

XVIII.

Love in the Triune Being of God.

“God is Love.”—1 John iv. 8.



Between *natural* love even in its highest forms and *Holy Love* there is a wide chasm. This had to be emphasized so that our readers might not mistake the *nature* of Love. Many say that God is Love, but measure His Love by the love of men. They study love's being and manifestations in others and in themselves, and then think themselves competent to judge that this human love, in a more perfect form, is the *Love of God*. Of course they are wrong. Essential Love must be studied as it is in God Himself; as He has manifested it in His Word. And the scintillations of the creature's feeble love must be looked upon only as sparks from the fire of the divine Love.

Our God is the very liberal Fountain of all good. Love being the highest good, God must be the very liberal Fountain of all Love. And from that Fountain flows every earthly love of whatever name, however faint or feeble. The Creator alone can create in His creature the irresistible love of *instinct*, in which we see a display of His glory. For the same end He created a strong creaturely attachment, *not wholly* instinctive, yet to some extent *unconsciously* active; to this belong the mother's love for her babe, love at first sight, brotherly love, etc. Higher than this is the love of *moral kinship*, whereby He has disposed spirit to spirit for congenial fellowship and mutual love. These are three forms in which is found something of the Love of God, but still belonging to Creation and Providence, in no wise partaking of the treasure of the divine Life.

Love on earth adopts this higher character only when it becomes self-consecrating, self-denying, self-sacrificing; when the object of love does not attract, but only repels. The devoted nurse caring for the pest-stricken stranger finds nothing in him to attract her; rather the reverse. And still she stays, she perseveres, not only from a sense of duty, but attracted by the misery and desolation of the sufferer. This is indeed the effect of a higher love, which flows from the Fountain of Eternal Love. That nurse exhibits devotion to the invisible, apprehension of the spiritual.



And altho God has so constituted our nervous system that suffering causes us discomfort, that the sight of pain affects us painfully, so that from a mere fellow feeling we are instantly ready to bear relief to the sufferer, yet that higher form of love usually rises from the lower nervous life to a higher expression which is impossible without an inward operation of grace.

It thus prepares the way for the highest love, that directs itself not only to the invisible *things*, but to the Invisible *One*, attracting the soul toward Him with irresistible drawings. And only then is Love itself reached.

The Word declares that God is Love, and the Spirit's testimony says in every heart: "Amen, not in us, but in Thee, O Eternal One. Thou art Love. There is no love that does not spring from Thee!" And this is a mystery that men and angels fail to fathom. Who ever expressed its perfection in words? Who does not realize that it is a harmony marvelously beautiful, blessed, and divine which the confused ear of the creature can not fully appreciate? Men confess it, drink in its sweetness and loveliness; the heart is blessed and cherished by it; but after the bliss is tasted and the cup taken from the lips, we know no more of the nature of Love than the babe that has enjoyed love at his mother's breast. We can not describe or analyze it; we can not fathom or penetrate its hidden essence. It takes possession of us, pervades us, refreshes us; but as the wind, of which we know not whence it cometh and whither it goeth, so in our best moments are the wonderful drawings of the Love of our God. It is not created nor conceived. It is eternal as God Himself. Love was never outside of Him, so as to come to Him from elsewhere; nor for a single moment throughout eternity was He without it. Without bearing in Himself deep, eternal Love, without being Love, He can not be our God.

Superficial minds, however, conceive of the Love of God only as forgiving sin; as too good to tolerate suffering; too peaceable to allow war. But the Word teaches that the Love of God is a *holy* Love, intolerant of evil, for its own sake causing the sinner to suffer that he may turn from his false joys. It was this very Love that said in Paradise, immediately after the breach of sin: "*I will put enmity!*"

God's children have derived from the Word deeper and richer conceptions of the divine Love, for they confess a Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, one God in three Persons: the Father, who generates; the Son, who is generated; and the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from both Father and Son. And the Love-life whereby these Three mutually love each other is the Eternal Being Himself. This alone is the true and real life of Love. The entire Scripture teaches that nothing is more precious and glorious than the Love of the Father for the Son, and of the Son for the Father, and of the Holy Spirit for both.

This Love is nameless: human tongue has no words to express it; no creature may *inquisitively* look into its eternal depths. It is the great and impenetrable mystery. We listen to its music and adore it; but when its glory has passed through the soul the lips are still unable adequately to describe any of its features. God may loose the tongue so that it can shout and sing to the praise of eternal Love, but the intellect remains powerless.

Before God created heaven and earth with all their inhabitants, the eternal Love of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit shone with unseen splendor in the divine Being. Love exists, not for the sake of the world, but for God's sake; and when the world came into existence, Love remained unchanged; and if every creature were to disappear, it would remain just as



rich and glorious as ever. Love exists and works in the Eternal Being apart from the creature; and its radiation upon the, creature is but a feeble reflection of its being.

Love is not God, but God is Love; and He is sufficient to Himself to love absolutely and forever. He has no need of the creature, and the exercise of His Love did not begin with the creature whom He could love, but it flows and springs eternally in the Love-life of the Triune God. God is Love; its perfection, divine beauty, real dimensions, and holiness are not found in men, not even in the best of God's children, but scintillate only around the Throne of God.

The unity of Love with the Confession of the Trinity is the starting-point from which we proceed to base Love independently in God, absolutely independent of the creature or anything creaturely. This is not to make the divine Trinity a philosophic deduction from essential love. That is unlawful; if God had not revealed this mystery in His Word we should be totally ignorant of it. But since the Scripture puts the Triune Being before us as the Object of our adoration, and upon almost every page most highly exalts the mutual Love of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and delineates it as an *Eternal Love*, we know and plainly see that this holy Love may never be represented but as springing from the mutual love of the divine Persons.

Hence through the mystery of the Trinity, the Love which is in God and is God obtains its independent existence, apart from the creature, independent of the emotions of mind and heart; and it rises as a sun, with its own fire and rays, outside of man, in God, in whom it rests and from whom it radiates.

In this way we eradicate every comparison of the Love of God with our love. In this way the false mingling ceases. In principle we resist the reversing of positions whereby arrogant man had succeeded in copying from himself a so-called God of Love, and into silencing all adoration. In this way the soul returns to the blessed confession that God is Love, and the way of divine mercy and pity is opened whereby the brightness of that Sun can radiate in a human way, *i.e.*, in a finite and imperfect manner to and in the human heart, to the praise of God.



XIX.

The Manifestation of Holy Love.

“And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us.” —*1 John iv. 16.*



The question which now presents itself is: In what way is the divine, majestic act of making man a partaker of true love accomplished? We answer that this is—

1. Prepared by the Father in Creation.
2. Made possible by the Son in Redemption.
3. Effectually accomplished by the Holy Spirit in Sanctification.

There is in this respect, *first* a work of the *Father*, which the Heidelberg Catechism designates, “Of God the Father and our Creation,” following the example of St. Paul, who wrote: “But to us there is but one God the Father, of whom are all things” (*1 Cor. viii. 6.*) By this we do not mean to deny that God the Father works also in redemption and in sanctification, for all the outgoing works of God belong to the three Persons. We only wish to indicate that seeking for the *origin* of things, one can not stop at the Holy Spirit, for He proceedeth from the Son and the Father; nor at the Son, for He is generated by the Father; but at the Father, for He neither proceedeth from any one, nor is He generated.

In this Scriptural sense we say, that the work of making man a partaker of Love is prepared by the Father in creation.

For every exercise of love, both in man and animal, finds its ground in *creation*. In the animal God created instinctive love directly; in the man He created love by making all men of one blood, by ordaining husband and wife to be each other’s helpmeets, and by creating in the blood itself that wonderful attraction of the one to the other.

Moreover, He also implanted in man’s consciousness the *sense* of love. The animal loves, but without knowing it. On the contrary, not only does man feel the *impulse* of love, but this impulse is also reflected in the mirror of his soul wherein he beholds the *beauty* of love; thus he learns to cherish love and to rise to the act of loving with full consciousness.



Finally, by His providence, which is but an effect of creation, the Father ordains that man should meet man, come into contact with man, that in this way the sense of love may become *active* in him. For whether it be a poor sufferer whose distress arouses my love, or a bold character that appeals to my sympathy; or lastly a pure and beautiful figure that attracts me irresistibly, it is always God the Father who allots me these meetings, who by His providential leadings makes the kindling of love possible.

This is followed, *in the second place*, by the work of the *Son*, who became flesh to reveal to us the fulness of divine Love in the flesh. Hence the manifestation of Love in the *redemptive* work.