

**THE REVELATION OF GOD
AND OTHER SERMONS.
THIRTEENTH AND FOURTEENTH
SERIES, PP. 2-236**

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JOHN W. CHADWICK

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BY

JOHN W. CHADWICK

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reasons, while giving up the customary meaning which identifies revelation with a supernatural—*i.e.*, miraculously authenticated—message, still claim for it a semi-supernatural meaning, in that they make it representative of a special kind of knowledge, superior to and independent of experience; a transcendental intuition of the higher reason rather than a laborious conquest of the understanding, or in any way conditioned by the limits of our ordinary knowledge. But whether there is or not this double-mindedness in man, this higher apprehension not developed from the lower, I insist that we should not confine the scope of revelation to the higher knowledge, but rather hold it true (as one of your own poets, Dr. Martineau, hath said) “that every fruitful study of human things implies a real insight into things divine”; and that “knowledge of God, like knowledge of human things, however partial, may yet be direct and progressive,” and, as such, a revelation of his character and life.

To attain unto the revelation of God has been the hope, the dream, the yearning, and the passion of many generations of the world and of countless millions of mankind. Nor have the generations of the world, the millions of mankind, cherished at any time a grander hope, or dreamed a better dream, or entertained a deeper yearning, or been moved by a more glorious passion, than in relation to this matter. There are those who, born, or born again, into some Flatland of contented ignorance, are wont to think and speak of the hope for, and the effort to attain unto, the knowledge of God as fruitless and ignoble. But, though it were never so fruitless, it would not be ignoble. Surely by nothing have men more approved their nobleness than by their inability to sit down in quiet patience, or to lie in slothful ease, before the curtain that conceals the mystery of the Eternal; even as the imprisoned bird, beating his wings against the obstructions of his cage in futile efforts to escape into the heaven's illimitable blue, is by such fruitlessness *approved* a creature of diviner essence than if, so long

as he had seeds enough to eat and other comfortable appliances, he were not concerned with anything which possibly might lie beyond his gilded bars. As the bird's restlessness declares him native to the fields and sky, so man's impatience with the limitations of his knowledge declares him native to an infinite inheritance of expansive reason. Nor is it any derogation to his nature that he has been hardly more contented with blank ignorance than with the observation of a multitude of unrelated facts or even with their coordination into laws of narrow range and special application. The true, the characteristic man is like unto his glorious image who was busy ever

" Searching through all he felt or saw,
The springs of life, the depths of awe,
To find the law within the law."

Like the Orient sage, he seeks "an all-pervading unity." Like one who climbs a mountain's mighty stairs, and finds himself at length with nothing but the immeasurable sky above him, so from generalization to generalization he ascends, to find himself at length alone with the Alone, embraced and overbowed with nothing but the infinite of God.

And as the search for God declares the greatness and nobility of those with whom it is a holy passion, and would if it were void of all result objective to the seeking mind, so must the many forms of faith in supernatural revelation, or at least the many efforts to establish such a faith, be recognized as arguing, not, as many teach of late, some miserable defect of manhood, but the greatness of man's heart. To have a certain knowledge of the highest things, to see Him as he is,—surely there is no belittling or dishonorable disposition here. At the worst, it only argues men's impatience with the slowness of the ordinary methods of their thought, or some dissatisfaction with their tentative results. They would know certainly and they would know at once "the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God." Be sure that never have the miracles, so called, ap-

proved the revelation to men's minds at the initial or any other stage of the development of a "revealed religion." What has approved it has been the larger thought of God contained in it, the higher and the holier thought of him. The miracles were nothing but the imaginative tribute of men's hearts to the greatness of some human personality — their stammering speech of gratitude and praise — or to the announcement of some grander vision of the eternal things. The infallible church and book, or Christ within the book, so understood, gain nothing on the side of their infallibility; but they gain immensely on the side of their relation to the religious consciousness, expressing as they do its impatience with all partial and all "regulative truth," its tolerance of delusion or deception in the sphere of matters of such vital interest. Revelation there was indeed in the prophetic souls of the Old Testament order, — in Amos and Isaiah and the Great Unknown of the Captivity, whose thought was as near to that of Jesus as the best days in April are to leafy June; in that "Hymn Book of the Second Temple" which contained the rarest of the Psalms; in the word made flesh in Jesus; and not less in Paul, though in his flesh he fancied there was no good thing.

But it is one thing to honor and to praise the impatience with half-truth or sad uncertainty which has found expression in the demand for a miraculous revelation, or to see in the affirmation of such a revelation the tribute of imagination to a glorious personality or a higher thought of God; and it is quite another thing to accept *the theory of supernatural revelation*, or to imagine that there is here a method of escape from the disabilities of natural reason.

"They reckon ill who leave me out;
When me they fly, I am the wings,"

the natural Reason sings rebukingly to all who think they can climb up some other way than hers into the fold of Truth. Unless every one who claims that he has a vision or a *sign* is to be accepted equally with every other, Reason

must arbitrate upon the different claims. Whether or not the resurrection of Jesus, for example, is a supernatural proof of immortality, the fact of such a resurrection is dependent on a film of human testimony so tenuous that a brave man, or wise, would much rather trust to his own nature's prophecy than to such a thing as that. But the film by which the resurrection hangs is not more tenuous than that which sustains every fact on which depends the evidence of a supernatural revelation,—*maxima e minimis suspendens*.

But that there is no supernatural revelation, and that, even if there were, our ultimate reliance would be upon our natural intelligence, are statements that suggest no fears, excite no terrors, for the man to whom our natural intelligence is equal to the soul's necessity for finding God. For such a one there is no lack of revelation. There is nothing but revelation. The universe is full of visions and voices. The things we are obliged to say, which manage soon or late to say themselves while we stand by and wonder, are better worth the saying than are those we formulate with the greatest care. And so there has not been a time during the last quarter of a century and more, synchronizing with the development of various doctrines of religious nescience and the agnostic temper, when between the lines of their imposing expositions some have not read a message of religious affirmation, thrilling their hearts with generous and lofty cheer. And with each restatement of the doctrine of the Unknown God, the affirmations, at first meagrely implied, come out in clearer lines, until at length they are the text, and the original nescience fades into a dimness that hardly blurs the fair and open page. Surely, we are far from the kingdom of agnosticism, and not far from the kingdom of God, when we are told that "we are always in the presence of an Infinite and Eternal Energy from which all things proceed"; and we are well within its broad and fair demesne, when we are told that "there exists a Power, to which no limit in time or space is conceivable, and that all

the phenomena of the Universe, whether they be what we call material or what we call spiritual phenomena, are manifestations of this Infinite and Eternal Power."

Manifestation is but another word for revelation. "Though unknown, yet well known!" may we not cry, triumphantly as Paul, of such a power as this? Known as infinite, known as eternal, known as the source of everything that is, known by its manifested life as such a God as is made manifest! And how unknown? As we are to each other save as we are made manifest, save as we are revealed by our phenomenal life, by the living garments that we wear, the vesture that doth grossly (meaning grandly) hem us in. Unknown as the abysmal deeps of our own personality are unknown to us; ay, as the loveliest or rudest object on which we can lay our hands is unknown to us, both in its inmost essence and in its total range of implication. Threadbare is the bit of verse embodying this perception; worn so in faithful service of a truth too long dishonored among men:—

"Flower in the crannied wall,
I pluck you out of the crannies;
Hold you here in my hand, root and all,
Little flower; but if I could understand
What you are, root and all, and all in all,
I should know what God and Man is."

Never, it seems to me, has there been less occasion than there is to-day for men to take counsel with their fears, as if the operation of our later thinking were to make the revelation of God less vast and luminous than it has been as apprehended by the supernaturalist or by the semi-supernaturalism of the more daring of the Transcendental school. Never has the Revelation of God assumed such grand proportions or so grave a charm, such an awful splendor or such penetrating sweetness, as at the present time. And it comes as one of old, not to destroy, but to fulfil. It takes up into itself the best of all that has been in the revelations of the past. Jesus is still Immanuel, God with us; he is