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men; but it is the publican overdoing his humility, and not so much as lifting his eyes to heaven save through some one standing between him and heaven. Just as men have difficulty in believing at all in the Divine Love, or that they have a Father in heaven who has no thoughts towards them but thoughts of good; so they have difficulty in believing that their share is as direct and immediate as that of any other in this Love—in saying with all their hearts "Our Father." They have difficulty in recognising that they are as near to God, and as dear to God as any priest is or can be: that they are close to Divine blessing and have an equal share in it with any minister. They shrink from the fulness of Divine Privilege which they have in Christ. They are content to stand afar off, if only some transmitted ray of the heavenly favour may reach them—some broken shower of the Divine blessing may fall on them. This spirit of religious servility lies deep in human nature; and Christian Churches have too often fostered it and used it, instead of trying to kill it, and to educate the popular religious conscience into a full perception of spiritual life and freedom. It is out of this servile spirit—this "spirit of bondage again to fear," as the Apostle terms it (Rom. vii. 15)—and not merely from pride and a perverted love of power that ideas of human priesthood come, and tendencies so constantly reappear towards a mediatorial religion incarnated in mere human forms and symbols. Continually men are sinking below the full conception of the Divine Love; and as they do so, the priest comes into the foreground and offers to mediate between them and a God whom they have ceased to comprehend. Priest-craft grows as true religion dies. When men make much of priests they cease to believe in God. This is the essential evil of ceremonial and priestly religion. It implies doubt of the equal love of God towards all men—of His equal care and concern for all—of the direct interest which all have in the Divine Fatherhood. The priest-idea—the idea that certain human creatures, in virtue of a certain human ceremony, stand or can stand nearer to God than others, and so to speak have more influence with God than others—this is the

death of all living, rational, healthy, and glad religion.

If we needed any evidence how deeply-seated in human nature is this idea—an evidence apart from the history of Christianity itself—we have it in one of the most significant phenomena of our day—a so-called religion, elaborated and propagated by scientific atheism, which denies God altogether, but exhibits a most elaborate ritual and priesthood, whom all men are called to observe and honour. One has only to study this system to see how hard it is for men to preserve the true idea of Humanity and the relation it bears to the Divine. In Christ alone it is to be found the perfect expression of this idea. He alone has seized and made prominent those essential characteristics of human nature which bring men together, and make them common or alike before God—those spiritual qualities which—in comparison with mere intellectual or social qualities—unite them on the same level. Dismissing from view all the accidents of which men make so much,—distinctions of social or intellectual grade, of education, or ability, or culture,—He fixes attention on the broad moral features in which we are all comparatively one—sinners alike needing salvation—alike capable of salvation. In His unerring sight no one stands before another—in His unerring, comprehending love no one receives to the default of another. He is the Father of all. "Of a truth God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness is accepted with Him" (Acts x. 34).

III. But God is not only "Our Father," He is "Our Father which art in heaven." This conveys to us the idea of perfect Fatherhood; and this idea is an important complement of those we have already considered. The effect of our previous exposition is to bring the Divine very near to man. God is a Father. He is our Father. The Supreme Being is represented under the nearness and dearness of a familiar human relationship. We approach Him, as children, a father. We are in the presence of One who loves us, who cares for us, who desires only our good. All this is fitted, if anything can be fitted, to touch with Him