

THE NATURE OF GOD.

Dr. Talmage's Expectations of the Day when That Which is Only Dimly Seen Will Be Fully Revealed.

Evidence of Divine Power—God's Infinite Love—His Nature Never Changes.

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WASHINGTON, D. C.—In this discourse Dr. Talmage raises high expectations of the day when that which is only dimly seen will be fully revealed; text, Job xxvi, 14: "Lo, these are parts of His ways. But how little a portion is heard of Him? But the thunder of His power who can understand? The least understood being in the universe is God. Blasphemous would be any attempt by painting or sculpture to represent Him. Egyptian hieroglyphs tried to suggest Him by the grotesque figure of an eye upon a sword, implying that God sees and rules, but how imperfect the suggestion! When we speak of Him it is almost always in language figurative. He is "Light" or "Dayspring From on High," or He is a "High Tower" or the "Fountain of Living Waters." His splendor is so great that no man can see Him and live. When the great theologians assembled in Westminster Abbey for the purpose of making a system of religious belief, they first of all wanted an answer to the question, "Who is God?" No one desired to undertake the answering of that overmastering question. They finally concluded to give the task to the youngest man in the assembly, who happened to be Rev. George Gillespie. He consented to undertake it on the condition that they would first unite with him in prayer for divine direction. He began his prayer by saying, "O God, Thou art a spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable in Thy being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth." That first sentence of Gillespie's prayer was unanimously adopted by the assembly as the best definition of God. But, after all, it was only a partial success, and after everything that language can do when put to the utmost strain and all we can say of God in the providential world we are forced to cry out with Job in his text: "Lo, these are parts of His ways. But how little a portion is heard of Him? But the thunder of His power who can understand?"

Archbishop Tillotson and Dr. Dick and Timothy Dwight and Jonathan Edwards of the past and the greatest theologians of this young century have discoursed upon the power of God, the attribute of omnipotence. And we have all seen demonstration of God's almightiness. It might have been far out of our ken when an equinoctial gale God showed what He could do with the waters. It might have been in an August thunderstorm in the mountains when God showed what He could do with the lightnings. It might have been in South America when God showed what He could do with the earthquakes. It might have been among the Alps when God showed what He could do with the avalanches. Our cheek was blanched, our breath stopped, our pulses fluttered, our whole being was terrorized, but we had seen the evidence of divine strength. What was the power that that storm compared with the power which holds all the oceans? What was the power that shook the hills compared with the power that strikes the earth through all the centuries and for 6000 years, and in a formative and incomplete shape for hundreds of thousands of years? What is that power that sustains our world compared with the power which rolls through immensity the entire solar system and all the constellations and galaxies and the universe? The mightiest intellect of our age could not give us a moment there came upon it the full appreciation of what omnipotence is. What you and I see and hear of divine strength are only "parts of His ways. But how little a portion is heard of Him? But the thunder of His power who can understand?"

We try to satisfy ourselves with saying: "It is natural law that controls things. Gravitation is at work; centrifugal and centripetal forces respond to each other." But what is natural law? It is only God's way of doing things. At every point in the universe God's power is at work, His continuous power that controls and harmonizes and sustains. That power withdrawn one instant would make the planetary system and all the worlds which astronomy reveals one universal wreck, besides the spheres, dismantled sunsets, dead constellations, debris of worlds. What power it must be that keeps the internal fires of our world imprisoned, only here and there spouting from a Cotopaxi or a Stromboli or from a Vesuvius, putting Pompeii and Herculaneum into sepulcher, but for the most part the internal fires chained in their cages of rock and century after century unable to break the chain or burst open the door! What power to keep the component parts of the air in right proportion, so that all around the world the nations may breathe in health, the frost and the heats hindered from working universal demolition! Power, as Isaiah says, "to take up the isles as a very little thing"—Ceylon and Borneo and Hawaii as though they were pebbles; power to weigh the "mountains in scales" and the "hills in balances"—Tenerife and the Cordilleras. To move rock we must have lever and screw and gear machinery, but God moves the world with nothing but a word; power to create worlds and power to destroy them, as from the observatories again and again they have been seen with flame, then pale with ashes and then scattered.

What is that power to us? asks some one. It is everything to us. With Him on our side, the recognized God, the sympathetic God, the omnipotent God, we may defy all human and satanic antagonisms, and when we are shut in by obstacles we can say, as did one of Frobenius's men when the sailor was describing how their ship was surrounded by icebergs in the Arctic sea, "The ice was strong, but God was stronger than the ice." And, whatever opposition we may have, our God is mightier than the opposition. All right with God, we may have the courage the general dying on the battlefield. He asked to be turned, and when they said, "Which way shall we turn you?" he said, "Turn my face toward the enemy." What a challenge that was uttered by the old missionary hero "If God be for us, who can be against us?" Think of it! God is the only being in the universe who has power to do as He pleases. All human and angelic forces have environments. There are things they cannot do, heights they cannot scale, depths they cannot fathom.

We get some little idea of the divine power when we see how it buries the proudest cities and nations. Ancient Memphis it has ground up until many of its ruins are no larger than your thumb nail, and you can hardly find a souvenir large enough to remind you of your visit. The city of Tyre is under the sea which washes the shore on which are only a few crumbling pillars left. Sodom and Gomorrah are covered by waters so deathful that not a fish can live in them. Babylon and Nineveh are so blotted out of existence that not one unimpaired shaft of their ancient splendor remains. Nothing but omnipotence could have put them down and put them under. The antediluvian world was able to send to the postdiluvian world only one ship, with a very small passenger list. Omnipotence first rolled the seas over the land and then told them to go back to their usual channels as rivers and lakes and oceans. At Omnipotent command the waters pouncing upon their prey and at Omnipotent command sinking back into their appropriate places. By such rehearsal we try to arouse our appreciation of what omnipotence is, and our reverence is excited, and our adoration is intensified, but after we find ourselves at the foot of a mountain we cannot climb, hovering over a depth we cannot fathom, at the rim of a circumference we cannot compass, and we feel like first going down on our knees and then like falling flat upon our faces as we exclaim: "Lo, these are parts of His ways. But how little a portion is heard of Him? But the thunder of His power who can understand?"

So all those who have put together systems of theology have discoursed also about the wisdom of God. Think of a wisdom which can know the end from the beginning, that knows the thirtieth century as well as the first century. We can guess what will happen, but it is only a guess. Think of a mind that can hold all the past and all the present and all the future. We can contrive and invent on a small scale, but think of a wisdom that could contrive a universe. Think of a wisdom that can learn nothing new, a wisdom that nothing can surprise, all the facts, scenes and occurrences moving in to come as plainly before it as though they had already transpired. He could have built all the material universe into one fell swoop and it, a glowing mass, through immensity, but behold His wisdom in dividing up the grandeur into innumerable worlds, rolling splendors on all sides, diversity, amplitude, majesty, infinity. Worlds, worlds, moving in complete order, shining with complete radiance. Mightiest telescope on one hand and most powerful microscope on the other, the discovering in the plan of God not one imperfection.

Witty writers sometimes depreciate the thunder and say it is the lightning that strikes, but I am sure God thinks well of the thunder, or He would not make so much of it, and all up and down the world He uses the thunder to give emphasis. It was the thunder that shook Sinai when the law was given. It was with thunder that He discomfited the Philistines at Eben-ezer.

Job pictures the war horse as having a neck clothed with thunder. St. John in an apocalyptic vision again and again heard the thunder, and the thunder is now quite well explained by the electricians, was the overpowered mystery of the ancients, and, standing among those who heard the thunder, Job exclaimed: "Lo, these are parts of His ways. But how little a portion is heard of Him? But the thunder of His power who can understand?"

So, also, all systems of theology try to tell us what is omnipotence—that is, God's capacity to be everywhere at the same time. "Where is God?" said a heathen philosopher to a Christian man. The Christian answered, "Let me ask you where He is not?" The child had it right when, asked how many Gods are there, he answered, "One." "How do you know that?" he was asked again. He answered, "There is only room for one, for He fills earth and heaven." An author says that if a man were set in the highest heavens he would not be any nearer the essence of God than if he were in the centre of the earth. I believe it. If this divine essence does not reach all places, what use in our prayer, for prayers are being offered to God on the other side of the earth as well as here, and God must be there and here to take applications which are offered thousands of miles apart. Uniquely! No one has it but God. And what an alarm to wickedness, an ever-present Lord, and whose presence and enforcement when we need help! God on the throne and God with the kneeling child saying his evening prayer at his mother's knee. God above you, God beneath you, God on the right of you, God on the left of you, God within you. No pantheism, for that teaches that all things are God, but Jehovah possesses all things as our souls possess our bodies. God at the diameter and circumference of everything, as close to you as the food you put to your lips, as the coat you put on your back, as the sunlight that shines in your face. Appreciation of God, if through Jesus Christ, the atoning Saviour, we are right with God, ought to give us a serenity, a tranquillity, that is not to be in motion, and it also is revolving around some great centre. But no peace has yet been found where God is not present by sustaining power. Omnipresent! Who fully appreciates it? Not I; not you.

Sometimes we hear Him in a whisper; sometimes we hear Him in the voice of the storm that jars the Adirondacks. But we cannot swim across this ocean. The only way to measure the infinite. We feel as Job did after finding God in the gold mines and the silver mines of Asia, saying, "There is a vein for the silver and a place for the gold where they fine it." The nature of God never changes, and from all eternity that holy passion moved in the infinite, and I think He was throwing out worlds into space and inhabiting them and more worlds for the application of that love. He may not have told the other worlds what He did for this world, as He has not told us what He did for them. I think the love of God was demonstrated in mightier worlds before our little world was fitted up for human residence. Will a man owning 50,000 acres of land put all the cultivation on a half acre? Will God make a million worlds and put His chief affection on one small planet? Are the other worlds and larger worlds standing vacant, uninhabited, while this little world is crowded with inhabitants? No, it takes a universe of worlds to express the love of God. And there are other ransoms and other rescues and other redemptions, as there may be other millenniums and other resurrection mornings and judgment days than those of our world. But in the space of six feet by five was comprised the mightiest evidence of God's love that any world ever saw or ever will see. Compressed on two planks joined together as a cross there was enough agony there concentrated, if distributed, to put whole nations into torture. That God allowed the assassination of His own Son for the rescue of our world is all the evidence needed that He loved the world. Go ahead, O church of God! Go ahead, O world, and tell us well as you can what the love of God is, but know beforehand that Paul was right when he said, "It passeth knowledge." Let other poets take up the story of God's love where William Cowper and Isaac Watts and Charles Wesley and Horatius Bonar left it, and let other painters improve upon the "Sistine Madonna" and the "Adoration of the Magi" and the "Crucifixion" as Raphael and Titian and Claude and Correggio presented them. Let the German pulpit orator take up the theme of God's love where Frederick Thueck left it, let Italian pulpit take it up where Gavazzi left it, let French pulpit orator take up the theme where Bourdeloue left it, let the Swiss pulpit orator take up the theme where Merle d'Aubigne left it, the English pulpit take it up where George Whitehead left it, let the Scotch pulpit take it up where Dr. Candler left it, let the Welsh pulpit take it up where Charles Evans left it, and let the American pulpit take it up where Archibald Alexander and Dr. Kirk and Matthew Simpson left it. But the world will never appreciate fully the love of God until they hear from His own lips the outburst of His infinite and everlasting affection.

Diary of a Pessimist.
The following are from a newly-found diary for pessimists:
Rings—One's future wife.
Rings—When made of iron, it is used to chain prisoners; when made of gold, it gives, under the name of wedding, liberty to young persons.
Year—A period of twelve months in the case of a man and six months in the case of a woman.
Apathy—The strength of the weaker sex.
Apprenticeship—All one's life.
Balloon—The trolley car of the future.
Barbary—The home of the barrel organ and of slang.
Shepherdess—A term applied to those rustic maidens whom the kings of former days were so fond of marrying.
Boa—A hairy serpent, which women try to revive by wearing it round their necks.
Nurse—Polite synonym for a hired domestic scourge.
Chance—Woman's favorite accomplice.
Marriage—A holocaust transformed into a sacrament.
History (French)—Pharomond was the first King of France. Some historians insist that he never existed, but all claim that his son Clodion succeeded him.

Natural Disadvantages.
"Taking into consideration the things Sharp has had to contend against, I think his success as a lawyer has been remarkable."
"Why, what did he ever have to contend against?"
"Everything. He came of a wealthy family. He didn't have to work his way through college. He never studied by the light of a pine torch, never had to drive a dray, never walked six miles to school, and wasn't compelled to borrow his books. He had every possible facility, and yet he has done well from the very start."

The Cabin.
Clutching her child to her bosom, Eliza looked out despairingly upon the rushing waters.
"What am I to do?" she moaned, wringing her hands. "The sheriff has attacked our last cake of ice."
"Was there no escape?"
"Were she and her innocent offspring to feed the ten-count 'em—ten fierce bloodhounds yonder?"
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For Biliousness, Torpid Liver, Indigestion, Sick Headache, Crab Orchard Water is a specific.
Oxford University has voted to do away with the Sunday afternoon sermons.

The Modern Father's Mistake.
"Well, my son, I've done the best I could to give you a first-class education, and now you can go out into the world feeling that you are fully equipped for the battle of existence."
"Father, I ought to feel grateful to you, but I cannot. I have just learned that by sending me to college you have robbed me of four years of my life—four years which I might have profitably spent in learning the only thing worth knowing, how to chase and capture the elusive dollar."

Amusing the Children.
Mrs. McShante (triumphantly)—I see ye are takin' in washin' again, Mrs. McProuder!
Mrs. McProuder (whose husband has lost a paying job)—Sure, it's only to amuse 't' childer. They wants 't' windies covered wid steam, so they can make pictures on them.

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Kansas Philosophy.
There is usually something the matter with a man who carries a woman's watch.
Some women would rather listen to a story about a spell of sickness than read a novel.
It is always easier for a busy man to find extra time for work than it is for a loafer.
Be bold enough to say, "I don't know." And if you can screw your courage up to it, add, "And I don't care."
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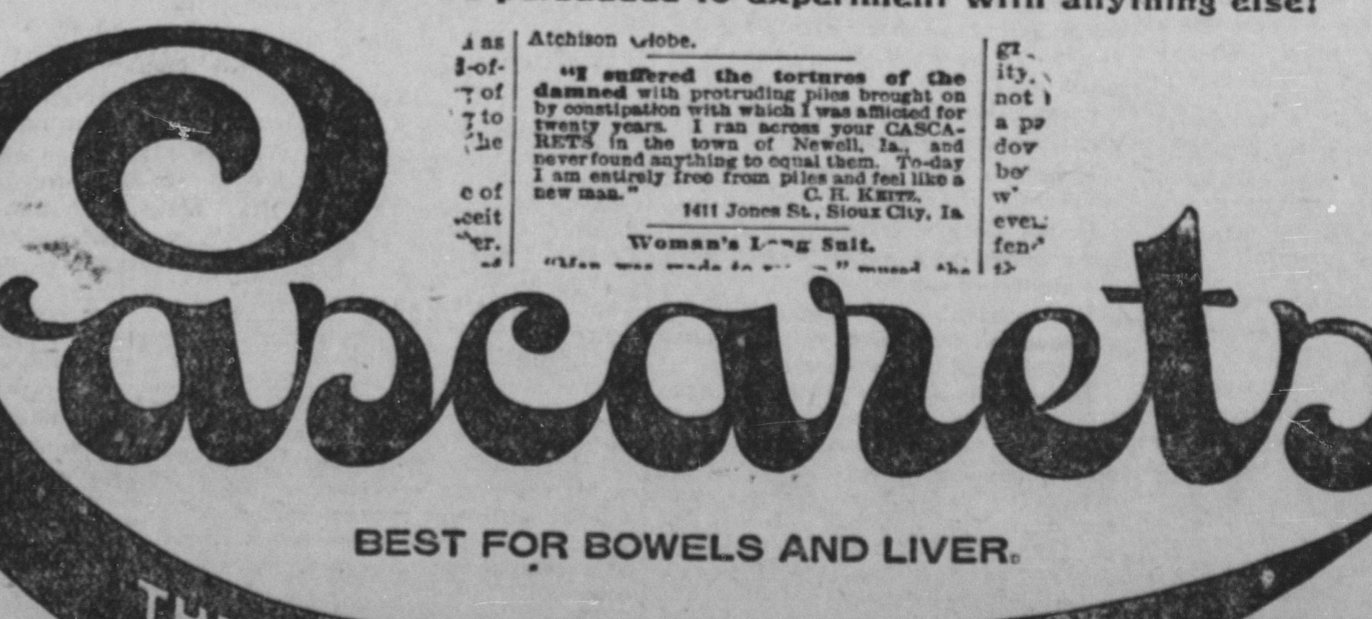
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