

Scripture represents it as moulded after God's own eternal image and likeness. The phrase, "in our likeness," writes Dr. Dods in his well known commentary on "Genesis," "is added merely for the sake of emphasis." The form, then, into which man's bodily structure was moulded was God's form, image, or likeness. That the Israelites imagined God as possessing an external form is the point that we have set out to prove, and also that this idea was held equally by their early writers, though finally rejected by their later ones, who had great difficulty in altering this material conception of God held to tenaciously by the majority of the people. (See Isa. xl. 18-26).

The opinion expressed, viz., that Gen. i. 26 contains an allusion to man's physical structure, is met with in Bishop Westcott's recent work on "The Gospel of Life." The Bishop thinks that this passage refers to man as a whole, "body, mind, and spirit." This I happen to know is Mr. Gore's opinion also; while Prof. Ryle, in his "Early Narratives of Genesis" writes, "He (man) stands erect, he is made in the image of God."

I do not consider, however, that any of these writers make sufficient use of the concession, since in merely mentioning the fact *en passant* the ordinary reader fails to appreciate the significance of the acknowledgment.

I venture to think that this admission when critically analysed will give an hitherto unappreciated significance to Gen. i. 26.

Dr. Dods, in his previously mentioned work, commenting on Gen. i. 26, avoids all mention of the physical inference in this phrase, and dwells merely on the spiritual aspect of it, one that I am quite as ready to admit as himself. I think, however, for any commentator to pass over in silence the physical aspect of it is to neglect to bring out the principal point in the writer's own mind, notwithstanding that the other point more urgently concerns ourselves.

Further, Dr. Dods, in enlarging on the spiritual aspect of this passage, seems to me to make more of it than the original writer intended. He tells us that, "this image which distinguished man from other animals would seem to consist in those faculties and principles of nature whereby he is capable of moral agency." Here the Doctor seems to have overlooked the fact that the narrative itself describes man as only becoming possessed of these higher mental capacities of conscience after his fall, and not before.

This is clearly seen in Gen. iii. 22, where we are presented with the apparent sole reason for man's ejection from Paradise, viz.: having become possessed of such knowledge through eating the forbidden fruit that made him in one respect the equal to God, lest he should eat of the tree of life and live and thus by acquiring immortality defeat the judgment of God, he was turned out of the garden.

How the act of disobedience was able to place a man on a level of greater equality with God we cannot fully understand, but that it did the narrative states. Now Dr. Dods explains "the man is become as one of us," that "he is become like the higher intelligences." This conflicts with his explanation of Gen. i. 26, for he there credits man with a possession at his creation which only became his at his fall. Nor is it the slightest use to try and reconcile both statements by asserting that at the fall an original faculty which had hitherto lain dormant was then for the first time awakened. This idea would destroy the whole drift of the narrative. We are told that the garden possessed two trees, one of knowledge and the other of life. Now the narrative implies that man was created to become possessed of both these faculties, principles, or capacities in God's own time, but there was a condition attached to these gifts. Now man, in defiance of God's command, helped himself to one of these gifts, and might have helped himself to the other, had not God interfered to prevent him. In neither case would the granting of the gifts have been simply a further development of original faculties, but rather the endowment of entirely new capacities.

For these reasons it seems to me that Dr. Dods infuses more into Gen. i. 26 than it will properly bear when closely analysed. That man had a conscience prior to his fall I readily admit, but I conceive it to have lacked that higher reflective capacity which, to carry out the language of Scripture, makes him so like God. This higher reflective capacity God would have given him in His own time; he would not wait God's time, however, but in an act of disobedience grasped the coveted prize. He got it, but he got something else as well, toil, sorrow, pain and endless death, for he was shut out from the tree of life, to which alone the road has been once more opened by Christ, who came to bring "life and immortality to light."

Thus instead of making Gen. i. 26 refer primarily to "those faculties and principles of nature whereby he (man) is capable of moral agency," to use Dr. Dods's words, I would make this a secondary inference of this text and would gather from it, first, what appears to me to be its true primary meaning, viz.,

the early Israelitish conception of God's bodily form, that is completely lost if we do not take this passage as applying primarily to man's physical structure.

Scripture represents God as having appeared upon many occasions in the bodily shape of a man. "Those," writes Prof. Macgregor in his commentary on "Exodus," "who believe what the Bible says about the Triune constitution of the Godhead, and about Immanuel Jesus Christ the Lord, will ordinarily see that the Exodus angel must have been Christ." And again, "An angel had appeared to the patriarchs, who was God (e.g., Gen. xvi. 10, etc.). Underlying the series of representations is the fact that Israel was dealt with by Jehovah through a person, the angel of Jehovah, "whom we know to be Christ." It is in this way that most commentators miss the significance of Gen. i. 26. Every appearance of God in bodily form in the Old Testament has been put down to a pre-incarnation of Christ, and evidently bearing in mind such a passage as John i. 18, "No man hath seen God at any time," they have come to the conclusion that the first person in the Trinity, "Jehovah" Himself, never appeared personally in bodily form, but that He always appeared in a representative capacity in the bodily appearance of the second person of the Trinity, viz., Christ.

The appearance of three persons to Abraham as he sat at the door of his tent in the plains of Mamre (Gen. xviii.), one of whom he addressed as personally representing Jehovah, together with the fact that while the one so addressed remained with Abraham, the other two went on to Sodom, and there one of them was addressed by Lot as also personally representing Jehovah, proves beyond the shadow of a doubt that two separate persons are represented by the narrator as personally representing Jehovah (compare the two incidents in Gen. xviii. and xix.).

Now if in the first incident the angel who remained with Abraham is to be taken as one of the persons of the blessed Trinity merely on account of the term in which the supplication made to Him is couched, the angel in the second incident must be taken also as one of the Trinity, seeing that He is addressed in the same manner.

Both Drs. Dod and Quarry maintain that God did appear in this incident to Abraham in a bodily form, but they both fail to show that there was a deific bodily presentation in the visit to Lot by the two angels, as well as in the visit to Abraham by the three. Delitzsch, however, thinks that in the first incident we have a manifestation of Jehovah as the God of Grace, Compassion, and Judgment. Thus there is here a manifestation of the Trinity in three separate human forms. Now I have said that one of the two angels that appeared to Lot was addressed by him as personally representing Jehovah (note verses 18 to 23). Who then was this second angel thus addressed by the second person in that Holy Trinity which had appeared to Abraham in three separate human forms. We have here, then, what perhaps may be looked upon as the first appearance to mortal eyes of the angel of His presence, the pre-incarnated Christ (cf. Isa. lxiii. 9 with Ex. xxiii. 20 to 24, and xxxiii. 14).

If this criticism be correct, we see God the Father appearing in bodily form to Abraham, while God the Son appeared in a similar manner to Lot.

It must be borne in mind that the early history of Israel represents God the Father as appearing upon many occasions in a human form, consequently, in such an anthropomorphic figure-making as Gen. ii. 7 depicts the form the figure was given, is to be seen in Gen. i. 26, and v. 1, which being the form in which God Himself was accustomed to appear, is called God's likeness or image. That God was represented as appearing in a bodily form the following passages amply testify. "And the Lord spake unto Moses face to face as a man speaketh to his friend" (Ex. xxxiii. 2); "I speak mouth to mouth even manifestly and not in dark speeches, and the form of the Lord shall he behold" (Num. xii. 8). Prof. Briggs, writing on these passages says, "Moses sees God's face and form habitually."

Now I do not for one moment dispute that in many of the appearances of Jehovah in the Old Testament He is represented by the second person of the Trinity. On the contrary, I have asserted this very fact myself, but I do maintain that all the appearances of God are not to be put down to the second person, for in many instances it was God the Father Himself who visibly appeared in human form.

The Rev. George Reith, in his commentary on St. John, writes: "The word (God) in Greek stands at the beginning of the verse, and is, therefore, emphatic; and being without the article (see i. 1) we may render thus: 'Godhead—none has ever seen. No man, not even Moses, has ever seen.' God is inaccessible to sense-perception; man cannot have visible fellowship with Him (I. John iv. 12 and 20), i.e., in His own original essence. Infinite spirit cannot be the object of human vision, Deut. iv. 12. The theophanies of the Old Testament were symbols and no more, and disclosed at best but the 'backparts' of God. Our Lord's glory was veiled in flesh."

Now no one surely would think of disputing what Mr. Reith is here contending for, viz.: that God is a Spirit, and that as such it is impossible to behold the inner glory of that eternal Presence. This has nothing whatever to do with my contention that the Father has exhibited Himself in human form. Mr. Reith quotes Exodus xxxiii. 20; 1 Tim. vi. 16; Jno. v. 37, and vi. 46, as showing that the Godhead had not been, nor could ever be, seen by man. He also tells us that "Our Lord's Divine glory was veiled in flesh." This last sentence gives the key to unlock the mystery of the appearances of Jehovah in the Old Testament which Mr. Reith has failed himself to use. The glory of Jehovah was there veiled in human flesh, as the glory of Christ was both in his last and prior incarnation.

Turning to Exodus xxxiii, we find what would appear at first sight to be a contradiction. In the 11th verse we read, "And the Lord spake unto Moses as a man speaketh to his friend." Now in Num. xii. 8, we are distinctly told that Moses saw God's form, who also spoke mouth to mouth with him. In the 20th verse of the xxxiii. chapter of Exodus, we read, "Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me and live."

Now what was it that Moses saw here, and what was it that he still wished to see that he might rest more satisfied that Jehovah was still with him? I reply that he saw God as Abraham had seen Him, viz., in bodily form as a human person. The people, however, had sinned greatly (see chapter xxxii.), so much so that Jehovah asserts His intention of no longer leading them in person, but that He would send His angel to go before them (verse 34). Here was a calamity that had overtaken them, for the presence of the angel seemed to signify the absence of Jehovah.

It is at this point that Moses asks for a greater exhibition of God's glory than had even yet been manifested (cf. Exodus xiii. 21 & 22, with xxxiii. 18). It is evident, however, that in his anxiety he had expressed a desire to see more of Jehovah's majesty than was possible for man to see and live, yet he had found exceptional favour in God's sight, and owing to this he was accorded a partial glimpse of that glory which no man had seen before or since except perhaps at the transfiguration.

When Mr. Reith says that the theophanies of the Old Testament were symbols and no more, and disclosed at best but the "backparts" of God, and quotes passages inferring that no man has ever seen God's shape or form, he seems to destroy the allusions to God's bodily appearances in the Old Testament in his anxiety to defend from a too gross materialistic conception the Divine essence of the Eternal Godhead.

The latter attempt is of course commendable, but it does not alter the fact, which apparently is what he desires to do by his whole criticism on John i. 18, that the Supreme Deity chose to manifest Himself in human form to His chosen people, and that in their original ignorance of the inner glory which that outward form shrouded, they took that outward form for His image, and described their own as made after His. Thus they believed that God possessed a human form like their own, and, consequently, when describing the shape into which God had moulded the image of plastic clay when out of the earth He modelled the first man, they represented it as made after that image and likeness in which God was accustomed to appear to them, viz., a bodily image and likeness such as their own.

There are but two points that are necessary to consider before adopting this conclusion as final, 1st.—Did Moses himself think this outward form in which God appeared to him, as He had also appeared to the patriarchs, was an essential part of His nature as our body is at present an essential part of ours? I think the fact that Moses asked to see a view of God's glory that he had not hitherto beheld, shows conclusively that he realized that the bodily presence was but a veil shrouding a greater. At the same time, inasmuch as God did appear to him, and had appeared also to the patriarchs in a bodily form, when describing the form into which God had originally modelled man, he called it God's form, a definition which the theophanies of the Old Testament amply justify. The 2nd point is—What did Christ mean when He told the Jews that they had neither heard His Father's voice nor seen His shape? (John v. 37).

This is an entire misapplication of a text by Mr. Reith, as I shall show by giving the paraphrase on this passage by the learned Hammond (John v. 37), "And God the Father by voice from heaven hath testified of me; but ye, as according to your Father's desire, expressed Exod. xx. 19; Deut. v. 25; and xviii. 16, ye have not heard the voice of God, nor seen His appearance, so it appears by your actions, ye behave yourselves as those that know nothing of God, ungodly, impious men." He then refers to I. John iii. 6, which shows that our Lord's words are to be taken, in John v. 37, in a spiritual sense, and not in a literal, as Mr. Reith has done. To apply this passage literally is impossible, since the forefathers of these