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1926

691ST ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING,
HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOM B, THE CENTRAL HALL,
WESTMINSTER, S.W.1, ON MONDAY, JUNE 14TH, 1926,
AT 4.30 P.M.

DR. JAMES W. THIRTLE, M.R.A.S., IN THE CHAIR.

The Proceedings opened with an announcement by the CHAIRMAN of the decease of Dr. D. Anderson-Berry, LL.D., F.R.S. Edin., Member of Council, and one who had read papers before the Society. A vote of condolence was passed unanimously, Members standing as a mark of respect to the deceased.

The Minutes of the previous Meeting were read, confirmed, and signed, and the HON. SECRETARY announced the election, as Associate, of Miss Marion Hilda Cooper.

The CHAIRMAN then explained that, owing to the unusual brevity of Dr. Howard Kelly's paper on "The Silence of God: How is it to be Explained?" Dr. David M'Intyre, of Glasgow, had also kindly prepared a paper on the same subject. He then called on Mr. Avary H. Forbes to read Dr. Kelly's paper, and the Hon. Secretary to read Dr. M'Intyre's paper.

*THE SILENCE OF GOD: HOW IS IT TO BE
EXPLAINED?*

By PROFESSOR HOWARD A. KELLY, M.D., LL.D.

"How rare it is to find the soul quiet enough to hear God speak."—*Archbishop Fenelon.*

"Silence is the nutriment of devotion."—*Thomas à Kempis.*

"Silence is in truth the attribute of God, and those who seek Him from that side invariably learn that meditation is not a dream but the reality of life, and not its illusion but its truth, not its weakness but its strength."—*James Martineau.*

MY theme of ten words is highly paradoxical, and as such I treat it. The first four words assume :

- (1) That we know there is a God generally recognized ;
- (2) That He has spoken to men in times past and was understood ;
- (3) That we cherish a reliable record of His speech of old ;
- (4) But that God no longer speaks as of yore ;
- (5) And yet that men to-day are longing to hear His voice, and hence the enquiry ;
- (6) That if He would but speak again, men would hear and heed His message.

The first three declarative propositions form the common ground basic to my thesis. I address myself, therefore, to the concluding six words. How is the silence of God to-day explained ?

That God has ceased to speak to the Jew as of old is recognized by the orthodox Jewish rabbi, who curtails discussion by declaring to the earnest enquirer that God is angry with His people, and has scattered them in all parts of the world as He forewarned them in Deuteronomy ; and for this reason they no longer hear His voice, and must, therefore, rest in the merits of their fathers and await His favour.

The first step in our enquiry must needs be, In what way might I expect God to speak ?

Without attempting to define the ways in which God may address us, I do not hesitate to aver that we dare not confine God's speech to language as used by man. An answer in part at least must obviously be suggested by God's previous methods of communication, referred to above in (2) and (3) ; to this end I search the scriptures of the world, only to find none worthy (although I do not deny some glimmer of light in all) or of serious consideration but the Hebrew Scriptures justly and *par excellence* named THE BIBLE. I assume, therefore, that this Book contains the mind of God expressly stated in human language.

If, on the other hand, natural man were left to dictate the manner of God's speech, he would inevitably, like the Jews of

old appealing to Christ on several occasions, ask for a sign from Heaven ; to whom Christ's answer was, " A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign," and again, " If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead."

And herein lies a crux. Men at large, through some basic inherent fault, invariably demand a form of speech God cannot grant, inasmuch as it merely contemplates an intellectual assent ; while God's methods in the past, although intimately associated with mighty works and miracles, have never in any instance used the miraculous solely for its dramatic effect. In brief, a mere dramatic sign is a futility or worse.

Our next enquiry is whether by the silence of God we refer to the absence of speech addressed to multitudes at once, or may we here include speech addressed to individuals as to His recognized prophets of old, who by one sign or another are sure God has spoken to them, and are then able as sent-forth-ones to convey their conviction to others ? Briefly, are there no longer any prophets of God in our midst ?

God's plan has ever been a quiet message lodged in the heart with the purpose of a complete transformation of the nature, best expressed by being " born again." In the Old Testament it was the still small voice, and in the New, One spake who was meek and lowly and gentle, who would not break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax.

May it not then be that God does still speak unmistakably to those who, in a chattering self-seeking age which dreads silence as a plague, step aside from the world to meditate before Him ? Are there not those among us even now whose faces image a peace not of this world, and who seem to mirror the light of the Throne of God out upon the world ? Is not, perhaps, the " Silence of God " but the absence of any loud speech striking the outer ear, while an inner ear attuned ever hears His Spirit's voice ?

Again, I say, God's message is ever a heart message. I boldly assert, therefore, that God does not speak to-day because of the supreme character of His revelation of Himself made once for all in His Christ, the culmination of all the prophecies of old and the transcendent revelation of the New Testament ; that this matchless message is a continuing one, while God waits for the answer of each individual of each generation since the advent of His Messenger of Peace upon the earth.

Just as we daily clearly recognize and guide our conduct by the voices of men long since passed from our midst yet continued in their written words, so, if we are not to be judged as merely captious in enquiring why does not God speak to-day, we must also equally recognize His voice in his final written Word, for this Word is of such a character that it is impossible that He should ever speak again more clearly, more positively, or more directly to the heart of man. So marvellous is this message and of such a character that it can be strengthened by no reaffirmation, that there can be no subtraction from nor addition to it, except as it ever reveals itself anew in the hearts of men through the ages in their varying circumstances and need. Thus it becomes clear that further speech would be detraction from the infinite dignity of the message.

I ask further, How can God give a new message when He has made a supreme revelation of Himself equally clear to each generation, a revelation which remains largely unheeded, in which God risked all for humanity in identifying His Son for ever with our race ?

Any complaint that God fails to speak to this generation must seem but an excuse, a gesture to hide the indifference of the world and its unwillingness to abandon its own ways.

I do affirm with every assurance and emphasis that God's message in His living Word, identified with His Son, is a continuing one, and that He does to-day speak indubitably to the hearts of men in each succeeding generation as He never spake of old.

The declaration that God, who spake of old by the prophets, "hath spoken unto us in these last days in a Son," refers not to any moment of time but to a dispensation succeeding the advent of His Son in our midst until His coming again.

I further aver that God speaks as never before to an age in which He has poured out His Spirit upon all flesh, the earnest of our inheritance and our unction from on high, of whom He has said, "Ye know Him, for He dwelleth with you and shall be in you."

The silence of God is not a period of darkness, but of such light as the world has never seen. And the light is life to him who will have it. And faith is the key which gives voice to the Word and to Nature, and which causes man's heart to become receptive, making life a great pilgrimage, a wonderful adventure. And faith ever cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. And

prayer is not a monologue, but a voice of the Spirit brooding over the soul's formless waters, and bringing articulate expression out of the voiceless waste of our needs.

It is almost invariably the fate of the words of men to live for a generation and then to die, while succeeding generations vainly try to perpetuate the dead word.

In the writings of men, great moral ideas do not perish, but lodge in men's hearts and do their work generation after generation. God's living Word, throbbing from Gen. i to Rev. xxii with the great moral purpose of the exposure of the true nature and final outcome of sin, and revealing His righteousness and judgment of sin, and developing a plan for the salvation of man, remains eternally sweet and fresh, providing daily instruction, strength, nourishment for the spirit, and solace to him who comes to it to be taught with the spirit of a child. This Word daily repeats its living drama through the ages, as efficacious to-day as when first uttered. This we may believe, in the language of our most modern science, is due to the timelessness of God Himself who is identified with it.

Illuminated by God's Word and His gifts to men, Nature was never before so vocal in His praises and in her appeals. Is it not pathetic to be made sceptic by the perfection of God's work and His gracious self-effacement that we may search Him out even in His handiwork ?

I believe, therefore, in view of this collocation of simple obvious facts, that our paradox is solved, and that the years of the silence of God are even the years of His plainest and most effective speech, during which He is gathering among the nations His *ἐκκληται*, His Church, destined to be the unique and living testimony to His grace, to the principalities and powers in the heavenlies, through the ages to come.

*THE SILENCE OF GOD: HOW IS IT TO BE
EXPLAINED?*

By the Rev. D. M. M'INTYRE, D.D.

IN tracing the analogy between natural and revealed religion, Bishop Butler has emphasized the fact that difficulties similar to those which confront us in our study of the Christian faith are built up into the fabric of creation.* In Nature we have the summer sunshine, the springing of flowers, the song of birds, the winsomeness and glee of all young creatures. We have also the pitiless storm, the hungry desert, the struggle for existence, with outbreakings of sudden cruelty. Pascal maintains that the course of the world confounds both the dogmatist and the pyrrhonist—Nature vindicates our belief that God is, it also permits us to deny that the universe is ruled by love. Modern thinkers as well as ancient theorists, have found refuge in the belief that creation has somehow been marred in the making, that a malign influence has mingled with the Divine working. St. Paul has been cited as one who supports this view, as when he declares that the earnest expectation of the creation is waiting for the revealing of the sons of God, and goes on to prophesy that creation itself, which now groans and travails

* “Origen has with singular sagacity observed, that ‘he who believes the Scripture to have proceeded from Him who is the Author of Nature, may well expect to find the same sort of difficulties in it as are found in the constitution of Nature.’”—*Analogy of Religion* : Introduction.

in pain with us, shall in due time be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the sons of God, whereas others, with the same prospect in view, argue that the severities of Nature are a bitter but wholesome discipline leading to higher things. Nature is not one with rapine ; to assert that the fair scene on which we gaze with so much pleasure is an Aceldama, a field of blood, is not all the truth. And if one should say to us,

“ Sit you down,
And let me wring your heart : for so I shall,
If it be made of penetrable stuff,”

we may reply that Nature is full of remedial activities, and that love is even now antagonizing, not without success, pain and fear and death. The calm words of the late Professor Flint, in this connection, are worthy of attention :—

“ The character of pain itself is such as to indicate that its author must be a benevolent being—one who does not afflict for his own pleasure, but for his creatures’ profit. . . . Pain tends to the perfection of the animals. It has, that is to say, a good end ; an end which justifies its use ; one which would do so even if perfection should not be conducive to happiness. . . . Perhaps susceptibility to pain is a necessary condition of susceptibility to pleasure ; perhaps the bodily organism could not be capable of pleasure and insensible to pain ; but whether this be the case or not, it is a plain and certain matter of fact that the activities which pain originates are the chief sources of enjoyment throughout the animal creation. . . . If there had been less death there must have been also less life, and what life there was must have been poorer and meaner.”—*Theism*, pp. 247-51.

Without attempting to follow out the analogy between the processes of Nature and the reign of grace, I simply offer three remarks :—

(a) The course of Nature teaches us to expect that the All-wise Ruler of the universe shall often veil His throne in darkness. We ought not then to esteem it a strange thing should occasions arise when, like the great French thinker, we are constrained to

re-echo the plaint of Isaiah: *Vere Tu es Deus absconditus*--
 "Verily, Thou art a God that hidest Thyself." It was by bringing this consideration with power to the mind of Job that the Almighty met the reproaches of His tried servant. Speaking out of the whirlwind, the Maker of All dazzled His interrogator with a galaxy of Nature's wonders, until the conscience-stricken patriarch humbled himself to receive instruction:—

"Who is this that hideth counsel without knowledge?
 Therefore have I uttered that which I understood not,
 Things too wonderful for me, that I knew not."

(b) Nature teaches us that the silence of God which from time to time invades the continuity of His revelation to men is apparently part of His ordered procedure: it is in accordance with the counsel of His will, and is determined by the wisdom of His love. This reflection came with strong encouragement to the later Jews. To their fathers God had spoken by the prophets; now, however, repeated calamities were falling on the discouraged remnant, who struggled to maintain their footing in a corner of the land which had once been all their own: they cried to God, but only "the silence that is in the starry sky" responded to their entreaty. Yet in their affliction, they remembered the Covenant and reposed upon the Divine election:—

"He has weighed the age in the balance,
 And with measure has measured the times,
 And by number has numbered the seasons:
 Neither will He move nor stir things,
 Till the measure appointed be fulfilled."

—IV Ezra iv, 36, 37.

(c) The end will explain the process. The confusions of time will resolve themselves into an ordered sequence under the sceptre of the Most High. With resistless majesty God moves through the most disquieting scenes. Each one of His purposes must come to accomplishment, for who hath resisted His will? All the progressions in Nature are evidence of the "one increasing purpose," which runs through the ages, and which, though still unfulfilled, is beginning to take form to the gaze of those who look with practised eyes through the prospect-glass of faith.

The City of God is builded in the heavens, but it comes down to earth.

I.

But we must define more exactly what we mean when we ask, "The Silence of God : How is it to be Explained ?"

Sir Robert Anderson finds a proof of the silence of God in the supposed cessation of physical miracle. But God has many voices, and if He is silent in one mode He may speak as with the sound of a trumpet in another. Physical miracle is not the only witness to the immanence of God in His creation. The direct intervention of God in the moral and spiritual spheres is constant. Not only is God calling to us out of the great deliverances of the past, and, in the remembrance of these, challenging our faith in His present power ; He is even now speaking to us in our dusty trudge along life's level ways as loudly as He spoke to the Hebrew fathers who were baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea. Are not the new birth, forgiveness of sins, answers vouchsafed to prayer, the grace of sanctification, the witness of the Spirit in our hearts, communion with our Heavenly Father, miracles as real as any that were wrought by the faith of Elijah or Daniel or Paul ? To His own people God is not silent.

"Miracles as real," one may reply ; "but in another sphere. Why have *physical* miracles ceased ?" They have probably ceased to be spectacular, but is it certain that they have ceased to be ? Does not prayer, for example, often project itself into the physical sphere ? If I pray for the restoration to health of one whose life has been despaired of, and the patient recovers, who shall say that my prayer had no power with God ? Indeed, it may very well be that miracles are being wrought for us daily, even in the physical sphere, but the Great Worker sounds no trumpet before Him : "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing." Our standing orders with regard to prayer are probably intended to assure us of this, "When ye pray, say, Our Father, which art in Heaven."

Passing from this, however, we may ask, Why are miracles such as those recorded in Scripture not common among us now ? A counter-question may be put, Why should they be common ? They broke forth in Israel's history only at critical points, and long periods in which no miraculous events seem to have happened

followed. Miracles are only signs attendant on the progress of the Messiah to His Birth, and Cross, and Crown. And their chief value appears to have been to open our eyes to the action of the supernatural in spiritual realms. In such events as the raising of the son of the Shunammite, the cleansing of Naaman, the feeding of the thousands on the scanty store provided by a boy, the resurrection of Lazarus, etc., we have it vividly brought home to us that God does not hold Himself apart from His creation. His interpenetration of natural law establishes our belief that Nature is not a closed circle, which shuts us in as in a prison; but that the world-order, rigid as it may seem, is as free as the air, as open as the heavens, as near as God is near. And this assurance, even though events such as we have been describing are rare, is surely the voice, and not the silence, of God.

Or, the silence which we are asked to consider may be observed in another sphere. In olden times "men spake from God, as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." Why should the canon of Scripture be looked upon as closed? Are there not to be in the future, as in the ancient days, lawgivers, and psalmists, and prophets? So, many writers ask.

What can even Infinite Wisdom say more than He has said? "What could I do to my vineyard," asks the Great Husbandman, "that I have not already done?"

"God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets, by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the effulgence of His glory and the very image of His substance, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had made purification of sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on High."—Heb. i, 1-3.

If God at times appears to be silent, it is because He has already spoken.

Scripture itself teaches us that the revelation of God in His Son is final, supreme, absolute. It remains to us now to apprehend, with all saints, the excellency of the knowledge of Christ, to possess ourselves of those unsearchable riches which are openly displayed before us. We do not require a new Bible; we have

only begun to discover the wealth which is contained in the Bible that we have. Age after age, God is still bringing forth new light from His Word, and His Holy Spirit is guiding the saints into all truth.

It is only in a very partial sense, therefore, that we are able to speak of the continuing silence of God in the history of men. What has really to be explained (if that is possible) is His seeming inaction in the course of events, His apparent indifference to the necessities of His creatures.

II.

We all know how the thought of the Purple East stung the sensitive brain of an English poet to madness. The Armenian massacres, when savage men plunged with avidity into incredible atrocities and covered an innocent land with blood, spread horror and amazement over the civilized earth. Even believing men were tempted to exclaim with Asaph, "Doth God know? and is there knowledge in the Most High?" Two partial explanations occur to us. The first is, that God expected the watching nations to arise and rid the wrong by might of arms. Did not Cromwell terminate the Piedmontese massacres by the mere threat to stretch a punitive arm across the Alps? The second mitigation of our difficulty is that God *is* working through the silence. The aphorism of Schiller that "the history of the world is the judgment of the world" is endlessly true. God stands back among the shadows and gives no sign; but He still wields the sceptre of universal dominion and executes His sovereign will.

But as I have said, these explanations do not carry us all the way. The true solution of this vast difficulty seems to be that it is necessary, in order to the vindication of the moral government of God before all ranks of created intelligences, that sin should be allowed to reveal itself in its hideous deformity and its unrelenting hatred to good. Sin must prove itself in the amplest measure to be "exceeding sinful." No created being shall ever be able to charge the Almighty with injustice. He is working through the ages of time for an irreversible verdict on behalf of righteousness. The long-suffering of a God of love is the Divine theodicy: *Patiens quia æternus*—"He is long-suffering, because He inhabiteth eternity."

(a) The light of truth has shone slowly upon earth; it was only in the fullness of the times that the Lord Jesus came.

On this fact St. Paul builds an imposing argument :—

“ Christ Jesus, whom God set forth to be a propitiation through faith, by His blood, to shew His righteousness, because of the passing over of the sins done aforetime, in the forbearance of God.”—Rom. iii, 25.

During thousands of years the authority of the Almighty was defied, His laws trampled underfoot, His overtures of mercy spurned ; yet He made no movement of wrath. But from of old His throne was pillared on righteousness, and all things were naked and open before Him. Yet the silence was unbroken—till in the fullness of the times the Word became flesh : “ God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and as an offering for sin, condemned sin in the flesh.” On the Place of a Skull, in the sufferings and death of the Sin-bearer, the sins of the ages were judged.

(b) The Messiah came to Israel, and was rejected. Jesus, the Son of the Blessed, went out of this world wearing a crown of thorns and bearing a slandered name. But as He went He said that He would return in the power of the Highest. The early Church believed that His advent was near. When Christians met in the street, they offered and received the mystic salutation—“ Maran-atha.” They said : “ He will come soon ; even now He is on His way : our eyes may be gladdened by the spectacle of the rending clouds as they brighten and break at the touch of His feet.” But, contrary to expectation, He tarried, till hope became faint, and scoffers said : “ Where is the promise of His coming ? for from the day that the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.” The reply of the apostle to these sceptical questionings is : “ The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness ; but is longsuffering to you-ward, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance ” (2 Pet. iii, 9).

The Apocalypse shows us Satan, as a furious red dragon (red, the colour of blood) tempesting through earth and air and sea. He scatters wrath and anguish over the face of the world, and drags the very stars down from heaven. Wars and famines and pestilences succeed one another, and earth is drunk with her own blood. But God is silent. The slow years pass, while the souls under the altar urge their plaintive remonstrance : “ How

long, O Master, the holy and true ! ” At last sin has displayed itself in all the debasing forms of its deep-seated malignity, and He who sits upon the eternal throne arises in power. One is almost abashed to see the ease with which He makes an end of sin and finishes the transgression :—

“ I saw an angel coming down out of Heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that original serpent, which is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and cast him into the abyss, and shut it, and sealed it.”—Rev. xx, 1-3.

III.

Within this all-embracing consideration—that the delays and silences of God are designed, in order that the Divine government may be fully vindicated to a watching universe—we have a further explanation of the seeming abstention on the part of God from interference with the courses of this world, when we remember that man is a moral agent, with freedom of choice, and with a delegated authority on the earth. This argument may be summarized in the words of the Psalmist : “ The heavens are the heavens of the Lord ; but the earth hath He given to the children of men ” (Ps. cxv, 16). The Creator respects the freedom of our manhood, and waits patiently for the fulfilment of the task assigned to us. Thus character is matured, and our moral nature is disciplined.

In the dawn of history God said to His creature, man : “ Repopulate the earth, and subdue it, and have dominion.” This mandate has never been withdrawn. Through all the eras man has been engaged in the endeavour to realize his sovereignty, to possess his possessions. He looked up to the stars, and after a time discovered the law of their motion, thinking the thoughts of God after Him. He mined the earth, laying bare its strata, and retracing the story of its birth. He questioned Nature, determining the elements, and setting free the viewless forces which God had hidden in the secret place. He peered into the darkest recesses of his self-consciousness, and so laid the foundations of mental science. He measured anew the line of this world’s progress, garnering lessons of wisdom from the seed-field of time. Who shall say that God was not with him, directing his search and irradiating the path of his progress ? Yet the

discoveries made were his own. The attainment was his; his, too, the failure to attain.

The quest for God is different from scientific research or the investigation of ancient records, for He has revealed Himself to men in a gracious covenant. But it may be said that before the light of the glory of God shone from the face of Jesus Christ, and still among those who have not the lamp of the Word to guide them, there has been, and there is, something of Divine aloofness. God has seemed to withdraw Himself, that men might seek after Him, and, finding Him, count Him the more their own.

Agur, the son of Jakeh, pours out his complaint: "O God, O God, I have wearied myself, and am become faint. . . . I have not learned wisdom, neither have I the knowledge of the Holy One. . . . What is His name, and what is His Son's name, if thou canst tell" (Prov. xxx, 1-4).

Asaph saw a rich oppressor clothed in purple and fine linen, sunning himself before the admiring gaze of his fellows, while a godly widow hears her children clamouring round her for bread, without being able to supply their need. In that vision Asaph's conventional theology fell from him, as the sheath drops from the bursting flower. He saw in the infinite distances a revelation so wonderful that, in the hour in which he thought he had lost his God, he discovered the Divine beauty and grace as he had never imagined them in his happiest dreams (Ps. lxxiii).

Jeremiah had learned to know God through vivid personal intercourse, but the pressure of the Almighty Will stirred him to a dull anger: he reproached Jehovah with harsh treatment of one who was constitutionally weak; why should He drive His servant with such pitiless persistence? And the prophet of tears vowed in his hot heart: "I will never speak in His name again" (Jer. xx, 9). Then there was given to the prophet a vision that streamed in light through the mirk centuries, and was undimmed even in the advent of the Christ:

"This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord. I will put My law in their inward parts, and in their hearts will I write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people: and they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord; for they shall all know Me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin will I remember no more."—Jer. xxxi, 33, 34.

Qoheleth went out to look for God, but he went where God was not. He traversed miry ways, and descended valleys as of the deathshade ; he stumbled among the dark mountains ; he wandered in the deserts until his eyes grew dim. At length a revelation startled and shamed him, such a disclosure as came to King Arthur's knight ; a revelation as of despair :—

“ Then every evil word I had spoken once,
 And every evil thought I had thought of old,
 And every evil deed I ever did,
 Awoke and cried, ‘ This Quest is not for thee.’
 And lifting up mine eyes, I found myself
 Alone, and in a land of sand and thorns,
 And I was thirsty even unto death ;
 And I, too, cried, ‘ This Quest is not for thee.’ ”

Finally, in the dreary round of his wanderings there came to him—by what alchemy of grace, who shall say ?—the conviction that God is, and that He is the Rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. And Qoheleth, kneeling before the throne of the Eternal, found the Object of his search : “ This is the end of the matter ; all hath been heard : Fear God, and keep His commandments ; for this is the whole of man ”—*this is everything for man.*

All the saints have made the silence vocal with their plaint, as they have called upon God : “ Lord, why castest Thou off my soul ? Why hidest Thou Thy face from me ? ” “ How long wilt Thou forget me, O Lord ? for ever ? ” “ Awake, why sleepest Thou, O Lord ? wherefore forgettest Thou our affliction ? ” “ Reproach hath broken my heart ; and I am full of heaviness.” “ Hear me, O Lord, hide not Thy face from Thy servant ; for I am in trouble.” “ Forsake me not, O Lord : O my God, be not far from me.” “ My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me ? ” (Pss. lxxxviii, 14 ; xiii, 1 ; xlv, 24 ; lxix, 16–20 ; xxii, 1). But the supreme example in the Old Testament of one who searched for God among the waste places of life, who would have stormed Heaven, and descended into Sheol in search of Him, is Job, the afflicted man of Uz : “ Oh that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come even to His seat.” This man, athirst for God, roamed through all of life's experiences that were open to him ; at last, he broke open the gates of the eternal world, and called upon the Living Word to be his Vindicator. He knocked at the doors of the underworld, saying : “ All

the days of the days of my appointed time, will I wait, till my change come. Thou shalt call, and I will answer Thee." He stood before the Throne of Judgment, and challenged Him who sat thereon: "Behold, my desire is that the Almighty would answer me, and that I had the indictment which mine adversary hath written." At last God spoke out of the whirlwind. What He said may not seem to us to be particularly satisfying: for Job it was sufficient. Jehovah recalls His creature to humility, presents to him some of the mysteries of the lower creation, bringing him to the place of blessing, where inspiration is given to those who are lowly in heart. "Now mine eye seeth Thee," exclaims the sufferer in the calm rapture of discovery. And, as Vinet says, "To see is to live."

IV.

Within the Christian Family questions relating to the silence of God are sometimes raised by the devout soul as it passes through unwonted, and it may be, painful, experiences. "Be not silent unto me," cries the believer who is ringed round with besetments: "Be not silent unto me, lest I go down to the pit." The silence of God may be designed to perfect our manhood, to discipline our will, to anneal our character. Faith is a warrior grace.

In the first place, there is what the mystics call "The dark night of the soul," in the ascent to God. The ascetic theologians describe it as "aridity." There are hours when God seems far away and the comfort of His presence is withdrawn. This experience may result from various causes. It is often temperamental. Perhaps we have an instance of this in the refrain of Pss. xlii and xliii: "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me?" Dark moods descend upon us, a grey mist from the sea creeps over the land, the sunshine pales, and the day grows chill. In its severer forms this trial is very distressing; and when it reaches mental derangement we are reminded of the German proverb: "He whom God deceives is well deceived."*

In all such cases the remedy is faith: let him who walks in darkness and has no light trust in the name of the Lord and stay

* Probably temperamental troubles have their seat in our physical system. And changes in our corporeal nature often register themselves in spiritual gloom.

upon his God. Faith exists that it may be tried. Sometimes, as our Lord taught, a germ of faith, insignificant as a mustard seed, dares to challenge a mountain, pluck it up by the roots, and hurl it into the depths of the sea. Charles Wesley triumphantly sings :

“ Faith, mighty faith, the promise sees,
And looks to that alone ;
Laughs at impossibilities,
And cries, It shall be done.”

But faith does not always have the comfort of its own victory. One of the mediæval saints, having passed through a time of fierce conflict, and having at length overcome, said to the Lord : “ Where wast Thou, Lord, when I was being tempted ? ” The Lord (it is reported) made reply : “ My child, I was in thy heart.” He was in the midst of the battle as “ the Lord God Omnipotent,” but the believer had not the intimate and tender assurance of His presence. An incident in English history may illustrate this experience. Edward the Third, when his son was hotly engaged at Cressy “ in a hard passage of arms,” refused to send him succour, saying, “ Let the boy win his spurs.” In such ways our Lord frequently honours His servants while He strengthens their faith. Said an English Puritan, “ God often reserves Himself for a dead lift.” And many a time it is when we have come to the last point of our endurance that Captain Credence sees the onset of the soldiers of Immanuel. Then they come so quickly that their feet seem scarcely to touch the ground.

Silence in regard to our prayers is another test which the saint must undergo.

The assurance that an answer will be granted to the prayer of faith, prayer offered in the name of Jesus, prayer according to the will of God, is full and absolute. The promise of Mark xi, 22-24, is as definite as words can make it—“ whosoever,” “ whensoever,” “ whatsoever.” And St. John, speaking for himself and his associates, seems to take it for granted that all his and their prayers shall be answered : “ Whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do the things that are pleasing in His sight ” (1 John iii, 22). Yet how often our experience is similar to that of the priests of Baal : “ There was no voice, nor any that answered.” We have as an instance St. Paul’s request that the stake in the flesh should

be removed : " Concerning this thing I besought the Lord thrice that it might depart from me." Apparently, at the first appeal, and also at the second, there was no response. Afterwards, recalling perhaps the thrice-repeated petition of Christ in the Olive Garden, Paul seeks the face of the Lord a third time, and prays that the messenger of Satan may be taken away. Then the Lord replies in words so gracious that the heroic soul chants a song of victory, though his flesh still thrills with pain : " Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

In looking for answers to our prayers we must remember that prayer is not merely a request that such and such things should be done for us. Prayer is a spiritual exercise, informed by knowledge of God's will, directed by faith, and energized by the Spirit. It is impossible that God should cease to be the Sovereign Disposer of events : His glory He will not give to another.

Nor does it follow that prayer shall always receive an answer without trial to faith. In Gethsemane our Lord was heard for His godly fear (Heb. v, 7), yet His prayer was offered " with strong crying and tears," and the cup did not pass from Him. Our prayer-life is part of the discipline which fits us for the eternal service.

In two parables—that of the Friend at midnight, and of the Unjust Judge—our Lord teaches that prolonged delays, which threaten to wreck our faith, must sometimes be encountered in our prayer-life.

The former of these parables is concerned with prayer for the Bread of God which the believer may dispense to the wayfarer who is belated and has missed his way. The wanderer has stumbled upon a hamlet in which all the lights are quenched but one. The master of the house to whom he makes appeal receives him graciously, granting him welcome, shelter, rest. But there is no bread to offer to the unexpected guest ; this must be won from another. The householder proceeds to a neighbour's dwelling ; this friend is asleep—his children are with him in bed, and he refuses for any call of hospitality to turn night into day. But the petitioner becomes obdurate in his turn : he will not accept repulse ; he *asks, seeks, knocks*. At length he prevails, his discourteous neighbour relents, and the necessity of the famished guest is met. The Bread of God, wherewith we may feed a hungry soul, must be won from God Himself. And God does not always respond to the first appeal. We have to become

even "shameless" (Luke xi, 8) in our entreaty. The reasons for the seeming refusal of our Father may lie deeply hidden in His inscrutable wisdom, though some considerations are obvious to our understanding. The greatest honour that the God of all grace can confer upon a man is to give him words of truth whereby his fellow-men may be saved. He will not bestow this priceless gift on any one who asks for it lightly, having only a tepid desire towards an endowment which comes to us out of the heart of Christ. Therefore, as often happens, our prayers receive no answer till we come to "the breaking-point," and cry with Whitefield, "Lord, give me souls—or I die."

The second parable represents a woman, a widow, whose orphaned children have been defrauded of their inheritance by a rich neighbour, or, it may be, a powerful and unscrupulous kinsman. She carries her appeal to a local justiciary, but he (we may presume) has been heavily bribed, and will not decree her right. She cannot endure the thought that her children should be deprived of their patrimony. Morning after morning she is the first appellant at the judgment seat, until her pertinacity begins to wear out the dishonest judge—she "gets on his nerves." Then he blusters: "Though I fear not God, nor regard man," he says, "yet because this widow troubleth me, I will right her wrong." This is more than half pretence: he is not so callous as he would have us believe. The shame of injustice has come home even to his seared conscience. He returns the bribe and dispenses righteousness. In our Lord's view this woman represents the Church, anguished and desolate on her children's account. Day and night His own elect cry unto Him. But He delays, because He is long-suffering (Luke xviii, 7). He thinks of others: He has compassion on the rebellious and the evil; He would that they also were enclosed in His merciful kindness—He willeth not the death of any. Judgment is His strange work. Then the searchlight sweeps on, and rests on the day of the Saviour's Advent: "When the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?" He seems to shade His eyes, as He looks down the long vistas, and speaks in questioning tones. He does not say that He will not find faith on the earth in His return in power. What He does imply is, that till then, and even in that hour, faith will be difficult to come by. It is the long silence that makes it so hard for faith to continue to clasp and cling.

The late Bishop Westcott has told us that once, after long absence, he met his former teacher, Dr. Prince Lee. For a time

they talked of old friends and remembered incidents, until presently the chill mystery and darkness of human life crept in between them. They sat silent for a time; then the older man ejaculated, "Ah, Westcott, μή φοβοῦ· μόνον πίστευε.—*Fear not: only believe.*"

There is another reason for the Divine silence. God speaks, but our ears are not always attuned to hear His voice.* There is possibly an allusion to such an experience in the record of the vision of Isaiah, when he beheld in the heavenly temple the Lord, high and lifted up. His penitent cry was a three-fold confession of sin—on account of his personal sinfulness, his unworthiness in his prophetic service, and the turpitude of the nation of which he was part. It was answered by the flight of the seraph, the touch of the flaming coal, and the words of grace, "Thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin is purged." After this, the prophet relates, "I heard the voice of the Lord saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Had not God been speaking before? Had not the summons to serve been falling, year after year, on closed ears? Now, when lips and heart have been cleansed, the call of God sounds out in strength and clearness.

In *Le Trésor des Humbles*, Maurice Maeterlinck describes the pilgrimage of a company of devout men to a holy temple in which, so it was reported, the voice of God might be heard. They came to the place of blessing; they sat before the gates of the temple, but did not enter; they waited. At length, after long tarrying, they turned away saying, "We have not heard His voice; the Lord has not spoken." But all the while, the voice of God echoed and reverberated within the sanctuary, and those who had passed in, and were kneeling before the shrine, were blessed.

If I do not hear the voice of the Lord God, I dare not say that He has not spoken, unless I am certain that my ears have not become heavy because of sin indulged, unless I am satisfied that I have drawn near to the place where His voice resounds.

Herod of Galilee had long desired to see Jesus, and when an opportunity of a personal meeting with our Saviour came to him, he was "exceeding glad." He asked Jesus many questions, but received no answer. Think of the tragedy of it! Herod, steeped to the lips in all manner of soul-destroying sin, is pressing

* The apparent lack of response to our prayers is often due to this.

swiftly down to Hell, and the compassionate Saviour, who came to seek and to save the lost, meets him, for the first and only time on earth, and has no word to utter : “ He answered him nothing.” Was it not because there was nothing to say ? And yet, perhaps, that awful silence may have rung in heart and conscience like a peal of doom, startling the drugged soul to a sense of bitter need, until—in the Divine mercy (it is at least possible)—he broke into an agony of prayer, that he might be delivered from the eternal silence, where God’s absence strikes more heavily than even His word of doom.

DISCUSSION.

The CHAIRMAN : I am sure we have listened with deep interest to the papers that have been read. The voices are two, but the utterance is substantially one. In both instances we are assured that, in an absolute sense, God is not silent : He speaks, but we do not hear—certainly not all of us, and assuredly not all the time. That is a truth which, for the most part, we shall readily allow. Moreover, it has been made clear that God’s speaking is not after the manner of men. Whether He speaks or whether He is silent, God is God, and if we would understand His ways we must bear in mind, in the first place, His essential nature, and, in the second place, the conditions of His self-revealing dealings with the creatures of His hand. For, if God is *God*, so also man is *man* ; and of the ways of God we learn in the pages of Holy Writ that they are high above man’s ways : His ways are not our ways, nor are His thoughts our thoughts.

I think I shall carry most of you with me when I say that the paper by Dr. M’Intyre brings the problem before us in a manner that is specially welcome. I do not disparage the utterance of Dr. Kelly, but his treatment has been too brief to give the full mind of its writer. Dr. M’Intyre, on the other hand, has succeeded in bringing the facts of life and experience—positive and negative—into relation with the truths of Holy Scripture, and the demands of a philosophy worthy of the Christian name. God is not silent to the extent that many men seem to think ; and yet, as God, He appears to stand aside from things, though all the time He may in reality intervene. And may He not speak in a subjective sense and thus make no appeal to objective faculties ? If we neither hear His words nor see His

acts to-day, yet we may find proofs that He is neither silent nor inactive when we survey the generations and centuries of human history. In the nature of things God is saying and doing all the time, and in the consummation of things this will be realized in a degree that is not possible at present. Now we know in part, but there will come a time when the whole—of times and of things—

Like a parchèd scroll
 Shall before our amazèd sight uproll,
 And without a screen
 At one burst be seen
 The Presence wherein we have ever been.

Yes, assuredly, we are ever in the presence of God, and we may be within sound of His voice, though we hear it not.

All the same, there is silence, and a silence that is of the essence of the ways of God, and this may be explained by two self-evident facts:—

First, by *the patience of God*. He is a God that waits to consummate salvation—that waits to visit vengeance. Though sin may call for judgment, nevertheless God is long-suffering. Though servants of God may be assured of eternal salvation, yet He leaves them to struggle with trials from which by a word He might afford them release. If we could conceive of the Infinite intervening in either event—for momentary release or for momentary judgment—we should be compelled to conceive Him as abdicating His part as the Eternal and Infinite, who in perfect wisdom has laid bounds for the accomplishing of His will, not only in relation to His people, but also to all that belongs to the ripening of His providential purposes.

Secondly, *the transcendence of God* demands that His attitude toward His creatures should not partake of the momentary, the hourly, the daily, the weekly, the monthly, or even the yearly character that dominates human action. As men, we have no time but *now*, and we speak and act accordingly; and it is only by grave misunderstanding that we look for God to speak and to act after the manner of men—in momentary, hourly, weekly, monthly, and yearly measures. We on our part hasten to achieve deliverance or visit vengeance. God's day of vengeance is in the future; His hour of deliverance likewise has not yet come. *He has all the time*: and a time to be silent as well as a time to speak. His transcendence

supplies reason for His attitude as God. If we only knew, we should recognize in His silence an attitude which speaks of mercy and grace, even as it affords opportunity for sinners to repent and for the children of folly to learn wisdom.

Two other considerations may be advanced. First, God is a *God of judgment*. Men follow their daily courses, and act as though there were no God. This was as clear to Qoheleth, "the Preacher who was king in Jerusalem," as it should be to discerning men to-day. And what was the Preacher's word to men of his time when he witnessed their bondage to the ways of their own hearts and eyes ? It was this—"For all these things God will bring thee into judgment." With this agrees a later writer in the sacred volume—"It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this cometh judgment." So we gather that it is because God maintains an attitude consistent with His place as Judge—one and supreme—that men have spoken of Him as aloof, and as being silent in regard to the things of righteousness. But in due time, when delay shall be no longer, as is made clear in Holy Scripture, God will speak, and when His voice shall resound throughout the spheres, it will be realized that what we have come to know in the disciplinary experience of life has been little indeed. In a word, we have seen the mere outskirts of His ways—in the words of Job of old : "How small a whisper do we hear of Him ! But the thunder of His mighty deeds who can understand ?"

Second, we must note that in Holy Scripture *life is spoken of as a walk, a pilgrimage*. From this it follows that were God to declare Himself in relation to each and all of our affairs, and to do it now—as hours and days and years pass—there would be an end of providential order, and the life of faith would be divested of all reality. There would be no place for trial and discipline. This was clear to the Jewish mind, even as it is part of Christian experience. Listen to Rabbi Tarphon, in a saying that takes us back to the second century :—"The day is short and the work is great, and the labourers are sluggish : the reward is much, and the Master of the house is urgent. He used to say : It may not be for thee to complete the work, but neither art thou free to desist from it. . . . Faithful is the Master of thy work, who will pay thee the wages of thy toil ; and know that the grant of the reward to the righteous will be in the time to come" (*Pirkē Aboth*, ii, 20, 21).

There is reality in the silence ; and in the meantime the servant must apply himself to duties that are well defined, and must not expect the Master, Employer, Rewarder—Rabbinical designations of the Eternal—to give now that which He holds in reserve for the time to come. In the language of the New Testament the same thought is emphasized. We are told to “occupy,” or get about the work ; and we are warned that “we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ.” In these circumstances, it is evident that if at every turn we were confronted by tokens of God’s reproof of sin, and of His good pleasure for those who work righteousness, there would be an end of the walk of faith which is characteristic of this dispensation. It is for us to pass our time “as seeing Him who is invisible,” and to render obedience to instruction already delivered by Divine inspiration rather than to wait upon words momentarily addressed to the outward ear. In the words of Dr. M’Intyre (pp. 262 and 263), “Scripture itself teaches us that the revelation of God in His Son is final, supreme, absolute. It remains to us now to apprehend with all saints, the excellency of the knowledge of Christ. . . . We do not require a new Bible ; we have only begun to discover the wealth which is contained in the Bible that we have. Age after age, God is still bringing forth new light from His Word, and His Holy Spirit is guiding the saints into all truth.” In other words, the present dispensation is *our* day of opportunity. By-and-by the Infinite and the Eternal will break the prevailing silence, and His words and deeds will command universal attention : He will consummate salvation and execute judgment, and so give glorious effect to the expectation of those who await “the age to come”—the Day of Christ.

In conclusion, the Chairman moved a hearty vote of thanks to the authors of the two papers.

Mr. C. E. LEWIS HEATH said : The few remarks I desire to make are not intended as a comment or criticism of the papers just read, with which I am generally in agreement ; though I cannot endorse Dr. Kelly’s view, that God has spoken once and for all in the Holy Scriptures, and has nothing further to say. But my reason for speaking is, that recently this expression, “The Silence of God, what does it mean ?” and other similar phrases, have frequently come to my notice ; and there seems to be an assumption that God is silent in these days, whatever the cause may be. With this

I cannot agree. I remind you that in the Book of the Revelation at the close of each of the Seven Epistles, the exhortation is given : "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches." And if, as is generally agreed, the Epistles have an application beyond those seven cities in Asia, and extend to the Church in all ages, then it follows that the Holy Spirit still speaks, still has something to say to the Churches. No ! God is not silent ; but it may be that His people cannot hear.

Let me illustrate the matter by a reference to the wireless broadcasting with which we are all familiar. Though I know nothing of the scientific aspect, I understand that the air is now full of wavelengths of sound, sent out from all directions. But I am told that unless your receiver is tuned to a particular length, you will get nothing at all, though your next-door neighbour may be hearing perfectly. Now, if we translate these things to the heavenly regions, I believe that the spiritual atmosphere is full of sounds, messages, and warnings from God, and loving and comforting words of the Holy Spirit. But whether we hear these words of warning and comfort, depends entirely on the tuning of our spiritual receiver. And if any should ask how this tuning is to be accomplished, there may be various methods ; but I prefer that suggested by the Apostle John, when he said, "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard a voice as of a trumpet talking with me." God was not silent to him, and He may be speaking now. At any rate, before any man decides that God is silent, and that there is nothing to hear, let him look first to the condition of his spiritual receiver, and make sure that it is rightly tuned ; for it may be that the fault is there.

Mr. AVARY H. FORBES : To my mind both these papers are most interesting. They grapple with a great mystery, and give the human heart assurance and consolation of the best kind. But, dealing with one of God's spiritual enigmas, they cannot do more. Dr. M'Intyre's opening sentence sets the matter very plainly before us. He cites Bishop Butler and Origen to show that we must expect in the Christian faith difficulties similar to those which we find in the physical world. He then proceeds to handle the matter in a very able way. I notice—both in the writer's original remarks and in his quotations—many a "perhaps," a "probably," a "possibly," "it may be," etc. This is only what one would expect,

for the subject is a *mystery*, and a mystery cannot be solved—or it would cease to be a mystery. Dr. M'Intyre reaches the right—and indeed, the only feasible—conclusion when he says, “In all such cases the remedy is faith” (p. 268).

With regard to the two sets of difficulties—the spiritual and the physical—there seems to me to be a great difference. The former remain, as they were from the beginning, insoluble mysteries; while the latter, all along the line of history, have been solved, or are still in process of being solved. The great spiritual problems—such as the origin of evil, the nature of Satan, the prosperity of the wicked, the failure of the righteous, election and reprobation, necessity and free-will, a personal devil, unanswered prayers, infinite punishment for finite sin, God's government of the world—yet “nature red in tooth and claw”—these are mysteries just as insoluble now as they were when Job grappled with them thousands of years ago. Not a single ray of light has been thrown on them by all the philosophizing and disputing of theologians since the world began. In early life I spent a whole year in reading psychology, ethics, and metaphysics, and almost nothing else; and at the end I found myself just as much in the dark as at the beginning.

The secrets of the physical world, on the contrary—the laws of Nature and their operations—have been unsealed and solved from the earliest times; and the process is still going on. The laws of light, of sound, of heat, of motion, of electricity, of gravitation, of cohesion, of chemical action, etc., have been opened up and brought to light in a very marvellous way; and especially, perhaps, during the last hundred years—though some of the nations of antiquity knew a good deal about the sciences, as the wonderful remains of many of them attest. All this seems to me to be in exact accordance with the Eden story of Genesis. There, we are told, man deliberately chose the forbidden tree of knowledge—that is, the earthly, the secular, the physical, and deliberately rejected the unforbidden tree of life:—the Divine, the Heavenly, the Spiritual. The latter was then taken from him, but the fruits of the other were left; and ever since, man's secular, earthly appetite has been gratified by fresh discoveries; while his spiritual aspirations have been left unlightened.

Many revelations have been granted to him by God, it is true; otherwise he could never have found a way to escape the consequences

of disobeying his Maker. But none of those revelations have solved, or were they intended to solve, those great spiritual problems which still confront him in their entirety, and will baffle him to the end of this dispensation.

Mr. WILLIAM C. EDWARDS said : The papers to which we have listened seem to take a double view of the meaning of their thesis— (1) That, in the face of many current events, God is silent ; (2) that He no longer speaks as by the prophets in Holy Scripture and verbal Revelation.

(1) On p. 264, Dr. M'Intyre says, " He made no movement of wrath." I can hardly agree with that. The Deluge and the overthrow of the Cities of the Plains, as well as the repeated destructions of Jerusalem, are certainly " movements of wrath." Outside of Holy Scripture there are many judgments, *e.g.* Vesuvius of old and Martinique in our own times. *But God is never in a hurry*—He is long-suffering. The prophet Habakkuk speaks of Chaldea (read chap. i, 13) : " Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil and canst not look on iniquity : wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he ? " The story of Chaldea shows that, notwithstanding the long-suffering of God, at last the punishment overtook the guilty city to its utter destruction (Isa. x, 5, 12).

(2) As regards the completion of the canon, let us remember that the Holy Spirit is now indwelling in each believer and not, as in olden times, in a comparatively few prophets. We cannot expect that God shall come down upon Sinai in glory and awful grandeur every day to pronounce with thundering voice His will and laws ; but He still speaks as in the still small voice to Elijah (1 Kings xix, 12), or as the inward voice of Jeremiah concerning Hanameel (Jer. xxxii, 7). There are times when no other way of comfort or direction can reach us, and then God speaks in a voice, *e.g.* Jeremiah in the dungeon (Lam. iii, 55), or Paul on the sinking ship (Acts xxvii, 23, 24), saying " Fear not." There is an " economy " in voices. The Gospels give us only three such voices, *viz.* :—*The Baptism* (Matt. iii, 17 ; Mark i, 11 ; Luke iii, 22) ; *The Transfiguration* (Matt. xvii, 5 ; Mark ix, 7 ; Luke ix, 35) ; *The Greeks in the Temple* (John xii, 20).

Consider the question in another way. Through the media of voice and hearing my spirit is in touch with your spirit. Cannot God get at our spirits directly and apart from such media? These may be generally necessary for the intercourse of men, but they are not at all necessary for God, who is a Spirit. With me, thought originates in the soul or mind, and passes through to the organs of speech into sound, and when I address another the process is reversed, and my thought passes through his organ of hearing, and through the brain reaches his soul. It is not really the eye that sees or the ear that hears, any more than it is the telescope that sees or the hearing-trumpet that hears; it is the mind that does both and *all*. To me these thoughts make it clear how God can never be silent but is always "speaking" or influencing minds, and His will is always operating. He can speak in a voice if He will; but He is not confined to that or any other form of communication. To those who walk with God, as Enoch did, God is ever speaking. There can be unbroken Communion, for "in Him we live, and move, and have our being."

Mr. PERCY O. RUOFF said: An analysis of Dr. M'Intyre's paper reveals an argument which, in its cumulative force, is of considerable weight, and throws light on some dark problems. Nevertheless, the lecturer has candidly admitted that "it is only in a very partial sense that we are able to speak of the continuing silence of God in the history of men. What has really to be explained (if that is possible) is His seeming inaction in the course of events, His apparent indifference to the necessities of His creatures." After everything has been said that can be said, and arguments gathered from history, from philosophy, from experience, and from the Holy Scriptures, we are still face to face with many mysteries, the adequate solution of which seem impossible with our present knowledge. The infinite glory of God and His purposes transcend our power of search, and go beyond our understanding.

There are, within a stone's throw of this building, men and women whose hearts are crying out on account of unspeakable wrongs, and God appears to be silent. But the revelation of the character of God, and the vindication of His ways as unveiled in the Apocalypse, make an adjustment certain at some time. Cowper, in perhaps the

best hymn of its kind in the language, with incomparable insight, wrote :—

“God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform ;
He plants His footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.

“Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never-failing skill
He treasures up His bright designs,
And works His sovereign Will.

“Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take ;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head.

“Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace ;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.”

It is to these problems that Dr. M'Intyre has directed our attention, and he has done so with an eloquence, a thoroughness, and reverence which can only command admiration.

Rev. Dr. H. C. MORTON said : I think one of the truest things said was that of Dr. Kelly—that in the Bible God is always speaking. He is certainly not silent, for in the Bible all problems are both foreseen and solved. We have endless things yet to learn from the Bible, and the way to get our instrument tuned in to hear His voice is earnest study of the Word.

It was not the silence, but the inactivity of God that so often baffled us. Sometimes there was no problem. In Ps. xviii, for instance, David said (in verse 6) that he called and God heard, and then there came “the thunder of God's mighty deeds” : “He bowed the heavens, and came down.” But (in verse 41), speaking of the enemies of God, he says : “They cried, but there was none to save them : even unto the Lord, but He answered them not.” That is no “small whisper” we have heard from Him, but a plain teaching, and one that solves many problems of His inactivity.

But Dr. M'Intyre's illustration—the ghastly problem of Armenia—moved me deeply. I do not believe there is anything to be added to the Canon. I love the reply Dr. Parker once gave to an eminent divine who said that he himself was as certainly inspired as Isaiah. Dr. Parker said: “Yes, yes: let him give us a specimen.” But if anything ever could have a shadow of a claim, it would be such poetry as William Watson's: those flaming Armenian sonnets, burning with the very fire of the Seraphim. Yet they had no solution of the problem: nor had anyone, spite of all the helpful personal things which had been said, given any solution of that awful national problem. I have listened with very great interest to the keen address of the Chairman. He said “the patience of God.” Yes: but patience with the Turk at the expense of the Armenian? He said “God's transcendence: He moves not on the human scale of hours and years.” No: but He does move on the scale of the generations and the centuries, and that is the scale of Armenia's agony.

I do not see how to “justify the ways of God to man” in such a tragedy. There is no explanation: but is it not the Bible principle that practice precedes philosophy? Perhaps we should understand, if Britain fulfilled her duty and saved Armenia. Watson said he saw on high “the gathering blackness of the frown of God.” In the distress which settles down upon our country, do not we too see that gathering blackness? Oh! if Britain would but listen to the voice which calls so loudly, it would not only be more tolerable for her in the Day of Judgment, but it would take an aching load out of many hearts.

WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS.

Mr. F. C. WOOD: To answer the question on which the two papers are based, it seems necessary first to define what is meant by “The Silence of God.” Personally, I take it to mean that God has not, since the days of the Apostles, spoken to us as He did to the Jewish people, from the time of Abraham to Christ and His Apostles; neither, perhaps, by miracle as He did during the same period. If this be the correct way of stating the matter, may we not answer by asking another question, viz. “Why should we desire or expect a definite communication, or a manifest sign as in the days of old?” Would it be to satisfy our curiosity, to strengthen

our faith, or to tell us something not already known ? We do well to remember that there were but few divine communications from Abraham to Moses, a period of 430 years, when the Pentateuch was given with its many special revelations ; or from Moses to Samuel, about 370 years ; then, some time after the kingdom was established, came the period of the Prophets whose writings we have, which began with Jonah and ended with Malachi, about 320 years. Then followed nearly four centuries of silence.

I take no account of present-day theories concerning certain Old-Testament writers living later than Malachi. There were, of course, some intervening communications, but not many, so far as we understand God to be definitely speaking. But what was the sum and substance of nearly all the communications ? Was it not to give Israel divine laws and statutes ; to rebuke them for national declension ; to establish a kingdom for God in the midst of the nations ; to reveal how the whole earth should be blessed through Israel ; and, more than all, to foretell in much detail the coming of Messiah with His life, sufferings, death, resurrection, intercession and coming again ? In a word, providing the world since then with everything it needed to know. The Old Testament, for special reasons, did not clearly indicate the long period of the present dispensation. When Israel completely failed, and crucified their King, and also as a nation failed to accept the offer of forgiveness as revealed in the Acts of the Apostles, then God turned to the Gentiles, and began to take out a people for Himself, both from Jew and Gentile, thus forming the Church.

Divine Revelation in the form of God, speaking to men, was almost entirely to Jews, though for our learning, and miracle was chiefly connected with the same people, until the Apostolic times when, for a short period, it was granted to confirm and bear witness to the truth of the Gospel of Christ. Another great question, therefore, arises, viz. Has God given a complete and sufficient revelation concerning Himself, and the Believers standing before Him, also instruction about his everyday life ? If He has, why should He now break His silence ? He will certainly break this silence when His Church is removed, and things become essentially Jewish again, as we read in Ps. l, and, in my way of looking at it, especially in the Book of The Revelation. God does now speak clearly to individual believers through His written Word, illuminated by the Holy Spirit,

and He works what are practically miracles, *i.e.* things out of the ordinary course, to those who pray in faith and really trust in Him ; but He has not promised to work miraculously to an ungodly world in general, or for unbelievers in particular, like to what He frequently did with His people Israel of old.

A great miracle, though not noticed by the world, is being performed, to-day, in Israel restored to Palestine according to Scripture. It seems, therefore, to me, so far as the believer is specially concerned, that, with a complete and perfect Old and New Testament—with an indwelling Holy Spirit, and with many promises and proofs that prayer will be (and is) answered—we are not taught to expect definite communciations or special miracles as of old, but rather to take heed to the reiterated word, “The just shall live by faith,” and to “walk by faith, not by sight.” Craving for anything beyond this is probably due to lack of satisfaction with what the Lord has provided, and might lead to spiritual troubles.

MR. SYDNEY T. KLEIN : The title of Dr. M'Intyre's paper takes for granted as a fact “The Silence of God,” and then asks “How is it to be explained ?”

From the paper itself, I glean that in using the word *Silence*, the writer means that God does not speak to us direct in finite physical words, so that we may hear Him by means of our auditory sense organ.

Surely God is ever speaking to us, but as He is a Spirit, and we are His spiritual offspring, He naturally speaks as Spirit to spirit. It was thus He spoke to the Hebrew seers of old, and has continued ever since to speak to all those who are God-loving, that they may clothe His messages in finite physical language and deliver them to mankind.

After more than half a century of reverent study of our surroundings in this life, I have come to the conclusion that God does not interfere with the working of the wonderful laws of Nature which, in His wisdom, He has ordained for carrying out His great Purpose. He does not, therefore, interfere with the doings of man, but speaks and acts through all those who have found the Kingdom of Heaven *within*, and have realized their oneness with the All-loving.

His voice is heard within, not objectively but subjectively, and

the only explanation required is not why He doesn't speak to us in audible language, but whether His messages have been truly transmitted by those who have been ordained to speak and act as His representatives on the physical plane. If we take the converse to this, we cannot help noting that many of us seem to address our prayers to God objectively, as though He were an outside Being, which we do when petitioning our earthly father, but spiritual prayer does not depend on or require finite words for utterance ; it is the *thought* within which must precede those outward symbols if prayer is to have power : " All things whatsoever ye ask in prayer, *believing*, ye shall receive," namely, the inner spiritual thought must come before the outward physical words.

We have a naïve account of the experiences of one of the mediæval mystics which expresses well the attitude necessary for true prayer. He describes how, in his early days, he first learnt the futility of praying objectively. For a long time he had been wrestling daily in prayer without getting any response, and at last desperately demanded of God why He didn't answer him ; he then received the reply : " I am only waiting until you have done shouting."

Mr. THEODORE ROBERTS : I should like to say that I very much appreciate Dr. M'Intyre's paper, and particularly his reason for the silence of God being because He has spoken finally to men in His Son. This comprises not only the three years of our Lord's public ministry, but that ministry which immediately followed through the Holy Spirit sent down from Heaven to dwell on this earth at Pentecost.

It is apparent, especially from the Johannine scriptures, that all that was spoken through the inspired writers had its origin in our Lord's own life, for, as the wise man said, " What can the man do that cometh after the King ? " (Eccles. ii, 12), and none could really speak after the Son of God in the way of a greater or different revelation. Therefore the Apostle Paul could say, in his last doctrinal epistle, that it was given to him to " fulfil (complete) the Word of God " (Col. i, 25). The inspired men who wrote after him based everything on what they had seen and heard of the living Christ. Nothing is more marked than the immense gap which separates the books of the New Testament from all subsequent Christian literature.

Miracles seem to have ceased much sooner than Christian apologists

are usually prepared to admit, being apparently intended only to accredit Christianity to an unbelieving world. The Apostle Paul remained in prison four years, and was unable to heal Epaphroditus (Phil. ii, 27) and Trophimus (2 Tim. iv, 20), though he had earlier done miracles of healing, and had been delivered from prison by a miracle. Just as there was no inspired Word for several centuries before the First Coming of Christ, and no miracles for a longer period, so I believe the present silence of God will continue until the Second Advent, for it is one of God's ways with men to present a testimony for faith's acceptance before it is fulfilled by His intervention.

Mr. W. HOSTE : There is an aspect of "the Silence of God" (if we may understand by the phrase that, for all-wise reasons, He does not at once interfere to punish wrongdoing) which has not, I think, been referred to, and that is the danger of misinterpreting that "silence" into acquiescence in evil. This supports the general thesis of Dr. M'Intyre's paper, that God is allowing sin to manifest itself fully in all its hideousness, before taking open measures to deal with it finally in judgment. The same thought is exemplified by God's words to Abraham, "The iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full." Ps. l illustrates the danger referred to above. It is addressed to two classes, God's people and the wicked, especially the religious wicked, as the context shows. The man addressed in the latter part of the psalm, if not an active religious *worker*, is an active religious *talker*. He "declares God's statutes"; he "takes God's covenant in his mouth," but his conduct belies his profession. He "casts God's words behind him"; is morally unscrupulous; speaks evil; tells lies; slanders his "brethren"; and God's only reply is beyond his ken, because outside his own use, *silence*. Thus he argues, if God disapproved, He would say so; therefore He approves! But the reverse is true, and when God's time comes the silence will be terribly broken. "These things hast thou done, and *I kept silence*, and thou thoughtest I was altogether such an one as thyself; but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes."

The "silence of God" is in reality only a relative term. Though normally silent as far as miraculous display is concerned, He is speaking through His Providences and His Word. But even His

“silences” are eloquent and effective. That “still small voice” had accomplished infinitely more than Elijah, armed though he was with the power of temporal judgments. He had to confess he was “left alone,” while Jehovah could point to “seven thousand men, whom He had reserved to Himself, who had not bowed the knee to the image of Baal.” “The Incarnation,” as Gregory Nazianzen, I think it was, has said, “was carried out in one of the great silences of Eternity.” There was a dead silence too at Calvary from the sixth to the ninth hour, while “the great transaction” was taking place ; and the closing panorama of the Great White Throne passes before us in the Scripture without a sound. Men seem to *read* their record and their fate. As has been well said, “There is more in the silences of God than in all the shoutings of men.”

The AUTHOR’S reply : The references to my paper in the preceding discussion are even too generous, and little occasion can be found for remark.

Mr. Edwards has rightly taken exception to a phrase of mine on p. 264—“He made no movement of wrath.” I was trying to paraphrase St. Paul’s statement in Rom. iii, 25, but I ought to have selected an exacter form of words.

With, I think, all the speakers, I agree that, in one sense, God is never silent. He speaks through Nature and history, in the Scriptures, and by the Holy Spirit. But there are many things which we desire to know that are still unrevealed. Nor, when He has spoken, does He always find attentive and understanding hearers.