

of God and man comes to its maturity in Christ. President Harper closes this part of his address by saying that, 'after all, the greatest contribution of the new religion introduced by Him was the conception of love instead of fear as manifested toward the Deity, love instead of selfishness as manifested toward one's fellow-men.'

But what has the Bible to do with all this? It is when President Harper asks this question that he begins to be original. His first word is a word of warning, and it is both new and true exceedingly. Do not, he says, put on one side the religious life, and on the other side the Bible. An unread, unstudied, untried Bible is nothing. There is in the Old Testament the story, the most interesting story, of the discovery of a long-lost Bible. As long as it was lost it was nothing. But when it was discovered Shaphan read it before the king. 'And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the book of the law, that he rent his clothes.'

An unread Bible is nothing. An unstudied Bible is nothing. And an untried Bible is nothing. For a mere knowledge of the contents of the Bible will not do. 'I know men,' says Dr. Harper—we all know men—who can repeat entire chapters, and even books of the Bible, not to speak of verses, whose lives and thought, so far as one can judge, remain wholly uninfluenced by the know-

ledge.' 'There is even a certain scholastic knowledge'—but you stop him there. Is the President of the University of Chicago going to lift up his voice against learning? No, no. He has already stopped himself. 'You will not misunderstand me,' he pleads; 'the most accurate and extensive learning is needed in connection with the archaeological, exegetical, and theological examination of biblical material.' But the most flawless scholarship, if it is alone, will do little for the man whose heart calls for consolation, whose soul needs lifting up from the depths of wretchedness.

Then President Harper brings the Bible into touch with the religious experience, both in its outward expression and in its inner life. But we need not follow him further. Surely this is within the reach of all of us to do. Let us pass from him with this one word. We are urged to-day, on many hands, to read the Bible less and other literature more, and the argument is that all that is contained in the Bible, and is good for the higher life of man, is found in modern literature, and in a form that is more agreeable to modern manners. President Harper is modern too. He knows our modern manners. But he knows that 'in these days, if never before, we are expected to go to the original sources for our information upon everything.' And he knows that for the divine life in man, 'the only source, as well as the original source, is the Bible.'

## The Living God.<sup>1</sup>

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'But the Lord is the true God; he is the living God, and an everlasting king.'—Jer x. 10.

IT is just the middle one of these three clauses of which I wish to speak more particularly. 'The living God' is one of the most characteristic of the Divine Names, both in the Old Testament and

<sup>1</sup>Preached at Trinity Church, New York City, 23rd October 1904.

in the New. It occurs many times over; but a verse like the text has the advantage of putting it in its true position, of making it as central as it really is in the religion of Israel. The other phrases serve to heighten the effect; they are, as it were, buttresses to the main building. Jehovah

alone, in contrast to the gods of the heathen, is 'the true God' or 'God in truth'; 'an everlasting king' brings out at once His eternal Being and His almighty Power. These attributes are almost contained in—they are certainly suggested by—the conception of 'the living God.'

For if we run our eye rapidly over the passages in which the phrase is used, we see how it is constantly associated with the thought of the Divine Majesty, the absolute unquestionable Sovereignty of God. Listen, for instance, to this, from the Book of Deuteronomy: 'For who is there of all flesh, that hath heard the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as we have, and lived?' (Dt 5<sup>26</sup>); or to this, from the Book of Joshua, 'And Joshua said, Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you, and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanite, and the Hittite,' and so on (Jos 3<sup>10</sup>). And then we remember how the giant of Gath, the uncircumcised Philistine, is described as defying 'the armies of the living God' (1 S 17<sup>26</sup>); or, again, how Sennacherib, king of Assyria, sent his servant Rabshakeh 'to defy' or 'reproach the living God' (2 K 19<sup>4</sup>, cf. 10). These last passages glance with a single word of scorn at the utter audacity and folly of the man, whatever his appearance of strength or power, who supposed for one moment that he could withstand the Most High.

When the biblical writers spoke of 'the living God,' they thought of His supreme authority, His absolute control, over the affairs of men. And then again they thought, as we should say, of His omnipresence. The living God is the fountain of life for all the universe; all lesser life streams, as it were, from Him; He is the boundless ocean of which the lives of His creatures are but, as it were, the ripples upon the waves. In this way we understand how it is that His infinite energy, His almighty power, penetrates into every place, into each remotest corner of space or time. 'Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord' (Jer 23<sup>23 f.</sup>).

Another aspect of this idea of 'the living God' is that it is intensely personal. We remember how Matthew Arnold, in his light, half-mocking, though at bottom really serious way, assured us that we made too much of the Divine Personality; how he

insisted that the verifiable portion of the idea of God did not lie in this, but rather in a certain 'stream of tendency,' a sort of impersonal law of things, 'which made for righteousness.' Whatever the value of this theory of his might be, it was at least utterly unbiblical. It may be said that the writers of the Old and New Testaments had neither the word nor the idea of what we mean by personality, that it was a later growth, and that in its full sense it is comparatively modern. That may be true; but none the less, the biblical writers had all the substance of what we mean by personality. Their whole conception of God, as I have said, was intensely personal. When they tried to describe His being or His attributes, they did so in terms which denote personal relation. Think, for instance, of the immense place which the Fatherhood of God fills in the New Testament. It is impossible to be a father, or to attract the feelings with which we regard a father, without being also regarded as a person. Or turn to a fundamental passage like that great proclamation of the Divine Name: 'The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in loving-kindness and truth; keeping loving-kindness for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin: and that will by no means clear the guilty' (Ex 34<sup>6, 7</sup>). All the leading attributes of God from the Old Testament point of view, His holiness, His righteousness, His mercy, His wisdom, His commanding will, His executive power, are attributes of a person. And it is just because He is a person that He is the object, for man, of reverence and awe and love. Take away the thought of personality, and the religion of the Bible collapses. But indeed, it is not only the religion of the Bible that collapses, but the whole unifying principle in things—that which makes the universe one—so far as it can be apprehended by the human mind.

This idea of personality is not obscurely hinted in the phrase, 'the living God.' All life is not personal, but personality is before all things living. It is through life that it manifests itself and makes itself felt. The living intercourse of persons is the highest function and form of life.

Thus we pass to yet another aspect of the phrase, 'the living God.' It is associated in the Bible with the nearness of the relation between God and man. It is a reminder that God is not afar off but near to His people, near to those who

seek Him. The passage that we quoted from the Book of Deuteronomy: 'For who is there of all flesh, that hath heard the voice of the living God, speaking out of the midst of the fire, as we have, and lived?' has reference to the great act of Revelation by which God held communion with men and imparted to them knowledge of Himself. In the Book of Joshua, it was when Israel was beginning the invasion of Canaan that their leader reminded them that 'the living God' was among them, going forth with their armies. And in both cases in which there was 'a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and of contumely,' caused by the arrogance of Goliath or Sennacherib, it was to 'the living God' that appeal was made. The point is that, although far off, He is also near; although He is 'the high and Holy One that inhabiteth eternity,' yet He is also ready to hear the prayers of His people and to succour them in their distress.

Hence we are not surprised to find that the phrase is used in connexion with the devotional life of the individual worshipper. Two lovely passages at once rise up before our minds in this connexion, which bring home to us in the most impressive way the intimacy of the relation in which the devout Israelite stood to his God. I will quote them in the familiar words of the Prayer Book version.

'Like as the hart desireth the water-brooks: so longeth my soul after thee, O God.

'My soul is athirst for God, yea, even for the living God: when shall I come to appear before the presence of God?' (Ps 42<sup>1, 2</sup>).

And then there is also that other Psalm which is in spirit nearly akin to the 42nd—

'O how amiable are thy dwellings: thou Lord of hosts!

'My soul hath a desire and longing to enter into the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh rejoice in the living God' (Ps 84<sup>1, 2</sup>).

People in these days sometimes speak disparagingly of the Old Testament, as though its worth were affected by the higher criticism and the like. It might be well for them to wait until they were conscious in themselves of such devotion and such delight in religious communion with God as was the constant attitude of these saints of old. The Old Testament forever stands to show us what are the elementary contents of religion; and, by showing us what they are, to enable us to realize them or make them our own. I do not

know how far I shall have succeeded in bringing home to you the richness of this conception. I am sure that in any case I shall have done so very inadequately. Observe at once the richness and the warmth and the deeply religious character of the whole conception—how admirably it is adapted to quicken and sustain the feeling of religion in the heart of man.

Imagine the heathen worshipping his gods. He goes to the temple, and he sees before him the carved figure of his deity, a figure of wood or stone or molten metal. Its expression never changes; the proud curve of the lip, the fixed gaze of the eye, never varies. It makes no response to his prayers. He may go day after day and week after week and month after month, and it is always the same. Why? because it is dead; it never was alive. It is nothing, an unreality; it has no place in the world of animated and conscious being; it is a sham god, a lifeless imitation of what the word 'God' means.

How different from this was the Israelite! When he went to the temple to pray, he knew that his prayers were heard. The God with whom he had to deal was the living God. He could not indeed be seen; there was no visible form. But the devout Israelite felt His presence. 'Thou art about my path, and about my bed, and spiest out all my ways, for lo, there is not a word in my tongue, but thou, O Lord, knowest it altogether' (Ps 139<sup>3, 4</sup>).

So life continually spoke to life. The living God spoke to the living soul of man. The man went on his way about his daily tasks, but he knew that he was not alone, for God was with him. He knew that God had a definite purpose for him. He knew that there was a work that he was called upon to do; and that, so long as he was doing it, the Power that rules heaven and earth was on his side.

And then, when he ceased to think about himself and his thoughts took a wider range, when he considered the heavens, the sun, and the moon and the stars, they were the work of His hands; when he looked at the earth with all its beauty and grandeur, it was God who made it and had planted man to dwell in it. And further, when he thought upon the history of man—how empire succeeded empire, and peoples rose and fell—all this too, he felt, was God's doing; it was by His appointment that kings reigned, and peoples flourished or

decayed. 'Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing' (Is 40<sup>15</sup>).

This was all contained in that single title, 'the living God.' And the next thing that I would ask you to observe is how that title was reached. It was reached by what we are in the habit of calling revelation. It was not arrived at by any process of taking thought; it was no inductive inference from the phenomena of the external world, as men saw it. As a matter of fact, speculative minds had been actively at work for many centuries, and they had arrived, or were arriving, at the belief that the ultimate cause of all existence was one; but what they meant by this was but a thin abstraction of thought, they were as yet far from attaining to the truth of the living God. Israel had attained to it; and the process by which it did so was not a process of scientific reasoning. Certain gifted men among the people reached the truth by what seemed to be a kind of intuition. And they themselves felt that this intuition was not wholly and simply an act of their own minds. They did not invent the truth or discover it, but it was revealed to them. They felt that there was a Spirit without, bearing witness with their spirit, that in some way—they could not tell how—they were guided to the truth by the Power outside themselves, in whom they lived and moved and had their being. And so convinced were they that the truth came to them by the gift of this Power that they boldly claimed to speak in His Name and by His Authority. They spoke as the Prophet Jeremiah speaks in the text, not tentatively and hesitatingly, but confidently and positively: 'The Lord is the true God; he is the living God, and an everlasting king.'

This is what we mean by Inspiration. It does not mean that the human authors of the Bible, in their capacity of human authors, never made mistakes; but it means that these great ruling ideas were put into their minds by God. It means that God Himself, the living God, who never leaves Himself without witness, caused the ideas to spring up within them. It means that the best account we can still give of them is St. Peter's: 'For no

prophecy ever came by the will of man: but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit' (2 P 1<sup>21</sup>). And now perhaps, at this distance of time, we ask whether this 'revelation,' as we have called it, of 'the living God,' is as valuable for us as it was for the Israelites of old. I think it is, even now, in spite of all our science and all our knowledge. 'The living God' is still the very best phrase we can use to describe the Power which is at the centre of the universe, the Power which binds together in one all its infinite variety, which has given it laws that shall not be broken, and has prescribed for it that

one far-off divine event

To which the whole creation moves.

Of course we may use other names if we please. We may speak of Divine Providence, by which we mean that divine foresight and arrangement by which things are as they are. But that is a far colder and less moving phrase. Hardly for that would the Psalmist have said that he was 'athirst,' that his soul 'longed for' it, that his heart and his flesh 'cried out' after it. We cannot do better than keep the old phrases, which have proved by long use how precious they are.

And then, further, we remember the Christian application of this same idea. 'Behold the birds of the air, that they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; and your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are not ye of much more value than they?' 'Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and not one of them shall fall on the ground without your Father: but the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore; ye are of more value than many sparrows' (Mt 6<sup>26</sup> 10<sup>29-31</sup>).

It is an easy and natural step from 'the living God' of the Old Testament to 'Our Father who art in Heaven.' He who holds the nations in the hollow of His hand, and before whom they are as the small dust of the balance, is the same who allows Himself to be called Our Father, and who counts the very hairs of His children. The infinitely great and the infinitely little are alike to Him. That means that His love is coextensive with His power, and from His love nothing can separate us, either in earth or in heaven.