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"The Progressive Development of the Conception
of God in the Books of the Bible."

A SERMON

DELIVERED AT THE PENNSYLVANIA YEARLY MEETING OF
PROGRESSIVE FRIENDS IN THE YEAR 1858.

BY THEODORE PARKER.

TO THE READER.

Of four sermons delivered by THEODORE PARKER before the Pennsylvania Progressive Friends in the year 1858, this is the first. The remaining three, treat of the "Ecclesiastical Conception of God," the "Philosophical Idea of God," and the "Souls Normal Delight in the Infinite God." These will be reprinted during the year. It will be seen therefore, that one leading idea is common to the four discourses. The object in reproducing them is to serve the cause of religious truth. JAMES MACDONALD, Elmwood Street.

To guaranteed Subscribers of One Shilling per quarter and upwards, these Sermons will be supplied at the rate of 1½d. each, single copies 2d., post free 2½d.

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- January 9th.—Rev. JAMES MACDONALD. — “Modern Literature in Relation to the Bible.”
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- January 23rd.—Rev. JAMES MACDONALD. — “The Kingdom of Heaven and its Conditions of Entrance.”
- January 30th.—Rev. JAMES MACDONALD. — “The Utility of Biblical Criticism.”
- February 6th.—Rev. JAMES MACDONALD.—“The Logic of Christian Orthodoxy.”
- February 13th.—Rev. H. W. PERRIS (of Warrington).—“Modern Life Theories, and their bearing on Religious Philosophy.”
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- February 27th.—Mr. JAMES WATSON.—“Christ, the Son of Man.”
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THE
PROGRESSIVE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONCEPTION
OF GOD IN THE BOOKS OF THE BIBLE.

A SERMON
BY THEODORE PARKER.

In the human race nothing is ever still ; the stream of humanity rolls continually forward, change following change ; nation succeeds to nation, theology to theology, thought to thought. Taken as a whole, this change is a Progress, an ascent from the lower and ruder to the higher and more comprehensive. Individuals die, special families pass off, nations go under ; and a whole race, like the American Indians, may perish, and their very blood be dried up from the ground ; yet still mankind survives, and all the material or spiritual good achieved by any race, nation, family, individual, reverts at last to mankind, who not only has eminent domain over the earth, but is likewise heir at history of Moses, of the Heraclides, of Egypt, and of the American Indians. So of much that slips out from the decaying hand of the individual or the race, nothing is ever lost to humanity ; much is outgrown, nought wasted. The milk-teeth of the baby are as necessary as the meat-teeth, the biters and the grinders of the adult man. Little Ikie Newton had a top and hoop ; spinning and trundling were as needful to the boy as mathematical rules of calculation to the great and world-renowned Sir Isaac. The Progress of Mankind is continuous and onward, as much subject to a natural law of development as our growth from babyhood to adult life.

You see this change and progress in all departments of human activity, in Religion and Theology, as distinct as in spinning and weaving. Theological ideas are instruments for making character, as carpenters' tools for making houses, Take the long sweep of four thousand years that history runs over, and the improvement in theological ideas is as remarkable as the change in carpenters' tools. You see this progress especially in the Conception of God, and in the Worship that is paid to him conformable to that conception.

2 THE PROGRESSIVE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONCEPTION.

Here the change is continuous, and the progress is full of encouragement for the future.

What unlikeness in the conceptions of God which Christian men have to day! The notion of God set forth in certain churches differs from yours and mine more than Moloch differs from Jehovah. Certainly the God which some ministers scare their congregations withal, is to me only a Devil—a Devil who has no existence, and never appears out of the theological graveyard, where this ghost of buried superstitions “walks” from time to time to frighten men into the momentary panic of a revival.

The Bible has become the Sacred Book of all Christendom. It is not only valued for its worth, which is certainly very great, but still more for its fancied authority—because it is thought to be a Revelation made directly and miraculously by God, to certain men whom he inspired with the doctrine it contains. Now, God must know himself, and that perfectly, and if he make a revelation thereof, he must portray himself exactly as he is. So it is maintained in all Christendom, that to learn the character of God, you are not to go to the World of Matter, or to the World of Man, but only to Revelation, which mirrors back to you his exact image and likeness; giving you God, the whole of God, and nothing but God. Accordingly, it is said that the conception of God is the same in all parts of the Bible, howsoever old or new, without variableness or shadow of turning.

But when you come to look at the Bible itself, and study it part by part, and then put the results of your study into a whole, you find a remarkable difference in regard to the character of God himself, that depends on the general civilization and enlightenment of the times and the writers: the further you go back, the ruder all things become. Take the whole of Greek literature, from Homer, eleven hundred years before Christ, to Anna Commena, eleven hundred years after him, and there is a great change in the poetic representations of God. The same thing happens in the books of the Bible. They extend over twelve or thirteen hundred years; it may be, perhaps, fourteen hundred. Perhaps Genesis is the oldest book, and the Fourth Gospel the newest. What a difference between the God in Genesis and that in the Fourth Gospel! Can any thoughtful man conceive that these two conflicting and various notions of God could ever have come from the same source? Let any of you read through the book of Genesis and then the Fourth Gospel, and you will be astonished at the diversity, nay, the hostility even, between the God in the old book and the new one. Then, and at some subsequent time, look at the various books between the two,

and you see what different notions of the Divine Being there are in this "infallible miraculous revelation of God."

Let us look at this great matter in some details, and to see just what the facts are, and make the whole matter as clear as noonday light, divide the Bible into its three great parts, the Old Testament, the Apocrypha, and the New Testament. In the Old Testament, Genesis may perhaps have been written in its present form, about a thousand years before Christ, though some scholars put it a few hundreds of years nearer our own time; at any rate it seems to have been compiled from ancient documents, some of them perhaps existing thirteen or fourteen hundred years before the birth of Christ, though others are clearly later. The book of Daniel, a spurious work, was evidently written between 170 and 160 years before Christ. In the Apocrypha, the book of Ecclesiasticus is perhaps the oldest work, and seems to have been written about 180 years before the birth of Jesus. The latest book is The Wisdom of Solomon, of uncertain date. In the New Testament, Paul's Epistle to the Galatians is the oldest, and was perhaps written 58 or 60 years after Christ; the Fourth Gospel, I think, is the last, and was written, perhaps, 120 or 140 years after Christ. There are seventy books in the canonical and apocryphal Bible. With the exception of fourteen prophets, Ezra, Nehemiah, David, and Asaph, the two authors of some thirty or forty, perhaps fifty of the Psalms, we know the name of no writer of the nine-and-thirty books of the Old Testament. Of the Apocrypha we know the name of the writer of the book of Ecclesiasticus, of him no more; of others not even that. In the New Testament it seems clear that Paul wrote the Epistle to the Galatians, that to the Romans, and the two to the Corinthians; but I doubt if we are certain who wrote any other of its twenty-seven books! Here, then, out of seventy biblical books, containing the writings of more than one hundred authors, we know the names of fourteen Hebrew prophets, two Psalmists, two other writers in the Old Testament, one in the Apocrypha, one in the New Testament—twenty men. This fact that we know so little of the authorship of the biblical books is fatal to their authority as a standard of faith, but it does not in the smallest degree affect their value as religious documents, or as signs of the times when they were written. I don't care who made the vane on the steeple, if it tell which way the wind blows—that is all I want: I don't know who reared these handsome flowers; it matters not; their beauty and fragrance tell their own story. We know the time the documents came from, and they are monuments of the various ages, though we know not who made or put them together.

Now, look at the conception of God in the first and last of

these three divisions. Of course in the brevity of a morning's sermon I can only select the most remarkable and characteristic things. I shall begin with the oldest part of the Old Testament, and end with the latest part of the New.

1. At first sight it seems the Hebrews believed in many gods, and no effort of the wisest and best men could keep the nation from falling back to idolatry for centuries. It was not until after the Babylonian Captivity which began in 586 B.C., and ended about eighty years later that the Israelites renounced their idolatry; then contact with monotheistic and civilised people corrected this vice.

At first, in the Bible, Jehovah appears as one God amongst others, and seems to have his council of gods about him. Next he is the special god of the descendants of Jacob, and called the God of Israel. By and by he is represented as stronger than any of the other gods; he can beat them in battle, though sometimes he gets worsted. Finally, he is the only God, and has regard for all nations, though he still takes special care of the Hebrews, who are his chosen people. The book of Job, I think, is the only one in the Old Testament which makes it appear that God cares for all men alike, and this seems to be the only book in the Old Testament which was not written by a Jew. I think it is one of the latest books in that collection.

Now see what character is ascribed to God in the earliest documents of the Bible. The first five books of Moses are the oldest; they contain the most rude and unspiritual ideas of God. He is represented as a very limited and imperfect being. He makes the world in six days, part by part, one thing at a time, as a mechanic does his work. He makes man out of dust, in "his own image and likeness," breathes into him, and he becomes a living soul. God looks on the world when he has finished it, and is pleased with his work, "and behold it was very good." But he is tired with his week's work, rests on the seventh day, and "was refreshed." The next week he looks at his work, to see how it goes on, and he finds that he must mend it a little. All animals rejoice in their mates, but thoughtful Adam wanders lone; he must have his Eve. So God puts him into a deep sleep, takes one of his ribs, makes a woman of it, and the next morning there is a help meet for him. But the new man and woman behave rather badly. God comes down and walks in the garden in the cool of the day, calls Adam and Eve, inquires into their behaviour, chides them for their misconduct, and in consequence of their wrong deed he is very angry with all things, and curses the serpent, curses Eve, curses Adam, and even the ground. The man and woman have tasted of the Tree of Knowledge, and he turns them out of the garden of Eden lest they should also

eat of the Tree of Life, and thereby live for ever. By and by God repents that he made man, and "it grieved him at his heart," they behave so badly; so in his wrath he sweeps off all mankind, except eight persons; but after the flood is over Noah offers a burnt offering, and God smells the sweet savour and is pacified, and says he will not again curse the ground, and he will never destroy the human race a second time.

To know what happens he must go from place to place; thus he understands that the people are building a tower, and comes near enough to look at it, and, not liking the undertaking, he says, "Go to now, let us go down and confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech;" he scatters them abroad, and they cannot build the tower, which was to reach up to heaven. Afterwards he hears bad news from Sodom and Gomorrah, that "their sin is grievous." He does not quite credit the tidings, and says, "I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me, and if not I will know." He talks with Abraham, who pleads for sparing the wicked city, beats Abraham in argument, and "as soon as he had left communing with Abraham," "the Lord went his way."

God appears to man visibly—to Adam, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, and to Moses. He talks with all those persons in the most familiar way, in the Hebrew tongue: "the Lord talked to Moses, face to face, as a man speaketh with his brother." He makes a bargain with Abraham, then with Jacob and his children. It is solemnly ratified, for good and sufficient consideration on both sides. It is for value received: God conveys a great quantity of land to Abraham and his posterity, and guarantees the title; they are to circumcise all their male children eight days after birth; that is the jocular tenure by which they hold Palestine. God swears that he will keep his covenant, and though sometimes sorely tempted to break it, he yet adheres to the oath:

" And though he promise to his loss,
He makes the promise good."

He dines with Abraham, coming in unexpected one day. Abraham kills a calf, "tender and good." Sarah makes cakes of fine meal, extemporaneously baked on the hearth. Butter and milk are set forth, and God, with two attendants, makes his dinner.

While Moses was travelling from Midian to Egypt, the Lord met him at a tavern, and "sought to kill him," but Moses's wife circumcised her son before God's eyes—so God let the "bloody husband" go.

He is partial, hates the heathen, takes good care of the Jews, not because they deserve it, but because he will not break his covenant. He is jealous; he writes it with his own

finger in the ten commandments : "I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God ;" and again, "*Jehovah*, his name is jealous." He is vain also, and longs for the admiration of the heathen, and is dissuaded by Moses from destroying the Israelites when they had provoked him, lest the Egyptians should hear of it, and his fame should suffer.

Look at this account of one of God's transactions in Numb. xiv. : "And the Lord says unto Moses, how long will this people provoke me ? And how long will it be ere they believe me, for all the signs which I have showed among them ? I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of thee a greater nation, and mightier than they." And Moses replied : "Then the Egyptians shall hear of it, and they will tell it to the inhabitants of the land ; they will say, "Because the Lord was not able to bring the people into the land which he swore unto them, therefore he hath slain them in the wilderness ;" "Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people !" So, lest the Gentiles should think him weak, *Jehovah* lets the Hebrews off for a time, and instead of destroying millions of men at once, he spread their ruin over several years. "In this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die."

He is capricious, revengeful, exceedingly ill-tempered ; he has fierce wrath and cruelty ; he is angry even with the Hebrews, and one day says to Moses, "Take all the heads of the people (that is the leading men, the citizens of eminent gravity), and hang them up before the Lord against the sun."

Once God is angry with the people who murmur against Moses, and says to him, "Get you up from among this congregation, that I may consume them as in a moment !" Moses is more merciful than his God ; he must appease this Deity who is "a consuming fire." So he tells Aaron, "Take a censer, and put fire therein from off the altar, and put on incense, and go quickly unto the congregation, and make an atonement for them ; for there is wrath gone out from the Lord ; the plague is begun !" Aaron does so. and the plague is stayed, though not till the fury of the Lord had killed fourteen thousand and seven hundred men ! (Numb. xvi. 41—50.) God hates some of the nations with relentless wrath ; Abraham interferes, pleading for Sodom and Gomorrah, Moses for the Israelites, but nobody cares for the rest of the people or burns incense for them, so God says, "I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven." All the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Hivites, the Perizzites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, and the Jebusites are to be rooted out—seven nations, each of which was more numerous than the Hebrews : "Thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them ; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor show mercy unto

them," saith the Lord. The Canaanites and the Moabites were kindred of the Hebrews, of the same ethnologic tribe, but they could not enter into the congregation of the Lord unto the tenth generation !

This God—powerful, terrible, partial, jealous, often ill-tempered, wrathful, cruel, bloody—is to be worshipped with sacrifice, the blood of bulls and goats, with costly spectacles by the priesthood, who sacrifice to him in a special place, at particular times ; and God gives the most minute directions how all this shall be done, but he is not to be served in any other way, at any other place.

Such seems to have been the conception of God with the leading minds of the Hebrews at the beginning of their national existence, or at the later day when the early books were deceitfully compiled. Now see how much they outgrew it a later day.

The highest Old Testament idea of God you find in the Proverbs and the later Psalms, which were written only four or five hundred years after the promulgation of these extraordinary documents which I have just quoted. In these God is represented as all-wise, and always present everywhere. You all remember that exquisite Psalm, the cxxxixth, "Whither shall I go from thy spirit ? or whither shall I flee from thy presence ?" There God is unchangeable ; his eyes are in every place, beholding the evil and the good ; no thought can be withheld from him. What grand and beautiful conceptions of God are there in Psalms ciii., civ., cvii. ! So in almost the whole of the admirable collection, which is the prayer book of Christendom to-day, and will be till some man with greater poetic genius, united with the tenderest piety, such as poets seldom feel, shall come, and, in the language of earth, sing the songs of the Infinite God.

There is a great change also in the manner of worship. At first it was a mere external act—offering sacrifice, a bull, a goat, a lamb ; nay, God commands Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, and the father is about to comply, but the Deity changes his own mind, and prevents the killing of the boy. Listen to this from Psalm li., and see what a change there is : "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness, according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. Create in me a clean heart, O God ; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence ; and take not thy Holy Spirit from me. For thou desirest not sacrifice ; else would I give it : thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit ; a broken and a contrite spirit, O God, thou wilt not despise."

Look at this from Hosea : "I desire mercy and not sacrifice ; and the knowledge of God more than burnt-offering." Or this of Micah : "What doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly and love mercy, and walk humbly with thy God ?" What a progress for the early times ! But even to the last book of the Old Testament there is the same wrath of God. The world has seen no such cursing as that of the Jews in the name of Jehovah. Take the sixth Psalm, and I will defy the hardest of you to wish worse and crueller things than the author imprecates against his enemies :—"Set thou a wicked man over him ; and let Satan stand at his right hand. When he shall be judged, let him be condemned : and let his prayer become sin. Let his days be few ; and let another take his place. Let his children be fatherless and his wife a widow. Let his children be continually vagabonds, and beg : let them seek their bread also out of their desolate places. Let the extortioner catch all that he hath ; and let the stranger spoil his labour. Let there be none to extend mercy unto him ; neither let there be any to favour his fatherless children. Let his posterity be cut off, ; and in the generation following let their name be blotted out. Let the iniquity of his fathers be remembered with the Lord ; and let not the sin of his mother be blotted out. Let them be before the Lord continually, that he may cut off the memory of them from the earth. As he clothed himself with cursing like as with a garment, so let it come into his bowels like water, and like oil into his bones."—vs. 6-15, 18. I quote these because they are seldom read, while the devout and holy portions of the Psalms are familiar to all men. In Bibles which have laid on the pulpit for fifty years, and those read in private from generation to generation, the best parts are worn out with continuous use, while the evil passages are still fresh and new.

I think no Old Testament Jew ever got beyond this : "Was not Esau Jacob's brother ? saith the Lord : yet I loved Jacob and hated Esau," (Mal. i. 2, 3.) A Psalmist speaks of God as pursuing his enemies with wrath "like a mighty man that shouteth by reason of wine." The Lord God of Israel says to his people, "I myself will fight against you with an outstretched hand, and a strong arm, even in anger, and in fury, and in great wrath." "I have set my face against this city for evil and not for good." If they do not repent, his "fury will go forth like fire, and burn that none can quench it ;" and "this house shall become a desolation."

Here is a terrible picture of the Hebrew God, sketched by the hand of a great master some time after the Babylonian Captivity. There had been a great battle between the Edomites and the Hebrews ! God comes back as a conqueror, the

people see him, and the following dialogue takes place :—

People :—Who is this that cometh from Edom ?
In scarlet garments from Bozrah ?
This that is glorious in his apparel,
Proud in the greatness of his strength ?

Jehovah :—I that proclaim deliverance,
And am mighty to save.

People :—Wherefore is thine apparel red,
And thy garments like those of one that treadeth the wine vat ?

Jehovah :—I have trodden the wine-vat alone,
And of the nations there was none with me.
And I trod them in mine anger,
And I trampled them in my fury,
So that their life-blood was sprinkled upon my garments,
And I have stained all my apparel.
For the day of vengeance was in my heart—
I trod down the nations in my anger ;
I crushed them in my fury,
And spilled their blood upon the ground.*

“Home-keeping youths have ever homely wits,” says the proverb ; it is not less true of nations than of men. The religious but idolatrous Jews met a monotheistic people in their captivity in Babylon, and came back with better ideas. Yet much of the old theological evil lingered still. Ezra, Nehemiah, and the author of the book of Daniel, devout men, intensely bigoted, knew only “the great and dreadful God ;” that is the name the last of them calls Jehovah. But from the first five books of the Old Testament to the Proverbs and later Psalms there is great progress.

II. You come to the New Testament, and here you do not find much literary excellence in the writers. Wild flowers of exquisite beauty spring up around the feet of Jesus ; only in the Revelation do you find anything which indicates a large talent for literature, neither the nature which is born in the man of genius, nor the art which comes from exquisite culture. The Fourth Gospel was writ, apparently, by some Alexandrian Greek, a man of nice philosophic culture and fancy. Paul had great power of deductive logic. A grand poetic imagination appears in that remarkable book, the Apocalypse. But, taken as a whole, in respect to literary art, the New Testament is greatly inferior to the best parts of the Apocrypha and Old Testament. It compares with Job, the Psalms, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ecclesiasticus, and the Wisdom of Solomon, as the works of the early Quakers compare with Hooker, Taylor, Herbert, Cudworth, and Milton ; and yet, spite of the lack of culture, literary art, and poetic genius in the New Testament, as in Fox, Nayler, Penn, and other early Quakers, there is a spirit not to be found in the well-born and learned writers who went before.

*Dr. Noyes's Translation.

I. In the New Testament, look first at the conception which Jesus has of God. I shall take it only from the first three Gospels. In that, according to Matthew, I think we have his early notion of God. He calls him *Father*. The same word is now and then applied to God in the Old Testament, but there I think it means only Father to the Jews, not to other nations. But it seems that some of the Greeks and Jews in Jesus's own time applied it to him, as if he were the father of all men. As Jesus makes the Lord's Prayer out of the litanies which were current in his time, so he uses the common name for the Deity in the common sense. With him God alone is good, and our Father which is in heaven is perfect. "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." He pities and forgives the penitent, as in that remarkable story of the Prodigal Son. With what tender love does Jesus say, "There is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth more than over ninety and nine just persons who need no repentance." Such noble thoughts come out in that time as "shines a good deed in a naughty world." But what becomes of the impenitent wicked? God has no love for them; they shall go into everlasting punishment. So, alongside of God there is a Devil, and to the left hand of heaven there is a dreadful, fiery, endless hell, whither a broad way leads down, and the wide gates stand ever open, and many there be who go in thereat.

At first Jesus limited his teachings to the Jews; he would not take the children's bread and give it unto the dogs; he declared that not a jot or tittle of the Mosaic ceremonial law should ever fail; he told his disciples to keep all that the Scribes and Pharisees commanded, because they sat in Moses seat. But by-and-by he nobly breaks with Judaism, violates the ritual law, puts his new wine into new bottles. With admirable depth of intuitive sight he sums up religion in one word, *Love*—Love to God with all the heart, and to one's neighbour as himself. Fear of God seldom appears in the words of Jesus. Fear is the religion of the Old Testament. Mercy is better than sacrifice. Men go up to heaven for righteousness and philanthropy, and no question is asked about creed or form. Other men go down to hell for ungodliness; and no straining at a gnat would ever save him who would swallow down a whole camel of iniquity. Human literature cannot show a dearer example of tenderness to a penitent wicked man than you see in the story of the Prodigal son, which yet the first Evangelist rejected, and two others left without mention.

All nationality disappears before Jesus. His model man is a Samaritan. We hear that word commonly used and do not understand that the Jews hated a Samaritan as the old

New England Federalists hated a Jacobin, as the British used to hate a Frenchman, or as a Southern slaveholder hates a black Republican to-day. Depend upon it, it created as much sensation amongst men who heard it when Jesus told this story of the Good Samaritan, as it would in Virginia to have some one represent a Negro as superior to all the "first families" of the State, on account of some great charity that he had done.

I do not find that Jesus altered the common idea of God which he found. He was too intent on practical righteousness to attend to that. Besides, he was cut off when about thirty years of age; had he lived longer, it may be that he would have reformed the popular notion of God; for there are some things in the words that drop like honey from his lips which to me indicate a religious feeling far beyond his thought.

2. In the writings of Paul I find more speculation about God than with Jesus; for Paul was mainly a theological man, as Jesus was mainly a pious and philanthropic man. Jesus could start a great religious movement; Paul could make a theology out of his hints, and found a sect. But the most important characteristic of Paul's idea of God is this: God's wrath was against all ungodliness in Jew or Gentile, and he was as accessible to Gentile as to Jew. Nationality vanishes; all men are one in Christ Jesus; God is God to all, to punish the wicked and to reward the righteous who have faith in Christ; the Jews are as wicked as the rest of mankind, and are to be equally saved by faith in Christ, and by that alone. Paul's Christ is not the Jesus of History, but a mythological being he conjured up from his own fancy. He says that the invisible God is clearly made known to the visible material world, and conscience announces God's law to the Gentiles as effectually as revelation declares it to the Jews. That is a great improvement on the Old Testament idea of God, as presented even in the Psalms.

3. In the Fourth Gospel and the First Epistle attributed to John—both incorrectly attributed to him—the idea of God goes higher than elsewhere in the New Testament. God is mainly love. He dwells in the souls of men who love each other and love him, and is to be worshipped in spirit and in truth, not only in Jerusalem, but anywhere and everywhere. Perfect love casteth out fear.

This God has an only-begotten Son, to whom he has given the Spirit without measure, put all things under his hand; he who believes on the Son shall have everlasting life, but he who does not believe on the Son shall not see life. Christ's commandment is that they love one another, and to those God will give another Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, who shall abide with believers for ever; nay, Christ will manifest himself to them.

But this God has created a Devil, who will send all unbelievers into endless torment.

Thus ends the last book of the New Testament. What a change from Genesis to the Fourth Gospel! What a difference between the God who eats veal and fresh bread with Abraham, and commands him to make a burnt-offering of his own son, who conveys all Palestine on such a jocular tenure, and the God whom no man hath seen at any time; who is Spirit, and has to be worshipped in spirit and in truth; who is love, and who dwells with all loving and believing souls! There are I know not how many hundred years between the two—what a series of revolutions! what vast progress of mankind had filled up that brief period of time.

But the idea of God which you gather from the Bible is quite unsatisfactory to a thoughtful and deeply religious man to-day. In the Old Testament there is no God who loves the Gentiles; he made the world for the Jews; all others are only servants—means, not ends. This being so, the Hebrew thought himself the only favourite of God; his patriotism became immense contempt for all other nations—was a part of his religion. In the New Testament, the God whom even Jesus sets before mankind has no love for the wicked; there is no Providence for them; at the last judgment he sends them all to hell, bottomless, endless, without hope; their fire dieth not, their worm is not quenched; no Lazarus from Abraham's bosom will ever give Dives a single drop of water to cool his tongue, tormented in that flame. Jesus tells of God, also of the Devil; of heaven with its eternal blessedness awaiting every righteous man, and of the eternal torment not less open and waiting for every one who dies impenitent. Paul narrows still more this love of God towards men; it includes only such as have faith in Christ; no man is to be saved who does not believe in Paul's idea of Christ. The author of the Apocalypse constricts it still further yet; he would cast out Paul from heaven; Paul is called a "liar," "of the Synagogue of Satan," and other similar names. The Fourth Gospel limits salvation to such as believe the author's theory of Christ, that he was a God, and the only-begotten Son of God, an idea which none of the three Evangelists, nor Paul, nor James, nor Simon Peter, seems ever to have entertained. I think that Jesus never held such a doctrine as what Paul and the writer of the Fourth Gospel makes indispensable to salvation.

To the Jews every Gentile seemed an outcast from God's providence. To the early followers of Jesus all unbelievers were also outcasts; "he that believeth and is baptised shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned." I find no adequate reason for thinking Jesus ever spoke these words, found only in the doubtful addition to the second canonical

Gospel. Yet there seems evidence enough to show that Jesus himself really taught that ghastly doctrine, that a great wickedness unrepented entailed eternal damnation on an immortal soul. Paul says human love never fails; he suffers long and is kind, and yet both he and the man whom he half worshipped teach that God has no love for the wicked man who dies in his impenitence; endless misery is his only destination. Neither in the Old Testament nor in the New do you find the God of infinite perfection, infinite power, wisdom, justice, love; it is always a limited God, a Deity with imperfect wisdom, justice, love; God with a Devil beside him, the created fiend getting the victory over his Creator! The Bible does not know that infinite God, who is immanent in the world of Matter and Man, and also lives in these flowers, in yonder stars, in every drop of blood in our veins; who works everywhere by law, a constant mode of operation of natural power in Matter and in Man. It is never the dear God who is responsible for the welfare of all and each, a Father so tender that he loves the wickedest of men as no mortal mother can love her only child. Does this surprise you? When mankind was a child, he thought as a child, and understood as a child; when he becomes a man he will put away childish things.

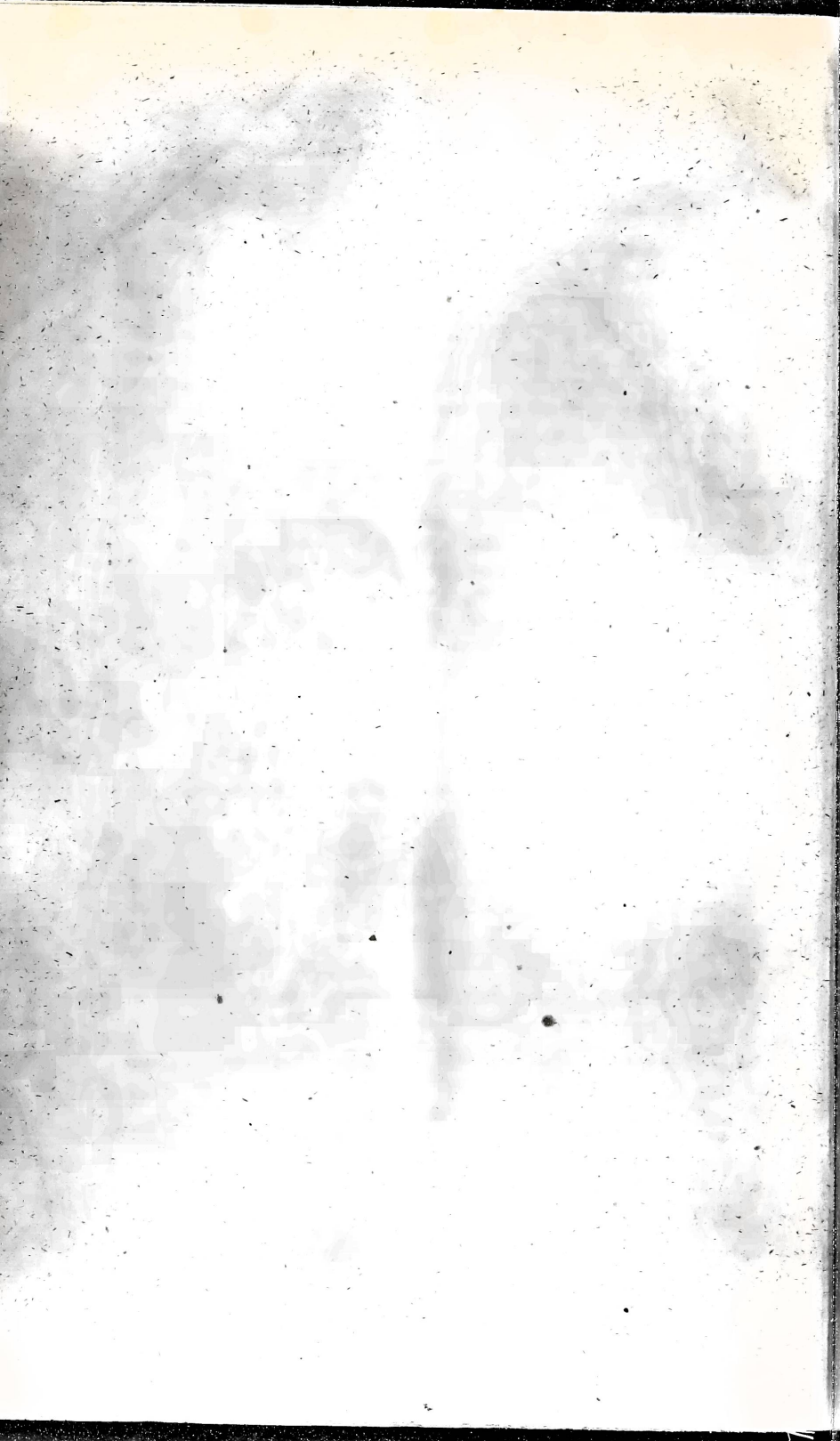
How full of encouragement is the fact of such a growth in man's conception of God, and his mode of serving him! In the beginning of Hebrew history, great power, great self-esteem, and great destructiveness are the chief qualities that men ascribe to god. Abraham would serve him by sacrificing Isaac; Joshua, a great Hebrew filibuster, by the butchery of whole nations of men, sparing the cattle, which he might keep as property, but not the women and children. This was counted as service of God, and imputed to such marauders for righteousness. In the notion of God set forth in the Fourth Gospel and the First Epistle ascribed to John, it is love which preponderates, and by love only are men to serve God. With Jesus it is only goodness which admits men to the kingdom of heaven, and there is no question asked as to nation, creed, or form; but this sweet benediction is pronounced: "Inasmuch as you did it unto the least of these my brethren, ye did it unto me;" "Come ye blessed, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world!"

Shall you and I stop where the New Testament did? We cannot, if we would, and it is impious to try. What if Moses had been content with the Egyptian chaos of a deity, "where every clove of garlic was a god;" what if Jesus had never broke with the narrow bonds of Judaism; what if Paul had been content with "such as were Apostles before him," and had stuck at new moons, circumcision, and other abominations which neither he nor his fathers were able to bear; where would have been

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OF GOD IN THE BOOKS OF THE BIBLE.

the Christian Church, and where the progress of mankind? No, we shall not stop! It would be contrary to the spirit of Moses, and still more contrary to the spirit of Jesus to attempt to arrest the theological and religious progress of mankind.

God in Genesis represents the conception of the babyhood of humanity. Manhood demands a different conception. All round us lies the world of Matter, this vast world above us and about us and beneath; it proclaims the God of Nature; flower speaking unto flower; star quiring unto star; a God who is resident therein, his law never broken. In us is a World of Consciousness, and as that mirror is made clearer by civilization, I look down and behold the Natural Idea of God, infinite Cause and Providence, Father and Mother to all that are. Into our reverent souls God will come as the morning light into the bosom of the opening rose. Just in proportion as we are faithful, we shall be inspired therewith, and shall frame "conceptions equal to the soul's desires," and then in our practice keep those "heights which the soul is competent to win."



Week Evening Lectures.

- Tuesday, February 22nd.—Rev. JAMES MACDONALD.—
“Unitarianism ; or the Gospel as Christ Taught it.”
- Monday, February 28th.—Rev. JAMES MACDONALD.—
“Unitarian Christianity in Relation to the Bible and
Science.”
- Tuesday, March 7th.—GEO. LUCAS, Esq.—“The Authority of
Scripture—What it is not—What it is.”
- Tuesday, March 14th.—Rev. JAMES MACDONALD.—“The
Bible an Inspired, but not an Infallible Book.”
- Tuesday, March 21st.—GEO. LUCAS, Esq.—“Scripture Inter-
pretation—The False Method—The True Method.”
- Tuesday, March 28th. — Rev. JAMES MACDONALD. —
“Religion—The Dogmatic System—The Rational Con-
ception.”
- Tuesday, April 4th.—GEO. LUCAS, Esq.—“Do we find the
Doctrine of the Trinity, or the Deity of Jesus taught in
the Book of Acts, if we do—where ? If not—why not”

An Open Conference will be held at the close of each of these
Lectures, to which inquirers after religious truth are invited.

The Chair will be taken each evening at 8 o'clock.

FEBRUARY, 14TH, ANNUAL CONGREGATIONAL TEA
MEETING.

On Tuesday Evening, February 15th, the Rev. H. W. PERRIS (of
Warrington) will Lecture, subject :—

“JOHN STUART MILL—A Study of Character.”

A Religious & Social Improvement Class

IS HELD

EVERY SUNDAY AFTERNOON, in the CHAPEL,

FROM HALF-PAST TWO TO HALF-PAST THREE.

THE CLASS IS OPEN TO THE PUBLIC.

WEEK EVENING CLASSES as usual on the Wednesday,
Thursday, and Friday.

The following valuable Books illustrative of Christian Unitarianism may be purchased from the book stall at the chapel door before or after the Sunday services, or from the Rev. JAMES MACDONALD, Elmwood Street:—

	Published at.	Offered at.
Channing's Complete Works	3/6	2/-
Channing's Perfect Life	3/6	2/-
Bible and Popular Theology. Dr. V. Smith...	3/6	2/-
Memoir of the Rev. Theophilus Lindsey, M.A.	5/-	2/-
Priestley's History of the Corruptions of } Christianity }	2/6	1/-
Unitarian Hand-book. Rev. R. Spears... ..	-/6	-/6
John Milton's Last Thoughts on the Trinity	1/-	-/9
First Principles in Religion. Rev. J. P. Hopps	1/-	-/8
Parker's Matters Pertaining to Religion ...	2/-	1/9
Spirit and Word of Christ. Dr. V. Smith ...	—	1/-
Childhood of the World. By E. Clodd, F.R.A.S.	1/-	10d.
The Church of the First Three Centuries. } By Dr. Lamson }	5/-	2/-
The Childhood of Religions. By E. Clodd, } F.R.A.S. }	5/-	4/-

The following Lectures may also be obtained at the book stall :

Sympathy of Religions. By T. W. Higginson.	-/2
A Study of Religion. By F. E. Abbot.	-/2
Sin against God. By Professor Newman	-/2
Birth and Growth of Myth. By E. Clodd, F.R.A.S. ...	-/3
Dreams and Ghosts. By Dr. Zerffi.	-/3
The Origin of the Devil. By Dr. Zerffi.	-/3
The Vedas and Zendavesta. By Dr. Zerffi.	-/3
Erasmus—His influence on the Reformation. By Elley Finch.	-/3
Discipleship with Christ. By Rev. J. Macdonald. ...	-/1
Ideal Religion. Do. do.	-/1
British Workman. Part I. Do. do.	-/1
Do. Part II. Do. do.	-/1
Comparative Religion. By Rev. J. Macdonald	-/1
Is Jesus God? Rev. R. R. Suffield	-/3
Light for Bible Readers. Rev. J. P. Hopps... ..	-/2
Popular Doctrines that obscure the views which the New Testament gives of God. By Rev. W. Gaskell, M.A. ...	-/1

The *Unitarian Herald* (weekly) price 1d., and the *Christian Freeman* (monthly) price 1½d., are also on sale at the stall.