heavens, but his glory is above the heavens (Ps. viii. 1), and he is exalted above all the earth (Ps. lvii. 5, 11). The heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain him (2 Chron. vi. 18). He has absolute control over every part and every power of nature; heaven is his throne and the earth

---

<sup>9</sup> Davis: *Life of J. H. Neesima*, pp. 20, 21.

his footstool because his hand made all these things (Is. lxvi. 1, 2; Acts vii. 42, 50).

Since God is the creator of all things all power comes from God (Ps. lxii. 11), no power can resist him, and his power extends over all.<sup>10</sup> It may be, as Tertullian says, that God's glory is greater if he labored, but the energy exercised in creation is the energy of omnipotence: "By the word of Jehovah were the heavens made; for he spake, and it was done; he commanded and it stood fast" (Ps. xxxiii. 6, 9). Everything that can be named is brought within the sweep of his creative activity. He created "the heavens and the earth" (Gen. i. 1), the usual formula, though not used with scientific exactness, for the visible universe or for the material world with all its contents and inhabitants (Ps. cxv. 15; cxxi. 2; Matt. xi. 25; Mk. xiii. 31; Acts xvii. 24).<sup>11</sup> He made all the nations of the earth (Acts xvii. 26); he is the creator of Israel (Is. xliii. 1); he is the creator of the idol makers and of those who destroy (Is. liv. 16); he creates light and darkness and even evil (Is. xlv. 7); he will create new heavens and new earth (Is. lxv. 17). As creator of all things he has supreme control over all natural forces and over men and nations. With equal ease he can make Assyria the rod of his anger to chasten Israel (Is. x. 5) and he can punish Israel's enemies. His purpose cannot be frustrated; his hand is stretched over the nations; who can turn it back?

<sup>10</sup>Pearson, *Exposition of the Creed*, p. 431, makes these three points. He says that "as in regard of the extension, he hath power over all things; so in respect of the intension, he hath all power over everything" (p.66).

<sup>11</sup>The addition of "the sea and all that in them is" (Ex. xx. 11, etc.) makes no essential difference as will be seen from Ex. xxxi. 17 which is without the addition. Gen. i. 1 is echoed in Jno. i. 3, "All things were made through him;" Eph. iii. 9, "God who created all things;" Rev. iv. 11, "Thou didst create all things." The expressions, "maker of heaven and earth" in the Apostles' creed and "maker of all things visible and invisible" in the Nicene creed are practically interchangeable. The fullest expression is in Neh. ix. 6, "Thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all things that are therein, the seas and all that is in them, and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshippeth thee."

(Is. xiv. 27). No weapon formed against his people shall prosper (Is. liv. 17); his counsel shall stand: none can deliver out of his hand; he will work and who can hinder? (Is. xlvi. 10; xliii. 13). He does his will in the armies of heaven and amongst the inhabitants of the earth (Dan. iv. 35). No power in space or time or in the spiritual world or in the exigencies of human existence can separate from his love (Rom. viii. 38, 39).

The belief in the almighty power of God in creation is with the saints of the Bible no merely formal article in their creed but enters vitally into their religious experience. With kings and prophets and reformers and apostles it gives confidence to their faith and is made the basis of their appeal in prayer (2 Ki. xix. 15; Is. xxxvi. 16; Neh. i. 5, 10; ix. 6, 22; Acts. iv. 24). The assurance that because the God of Israel is the Creator he can and certainly will fulfill his gracious promises to Israel is strong in the lofty and impetuous eloquence of the later chapters of Isaiah. Because he is the Creator of the ends of the earth, he will give power to the faint (Is. xl. 28); it is he who has created the heavens and given breath to man that has called Israel in righteousness (xlii. 5, 6); it is the Lord who made all things that says of Jerusalem, She shall be inhabited (xliv. 24, 26); it is he who made the earth and stretched out the heavens that shall build the city and let the exiles go free (xlv. 12, 13); it is the maker of Israel and of the heavens who shall destroy the fury of the oppressor (li. 12); it is the maker and husband of Israel who is her Redeemer, the God of the whole earth (liv. 5).

As the omnipotence of God is the solution of Israel's problem in Isaiah, so it is the solution of the personal problem in the book of Job. The patriarch's questionings as he struggles with his own sufferings and with the problem of suffering are not answered, as modern logic might suggest, by the thought that God's power is limited, but by sustained and overwhelming revelation of the power of God as shown

in his wondrous works (xxxviii-xli). Job gains a new vision of God, not only of his power but of his wisdom and holiness, and exclaims, "I know that thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of thine can be restrained, I uttered that which I understood not, things too wonderful for me which I knew not. I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (xlii. 2, 6).

It is well known that the interpretation of the first three verses of Genesis has recently been the subject of active debate. Following the suggestion first made by Raschi, a Jewish exegete of the eleventh century, some scholarly expositors take the first word *B'reshith* in the construct state, "In the beginning of God's creating," etc., so that verse 1 is no longer an independent sentence but a sort of protasis to verse 3, verse 2 being a parenthesis. The sense would then be: "When God began to create the heavens and the earth (now the earth was without form, etc. . . .) God said, Let there be light." The tendency of those who adopt this construction is to revive the Gnostic-dualistic theory of an original formless matter, co-eval with the Deity and merely shaped or molded by him. The subject is of interest to us because of its bearings upon the question of omnipotence.

(1) Verse 1 is usually taken as an independent sentence, describing the calling into being (from non-being) of the universe by the Divine word and will; then verse 2 describes the condition of the created world before light and order were evoked. The words so understood form a simple and majestic introduction to the narrative of the six creative days, and contain the maximum of truth about the relation of God to the world in the minimum of words, excluding the errors of materialism, polytheism, pantheism and dualism. The term *bārā* may not be sufficient in itself to bear the whole weight of the *ex nihilo* doctrine of creation, but it is admitted that if the writer wished to convey the idea of absolute origination or calling from non-existence into existence there is no more appropriate word, or in fact no

other appropriate word, in Hebrew to express the thought.<sup>12</sup> What is decisive is the general conception of God in this chapter, utterly foreign to that of a Demiurge forming the world out of more or less intractable material: there is no obstacle to fulfillment of his will—He said, Let there be light, and there was light; and no failure or defect in its complete accomplishment—He saw that all things were good.<sup>13</sup> Ryle maintains that Genesis never deviates from the pure monotheism of the Israelitic prophets, and says that while Hebrews xi. 3 (creation out of nothing) is not asserted in verse 1, yet “it is implied in the general representation of God’s omnipotence, and his sole personal action.”<sup>14</sup> Comparing the Babylonian and Hebrew cosmogonies, K. Fullerton says: “In the one account creation is described in the most mythological terms. It is a struggle between the gods of light and order against the monstrous powers of darkness and anarchy. In Genesis God speaks and it is done. There is no struggle, no effort here, only the calm of absolute

<sup>12</sup>Skinner notes the following points in the use of the word: “(a) The most important fact is that it is used exclusively of *divine* activity—a restriction to which perhaps no parallel can be found in other languages. (b) The idea of *novelty or extraordinariness* of result is frequently implied, and it is noteworthy that this is the case in the only two passages of certainly early date where the word occurs. (c) It is probable that it contains the idea of *effortless* production (such as befits the Almighty) by word or volition (Ps. xxxiii. 9). (d) It is obvious (from this chapter and many other other passages) that the sense stops short of *creatio ex nihilo*,—an idea first explicitly occurring in 2 Mac. vii. 28. At the same time the facts just stated, and the further circumstance that the word is always used with the acc. of product and never of material, constitute a long advance towards the full theological doctrine, and make the word ‘create’ a suitable vehicle for it” (*Genesis: Internat. Crit. Com.*, p. 15).

<sup>13</sup>Jowett attempts to assimilate the Platonic representation in the *Timaeus* to the doctrine of creation out of nothing, saying that “the original conception of matter having no qualities is really a negation, and might as well be represented by nothing.” He admits however that the Platonic conception has less of freedom or spontaneity than the Jewish description, and that the Creator in Plato “is still subject to a remnant of necessity which he cannot wholly overcome” (*Dialogues*, ii. p. 492).

<sup>14</sup>*Genesis*, Cambridge Bible, p. 3, and see p. xlvi.

power, the effortlessness of omnipotence." Of Genesis i. he says, "This chapter stands out as the magna charta of ethical monotheism, a bulwark against the polytheism and the pantheism of the ancient world, and all the ethical and spiritual confusion which they inevitably produced."<sup>15</sup>

(2) Genesis i. 1 may be again regarded as an independent sentence, but now as a sort of heading or summary of the contents of the chapter, so that the first statement in chronological order is verse 2. "The heavens and the earth," it is insisted, must refer to the ordered universe, as in ii. 1. It is possible to import dualism into this interpretation, as is done by H. G. Mitchell who says: "*God created*. Not from nothing, but, as appears from v. 2, from matter already in existence."<sup>16</sup> The best representative of this second interpretation, however, is Dillmann who says that the question of the origin of the chaos is not raised, but that if raised there is no doubt that the author "on the ground of his conception of God must have decided that the world considered as to its material has the ground of its possibility and of its existence in the Divine will. . . . That God spoke and it was done—therein lies not only the ease and effortlessness of his creation, his omnipotence (*Allmacht*), but also the fact that he created of his own consciousness and will."<sup>17</sup>

(3) The third interpretation, taking the word "beginning" (*Reshith*) in the construct state with what follows, makes both verses 1 and 2 introductory to verse 3. The meaning becomes: When God began to create—(now the earth was without form—and the spirit of God was brooding—), then God said, Let there be light. Here again, it may be noted that nothing is said about the origin of the primitive formless earth or chaos, and no dualism of an eternally co-existing matter is necessarily implied. Thus Raschi, who first advocated this construction on the ground that "beginning" in

<sup>15</sup>"The Problem of the Old Testament," *Biblical World*, Nov., 1912, pp. 333, 335.

<sup>16</sup>*Genesis* in the "Bible for Home and School" series, p. 29.

<sup>17</sup>*Genesis*<sup>4</sup>, 1882, pp. 18, 19.

Scripture is not used absolutely but always means the beginning of something, says nothing to intimate that a Greek dualism is implied in it,<sup>18</sup> and Bennett who follows his lead says that the origin of the chaos is left open to question.<sup>19</sup> Gunkel, however, insists that the notion of the creation of a chaos is contradictory and whimsical; chaos is the world before the creation. He believes that neither the Old Testament as a whole nor P. reaches the conception of creation *ex nihilo* (2 Mac. vii. 28; Heb. xi. 3); the meaning rather is that God found a chaos before the creation and made the world out of formless matter (Sap. Sol. xi. 18). So "creation" means a specially great miracle, but not a wholly unique act involving omnipotence.<sup>20</sup>

It cannot be said that the arguments either for the construct state of *Reshith* or for the inferences drawn from it by some modern exegetes are very convincing. Holzinger, (*in loc.*) who accepts the Raschi interpretation on the analogy of Gen. ii. 2b-7, admits that *Reshith* is used absolutely in Is. xlvi. 10, "declaring the end from the beginning." The "beginning" in any language, as with ἀρχή in Greek, is of course usually the beginning of something, but this does not prevent it from being used in an absolute sense when the subject requires. In the New Testament we read of "the beginning of the gospel" (Mk. i. 1), "the beginning of signs" (Jno. ii. 11), "the beginning of confidence" (Heb. iii. 14), but this does not prevent the writers from using the word absolutely in Jno. i. 1; 1 Jno. i. 1; Matt. xix. 4 and 8, where the meaning is practically the same as Matt. xxiv. 21 "the beginning of the cosmos," or Mk. x. 6 "the beginning of creation." "The essentially *relative* idea of *Reshith*," insisted on by Skinner<sup>21</sup> is a slender foundation upon which to build the theory of chaos before the creation, and is more than offset by the implications of the word *bārā*.

<sup>18</sup>*Pentateuch*, ed. Dessauer, 1863, p. 2.

<sup>19</sup>*Genesis*, New Century Bible series, *in loc.*

<sup>20</sup>*Genesis*, pp. 90, 91; and cf. *Schöpfung und Chaos*, p. 7.

<sup>21</sup>P. 13 n.

To the assertion that a created chaos is a contradiction, the remark of Delitzsch is in point: "If it does not contradict the idea of an Almighty God that the development of the cosmos was effected in a series of gradually advancing stages, neither will the fact of his having made chaotic primitive matter, as yet formless and confused, the foundation of this development."<sup>22</sup> But what of the position taken by Gunkel, Skinner and others that "the heavens and the earth" of verse 1 must mean the ordered cosmos and cannot refer to the creation of the watery waste of verse 2, the proper designation for which is "the earth"? We must remember that the events of verses 1 and 2 cannot on any theory be described except in terms of our present knowledge, which necessarily has to do with the ordered world. We cannot expect scientific precision when terms are used in a pictorial sense and in the meagre vocabulary of Gen. i. Thus the "earth" is used not only in connection with the heavens in verse 1, and to describe the chaotic waste of waters in verse 2, but of the fully formed dry land in distinction from the waters in verse 10. There is no reason why "the heavens and the earth," the usual term throughout Scripture, as we have seen, for the visible universe, could not be used of the world in the primitive as well as in the later stages of its development.

The practically uniform interpretation of Genesis i. by other Scriptural writers, by the church fathers, by all the versions and by the succession of Jewish and Christian exegetes should carry some weight with the exegete of today. Under any theory of authorship the connection is certainly close between the creation narrative and Isaiah xl. ff. which is filled with the thought of God as Creator and reiterates the refrain, "I am the first; I am God, and there is none else." The uncompromising monotheism of Isaiah leaves no place for an uncreated chaos existing side by side with God. Skinner observes that in the Genesis cosmogony "the monotheistic principle of the Old Testament has obtained classical ex-

<sup>22</sup>*Genesis*, E. T., vol. i. p. 80.

pression. The great idea of God, first proclaimed in all its breadth and fulness by the second Isaiah during the exile, is here embodied in a detailed account of the genesis of the universe, . . . The central doctrine is that the world is *created*—that it originates in the will of God, a personal Being transcending the universe and existing independently of it.”<sup>23</sup> On the modern theory of authorship it is peculiarly difficult to suppose, with Strachan,<sup>24</sup> that P., an intensely Jewish and legalistic writer, had immediately declined from the pure monotheism of II. Isaiah and had introduced into it the idea of a (Greek) dualism, so foreign to the Isaian conception, to his own narrative even in the same chapter and to every other Scriptural writer whether earlier or later. If another cosmology, as Strachan suggests, is taught in Gen. i., it is certain that P. did not succeed in imposing it on his countrymen. “Most Jewish philosophers,” we read in the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, “find in *Breshith* (Gen. i. 1) creation *ex nihilo*,”<sup>25</sup> and modern Jewish exegetes, even when they see in Gen. i. a derivation from Babylonian and other cosmogonies, say that the Genesis account was meant “to impress and to express the twin-doctrines of God’s creative omnipotence and of man’s dignity as being destined on earth to be a creator himself.”<sup>26</sup>

In the Apocryphal writings the statement in 2 Mac. vii. 28, “Look upon the heaven and the earth—God made them

---

<sup>23</sup>*Genesis*, pp. 6, 7. Skinner’s position is puzzling, for after saying the above he adds: “It is indeed doubtful if the representation goes so far as a *creatio ex nihilo*, or whether a pre-existent chaotic material is postulated; it is certain at least that the *kosmos*, the ordered world . . . is wholly the product of divine intelligence and volition.” He then speaks of God’s “absolute sovereignty over the material He employs,” “the effortless expression of his thought and purpose,” and says that each part, pronounced good, “perfectly reflected the divine thought which called it into existence.” A pre-existing material so absolutely responsive to the effortless volition of God could scarcely have existed independently of God.

<sup>24</sup>*Hastings’ Encycl. of Rel. and Ethics*, vol. iv., p. 229, col. 1.

<sup>25</sup>Art. “Creation,” vol. iv., p. 336.

<sup>26</sup>Art. “Cosmogony,” vol. iv., p. 281.

of things that were not (οὐκ ἔξ ὄντων) is offset by Wisdom of Solomon xi. 17, "Thy Almighty (παντοδύναμος) hand that made the world of formless matter (ἔξ ἀμόρφου ὕλης)." In the latter passage, however, while the form of expression seems influenced by Greek thought, the whole purpose is to emphasize rather than to belittle the power of God. In the context it is said, "Who hast made all things by thy word" (ix. 1); "Wisdom was with thee and was present when thou madest the world" (ix. 9); God could send upon his enemies "newly-created" (νεοκτίστους) beasts breathing out fire (xi. 18); "For thou canst show thy great strength at all times . . . ; and who can withstand the power of thine arm? For the whole world before thee is as a little grain of the balance. . . . For thou canst do all things . . . And how could anything have endured, if it had not been thy will? or been preserved, if not called by thee?" (xi. 21, 22, 23, 25). There is no hint here of any intractable material, and it is not surprising that many have seen in this "formless matter" an allusion to a *creatio secunda*, not excluding a *creatio prima*.

The New Testament writers, basing themselves on the Genesis narrative, are explicit in negating the theory of a pre-existent matter. The Logos or Son was in the beginning and all things were made by him (Jno. i. 1, 2); he was before all things (Col. i. 17); and before the foundation of the world (Jno. xvii. 24); God calls the things that are not as though they were (Rom. iv. 17); and we understand by faith that the worlds, or ages, were framed by the word of God so that what is seen has not been made out of things which appear (Heb. xi. 3).

The church fathers under Platonic influence might easily have seen in Gen. i. 1, 2 the dualism of a pre-existing matter if this view had any plausible exegetical support, but we find them with practical unanimity adopting the alternative of creation out of nothing as in harmony with the Biblical narrative. They saw with a sure instinct that to set up pre-existing matter as an independent sphere of being, co-

eternal with God and supplying him with indispensable means for his work or prescribing the lines it must follow,—to conceive of God, as we might say, with an “environment” in no way dependent upon his will—would be to detract from his power and glory if not to set up another deity. In Rouët de Journal’s *Enchiridion Patristicum* (new ed., 1913) we find 40 references under the heading “*Creatio ex nihilo*,” and the number might be considerably increased. That the world was called into being out of nothing by the Divine word was the opinion of Hermas (Mand. I. 1; Sim. 8), Theophilus (*ad. Autol.* ii. 4, 10 and 13), Aristides (*Apol.* 4), Irenaeus (*adv. Haer.* i. 22.1; ii. 10.4), Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* v. 14), Tertullian (*contra Hermog.* 33, and often), Hippolytus (in Gen. i. and *Ref. Haer.* x. 32), Origen, who holds that God was always creative but yet says that God did not find matter already in existence, but made the things that are out of nothing (*de Princ.* i. 4; ii. 164; *Com. on John* 18, 3), Lactantius (*Div. Inst.*, ii. 9), Augustine (*Conf.* xi. 5; xii. 7, etc.).<sup>27</sup> Justin alone, arguing that Plato derived his doctrine from Moses, says that the world was made of formless matter (ἐξ ἀμόρφου ὕλης, *Apol.* i. 10), but as he says elsewhere that God made all things, that the world was made or begotten (γεννητός, *Dial c. Thyph.* 5), and in his *Address to the Greeks*, assuming its genuineness, says in opposition to Plato that God made what he made by his own power (22), he was certainly no unqualified adherent of the Greek dualism.

We have gone at some length into the subject of the interpretation of Genesis i. because of the fundamental importance of the passage and the radical difference which has been developed in its recent discussion. Into an interpretation, that of Raschi and his followers, which is confessedly rhetorically weak and throws into undue prominence the

<sup>27</sup>The usual expression in Greek is ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων but ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος (Hermas), ἐκ μὴ ὄντος (2 Clem. ad Cor. i. 8), and ἐκ μὴ ὄντων (Hippolytus in Gen. i) are found without essential difference of meaning.

creation of light in verse 3 (while the creation of the heavens and the earth, i. 1 and ii. 1, is plainly the main topic of the writer), has been imported the dualistic idea of a pre-existent matter, entirely foreign to Hebrew thought and impairing the purity of its monotheism and without a trace of influence in any other verse of the Bible or in any version. The burden of proof plainly rests on the advocates of the new exegesis, and with a good exegetical conscience we may regard the opening verses of Genesis, telling with matchless simplicity and beauty of the stupendous miracle of calling the universe into being by almighty power, as the appropriate doorway to the temple of Scripture, rather than as an obtrusive defect in the architecture which mars and weakens the impression of the whole.

2. Briefly we notice the two other spheres in which for the Scripture writers the power of God has been signally exhibited. The great historic miracle of the Old Testament is the deliverance of Israel from Egypt with a mighty hand and a stretched out arm. The indelible impression which this event or series of events made on the national consciousness is reflected by psalmists and prophets and in the historical books. "Ask now of the days that are past . . . since the day that God created man upon the earth . . . , Did ever a people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as thou hast heard, and live? Or hath God essayed to go and take him a nation from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, and by wonders, and by war, and by a mighty hand, and by an out-stretched arm, and by great terrors, according to all that Jehovah God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? Know therefore this day, . . . that Jehovah he is God in heaven above and upon the earth beneath; there is none else" (Deut. iv. 32-34, 39). Appropriately the works of nature responded to this unique exhibition of Divine power: "When Israel went forth out of Egypt, the sea saw it and fled; the Jordan was driven back, The mountains skipped like rams, the little hills like lambs.

Tremble, thou earth, at the presence of the Lord" (Ps. civ. 1, 3, 4, 7). The power of God shown in the events of the exodus furnishes constantly the theme of praise and the basis of appeal in prayer and is the ground of confidence in God's covenant relation to his people: His right hand is glorious in power; he is fearful in praises, doing wonders (Ex. xv. 6 and 11); "I am Jehovah thy God, who brought thee up out of the land of Egypt: open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it" (Ps. lxxxii. 10); "What one nation in the earth is like thy people . . . whom God went to redeem for himself . . . to do great and terrible things" (2 Sam. vii. 23). As Ps. civ. is the psalm of creation so Pss. cv. and cvi. are psalms of redemption from Egypt. "Who can utter the mighty acts of Jehovah, or show forth all his praise? (Ps. cvi. 2). In Ps. cxxxvi. the creation of the world and deliverance from Egypt furnish the double sphere in which God's power and goodness are displayed; and there is the double appeal to the God of creation and redemption in prayers such as that of Nehemiah, ix. 6 and 9. God deals with nations today as much as he did in the time of Moses and Pharaoh, but never in the history of a nation has his supreme power been so dramatically displayed as in the deliverance of Israel and their establishment in national existence.

3. As the Jews believed in a God who brought Israel out of Egypt, so Christians believe in a God who raised up our Lord Jesus from the dead. Resurrection is, in fact, a sort of correlative to creation; for both are wholly supernatural works and call for the highest conceivable exercise of transcendent power. As creation means lordship over nature and mankind, so resurrection means headship over the church. It points out Jesus as the Son of God with power, possessed of the power of an endless life; it means that he is exalted to lordship over dead and living; that to him has been given for the church the gift of the Holy Spirit; that he has broken the power of death and reigns at God's right hand, now in intercession for his saints and in ultimate triumph over

all his enemies; that he is the head of principalities and powers; that he is the Prince and author of life; that to believe in him is to believe in a God who can raise the dead; that he has broken the power of death for himself and his people; that he can raise up those who are dead in trespasses and sins; that he can break the power of sin and make it possible to walk in newness of life; that to know him and the power of his resurrection opens new possibilities in experience and in service; that he will finally complete our redemption by the change of bodily weakness and humiliation into power and glory. It means that Jesus is the strong Son of God, immortal love; that all authority is given to him in heaven and earth; that he is clothed with "the imperial purple of the universe," traveling in the greatness of his strength, mighty to save. It means the firmest assurance that nothing can separate from his love; it means the omnipotence of God in that aspect in which we are most interested—that of its exercise in the salvation of his people.

The omnipotence of God is the tacit assumption of every page and of every promise of Scripture. It is involved in the transcendent miracle of creation and inspires the final song of triumph, "The Lord God Omnipotent reigneth." It is seen in exercise in the redemption of God's people, in the punishment of his enemies, in the orderly processes of nature, in the grandeur of sea and stars. It is seen in miracles and wonders and signs, works of power and mercy, which cluster around the Incarnation or prepare the way for it. It is seen in spiritual transformations, in taking men from the horrible pit and planting their feet upon a rock. It is seen in its highest exercise in the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus from the dead as Prince of life and giver of eternal life to those who believe on him. It is a power accessible and available for every believer—"the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe."

In a time of spiritual disorder and disillusionment, in the ebb-tide of faith, it is good to think again of the almighty

power of God. If we can share the psalmist's faith and say with him, "Our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth," we can join with him in his praises, "Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things; and let the whole earth be filled with his glory!"

*Lincoln University, Pa.* WM. HALLOCK JOHNSON.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

# The Princeton Theological Review

APRIL, 1923

---

## THE ORIGIN OF THE IDEAS OF DANIEL

Before entering upon the discussion of the origin of the ideas of Daniel, several fallacies must first be considered.

Thus it is claimed that it is possible to determine the time of a revelation from its ideas in the same manner as we would determine that of a mere human production. But, for those who believe in a thinking God who has made the universe including man it is impossible to deny the possibility of a revelation to His creatures of Himself and of His plans up to the capacity of those creatures to receive such a revelation. How and why He makes such a revelation it may be impossible for the objects of it to determine or to understand: but that He can reveal what He desires to reveal must be admitted.

Further, to all who believe that God has begun to make such a revelation it is clear that no limits as to the time and manner and order and emphasis, extent and subject-matter, of such a revelation can be set by the creatures who receive it. These are matters for the Revealer to determine and not for the persons to whom the revelation is made.

To those who accept these premises (and we take it that all Christians must accept them), all objections against the book of Daniel on the ground of the character of the revelation that it contains may safely be looked upon as beyond the legitimate realm of discussion. Whether God saw fit to reveal these truths in the sixth or in the second century B.C. must be a matter of comparatively little importance. What is of importance for us is, that He has revealed them.

To object to the fact of a certain alleged revelation that it is too detailed, or that it is written in veiled language, or in an unusual rhetorical style, or in a novel literary manner, is

## IS GOD ALMIGHTY?

### II. OMNIPOTENCE AND RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

It was a remark of the late Theodore L. Cuyler that "God reigns, even if the devil is trying to." The fact that God reigns brings confidence and assurance, while the fact that the devil is trying to (and trying very hard today) should lead to watchfulness, prayer and the putting on of the whole armor of God. To say that God reigns in history and nature and over the destinies of men is practically to say that God is omnipotent; while to say that the devil is trying to reign is to bring up the problem of evil which has always been an obstacle to belief in omnipotence.

Following a previous review of the Biblical data<sup>1</sup> we wish in this paper to consider the relation between the doctrine of omnipotence and religious experience, keeping especially in mind the two points of the value which the doctrine may have for religious experience and the confirmation it may receive in the religious life and achievements of those who believe in it.

In his *Varieties of Religious Experience* William James contends that certain "metaphysical attributes" of Deity such as aseity, necessariness, immateriality, simplicity, indivisibility, etc., make no definite connection with life and that their truth or falsity makes no vital difference to a man's religion. With what he calls the "moral attributes," however, the case is otherwise. "Pragmatically, they stand on an entirely different footing. They positively determine fear and hope and expectation, and are foundations for the saintly life. It needs but a glance at them to show how great is their significance. God's holiness, for example: being holy, God can will nothing but good. Being omnipotent, he can secure its triumph. Being omniscient, he can see us in the dark. Being just, he can punish us for what he sees. Being loving, he can pardon too. Being unalterable, we can count on him securely. These qualities enter into connection with our life,

---

<sup>1</sup> In this REVIEW, October, 1922.

it is highly important that we should be informed concerning them. If dogmatic theology really does prove beyond dispute that a God with characters like these exists, she may well claim to give a solid basis to religious sentiment."<sup>2</sup> On pragmatic principles one would think that the admitted utility of belief in these doctrines is the strongest possible reason for holding them to be true. James contents himself with saying, however, that it stands as ill with the dogmatic proof of these attributes as it does with the arguments for the existence of God.<sup>3</sup>

Instead of discussing in the abstract the relation between religious experience and belief in omnipotence, it will be more profitable and interesting to seek for illustrations of this connection in the lives of some outstanding saints and heroes of the faith. To turn to the Scriptures for these illustrations would be to traverse again in part the ground we have already gone over. Because they all had faith in the almighty power of God, Abraham believed in a God who could raise the dead. Moses led the children of Israel through the Red Sea, and Joshua through the Jordan; Deborah sang that the stars in their courses fought against Sisera, and Gideon led his band against the hosts of Midian; David went against Goliath in the name of the Lord crying that the battle is the Lord's, and Jonathan went to the camp of the Philistines saying, "There is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few" (1 Sam. xiv. 6); Asa went into the battle crying, "It is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or them that have no power" (2 Chron. xiv. 11, A. V.); Hezekiah prayed against Sennacherib, "Save us out of his hand that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou Jehovah art God alone" (2 Ki. xix. 19); Elijah called down fire from heaven, saying, "The God that answereth by fire let him be God" (1 Ki. xviii. 24); Isaiah saw across the centuries the kingdom of righteousness and of peace; Jeremiah, against the background of doom and disaster, caught the gleams of a mighty

<sup>2</sup> Pp. 445-448, condensed.

<sup>3</sup> Pp. 448.

hope; Ezekiel foresaw displays of almighty power which would convince the world that God is the Lord; the Hebrew children were delivered from the fiery furnace and Daniel from the lions' mouths; Mary became blessed among women believing that no word of God was void of power (Luk. 1. 37); John the Baptist declared that of these stones God could raise up children to Abraham (Matt. iii. 3); the early disciples at Jerusalem spoke the word of God with boldness (Acts iv. 22, 31); and the Apostle Paul could say, "I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me" (Phil. iv. 13). With all these heroes of the faith their belief in the omnipotence of God was no perfunctory assent to a creed, but was a mighty dynamic bringing courage to their hearts and strength to their arms. In this faith they "subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, waxed mighty in war, turned to flight armies of aliens" (Heb. xi. 33, 34). Without this faith there would have been a radical difference not only in their religious experience but in the issue of their lives and in the whole course of Biblical history. In fact without this faith, to put it bluntly, there would have been no Biblical history at all.

In the religious convictions of the Biblical characters the attribute of omnipotence was of course not abstracted from the other Divine attributes. We may say that the two pillars upon which their faith was supported were the omnipotence and the faithfulness of God: God is *able* and God is *faithful*. When the promise of a son, humanly speaking impossible of fulfilment, was given to Abraham and Sarah, Abraham believed that what God had promised he was able also to perform (Rom. iv. 21), while Sarah counted him faithful who had promised (Heb. xi. 11). Faith in the case of both was dependence upon a God who in his character and resources could be absolutely depended on.

These characters of the Bible, it may be said, apart from the halo of sainthood which tradition has thrown about them,

lived in the golden age of faith, in the age of special revelation and of dramatic and unexampled displays of Divine power. It is otherwise with us upon whom the ends of the ages have come. The supernatural, admitting its existence, has receded into the background; our emphasis is properly and almost necessarily upon the orderly processes of spiritual development and upon the ethical and social elements in religion. Whether God is almighty or not is an academic question which may be discussed in the schools but has now no vital relation to religious experience. Before accepting this verdict we may well ponder a remark made by Dr. Wilbur Chapman. When he first studied the lives of men like Abraham, Moses and Paul he thought that these men were the favorites of heaven and that they had a monopoly of God, but on deeper study he saw that God had a monopoly of them. Perhaps if we can find in modern life men of patriarchal faith, of prophetic vision and of apostolic devotion, we might discover that with them also belief in the Divine omnipotence bulks large in their experience and is in fact the secret of their power.

Fortunately we do not have to look far in recent religious biography to find men who in character, zeal and usefulness were cast in the apostolic mold. If we were to seek for the union in one person of a lofty type of personal piety, consuming zeal to preach or to send the gospel to the regions beyond, abundant and unremitting labors continued beyond the limit of three-score and ten, executive talent shown in the management of large enterprises and the administration with scrupulous care of large sums of money, devotion to God combined with sympathy for suffering humanity, we could find no better examples of the union of these qualities than George Müller of Bristol, Hudson Taylor, the founder of the China Inland Mission, Andrew Murray of South Africa and General William Booth of the Salvation Army. Wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world the example of these men of God has quickened faith and caused men to give glory to God. The lives of all four, which may

now be studied in excellent biographies, afford an inviting field for the student of religious experience.

The life of George Müller of Bristol (1805-1898) almost spans the century.<sup>4</sup> Born in Germany he was as a boy and a student, even as a student for the ministry, careless and indeed vicious in his habits. As a boy of sixteen he "was already a liar and thief, swindler and drunkard," and looking backward could say, "What a bitter thing is the service of Satan, even in this world!"<sup>5</sup> The turning point came when as a young man of twenty he attended a meeting of devout believers and for the first time in his life saw a man on his knees praying. Light came to his soul through the "little gospel" of John iii. 16. The stages of his preparation for his life's work were rapidly passed. He learned to pray; he came to read and love the Bible; he learned to seek guidance from God rather than to trust to the judgment of men, even of his own relatives; he read with intense interest missionary biography and decided to devote himself to missionary work; he learned the secret of renunciation in giving up his attachment for a young woman who did not share his missionary enthusiasm; and in the last two years of his theological studies he learned to trust in God for temporal support. Dr. Tholuck at this time recommended him as tutor to certain American students at Halle, one of them being Dr. Charles Hodge.

It is said to be a mark of genius "if the work of a man's life obeys and fulfils a plan which seems to have been made not by him but for him." It was more than coincidence that George Müller enjoyed for two months the free hospitality offered to poor theological students by the great Orphan House at Halle, founded by A. H. Francke (died 1727) in sole dependence for support upon the instrumentalities of faith and prayer. This great institution was an object lesson

---

<sup>4</sup> The life of George Müller may be studied in his journal, *The Lord's Dealings with George Müller* (5 vols. London, Nisbet & Co.), or in the briefer form of this in *The Life of Trust* (final edition with introduction by J. R. Miller, 1898); also in A. T. Pierson's *George Müller of Bristol and His Witness to a Prayer-hearing God*, 1899.

<sup>5</sup> Pierson, p. 20.

to Müller, and the later study of Francke's life awakened the longing to become himself "an Elijah to his own generation" and to have something to point to "as a visible proof that our God and Father is the same faithful God as ever he was; as willing as ever to *prove* himself to be the *living God*, in our day as formerly, *to all who put their trust in him.*"<sup>6</sup>

The steps which led to the founding of the orphanage at Bristol need not be dwelt upon. They include Müller's exemption from military service in Germany because of physical disability; his removal to England hoping to be sent out to the foreign field by a London missionary society; his break with the management of the society because he believed some of their methods to be unscriptural; his preaching for a time at Teignmouth relying upon unsolicited gifts for his support; his removal with his friend Henry Craik to Bristol, and his preaching in the Bethesda Chapel; his gathering in of poor children from the streets to teach and to feed them; his starting, after the example of John Newton, of an autobiographical journal, "The Lord's Dealings with George Müller," which has been called a new Acts of the Apostles; his founding of the "Scriptural Knowledge Institution, for Home and Abroad," whose work attained later world-wide proportions; and finally in his thirtieth year, after a study of the life of Francke and a prolonged period of prayerful waiting upon God, a definite decision to ask from the Father of the fatherless but from no human being for a site and funds and workers and finally for *orphans* in order to establish a home for "God's orphans."

Coincident with these outward events there was a diligent searching of the Scriptures, a growing independence of conventional opinion, and a growing dependence upon God alone alike for guidance and for temporal support, a decision with his new bride to obey literally the command, "sell what thou hast and give alms," and a burning desire to strengthen the faith of believers and to convince unbelievers by providing in his generation an object lesson and an ocular proof of the

---

<sup>6</sup> Pierson, p. 396.

power and faithfulness of God in answer to prayer. "I have joyfully dedicated my whole life," he said later, "to the object of exemplifying how much may be accomplished by prayer and faith."<sup>7</sup> It is interesting to note that in this period he became through study of the Scriptures an ardent believer in the doctrine of election which he had previously rejected, and he found in this doctrine with that of perseverance a powerful support to his faith.

The story of the Ashley Downs Orphanage, of which George Müller was the founder and the director from his thirtieth to his ninety-third year, is too familiar to need to be retold. This enterprise, through which ten thousand orphans were supported and trained for usefulness, was born, baptized and continued in prayer. The significant thing in each annual report is the statement that "without any one having been personally applied to for anything by me, the sum of — pounds, etc., was given to me for the orphans as the result of prayer to God." The voice of A. H. Francke, he said, had spoken to his soul, and he learned from Francke the two-fold principles upon which the Bristol work was conducted: faith in God as the great Provider and Promiser, and love for destitute children especially for the orphans.<sup>8</sup>

In times of difficulty and trial of faith he wrestled with God like Jacob at Peniel, he pled with God like Elijah on Carmel, he even argued with God like Abraham on behalf of Sodom, setting forth the explicit reasons why it would be for the glory of God to continue and maintain the work which was begun in faith for the glory of his name.

In 1851, when a new orphanage was called for, involving an outlay of 35,000 pounds, Müller knew that "naturally" the project of securing this sum without asking any human being for it was preposterous in a high degree and opposed to reason and common sense. He knew that to attempt such a thing—"naturally"—would, instead of promoting the glory of God, make the projector of it a laughing stock and

---

<sup>7</sup> Pierson, p. 293.

<sup>8</sup> See *Life of Trust*, p. 360.

bring religion into disrepute. But hear him as he sets forth without rhetoric or emotion but in the calmest and most matter-of-fact way the arguments pro and con:

There must be a limit to my work and service. Answer: That is true, but I am not sure that I am come as yet to God's limit. Is it not like "tempting God," to think of building another Orphan House for seven hundred more orphans? Answer: "Tempting God" means according to the Holy Scriptures, to limit him in any of his attributes. I, by his grace, do not wish to limit his power or his willingness to give to me, his poor servant, simply in answer to prayer, all the means and every other help and blessing which I shall need to build another large Orphan House. You will not get the means for building and fitting up so large an Orphan House. Answer: Looking at the matter *naturally*, this is indeed a weighty objection. I might, therefore, well tremble, looking at the matter naturally, for where is this large sum of thirty-five thousand pounds to come from? But whilst thus, *naturally*, I have no hope of succeeding, I am not in the least discouraged *spiritually*; for by faith in the living God I say this: He has the power to give me these thirty-five thousand pounds, and much more were it needed; and he has the power in the meantime, to give me also all the large sums required, week after week, for meeting the current expenses for the present state of the work. Moreover, I delight in the greatness of the difficulty as it respects the large sum needed for building and fitting up such an establishment; for I desire to be most fully assured, from the very outset, that I go forward in this matter according to the Lord's bidding. If so, he will give me the means; if not, I shall not have them. . . . How blessed is it to trust in God, and in him alone, and not in circumstances nor friends! . . . I find the great help, the uninterrupted help which the Lord has given me for more than fifteen years, a great reason for going forward in this work.<sup>9</sup>

All this was written January 14, 1851, and that deliberate reflection, not fanatical impulse, was at work is shown by the fact that for some time he told no one, not even his wife, of the new plans, and that for about six months he was never led to pray for means but only for guidance as to whether he should undertake the work. At last when he could go forward in full assurance of all the will of God he writes, May 24: "The greatness of the sum required affords me a kind of secret joy; for the greater the difficulty to be overcome, the

<sup>9</sup> *Life of Trust*, pp. 354-359, condensed, and p. 363.

more will it be seen, to the glory of God, how much can be done by prayer and faith."<sup>10</sup>

With George Müller, as with Hudson Taylor, God was the "Great Circumstance," the great environment and the controlling factor in his life. For the support of his enterprises he depended not on known friends, nor on previous donors, nor even on people in England, but on God who possessed all the wealth of the world and could influence as he willed the minds of men in all parts of the world. In his report in 1872 he says: "The work goes steadily on—we want nothing. No war, no fire, no water, no mercantile panic, no loss of friends, no death, can touch it. It goes on its own steady course. It triumphs over all difficulties."<sup>11</sup>

If Müller had "limited" God in his attribute of power or entertained the conception of a finite Deity which is popular today, it is clear that both his religious experience and his life-work would have been vastly different from what they were. It is certain that he never would have had the audacity to attempt or the ability to perform his great work unless he had taken a God of infinite resources as his "business partner" and had believed, as he said, that he "could not overdraw his account on the Almighty." This man who delighted in difficulties, who burned behind him all the bridges of worldly methods and of human help, who made his boast in God before the sons of men and through sixty-three years was never put to confusion, who raised about \$7,500,000<sup>12</sup> for his various enterprises without asking the aid of a single human being, who sometimes purposely withheld the publication of reports in time of special need, who though faith was tried yet never lacked for the necessities of life for himself or for his orphans, has given to his generation a convincing "prayer test" and has thrown out a challenge

<sup>10</sup> *Life of Trust*, p. 367.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxvii n.

<sup>12</sup> His entire personal estate at his death was appraised at £169 9s. 4d. The head of an institution in this country who has been remarkably successful in raising funds attributes his success in great part, it is said, to a visit to Bristol, England, and to a study of the methods of George Müller.

that unbelief has never answered. Until unbelief, or belief in a finite God, can produce similar results we may say with Spurgeon, "The God that answereth by orphanages, let him be God."<sup>13</sup>

The autumnal fruit in the life of George Müller was abundant. From his seventieth to his eighty-seventh year he travelled in forty-two countries and over two hundred thousand miles, addressing, it is estimated, over three million people. His biographer says, "It may be doubted whether any other man of this century accomplished as much for God and man."<sup>14</sup> The secret of his life and the witness of his experience and work to the omnipotence and faithfulness of God is well summarized in the inscription on his tombstone in Arno Vale Cemetery:

HE TRUSTED IN GOD WITH WHOM  
 "NOTHING SHALL BE IMPOSSIBLE."  
 AND IN HIS BELOVED SON JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD  
 WHO SAID "I GO UNTO MY FATHER,  
 AND WHATSOEVER YE SHALL ASK IN MY NAME  
 THAT WILL I DO THAT THE FATHER  
 MAY BE GLORIFIED IN THE SON."  
 AND IN HIS INSPIRED WORD WHICH DECLARES THAT  
 "ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE TO HIM THAT BELIEVETH."  
 AND GOD FULFILLED THESE DECLARATIONS IN  
 THE EXPERIENCE OF HIS SERVANT BY ENABLING  
 HIM TO PROVIDE AND CARE FOR ABOUT  
 TEN THOUSAND ORPHANS.<sup>15</sup>

The brightest chapter in modern Church history is the record of foreign missionary work, and one of the most notable

<sup>13</sup> W. James in his *Varieties of Religious Experience* speaks of the case of George Müller but dismisses him with some impatience. Müller's prayers are said to have been "of the crassest petitional order" (p. 467), but James ignores the question whether they were really answered. Müller is described as a sturdy beggar, narrow in intellectual outlook, whose conception of Deity "continued the traditions of the most primitive human thought." "Müller, in short, was absolutely unphilosophical" (p. 471).

<sup>14</sup> Pierson, p. 264.

<sup>15</sup> A photograph of the stone is given in Pierson, facing p. 290.

names in this chapter is that of J. Hudson Taylor, founder of the China Inland Mission. "It was the witness of Mr. Müller to a prayer-hearing God," says Pierson, "which encouraged Rev. J. Hudson Taylor, in 1863, thirty years after Mr. Müller's great step was taken, to venture wholly on the Lord, in founding the China Inland Mission."<sup>16</sup> In the life of Taylor as in that of Müller, we can trace the working out of a Divine plan, and the gradual growth and strengthening of faith until Hudson Taylor takes his place with George Müller as one of the outstanding heroes of faith in his age and in the ages.

The conversion of Hudson Taylor,<sup>17</sup> while reading in a tract as a young man the words, "the finished work of Christ," took place as his mother was praying for his conversion with such assurance that her prayer was turning into praise. Going to London to prepare for foreign missionary work, he had the choice of looking to his father or to the missionary society for support, but he refused support from each source without letting it be known that he was not receiving it from the other. He resolved to put the Bible to the test and to trust in God alone for temporal needs, and he could say later: "I think I may say that since then I have put God's Word to the test. Certainly it has never failed me. I have never had reason to regret the confidence I have placed in its promises."<sup>18</sup> Facing the difficulties of missionary work in China, he questioned whether his faith was sufficient to carry him through. "How important," he said to himself, "to learn, before leaving England, to move men through God by prayer alone."<sup>19</sup>

His faith was strengthened by what he deemed three notable answers to prayer. The first test came when with only a

<sup>16</sup> P. 354.

<sup>17</sup> For the life of Hudson Taylor consult *Hudson Taylor in Early Years*, by Dr. and Mrs. Howard Taylor, 1912, and *Hudson Taylor and the China Inland Mission*, by the same authors, 1918. For convenience these two volumes are referred to as I and II respectively.

<sup>18</sup> I, p. 66.

<sup>19</sup> I, p. 131.

half-crown piece in his pocket he was called at night to visit a woman who was desperately ill and was without money or food. If only the half-crown had been in change so that he could keep a shilling for the next day's needs! But it was a case of all or nothing. To take the half-crown from his pocket and give it up under these circumstances was, he says, the greatest struggle of his life, and he looked back upon it as the turning point of his career. But the thought came to him that he was trusting in a shilling rather than in God. He gave the coin, thus helping as it proved to save the woman's life, and as he left the house, he says, "My heart was as light as my pocket."<sup>20</sup> In the morning means were unexpectedly provided. Again when weak from a serious illness and without funds it seemed necessary for him to go to a distant part of the city, and he believed that strength was given him to walk the distance in answer to his prayer. Once more a hard-drinking man was converted through his efforts and prayers. The case seemed incorrigible, but, says Taylor, "with God all things are possible, and no conversion ever takes place save by the almighty power of the Holy Ghost."<sup>21</sup>

The principles upon which his life-work was to be based are already indicated in quotations from his letters and journal during this period. He says of God: "His love is un failing, his word is un failing, his power is ever the same."<sup>22</sup> "Nothing certain yet, except—I will never leave thee nor forsake thee."<sup>22a</sup> While unbelief sees only difficulties, faith sees God between itself and them."<sup>23</sup> "Those whose trust is in the Lord *always have something to depend on.*"<sup>24</sup> "I feel as if I could not live if something is not done for China."<sup>25</sup> He learned "to think of God as the One Great Circumstance in whom we live and move and have our being, and of all lesser circumstances as necessarily the kindest, wisest, best, because either ordered or permitted by him."<sup>26</sup>

<sup>20</sup> I, p. 134.

<sup>21</sup> I, p. 178.

<sup>22</sup> I, p. 149.

<sup>22a</sup> I, p. 158.

<sup>23</sup> I, p. 159.

<sup>24</sup> I, p. 160.

<sup>25</sup> I, p. 130.

<sup>26</sup> I, pp. 387, 388.

We see the growth of the mustard seed of faith as Hudson Taylor goes to China as a missionary, returns to England invalided home and is told that he could return to China only at the cost of his life. For four years he was engaged in medical studies and in revising the translation of the Ningpo Testament. But for the intensive study of the Bible and its promises, which he examined "under a microscope" in the work of this translation, he declared that he never would have had the faith to launch out upon the great enterprise of the China Inland Mission. The impelling convictions at work in his mind in this period are shown by the statement, "They perish—a thousand every hour of the day and night—and this while to me, as to every believer, is given power to ask in prayer whatsoever we will; to ask *without limit* in the name of Jesus."<sup>27</sup> In his *China's Spiritual Needs and Claims*, written at this time, he says: "We have to do with One Who is Lord of all power and might, Whose arm is not shortened that it cannot save, nor His ear heavy that it cannot hear; with One Whose unchanging Word directs us to ask and receive that our joy may be full, to open our mouths wide that He may fill them; and we do well to remember that this gracious God, Who has condescended to place His almighty power at the command of believing prayer, looks not lightly on the blood-guiltiness of those who neglect to avail themselves of it for the benefit of the perishing."<sup>28</sup>

In founding the China Inland Mission, for the purpose of sending the Gospel into the eleven unoccupied provinces of China, Hudson Taylor's conviction, as frequently stated, was not that it was unscriptural or far less sinful to solicit funds (the Apostle Paul asked contributions from the churches), but that God would be glorified by a missionary agency founded upon the avowed principle of dependence upon God alone for its support and its workers. The faith of the founder was severely tried but was always triumphant. He used to say that, "there are commonly three stages in work

---

<sup>27</sup> II, p. 27.

<sup>28</sup> II, p. 40.

for God, first *impossible*, then *difficult*, then *done*.”<sup>29</sup> Was he in need of anything, he would say, “We are children of a very rich Father,” and he often added: “Before I had children of my own I used to think, God will not forget me; but when I became a father I learned something more—God *cannot* forget me.”<sup>30</sup> Was he enduring what he declared to be the greatest hardship of missionary life, daily contact with the dead mass of heathenism, he would say, “When God’s grace is triumphant in my soul and I can look a Chinaman in the face and say, ‘God is able to save *you*, where and as you are,’ that is when I have power. How else are you going to deal with a man under the craving for opium?”<sup>31</sup> In time of persecution he taught his fellow-workers to say, “God is almighty—we know that He can keep His own.”<sup>32</sup> “We are in God’s hands, and He is almighty.”<sup>33</sup> At a time of discouragement when funds were low and workers were leaving the field Taylor and his associates in China waited upon God in prayer, and instead of deciding upon retrenchment or a change of method they prayed definitely for seventy more workers—“other seventy also”<sup>34</sup>—and funds for their support to be provided within the year. Before the year was ended seventy new missionaries sailed for China, and a later prayer offered with similar assurance and audacity of faith for an additional one hundred missionaries met with as striking an answer.<sup>35</sup>

That the China Inland Mission was founded upon no transient enthusiasm or quixotic impulse is shown by its steady growth during the forty years of its founder’s life and by the fact that after fifty years there were one thousand mission stations under its control, and that a total of nine hundred missionaries had been sent out to China coming from every evangelical denomination and from every Protestant country,

<sup>29</sup> II, p. 276.

<sup>30</sup> II, p. 589.

<sup>31</sup> II, p. 405.

<sup>32</sup> II, p. 576.

<sup>33</sup> II, p. 578.

<sup>34</sup> II, 356.

<sup>35</sup> II, pp. 423, 433.

and that the sum of 1,500,000 pounds had been raised without solicitation of funds from any human source.<sup>36</sup>

The parallel between the life of Hudson Taylor and that of George Müller is remarkably close. Both formed the habit of reading the Bible on their knees. Both were men of affairs but in a peculiar sense men of prayer. For many years it could be said by Hudson Taylor, "The sun has never risen upon China without finding me at prayer."<sup>37</sup> Both adopted a mode of life which kept them in peculiar dependence upon God, and with both God was the great reality of their existence. "Never let enter your minds," said Müller, "a shadow of doubt as to the love of the Father's heart or the power of the Father's arm."<sup>38</sup>

Müller engraved upon the window-pane of his bedroom with a diamond ring donated for his work the motto, "Jehovah-Jireh," and Taylor took the same text as a motto of his mission. The faith of both grew as they drew upon Divine resources; Hudson Taylor said, "It is upon past Ebenezers we build our Jehovah-Jireh."<sup>39</sup> Both men based their faith solidly upon the Bible and its promises. Thus Taylor said: "To be unsettled on the question of inspiration is to be overcome by temptation, and to be unable to accomplish God's work."<sup>40</sup> In the institutions they founded and in the world-wide influence of their work both became object lessons of the power of prayer. If the deep things of God can be revealed in the lives of his servants, or if a doctrine can be proved by its utility and verified in experience, then the successful work of these men and the steady coincidence—for sixty-three years in one case and forty years in the

---

<sup>36</sup> For some years nearly 2,000 pounds a year came from George Müller and his Scriptural Knowledge Institution. II, p. 183 n.

<sup>37</sup> II, p. 624.

<sup>38</sup> Pierson, p. 287.

<sup>39</sup> II, p. 44.

<sup>40</sup> II, p. 404 n. He says elsewhere: "Forty years ago I believed in the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures. I have proved them for forty years, and my belief is stronger now than it was then. I have put the promises to the test; I have been compelled to do so, and have found them true and trustworthy." (II, p. 518.)

other—between prayer and its answer afford a striking confirmation of the hypothesis that God has “placed his almighty power at the command of believing prayer.”<sup>41</sup>

The most popular and influential devotional writer of the past generation was Andrew Murray whose biography by his associate J. Du Plessis,<sup>42</sup> itself a devotional classic, has recently been published. The keynote of Andrew Murray’s life was full devotion to Christ and unbroken communion with Christ. The central theme of his thought and writing is prayer, which he says is “the very essence of true religion.” the channel of all blessings, the secret of power and life.” Of his book “With Christ in the School of Prayer” Dr. Alexander Whyte, himself an authority on the subject, wrote to him, “Your book goes to the joints and to the marrow of things. Happy man! you have been chosen and ordained of God to go to the very heart of things.” While most widely known as a devotional writer Andrew Murray was a man of affairs, a beloved pastor, an indefatigable evangelist, six times chosen as moderator of the Synod of South Africa, the founder of a number of schools, honored in 1907 by the University of Good Hope with the degree of Litt.D. for his services to national education, a missionary statesman, and a Christian patriot deeply concerned for the welfare of the Dutch-speaking and English-speaking and native population of the country. A Roman Catholic friend wrote of him: “He is an ideal instance of Aristotle’s famous definition of happiness: ‘The fullest exercise of our highest energies in a congenial medium to the proportioned end.’” His advice to his people was, “Open your hearts to a steadfast and large faith in God’s power.”<sup>43</sup> On his last birthday, 1916, he said, “Think

---

<sup>41</sup> The testimony of these men, if it is worth anything in the premises, is a testimony to the personality and power of God and to his faithfulness to the promises of his word. No theory of coincidence, of telepathy, of pantheistic union with the infinite, or of a drawing by auto-suggestion upon the resources of the subconscious mind is adequate here to explain the facts.

<sup>42</sup> *The Life of Andrew Murray of South Africa*, by J. Du Plessis. Marshall Bros., London, 1919.

<sup>43</sup> P. 326.

not of what *you* can do but of what *God* can do in you and through you.<sup>44</sup>

In an account of a convention in London in which Andrew Murray was the principal speaker, the *British Weekly* of November 28, 1895, said: "Perhaps the most striking and profoundly spiritual of Mr. Murray's addresses was that delivered on Friday morning from the words, 'Kept by the power of God through faith.' . . . 'The keeping of God,' he said in the course of his sermon, 'is an omnipotent keeping. I want to get linked with the Omnipotent One. Why is it that we, the children of Pentecost, know so little of what it is to walk step by step with the Almighty God? I can experience the power and goodness of God only so far as I am in fellowship with Him. Omnipotence was needed to create the smallest thing, and Omnipotence is needed to keep the smallest thing. You must learn to know and trust Omnipotence. A godly life is a life full of God. This keeping is continuous and unbroken. All life is an unbroken continuity, and the life of God is His Almighty power working in us. *Let us make God's Omnipotence the measure of our expectation.*'"<sup>45</sup>

It would be interesting to pursue our theme still further in the field of recent religious biography. The secret, for example, of the life of General William Booth of the Salvation Army was his faith in the power of God. When founding his mission in the London slums he was asked where he would get his Christian workers and he replied, "From the saloons and dance halls." As an apostle to the down-and-out he had a sublime confidence in a Divine grace and power that could save them. One of his mottoes was, "God loves with a great love the man whose heart is bursting with a passion for the impossible."<sup>46</sup> The love and the power of God were

<sup>44</sup> P. 507.

<sup>45</sup> P. 446. The writer adds that "the words in italics are a prominent and characteristic part of Mr. Murray's teaching."

<sup>46</sup> *Hudson Taylor*, II, p. 216. On the same page is quoted the remark of Rev. F. B. Meyer that "you do not test the resources of God until you try the impossible."

the foci around which the thought of William Booth revolved. At the end of his life he said, "I cast anchor in my old trust—that is, the goodness of God. I believe He loves me, and I am sure I love Him"; and his last rational words were, "The promises of God—are sure—if you will believe."<sup>47</sup>

It would be tempting for a moment to venture outside the bounds of religious biography for an illustration of the relation between belief in the omnipotence of God and human experience and achievement. The example which naturally suggests itself is that of Abraham Lincoln whose fame now transcends all sectional and even national boundaries.

Lincoln was not a man of religious vocation who cultivated the devout life in the sense of the other men we have mentioned, but he was a man of rugged common sense and of clear spiritual intuition. The impression grows, as his latest biographer, Lord Charnwood, has said, that this man "did of set purpose drink and refill and drink again as full and fiery a cup of sacrifice as ever was pressed to the lips of hero or saint."<sup>48</sup>

When Lincoln was leaving his home in Springfield he said, "Without the assistance of that Divine Being who ever attended him (Washington), I cannot succeed. With that assistance, I cannot fail."<sup>49</sup> This same thought of reliance upon the power and wisdom of God was repeatedly expressed during his journey to Washington. Thus to the Legislature at Albany he said, February 18, 1861: "I still have confidence that the Almighty, the Maker of the Uni-

---

<sup>47</sup> *Life of General Booth*, by Harold Begby, vol. II, p. 403.

<sup>48</sup> *Abraham Lincoln*,<sup>3</sup> p. 155.

<sup>49</sup> This is the form of the address given in Nicolay and Hay's *History*, vol. III, p. 291. As reported in the *Illinois State Journal*, Feb. 13, 1861, Lincoln said, "If the same Omniscient Mind and Almighty Arm that directed and protected him shall guide me and support me, I shall not fail—I shall succeed." In still another version of the speech Lincoln's words are reported to be, "I feel that I cannot succeed without the same Divine Aid which sustained him; and in the same Almighty Being I place my reliance for support." Dodge's *Selections from Lincoln*, pp. 70, 71.

verse, will, through the instrumentality of this great and intelligent people, bring us through this as he has through all the other difficulties of our country." That these expressions were not merely those of a popular orator appealing to religious sentiment and making use of stereotyped language is shown abundantly by Lincoln's state papers and speeches as president, by his private notes and by the testimony of his closest friends. In his first inaugural address Lincoln said, "If the Almighty Ruler of Nations, with his eternal truth and justice, be on your side of the North, or on yours of the South, that truth and that justice will surely prevail by the judgment of this great tribunal of the American people." In his Thanksgiving proclamation of July 15, 1863, he said, "It is meet and right to recognize and confess the presence of the Almighty Father, and the power of his hand equally in these triumphs and in these sorrows." And in his second inaugural he said, "The Almighty has his own purposes." In one of the darkest hours of the war he wrote, "The will of God prevails.—I am almost ready to say that God wills this contest, and wills that it shall not end yet"; and to a delegation of Quakers in 1862 he said, "We cannot but believe that he who made the world still governs it." The author of *Abraham Lincoln, the Christian* says, "It is well known that Mr. Lincoln seldom made even a short speech after he was elected President without referring to the omnipotence and providence of God."<sup>50</sup>

The proof is abundant that Lincoln was a man of prayer. Just after the battle of Gettysburg he told Generals Rusling and Sickles that he had not been anxious about the battle, because, he said: "I went to the room one day, and I locked the door, and got down on my knees before Almighty God, and prayed to him mightily for victory at Gettysburg. . . . And after that (I don't know how it was, and I can't explain it), soon a sweet comfort crept into my soul that God Almighty had taken the whole business into his own hands

---

<sup>50</sup> Rev. William J. Johnson, p. 121.

and that things would go all right at Gettysburg."<sup>51</sup> To a friend the President wrote: "I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go. My own wisdom and that of all about me seemed insufficient for that day."<sup>52</sup>

Lincoln in fact could not have expressed himself more strongly if he had been writing a theological polemic or if the main purpose of his public utterances had been to affirm and defend the doctrine of omnipotence. It was the assurance that his own life and the destiny of the nation were under the sovereign control of God and were linked with Omnipotence that gave him the calmness and courage that he needed for his great task. Without this faith we may safely say his own experience and career and to that extent the history of the country would have been different.

The prayers and labors and lives of these men do not fit in well with the scheme of a pluralistic universe or harmonize with the doctrine of a finite God. They furnish rather an eloquent commentary upon the scriptural truths that nothing is impossible with God or with him that believeth. If we have read aright the lesson of their lives they have shown anew in a skeptical and materialistic age that God is not only the God of Abraham who can raise the dead, or of Moses who can lead through the sea, or of Elijah who can answer by fire, but a living God who hears and answers prayer today. To take away from these great believers their faith in a God of infinite wisdom and power would have been to stunt their spiritual growth and to blunt the weapons of their warfare; it would have been to quench that audacity of faith which led them to attempt great things for God and to limit materially the range of their usefulness. The study of their lives suggests that belief in the omnipotence of God is not merely a barren assent to an obsolete creed but is the gateway to a rich experience of God's grace and power and a dynamic for

---

<sup>51</sup> This extract is taken from *Abraham Lincoln, the Christian*, by W. J. Johnson, where the source of this and many similar utterances is given.

<sup>52</sup> J. G. Holland, *Life of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 435.

a fruitful service. Considering the issue of their manner of life we may well imitate their faith, and when the God of Elijah seems far off may say, Where is the Lord God of George Müller and of Hudson Taylor?

In a concluding paper we hope to consider the doctrine of omnipotence in the light of recent philosophic discussion.

*Lincoln University, Pa.*

WM. HALLOCK JOHNSON.

# The Princeton Theological Review

OCTOBER, 1923

---

## IS GOD ALMIGHTY?

### III. OMNIPOTENCE AND PHILOSOPHY<sup>1</sup>

“God either wishes to take away evils and is not able; or he is able and not willing; or he is neither willing nor able; or he is both willing and able. If he is willing and not able he is feeble, which does not belong to the nature of God. If he is able and not willing he is envious, which is equally foreign to God. If he is neither willing nor able he is both envious and feeble, and so is not God. If he is both willing and able, which alone is suitable to God, whence are the evils? or why does he not take them away?” It is in this way that Epicurus, according to Lactantius, *De Ira Dei*, xiii, formulated the problem of evil. A similar dilemma, stated in more up-to-date fashion by a soldier in the trenches who writes from “Somewhere in Hell,” is thus set forth in a letter to an American preacher in London: “The luck is all on your side; you still believe in things. Good for you. It is topping, if one can do it. But war is such a devil’s nursery. I got knocked over, but I am up and at it again. I’m tough. They started toughening me the first day. My bayonet instructor was an ex-pug, just the man to develop one’s innate chivalry. They hung out the bunting and gave me a big send-off, when we came out here to scatter the Hun’s guts. Forgive me writing so. I know you will forgive me, but who will forgive God? Not I—not I! This war makes me hate God. I don’t know whether he is the God of battle and enjoys the show, as he

---

<sup>1</sup> Previous articles have discussed the Biblical Data and Omnipotence and Religious Experience. See this REVIEW, October, 1922, and April, 1923.

is said to have done long ago. . . . If so, there are smoking holocausts enough to please him in No Man's Land. But, anyway, he let it happen. Omnipotent! and—he let it happen! Omniscient! Knew it in advance, and let it happen! I hate him. You are kinder to me than God has been. Good-bye."<sup>2</sup>

From the dawn of philosophy until the present the problem of evil has pressed heavily upon thoughtful minds. We enter life with a cry and end it with a groan. Lucretius, disciple of Epicurus, speaks of humanity as *genus infelix humanum*. The Christian apostle describes the whole creation as groaning and travailing in pain. Huxley would have welcomed the advent of a friendly comet which would put an end to the human drama. Lord Shaftesbury, the philanthropist, could not bear to leave the world with so much suffering in it; and Shelley, poet of beauty and passion, sings of the sea of time:

Unfathomable Sea! whose waves are years,  
Ocean of Time, whose waters of deep woe  
Are brackish with the salt of human tears!

While the problem weighed upon the minds of Hebrew prophets and Greek philosophers, it became especially acute at a time when H. G. Wells could say that "all the world is now Job." Epicureans, ancient and modern, have questioned the benevolence of God while pious Israelites were tempted to doubt his justice. The Epicureans asked, How can God be benevolent while anybody suffers? and the Hebrews asked, How can God be just while the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper?<sup>2a</sup>

The most obvious solution of the dilemma of Epicurus is to save the goodness of God at the expense of his power. This solution is hinted at in Hume's *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, in which Cleanthes (Part XI) supposes that "benevolence, regulated by wisdom and limited by neces-

<sup>2</sup> *Preaching in London* by Joseph Newton Fort, pp. 65, 66.

<sup>2a</sup> The Japanese earthquake has now brought up the problem anew in an acute form.

sity, may produce just such a world as the present." This conception of a finite Deity was developed by J. S. Mill in his *Essays on Religion*. Mill maintained that the benevolence and justice of God were incompatible with omnipotence. God might still be supposed to have perfect knowledge and absolute wisdom, but he added, "nothing obliges us to suppose that either the knowledge or the skill is infinite." W. James adopts Mill's idea of a finite Deity and adapts it to the purposes of his pluralism. The escape from a block-universe, he believes, is to "assume that the superhuman consciousness, however vast it may be, has itself an external environment, and consequently is finite." He favors the view that "there is a God, but that he is finite, either in power or in knowledge, or in both at once."<sup>3</sup> H. G. Wells goes even further, and his "God the Invisible King" has no eternity in the past and no existence before humanity.

Before we limit the power or other attributes of God because of the fact of suffering, we ought to be sure that even from a hedonistic standpoint the sum total of happiness would be increased by doing away with suffering. The alternatives in the case, after the earth is stocked with living beings, are these so far as we can see: a single generation of animals and men living on indefinitely in an earthly paradise without danger, strife, disease or death; or a succession of generations which are subject to these ills. If in the life of sentient beings pleasure predominates over pain—and this is surely the impression that we gain in observing animal life—the sum of pleasure would be far greater in a world such as this is than in a world from which were banished all the ills which flesh is heir to. The presence of suffering in the world does not then imply a limitation of the Divine power unless it can be maintained that a Deity of infinite power and wisdom could devise a world with all the advantages of ours and none of the disadvantages. This seems like insisting that one could eat his cake and have it.

---

<sup>3</sup> *A Pluralistic Universe*, pp. 310, 311.

So far as animal suffering is concerned Darwin's words are still classic:

"When we reflect on this struggle, we may console ourselves with the full belief, that the war of nature is not incessant, that no fear is felt, that death is generally prompt, and that the vigorous, the healthy, and the happy survive and multiply."

Drummond in his *Ascent of Man* has emphasized the "struggle for the life of others" in nature, and in fact the care of the eagle and the hen for their brood are used in Scripture as suitable illustrations of the Divine love (Deut. xxxii. 11; Matt. xxiii. 37). There is good scientific authority for saying: "The ideal of evolution is thus no gladiator's show, but an Eden; and though competition can never be wholly eliminated . . . it is much for our pure natural history to see no longer struggle, but love as 'creation's final law.'"<sup>4</sup>

The problem is more acute in the case of human beings and is complicated with the problem of moral evil or sin. Human suffering may be punishment for sin, its object may be the correction or reform of the sinner, or the development of the virtues of the saint. If we could eliminate from human life all the suffering which is connected with sin as its effect, its prevention or its cure, the problem of suffering would be reduced to a minimum. Aside from the ultimate problem of the origin of sin, it is by no means clear that the complete elimination of suffering, were such a thing possible, would make the world a better place to live in. Would we live as angels, or is it not more probable that we would descend to the level of brutes? If the matter were left to our wisdom where would we begin in eliminating specific kinds of suffering or instances of suffering? "What finite creature," asks Bosanquet pertinently, "in drawing his schedule of permissible evil, would not have ruled out the crucifixion?"<sup>5</sup> Again Martineau asks: "In what Elysium could you find the sweet patience and silent self-control of which every nurse can testify? or the fortitude in right which the rack cannot

<sup>4</sup> Geddes and Thomson, *Evolution*, p. 248.

<sup>5</sup> *Value and Destiny of the Individual*, p. 222.

crush or the dungeon wear out? or the courage of the prophet, to fling his divine words before the wrath of princes and the mocking of the people?"<sup>6</sup>

It is a commonplace of the poets and moralists that those virtues and graces which are the finest adornments of human nature can only be learned in the school of suffering. In the absence of danger, distress and persecution then (unless there were other profound changes in the constitution of things) life would lose much of its zest, character would lose its crown and human life its glory. It is a paradox of hedonism that for contenders in a sacred cause the rack or the stake may be softer than a bed of roses.

What better would'st thou have when all is done?  
If any now were bidden rise and come  
To either, could he pause to choose between  
The rose-warm kisses of the waiting bride  
In a shut silken chamber, and the thrill  
Of the bared limbs bound fast for martyrdom?

It is a matter of common experience that the most severe trials and disappointments may in retrospect be regarded as the greatest pieces of good fortune. An octogenarian who speaks of the two greatest disasters that have come into his life recently said: "I have lived long enough to see results, direct and indirect, on character and events, which on the whole have made life better and bigger than it would have been without them."<sup>7</sup> If we are so lacking in wisdom and foresight in the matter of personal afflictions, it is more reasonable to confess the limits of our knowledge than to impose limits upon Divine power. If we could foresee the beneficent results of suffering in our own experience and the experience of the world we might well magnify the Divine goodness and mercy rather than limit the power or the benevolence of God. To confess our shortsightedness is to admit that the data for a solution are not yet in our hands, not

<sup>6</sup> *A Study of Religion*, vol. ii, p. 95.

<sup>7</sup> Henry Holt in *The Independent*, Feb. 17, 1923, p. 128. He adds, however, "I doubt if I could hold this conviction if my view of the universe did not include a future life."

necessarily that they never will be. In the meantime we may well take the attitude of Dante as he scanned the sufferings of Purgatory:

O Almighty Power!  
 Who wast in earth for our sakes crucified,  
 Are thy just eyes turned elsewhere? or is this  
 A preparation, in the wondrous depth  
 Of thy sage counsel, made for some good end,  
 Entirely from our reach of thought cut off?<sup>8</sup>

If men were as wise in learning the lessons of history and providence as they are skilful in devising means of mutual destruction even the disasters of the war might be justified. The tragedy of the siege of Jerusalem was not in the blood that ran in the streets or in the crosses that crowded the surrounding hills, but in the sinful blindness and folly of its people. "How often would I have gathered thy children together," said Jesus, "and ye would not!"

The presence of sin in the world is after all the crux of the problem of evil. How did sin arise in a world created by a God of infinite holiness, wisdom and power? No short or easy solution may be possible, but relief may be sought in two directions. The glory of God and the good of the universe as a whole may conceivably be enhanced by the creation of free beings who, being free, will be capable of rebellion against God as well as of complete and holy obedience. It cannot be maintained that it would be a better world without freedom and the possibility of sin than it would be with both. Human freedom in itself is sometimes used as an argument against the omnipotence of God, but on the other hand the creation of free spirits, endowed so to speak with a spark of the Divine life, is the highest exercise that we can imagine of the power of God.<sup>9</sup> The power of God, it is admitted, will not be exercised in the same way in a world of free spirits as it

---

<sup>8</sup> *Purgatorio*, Canto vi, lines 120-125, Cary's trans.

<sup>9</sup> W. Temple says: "God cannot be omnipotent except by the revelation of his Love. By his power he could control our actions, but not our wills. If he is to be Lord of all that exists, he must be Lord of our wills." *The Faith and Modern Thought*, pp. 149, 150.

would in a world that was without them, but this limitation of his power, if it be called such, is self-limitation. Belief in the creation of free spirits capable of both good and evil is in itself no barrier to the admission of the almighty power of God.

The case would indeed be desperate if the perversion of human freedom had plunged humanity into hopeless and irremediable evil—that is, if no provision had been made for redemption. We must reckon with both of the two foci of God's moral government, sin and redemption.

The problem becomes less acute in a world in which while sin abounds yet grace much more abounds; and no infringement of the attributes of God is necessary when all the facts—free-will, the possibility of sin, actual sin and the provision for redemption—are taken into account. The clearest light upon the problem of evil, both physical and moral, shines from the cross of Christ. We might as well acknowledge first as last that it would be difficult to maintain a full-orbed theism, in view of the mystery of evil, except in the light that is shed upon it by the doctrine of a suffering and sin-bearing Saviour.

We may notice in passing how remarkably the Bible account of sin avoids all the pitfalls into which human speculation upon the subject has fallen. In the Biblical account of sin in Genesis iii and Romans v sin is not a necessary result of the original nature of man or of God. It is not due to the evil inherent in matter or to the inheritance of animal instincts; it is not dismissed as an illusion nor minimized as moral growing-pains or a blundering search after God; it is not accounted for by man's finitude or glorified as the means of man's intellectual and moral advance; it is not referred to a chaos of instincts or to a necessary antagonism between the will of the individual and that of the community; it is not a moment in the evolution of the life of God nor is its commission traced in any way to the Divine agency. A comparison with some modern theodicies will bring out in stronger relief

the clearness of moral vision and the sureness of touch of the Scriptural writers.

While the arbitrary definition of omnipotence as the ability to do the logically impossible impairs the value both of H. Rashdall's *The Theory of Good and Evil* (1907) and of J. M. E. McTaggart's *Some Dogmas of Religion* (1906), it will be instructive to glance at the discussion of these authors. While Rashdall presents in admirably effective form the moral argument for theism and supplements this by the idealistic argument that there must be one Mind, to whom everything is known, and one Will, the source and ground of all, he qualifies his theism by limiting the power of God, and further reduces it by a rigid determinism which leaves no freedom for God or man. God who knows all things wills the universe which seems to him the best that is possible. But possibility is a human conception; "to perfect knowledge nothing could seem possible except that which is or will be actual."<sup>10</sup> The world is made what it is by a divine volition or series of volitions which is made what it is by the positive and eternal nature of God."<sup>11</sup> With both the human and the Divine will, in Rashdall's theory, actuality exhausts the range of possibility. Given the nature of God, he could not have made man other than he did; and given the nature of man and his environment (both of which thus flow necessarily from the Divine will), man can only act as he in fact does act. Of course omnipotence is thus excluded.

Rashdall does not shrink from the consequences of this determinism: that God is the author of bad souls and of the bad acts which they necessarily do. He says: "One cannot help asking oneself the question why God should make bad souls, and so cause bad acts to be done."<sup>12</sup> These souls are "souls with evil potentialities which must necessarily develop into evil actuality."<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> *Theory of Good and Evil*, vol. ii, p. 238.

<sup>11</sup> Vol. ii, p. 341.

<sup>12</sup> Vol. ii, p. 340.

<sup>13</sup> Vol. ii. p. 345.

God wills the evil but only as a means to the good. "The point of the theory which I advocate is that God causes bad souls to appear as a means to an ultimate good, a good which is unattainable without them. . . . A better universe is imaginable, but a better universe is not possible, because nothing is *really* possible but what is or will be actual."<sup>14</sup> The means adopted (by a God of limited power who could not achieve the good ends without them) are means which in themselves "are bad, and which remain bad from whatever point of view we look at them."<sup>15</sup> It must be admitted that in Rashdall's theory the distinction between good and evil in both God and man is inevitably blurred. It is a lame theodicy which imputes to the Divine Being a casuistry which Paul has condemned (Rom. iii. 8) and Pascal has pilloried in his *Provincial Letters*.

Aiming to preserve God's goodness at the expense of his power, Rashdall has in fact sacrificed the holiness of God, ascribing to him a principle of action which we should condemn in ourselves or in other men. Certainly a Being necessitated by the limitations of his nature to produce evil is not the God of infinite holiness and perfection who, as Rashdall has finely argued, is revealed in our moral consciousness at its highest, as well as in Christianity where moral ideals are confessedly most fully embodied.

Rashdall makes one objection to omnipotence which has nothing to do with the problem of evil. No matter how much good there were in the actual world, we could always ask: "Why should there not have been twice that amount of good?" There can be no answer so long as we look on God as having infinite resources of creation. "We could ask: 'Why not more good?' —and so on *ad infinitum*."<sup>16</sup> It is a singular limitation to place upon Omnipotence to insist that infinite goodness and power could not find expression in a finite world. It is to insist that if the goodness of the Infinite

---

<sup>14</sup> Vol. ii, p. 341.

<sup>15</sup> Vol. ii, p. 344.

<sup>16</sup> Vol. ii, p. 344.

be shown forth it can only be in a world infinite in size or in an infinite number of worlds; in other words, as Martineau suggests, it is to insist that the Infinite create another infinite. It is plain that the root of Rashdall's objection to omnipotence is his rigid doctrine of determinism which denies that all things are possible, or that anything except the actual is possible, with God. If God should create a world, no matter what its character, that world would exhaust the possibilities of creation, and the limits of his power would be reached.

Readers of McTaggart's extended discussion of the doctrine of omnipotence will carry away three impressions: (1) of his undue extension of the idea of omnipotence to cover the absurd and the logically impossible; (2) of the arbitrary limitations which he imposes upon omnipotence as so defined; and (3) of his valuable critique of the doctrine of a finite or non-omnipotent God.

(1) Omnipotence is defined as the power to do anything, even the logically contradictory. "There is nothing that an omnipotent being cannot do. Even if the two were logically contradictory, a really omnipotent being cannot be bound by the law of contradiction."<sup>17</sup> Such a being could make a thing to be and not to be at the same time, and it takes little argument to show that a being of this kind cannot exist. But such an omnipotent being is not the God of Scripture who can do all things, but cannot lie or deny himself, nor is it the Almighty God of common speech. President Harding expressed the common idea of an Almighty God in the lines with which he ended a Fourth of July speech at his home in Marion:

Thoughts unexpressed may sometimes fall back dead,  
But God himself can't kill 'em once they're said.

Clement of Alexandria (on Heb. vi. 18) says that "nothing is impossible with God except to lie." Augustine well says (*Serm.* 214) that justice cannot do what is unjust, or wisdom what is foolish, or truth what is false. Those who have continued the Augustinian tradition with its emphasis on the sovereignty of God have been careful to safeguard

---

<sup>17</sup> *Some Dogmas of Religion*, p. 166.

omnipotence from the charge of caprice or logical extravagance or moral license. Calvin in his *Institutes* (III, xxiii, 2) says that the doctrine of omnipotence which divorces it from the principles of reason and morality is profane and detestable. Charnock says that to ascribe to God a power to make a thing that is past not to be past is to make God to lie. God might in that case take back what he himself has said, and there would be no foundation for our faith.<sup>18</sup> A similar opinion, that such a view of omnipotence is degrading to God, is expressed by modern theologians such as Charles Hodge, Shedd, H. B. Smith and Bavinck. Even those schoolmen who exalted the will over the intellect, Duns Scotus and his disciple, William of Occam, while advocating a *potentia absoluta*, expressly said that omnipotence was limited by the logically impossible and could not make a thing to be and not to be at the same time.<sup>19</sup> McTaggart's definition of omnipotence makes it a sort of sovereign caprice, not only abstracted from all relation to reason and morality but destructive of them.

(2) It is interesting to notice that McTaggart's omnipotent being, who by definition can do anything regardless of the laws of contradiction and excluded middle, is in the progress of the argument very soon placed in a straight-jacket where he can do practically nothing. Extremes meet when McTaggart first expands the idea of omnipotence beyond all reasonable limits and then contracts it so that his omnipotent being becomes far more helpless than finite man. An omnipotent being, we discover, cannot be good, cannot be personal, cannot prevent the existence of the world, and cannot adapt means to ends. Since there is evil in the universe, as the slightest pang of toothache proves, then, "if God is omnipotent it is impossible for him to be good at all."<sup>20</sup> Again he cannot be personal: "I maintain that omnipotence

---

<sup>18</sup> *On the Attributes*, vol. ii, pp. 33, 34.

<sup>19</sup> See articles on these two men by R. Seeberg in *Hauck's Realencycl. für prot. Theol. u. Kirche*, vol. v. p. 70 and vol. xiv. p. 273.

<sup>20</sup> *Some Dogmas of Religion*, p. 167.

is incompatible with personality.”<sup>21</sup> An omnipotent being must always have an Other, “that is to say, it would be impossible for him to prevent the existence, some time or other, of a universe.”<sup>22</sup> Once more he cannot use means, for “there is nothing that an omnipotent God cannot do, —otherwise, he would not be omnipotent. He could get the ends without the means, if he chose to do so. And, therefore, it would be inconsistent with his wisdom to use them.”<sup>23</sup>

One is tempted to think that McTaggart is not quite serious in conjuring up the anomalous figure of an omnipotent being who can do everything conceivable and yet, just because of his omnipotence, is practically helpless. But these disabilities need not be attributed to the Almighty God of theological scholarship or of popular religious thought. For example, as has been pointed out recently by both Bishop Gore in his *Belief in God* and by C. C. J. Webb in his Gifford Lectures on *God and Personality*, if the personality of God requires the presence of an Other, this requisite is met by the Christian doctrine of the eternal and Divine Logos, and there is no need of assuming the eternity of the world. God can certainly dispense with the use of means, or second causes, but this does not deprive him of the power to use means when his purposes can thus best be accomplished.

It is recognized by McTaggart that some fundamental assumption must be made. “There must always be a fundamental fact which is accounted for by nothing, and which accounts for everything”; and with him this fundamental fact or assumption is “the harmonious system of selves.”<sup>24</sup> He will not admit (with Rashdall) that an All-knower is necessary in a system of idealism, but he says that “if all reality is a harmonious system of selves, it is perhaps sufficiently god-like to dispense with a God.”<sup>25</sup> It will be objected that the

---

<sup>21</sup> P. 202.

<sup>22</sup> P. 205.

<sup>23</sup> P. 201.

<sup>24</sup> P. 248.

<sup>25</sup> P. 251.

harmonious system of (finite) selves is not the fundamental fact sought for, but that it calls loudly for more ultimate explanation. The finite selves, if conscious of their finitude, will recognize that the ground of their being is not in themselves; and it will be asked why they exist as a harmonious system, or as a system at all, instead of as a fortuitous concurrence of disconnected wills. McTaggart's pluralism of finite selves in a harmonious system points inevitably to a unitary Being as the ground of their existence and the principle of their union in a system. The system of selves points to the single Self, and it may be added that the problem of evil must be faced by the advocate of a godlike and harmonious system of selves as well as by the theist.

(3) In showing that the assumption of a non-omnipotent Deity affords no solution or relief to the problem of evil McTaggart becomes the ally instead of the foe of the traditional theism. A God of limited power, he contends, whether creative or directive, has little or no value for religion. If he is creative the only obstacle to the performance of his will must be in his own nature; and "how can God's nature at once impel him towards an end and yet be the sole obstacle to his realizing that end?"<sup>26</sup> A finite Creator, it is maintained, will be responsible for the evil that is in the world. It will not help matters to say that the evil was not foreseen, for if a God of limited knowledge created, without knowing what would happen, a world that was liable to evil, his ignorance would not excuse him from responsibility.<sup>27</sup> The only safe

---

<sup>26</sup> P. 232.

<sup>27</sup> An interesting conversation is recorded between the late Dr. Borden P. Bowne and his friend Dr. L. D. McCabe at Delaware, Ohio: "Dr. Bowne arrived at the home of Dr. McCabe at three o'clock one afternoon, and departed just after breakfast the next morning. They had but one theme, these two,—the character of God and his ways with men. Dr. McCabe believed that some limitation of the foreknowledge of God was necessary if God could be justified in his dealing with men. The two talked till midnight, rose early in the morning, talked through the morning meal, talked till the time of departure. Dr. McCabe's last word to Dr. Bowne was: 'Do you think God would have made this universe with all its tragedies if he had known how it would come out?' And the last

way is to deny that God is creative and to make him directive only, but in proportion as his power is lessened the probability is lessened of his final triumph over evil. What is apparently gained at one end is lost at the other. In any case, "if God's moral character is saved by limiting his power, we have no right to be confident as to the eventual victory of those ends in which he is interested,"<sup>28</sup> and if he is only directive he may already be the general of a hopelessly beaten army.<sup>29</sup>

To place a limitation upon God's power in view of the presence of evil is not to solve the problem of evil but to admit that it is insoluble even for God himself. The attempted solution, we venture to affirm, is unacceptable alike to religion, to morals and to philosophy.

If one of the attributes of God is impaired there is of necessity a deterioration in the others. McTaggart justly remarks that "a person is not a mere aggregate of watertight compartments. . . . If any cause exists which causes some imperfection in any aspect of God's nature, it will be impossible to regard him as completely perfect in any respect."<sup>30</sup> Rashdall's attempt to limit the power of God resulted, as we have seen, in the infringement of his holiness, and it is significant that both Mill and James couple a possible limitation of knowledge with the limitation of power. The deity of Wells is not eternal, and instead of being the creator must be himself a created being. In all these constructions God is so reduced in the perfection of his attributes that he is no longer the proper object of adoration and worship. It is not surprising that Mill in his *Essays on Religion* has evidently no enthusiasm for his finite Deity and in the sequel practically gives up the benevolence of God, saying that we are not justified by the evidence in holding "that his sole or chief purposes are

---

thing Dr. Bowne said to Dr. McCabe was: 'Do you think God would have made this universe with all its tragedies if he had not known how it was coming out?'"—Henry M. Rankin in *Record of Christian Work*, June, 1922.

<sup>28</sup> P. 259.

<sup>29</sup> P. 266.

<sup>30</sup> P. 254.

those of benevolence." Hume in his *Dialogue* (Pt. V) ridicules the idea of a finite God, saying that if God be finite the world may be the work of an infant deity, or an infirm deity, or a superannuated deity. "From the moment the attributes of the Deity are supposed finite all these (suppositions) have place. And I cannot, for my part, think that so wild and unsettled a system of theology is, in any respect, preferable to none at all."

The strength of the theory of a finite Deity has been supposed to lie in its moral appeal. If God is "one of the strivers" engaged with us in a contest of uncertain outcome and striving with us to bring about the victory of righteousness, there is a stirring appeal to fine spirits to come up to the help of the Lord against the mighty. There may even be the romance of a lost cause in the struggle. History shows, however, that the heroes and martyrs of the race have been trained in the school of the Divine sovereignty. A morality of uncertain outcome, with no secure tenure in reality, a sort of "Melchisedek" and perhaps a late comer in the universe, cannot appeal as strongly to the will as—to use one of James' earlier phrases—"the ethics of infinite and mysterious obligation from on high." Only a Will that is sovereign in the universe can permanently claim the undivided allegiance of the will of man. The call to share in an uncertain struggle is noble, but men will plunge into the struggle with greater intensity and abandon when they believe that the universe is moral at bottom and that the stars in their courses are fighting against Sisera. If God is not the Alpha he need not be the Omega, and there is no ultimate foundation for morals and no assurance of the final triumph of righteousness. If Righteousness and Wisdom are not now seated on the throne of power, there is no assurance that they ever will reach and hold that throne.

Philosophy unites with religion and morality in an emphatic protest against the doctrine of a finite God. When Mr. Rockefeller was asked how much money would really satisfy a man, he is said to have replied, "A little more." A finite Deity cannot satisfy the thirst of the mind for the Infinite

or the thirst of the soul for the living God. "The central demand of reason is for a God who is the self-existent ground of all reality,"<sup>31</sup> and when a Deity of attenuated attributes is proposed to the mind there is an instinctive and insistent demand for a more majestic and more ultimate object of its contemplation and of its worship. We do not wonder that there is a "Veiled Being" in the background behind Wells' "God of humanity," that the Absolute lies behind the shadowy and less real finite God of Bradley, and that Sir Oliver Lodge while impressed with the reality of "powerful but not almighty helpers" is impressed as well "with the fearful majesty of still higher aspects of the Universe." A student of religion has noted the fact that "man's religious consciousness has invariably caused the rejection of every system which limited the omnipotence of God in order that his holiness, righteousness, and love might be preserved intact";<sup>32</sup> and a theologian of radical tendency has recently said that "all who think of God as finite feel the need of an infinite background of reality out of which rises the divine personage whom we call God."<sup>33</sup> The worshippers of a finite Deity are in fact much in the position of savage peoples who worship tribal gods and yet believe in a creative Spirit who made the world.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>31</sup> A. T. Ormond, *The Philosophy of Religion*, 1922, p. 93. In the same work the late Professor Ormond says that the mind is "insistent in refusing to accept the terms of a world-plurality as final." It is the law of the mind's own ideal "which requires the many and changing to be grounded in the unitary and perdurable" (pp. 7 and 8).

<sup>32</sup> Thiele, *Gifford Lectures*, vol. ii, p. 93. Quoted by D. S. Cairns, *The Reasonableness of the Christian Faith*, p. 202.

<sup>33</sup> C. A. Beckwith, *The Idea of God*, 1922, pp. 309, 310.

<sup>34</sup> An instance which comes to hand may be quoted: "I was informed by a great traveller who has done much scientific work in the islands of the Pacific and of the Indian Ocean, that he had never come across a tribe which did not entertain a belief in some Big God or Great Spirit who made the whole world, even though they rarely worshipped Him, because He seemed so far away, and especially because He was the God of other tribes as well, while their own gods were very near and wanted constant attention, and moreover were more likely to help them in war." Stewart A. McDowell, *Evolution and the Need of the Atonement*, 1912, p. 68.

The conviction of the existence of a perfect, self-existent, all-wise and all-powerful Being, than whom no greater can be conceived, lies deep in the mind of man. The sense of mystery, the instinct of worship, the feeling of dependence, the idea of the infinite, the consciousness of absolute obligation, all point to a Being who is the sum of infinite perfections, the ineffable object of adoration, love and praise. Without the doctrine of an omnipotent God whose sovereign will is the controlling and determining factor in the universe the theistic faith is fatally impaired and loses its practical value for morals and religion.

The evolution theory, now the storm-centre of discussion, affects the doctrine of omnipotence only as it assumes the rôle of a naturalistic philosophy. Assuming Divine agency in the production of the organic world, the power and wisdom involved in the separate production of species, and in the production of a scheme of things so framed that the reaction of organism and environment would automatically give rise to these species, does not necessarily differ. Thomas Aquinas said that the potency of a cause is the greater the more remote the effects to which it extends. The evolutionist who denies a creation has to reckon with the principle of causation and cannot pay his debt by infinitesimal repudiations. Nor does it help him in the court of logic to endow the primitive elements with creative attributes.

Fools, who from God omnipotence detract,  
Think atoms can omnipotently act.

A theory in science, as was said by Sir J. J. Thompson in his recent lectures in Philadelphia, is "a tool, not a dogma," but it is not always satisfied to occupy this humble position. Evolution as a scientific theory easily passes into evolution as a philosophy or even as a religion, and this transition seems to have taken place when it is said by a distinguished evolutionist: "The centre of the conflict between science and theology is naturalism *vs.* supernaturalism. Almost every religion claims to have had a supernatural origin, to have been made known to men by supernatural revelation, to be at-

tested by supernatural miracles, to influence the lives of men in a supernatural manner and to lead to supernatural rewards and punishments in a future supernatural life."<sup>35</sup>

The issue here raised is between theism and naturalism rather than between belief in an omnipotent and in a finite Deity. Naturalism may take the form of materialism, or of a more refined theory of immanence—a pantheism, higher or lower—or of a deism which sees God in the beginning but only in the beginning, but in any case it denies that there can be any direct and effective personal agency of God in natural or human history. Much of so-called theistic evolution should undoubtedly be called deistic, but it is interesting to see that there are thorough-going evolutionists who can believe in supernatural Christianity. Thus a professor of zoology can say in speaking of the preëxistence of Christ: "The Creator must have existed before the thing created. . . . Evolution does not limit the power of the Omnipotent One; it only expresses the method by which the Creator chose to work out the creation of nature in so far as it is manifested to finite minds."<sup>36</sup>

Perhaps the subtlest danger to belief in an Almighty God is in an idealistic philosophy which is theistic in intention but is averse to a cordial acceptance of the transcendence of God. The two most notable recent contributions to theistic thought have been J. Ward's *The Realm of Ends*, 1911, and J. S. Pringle-Pattison's *The Idea of God*, 1917. Both works are characterized by a wealth of learning, by a keen dialectic and a rare felicity of style, but both contend that the conception of creation must be profoundly modified, and both insist with Hegel that "God and the world" or "God and the spirits" is the Absolute. In Ward's exposition God is not transcendent in time, or as existing independently of the universe, or as being now able to exercise creative power (for it is said that there can be no new creation since the beginning).<sup>37</sup> Whether

<sup>35</sup> E. G. Conklin, *The Direction of Human Evolution*, 1921, p. 185.

<sup>36</sup> H. H. Lane, *Evolution and Christian Faith*, 1923, p. 196. This book was noticed in the last number of this REVIEW.

<sup>37</sup> See *The Realm of Ends*, p. 204.

there is any place in Pringle-Pattison's system of thought for the transcendence of God is at least a debatable question which Bishop Gore, in his *Belief in God*, answers in the negative.

Omnipotence is of course an empty abstraction if God is not transcendent over the world of nature and the world of spirits. Practically the crux of the question of transcendence, whatever the philosophers may think of it, lies in the Gospel miracles. When Jesus, aroused from sleep in the storm, rebuked the winds and the sea so that there was a great calm, he incidentally rebuked materialism, mechanism, pantheism and deism and even the doctrine of a finite God, if the narrative of the Gospels is true. Sometimes the miracles are characterized as a hindrance to faith, but they are in fact the indispensable support of a faith which is concerned to maintain the integrity and permanent influence of theism. In the present alignment of thought the fortunes of theism and of supernatural Christianity are inseparably bound up together. The personality of God, his sovereign power and his transcendence of the world as Creator, as well as his love, are permanently secure only under the Christian scheme of things. The transcendence of God over the world of nature and of man, necessary to his ineffable holiness as well as to his almighty power, is only safeguarded when we believe in a God who raises the dead and calls the things that are not as though they were.<sup>38</sup>

It is remarkable that the apostle Paul in a passage in which he directly faces the fact of suffering and sounds the mystery of suffering with the plummet of his thought, never thinks of opposing the almighty power to the infinite mercy of God, but describes the former as exercised in the service of the latter. The forces of the universe are at the absolute disposal of the Divine redemptive purpose. All things work together for good to them that love God. These are more than conquerors in every affliction, and no conceivable power in space or

---

<sup>38</sup> The thought of this paragraph is repeated from an article by the writer in the *Biblical Review*, April, 1919, pp. 255, 256.

time or in the sweep of thought or imagination can separate them from the love of God. Who can doubt that Paul's insight is truer than that of men who are lacking in his experience alike of human suffering and of Divine grace?

The problem of evil comes to a focus at the cross of Christ. There we see in their fullest and most dramatic exhibition the sufferings of the righteous, the sin of man—"man's hatred of God"—and the love of God for man. In his weakness, shame and suffering Jesus established his empire of love over the hearts of men. "A feeble reed is his rod of office, but with the Sceptre of Omnipotence, which he wielded from the beginning, he did not perform the wonders which he works with this mark of abasement and weakness." As if to prove that there is no need of choosing between a God of almighty power and a God of infinite love, these attributes of God are revealed in the zenith of their splendor in the cross and resurrection of Christ. As we look at the cross we may say with perfect assurance that there is no limit to the love of God, while the resurrection stands out for all time on the page of history as the supreme manifestation of Divine power. Love and omnipotence are inseparably wedded in the revelation of God in Christ.

Our discussion may fittingly end with the words with which Paul closes his theodicy: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed to him again? For of him, and through him, and unto him, are all things. To him be the glory forever."

*Lincoln University, Pa.*

WM. HALLOCK JOHNSON.