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DOCTRINAL SERIES.
(EIGHTH ISSUE);
THE CHARACTER OF GOD**

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FERGUS FERGUSON

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OTHERS IN PREPARATION.

THE
CHARACTER OF GOD.

BY
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“God is a Spirit.”—*Jesus*.

“God is Love.”—*John*.

“God is Light.”—*John*.

“We own and feel the force of amiable and worthy qualities in our fellow-creatures; and can we be insensible to the contemplation of perfect goodness? Do we reverence the shadows of greatness here below? Are we solicitous about honour, and esteem, and the opinion of the world? And shall we not feel the same with respect to Him, whose are wisdom and power in their original?”—*Bishop Butler's first sermon upon the Love of God*.

THE
CHARACTER OF GOD.

CHAPTER I.

THE EXISTENCE OF GOD.

IN commencing a treatise on the Moral Character of God, it is almost unnecessary, in order to gain our object, to begin, as Natural Theologians generally do, with a condensed argument in proof of the Existence of the Deity. We are indeed, for ourselves, content, like the Holy Scriptures, to take that grand fact for granted. The Bible nowhere conducts such a demonstration. It begins with the sublime utterance, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth;" and in its New Testament, when about to announce the wondrous manifestation of God which was made to accomplish man's salvation, with equal sublimity it declares, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." It has no patience with the atheist—scornfully calling the man *a fool* who has said in his heart, "There is

no God"—even although he may not have uttered as much with his lips, or written it with his pen. How withering, then, would we expect the rebuke of the Almighty to be which would be administered to him who would print a book and publish it to the world with the express intention of proving that God did not exist! How puny, but how daring, such an arm must look in the sight of high Heaven, thus impiously lifted up against the Omnipotent!

Again, when the Bible would account for Atheism, or rather for its equally foolish counter-part Polytheism, it does not hesitate to ascribe it to the wickedness, as well as the folly of man. "They became vain in their imaginations;" "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind."

But the very air seems to be so full, in this nineteenth century, of questioning and unbelief, as well as of objections against even this cardinal article of our grand and good old faith, that we require to take some notice of them at the commencement of this argument, that thus we may carry the convictions of our readers along with us. M. Renan, in an essay published in 1869, says, "We know

nothing of intelligence or personality apart from a nerve-centre." To the same effect G. J. Holyoake wrote in what he called, about eighteen years ago, "the Refutation of Paley in his own words," "We know of no person without an organisation;" and Matthew Arnold has sarcastically observed, "Many divines write about the Deity as if they were quite intimate with him, as if, in fact, he lived just round the corner in the next street."*

To the first two doubters we reply, "We do know of a person apart from a nerve-centre and an organisation." That person is man; for most assuredly the friend whom we admire and love is not a mere thing of nerve and fleshly build, but an intelligent spirit that uses the nervous system and the bodily members as its servants and instruments. And if the objection should be pushed that, at any rate, we know of no rational intelligence save that which works through a bodily organisation, our reply would be, Quite true, *human* spirits require bodies as instruments of energy; but surely he would be a bold man

* See "Cornhill Magazine" for July, 1871. Article on "Literature and Dogma," by Matthew Arnold, page 47.