

criticism. Proceeding to the central idea at once, then, "we find it stated that, "thinking men hold it beyond a doubt that God is." Now, even admitting this to be so, (although it is rather a severe stricture upon the conscientious materialist,) the question immediately presents itself: What is the nature of this God who is so universally held to exist? It is found that unless we assume him to be the God of the Bible, the position which the writer takes with reference to the solution of the problem as to how man is related to this God is unaccountable. But, that all these 'thinking men' understand by God the God of the Hebrews, is by no means true. In fact, so numerous and widely different are the ideas expressed by the word 'God' among the various sections of humanity, that there is the greatest necessity for making it clearly understood as to which of these conceptions we are referring, and especially when we are speaking of any particular God who is the centre of a particular system of religion or philosophy. In the present case, the fact that Christ is declared to be the solution of the problem, shows conclusively that it can only be the Hebrew God to whom reference is made. But just because this reference is never made explicitly, the assumption of the identity between the Deity represented in the Bible and the God who is conceived of in any other system of religion, or by any philosopher, is apt to pass unnoticed. Besides, it is a well known popular error, and an exceedingly natural one, that when reference is made to God the majority of people in Christian countries immediately conceive the God of the Bible to be meant, and in the majority of cases they may be correct, but along with that goes the belief that if only the existence of a God is proved we have immediately proved all his attributes as set forth in Holy Writ, or at least we are entitled to deduce them from that existence. In the present case, however, we must be careful to rid ourselves of all these natural preconceptions, and, if we would bring order into chaos, not allow our minds to be influenced by the use of ambiguous terms. The Christian God no doubt has many points in common with other conceptions of the Deity, but when we come to consider all the conceived Gods between whom and man a relationship is sought to be established, there is found to be very little common ground among them. Even in the theories put forth by those 'thinking men' of the present day, the differences are of such a wide and radical nature that their conceptions of God have little more than the name in common. Hence, when the writer of the article referred to makes the statement that "philosophers now set out from the starting point of the existence of God to discover the nature of his relation to man," though I cannot agree with him in saying that that is the starting point of philosophy, or that philosophers do now start from that point, yet it is true that *existence* is the only attribute that all are agreed in assigning to God. In fact, existence is the one small category which separates the minimum God from no God at all. Still this is the only attribute which is even explicitly asserted to belong to the Deity in the article under discussion; and it is

quite plain that had any other attributes been added to these, it would immediately have shut out from the category of 'thinking men' all those whose God cannot be said to have any other attribute than that of existence. If, then, we go on adding attributes or qualities to this bare existence, until we have reached that conception of God which makes necessary the mediation of Christ to perfect our relationship to him, we have shut out every philosophy or system of religion save the Christian religion. The problem, therefore, which is stated in the passage which we have quoted, either has no interest whatever for the philosopher as such, or else the solution which is presented at the close of the article, taking the problem to imply no more than is stated, has not the remotest connection with that problem. Judging the problem by the ostensible solution, it is altogether beyond the pale of philosophy; judging the problem as stated, it has no connection with the solution. But, as I have said, the excessive ambiguity of the word God, used indiscriminately in a general and particular sense, and very often in both senses at once, serves to hide that want of connection which becomes so manifest throughout the article as soon as we begin to distinguish the various senses in which the term is used. The writer is altogether astray in supposing it to be the task of philosophy, or any part of its task, to discover the relation existing between the God of the Bible,—that is, God as he is there represented—and man; therefore failure cannot legitimately be attributed to any system of philosophy on the ground that it has not accomplished that end. With the fundamental and characteristic dogmas of the Bible philosophy has nothing whatever to do, and nothing would so surely destroy its validity, and reduce it to that servile and useless position which it occupied in the middle ages, as any attempt to make it proceed upon such foregone conclusions. If philosophy is ever to be of any real benefit to Christianity, it must be allowed to proceed upon its own ground, which is experience, and not revelation or theological dogma, and make use of its own method, which consists in showing what are the necessary conditions of that experience, and not what is implied in some given principle or fact as its *consequences*, not as its *conditions*. Now, although, in the article referred to, the relation of man to God is the problem which is set forth as requiring solution, "the mist of the ages which is still to be dispersed," and although this is the problem of which Christ is said to afford the only solution, yet, between the statement of it and the solution given, and contributing still further to the confusion and ambiguity already indicated, there appear certain other ideas and fragments of ideas which have little or nothing to do with the point at issue, or are only forced into connection with it by contradicting the starting point, or at least materially altering the nature of the question. Could we discover no reason for the aggregation of these disconnected and conflicting ideas, we should be at a loss to understand why anyone should take the trouble of stringing them together. We are enabled to account for this incoherency, however, when we perceive that the writer is evidently proceeding under the influence of a foregone conclusion, which conclusion, is that the only actual God is the God whose character is set forth in the Bible, that therefore the only actual relation which exists between man and God is the relation between man and that God; that, moreover, every one who is searching for God and his relation to man is, whether he acknowledges it himself or not, searching for that God and that relation. Keeping this foregone conclusion in view, we can understand how it is that while he freely criticises all other positions, his own requires no resting place. Conceiving, however, that philosophy is in some way connected with that conclusion, he seeks to judge its merits by it; and wherever