

# THE PRESBYTERIAN

MAY.

## YALE LECTURES ON PREACHING.

BY HENRY WARD BEECHER.

Continued.

### THE DIVINE PERSONALITY.

As regards the divine personality, I speak of it as distinguished, in the first place, from pantheism, or from those things which tend toward an impersonal God. It is not necessary for me to go into a discussion of the idea that God is the universe, as he has been represented to be. I only say that this idea is a thing so scattered, so absolutely unconcentrated, that it is in effect a mere atmosphere, and an atmosphere so rarified that men cannot breathe it. It is absolutely without moral effect. And although it may seem to be very harmless, yet, to say "No God" is to me no worse than to say, "Impersonal God."

Next to this, I rank what are called the theories of "the unknowable" in God. Men hold, almost *a priori*, that the divine nature must be so very high above ours that it is not knowable by us. No person at all instructed in the Word of God ever teaches that we can perfectly understand the Almighty, but cannot the human mind grasp so much of the divine nature that it shall know it in kind, if not in degree? May we not know the quality of God's being, without knowing its quantity? May we not know what water is, when we see a drop? May I not know what the Atlantic Ocean is made of, by seeing a tumblerful of water? As far as it goes, a drop is the same as the sea—the same, not in magnitude, but in quality. The rill that comes running down from the seams of the rock, and the flowing stream that helps to make the gushing river below, and the lake into which the river empties—all these are types of the ocean—that is, they tell me what water is. They cannot exactly tell me what shape it assumes, or what its power is; but from these I can learn its constituent elements just as I could from the Atlantic itself. And although there is much that is unknowable in regard to the divine nature, yet there are elements of it which may be known, and which, being known, make it a power on the hearts and consciences of men.

To say to me that a thing is of a different colour from anything that we know; to tell me that its colour is magnificent, but that it is not white, nor black, nor red, nor green, nor blue, nor yellow, nor purple; to tell me that it comes nearer to red than anything else, but that it does not come near to that at all; to tell me that it comes near to something that it does

not resemble, but that it would resemble if it were something very different from what it is, would be not only to give me no conception of the thing, but to destroy any conception of it which I might already have. And to say to me of the divine nature, that it comes near to intellection, but that it is not intellection; that its comes near to the will, but that it is not the will; that it comes near to benevolence, but that it is not benevolence, is to annihilate my conception of that nature. These terms which seem to describe the Supreme Being to men, have the effect of destroying the influence on their minds of the representation which is made of him.

### COMPLETE CONCEPTION OF GOD IMPOSSIBLE.

I had occasion, last week, to call your attention to that character of God which is presented in the 34th chapter of Exodus. Another description of God is given in the Old Testament, which I think is extraordinary when you regard the time in which it emerged—namely, the description which God gives of himself. In one place he says, "I am that I am;" and in another place, "I am he." Abstraction can be carried no farther than it is carried in these passages; and it seems to me something astounding, far back in the time of that pictorial people—that people of an old Semitic language, in which everything was graphic and dramatic—to see these declarations of God, that he transcends knowledge and that he exists in his own absolutely unapproachable totality; as where he says, substantially, "I am myself; I am all that I am; I am because I am; look upon me, indescribable and wonderful, past all pronunciation."

Continually, there are such statements, and others, declaring that we cannot know God unto perfection—that he is, in every respect, so large and so good that no man can rise to a conception of him. This is declared, after the manifestation of God in Christ Jesus, and even down as late as the time of Paul, who says that we can only see God as through a glass, darkly. We have the declaration in the 1st epistle of John, "beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be." In other words, the declaration is, "We are allied to him as sons," and yet we have very little intimation of what it is to have such a Father. The largeness of it, the fullness of it, and the grandeur of it, transcend our comprehension.

Bring me out of the Music Hall in Boston, one by one, the magnificent array of stops in that great organ, and lay them on the trial-board, and let a man blow every one of them, first