

ARTICLE VII.

THE THEISTIC CHRIST.

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"The old need not be therefore true,
O Brother man, nor yet the new.
Ah still awhile the old thought retain
And yet consider it again.

"The souls of now two thousand years
Have laid up here their tolls and fears
And all the earnings of their pain,
Ah yet consider it again."

Clough.

THE time allotted me is brief. I must often crush into a sentence what would justly require a treatise. I will try to restrain wrath and rhetoric. Really the most modest form of expression in philosophical or rhetorical writing is, "I think" or the *Ὡς γὰρ ἔμοιγε δοκεῖ* of Socrates. I am giving my personal opinion in what I write. But I wish it understood that it is the expression of conviction. It is the result of a half-century's study. My conviction is as "deep as life."

I assume and assert the New Testament view of Christ as we read it, and as it has been read through the centuries. I make all allowances of error that textual or higher criticism in sane rationality can claim. I shall not respect the mere whim of subjectivism. The blunder is as eminent to treat history as myth as myth history. The critical work of the last century has left the New Testament substantially as it found it. Nothing has been discovered or done which has essentially modified

the estimate in which it has been held as a record of historic fact. Research has strengthened that estimate. The "finds" in my lifetime have all fallen one way — the way of confirmation. Instances: The Codex Sinaiticus, Tatian's Diatessaron, the Didaché, and so forth. Prediction is a dangerous road. But I will venture the prediction that future "finds" will fall the same way.

The New Testament is verified as no other book or documents known to man. Subsequent history bears witness to it in ways conclusive. A few words written incidentally, floating down the stream of time, often indicate the character of its contents. There is a granite boulder before my door. It tells the tale of the ice age. It came from parent granite up, by, or beyond the Georgian Bay.

Take the letter of Pliny to Trajan. Pliny says that the two female slaves whom he tortured for information about the Christian religion testified that the Christians met before it was light, to eat a harmless meal together and to sing a hymn to Christ *ὡς θεῶν*. *Ὡς θεῶν* — there is a granite boulder in the drift of history at the end of the first century up in Bithynia by the Black Sea, telling of the far-off stratum of theism from which it was derived.

Now go away to the west — to Lyons, in Gaul, half a century later. Irenæus in his letter to Florinus says, that Polycarp would describe his intercourse with John, and with the rest who had seen the Lord, and relate the accounts he had heard from them, *both* about *τῶν δυνάμεων αὐτοῦ* and his teaching. "*Τῶν δυνάμεων*" — there you have another drift boulder bearing testimony to theism.

The woof of Christ's demonstration might have been his teachings, but there was a warp exhibiting theistic dynamic control. It is record and history that Jesus claimed and exer-

cised theistic powers. That claim and exercise sent him to the cross. Dispute in hot blood can be read, on page after page of the four Gospels, over the assertion of Jesus to be a voice and power from the management and control of the universe — not from out the managed and controlled.

There has always been an attempt to account for Christ on the plane of humanism. There is renewed attempt in this day so to limit him. That cannot be done without reducing the New Testament to a small collection of ethical precepts and theological speculations of an obscure wandering Jewish rabbi. That is to play "Hamlet" with Hamlet left out, and to leave the origin, progress, and persistence of Christianity inexplicable. There is now manifest a disposition to ignore the theistic signs and dynamism of Christ in the realm of physics and put his religion entirely on an ethical foundation.

It is said no demonstration in physics can compel assent to moral truth. That may be so. But such demonstration may arrest attention and thus be an influence leading to acceptance of the truth. Christ himself so held. He put the two systems together, and said that acts performed in the physical system might be taken into account in judging his assertions of spiritual, ethical cast: "But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins (then saith he unto the sick of the palsy), Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house" (Matt. ix. 6); "If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works" (John x. 37-38); "Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me; or else believe me for the very works' sake" (xiv. 11); "If I had not done among them the works which none other did they had not had sin" (xv. 24). This attitude of Christ was characteristic. He had no hesitancy in calling attention to his power in the physical realm as

attesting his right to teach in the moral realm. He claimed dominion over both as rightful master.

Why should we rule out or neglect evidence on which Christ relied to substantiate his nature and mission? God is over all or he is over nothing. His representative ought to show mastery in other realms as well as in morals. If you confine Christ solely to ethics in the plane of humanism, you thereby reduce his religion to a specialty — make it an aside in philosophy — allow thought to take its own way in the other departments of the universe open to inspection, and weakly take without question what is told by other specialists there — and even give up to them the philosophical synthesis of the whole. In throwing away the acts of Christ that show theistic dynamism in other realms than the specialty it has reserved for itself, religion shows cowardice and is paying its penalty. It is said that young men are not entering the ministry. Why should they? History has been abandoned on one hand by the profession, and science on the other. Who hears a sermon on Evidences of Christianity or on Natural Theology?

Easy is the road to one idea, and many go thereon. Religion is trying to survey the universe with a theodolite tottling on one leg. The ministry has become a waiting maid to sociology. It ought to be Master of the Rolls in history and science. Theology is practically abandoned. No wonder the profession is discredited. The main ambition of religion seems now to be to reform politics and to be a voice crying in the slums. "These ye ought to have done, and not to have left the other undone." It is not my observation that politics is corrupt because Christians neglect civic duty, but because they are outvoted by those with whom ethical considerations are secondary or of no account at all. If we were to cease belaboring Christians, and to make more men Christian, we should

be nearer solution of all civic difficulties. We daub with untempered mortar. As to the slums, the multitudes do not live in the slums. They live in homes. They work and think. Their irreligion is of intellectual cast. As of old, "the people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" — just the knowledge the ministry could impart. I have never had any knowledge I could not explain to my hearers. What has astonished me is the mental as well as spiritual capacity of the average human being.

Sir J. J. Thomson, President of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, at the recent meeting at Winnipeg, took occasion to warn even scientists themselves of the danger of specializations to themselves and to science itself. A man can become so special that his judgment as to the relations of his specialty would be valueless. Retreat in Christianity to one specialty is confession of weakness at the outset. Voluntarily to abandon a "far-flung battle line" that has been drawn up for ages is not an encouraging symptom. The army that retreats or even intrenches is defeated. It is not good strategy to surrender a position that Christ took. To take Christ from the throne in philosophy is to open the way to impeachment of his ethics. That is a process already in blast. A record that is not good for Christ's deeds will not save his words. The deeds are more likely than the words to be correctly reported. To this position we are coming with reference to them — Christ said nothing definite about anything — he only meant to indicate a spirit. Then each man construes the spirit to suit himself. The end of that is moral disintegration — dialysis. We shall not save Christ even as an ethical leader in this way. In sky-flying it is well not to forget geology.

There is a line of the recorded sayings of Jesus that will not bear inspection in *morals* on the basis of humanism. I

refer to a class in which "I am the light of the world," "I am the bread of life," "I am the way, the truth, and the life" are instances. Sayings of this tenor are distributed freely through all the four Gospels. I will call attention to some instances from the Synoptics. You will not be rid of them by dehistoricizing the Gospel of John. They are a water-mark in the paper on which all are writ. "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, . . . of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with the holy angels" (Mark viii. 38). Who fears the shame of any *man* in any ultimate assize? To begin with, any *man* will have his own condition to attend to on such occasion. He will not be asked to sit in judgment on any other man. If he is a *perfect man* he will have enough to do to express thanks to God that he is perfect without shying condemnation on others. The judgment scene is in Matthew. From a human base it is intolerable. Theistic function is preferable for that occasion.

"Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Try that in humanism and it breaks to pieces — it is an irreparable wreck. No man will take a step toward another *man* to find in *him* rest to his soul. We can do better.

"As the hart panteth after the water brooks,
So panteth my soul after thee, O God.
My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God:
When shall I come and appear before God?"

Psalm xlii. 1, 2.

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

LONGFELLOW.

On the basis of humanism the communion must cease to be. "Take, eat; this is my body." What if it is? If Jesus were human simply, he had the use of his body; and with that he and we ought to be content. Men will not eat bread and drink wine once in two months through the ages in honor of any *man*. No wonder Emerson dropped the communion when he brought Christ down to humanism. He would have lost his own self-respect, and ours too, if he had not. But the case is altered when you find in bread and wine symbolism of nutrition from "that eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us." There you are in the presence of theism; and in it the omnipresence promised in "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world," is realized.

By no psychic conjuring can you transfer to humanism reverence and adoration that belongs to theism. Look one moment more at that last saying. Did Christ say it? If he did not, what did he say? There you are at the open door out of which everything he is reported to have said can go. We are in the outer darkness, where nothing is visible save the smoke of infinite delusion. If he said it and said it from the plane of humanism, the case is not better. Could it be true? If it was said from the plane of theism, it simply states religious experience. Of all explanations theism is the simplest.

A fertile exercise in thought upon the theism of Christ will come out from reading the four Gospels with an eye to mark the indications in the acts of Christ of the omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence of God. More will come out in one form or another of these attributes or potencies of God than one even familiar with the Gospels would be likely to suppose. You may not be able sometimes in his moral teaching to tell whether he is speaking from the plane of humanism or of theism. But often the light will so flash that you have no

doubt that you have truth from the Logos of God. The same thing is true in the physical realm. You may at times doubt whether you have passed from the control possible to humanism to that belonging to theism. But there will be times when you will have no doubt. "I will; be thou clean" — to leprosy, and tissue resuming its normal function, comes only from the upper realm. Over and over again in that long career of healing, extending even to resurrections from the dead, you come upon mastery in biology that can proceed only from the plane where dwells the Creator and Director of life. At a word the winds and waves are quiet. The rational explanation is that the word came from omnipotent will.

Now take omniscience in the psychic realm. We usually think we have a close guard over our own souls. We can keep human inspection from intrusion. But look at the case of the woman at the well in Samaria. The conduct and present condition of an utter stranger lie open in long line to the vision of Christ. No wonder that the woman stammered, "Sir, I perceive thou art a prophet." There was the omniscience for which we can find base only in theism. So too the forereading of Peter's denial. These are specimens of the sight that sees to the thoughts and intents of the heart, and the conduct that has arisen or may arise therefrom, as we know God, and God only, can do.

For claim to omnipresence we should naturally expect him to refer to the future; and we are not disappointed. "I will not leave you orphans. I will come to you"; "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." Experience for the whole Christian era has verified that. A promise made to all men everywhere has been kept. Asking souls have found their answer simultaneously in China and America. The ends of theism have been answered by Christ. This omnipresence

in ministry in religion is satisfactory evidence of the theism of Christ.

But we now have a new way of depriving Christ of theism; and that is by pantheism to identify humanity with theism. The theory is that God comes to consciousness only in man — that in man God has found the highest expression of himself. If this expression is as yet largely of low order, we must regard the case as like that of Milton's

"tawny lion, pawing to get free
His hinder parts"

from as yet unorganized mud. The best has been done that could be done. The expression will be better further along. If man is the highest intellectual expression of God, it is strange that man has had and has so many unsolved problems, and so many for which he has found solution so late in his history. Man's mathematics of spectroscopy is scarcely half a century old, yet it was in existence when the first motion of the first nebula gave light. The infinite complexus of mathematics in chemistry came up to man's consciousness only a little more than a century ago, yet that began to come into existence as long ago as when (or before) God divided the waters from the waters and the dry land appeared. If one is so limited in his mind as not to be able to see that the infinite mathematics, from the atom of atoms to the universe of universes, of matter and force is, *per se*, expression of intelligence and will and consciousness — why that is his limitation, but he cannot impose it on all mankind. To hold that God came to highest intellectual consciousness in man betrays ignorance and vanity bathetic.

If you run after everything which anybody calls science, you may have a will-o'-the-wisp chase. Even the nebular hypothesis of Laplace is whirling itself to pieces. You can read in the

same day the hypothesis of one astronomer that the moon is a stray from the Pacific Ocean, and of another that it is a capture from space. Where is the corps of smart lyceum lecturers and pencil-pushers who set the world agrin with the information that man sprang from a monkey and was now free from the fetters of the old theology? If evolution stood for that idea, the ministers who railed at it were right. Since man became man, he has been separated from the *Quadrumana* not only in other respects but by the whole diameter of the universe of moral phenomena.

In 1859 Ralph Waldo Emerson asked me to procure for him a copy of Darwin's "Origin of Species." About that episode no matter. But I have had that book under sight for fifty years. In reference to it I will give my opinion. The book was not the first word said about the origin of species, nor the last word said or to be said about differentiation. But it has produced a general conviction of genetic connection in biology. In that conclusion Darwin was following in the track of a Vermont Congregational minister — the Rev. Dr. Asa Burton, of Thetford, who, more than a half-century before, maintained that animals were brought forth not by fiat but by laws. Classification is still a fact in biology — a fact that attests intellectuality in the system and enthrones theism. Hostility in theology to Darwinism is very much misunderstood. It came not from antagonism to the idea of genetic connection, but to unethical consequences sought therewith to be connected.

Why should a minister take delight in being a *claqueur* for any wandering show, as soon as it heaves in sight over the hill, that labels its carts "Science"? Better wait till the performance is over. Science is grand. Scientists mean to be true. Yet they are no more truthful or fearless than theologians. Scientists have and ought to have liberty and cour-

age to make hypotheses. But during the hypothetical era — the period of conjecture and question — they should pray, "From our volunteer spokesmen who rush in where we fear to tread, 'Good Lord, deliver us.'" The philosophical habit of suspending judgment — of not going off at half-cock at everything — is worth much.

The attempt to degrade the theism of Christ by apotheosis of humanity is barred. It is contradicted by science and experience. They both, everywhere they look, find the dualism of God and man. In psychology Kant has given us the "categorical imperative." He might have given us also the categorical subjunctive — if — the rational; the categorical potential — can — freedom; the categorical indicative or even suggestive — wisdom, inspiration. Any or all of the moods that can be found in morals will guarantee dualism. Matthew Arnold — a free lance in thought — has given us "the Power not ourselves" as an ultimate residual in all moral experience. James Martineau says, in substance, that the distinctive feature of our ethical consciousness is the opposition we find there to our personal aims. Therein dualism is implicit. If one cannot make and keep the distinction between God and man, he should come out from behind the Bible, for the distinction is there from Genesis to Revelation. The issue is dualism or Mrs. Eddy. There is the great divide. Therefrom you will reach a different sea. It is either, or. Knowledge will cease to be when we fail to distinguish things that differ and fail to give significance to difference. Evolution is by variation. Tendency to vary goes by heredity as well as tendency to repeat. Asa Gray says, "In every variation lies hid the mystery of a beginning." In every variation we are face to face with theism in action. "Behold, I make all things new."

Repetition of sameness is but a partial principle in the man-

agement of the universe. There are kata- and ana-strophes in perpetual permutation and of infinite variety of intensity.

“There rolls the deep where grew the tree.
O Earth, what changes thou hast seen.
There where the long street roars, hath been
The stillness of the central sea.

“The hills are shadows, and they flow
From form to form, and nothing stands:
They melt like mist; the solid lands,
Like clouds, they shape themselves and go.”

TENNYSON.

The next Renaissance, the next Reformation in Christianity, will be from the scientific quarter, in a new birth of conviction in regard to the theism of Christ. Tyndall complained of Faraday that he put his science and his religion in two compartments that had no connection with each other. This might have seemed true to Mr. Tyndall, with his peculiar mental bent reinforced by his acquisitions in nescience. But there is not the slightest evidence that it was true of Faraday. His religion had a very simple content. It rested in just what Irenæus said John set forth—the *powers* and *teachings* of Christ. To the mind of Faraday that closed no door to knowledge and knowledge closed no door against that. Those who cultivate knowledge, as fact, now, in very preponderant measure, hold to a “God over all, blessed forever.” When that position is gained, it will cause no very violent wrenching to a sound athletic intellect to conclude that one who has represented God with such unflinching accuracy in morals, to such wide acceptance, might also represent him in control of matter and force. Then, as Mr. Huxley said, it is only a question of testimony. The historic testimony stands and will stand. The mind scientific is assenting and will assent to the theism of Christ. The religious doubt of men engaged in scientific

research is very much overestimated. Asa Gray said he was a "theist, an evolutionist, and a subscriber to the Nicene Creed." That position is representative in science. It will not strengthen Christ in religion to give up his theistic mastery in physics.

It is remarkable how we shy at evidences of theistic action in small measure and hasten to express belief in the resurrection of Christ — "strain at a gnat and swallow a camel." In this way we come round to the old position — an absentee God; interfering only on great occasions. We meet this argument, "flotsam and jetsam" now — we have learned or may learn to do some things Christ did; therefore Christ's acts were not theistic. We have learned how to burn hydrogen and form water; therefore the sea was not formed by God, all-wise and mighty. Anything we can do God did not. Oh, give us back

**"The sea is his, and he made it;
And his hands formed the dry land."**

God had hydrogen to burn, and he burned it and stamped the result, in the die of his mathematics, H_2O — and the fool saith, "Where is the evidence of theism in water?"

The very prophets of the immanence of God are sacrificing to the idol of the absentee. God is banished from his immanence. He is merely "the go" of things. Of what he shall or can do they have established themselves judges. He is run in their molds. He must act as they think. 'Verily he has become altogether such a one as themselves.'

More and more as knowledge grows there will be craving for unity in the system in which we live. More and more men will ask, Is there evidence that the voice that "speaks all the promises" in religion is one with

"The voice that rolls the stars along"?

The dynamism of Christ in physics is the keystone which completes that arch.

Tides in thought — in truth and error — repeat themselves. We are having the repetition of a tide that swelled to a great height in the fourth century. The world in regard to Christ then seemed to become humanistic. But Athanasius stood "contra mundum," and the Nicene is to-day the creed of Christendom. It will so remain. You might as well attempt to overthrow the work of Copernicus in astronomy as to try to render null the work of Athanasius in theology in assigning to Christ place in the plane of theistic control. Some things are done once and done forever. The religion of the future will carry this as the definition of Christ — "τὸν ἀληθινὸν θεὸν ἐκ τοῦ ἀληθινοῦ θεοῦ." That, or nineteen centuries of delusion! That, or Schopenhauer — a world bad when it is sane and insane when it is good! — the worst possible world. To me that — "Very God of very God" is sanity. To me that makes life worth living, eternity secure and grand.