

## The Mystery of God.

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"GREAT IS THE MYSTERY OF GODLINESS. GOD WAS MANIFEST IN THE FLESH!" exclaims Paul in his first letter to Timothy.

"Mystery! the mystery of deity and doctrine—why I don't like mystery in religion at all!" cry many in these days. "Away with all your sacred mysteries and all your profound theologies, and give us what we can naturally discern—what we can easily and instantly comprehend." Very good, the simpler and more transparent everything is the better; but in what objects, in what subjects can you find this simple transparency, this easy and instantaneous obviousness you demand? A grain of sand and a drop of water, these are simple enough, are they not? A sprig of grass, the leaf of a bramble bush, the wing of a moth, the head or the leg of a fly, a grain of wheat or oats—why, all these are simple and void of mystery, are they not?

Indeed! Put your eye to the microscope under which these very common and simple objects have been placed, and then tell us whether or not you can see this awful word "mystery" inscribed upon every one of them? MYSTERY! how far must we travel to encounter it? how much, or rather how little, must we study to be perplexed by it? In the instinctive action of our own hand, in the subtle movements and utterances of our tongue, in the spontaneous operations of our stomach in the assimilation of our food, in the incessant circulation of our blood, in the faculties of our own brain; in the quiet contemplation of these things with which we are all so intimately acquainted, are we not so met and so solomized by "mystery" that we can only sink into silence confessing along with David, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made."

Mystery! where is it not? Count and weigh those thousand volumes which have been written by earnest souls upon physical, mental and moral science. What can all those volumes of deep thought and laborious explanation possibly mean? They are nothing more than attempts to unravel the mystery of the human constitution and human experience—nothing more than laborious efforts to trace out the origin and end of man, his perceptions and thoughts, the operations of his affections and will—nothing more than honest attempts to explain the mystery of ourselves and our environments to ourselves.

And what have our wisest men discovered! They have discovered that every quality and every function of our own nature rises and sinks into mystery; that every common object around us in every day life is inexplicable mystery; that the commonest and simplest experiences of our own daily lives are all mystery most profound. Allow me to illustrate what I mean. Suppose we are resolved not to drink until we have exhaustively analysed the chemical mystery contained in a cup of clear water, we shall certainly die of thirst. How is it possible that certain invisible and impalpable gases can be combined into this beautiful liquid? How—? But stop; we are thirsty; so, closing our scientific eyes, and opening our animal mouth, by simple faith we pour the refreshing gaseous mystery down our throat and feel very much refreshed. If we are resolved not to eat until we have exhaustively discovered the mystery of food and nutrition we must certainly die of starvation. How can sand, clay and water, air and sunlight chemically combined make solid nutritious wheat or oats; and how is it possible that by masticating and digesting such a composition we can be both corporeally and intellectually nourished and invigorated? What can we do when very hungry but open our mouth by simple faith and eat the mystery, bread?

With all these mysteries and ten thousand more waiting for solution need we be amazed or offended when divine inspiration tells us "Great is the mystery of godliness?" We could not rationally expect anything else, could we? Any other statement about the Infinite and Omnipotent God would simply be incredible. The divine Origin, the Creator of all the fathomless mysteries of nature must Himself be supremely, awfully, profoundly and unutterably mysterious. "Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? the measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea.

I. "GREAT IS THE MYSTERY OF GOD-LIKENESS." What do we understand, what can we even imagine God to be like? How does He appear in His person to those who can see Him? What are the qualities of His nature and what His personal attributes? Whence came He? How is He sustained? As distinct from His person how do His omnipresent attributes operate? Ask the opinion of all the wisest and devoutest sages of heathenism who have lived for the last six or seven thousand years, and they

reply by presenting to us a thousand different divine ideas. The Assyrians, Egyptians and Phœnicians, the Chinese, Japanese and Hindus, the Greek and the Roman, the ancient nations of Northern and Western Europe, including our own ancestors, have all elaborated their ideas of Deity—have all done their best to tell what God is like, and what has been their theological finding! Millions upon millions of divinities—grotesque, monstrous, revolting, beautiful, majestic. Before this vast pantheon we stand amazed and confounded, humbled and hopeless. The divine mystery by this spectacle is only made more mysterious, and we turn away from it in despair and silence.

In his letter to the Romans Paul tells us that God has revealed Himself—not explained Himself—but revealed Himself to mankind in His works of creation and providence; "The invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things which are made, even His eternal power and Godhead,"—i. e. in nature's origin order and daily operation we see and feel emanations from God—gleams and reflections of His light, touches of His hand, suggestive manifestations of superhuman wisdom and power, indications of His moral character, expositions, fragmentary and dim it may be, but truthful and trustworthy expositions and assertions of His eternal Godhead, by the aid and the leading of which it is possible for us to worship Him alone and obey Him as supreme.

But after we have accepted all this, O what mystery there still is even in all these illustrations of God! Through the microscope we get lost in the infinity of smallness and fineness of construction; through the telescope we get lost in the contemplation of boundless expanse and vastness of power. I myself have gazed at Jupiter and Saturn and the moon until I have sought relief in wandering about in dazed silence. But what are these three—Jupiter, Saturn and the moon—more than mere astronomical baby's balls in comparison with those myriad orbs shining all around them? Away beyond our solar system we see that star, 61 Cygni, which is distant fifty billions of miles, yet of all the fixed stars this one is the nearest to us, the next being some eighty millions of miles farther away. Facts such as these seem to crush out of us any ideas we may suppose we have held regarding the Creator, and raise Him far above the reach even of our imagination.

Again, in the order and disorder—in the abundant wealth, in the beauty and deformities of our own world's geological system divine power and Godhead are clearly seen. In the march of the seasons, in the daily dealings of a supreme providence in which there appear so much general uniformity and such endless variety of details—so much iron law and so much elastic chance; in the vegetable and animal systems in which ingenuity and skill are so marvelously manifest—in all these things are seen, not mere law in operation, but personal divine power and Godhead. In man himself—in his animal nature and mental intelligence—in his moral and spiritual nature, manifestly the head of terrestrial creation—God reveals not a little of Himself. What infatuation can be imagined more extravagant than the erudite evolutionary theory which attributes such effects to the spontaneous action of insensate dust! Divine method, skill and power are plainly stamped upon them all. By and through all such objects and subjects of thought, even with our weak and fallible faculty we may grope after God, and may shrewdly guess what are his nature and attributes. Had not our faculties been weakened, darkened and distorted by sin, had not our lives been shortened to a span so that we have not sufficient time to study those vast volumes of natural revelation, doubtless, we might have very much more clearly seen and understood the divine Artist and Mechanic by the exhaustive contemplation of His works. "Now we see through a glass darkly, Him who dwells in light inaccessible.

As we now are—fallen, ignorant and so short-lived, how are we ever to know God? How are we to see (I don't say understand) this grandest of all sublime mysteries, God "in whom we live and move and have our being?" To this question the New Testament answers, God was manifest in the flesh." In Him is the manifestation of this profoundest mystery, God became man.

Is such a revelation of the Divine a very improbable thing? If God desires to manifest Himself to our weak eyes and to our childish intellects I think this no very improbable thing. No doubt this act of Divine self-humiliation is an act of stupendous and ineffable condescension, but when we are informed that the great "God made man in His own image" it seems not unlikely He Himself assume the image of man. Thus the creation may foreshadow and suggest the incarnation of grace, "God manifest in the flesh."

This startling sentence in Paul's letter to Timothy is no isolated unique and solitary one around which the ingenuity of modern Arianism may weave a web of theological obscurity. Listen to what the monosyllabic John declared,—"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." Listen to the plain positive assertion of Jesus Himself,—"He that hath seen me hath seen the Father."

Now, granting such plain assertions to be true that the man Jesus of Nazareth is actually "God manifest in the flesh," when we behold—when we approach Jesus what may we rationally expect? I answer deliberately. We must expect and be prepared for the mysterious,—in His nature, in His words, in His works, in His conduct we must expect profoundest mystery, that is, whenever we attempt to push our investigations and enquiries to finality. "Mystery" incomprehensible is written upon every grain of sand as plainly as upon every mighty star,

upon every drop of water in the ocean and upon every drop of blood in our own veins,—indeed upon every thing God has made and upon every law He has enacted. Surely, then, it is to be expected that the Divine worker and Law maker shall Himself be mysterious, when we see Him.

Many of the very wise and keenly scientific geni of our day tell us they cannot acknowledge the man Jesus to be God, because His nature is to them an inexplicable mystery. How could the Divine and Infinite One so shrink, so stoop, so repress Himself? query they. How can it even be imagined except by religious insanity that a creature so small and so weak as the babe lying asleep in Bethlehem's manger can possibly enshrine the Almighty Creator? How can a frail small vial contain the ocean? How can a taper contain the light of all the suns? How a spot of dust like our globe support that Deity who holds up the vast and ponderous universe? How can the almighty life and force of the universe quietly throb within the feeble body of your weary wayfaring man who sits exhausted on the edge of Jacob's well?

How? How? Why? Why?—and still why? Ask Saul of Tarsus, confessedly one of the mightiest intellects that ever thought or wrote, and here is his answer, "Great is the mystery of Godliness; God was manifest in the flesh." This is his answer after having for thirty years been a Pharisee and for thirty additional years a Christian, and after having examined the theosophies of learned Greece and masterful Rome in all their living perfection, "Great is the mystery."

To many of the objections urged against this doctrinal answer of Paul by our materialistic aid, philosophy makes this deliverance,—essential deity cannot be limited or explained by the properties and conditions of matter and space. If God be not supremely independent of matter and space and even of progressive thought He cannot be God. A more recent deliverance of philosophy runs thus—The substance of all creation is God. Monistic Pantheism is the only possible explanation of substance, life, law and action. Ordinary mortals, of course, are utterly bemuddled and confounded by such deliverances, while the schools of materialistic scientists answer, such statements are utterly imaginary—all the mere arbitrary creations of mystic rationalism. All we can know of God we can only discover by observing the composition and the laws of nature, by the use of the telescope and the microscope by chemical analysis and the X rays. Beyond the sphere of scientific investigation deity is all a "hopeless mystery which we ought to let severely alone.

Just so. The mystery of God remains as profound—as unfathomable as ever. Unless we can see the Divine in the Man Jesus, we never shall see it. And we never can settle Jesus Christ's claim to Divinity by scientific or rationalistic methods of investigation. His stupendous claim, "I and the Father are one" we can accept only by simple faith. His miraculous birth and works and resurrection unquestionably prove the veracity of His claims, or we have no proof at all. "The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me." "If ye believe not me, believe the works."

Upon all His doctrinal assertions—upon all His personal claims the Divine imprimature is stamped by His miraculous deeds. Beyond this we cannot reason the matter out. Beyond this the mystery of God has never been manifested to mortal ken and must remain insoluble.

In this Man Jesus God mysteriously meets the dark, mystery of my ruin, by giving Himself to me; but how the righteousness of this man can be transferred to me how the blood of this Man can now cleanse my soul from moral guilt and pollution, no theory of mere human ethics can explain, how Jesus Christ's life can become mine is a mystery beyond the range of natural law. This is all a scheme of God's own devising and operating. "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, said the Lord. For as the Heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

O how very precious does this Christ scheme of God's grace become to us when we know that there is wrapt up in Jesus all the resources and potencies of deity. If Jesus Christ's human righteousness be indeed the righteousness of the Infinite God provided for lost me, then I can very easily believe that I can share it. If Jesus Christ's atoning blood be indissolubly identified with divine value, then I can easily believe that it can cleanse me from all sin. If Jesus Christ's life was essentially Divine then (stupendous as the mystery may be) I can have no difficulty in believing that it is capable of endowing me with glorious immortality. All this believing and receiving on my part does not solve "the mystery." The creature never can comprehend the Creator. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him."

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### Letter from Burma.

DEAR MESSENGER AND VISITOR,—I have not gotten so far from my N. B. home as to be beyond the reach of your welcome visits. I was a little surprised one day early in the New Year to find a stranger in the place of my old friend, but great was my pleasure when I found that after all it was not a "new comer," but the same good friend in a new garb.

But I have a little message to send through you to many in the home land, who are looking, I know, for a personal letter from me. Methinks the English Girls High School in Moulmein the busiest place in the mission world, for from early dawn till old Orion has completed a good three hours of his nightly journey, there is little rest for hand or brain. So will you tell the dear friends at home just how full my days are and how impossible it is for me to write other than the letters that home ties and duty demand.

At present I am taking a not well earned vacation in

Thaton. In the v trying to send out arrival; but as I sage, sad thought the words from be ago, as I sat by I promised I would paper he loved so will never be seen earth, and the ear news from the taught, will not this sainted man up in heaven th Heavenly Father Master he loved to work is done in ne is hidden from the believe, known to down from their hope one day to sl

Our long six we land were delight what it could do in cay was as calm as It was Dec. 13th two days later I welcomed me to a F. D. and Mrs. C. 12,000 miles from on my arrival.

Moulmein is per but it is sin cursed are only two thous sixty thousand wh Allah and his prop but in the English and ignorance and to give me a great I may speak to these

Since Mrs. Arm been our happy pr Last Saturday eve thickly peopled su strong with her pre people for a long ti a wide-spreading h gathered here as the quite attentively of the cross. About received the same in the good seed sown story so new to the called the sleeping air, but despite the they listened eager ally when Mrs. Arm of good is done in long months or ever is ready to be garner earth—when one of and often the labore gathered into the meetings on the bus

While the interest these lines are large Telugu field, I trust the one who finds su Moulmein, April 2

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BY REV. TH

A fond, ambitious with a large dream in enthroned Messiah her two beloved sons the imperial throne. thou?" Her reply may sit, the one on the left hand in thy king mother, and her pra dream is of a crown a soon disabuses her m the only crown is to sceptre a "reed" of ask," is our Lord's ambition; "are ye at drink of, and be baptised with?"

There are plenty of them in the church of her beloved daughter with a crown of fortune dream realized would heart, with all the sw