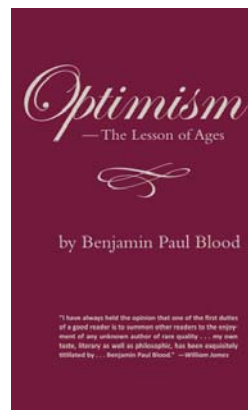


Optimism—The Lesson of Ages
Benjamin Paul Blood (1860)
(excerpt)
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Could we have proof of God's existence, there were no God worthy to be proved. Proof shifts its object into other essence, or other truth: but that which is infinite cannot be shifted to aught that is within our capacity. Incomprehensible as eternity, against what background shall our God stand relieved? Say space is filled, and time is filled, and we are a portion of that filling; how shall a part contain the whole?—how shall that which cannot be compassed be known, whether it be entirely proved or not? The poet cannot teach his poetry to a stone; nor can God condense his being to a picture in our souls; he were not God, nor we men. Yet God is in us, the assurance of his presence, whose majesty is the birth of reason. He is not afar, that we should see him. He is in the light of the eye, and in the object that it shines on. He is not a curiosity, a member of a species, or a thing to be represented by any device. He is the One—the original—the all in all. All creeds acknowledge him. His name needs no interpreter when they say "God created." Boundless and incomprehensible, yet indisputable, the key of all mystery, without form, without centre or circumference, beginning or end, the life, space, and atmosphere wherein all being dwells, words were not made to present him; we cannot show him to another, nor another to us; yet in the human soul he has said immemorially, "I am! and there is none beside me!"

It is queried whether God is self-conscious.—If the heavens should burst in thunder and say *aye!* what were we the wiser? We cannot conceive universal consciousness; we cannot receive an answer though it were given. Think not because our language contains the word *universal* that the word must convey to us an idea. It is but the symbol of an inconceivable thought, useful to the finitude of the soul when it would acknowledge a greater than itself.

We delight to fancy a lone and glorious self-love in the Almighty; yet from this method has grown some of the worst of our theological discourse. It has made God in man's image. It has invested him with error, confusion, repentance, and worse than all, anger. It has made folly, sin; it has made

policy, duty; it has made pain a judgment and a punishment; it has given to God all the frailties of man, and made man confound himself in efforts to prove—made him stultify himself in professions of faith in proof—that *justice* is lashing us solely for having opposed the will and thwarted the wishes of “the judge of all the earth.” But from this conceit of God in man’s image, bad though it be, worse conclusions are drawn than analogy will sanction. Will our heavenly father torture a child eternally for an offence at which his earthly father will but take him a box on the ear? We trace man’s cruelty to his weakness—to envy, excess, disease; but all things must obey the will and subserve the purpose of the Almighty, and fear, envy, disappointment cannot ruffle his brow. Even man is noble, generous and forgiving. Place a human life in jeopardy, and many lives will be risked to save it. Friend or foe, be a man fallen, he is the brother of the human race. Scarce a man living would torture his enemy’s dog for two days together; and shall He be believed to damn a man—He in whose image man was made?

It is pleasing to us to look back over the records of the earlier men of time, and to find that the wise of all ages have been truly brothers in this doctrine of the unity of God; and the more so because it is a doctrine which is attended with difficulties, when applied entirely to the destiny of man, which no record has come to us wholly explaining. We mean, chiefly, the difficulty of the origin of evil. Yet mark with what calm solemnity the first chapter of one of the oldest of books unfolds the doctrine of one God, in spite of evil:—“God is one: he has created all: it is a perfect sphere, without beginning or end. . . Thou shalt not seek to discover the nature and essence of the Eternal, nor by what laws he governs. Such an attempt would be vain, and criminal. . . . It is enough for thee to contemplate day and night his power, his wisdom, and his goodness, through his works.”—This from the Shastah. Again:—“The sea enters the vessel that floats upon it; but time breaks the vessel, and the sea receives its own. And man is as a vessel, and God is as the sea; and the soul, God’s power, returns to him who emitted it.”