

V

THEISM WITHOUT CHRIST

- 'Ye believe in God, believe also in Me.'—S. JOHN xiv. 1.
- 'I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: no man cometh unto the Father but by Me.'—S. JOHN xiv. 6.
- 'He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.'—S. JOHN xiv. 9.
- 'Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.'—ACTS iv. 12.
- 'He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.'—2 S. JOHN 9.

V

THEISM WITHOUT CHRIST

By Theism without Christ is not meant a system like Judaism or Mohammedanism, but a modern school which maintains that faith in God becomes weakened and impaired by being associated with faith in Jesus. There are those who cling with tenacity to the first article of the Apostles' Creed, 'I believe in God the Father Almighty,' but who reject with equal fervour the second article of the Creed, 'And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord.' They resist with horror the suggestion that the world is under no overruling Providence, or that the humblest human being is not regarded with the tender love of the Infinite God : they rival the most

mystical worshipper in the ardour of the language with which in prayer they address the Father in Heaven, but they refuse to bow in the Name of Jesus: they go to the Father, as they think, without Him: they assert that to look to Him is virtually to look away from God. They are as hostile as we can be to the Substitutes for Christianity which we have been considering. They have no sympathy with those who loudly deny that there is a God, or with those who say that it is impossible to find out whether there is a God, or not, or with those who think that the Creator and the Creation are one, that the universe is God, or with those who, not believing in any Unseen and Eternal God, insist that the proper object of the worship of mankind is man. In the proclamation of the existence of an All-Wise and All-holy Being, in the proclamation that He has made the world and rules it to its minutest detail, in the proclamation that

there is a life beyond the grave, they are the allies of the Christian Church. But then they go on to argue, For those who hold these doctrines, Christ is quite superfluous : to hold them in their purity Christ must be dethroned and His name no longer specially revered. Some may still wish to speak of Him as among the Great Teachers of the world, but some, in order to preserve these precious truths unmixed, decline in a very fanaticism of unbelief to assign Him even that position.

I

The declaration of our Lord, 'No man cometh unto the Father but by Me,' has been a chief stumbling-block and rock of offence. Are we to believe, it is asked, that only the comparatively few to whom the knowledge of Jesus Christ has come can possibly be accepted of the Father? When the words were spoken the number of His disciples was exceedingly small. Did he mean that the

Father could be approached only by that handful of people, that all beyond were banished from the Divine Presence and must inevitably perish? That this is what He meant both the friends and the foes of Christianity have at times been agreed in holding. The friends have imagined that they were thereby exalting the claim of Christ to be the One Mediator. It may be a terrible mystery that the vast majority of the human race should have no opportunity of believing in Him, should be even unacquainted with His Name. We can only bow before the inscrutable decree, and strive with all our might, not only that our own faith may be deepened, but that the knowledge of Christ may be diffused over all the earth, so that some here and there may be rescued. There is little wonder that such a view should have given rise to questionings and opposition, should have been rejected as inconsistent with mercy and with justice. It is an

interpretation on which hostile critics have laid stress as incontestably proving the narrowness and bigotry of the Christian Creed.

If we bear in mind Who it is that is presumed to say, 'No man cometh unto the Father but by Me,' the misconception disappears. It is not merely an individual man, separate from all others, giving Himself out as a wise and infallible Teacher. He Who makes the stupendous claim is One Who by the supposition embodies in Himself Human Nature in its perfection, Who is identified with His brethren, Who says, 'He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.' The Life which He manifests is the Life of God. He is set forth as the Way to the Father: in mercy and in blessing the Way is disclosed in Him: it is not in harsh and rigid exclusiveness that He speaks, debarring the mass of mankind: it is in tender comprehensiveness, inviting all without distinction of race or circumstance, opening a new

and living way for all into the Holiest. It is the breaking down of all barriers between man and man, between man and God, not the setting up of another barrier high and insurmountable. When Christ declares 'No man cometh unto the Father but by Me,' He is not declaring that the way is difficult and impassable, He is pointing out a way of deliverance which all may tread. So far from laying down a hard and burdensome dogma to be accepted on peril of pains and penalties, He is imparting a hope and a consolation in which all may rejoice.

If we believe Him to be the Word of God made Flesh, if we see in Him the Brightness of the Father's glory, it becomes a truism to say that only through Him can life and healing be imparted to mankind. When He Himself says, 'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life,' it is natural for Him to add, 'No man cometh unto the Father but by Me.' It will

be granted by all who believe in God that, apart from God, no soul of man can have life eternal. The most strenuous advocate of the salvation of the virtuous heathen will grant that their salvation does not descend from the idol of wood and stone before which they grovel. It is from the True God, the Living God, that the blessing proceeds. It is His touch, His Spirit, His Presence which has consecrated the earnest though erring worship of the poor idolater. No one who believes in the Infinite and Eternal God could possibly say that the monstrous image whose aid is invoked by the devout heathen is itself the answerer of his prayer, the cause of his deliverance from sin, the bestower of immortality upon him. The utmost that can be said is that in the costly sacrifices, the painful penances, the passionate prayers which he presents to the object of his adoration, the Almighty Love discerns a longing after something nobler and better,

and accepts the service as directed really, though unconsciously, to Him.

The feeble hands and helpless,
Groping blindly in the darkness,
Touch God's right hand in that darkness
And are lifted up and strengthened.¹

But it is the hand of God that they touch. It is from the One Omnipotent God that every blessing comes: it is the One Omnipotent God Who turns to truth and life and reality every sincere and struggling and imperfect attempt to serve Him on the part of those who know not His Nature or His Name.

And what is true of God is equally true of Christ, the manifestation of God. Only grant Him to be the Incarnate Word of God, and it becomes plain that salvation can no more exist apart from Him than apart from the Father. This Word of God is the Light that lighteth every man. Whatever truth, whatever knowledge of the Divine, anywhere

¹ Longfellow, *Song of Hiawatha*.

exists is the result of that illumination. The sparks which shine even in the darkness of heathendom betoken the presence of that Light, not wholly extinguished by the folly and ignorance of man. That is the One Sun of Righteousness which gives light everywhere, though in many places the clouds are so dense that the beams can scarcely penetrate. Now, if that Word has become Flesh, if that Light has become embodied in Human Form, we are still constrained to say, There is no true Light but His, it is in His Light that all must walk if they would not stray, there is no Guide, no Deliverer, save Him. Christ discloses, brings to view, all the saving health which has ever been, all the power of restoring, cleansing, healing, which has ever worked in the souls of men. The one Power by which any human being, in any age or in any land, has ever been fitted for the presence of the All Holy God, is made manifest in Christ. 'Neither is there

salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.'

We need have no hesitation in asserting that all who in any age or in any land, or in any religion, have come to the Father must have come through the Son of Man, the Eternal Word made Flesh. We do not contend, as has too frequently been contended, that beyond the limits of Christianity, beyond, it may be, the limits of one section of Christianity, there is no truth believed, no acceptable service rendered. We hail with gratitude the lofty thoughts and the noble achievements of some who do not in word acknowledge Christ as Lord. In the vision of the Light that lighteth every man, we see

How light can find its way
To regions farthest from the fount of day.¹

'Now,' as is well said by the present Bishop

¹ Keble, *Christian Year*.

of Birmingham, who will hardly be accused of any tendency to minimise the claims of Christianity, 'this is no narrow creed. Christianity, the religion of Jesus, is the Light: it is the one final Revelation, the one final Religion, but it supersedes all other religions, Jewish and Pagan, not by excluding, but by including all the elements of truth which each contained. There was light in Zoroastrianism, light in Buddhism, light among the Greeks: but it is all included in Christianity. A good Christian is a good Buddhist, a good Jew, a good Mohammedan, a good Zoroastrian; that is, he has all the truth and virtue that these can possess, purged and fused in a greater and completer light. Christianity, I say, supersedes all other religions by including these fragments of truth in its own completeness. You cannot show me any element of spiritual light or strength which is in other religions and is not in Christianity. Nor can you

show me any other religion which can compare with Christianity in completeness of light: Christianity is the one complete and final religion, and the elements of truth in other religions are rays of the One Light which is concentrated and shines full in Jesus Christ our Lord.'¹

II

From whatever cause, whether as a reaction against the mode in which this great truth has been at times presented, there have been, and there are, attempts to supersede Christianity because of its narrowness. Religion must not be identified with any one name: God manifests Himself to all, and no Mediator is needed. Theism, therefore, the worship of the One Almighty and Eternal Being, not Christianity, in which a Human Name is associated with the Divine Name, can alone pretend to be the Universal Religion, the

¹ Bishop Gore, *The Christian Creed*.

Religion of all Mankind. It is not the first time that such an attempt to do without Christianity and to do away with it has been made. In the eighteenth century there was a similar movement. To this day at Ferney, near Geneva, is preserved the chapel which Voltaire erected for the worship of God, of God as distinguished from Christ as Divine or as Mediator between God and man. Voltaire thought that he could overthrow and crush the Faith of Christ, but he none the less erected a temple to God. The Deists upheld what they called the Religion of Nature and repudiated Revelation. *Christianity not Mysterious; Christianity as old as the Creation*, were among the works issued to show the superiority of Natural Religion, its freedom from difficulties, its agreement with reason, its universality. The most enduring memorial of the controversy is Bishop Butler's *Analogy of Religion to the Constitution and Course of Nature*,

in which it was argued that the Natural Religion of the Deists was beset by as many difficulties as the Revelation of the Christians, that those who were not hindered from believing in God by the problems which Nature presented need not be staggered by the problems which were presented by Christianity. Bishop Butler's argument was directed against a special set of antagonists, an argument, it may be said, of little avail against the scepticism of the present day. The argument seems to have been unanswerable by those to whom it was addressed. The grounds on which they rejected the Revelation of Christ were shown to be inadequate. When they accepted this or that article of Natural Religion, they had accepted what was as difficult of belief as this or that part of the Revelation which they rejected. The mysteries which existed in the religion with which they would have nothing to do were in harmony with the

mysteries which existed in the religion which they declared to be necessary for the welfare of society. That retort may be made with even more effect to those who so far occupy that same ground to-day. They rejoice to believe that there is a God, that He is not far off, that He communicates Himself to their souls, that the love which we bear to one another is but a faint image of the love which He bears to us, that the noblest qualities which exist in us exist more purely, more gloriously in Him, that we are in very deed His children and are called to manifest His likeness. It is by prayer, both in public and in private, both in congregations and alone with the Alone, that His Love and His Help can be comprehended and used. He is no absent God: His Ear is not heavy that it cannot hear, nor His arm shortened that it cannot save. With this belief we, as Christians, have no dispute: we gladly go along with Theists in asserting it: we

only wonder at their unwillingness to go along with us a little further. For if God be such as they glowingly depict Him, if our relations to Him be such as they esteem it our greatest dignity to know, there is nothing antecedently impossible in the thought that One Man has heard His Voice more clearly, has surrendered to His Will more entirely, than any other in the history of the ages and the races of mankind: nothing antecedently impossible in the thought that to One Man His Truth has been conveyed more brightly, more fully than to any other; that in One Man the lineaments of the Divine Image may be seen more distinctly than in any other. If God be such, and if our relations to God be such, as Theists describe, why should they shrink with distrust or with antipathy from a Son of Man Who has borne witness to those truths in His Life and in His Death with a steadfastness of conviction which none other has ever surpassed; Who, according

to the records which we possess of Him, habitually lived to do the Father's Will and died commending His Spirit into the Father's Hands: a Son of Man Who could truly be said to be in heaven while He was on earth? If God be such, and our relations to God be such, as Theists describe, would not that Son of Man be the confirmation of their thoughts? Would not His testimony be of infinite value on their side? Would He Himself not be the radiant illustration, the eagerly longed for proof of the truth for which they contend? They believe in God: why should it, on their own showing, be so hard to believe in Christ?

III

The Theism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is in some respects different from the Deism of the eighteenth. It is not so cold, the God in whom it believes is not so distant from His creatures. But it is not

less vehement in its depreciation of Christianity as a needless and even harmful addition to the Religion of Nature. Conspicuous among the advocates of this modern Theism have been Francis William Newman, Miss Frances Power Cobbe, and the Rev. Charles Voysey.

Francis Newman, in his youth, belonged, like his brother the famous Cardinal, to the strictest sect of Evangelicals, but, like the Cardinal also, drifted away from them, though in a totally different direction.¹ As he found the untenableness of certain views which he had cherished, the insufficiency of certain arguments which he had employed, he came with much anguish of mind to the conclusion that the whole fabric of historical Christianity was built upon the sand. He rapidly renounced belief after belief, and caused widespread distress and dismay by a crude attack upon the moral perfection of

¹ Appendix XX.

our Lord. His conviction that Christianity had nothing special to say for itself, and that one religion was as good as another, seems to have been mainly brought about by a discussion which he had with a Mohammedan carpenter at Aleppo. ‘ Among other matters, I was particularly desirous of disabusing him of the current notion of his people that our Gospels are spurious narratives of late date. I found great difficulty of expression, but the man listened to me with much attention, and I was encouraged to exert myself. He waited patiently till I had done and then spoke to the following effect: “ I will tell you, sir, how the case stands. God has given to you English many good gifts. You make fine ships, and sharp penknives, and good cloth and cottons, and you have rich nobles and brave soldiers ; and you write and print many learned books (dictionaries and grammars) : all this is of God. But there is one thing that God has withheld

from you and has revealed to us ; and that is the knowledge of the true religion by which one may be saved.”’¹

But although Newman was led to give up Christianity, and practically to hold that one religion was as good as another, he clung tenaciously to what he supposed to be common to all religions, belief in God, a belief deep and ardent. The rationalism of the Deists did not approve itself to him. ‘Our Deists of past centuries tried to make religion a matter of the pure intellect, and thereby halted at the very frontier of the inward life : they cut themselves off even from all acquaintance with the experience of spiritual men.’² He nourished his soul with psalms and hymns : he sought communion with God. He saw the weakness of Morality without the inspiring power of Religion. ‘Morals can seldom gain living energy without the impulsive force derived from Spirituals. . . . However

¹ *Phases of Faith.*

² *The Soul : its Sorrows and Aspirations.*

much Plato and Cicero may talk of the surpassing beauty of virtue, still virtue is an abstraction, a set of wise rules, not a Person, and cannot call out affection as an existence exterior to the soul does. On the contrary, God is a *Person*; and the love of Him is of all affections by far the most energetic in exciting us to make good our highest ideals of moral excellence and in clearing the moral sight, so that that ideal may keep rising. Other things being equal (a condition not to be forgotten) a spiritual man will hold a higher and purer morality than a mere moralist. Not only does Duty manifest itself to him as an ever-expanding principle, but since a larger and larger part of Duty becomes pleasant and easy when performed under the stimulus of Love, the Will is enabled to concentrate itself more on that which remains difficult and greater power of performance is attained.'¹ Where shall we find a more

¹ *The Soul: its Sorrows and Aspirations.*

vivid or more spiritual description of the rise and progress of devotion in the soul than in the words of this man, who placed himself beyond the pale of every Christian communion? 'One who begins to realise God's majestic beauty and eternity and feels in contrast how little and transitory man is, how dependent and feeble, longs to lean upon him for support. But He is *outside* of the heart, like a beautiful sunset, and seems to have nothing to do with it: there is no getting into contact with Him, to press against Him. Yet where rather should the weak rest than on the strong, the creature of the day than on the Eternal, the imperfect than on the Centre of Perfection? And where else should God dwell than in the human heart? for if God is in the universe, among things inanimate and unmoral, how much more ought He to dwell with our souls! and they, too, seem to be infinite in their cravings: who but He can satisfy them? Thus a restless

instinct agitates the soul, guiding it dimly to feel that it was made for some definite but unknown relation towards God. The sense of emptiness increases to positive uneasiness, until there is an inward yearning, if not shaped in words, yet in substance not alien from that ancient strain, "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God; my soul is athirst for God, even for the Living God." ¹

Mr. Newman, in his later days, we understand, had modified the bitterness of his opposition to historical Christianity and was ready to avow himself as a disciple of Christ.

Miss Frances Power Cobbe was another devout spirit who, with less violence but equal decisiveness, accepted Theism as apart from Christianity. In her case, even more visibly than in Mr. Newman's, it was not Christianity which she rejected, but sundry distortions of it with which it had in her mind become

¹ *The Soul.*

identified. She wrote not a few articles so permeated with the Christian spirit and imbued with the Christian hope that the most ardent believer in Christ could read them with entire approval and own himself their debtor. She took an active part in many philanthropic movements, and she was an earnest and eloquent advocate of faith in the Divine Ordering of the world and in human immortality.

‘Theism,’ she said, ‘is not Christianity *minus* Christ, nor Judaism *minus* the miraculous legation of Moses, nor any other creed whatsoever merely stripped of its supernatural element. It is before all things the positive affirmation of the Absolute Goodness of God: and if it be in antagonism to other creeds, it is principally because of, and in proportion to, their failure to assert that Goodness in its infinite and all-embracing completeness.’¹ ‘God is over us, and heaven

¹ *Alone to the Alone.*

is waiting for us all the same, even though all the men of science in Europe unite to tell us there is only matter in the universe and only corruption in the grave. Atheism may prevail for a night, but faith cometh in the morning. Theism is "bound to win" at last: not necessarily that special type of Theism which our poor thoughts in this generation have striven to define: but that great fundamental faith, the needful substruction of every other possible religious faith, the faith in a Righteous and Loving God, and in a Life of man beyond the tomb.' ¹

'All the monitions of conscience, all the guidance and rebukes and consolations of the Divine Spirit, all the holy words of the living, and all the sacred books of the dead, these are our primary Evidences of Religion. In a word, the first article of our creed is "I BELIEVE IN GOD THE HOLY GHOST." After this fundamental dogma, we accept

¹ *Alone to the Alone.*

with joy and comfort the faith in the Creator and Orderer of the physical universe, and believe in GOD THE FATHER ALMIGHTY, MAKER OF HEAVEN AND EARTH. And lastly we rejoice in the knowledge that (in no mystic Athanasian sense, but in simple fact) "these two are One." The God of Love and Justice Who speaks in conscience, and Whom our inmost hearts adore, is the same God Who rolls the suns and guides the issues of life and death.'¹

In an able paper, *A Faithless World*, in which Miss Cobbe combated the assertion of Sir James Fitzjames Stephen, that the disappearance of belief in God and Immortality would be unattended with any serious consequences to the material, intellectual, or moral well-being of mankind, she forcibly said, 'I confess at starting on this inquiry, that the problem, "Is religion of use, or can we do as well without it?" seems to me

¹ *Alone to the Alone.*

almost as grotesque as the old story of the woman who said that we owe vast obligations to the moon, which affords us light on dark nights, whereas we are under no such debt to the sun, who only shines by day, *when there is always light*. Religion has been to us so diffused a light that it is quite possible to forget how we came by the general illumination, save when now and then it has blazed out with special brightness.' The comment is eminently just, but does it not apply with equal force to Miss Cobbe herself? The Theism which she professed was the direct outcome of Christianity, could never have existed but for Christianity, was, in all its best features, simply Christianity under a different name.

That Theism, as a separate organisation, gives little evidence of conquering the world is shown by the fact that, after many years, it boasts of only one congregation, that of the Theistic Church, Swallow Street, Picca-

dilly, of which the Rev. Charles Voysey is minister. Mr. Voysey was at one time vicar of a parish in Yorkshire, where he issued, under the title of *The Sling and the Stone*, sermons attacking the commonly accepted doctrines of the Church of England, and was in consequence deprived of his living. He is distinctly anti-Christian in his teaching; strongly prejudiced against anything that bears the Christian name: criticising the sayings and doings of our Lord in a fashion which indicates either the most astonishing misconception or the most melancholy perversion. But his sincerity and fervour on behalf of Theism are unmistakable. He describes it as *Religion for all mankind, based on facts which are never in Dispute*. The book which is called by that title is written for the help and comfort of all his fellow-men, 'chiefly for those who have doubted and discarded the Christian Religion, and in consequence have become Agnostics or

Pessimists.' It is prefaced by a dedication, which is also a touching confession of personal faith: 'In all humility I dedicate this book to my God Who made me and all mankind, Who loves us all alike with an everlasting love, Who of His very faithfulness causeth us to be troubled, Who punishes us justly for every sin, not in anger or vengeance, but only to cleanse, to heal, and to bless, in Whose Everlasting Arms we lie now and to all eternity.'¹

Mr. Voysey has compiled a Prayer Book for the use of his congregation. The ordinary service is practically the morning or evening service of the Book of Common Prayer, with all references to our Lord carefully eliminated. The hymn *Jesus, Lover of my Soul* is changed to *Father, Refuge of my Soul*; and the hymn

Just as I am without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidst me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come,

¹ Appendix XXI.

is rendered :

Just as I am without one plea,
But that Thy love is seeking me,
And that Thou bidst me come to Thee,
O loving God, I come.

The service respecting our duty, and the service of supplication have merits of their own, but, except for the wanton omission of the Name which is above every name, there is nothing in them which does not bear a Christian impress. 'Christianity *minus* Christ' would seem to be no unfair definition of their standpoint: and without Christ they could not have been what they are. The Father Who is set forth as the Object of worship and of trust is the Father Whom Christ declared, the Father Who, but for the manifestation of Christ, would never have been known. Far be it from us to deny that the Father has been found by those who have sought Him beyond the limits of the Church: this only we affirm that those by whom He

has been found, have, consciously or unconsciously, drawn near to Him by the way of Christ. Nothing of value in modern Theism is incompatible with Christianity: nothing of value which would be not strengthened by faith in Him Who said, 'He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.'

IV

The strange objection to faith in Christ is sometimes made that it interferes with faith in the Father. The notion of mediation is regarded as derogatory alike to God and to man. There is no need for any one to come between: no need for God to depute another to bear witness of Him: no need for us to depute Another to secure His favour, as from all eternity He is Love. The assumption, the groundless assumption, underlying this conception is that the Mediator is a barrier between man and God, a hindrance not a help to fellowship with the Divine: that one

goes to the Mediator because access to God is debarred. Whatever may occasionally have been the unguarded statements of representatives of Christianity, it is surely plain that no such doctrine is taught, that the very opposite of such doctrine is taught, in the New Testament. 'We do not,' says M. Sabatier, 'address ourselves to Jesus by way of dispensing ourselves from going to the Father. Far from this, we go to Christ and abide in Him, precisely that we may find the Father. We abide in Him that His filial consciousness may become our own; that the Spirit may become our spirit, and that God may dwell immediately in us as He dwells in Him. Nothing in all this carries us outside of the religion of the Spirit: on the contrary, it is its seal and confirmation.'¹

The whole object of the work of Christ, as proclaimed by Himself, or as interpreted

¹ *The Religions of Authority and the Religion of the Spirit.*

by His Apostles, was to show the Father, to bring men to the Father. 'Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of Myself: but the Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works.' He 'came and preached peace to you which were afar off and to them that were nigh. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.' To argue that to come to Christ is a substitute for coming to God, is an inducement to halt upon the way, is an absolute travesty and perversion. To refuse to see the glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ is not to bring God near: it is to remove Him further from our vision. That God should come to us, that we should go to God, through a mediator, is only in accordance with a universal law. 'Why,' says one, who might be expected from his theological training to speak otherwise, 'Why, *all* knowledge is "mediated" even of

the simplest objects, even of the most obvious facts: there is no such thing in the world as *immediate* knowledge, and shall we demur when we are told that the knowledge of God the Father also must pass, in order to reach us at its best and purest, through the medium of "that Son of God and Son of Man in Whom was the fulness of the prophetic spirit and the filial life?" . . . Of this at least I feel convinced, that where faith in the Father has grown blurred and vague in our days, and finally flickered out, the cause must in many instances be sought—I will not say in the wilful rejection, but—in the careless letting go of the message and Personality of the Son.¹ So far from the thought of the Father being ignored or set aside by the thought of Christ, we may rather say with S. John, 'Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: he that confesseth the Son hath the Father also.' 'He

¹ J. Warschauer, *Coming of Christ*.

that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.’

The homage that we render Thee
Is still our Father’s own ;
Nor jealous claim or rivalry
Divides the Cross and Throne.¹

V

The notion that Theism as contrasted with Christianity is a mark of progress and of spirituality is a pure imagination. ‘More spiritual it may be than the traditional Christianity which consists in rigid and stereotyped forms of practice, of ceremonial, of observance, of dogma : but not more spiritual than the teaching of Christ Himself, the end and completion of Whose work was to bring men to the Father, to teach them that God is a Spirit, and to send the Spirit of the Father into the hearts of the disciples. It would be a strange perversity if men should reject Christ in the name of spiritual

¹ Whittier, *Our Master*.

religion when it is to Christ, and to Him alone, that they owe the conception of what spiritual religion is.'¹ To preach the doctrines of Theism without reference to Christ is to deprive them of their most sublime illustration, their most inspiring force, and their most convincing proof.

It is as Christ is known that God is believed in. The attempt to create enthusiasm for God while banishing the Gospel of Christ meets with astonishingly small response. The 'Religion for all Mankind' makes but little progress, is, in spite of the labours of five-and-thirty years, confined, as we have seen, almost to a solitary moderately sized congregation. And whether or not the 'facts' on which the religion is based 'are never in dispute,' the religion itself is oftentimes disputed very keenly. Modern assaults upon religious faith are, as a rule, directed quite as much against Theism as

¹ R. E. Bartlett, *The Letter and the Spirit* : Bampton Lecture.

against Christianity.¹ It is the Love, or even the existence, of the Living God, it is human responsibility, it is life beyond the grave, that are called in question as frequently as the Resurrection of Christ. The assurance that God at sundry times and in divers manners has spoken by prophets renders it not more but less improbable that He should speak by a Son: the assurance that there is life beyond the grave for all renders it not more but less improbable that Jesus rose from the dead. Conversely those who believe in Jesus believe with a double intensity in Him Whom He revealed. 'Ye believe in God,' said Christ, 'believe also in Me.' For many of us now, it is because we believe in Christ that we believe also in God. The Almighty and Eternal is beyond our ken: the grace and truth of Jesus Christ come home to our hearts. The Word that was in the beginning with God and was God,

¹ Appendix XXII.

is wrapt in impenetrable mystery : the Word made Flesh can be seen and handled : has

wrought

With human hands the Creed of Creeds
In loveliness of perfect deeds,
More strong than all poetic thought.¹

And however it may be in a few exceptional cases, where people nominally renouncing Christ desperately cleave to a fragment of the faith of their childhood, the fact remains that, where He ceases to be acknowledged, faith in the Father Whom He manifested tends, gradually or speedily, to vanish.

VI

The superiority of Theism to Deism simply consists in its being more Christian. With the ideas of God which 'Theists' hold, we can, as Christians, most cordially sympathise. We can sincerely say, 'Hold to them firmly, they are your life : let no man rob you of

¹ Tennyson, *In Memoriam*.

them by any vain deceit.' But we cannot help also asking, 'Whence have you drawn those lofty ideas? where have you obtained so exalted a conception of the Divine Being in His mingled Majesty and lowliness, in His inconceivable greatness, and His equally inconceivable compassion? We turn from the picture of God which, with so much labour, so much skill, so much moral earnestness, you have exhibited, and we behold the Original in Christ and His Teaching. However unconsciously, it is His Truth, it is His Features, that you have reproduced. You have been brought up in the Church of Christ, or you have been brought into contact with its influences, and you have imbibed its teachings, perhaps more deeply than some who would not dare to question its smallest precepts. Still, Christ's teaching you have not outgrown, from Christ Himself you have not escaped. You cannot go from His presence or flee from His Spirit. Those

views which you hold so strongly, which are to you the most ennobling that have ever been given of God and of religion, where is it that alone they are to be found? In places where Christianity has gone before.

No doubt, belief in God is not confined to Christian countries: worship of the Maker of heaven and earth exists where the name of Christ has never been heard, but not *such* belief, *such* worship, as that for which those persons contend. The God Whom they adore will not be found anywhere save where Christianity has penetrated. In this country it is the desperate clinging to one portion of the Christian Faith when all else has been abandoned: in other lands, in India, for example, where representatives of this way of thinking are not uncommon, it is the rapturous welcome of one of the sublime truths of Christianity before which the idolatries of their forefathers are passing away. It is safe to call it a transition stage:

it will either part with the fragment of Christianity which it retains and become merged in doubt and speculation and unbelief; or it will include yet more of the Christianity of which it has grasped a part: its belief in God will be crowned and confirmed by its belief in Christ.

For, speaking to those who cherish faith in the All-Righteous and All-Loving God as the only hope for the regeneration of mankind, we cannot shut our eyes to the fact that where faith in Christ fades, faith in God has a tendency to become vague and dim. He ceases to be thought of as a Friend and Help at hand: He is resolved into a Creator infinitely distant or into a Law, unmovable, inexorable, a blind, unconscious Fate. It is Christ Who gives life to the thought of God. It is the Word made Flesh that makes the Eternal Word more real. The attempt of the Deists to purify religion by the preaching of a God who had not

revealed Himself, and could not reveal Himself, in a Son, came to nothing. Voltaire's chapel at Ferney still stands, but nobody worships in it. Religion seemed to slumber: belief in God seemed to be decaying, when the preaching of the name and the work of Christ again aroused it into life. And so it is now. Whatever the ability, whatever the sincerity of the advocates of belief in God without reference to Christ, it lacks motive-power, it lacks the missionary spirit. If we may judge by the past, Theism without Christ is a faith which will not spread, which will not lay hold on the labouring and the heavy laden: which may be maintained as a theory, but which will not be as a fire in the souls of men diffusing itself by kindling other souls. It is from Christ alone, from Christ the manifestation of what God is in Heart and Mind, from Christ the manifestation of what man ought to be, from Christ Who said, 'In My Father's house are many

mansions : he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father,' that there comes with an authority to which, in face of the difficulties besetting the present and the future, the human soul will bow, with a soothing power to which the human spirit will gladly yield—it is from Christ alone that there comes the Divine injunction, 'Let not your heart be troubled, ye believe in God, believe also in Me.' It is as He is clearly seen and truly known that the clouds of error and superstition vanish from the Face of God, and men are drawn to worship and to trust.