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The decalogue and the Lord'
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THE DECALOGUE

AND

THE LORD'S DAY

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THE LORD'S DAY

IN THE LIGHT OF THE GENERAL RELATION OF
THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

WITH A CHAPTER

ON CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

1100

BY THE

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P R E F A C E.

I PUBLISH the following Lectures on the Decalogue and the Lord's Day, partly because I have been pressed to do so by many who heard them delivered, but mainly in the earnest hope that they may at least be a help towards the solution of the deeply interesting and important question which has been lately brought before the Church with peculiar prominence. It may be said, indeed, that the question is already settled, and that there is no need of further argument; but it appears to me that this is a mistake. So far as I have had an opportunity of observing, a large portion of the more intelligent laity of the Church are not satisfied with the grounds upon which the divine obligation of the Lord's Day is generally rested; and it is a fatal error to imagine that, in their case, silence implies consent. My sole desire—one deeper than I can

express in words—is to aid them amidst the difficulties by which they are surrounded. Whether I may be in any degree successful in this attempt is for others to judge.

It may be thought by some that the defence of the Confession of Faith contained in the last Lecture is hardly consistent with the method of statement in regard to the divine obligation of the Lord's Day adopted in the earlier Lectures. It seems to me, however, that a fair interpreter will find no difficulty in reconciling the two things with one another.

I have only to add further, for the sake of those inhabitants of Aberdeen to whom the following Lectures were originally delivered, that the passages then omitted, owing to want of time, are now supplied.

W. M.

THE UNIVERSITY, ABERDEEN,

28th April 1866.

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THE DECALOGUE

AND

THE LORD'S DAY.



LECTURE I.

BOTH the delivering of the following lectures and the choice of their subject are explained by the circumstances of the time. No one can deny the deep interest and importance of the question to which they are devoted. Controversy upon it has been begun, whether wisely or unwisely is nothing to the purpose, but having been begun, it neither can nor ought to rest until a satisfactory solution is attained. All who have the welfare of Christianity at heart must be watching its progress with anxiety. The topic in dispute is one which branches out into others even more important, if possible, than itself. The power and freedom of Christian living are most intimately associated with it.

It is what is commonly called the Sabbath question that is before us ; and, more particularly—for it is absolutely necessary to limit the field of investigation—one part of it, How far our obligation to devote one day in seven to the special service of God is connected with the Fourth Commandment of the Decalogue? Our relation, however, to the Decalogue as a whole is immediately involved in this inquiry ; and that, again, is only one branch of another inquiry wider and deeper still, The relation of Christianity to Judaism—of the Gospel to the Law. Without entering upon the latter question it is impossible to discuss the former in a satisfactory manner ; while, at the same time, a proper understanding of the relation referred to is of the highest moment, from its bearing upon the character of God, upon the history of His dealings with His creatures both in providence and grace, upon the light in which we are to regard the Bible, and upon the duties and privileges of our own position as Christian men. To this, therefore, let us first turn our thoughts.

Within the whole range of theology there is, probably, no point upon which opinions more opposed to one another have prevailed ; and our main duty, therefore, is to submit ourselves to the teaching of Scripture itself, and to avoid all merely general speculation. Keeping this principle in view, and in the earnest hope that what is to be said may tend to confirm a belief of the divine obligation of the Lord's Day, although in a form

corresponding to the general nature of the Christian dispensation, it is proposed to inquire into—

- I. THE REVELATION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT AS A WHOLE.
- II. THE JEWISH DISPENSATION ; OR, THE ECONOMY OF THE LAW.
- III. THE RELATION IN WHICH CHRIST AND CHRISTIANITY STAND TO THESE.

After which we shall be prepared to examine—

- IV. THE SABBATH QUESTION IN PARTICULAR.

When we turn to the Old Testament we are immediately struck by the fact, that there are two great lines of thought running through it; or rather, perhaps, it ought to be said, that there is one great line of thought which marks it from its beginning to its close; while, at a particular point in the history of the race, another line comes in, and continues to be mingled with and to accompany the first, till we reach the end of that revelation of the will of God which it contains. The one is the Almighty's manifestation of Himself to man under various and successive dispensations from Adam downwards; the other is the Mosaic dispensation in particular, or the economy of the law.

I.

THE REVELATION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT
AS A WHOLE.

Thus we may be allowed to describe the first of the two lines of thought spoken of above; and in looking at it we cannot fail to observe the unmixed singleness of that light in which it presents us with the great truths of spiritual and eternal religion. No doubt can arise in our minds whether the God who meets us there is the same God who afterwards meets us in the New Testament—the same spiritual Being, the same universal Parent, the same God of mercy and love; whether sin is not viewed in the same light as that in which we are afterwards taught to regard it under the Gospel; whether substantially the same method of reconciliation to one whose condemnation we deserve is not set before the sinner; whether the righteousness of a holy life is not traced for us in the same great lines; and whether even a similar hope of immortality is not presented to God's redeemed as the goal of all their exertions and desires. We may be perplexed upon these points when we come to the dispensation under Moses, and when we confine ourselves to its more special characteristics. No such perplexity can exist in the age of the patriarchs; or even under the Mosaic economy itself, if we

first direct our attention only to one line of thought pervading it ; or still less in those later times, when the purpose of that economy had nearly reached its accomplishment, and when the Messiah himself was at the door. Let us endeavour to establish this ; and for that purpose let us examine as briefly as possible the teaching of the Old Testament upon the points above mentioned.

1. *The being and character of God.* It is often said that there is a wide distinction between God as He appears in the Old Testament and as He appears in the New ; that while nothing can be higher, more spiritual, more absolutely perfect, than the manner in which He is set before us in the latter, He is set before us in the former as a Being local, limited, partial, clothed with attributes accommodated to what are supposed to be the gross conceptions of the human race in the period of its infancy. It is not necessary to ask whether such an idea is consistent with any just notions of the Almighty. Let us rather ask, Is it consistent with fact ? Is God, in the Old Testament, thus destitute of true spirituality of existence ? Is He the God only of a few particular individuals, or of one small nation, exercising an interested and watchful guardianship over them alone, confined within the limits of a chosen land, and content to recognise the divinities of the heathen as, in the meanwhile at least, entitled to the worship which they receive ? Or, from the remotest periods of Old Testament history,

is He the only, the spiritual, the self-existent Jehovah, the God of the whole earth, interested in all His creatures, embracing all under His protecting care, and claiming from all an exclusive homage? We cannot have a moment's hesitation in answering these questions. The very opening words of Scripture are an answer: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." More sublime words, testifying to the one spiritual Creator and Governor of all things, are nowhere to be found in Scripture; while the simple facts thus made known, that God did create all things, and that from Him proceeded all those beneficent arrangements which prevail everywhere around us, establish at once the equal closeness of His relation to all His offspring. The lessons thus taught in the first page of the Bible are constantly repeated. To Noah God speaks not as his God only, or as presiding only over the district in which he lived, but as the God of the "earth" and of "man" (Gen. viii. 21, 22). Abram is told that in him "shall all the families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. xii. 3); and the revelation thus made was accepted and understood. "I have lift up," said the patriarch, "mine hand unto the Lord, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth" (Gen. xiv. 22). The wide and comprehensive promise given to Abram was renewed to Isaac (Gen. xxvi. 4); and to Jacob (Gen. xxviii.

14); and means were taken to keep the remembrance of it alive in all succeeding ages by the fact, that the Almighty expressly assumed the title of "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, saying, This is my name for ever, and my memorial unto all generations" (Exod. iii. 15). From such a name it must have been impossible to separate the thought of that covenant promise of which it was to be the perpetual expression; and it could not fail, therefore, to remind those who would interpret it aright that he to whom it belonged was not a national and local God only, but one to whom the whole earth was a care. The history of the meeting of Abram with Melchizedek must have led powerfully to the same conclusion. We know, at least, how that mysterious incident was afterwards explained and applied in the Psalms (Ps. cx.), and in the Epistle to the Hebrews (chap. 7); but it is against all analogy to find a New Testament writer putting into an Old Testament narrative what might not, at least in principle, have been discovered by those to whom the narrative was first addressed. That Abram, therefore—"the patriarch," he "that had the promises" (Heb. vii. 4, 6)—should, in the very moment of his triumph, have been blessed by a "priest of the most high God" (Heb. vii. 1)—by a priest and king from that land which exhibited heathenism in its darkest and foulest form—must have opened up to the inquiring mind more striking proofs of God's universal presence that it is easy for us to conceive.

Passing to the later books of the Old Testament,

it is sufficient to say that it is denied by no one that the most exalted idea of God is expressed in very numerous passages of the Psalms and Prophets,—passages so numerous that it is unnecessary to attempt to quote them.

It is of more importance to observe, that the same idea of the oneness, the spirituality, the universality of God's character, was a fundamental truth of the constitution even of the Hebrew commonwealth. To Israel God was the "I am that I am" (Exod. iii. 14, vi. 3). The first commandment of the Decalogue was, "Thou shalt have no other gods besides me;" the second forbade the making of any likeness of anything whatever for religious worship (Exod. xx. 3, 4); and that God was a Spirit, and that worship must be spiritual, was the necessary inference. That inference was made, or the truth, at least, was otherwise known; for Moses and Aaron addressed God as "the God of the spirits of all flesh" (Numb. xvi. 22, xxvii. 16). Nor was the theocratic constitution itself so exclusive as it is often represented to have been. Even under it God was "not the God of the Jews only, but of the Gentiles also." He drew, indeed, His ancient people to Himself by peculiar bonds—He revealed Himself to them more clearly than to any other nation; but care was constantly taken, both by express declarations and by many different provisions of the economy under which they lived, to guard against the idea that He had no concern for others. How many and how beautiful are the precepts of the Mosaic law with

regard to "strangers!" and it would seem that, even without being circumcised, these strangers were not only to enjoy the rest of the Sabbath, but that they were allowed to offer all the different kinds of sacrifice, and to take their part in all the great festivals except the Passover.* Nothing could more clearly show that the God of Israel was a being altogether different from the local and exclusive divinities of the heathen, the gods of "the hills" and of "the valleys" (1 Kings xx. 28).

Not only, however, does the essential teaching of the Old Testament upon these points thus correspond with the highest conceptions of God which Christianity teaches us to form,—the same remark may be made with regard to all the moral attributes of His character. If, as Christians, we know Him to be holy, He is distinguished throughout the Old Testament by the same perfection. Our first parents are expelled from Eden for their sin (Gen. iii. 17). The deluge is the punishment of transgression (Gen. vi. 13); and Noah is saved from it because he is a righteous man (Gen. vi. 8, 9). Abraham is commanded to "walk before God," and to be "perfect" (Gen. xvii. 1); and Sodom and Gomorrah are consumed by fire "because their sin is very grievous" (Gen. xviii. 20). Still later God is spoken of as "glorious in holiness" (Exod. xv. 11). The demands of the law rest upon His holiness,—“Speak unto all the congregation of Israel, and say unto them, Ye shall be holy, for I

* Compare Kurz's 'Sacrificial Worship of the Old Testament,' p. 21.

the Lord your God am holy" (Lev. xix. 2 ; comp. xxi. 8). And when Isaiah beheld Him sitting upon a throne high and lifted up, and surrounded by the seraphim, he heard one crying unto the other, and saying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts" (Isa. vi. 3 ; comp. i. 4). Nor is it possible to say that the holiness thus ascribed to the Almighty in the Old Testament is a mere outward holiness ; for not only are the words, "I the Lord your God am holy," an introduction to a series of moral duties rather than ceremonial observances (Lev. xix.); not only is Isaiah, in the presence of the vision, overwhelmed with the sense of his own moral impurity and the moral impurity of his people (Isa. vi. 5) ; but when the apostle Peter exhorts those to whom he writes to be, in the full Christian sense of the words, "holy in all manner of conversation," he enforces his exhortation by the words, "Because it is written, Be ye holy, for I am holy" (1 Pet. i. 15, 16). It is no doubt true that, under the old covenant, the word "holy" is often applied to material things consecrated to the service of God, and which could be only outwardly, not inwardly, holy. The reason of this will meet us afterwards. In the mean time, it is enough to observe that, in such passages as those that have been referred to, a moral and spiritual holiness, of a kind hardly less exalted than that which belongs to the highest conceptions of the most spiritual religion, is ascribed to the God of the Old Testament.

Again, if, as Christians, we know God to be just, it is not only from the New Testament that we learn it.

Even Abraham pled for Sodom on the ground, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. xviii. 25). When Moses, in the song which he composed for Israel as a testimony at once against them and for God, exclaims, "I will publish the name of the Lord," he immediately adds, "He is the rock, His work is perfect; for all His ways are judgment: a God of truth, and without iniquity, just and right is He" (Deut. xxxii. 3, 4). When Israel is warned to have only just and perfect weights and measures, it is on the ground that "divers weights and measures are an abomination unto the Lord their God" (Deut. xxv. 15, 16); and, in later times, the Almighty is magnified by the prophets as the "just God" and the "just Lord; every morning doth He bring His judgment to light; He faileth not" (Zeph. iii. 5).

Again, if, as Christians, we ascribe truth and faithfulness to God, these attributes were ascribed to Him in not less decided terms in the Old Testament. He is "God, the faithful God which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love Him and keep His commandments to a thousand generations," (Deut. vii. 9). He "is not a man that He should lie; neither the son of man that He should repent: hath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?" (Numb. xxiii. 19). Isaiah speaks of Him as "the God of truth" (lxv. 16).

The same thing has to be said of the goodness of God, which is described in the earliest books of the Bible in strains unsurpassed by the loftiest descriptions of the latest: "And the Lord passed by before

Moses, and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin" (Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7); while, at a later period, such a psalm as the 107th illustrates that goodness in detail, when the Psalmist, ever and again pausing in a description than which no loftier could be penned, cries out in adoration, "O that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works unto the children of men!"

Nay, the very idea of the love and fatherhood of God, although brought out more fully in the New Testament than in the Old, is to be traced in the latter with a degree of distinctness which we too frequently overlook. "Do ye thus," says Moses, in the song already spoken of, "requite the Lord, O foolish people and unwise? Is not He thy Father that hath bought thee?" (Deut. xxxii. 6); and God, on His part, speaks of Israel as His "son," His "first-born" (Exod. iv. 22). When David, animated by the liberality of the people, blessed the Lord before all the congregation, he began—"Blessed be Thou, Lord God of Israel, our Father" (1 Chron. xxix. 10); and Isaiah exclaims, "Doubtless Thou art our Father;" and again, "But now, O Lord, Thou art our Father" (Isa. lxiii. 16, lxiv. 8). It is not less distinctly stated that God is a God of love: "The Lord did not set His love upon you, nor choose you because ye were more in number than any people; but because the Lord loved you" (Deut. vii. 7, 8);

and, once more, in the later language of Isaiah—
 “In His love and in His pity He redeemed them”
 (Isa. lxiii. 9).

Thus it appears that not only the idea and the essential qualities of the divine Being, but even those gracious attributes of His character, the revelation of which is often thought to be the peculiar province of the Gospel, are set before us in the Old Testament in the same light as that in which they are exhibited in the New.

If we now, for a moment, turn to the other side of the picture, it is not less evident that those more terrible aspects of the divine nature, the manifestation of which is not unfrequently supposed to belong exclusively to the earlier dispensation, are presented to us who live under the later in a still clearer light, and in a still more forcible manner, than before. There can be no greater mistake than to imagine that those awful displays of God’s power and justice and holiness, before which Israel trembled, have passed away under the Gospel. Christ himself, the great revealer of the Father’s love, who came “not to destroy men’s lives, but to save them,” appears not simply as the Saviour, but, in such scenes as the cleansing of the temple and the cursing of the barren fig-tree, as the Judge, of men; and, in denouncing the formalism and hypocrisy of His day, He employs threatenings even more terrible than any which the Old Testament contains. Paul, too, persuades by “the terror of the Lord” (2 Cor. v. 11); and, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, the most

glowing description of Christian privileges which the New Testament contains is immediately followed by the words, "Wherefore, we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear; for our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. xii. 28, 29).

Throughout the whole Bible, then, from its beginning to its close, the Almighty is set before us in the same, and not in different, lights. He is not in one part material and local, in the other spiritual and universal. He does not in the one inspire only awe and terror, in the other, only confidence and love. What in the one inspires awe, is relieved by mercy; what in the other awakens confidence, deepens awe. At every stage of the history of the race men have to deal with the same great Being, who is ever "without variableness or shadow of turning."

2. The second point which we have to consider in comparing the Old Testament with the New has reference to *the condition of man as a sinner*. Is sin conceived of in the former only as an outward act, or as a breach of ceremonial observances, without being regarded as moral evil, or being traced to its root in the heart? Or is the same idea of sin indicated there which we, as Christians, are taught to entertain? The answer is involved in what has been already said; for if the idea of God be moral and spiritual, the idea of sin against Him must

obviously include what is immoral and unspiritual. Sin cannot, then, be confined to the simple outward act, to the mere ceremonial transgression. It is not enough, however, to rest in this. We must inquire whether there is any positive proof that this is the Old Testament idea of sin. Such proof abounds. What is the very first lesson that is set before us on this subject in the history of the Fall? Is it not that sin is moral transgression, and that, in separating man from the presence and the favour of his Maker, it involves in it moral ruin? Our first parents are created in the divine image and after the divine likeness; and, although we are not expressly told that this image and likeness are spiritual, we cannot avoid the conclusion that such spirituality is implied when, a little further on in the narrative, and after Adam's fall and expulsion from Paradise, it is said, "And Adam begat a son in his own likeness, after his image" (Gen. v. 3). The "likeness" and "image" here are those of the fallen progenitor of our race; the "likeness" and "image" of the former passage must be those of the spiritual God, at whose word all things had started into existence. But this divine image is spoken of as lost, and lost not by mere ceremonial transgression, but by the creature's disobedience to the Creator—by his aspiring to a knowledge which had been withheld from him—by pride and presumption—by taking his own will instead of the will of God to be his rule. All that is moral. In like manner, the "death" which is

threatened and executed includes, at all events, the idea of spiritual death, for to apply it to temporal death alone would be to make the narrative inconsistent with itself. Man is not described as having returned to the dust when he ate the forbidden fruit; and yet it had been said to him, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. ii. 17).

The idea of sin thus embodied in the history of the Creation and the Fall continues to appear in all the accounts subsequently given of the progress of the race. "And God saw," we are told, "that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. vi. 5); while Noah is expressly distinguished from this ungodly generation by the fact, which "found him grace in the eyes of the Lord," that "he was a just man and perfect in his generations, and that he walked with God" (Gen. vi. 8, 9). No words, no contrast, could more strikingly set before the readers of the earliest history of mankind an ethical, and not a merely ceremonial, idea of transgression. The building of the tower of Babel is evidently conceived of as the indication of a rebellious spirit against the will of the Most High, and is punished on that account (Gen. xi. 1-9). The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is occasioned by the grievousness of their sins; and the guilty cities would have been spared had ten righteous men been found within them (Gen. xviii. 20-33). The character of the Moabites and the Ammonites is obviously connected with

the circumstances to which the heads of these nations owed their birth—circumstances which the sacred historian thus shows his desire to set before us in the most odious light (Gen. xix. 30-38). And when, finally, the original inhabitants of Canaan are to be expelled, their expulsion is justified by the fact that their “iniquity was full” (Gen. xv. 16).

There can be no doubt, then, as to the light in which we are taught in the book of Genesis to look on sin and on man’s condition as a sinner. But it may be asked, Was it not otherwise under the law? So far was it from being so, that the idea of sin was then presented, not perhaps with greater clearness, but in a greater variety of ways. Called upon to be holy because God was holy, the thought of unholiness could not fail to present itself to the mind of Israel; while the law extends not only to outward acts, but to the thoughts and desires of the heart (Exod. xx. 17). The impossibility, indeed, of confining the Jewish idea of transgression to what is merely formal and ceremonial, and the singular distinctness with which the thought of sin had taken possession of the national mind and conscience, appears in nothing more clearly than in this, that so many different words were employed in the Hebrew language to express it. It is at one time named by a term which means wandering from the right path, at another by one which signifies a rebellious rising against God. Again it is denoted by a word derived from the thought of unrest, of misery of soul; again by one springing from the thought of opposition to what is

true; and yet again by one expressive of idleness and vanity—the vanity of all that opposes the Almighty—and carrying in it, because it does so, the elements of its own destruction.* These different aspects of transgression have all ethical ideas for their ground. The same conclusion is to be drawn from the existence of those many moral precepts of the law which will shortly come under our notice.

If such was the idea of sin even at the institution of the theocracy, much more does the same idea appear in the Psalms and in the Prophets. So distinctly, indeed, is it expressed there that it would be an unnecessary occupation of time to make even a selection from the many texts which establish the conclusion. Nowhere in the Bible have we more mournful lamentations over the corruption of the heart, nowhere more stern and impressive denunciations of moral evil, than in the utterances of those men of God by whom the Psalms and the prophecies were penned. They trace sin to its original fountain in our nature (Ps. li. 5); see it in its true character as committed not so much against man as against God (Ps. li. 4); follow it out in all its manifold ramifications in thought and word and deed (Prov. xxiv. 9; Ps. xxxvi. 3, xiv. 1); mark it in the misery which it produces (Ps. xxxviii. 3); and in the death to which it leads (Ezek. xxxiii. 18). Even now the penitent finds no more suitable language than theirs in which to express the anguish of his soul; and he

* Hävernack, 'Die Theologie des A. T.,' p. 84. Compare Appendix.

who, in our own day, would rise up to show the world its sins—to denounce the moral evils both of individuals and of classes of society—would learn the language of holy indignation and of righteous rebuke even more from the words of Isaiah, or Jeremiah, or Ezekiel, than from those of St Paul, St Peter, or St John. That sin is moral evil, is undoubtedly the lesson of the Old Testament not less than of the New.

3. From the views expressed in the Old Testament as to the character and condition of man as a sinner, let us pass, in the third place, to *the light in which it presents to us the means of reconciliation to God*. Salvation is either of grace or of works: "If by grace, then is it no more of works; otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace; otherwise work is no more work" (Rom. xi. 6). Which of these alternatives does the earlier revelation of God set before us? From the very beginning; and running throughout the whole of the Old Testament, we see the same great principles of grace which are unfolded to us in the New Testament. The earliest declaration upon the point, that made immediately after the Fall, contains in it the kernel of all that was to be afterwards revealed: "And I will put enmity," said the Almighty to the serpent, "between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gen. iii. 15). The promise is unquestionably vague. It is more than probable that it would convey at

the moment, to those who heard it, no idea of a personal Redeemer to appear in the fulness of the times. But it was a promise; it was a word of encouragement and hope; it was glad tidings; it was a gospel. It directed the thoughts of our first parents to God as even then, at the instant of His just anger, a God of mercy and love. It assured them that, of His own free grace, He would destroy the spiritual enemy who had been the means of separating between them and their Creator; and it could hardly fail to convey to them the intimation that, to all their posterity who did not prove themselves to be the seed of the serpent, paradise would be restored. The same principles are expressed in the covenant with Noah, and in the token of the covenant (Gen. ix. 11-17); and we see by the patriarch's own words that they were so far at least appreciated by him, when, in the spirit of prophecy, he shortly afterwards exclaimed, "Blessed be the Lord God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant. God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant" (Gen. ix. 26, 27). To two of the three sons from whom the future generations of the world were to descend, the free mercy, the unconditioned grace, of God is promised; and on one line only of descent from the third son was the curse to fall—again an indication, clear enough to those who would search into the meaning of the prophecy, that God would prove Himself to be a God of grace to all the families of the earth, except such as should, in the hardness of their own hearts,

reject him. The next intimations of God's plan of mercy are given us in connection with Abraham. It is unnecessary to quote the exact words which are employed, for the Saviour himself explained the position of Abraham when He said to the Jews, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad" (John viii. 56); and that position is dwelt upon at length by the apostle Paul, in the fourth chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, and in the third chapter of that to the Galatians. The latter passage is peculiarly important, for it does not only, like the former, set Abraham before us as the father of all who believe and are justified by faith; it does not only connect this justification in his case with a period anterior to the institution of that rite of circumcision by which the patriarch was marked out as the father of a line of special descent, and when, in his own proved and triumphant faith, he was the father of "all them that believe though they be not circumcised;" but it does this with especial reference to that "law" of Israel, which is so often looked upon even now as the sum and substance of the Old Testament. The Judaising Christians, to whom in that chapter the apostle writes, looked upon it in that light; and how are they met? The argument is one of the clearest and most instructive in the Bible, and should be carefully studied by those who would see the unity of God's plan throughout all His dealings with His Church. It will be necessary to refer to it again; but, in the mean time, it is sufficient for our present

purpose to observe that the sum of the argument is this: The "law," important as it is, is not the whole of God's earlier revelation to mankind. There was another revelation, more important still, given four hundred and thirty years before—for it is not to the apostle's purpose to go further back—that to Abraham, when "God preached before the Gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed" (Gal. iii. 8). Upon this St Paul reasons; and the whole reasoning of the chapter proceeds upon the supposition that, from the time at least when these words were spoken till the days of Christ, salvation by faith in the promise, the promise of that seed which was Christ, had been not merely the only way of salvation, but a way in some degree made known; that this was the true and *one* covenant made between God and His people; that, properly speaking, there never had been a covenant of law between them, but that the law given in the wilderness was something only added to the covenant, that it might shut Israel up to the faith of Christ (Gal. iii. 6-19). The faith of Christians is identified, as to its substance, with the faith of Abraham. Even they have no higher merely human example of what faith is, of its principle, of its power, and of the blessing which it brings with it. The same path of reconciliation was substantially laid open to Abraham by which they approach God and learn to know Him as their God; and to none of them can God say more than He said to him, "I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward" (Gen. xv. 1).

We come now to the Mosaic dispensation, to the dispensation of the law. Through the whole of it there runs the same principle. To suppose that that dispensation threw Israel upon a covenant of works is altogether to misunderstand it. The apostle's words in the chapter of Galatians already referred to ought to be enough upon this point: "And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect." (Gal. iii. 17). But the same conclusion is forced upon us by the whole history of the Jewish economy. For, not to dwell at present upon a fact which will meet us more fully afterwards, that Israel was a redeemed people, let it simply be observed that the law itself contained many special provisions by which the mode of reconciliation between God and the sinner was shadowed forth. According to the teaching of Heb. vii. 12, the institution of the priesthood and of sacrifices was its central point, and at the bottom of these institutions the great doctrine of atonement lay. We are not, indeed, to imagine that, in betaking himself to the priest, or in offering up sacrifice, the Israelite beheld directly in the one the representation of that great High Priest who was afterwards to enter into the true holy of holies for His people, or, in the other, of that blood of the Lamb "slain from the foundation of the world" which can alone effectually take away sin. To imagine this, would be at variance not only with the express teach-

ing of the Epistle to the Hebrews, but with all the notices given us in Scripture of the imperfect character of the older dispensation. These institutions had a double character. Just as the redemption, in the conscious possession of which Israel was to live, awoke first the thought of deliverance from bondage and of admission to all the temporal benefits of the theocracy, while yet the character of the God who had given that redemption was so revealed that the thoughtful and spiritual heart could not fail to rise secondly to the idea of a higher redemption and a higher home than Canaan, so the priesthood and sacrifices referred first to the theocratic standing of the Israelite, but were not confined to that. Nay, that, although the first, was not the deepest, thought which they awakened, the true thought which they were designed to awaken. It ought to be borne in mind that sacrifice did not begin with the Mosaic economy, that the idea of the priesthood was not then for the first time introduced. Both had existed from the beginning, when there was no great fabric of ceremonial observances, and when therefore there could be no merely ceremonial transgression. It is impossible to imagine that the Almighty could design that the moral idea in sacrifice, which had existed in these times, should give way under the Mosaic law to a ceremonial one. It would be out of all keeping with the general course of His dealings, as well as with the general teaching of the Bible, to think that, in the period of the theocracy, just ideas as to the method of reconciliation *were*

intended to be less known than in former ages. God himself, we have seen, was not less clearly resolved in what He was—man in what he was. Can we suppose that, at the very moment when Israel was so mercifully dealt with, it should have been left wholly uncared for and uninstructed as to those deeper necessities of the soul which would be exactly the more felt the more it accepted God's revelation on other points? It is impossible to think this without saying that the end of the Mosaic dispensation was to produce despair, a view of it inconsistent with all that we are taught of its general character. In the light of these remarks, then, we should not have much difficulty in seeing our way through the vexed and difficult question of the effect of the legal sacrifices. They did not atone for sin as sin. They could not. Earlier sacrifices had not done so either. "It is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins" (Heb. x. 4). What they atoned for was breaches against the theocratic rule; what they procured was restoration to its privileges. An Israelite might have been guilty, as every man in his natural condition is guilty, of such sins as necessarily excluded him from the favour of God, yet he might enjoy to the full the blessings associated with the theocracy. He might, by the exercise of the faith of Abraham, have stood in real acceptance with the Father, and yet he might have been excluded from the theocratic covenant. For sin, therefore, in its deep moral and spiritual sense—for sin as we understand it—the sacrifices of the law

did not atone; and although it is true that not merely ceremonial, but at least certain classes of moral, transgressions are said to be atoned for by them (Lev. vi. 1-7, xix. 20-22), yet when we think of atonement in connection with these, it is necessary to embrace them, along with ceremonial offences, under the one idea of offences against the positive rules of the theocratic King. But that does not exhaust the meaning of the sacrifices. It is one part of their character, but not the whole. The other part was, that they carried forward the old idea of sacrifice embodied in the sacrifices of Abel, and Noah, and Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob. They contained wrapped up within them deeper truths than they expressed; and this significance was connected with the whole sacrificial system, and not with any one part of it alone; not with sacrifices offered for moral sin only, but with those offered also for ceremonial transgression. All proceeded upon the supposition that there was something separating between man and God; and the whole sacrificial ritual into which, deeply expressive as it is, time does not permit us to enter, presented the idea that this something could only be removed by expiation—by the substitution of the clean for the unclean, of the holy for the unholy.

As, now, the idea of this holiness of God rose—as the idea of the cause of his own separation from Him deepened in the mind of the Israelite—the idea of something higher than mere animal sacrifice would begin to dawn upon him. He might never

know clearly what it was to which the aspirations of his heart were pointing, but he would feel that means of reconciliation there must be, and he would cast himself upon the mercy of God, believing that He who had provided the atonement for the lower, would provide also in His own way the atonement for the higher, fault. We find, accordingly, that this was actually the case; and when we pass beyond the earliest period of the theocracy, we see the more spiritually minded of Israel discovering the unsatisfactoriness of animal sacrifice to meet the deeper wants of the soul. Not that these sacrifices were less than before parts of the divine constitution under which they lived; not that, when men saw their insufficiency, they began gradually to give them up; not that they could have ventured to do so more than the mass of those who had not penetrated to the truths which they carried in their bosom. The same Samuel who proclaims the great spiritual truth, "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (1 Sam. xv. 22), denounces the judgment of God upon Saul because that king had dared to offer the burnt-offering with his own hands (1 Sam. xiii. 9-13). The same David who exclaims, "For Thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it; Thou delightest not in burnt-offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise," adds, in the very next words of the Psalm, after he has prayed that God would do good to Zion, and build the

walls of Jerusalem,—“Then shalt Thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt-offering, and whole burnt-offering: then shall they offer bullocks upon Thine altar” (Ps. li. 16-19). It was not that the outward sacrifice might be neglected when its weakness had been discovered, but rather that, filled up with its true idea, it was to be offered more joyfully and more hopefully than before.

Salvation, then, is of grace—pardon is through the free mercy of God, who has provided His own method of expiation; that is the leading idea of the Old Testament upon the point before us. Is it not, also, the leading idea of the New Testament upon the same point? Let us pass to a fourth point.

4. *The nature of that life to which they are called who have found reconciliation with God.* Here, as far as concerns the saints who lived before the period of the Mosaic economy, a very few words are all that will be necessary, for many of these saints are held up to us in the New Testament itself as the great models of our piety. We are referred by the Saviour to Noah and to Abraham (Luke xvii. 27; John viii. 56); and, to say nothing of the mention made of these and others in scattered passages of the epistles, we are directed, in the noble list contained in the 11th chapter of Hebrews of those whose faith we are to follow, to Abel, and Enoch, and Noah, and Abraham, and Sarah, and Isaac, and Jacob, and Joseph. Such references might be enough; for how is it possible to imagine that, if the

piety of these saints of God was wholly different in kind from that to which we are called, they should thus be set before us as models for our imitation—as a part of that cloud of witnesses who, having finished their labours, wait for us that they with us may be made perfect? (Heb. xi. 40). But even the statements of the Old Testament bear out the point. “Enoch walked with God” (Gen. v. 22). “Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God” (Gen. vi. 9). To Abraham it was said, “I am the Almighty God; walk thou before Me, and be thou perfect” (Gen. xvii. 1). All, words which testify to the fact that the Almighty had then revealed the great lines of that life to which, from the very necessity of his nature, He must in every age call His people. It is of more consequence to look again at the economy of the law, and to ask whether these demands were lessened under it—whether an outward and formal righteousness was now substituted for an inward and spiritual one. The question is not whether there was such an outward and formal righteousness therein proposed to man—for such, undoubtedly, there was; but, Was there nothing else proposed? Were there no deeper views running through the Mosaic dispensation? Were no nobler requirements set before the people as requirements the fulfilling of which was necessary to constitute the true Israelite? Nothing can be clearer than that these questions must be answered in the affirmative. From the very first the people were called to be a kingdom of priests and a holy

nation (Exod. xix. 6). The idea of a universal priesthood was thus introduced at a time previous to the institution of the Aaronic priesthood; and, even after the latter was formally established, the Israelite was not suffered to forget his own high destination; for, like his fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who had built altars and offered sacrifices (Gen. xii. 7, xxvi. 25, xxxiii. 20), each father of a family, and not the priest, slew, in the great annual festival of the Passover, the paschal lamb. Even in the ordinary sacrifices for individuals, indeed, it seems to have been the original rule that the offerer himself slew the victim which he offered (Lev. i. 5). The same truth, however, is still more strikingly illustrated in part of the ritual for the restoration of a leper to his house, and to the enjoyment of all his old privileges, for he was then restored with the most characteristic features of the ceremonies with which the priests were consecrated.* Thus, even after the institution of the priesthood, the Israelites were impressively reminded that all were priests.

* The part of the ritual especially referred to in the text is described in Lev. xiv. 14, and consisted in putting some of the blood of the trespass-offering upon the tip of the right ear of him that was to be cleansed, and upon the thumb of his right hand, and upon the great toe of his right foot—ceremonies observed only at the consecration of priests (see Exod. xxix. 20). The explanation is to be found in the fact that the leper, while his leprosy was upon him, had been regarded as dead. He was now to be restored, as one raised from the dead, to the full enjoyment of the privileges of the covenant people, the priestly nation, and it was necessary to symbolise this by giving him priestly consecration.

Could anything be more inconsistent with the idea that only a formal righteousness was demanded of them by God than this simple fact, that the idea of a priesthood which draws near a holy God, as sinful man feels that he dare not do, remained attached to the whole congregation? *

Again, the ten commandments distinctly express the idea of a discipline of the heart as well as of a discipline of the outward life, when it is said, "Thou shalt not covet." Coveting is an inward, a spiritual, offence; and the apostle Paul had felt it to be so when he says, "For I had not known lust except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet" (Rom. vii. 7).

Again, the great duties of the law are expressed in the Pentateuch in the very same words even as those employed by the Saviour, when He delivered the two commandments upon which "hang all the law and the prophets" (Mat. xxii. 40); for, in Deut. vi. 5, we read, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might;" and, in Lev. xix. 18, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." The duty of holy, loving, and heartfelt service, indeed, is constantly enjoined (Lev. xx. 26; Deut. x. 12; xi. 1, 13; xiii. 3; xxvi. 16, 17; xxx. 1, 5, 20). And the very rite of circumcision is so explained as a circumcision of the heart (Deut. x. 16, xxx. 6), that the language of the apostle Paul, when he declares that "he is not a

* Comp. Exod. xx. 19, where a mediator was first appointed, and the instructive incident, Numb. xvi. 1, &c.

Jew which is one outwardly ; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh : but he is a Jew which is one inwardly ; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter ; whose praise is not of men, but of God ” (Rom. ii. 28, 29), must be taken, not as simply the commentary of a Christian apostle, but as expressing literally what was aimed at under the law. Hence, accordingly, the same apostle is able to say, “ For we know that the law,” the Mosaic law—*ὁ νόμος*—“ is spiritual,” corresponds to the nature of that Holy Spirit, of that spiritual God, who has expressed in it His will (Rom. vii. 14). Hence, again, he says, “ The law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good ” (Rom. vii. 12). And hence, again, the words, “ That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit ” (Rom. viii. 4). In this last passage the apostle is not speaking of justification, but of the divine life formed in the believer’s soul ; and the word rendered in our version “ righteousness,” ought rather to be rendered “ the righteous requirement ” (comp. i. 32, ii. 26) ; so that the meaning is, that “ the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus ” accomplishes what the law itself could not do—enables him who “ walks not after the flesh but after the spirit ” to reach on to the fulfilment—of what ? of the righteous requirement which had been substantially contained in the law. It is unnecessary, however, to multiply individual texts. The whole strain of New Testament teaching proceeds upon the same view of the

law. The greatest attainments of the believer are never spoken of as if they surpassed, or were to surpass, what, given to man under the Mosaic dispensation, had involved in it the perfect demands of a perfectly holy God. Love itself, that love in us which is the answer of the heart to Him who is love, is only "the fulfilling of the law." A higher righteousness than that, the idea of which was contained in the law, it is not only impossible to reach, it is impossible even to conceive.

5. A word or two must still be said upon a fifth point of comparison between the Old and New Testaments,—*the hope of a future life*. It is not denied that the doctrine of immortality is not brought out in the former as it is in the latter, although the same observation might be made with regard to all the points already spoken of. It is admitted that it is "our Saviour Jesus Christ who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Tim. i. 10). He has "brought them to light," but the word implies the previous existence, an earlier though partial manifestation, of what is now fully revealed.* That is the true state of Bible teaching upon this great doctrine. It is true that when we turn to the earliest parts of the Old Testament we find but scanty notices of this truth, yet they do not altogether fail; for we are told of Enoch that "he was not, for God took him" (Gen. v. 24). Whatever be the express

* Compare the use of the verb in Eph. iii. 9.

meaning of these words, it was impossible that, spoken as they are of Enoch in the midst of a long list of patriarchs, of every one of whom except himself it is said that "he died," they should not have suggested to the inquiring mind the thought of an existence beyond the grave. When we come to the later patriarchs, however, we are left in no doubt as to the nature of their faith. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews distinctly says of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, whose hope of the future we are apt to associate only with the hope of Canaan, that "they desired a better country, even an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He hath prepared for them a city" (Heb. xi. 16; c. v. 13).* And the whole reasoning of the fourth chapter of that epistle proceeds upon the supposition that the "rest" promised to the fathers was the same rest as that to which we look forward,—not a mere earthly settlement under vines and fig-trees, but a heavenly rest—a rest from all the toil and sorrow that have been introduced into the earth by sin. To those who believe in the inspiration of the Epistle to the Hebrews, this simple assertion of

* This passage is well worthy of our attention as an illustration of the singular accuracy of the statements of Scripture. The inspired writer does not say that the hope of heaven was directly presented to the patriarchs, but that they, by faith, penetrated to it. "*They that say such things* declare plainly that they seek a country. But now *they desire* a better country, that is, an heavenly." The following words in verse 16—"Wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God"—form an important illustration of the difficult argument of our Lord in Mark xii. 26, 27.

the fact might be enough. But it is not desirable to rest our acceptance of what seems so strange a statement upon that ground alone. Is there anything in the circumstances of the case which seems to warrant it? There is; and, as the principle is one of great importance in the whole inquiry which we are pursuing, it will be well to state it. It is as follows:—These patriarchs received the promise of the rest in Canaan from God. In receiving and accepting it, it was to God himself that they ascended—it was in Him and in His word that they believed. But that very faith, thus ascending to Him, included within it a power which breaks through all barriers of the local, earthly, temporal, and which does and must apprehend the infinite, the heavenly, and the eternal. Faith, however, cannot go beyond what is at least implicitly contained in the promise upon which it rests. There must therefore have been in the promise of the land of Canaan an element able to lift faith above earthly things, and to carry it on to the contemplation of the hope of heavenly things. Now such an element did lie in it. It was, indeed, closely associated with the earthly; but that was only the shell in which the kernel of the promise lay—a shell which was of itself sufficient to lift up a generation apt to dwell only in the present to the thought of something at least higher and better than that present, but which was never intended to *limit* the higher aspirations of those more spiritually minded, who, believing in a spiritual God and in spiritual things, could not,

in the very nature of the case, rest in the hope of what was not spiritual, and so accommodated to their deepest wants. A very similar principle, it may be remarked, pervades much of the language of the New Testament. The representations given us in the Apocalypse of the New Jerusalem are of much the same character. They are adapted to a certain condition of the human mind—a condition not characteristic only of the sensuous and the uneducated, but even of the spiritual and educated—whenever they fall below the level of their highest moods. To men in such a state these representations speak of something higher than that in which they would otherwise dwell. But they do not *limit* us, while they thus lift us up. We may pass beyond the pictures of streets of gold and gates of pearl, and in doing so we are not violating their spirit—we are catching their spirit; for that spirit is to lead us onward, and above the earthliness in which we might otherwise rest. Apply all this to the subject which we have now in hand, and it goes far to explain that apparent heightening of the meaning of Old Testament passages which we find in the New Testament, and more especially in the Epistle to the Hebrews. It is not, properly speaking, a heightening of the meaning, but it is a penetrating to the principle which lay at the bottom of these passages. It is a passing beyond the husk to the living germ. The germ was always there, but men were not always able to see it. We see it because that germ has struck its roots downward

and sent its stem upward. Our stage of spiritual advancement, which has grown with the germ's growth and strengthened with its strength, is what lends clearness to our vision. But that stage of spiritual advancement is not necessarily confined to us. It might have been reached by the spiritual in any age who made themselves acquainted with God, who feared Him, and to whom He showed His covenant. Since, then, the same hope lay at the bottom of God's promises of old that lies at the bottom of them now, men might then apprehend that hope—they might look deeper than the outward form in which the hope was clothed. That very form, itself an advance, might suggest the principle of advance, and might lead them to ask, What is the higher thing which is here enwrapped—the higher thing upon which our highest faith should fix? It was thus with the patriarchs. The promise of the earthly Canaan stood to the hope of spiritual and eternal rest in a relation somewhat similar to that in which the thought of golden streets stands to the full satisfaction of all the longings of the soul. The one was suggestive of the other to the principle of faith. Hence Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob wandered in the hope of a better home than Canaan. Hence the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews was justified in speaking of one rest as that which has been all along offered to the people of God.

We come now to the Mosaic dispensation. That the promises of the theocracy were temporal it is impossible to deny. But surely along with these

promises many a believing heart among the people must still have continued to cherish the faith of Abraham, and must have broken, as he did, through the temporal to the eternal. Nay, more, our Lord teaches us that even the law itself was not without hints upon this subject—hints which, to an inquiring Jew, whose whole religious ritual expressed in such remarkable and various ways the contrast, the opposition, between the “living God” and death, must have had a more powerful meaning even than they can have to us.* “As touching the dead, that they rise,” said Jesus on one occasion to the Sadducees; “have ye not read in the book of Moses, how in the bush God spake unto him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living: ye therefore do greatly err” (Mark xii. 26, 27). The fact that the Sadducees are reproved for not having seen the force of this ancient declaration shows us that, whether we who naturally turn to our clearer light could have seen it or not, they ought to have done so.

* It seems of much importance to remember the greatness of this contrast in considering the difficult argument in the passage quoted. The singular intensity of that uncleanness which was contracted by touching a dead body appears in the very remarkable ritual of the water of separation, described in the 19th chapter of the Book of Numbers, by which the unclean person was cleansed. No part of the whole Mosaic code brings so prominently before us the idea of the potency which that water needed to possess in order to effect its object. It is most difficult for us to conceive the amount of meaning which lay in such symbolical lessons.

Finally, it is not denied by any that when we come down to the later books of the Old Testament there are clear indications of the hope of immortality, or that, in the days of our Lord, there existed in the Jewish mind a firm belief in it. The only question which it is of moment to ask here is, Whether this clearer and firmer faith sprang from entirely new revelations of the divine Spirit, or whether it was the result of that Spirit's opening up to those in whom He wrought a fuller understanding of hints given before? The incidental manner in which these expressions of faith are uttered, the hesitation, the darkness, with which they are accompanied, leads rather to the latter supposition; and, if so, it shows that, from the earliest times, there were such hints to be improved. Even on this point, therefore, upon which it is generally supposed that the New Testament differs most widely from the Old, it would seem that, with differences afterwards to be spoken of, there is one circle of ideas common to them both.

Such is what we have spoken of as the first Old Testament line of thought.

What result, then, have we reached? First of all, we see how utterly inconsistent is what has been said, with the most dangerous tendency evoked in connection with the Sabbath controversy in its present phase—the tendency to make us leave the Old Testament behind us as something with which we have nothing to do. But, again, we reach a result more positive than that; for we see that

the Bible, from its beginning to its end, presents to us the same great principles of religion; in essence the same views of God, of man, of the means of reconciliation to God, of the life of God's children, of the hopes which animate them. Through the thousands of years over which its successive revelations extend, one God, one divine plan, is there. What a magnificent spectacle is thus presented to our view! Amidst all the revolutions of empires, amidst all the changes of human thought, the essential principles of true religion are revealed from the first, and never change. The God who speaks in the first, is the same God who speaks in the last, book of the revelation of His will. Not only in His own positive declarations, but in His manifestations of Himself, He is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." That one fact, standing in striking contrast with everything else in the history of man, is a testimony to the divinity of the Bible, which it is impossible to gainsay. No wonder that those who do not sympathise with the idea of a positive revelation should try to widen the breach between the Old and the New Testaments. But on that very account ought the Christian to satisfy himself as to their real unity; and to wander with delighted and adoring mind by that one stream of divine communication with man, which, from the paradise restored in which he stands, leads him through many a waste and howling wilderness, yet ever, where it flows, on green and fruitful banks, to the paradise which our first parents lost.

Then will he understand how it should be that he can find no more suitable language in which to express the deepest feelings of his heart than the language of many an Old Testament saint. He will understand how it was that, in the very infancy of the Christian Church, while her faith in her Lord was at its highest, her love to Him at its most glowing point, she should have found in the books of the Old Testament constantly read in her assemblies—for the New Testament was not yet penned—the nourishment of that divine life which burned in her breast in all its fervour; and he will associate himself with a spiritual ancestry reaching back to the beginning of the world, who, tried here by the same conflicts and supported by the same faith, have thus been prepared, as he is, for the one “general assembly and church of the first-born in heaven.”

LECTURE II.

THE JEWISH DISPENSATION ; OR, THE ECONOMY OF THE LAW.

WE saw in the last lecture that, upon all the leading points of religious truth, the idea and attributes of God, the condition of man as a sinner, the method of acceptance with the Almighty, the nature of the redeemed life, and the hope of immortality, the Old Testament sets before us the same essential principles as those which are set before us in the New. Not, indeed, that they are as clearly and as fully spoken of in the former as in the latter, but only that, where they are revealed, they are the same : where they are not distinctly revealed, spurs and hints are given which ought to have led all, which actually did lead many, spiritual minds to comprehend them. In looking, however, again at the Old Testament, we cannot fail to observe that there is more in it than the effort to give expression to these or cognate truths, upon which, considering the object now in view, it was not necessary to dwell. It also

contains the history of a chosen and peculiar people—of a people selected from the other nations of the world to be the special depositaries of the Almighty's will—of a people far more closely connected with the Christian dispensation than the Gentiles were. To this people God reveals Himself in a manner which may at first sight appear inconsistent with that revelation of Himself which has been already spoken of. He makes a covenant with them. Is not that to introduce the idea of a limited and local, instead of an unlimited and universal, God? He dwells in one particular spot—first in the tabernacle, and then in the temple. Is not that to associate His worship in their minds with the sensuous instead of the spiritual? He sets before them a vast complexity of ceremonial arrangements, the breach of any one of which is sin. Is not that to substitute a ceremonial for an ethical idea of transgression? He institutes a variety of bodily washings and cleansings, which admit to the privileges of His covenant. Is not that to lower the conception of an inwardly spiritual and holy life? And, finally, He promises temporal rewards to the obedient, and inflicts temporal punishments on the guilty. Is not that to withdraw the mind from a day of final recompense, and from the eternity which is to follow it? In short, the whole is an economy of law. Can that be the economy of the same God who dealt with the patriarchs by principles rather than rules? It is necessary, then, before we can understand the nature of God's dealings with our race, that we endeavour

to form correct notions as to the nature and purpose of that special economy under which Israel was placed. This was the second point which we proposed to consider.

II.

THE JEWISH DISPENSATION ; OR, THE ECONOMY OF THE LAW.

Two questions meet us here :—1. What is meant by The Law, and to whom was it given ? 2. What was the purpose which it was to serve ?

1. What is meant by The Law, and to whom was it given ?

When we turn to the *Old Testament* for an answer, there seems only one conclusion to which it is possible to come—that under the words, Economy of The Law, we are to include all those arrangements by which the Almighty constituted Israel into a separate people, and disciplined them for that part which they were to act in the history of His dealings with man. It is true that some of these arrangements were in themselves more important than others, and that they were made under circumstances in the highest degree calculated to impress that importance on the mind. It is true, also, that none of them were intended to be the exclusive property of Israel, but that provision was made at many a

point for admitting the Gentile nations to all the privileges involved in them, if they would accept the boon. Even admitting this, however, it is impossible to study the various enactments given through Moses to the covenant people without feeling that these enactments constitute one whole, and that the obligation to observe them rests upon the same principle—the respect due to the authority of God. We are, no doubt, in the habit of dividing the law into three great parts—the moral, the ceremonial, and the political. Such a division exists. Some of the precepts of the law are moral, some are ceremonial, and some are political. But it is to be observed that no such distinction is pointed out and enforced in the law itself. Every precept contained in it is rested upon the authority of God: the obligation to obey one was as great as the obligation to obey another. The punishment inflicted for the transgression of a ceremonial, was, in several cases, not less severe than that inflicted for the transgression of a moral, law. And the strictest observance of any one of the three classes of precepts which have been referred to would not have saved those who observed it from exclusion from the covenant if they had neglected the others. However, therefore, we may, for convenience' sake, separate the law into its different parts, to the Israelite it was one. It had all been given by the express revelation of the Almighty; it had all been confirmed by the most solemn sanctions; it was all entwined with the citizen's public

and spiritual life. God had joined its different parts together ; no Jew might then have dared to put them asunder. Neither may we dare to do so, when we consider either what it was to Israel, or what was the relation towards it which the Saviour of the world took up.

To these statements, which are, in the main, admitted, one exception is generally made. The Decalogue, it is said, did stand out from all the other precepts of the law in such a manner as to show that it occupied a different ground from the ceremonial, the civil, and the criminal precepts. Is this the fact? Is there any evidence that it was intended to have, *in its particular form*, a more universal character, or a more permanent obligation than these other precepts? That the Decalogue possessed pre-eminence of a certain kind, is to be at once admitted. It possessed it in its matter—expressing, as it did, the everlasting principles of human duty both towards God and towards man. It possessed it in its form—the number ten indicating, according to the whole symbolism of the Bible in connection with numbers, the idea of completeness, of perfection ; while those more minute analyses of it which have been given by different scholars, present to us a striking picture of the wisdom with which its different parts are arranged, as well as of the comprehensiveness of the whole.* It possessed

* Ewald, 'Geschichte des Volkes Israel,' ii. 206, &c. Kurz, 'History of the Old Covenant,' Clark's translation, iii. 123, &c. Fairbairn, 'Typology of Scripture,' ii. 100, &c.

it in the circumstances amidst which it was given, the awful displays of the divine glory and majesty at Sinai, when it was written by the finger of God himself upon tables of stone. Finally, it possessed it in the position assigned to these tables, and in the care with which they were preserved. They alone were kept in the ark, which was made, indeed, exactly of a size to hold them ; while the other precepts of the law were only placed by the side of the ark (Deut. xxxi. 26). All these things, apart even from the high character of those enactments by which the Decalogue is so eminently distinguished from every code of religious duty possessed by the ancient nations of the world, mark it out as intended to have, in the eyes of Israel, a peculiar pre-eminence. But our question is not at present whether it was eminent among the institutions of Israel, but whether, *as a law*, it was a law designed, like all the other parts of the legal economy, for Israel alone, and for mankind only in so far as they might identify themselves with Israel, as they might enter within the covenant of the chosen people. The commandments themselves ought at once to supply the answer. The very first words—words, be it remembered, graven upon the tables of stone*—were these : “ I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage ; ” and then immediately follow the commandments. The words of the fifth commandment are—“ Honour thy father and thy mother,

* Kalisch on Exod. xx. ; Keil and Delitzsch on Exod. xx.

that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." And it is not without some bearing on the subject, although the argument cannot be pressed because the words written on the stones were different, that when Moses, in the Book of Deuteronomy, repeats the commandments, he associates the duty enjoined in the fourth with a reason peculiar to Israel : "And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee out from thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched-out arm ; therefore the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the Sabbath-day" (Deut. v. 15). Now, the question which we are at present considering is not whether there is anything in these commandments which has a universal reference—which is authoritative for us as well as Israel—or, if there be, upon what ground such a statement is to be rested : that question will meet us afterwards. The point with which we have to do is, whether commandments so expressed do not bear upon the face of them that, in their form, they are parts of an economy designed for Israel alone—that, in that form, they have the same aspect of limitation to Israel which appears in all the other arrangements of the law. It is said, indeed, that "if God speaks, man must hear and obey, or incur the reward of unbelief and disobedience."* But if it be meant by this that whatever God has spoken must be universally and eternally binding, how shall we explain the fact that many

* Gibson, 'Connection,' &c., p. 37.

precepts of the Old Testament which, if not strictly moral in themselves, are yet closely associated with moral grounds—*e. g.*, the not taking of usury from a brother Israelite—are not held binding by Christian men? No one can point to a New Testament passage declaring in express terms their repeal, yet no member of God's spiritual Israel thinks that, in taking usury from a brother member of the same spiritual family, he is violating the command of God. Again, it is said that "it is through particular churches, and particular individual saints at Rome, Corinth, Galatia, &c., that Paul declares the unsearchable riches of Christ, and the sublime and tender precepts of Gospel morality."* Most true—it could hardly have been otherwise; or, had it been otherwise, the Scriptures would have been deprived of one of the most precious elements of their power. But the difference between this and the point before us is so great as completely to destroy all that analogy which might otherwise be the foundation of an argument. The saints in Rome and Corinth and Galatia were not written to as a peculiar people. The very contrary was the case. It was taken for granted that they were not so; that the middle wall of partition which separated them from other nations had been broken down; that they were only a part, a sample, of a community in which there was neither Jew nor Gentile, neither bond nor free. What was spoken to them, therefore, involved in it the idea that it was spoken to us all, for we all

* Gibson, p. 45.

occupy the same ground as they did. How completely different was it with the Jews! It was as a people separated from others that they were addressed. None deny that large portions of that economy under which they were placed were, in their form, local and temporary. We take another portion of it. We find it containing allusions of a similar character, and it is impossible to evade the inference that these allusions must have impressed, must have been designed to impress, Israel with the conviction that the Ten Commandments engraven upon stones were a part of their own, and not of a universal, polity. If this be not admitted, it must follow that other parts of the Jewish economy were designed to be authoritative for all nations as well as the Ten Commandments. Further, it must follow that the Gentile nations surrounding Israel were guilty in that they did not, as Gentiles, receive and obey these commandments, and that not as commandments containing eternal truths of religion and morality, but as commandments which, uttered as they had been by God, were intended not less for them than for the Jews. Yet can any one suppose that the apostle Paul would have sought to convince such Gentiles upon such a ground; that he would even have endeavoured to convince of sin a Gentile living in the midst of Jews, because he had not received the Ten Commandments as the law of God? Certainly he would not. In writing to the Romans he draws a clear distinction between Gentiles and Jews with reference to this very point.

The latter he convicts of sin by their own law, and that too by the moral parts of it. The former he convicts, not by even the moral parts of the Jewish law, but by the light of nature (Rom. ch. ii.) Nor can any passage be referred to in the New Testament wherein, looking back upon the days of the theocracy, it is made a charge against the Gentiles, that they did not observe its laws and institutions.

Not only, however, does the Decalogue contain local and temporal allusions which show that, in its particular form, it was designed for Israel, and not for the other nations of the world; it is expressly spoken of as if, even more than all else, it constituted the basis of the covenant made at Sinai. "And He wrote upon the tables," it is said, referring to the Almighty, "the words of the covenant, the ten commandments" (Exod. xxxiv. 28—compare verse 1). When Moses, in the Book of Deuteronomy, gives a direct account of the transaction, it is in the following words: "And the Lord declared unto you His covenant, which He commanded you to perform, even ten commandments; and He wrote them upon two tables of stone" (Deut. iv. 13). Again he says "So I turned, and came down from the mount, and the mount burned with fire: and the two tables of the covenant were in my two hands" (Deut. ix. 15). And, in later times, so much did this view of the Decalogue prevail that Solomon, in his prayer at the dedication of the temple, calls it "the covenant of the Lord." "And I have set there a place for the ark, wherein is the covenant of the Lord, which He

made with our fathers, when He brought them out of the land of Egypt" (1 Kings viii. 21).

From all that has been said, and so far as the statements of the Old Testament guide us to a conclusion, we are warranted to draw the inference that the Decalogue, not less than the other parts of the law, was specially designed for Israel, and for the other nations of the world only when they entered, by the appointed means, within Israel's covenant. But this point is so intimately connected with the whole question before us, that we must look also at the teaching of the New Testament upon it.

What is meant by "the law" spoken of in the *New Testament*?

The earliest and most important notice which we find of it is in our Lord's Sermon on the Mount. In Mat. v. 17 we read, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil." The meaning of the latter part of these words will afterwards come under our consideration. In the mean time we have to think only of the former part, "the law or the prophets." That the law here spoken of cannot refer *only* to the Decalogue must be obvious to every one at a moment's glance, for in the illustrations of the principle given in the following verses of the chapter our Lord passes beyond the Decalogue. Further, that they do not refer *only* to the strictly moral precepts of the law as a whole is evident from this, that the reference to divorce at verse 31 is a reference to something which, however closely connected with

morality, is in its own nature civil rather than moral. But, apart from that, the simple combination in verse 17 of "the law" and "the prophets," the two great divisions of the Old Testament Scriptures, must convince every unprejudiced mind that the whole Old Testament economy is included in these terms. While, again, the words of verse 18, or of Luke xvi. 17, where the same sentiment is still more pointedly expressed, "It is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than for one tittle of the law to fail," so clearly demand a reference to all the parts of the law that, if this consideration is not felt, no argument could make it good. In this passage, therefore (the key passage, as we shall afterwards see, to the whole question of the relation of the Old covenant to the New), "The Law," including the Decalogue, the scattered moral precepts, the ceremonial and civil institutions, is considered as a whole.

The same lesson is taught us in Mat. xi. 13, "For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John."

It is true that, on different occasions, our Lord separated the moral precepts of the law from the rest of it as its most important part. In conversation with the rich young ruler, who asked what those commandments were by keeping which he would enter into life, "Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Mat. xix. 18, 19); and

when the lawyer, in reply to Christ's own question, "What is written in the law, how readest thou?" replied, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself," he was told that he had answered right (Luke x. 26-28). That such a separation should be made, when occasion called for it, was inevitable, for the distinction actually existed in the nature of things; and all that is maintained is, that there are other passages where Christ, when He speaks of His relation to the law, does not separate it into its parts—He takes it as a whole; the bearing which His work has on one part it has on all.

From the teaching of our Lord upon the point before us, let us turn to that of the Apostle of the Gentiles. Here also, it is to be at once admitted, not only that Paul, in his arguments with the Judaizers of his day, is frequently led to distinguish between the moral and the ceremonial precepts of the law, but that these arguments were mainly called forth by the importance which his opponents attached to the latter rather than the former. It was the ceremonial ordinances—it was the observance of "days, and weeks, and times, and years"—above all, it was the rite of circumcision—upon which his opponents dwelt as so essentially necessary to salvation. In meeting them, therefore, it was the temporary character of this part of the law that the Apostle was required to show; and, more especially if the Gospel recognised a distinction between the moral

and ceremonial law, it was imperatively necessary to bring that distinction out, and to take care that, in speaking of the temporary character of the one, language should not be used which might even seem to pass the same sentence on the other. Yet it is to be observed that St Paul, in dealing with these questions, draws no such distinction as we might expect to find. He takes up the law as one whole; and he proves, in many a passage, and by different illustrations, that, whatever the relation in which the faith of Christ stood to any one part of that law—a point to be afterwards considered—it stood in the same relation to all its parts. Thus, in the whole reasoning of his Epistle to the Galatians, where it was the efforts of those who would enforce circumcision upon the Gentile converts which he had especially to put down, there is no trace of a distinction drawn between the moral and ceremonial precepts of the law. There is a distinction between the idea of law in itself, and of “The Law” as given to Israel. But wherever “The Law” is spoken of, it is the whole law which is in the Apostle’s eye; or, if he thinks of any particular aspect of it, it is not of the ceremonial but the moral aspect. Thus he says, “Christ hath redeemed us”—that is, us Jews, as appears by the contrast of the Gentiles in the verse immediately following—“Christ hath redeemed *us* from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us” (Gal. iii. 13). And what is that curse? It is given in the 10th verse, “Cursed is every one that continueth not in *all things that are written in the book of the law to*

do them." Again, we read in the same chapter, "And this I say, that the covenant that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul" (Gal. iii. 17). What law is this? Surely the whole Mosaic law; or, at all events again, if one part of it must be thought of more than another, it must be the moral part, and even especially that Decalogue which, as we have already seen, was the central, the fundamental, portion of the Sinaitic covenant. Still more clearly does this appear from the 19th verse of the same chapter: "Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions." Into the full meaning of these words we do not inquire just now. Enough for us at present, that it is utterly impossible to refer them to the ceremonial aspect of the law. Either they mean the whole law, or they mean especially its moral precepts; for it was the latter, as we learn by the constant teaching of the Apostle elsewhere, which performed that function in regard to transgression that is here spoken of. Once more we read, "I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law" (Gal. v. 3)—that is, by adopting that rite, which was the seal of the whole dispensation of the law, he places himself within that dispensation considered as one whole. Very many passages to the same effect might be quoted, and the general result is that, when we speak of what the law was to Israel or of the relation in which we stand to it, we are not entitled to separate it into different parts. All its parts con-

stituted one whole, and that whole was designed for God's ancient people, and, at that time at least, for them alone.

2. Our second question, then, is, What was the purpose which it was intended to serve?

Before giving a direct answer to this question, it is above all things necessary to observe, that the law was not given to Israel that, by doing its works, they might establish a claim upon the favour of God—that it might be a covenant of life, a ground of justification. Nothing does more to confuse our whole notions, both of the Israelitish covenant in itself, and of our own relation to it, than the idea that it was what we would call a covenant of works. The most essential characteristic of Israel, even under the law, was that they were a redeemed people. In the beautiful and tender language of the Almighty himself, when He sent Moses to Pharaoh, they were "His son, His first-born." They had not chosen God, but He had chosen them (Deut. vii. 7). He, "the Lord their God," had brought them out of Egypt, "through a mighty hand and by a stretched-out arm" (Deut. v. 15). He had said, "I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God" (Exod. vi. 7). And all His subsequent dealings with them in the wilderness were, not to give them an opportunity of establishing a claim upon Him for reward, but for the sake of humbling them and proving them—for the sake of teaching them that it was He who "gave them power to get wealth, that

He might establish his covenant which He swore unto their fathers" (Deut. viii. 2, 18). This idea of redemption, accordingly, was the fundamental idea of Israel's position. It was placed at the head of the Ten Commandments (Exod. xx. 2). It was again and again repeated in connection with many of the other precepts of the law (Lev. xix. 33, 34; Deut. xiii. 5, xv. 15). It was the spring of their Sabbath service (Deut. v. 15), and of all those joyful festivals in which they celebrated their deliverance from the house of bondage, and the continual goodness of God in giving them the various harvests of their fruitful land (Deut. xvi. 12, xxiv. 22). You may say, This is not all that we mean by redemption; and you say true. But it would be a mistake, on the other hand, to think that this redemption was either only outward or only national. Spiritual, universal ideas were at the root of it—spiritual ideas, for the people had been taught that God was a Spirit; and to be further taught that this God was their God was in itself something spiritual—universal ideas, for this redemption with its blessings was not confined to them. The stranger, we have seen, shared in great measure, and might, by being circumcised, share all the national blessings of the chosen people; and there is not one word, in any part of the Almighty's revelation to Israel, which implies that, even when uncircumcised, he might not be the friend of God. We misapprehend, then, Israel's position under the law if we imagine that that law's only, or even its main, object was to gender a spirit

of bondage, or to demand works of one kind or another, on condition of blessing. It did gender such a spirit, because the people did not apprehend its right idea. It was designed, in the view of this, to gender it, that they might be led to long for something better. It also demanded works as the fulfilling, on the people's side, of the condition upon which its blessings were to be continued. But it sprang from neither of these considerations as its main principle. What we understand by the word legalism was not the fundamental idea even of the law. Free electing mercy, unconditioned grace, was at the bottom of it. The people when they received it were already a redeemed people. The law was to be filled out with the idea of redemption; and where that idea exists, even in part, we may say that there there is at least so far the spirit of the Lord, and "where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." Hence, accordingly, the law is always spoken of as given to be Israel's privilege, and not its burden—as the gift of God, as the token of the love wherewith He loved them (Deut. iv. 35, 36). Hence, also, nothing can be more erroneous than the ideas so commonly entertained of the severity, the gloom, the darkness of the Mosaic dispensation. That it became a yoke, and how it became a yoke, we shall immediately see. But its idea was the very opposite. "Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency" (Deut. xxxiii. 29); "Blessed is the people that know

the joyful sound; they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of Thy countenance" (Ps. lxxxix. 15)—such passages express to us the true idea of the Hebrew commonwealth. Its temporal mercies—corn and wine and oil, rest under its vines and fig-trees; its spiritual privileges, its sabbaths, its high solemnities, its pilgrim bands coming up three times a-year to Jerusalem with such feelings of gladness in their hearts, and such songs of gladness on their lips, that dry and thirsty valleys seemed filled to them with streams of water; its psalms of praise, kindled into loftiest poetry by glorious memories of the past and bright hopes of the future; all its institutions were a nation's festival—a nation's triumph in its heavenly King. We do God, we do Israel, injustice when we talk of the harshness of the legal economy, as if that were its leading characteristic, when we think of the people toiling to acquire life with the groans, the tears, the disappointments of a legal spirit. God was a Father to His son, a Bridegroom with all the love of a time of espousals to His bride.

What, then, was the object of the law?

(1.) *It was to restrain sin.* It was to be a check upon the evil desires and inclinations of the people. Without entering into any lengthened argument upon the point, this purpose of the law would seem to be indicated, along with another to be soon noticed, in Gal. iii. 19, "It was added because of transgressions." It is a question, indeed, whether we are to understand these words as meaning that the purpose

of the law was to restrain the outbreaks of sin, or to multiply sins, to provoke the evil of the human heart so that that evil should appear, and become more fully known than it would otherwise have been. This latter purpose of the law is unquestionably expressed in many passages: "Nay, I had not known sin but by the law; for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet" (Rom. vii. 7); "Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful" (Rom. vii. 13); "Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound" (Rom. v. 20); "By the law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom. iii. 20). But it may well be doubted whether, when words are expressly used by the Apostle which are capable of a twofold application—of embodying with equal propriety different shades of thought—commentators are entitled to limit them, as they so generally do, to one of these. It is more in harmony with the principles of true interpretation to allow them to bear all their meaning, unless one part of it is necessarily excluded by the context. Thus, in the passage before us, we are not to confine ourselves to one of the two ideas which the words have been taken to express; we are to include them both. Looked at in this light, they teach us that one great purpose of the law was to be a check upon the evil desires and inclinations of Israel. Other passages of Scripture confirm this view. More particularly,

it was thus that our Lord himself explained the law's toleration of divorce : " Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, suffered you to put away your wives " (Mat. xix. 8). It was not to encourage, it was to limit and restrain, divorce that the law affecting it was given. The condition of the people at the time was such, that to have set before them the high principles of Christian marriage would have been more than they would have been able to comprehend. Divorce, therefore, to a certain extent was tolerated, but it was fenced round with regulations which exercised a check upon the loose principles on the subject that would otherwise have prevailed. The same observation applies to the toleration of polygamy. It was not entirely prohibited, because, such were the feelings of the people upon the point, that they could not have understood the prohibition, and a law too high for them would have been equivalent to none. The practice would have continued to be indulged in without restraint. Polygamy, therefore, was to a certain extent allowed ; but, again, the allowance was coupled with so many conditions, that it was as much as possible discouraged, and an important step was taken in preparing for the time when it should be wholly done away. What is known as the *lex talionis* was marked by a similar character, and was made a part of the Mosaic legislation with a similar object. In thinking of that law, men are often at a loss to comprehend how it should have been appointed by the Almighty in the Old Testament when it is forbidden in the New.

But the explanation is a simple one. It was a law, not to countenance, but to condemn, revenge—to limit and restrain, by submitting it to judicial administration, what would otherwise have been the insatiable appetite for personal retaliation. The same remarks apply to the toleration of slavery, to the law of the avenger of blood, and to the institution of cities of refuge for him who had accidentally been the means of another's death. Whenever, in short, we are startled by what appears a lower code of morals in Israel than that by which the Christian Church is to be guided, we have only to look at the matter for a moment in order to see that that lower code was not given either as the highest or as a permanent rule. It was given because it was the best that men could bear. It was given to check evil which, but for it, would have been rampant, and to suggest the thought of something better. That better was not excluded by the law. It was not required that an eye should always be taken for an eye, or a tooth for a tooth. If the injured person freely forgave, he threw himself only the more entirely by doing so into the spirit of the Mosaic institution; he reached more thoroughly the object of the law, which was to modify and gradually root out the spirit of vengeance altogether.

These illustrations may help us to understand the purpose of the whole Mosaic law. By its commandments graven upon tables of stone, by its other moral precepts, by its civil and ceremonial injunctions, it was a barrier against sin at a time when

Israel was not yet ready for a dispensation of the Spirit.

(2.) The law was designed not only to restrain evil, but to *protect and shadow forth truths higher than those to which it gave direct expression*. “Thou shalt not kill,” “Thou shalt not commit adultery,” “Thou shalt not steal,” were commandments which, though in word they referred only to the outward act, yet pointed, by their very form, at that evil in the heart from which the outward act proceeded. Although in the letter, therefore, they forbid only the special sins which are mentioned in them, it is not to be forgotten that they flow from that higher source expressed in another precept of the law, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Lev. xix. 18); and that they thus constitute a protecting shell for a principle which the people were unable to value and apply. The same thing may be said of those points of divorce, polygamy, the *lex talionis*, and the law of the avenger of blood which have been spoken of. It is not only, however, in the moral precepts of the law that we trace this great principle. We see it in all its institutions. Take, for example, that of the priesthood. It was not to substitute a particular caste for a universal priesthood that Aaron and his sons were formally set apart to the priestly office. It was to preserve in a concrete form—in a form which should be visible, tangible, capable of being appreciated by the lowest mind in Israel—an idea which even the law itself attached to all the members of the congregation. Or look at the law of

tithes. The meaning of that law was not that one-tenth of all the produce of the soil belonged to God, and nine-tenths to the possessor of the land. The whole land, the whole produce of the land, was God's (Lev. xxv. 23); and the giving of a tithe to Him was designed to preserve that idea at a time when otherwise it might have been wholly lost. In like manner, God's dwelling first in the tabernacle and then in the temple did not imply that those spots alone were holy. The whole land was holy (Lev. xxv. 23); God was everywhere (2 Chron. ii. 6); He might be found on every hill and in every valley. But that high spiritual conviction was difficult to retain, and therefore God's presence in the midst of His people received a marked expression by the choice of one spot as His peculiar abode. So, also, the vessels and garments of the temple were in a certain sense specially holy, and the high priest bore upon his forehead a plate of gold inscribed with the words, "Holiness to the Lord." But this idea of holiness was not confined to either. The whole congregation was holy (Exod. xix. 6); and when the prophet Zechariah looks forward to the better time to come, he describes it, amidst other figures, by the words, "In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, Holiness unto the Lord; and every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness unto the Lord of hosts" (Zech. xiv. 20, 21). That golden age was not yet come in the days of the theocracy; but to protect the idea of a universal holiness—of a holiness extending even to the meanest vessels of

the house—the idea of holiness was, for a season, more especially connected with certain vessels and with certain persons.

Other illustrations might be given, but enough has been said to show that one great object of the law was to protect the higher truths of God's revelation at a time when, but for that protection, they might have perished.

Thus, too, it was that the law was a means of positive religious instruction for Israel, not only of a high kind, but of a kind more deeply interesting, and more full of meaning, than it is easy for us to conceive. We are not accustomed to that symbolism which pervaded it so largely, yet those who have made Christian symbolism to any extent a study can speak of the singular charms which it possesses for them. As, therefore, the Israelite of old moved amidst those expressive symbols which met him at every step and in every rite, protecting and shadowing forth the highest truths which God has revealed to man, he possessed in them a system of spiritual instruction not only wonderfully adapted to his Eastern mind, and his stage in the history of the race, but spurring him on to penetrate the meaning of his symbols, both by the pleasure of the exertion and the profit of the reward.

(3.) *The law was designed to awaken a longing for redemption, and thus to prepare the way for Christ and His Gospel.* It did this both outwardly and inwardly. Outwardly, for at every step the member of the theocracy was hemmed in by a multitude of

regulations which could not fail in time to become burdensome, both to those in whom their end was answered, who were reaching on to the spirit of what was thus enforced in the letter, and to those who, not apprehending their spirit, sinking into worldliness, would begin to regard them only as interminable and vexatious rules. With still greater power would this be produced inwardly. When the moral parts of the law were brought home to the conscience and heart, they generated a spirit of bondage, a law work, which is still known—often in anguish and in tears—by those who pass through deep convictions of sin to the peace which Jesus gives. What it was we see in St Paul's description of his own case. He was alive without the law once, but, when the commandment came, sin revived, and he died. O wretched man that he was! who could deliver him from the body of that death? This was not an incidental effect of the law. It was intended to be produced, and the more the further the human race advanced and became acquainted with deeper views of other parts of divine truth. "The law," the Apostle tells us in Gal. iii. 19, "was added because of transgressions;" and this is the meaning, additional to that already spoken of, which is included in these words. The law was designed to multiply sins, to provoke the evil of the human heart, so that that evil should appear and become more fully known. It was a painful discipline. To be brought to know sin in all its reality, and yet to see redemption—perhaps only in shadow,

certainly not in fulness—how must the iron have entered into the soul! We are apt sometimes to think that some of the Psalms of David and of the lamentations of the prophets betray exaggerated feeling as to sin. Let us place ourselves in the position of these holy men, and we shall rather wonder that, at other times, they could speak of having been able to put off their sackcloth and of being girded with gladness. It was God's plan that they should thus suffer. He was teaching the world, ever prone to depend on law, what law could do and what it could not do for it. He was teaching men that grace must be the only spring of life and joy. He was bringing about that blessed revolution of thought which was, with the Christian dispensation, to imprint upon our minds in such a manner that it can never again be let go, the great truth, that in an appropriation of God's free love alone are peace and fruitfulness of holy living to be found. True, He had shadowed this all along; but with the changes and progress of the world there came a need for more inward dealing with men. The law was equal to the task. It taught the bondage of sin, and deepened a longing for redemption.

Such, then, was the object of the law, and of the legal economy. Let us note very briefly two points more in connection with it, and we shall then at once see the complete nature of its position in God's dealings with men under the Old Testament.

1. Let us simply call to mind—it is unnecessary to dwell on it—that *the earlier line of revelation for-*

merly spoken of was not interrupted during the legal economy. That economy was not a falling back rather than an advance. Less spiritual principles than those previously revealed were not the only ones made known under it. The law, besides having its more specific regulations, spoke on all those points of the earliest and latest revelation of the Old Testament which were mentioned before. We have seen how it spoke. God, in His being and attributes, is still described in it as spiritual, caring for all, holy, just, true, good, merciful, and loving. Sin is described by so many terms, looked at in so many aspects, that an ethical idea of it could not fail to be engraven on the Hebrew mind. Redemption was the fundamental idea of the law. The great duties of the law are expressed in the Pentateuch in the very same words as those employed by the Saviour when He delivered the two commandments upon which "hang all the law and the prophets." And, lastly, we have the testimony of our Lord himself that the law was not without its hints on immortality. The presence of these truths, so taught, must have been a powerful aid to the Israelite as he tried to penetrate the meaning of the symbols in which they were again enwrapped. In short, God seems to have dealt with Israel as a parent would deal, not with a child whom he was subjecting to moral training for the first time, but as he would deal with a son who had once been trained, but who, betrayed by the temptations of the world, had forgotten the lessons of his infancy.

The two processes of education would not be exactly the same. In the latter case, along with elementary teaching, higher teaching would also be presented. The parent would hope that the first instructions were not wholly forgotten. Although, therefore, he might feel it necessary to repeat them, he would accompany the repetition with a fuller statement of principles than would have been appropriate in the first case. He would remember that he was dealing with one grown up, and would calculate on more than a child's powers of apprehension, and on the recollections of an early discipline not completely obliterated. It is true, indeed, that the great ideas thus present were not the prominent ideas of the law. Why? Because, and this is the second remark to be made,

2. *The spiritual condition of the people did not permit it.* Israel, as a people, was not able to apprehend and preserve these truths. At the beginning of the captivity, in all probability, they were. Abraham had apprehended them, and had walked with God. That patriarch needed no discipline of formal law. Isaac and Jacob had also apprehended them; and when the latter went down into Egypt with threescore and ten persons, we cannot doubt that his own pious instructions would be enough to preserve them in the little circle of his family. The time of patriarchal simplicity had not yet passed away, and Jacob's household would be like a child upon its parent's knee. Rather more than two centuries afterwards, things were changed. A great

nation had sprung from the small root which had been transplanted from Canaan into the fruitful soil of Goshen. That nation, however, had grown up by the side of one mightier, more civilised, more enlightened than itself, and, in owning the powerful influence, had submitted at the same time to the degrading tastes, to the corrupting religious ideas, which then marked the valley of the Nile. It had also been subjected to the most oppressive slavery, and the minds of the people had been crushed beneath the yoke. We know, indeed, but little of the religious views and feelings of the people at this moment of their history ; but many events which afterwards occurred—their longings after the flesh-pots of Egypt ; their worship of the golden calf, one of the gods of Egypt, at the very foot of Sinai ; and that tendency to idolatry which, for centuries, drew them ever and again away from the service of Him who had made Himself known to them by so many wonders to the service of heathen divinities of the lowest type ;—these things are enough to leave no doubt in our minds that the simplicity of their infant state was gone ; that they must have been marked by all the waywardness of a wild and reckless youth.

This condition of the people determined the dealings of the Almighty with them. Had it been possible for them, had it been possible for the race of which they were part, to go on in a calm and undisturbed progress, we may believe that there would have been no dispensation of the law. But it was not possible, and the law came in.

It now remains for us only, founding on the observations which have been made, to mark the relation of this second line of thought which we find in the Old Testament to what was spoken of as the first. With that first you will observe that the second entirely harmonised. It did not supersede it. It was introduced to guard it, to protect it, to shut men up to it. If an imperfect comparison may be allowed, in order to illustrate the relation of the two to one another, it may be said that the main revelation of God's will might be likened to a stream coming down from the mountains, and, soon after it has reached their base, spreading itself out into a broad and placid lake. That lake is the patriarchal dispensation. But the waters must be set free, and they have yet many hundred miles to run before they reach the ocean. The country, however, through which they have to pass is wild and rough. Let loose over it, they will be swallowed up in many a morass. Therefore, they must be enclosed within banks. These banks are the economy of the law. Between them, ever widening as they flow, the waters run, till, as they draw near the sea, it passes upwards in a great frith to meet them; and then, their course completed, they mingle with it, and are lost in that ocean of the Christian dispensation, which is unfathomable and without a bound.

LECTURE III.

THE RELATION OF CHRISTIANITY TO THE OLD TESTAMENT.

WE proceed to the third point proposed for our consideration.

III.

The relation in which Christ and Christianity stand to the two points which have come under our notice.

After what has been said, first, with regard to the great line of revelation running through the whole of the Old Testament, and, secondly, with regard to the special purpose of the Sinaitic covenant and the Jewish economy, we ought to have little difficulty in forming clear ideas upon the important and interesting topic now before us. The Lord Jesus Christ was the great end of the whole revelation of God. It was to prepare His way that all the previous history of the world had been directed, and all earlier revelations given. When He came, the final revelation of the Almighty's will was bestowed on man. As we are taught in the opening of the

Epistle to the Hebrews, "God, who in sundry portions and in divers manners spake in days past unto the fathers in the prophets, hath, in the end of these days, spoken unto us in a Son" (Heb. i. 1); "To Him give all the prophets witness" (Acts x. 43). Through all the past generations of the world, from the moment when the voice of prophecy was first heard, in the language of God himself, in the garden of Eden, it was of His salvation that "the prophets inquired and searched diligently, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow" (1 Peter i. 10, 11). With gradually increasing clearness the Saviour to come was revealed to men; and the analogy of all God's dealings compels us to believe that the measure of light granted would be determined by man's capacity to receive it. At last the "fulness of the time" (Gal. iv. 4) arrived; a moment fixed, indeed, in the eternal counsels of the Father, but not arbitrarily fixed—fixed with a reference to that stage which the world in its course of training would then have reached, by the consideration of that spiritual condition to which it would then have been brought. That great moment, so fixed, arrived, and "God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Gal. iv. 4, 5). Then Christianity, the "kingdom of God," or the "kingdom of heaven," as it is often called in

Scripture, was established in the world. The darkness was past; the shadows not only of the night but of the morning twilight fled away; the fulness of God's spiritual blessings was offered to all; and all were invited and commanded to walk in the light of the Sun of righteousness, and in the life of love, of freedom, and of hope, to which we are called in Him.

1. In the first place, Christ connected Himself with the past leadings of God—with the revelation of His will as contained in the Old Testament, and with the marvellous people whose history is there presented to us. That the mission of the Redeemer had a reference also to the wants of the heathen—that there is a sense in which He was the “desire of all nations” (Haggai ii. 7), and not of the Jews only—is true. All men needed Him, and He came to be the Saviour of all. Besides which, the apostle Paul, in the fourth chapter of his Epistle to the Galatians, shows us that there is an aspect under which the heathen religions may be classed along with the divinely-given economy of Israel. Both the one and the other are included under the words, “the elements of the world” (Gal. iv. 3).*

It is important for us to notice this. It enlarges our conceptions of Him who was always the God of the Gentiles as well as of the Jews—who regarded the former not less than the latter as His children, though not yet redeemed—and who would lead them also onward by a discipline of their own to one who

* Comp. verse 9, and notice the word “again” in that verse.

was to be a light to lighten the Gentiles, as well as the glory of His people Israel. But while all this is to be thankfully admitted, it is undeniable that our Lord spoke of Himself as standing in a special relation to the Jews, and to the revelation of the Old Testament. To the Gentile half of the world His coming was a new thing in a sense in which it was not a new thing to Israel. "Salvation," He himself said, "is of the Jews" (John iv. 22). He was the Messiah promised to the fathers; for the title, "Son of David," was the known title of the great Deliverer. He declared that "Abraham rejoiced to see His day; and he saw it, and was glad" (John viii. 56). He led His hearers to infer that it was He of whom David spoke as his Lord (Mat. xxii. 42-45). And, in conversation with the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, "beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Luke xxiv. 27). The same lesson is taught us by St Paul; for though, in the passage which has been quoted from the Epistle to the Galatians, he recognises one point in which Judaism and heathenism met in their preparation for the Saviour, he elsewhere speaks constantly of the Messiah as standing in the same special relation to Judaism which is spoken of by our Lord. Thus, in Rom. i. 3, the Redeemer is "Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh." In Rom. i. 2, the Gospel of God, of which he is himself appointed an apostle, is the Gospel which "God had promised afore

by His prophets in the holy Scriptures." In 2 Tim. ii. 8, Jesus Christ is "the seed of David." In Rom. ix. 5 we are told that of the Jews "according to the flesh Christ came." And, to quote only one passage more, in Gal. iii. 13, 14, the redemption of the Jews from the curse of the law is made the preliminary condition of the coming of the blessing of Abraham upon the Gentiles, that all, whether Jews or Gentiles, might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

2. Since, then, our Lord thus placed Himself and the faith which He proclaimed in a special relation to the Old Testament, we have now to inquire what that relation was. And, as we have already seen that there is a double line of thought running through the earlier revelation of God, it will be necessary to ask in what relation Christ and Christianity stand to each of the two lines.

(1.) With regard to what has been spoken of as the specially Gospel revelation of the Old Testament—that line of revelation which begins with the first promise made to Adam, which is given in a fuller form to Abraham and the patriarchs, which goes side by side with the special arrangements of the Mosaic economy, and which is still more fully unfolded in the communications of the Almighty with the later prophets—Christianity simply takes that revelation up as a revelation in substance identical with itself, although not so complete. Thus, when God is spoken of in the New Testament, it is always with the pre-supposition that He is already known, and

that He is the same great Being who had all along revealed Himself to man. The object of the New Testament is not to tell us about God as if men had had no means of becoming acquainted with Him before. It is not to describe attributes of His character of which no previous revelation had been given to the world. It takes for granted that what He is had been already manifested. It expresses indeed, with a clearness and force greater than we find in the Old Testament, His glorious attributes; it clears away the false ideas with which a degenerate Judaism had incrustated the pure elements of earlier revelation; but it does not announce anything with regard either to what God is in Himself, or in His relation to man, which can be called absolutely new. Even the words of our Lord to the woman of Samaria, "God is a spirit; and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth," express nothing essentially different from what we have already found running through the whole Old Testament, where God is spoken of not only as the God who alone has in Himself essential existence (Exod. iii. 14), and as the living God (Deut. v. 20; Isa. xxxvii. 17), of whom no image may be made (Exod. xx. 4; Deut. iv. 15), qualities of being which imply spirituality, but where He is expressly described as the "God of the spirits of all flesh" (Numb. xvi. 22, xxvii. 16). The same remark is applicable to the moral attributes of His character; even the very testimony of the beloved disciple that "God is love" (1 John iv. 8) being nothing more than the collect-

ing together into one burning point the scattered rays which meet us in the law and in the prophets (Deut. xxxii. 10 ; Jer. xxxi. 3 ; Ezek. xvi. 8 ; Hosea xi. 1, 4). It is needless, however, to enlarge on this, as doing so would imply a repetition of many of those texts which have been already quoted. Enough, therefore, only to notice further in connection with the truth before us that, in the opening of the Epistle to the Hebrews, stress is evidently laid by the writer on the fact that the *same* God who spoke to the fathers in the prophets speaks to us in His Son.

It is not only, however, the Old Testament idea of God that is thus taken up in the New Testament and redrawn for us in lines which, although clearer and brighter, are not substantially different ; the same remark is applicable to the idea of sin, of reconciliation to God through faith in the promised seed, of that obedient and holy life to which the redeemed are called, of that hope of a heavenly city which they are permitted to entertain. The essential identity of the teaching of the two great divisions of the Bible upon these points has already been considered by us, and it is needless to travel over the ground again. Not that the revelation of the Old Testament is coextensive with that of the New ; not that, along with their essential identity, there is not also a difference ; but it is a difference of degree, not one of kind. The light is the same light, although in the one it is only breaking in the sky, while in the other it shines in splendour. The tree is the same tree, the sap which nourishes it the

same sap, although at the one stage we behold only the buds bursting, the leaves expanding, the flowers opening—while in the other the ripe fruits hang on every bough.

We have seen what this identity is in several particulars, let us notice it only in two more before passing on. Perhaps if there be any part of our Lord's teaching which might be imagined to be more peculiar to the New Testament than another, it would be the seven Beatitudes with which the Sermon on the Mount begins. Yet every one of these Beatitudes is to be found in the Old Testament, in one or two cases more indeed in spirit than in words, in others in the very words which the Saviour employs. If our Lord says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mat. v. 3), Isaiah had proclaimed, "Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones" (lvii. 15). If our Lord pronounces the mourners blessed, for they shall be comforted (Mat. v. 4), the same prophet had spoken of the Redeemer as One who was "to comfort all that mourn" (Isa. lxi. 3). If our Lord promises to the meek the inheritance of the earth (Mat. v. 5), David had long before exclaimed, "But the meek shall inherit the earth" (Psalm xxxvii. 11),* and so throughout them all.

* Comp. Stier, 'The Words of the Lord Jesus,' Clark's translation, i. 132.

The teaching is new in its fulness, in its emphasis, in the manner in which it concentrates the great truths of God's earlier revelation; but its substantial identity with that revelation cannot be mistaken.

The second case of identity to which reference may be made is afforded by the answer of Christ to the Pharisees when tempted by them on the question of divorce: "Have ye not read that He which made them at the beginning made them male and female?" and again, when farther asked why, then, Moses had allowed divorce? "From the beginning it was not so" (Mat. xix. 3-8). Upon the important question He gives no law absolutely new. He goes back to God's original constitution—a constitution which had existed from the beginning, which was always the true constitution of married life, although, for particular reasons, departure from it had been permitted for a time.* The principle is evidently

* A strict attention to the words of the Saviour in this important passage, and to the original language of the Mosaic law, throws much light upon the whole relation of the latter to the primal constitution of God. Our Lord does not say in the 8th verse Moses commanded, but Moses "suffered you to put away your wives;" and when we turn to Deut. xxiv. 1-4, this, and not command, as in the English version, is the true translation of the passage. The apodosis ought to begin, not in the 1st verse with the rendering, "*then let him write,*" &c., but in the 4th verse, "*her former husband,*" &c. The true translation is thus given by Michaelis: "If a man has taken a woman to wife and she please him not, because he findeth a defect in her, *and he write her a bill of divorce,* and give it into her hand, and dismiss her from his house, *and she actually leave his house, and marry another husband,* &c., her first husband who had put her away may not take her again to wife," &c.—'Commentaries on

one which applies to many other cases besides that submitted at the moment to our Lord, and shows us that Christ recognised in the Almighty's arrangements from the first, not principles for which He would substitute new ones, but the principles of eternal truth.

Thus, then, it appears that, in one most important aspect, Christianity is substantially the same revelation of the will of God which had been given from the beginning. The position of the Church of God in the New Testament is not essentially different from her position in the Old. She sees, indeed, now in fulness what she then beheld in shadows. She enjoys all the unspeakable advantages of knowing the Christ who has come, whereas formerly she could only anticipate His coming. But the truths by which she lives, the privileges which are offered to her, the duties which are demanded of her, have not changed. Our Lord simply adopts that part of the revelation of God. He gathers, indeed, its different parts together, clears what was dark, and completes what was incomplete ; He places the parts in their right relation to each other ; He exhibits them all not in word only but in Himself ; He gives a power to His people to appropriate and carry them out which was not previously given ; but the truths themselves are essentially the same. Hence, accordingly, it is that in so much of the Old Testament we find language than which none is better

the Laws of Moses,' ii. p. 128. Divorce was not enjoined, it was only permitted for a time.

adapted to the expression of our Christian convictions, feelings, affections, and aspirations. It is not that we put into these words a meaning which does not belong to them. The Christian meaning is their own. They were the words of men who, from the mountain-tops, beheld the Sun of righteousness before He had risen on the horizon of those dwelling in the valleys below. It is true that these utterances are mingled with many others which are of a kind inconsistent either with our Christian privileges or our Christian duties. The same David who at one moment breathes the most triumphant joy, is at another moment in all the darkness of despair; he who, in one passage, celebrates the beauty of meekness in words adopted by the Saviour himself, in another breathes a spirit of vengeance towards his enemies at variance with the most essential requirements of the Gospel (1 Kings ii. 6). But why was this? Because even David caught only at times a full vision of the truths now made known in all their clearness to us. Yet, because at times he and the prophets who succeeded him did catch that vision, and, when they did so, spoke out in the fulness of their hearts, has the Church of Christ in every age found, in their words, words which express for her all the brightness of her faith, and the very loftiest emotions with which she stands in grace.

(2.) Let us pass to the relation in which Christianity stands to what has been spoken of as the second line of thought in the Old Testament, to the

Mosaic dispensation, to the particular theocracy of Israel. We have already seen what the purpose of this dispensation was—that it was not so much directly to express the highest truth as to shadow it forth, to be a protection to it in a degenerate time. The relation of Christianity to it, therefore, was different from its relation to the first and highest line of thought. The latter it merely took up and brought out in perfect brightness. The former it fulfilled—that is, it penetrated to the ideas which lay at the bottom of the economy; it unfolded these ideas; it extracted the kernel, and, in doing so, broke the shell; it ripened the fruit, and, while it did so, the husk of the bud and of the blossom necessarily fell away. Let us first mark the teaching of the Saviour himself upon this point.

The essence of that teaching, as already indicated, is to be found in the words of Mat. v. 17, “Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.” The meaning of the word “fulfil” here is all-important. It is not to confirm, as if the Saviour had said, I am come to establish the law and the prophets. That is a sense in which neither the word itself nor its derivatives are ever used. It is to fill up, to fill out, to catch the true ideal, and to bring that ideal to perfection—to expand to all their breadth and completeness the principles which lay at the bottom of what the law and the prophets said. That was the great moral work which our Lord was to do in reference to the law—the great scheme of

practical righteousness, of His kingdom as a practical kingdom, which He was to set before the eyes of men. It is often, indeed, maintained that, in the illustrations which follow these remarkable words, our Lord shows that He had only the ideas of a degenerate Israel in view—that He only meant to present the righteousness of His kingdom in contrast with that outward and formal and hypocritical righteousness which was then, in the persons of the scribes and Pharisees, esteemed the true righteousness of the law. There is a certain measure of truth in this; “For I say unto you,” is His language, immediately before giving His illustrations, “that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven” (v. 20). Against that Pharisæic righteousness, therefore, He certainly spoke, showing how far short it fell of the righteousness of the law. The Pharisee had ceased to view the sixth commandment of the Decalogue as a restraint upon the violence of human passion—as implying, therefore, in its principle more than it expressed in words; and had so interpreted it that, if he did not actually kill, he held himself free from a breach of the commandment, whatever thoughts of vengeance he might nourish in his heart, or whatever smaller deeds of vengeance he might do. Our Lord would correct that abuse, and would show how much more was implied in the commandment. The third and seventh commandments had in like manner been abused, and the abuse was in like manner to be exposed. It

is true, then, that the object mentioned was one which the Saviour had in view, but it was not the only object. The words of the 17th verse should of themselves be conclusive upon the point. Why does He not say that He is come to clear and confirm the law, if that be all His meaning? Yet He says that He is to fulfil it; and by the law His hearers must at once have understood Him to mean, not the law as misinterpreted by Pharisees, but the law as originally given by the Almighty. Again, some of the illustrations which He employs make this still clearer. Thus, at verse 38, He quotes the *lex talionis* exactly as it was given in the Old Testament—“Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.” No Pharisaic commentary is added as at verses 21 and 43. The law is given exactly as it had been enacted in the theocracy. It is probably true that this law also had been abused, and that, originally intended as a law to be enforced only by the magistrate, and after the coolness of judicial investigation, it had been held to justify both feelings and acts of private revenge. But if the object of the Saviour had been to correct that alone, it is not conceivable that He should not have used some expression which would have explained His meaning, which would have shown us that, when we were injured, our proper course was to seek judicial redress. He does not so. He contrasts with that law, carried out in any circumstances, what was to be the conduct of His followers. He sets before them another and a higher principle of

action altogether. Their true spirit is in no way to injure those who injure them. They are to "resist not evil;" but "whosoever shall smite them on the right cheek, they are to turn to him the other also." It may indeed be said that this is a strange doctrine, and one that, acted on, would lead to the overthrow of all social order. But we are not concerned at present with that question. It does not concern us either to ask what place the seeking of redress for injuries at the hands of those constituted authorities which are the ordinance of God is to hold in the practical conduct of the Christian, or to see that the principle of the *lex talionis* may be said to be the foundation of all administration of justice in this world. Some observations to be made afterwards may be found capable of application to that subject.* Our present business is an honest interpretation of the Word of God; and it can only, therefore, be repeated, that what our Lord opposes to the abuses of the Pharisees is not application to the civil magistrate, but that it is, as plainly as language can express it, "Whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also." How, then, can it be maintained by any one, with even the slightest plausibility, that these precepts of the Mosaic law, taken as they stand, set forth only the same rules as those which the Redeemer of the world lays down. We have but to place the two

* Comp. p. 130.

things in juxtaposition to see how wide is the difference between them:—

Mosaic Law in the Letter.

Sermon on the Mount.

Thou shalt not kill.

Whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca! shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool! shall be in danger of hell fire.

Thou shalt not commit adultery.

Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.

An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.

Resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.

Not that our Lord means, in any of these examples, to say, that even the spirit which He enjoins was not the spirit of the Mosaic law, was not pointed at in the very precepts with which He contrasts His own higher rule. It was pointed at. It was because it was pointed at that the precept was given. But it was not fully expressed—it was limited by the actual condition of the Jews; and now Christ came to break through these limits, to draw out what had always been the principle of the law, to unfold that principle, that it, and not the letter of the old commandment, might be the guiding rule of His disciples. Thus He “fulfilled the law,” and in the doing so, it

is evident that the limited precept must fall away, in order that the eternal truth may stand forth in all its clearness. We may still further see the force of what has been said when we remember that our Lord, as He himself declares, was to "fulfil" not only the law but the prophets. We cannot understand the word in one sense with reference to the law and in another sense with reference to the prophets. But to *confirm* the prophecies—surely that was not the deep purpose of Christ's coming. He came so to fulfil them that His people shall live no longer by them, but in the fulness of that blessing of which they spoke. And, in like manner, He so fulfilled the law that His people shall live, not according to the glimpses which it afforded of God's perfect law, but according to that law itself, in all the comprehensiveness, the depth, and the spirituality of its meaning. This also, it will be at once seen, was not to be, strictly speaking, a giver of new laws—it was to be an unfolders of old ones.

From the teaching of our Lord let us pass to that of His apostles, and especially to that of St Paul, who has unfolded this point to us with peculiar clearness and fulness. Out of the many passages which might be quoted, it will be enough to select four. The first is in the third chapter of Galatians, where, after having shown in the earlier part of the chapter that the promise given to Abraham was the great Gospel promise, and that they only who are partakers of Abraham's faith are partakers of his blessing, the writer is arrested at the 19th verse

by the thought that this doctrine of his may make the whole economy of the law appear without a meaning. "Wherefore then," he asks, "serveth the law?" He immediately answers the question, "It was added* because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made"—*i. e.*, until Christ should come. No language could well express more clearly that, when Christ did come, the law, in the form in which the Apostle had been speaking of it, should pass away. Again, at the 23d verse, he says, "But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed,"—words which imply as distinctly as the previous ones that, now when faith had come, this period of ward under the dominion of the law was at an end. But even this is not all, for the Apostle adds immediately, in the 24th and 25th verses, "Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But, after faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster." It is unnecessary to occupy time with inquiring into the nature of the figure here employed—which is, properly speaking, not so much that of a schoolmaster as that of one who was intrusted with the whole guardianship of the child. Whatever the guardianship, that guardianship was over for those who were no longer children, but SONS of God.† The time of

* Προστέθη. comp. Rom. v. 20, παρεισήλθεν.

† The force of the Apostle's argument is very much marred in the English version by the manner in which the 26th verse is

their childhood was past—they had grown up, and they were free.

The second passage which we may examine is in the fourth chapter of this epistle, from the 1st to the 7th verse, where the time of the law—the time of “the elements of the world,” in which the Jewish dispensation is included—is compared to the time of childhood, when the heir, because he is a child, “differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; but is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father.” That time is the coming of Christ. Then, receiving the adoption of a son, passing out of childhood into sonship, the tutors and governors are no more needed, and, instead of them, he receives the Spirit of God’s Son into his heart, crying, *Abba, Father*.

A third passage worthy of our notice is in the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, iii. 7-11. The ministration of the spirit, that of which (verse 6) Paul himself was made a minister, is contrasted with what he calls “the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones.” It is impossible to doubt that he is here speaking of the whole Jewish dispensation, and especially of that Decalogue which was its central and most important part. He says of it that it was glorious, glorious in many respects, upon which it is unnecessary to dwell. He compares it to the glory which lightened the countenance of the

rendered—“For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.” The rendering ought to be, “Ye are all the sons of God.” A special emphasis belongs to the word “sons;” comp. iv. 1, 5.

great lawgiver of Israel when he came forth from speaking with God; but, like that glory, it was to pass away: while, in the 11th verse, the glory of the ministration of the Gospel is compared with it as a glory that "remaineth."

The fourth and last passage to be spoken of is in Ephes. ii. 14, 15: "For He is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances (*τὸν νόμον τῶν ἐντολῶν ἐν δόγμασι καταργήσας*); for to make in Himself of twain one new man, so making peace." It is impossible to enter into a minute analysis of this important passage, or to discuss the various meanings which have been assigned to it. Nor does it seem to affect the sense whether we connect the words "in ordinances" with the "law of commandments" or with "having abolished." In the former case, when we read "the law of commandments in ordinances," expression is given to that special aspect of the law of which the Apostle is speaking. It is not the law itself, the law in its substance, which Christ has abolished, made weak, made void; it is the law in its decretal, in its limited and outward form—the law "in ordinances." In the latter case, when we read "having abolished in ordinances," it is again not the law itself, the law in its substance, which is made void; the making void applies only to the law on the side of its decretal, its limited form, its "ordinances," but the substance of the law remains.

Thus, whatever connection of the words referred to we adopt, the same great truth comes out, that the law in its real meaning and essence continues, but that the particular expression of it, the law "in ordinances," or "on the side of its ordinances," has passed away.

To the inference which seems clearly deducible from these and similar passages, that, with the coming of the Redeemer, the law in its outward and limited form has passed away, three answers have been given: first, That the Apostle is treating in them not of the moral but of the ceremonial law; secondly, That, though treating of the moral law, he is treating of it as a ground of justification—as a covenant of works; and, thirdly, That, though speaking of it not as a ground of justification but as a rule of life, his meaning is, that it is only passed away for the believer because it is now written in his heart. To the first of these answers it is almost needless to reply, so manifest is it that that law which was "added because of transgressions" must be the whole law, and even more especially its moral part; add to which, that no scholar would now for a moment endeavour to maintain the position involved in this answer. To the second it is enough to reply that the law never was a ground of justification. Men, no doubt, tried to make it so; but the Apostle does not deal only with the abuses of men; he corrects the abuses of men by what he unfolds of the purposes of God. It never, then, was the Almighty's object,

in giving the law, to represent it as a possible ground of salvation. He gave it for the very purpose of showing that it could not be so—for the very purpose of shutting men up to the promise. As a ground of salvation, therefore, it could not pass away, for as a ground of salvation it had never existed. The third answer is the only one of importance; and it may be stated in the words of Dr Fairbairn, in his able work on the 'Typology of Scripture: ' "According to the doctrine of the Apostle, then," Dr Fairbairn says, "believers are not under the law as to their life and conduct; or, as the Apostle says elsewhere, 'the law is not for the righteous.'" And then he goes on to answer the objection that this is "dangerous doctrine." It is not so, because "the freedom the Apostle asserts from the law has for its sole aim a deliverance from sin's dominion, and a fruitfulness in all well-doing to God. The truth more fully stated is simply this: when the believer receives Christ as the Lord his righteousness, he is not only justified by grace, but he comes into a state of grace, or gets grace into his heart as a living, reigning, governing principle of life. What, however, is this grace but the spirit of life in Christ Jesus? And this spirit is emphatically the Holy Spirit; holiness is the very element of His being, and the essential law of His working. Every desire He breathes, every feeling He awakens, every action He disposes and enables us to perform, is according to godliness; and if only we are sufficiently possessed of this Spirit, and yield

ourselves entirely to His direction and control, we no longer need the restraint and discipline of the law—we are free from it because we are superior to it. Quickened and led by the Spirit, we of ourselves love and do the things which the law requires.”* The force of these remarks is not denied. It is undoubtedly a part of the teaching of the Apostle upon this great subject, that the believer becomes free from the restraint and discipline of the law by having the law written on his heart; and, without keeping this idea in view, we shall not be able to explain those passages of his writings where he speaks of “the righteousness of the law being fulfilled in those who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit” (Rom. viii. 4); or of the “liberty” which belongs to the true children of God (2 Cor. iii. 17). But what renders it impossible to adopt this view as alone sufficient to explain the meaning of St Paul in all the passages where he mentions the relation of Christians to the law is, that in those above referred to, the contrast drawn by him is not the contrast of two stages in the spiritual life, in one of which the law is an outward letter, in the other an inward spirit; it is the contrast of two dispensations, in one of which the law was set before men in an outward and limited form, in the other of which we have nothing to do with that form, but only with the eternal principles from which it flowed, and to which it gave partial

* Fairbairn on the ‘Typology of Scripture,’ 4th ed., vol. ii. pp. 188, 189.

expression—principles which are to be adopted into our hearts, not in oldness of the letter, but in newness of the spirit. The difficulty on this subject arises from the fact that the order of God's dispensations corresponds so closely to the order of individual experience that the very same language may be easily applied to both; and the full truth seems to be that both thoughts—the thought of the coming in of a higher dispensation, and the thought of its being necessary that even that dispensation should find its counterpart in individual hearts—are present to the mind of the Apostle when he dwells on our position relative to the law. His conception of the matter as a whole appears to be the following: Under the Christian dispensation, the law in its outward and limited form—in its form as given to Israel—has passed away; but the substance, the principles, of the law remain. Would we be free, that substance, these principles, must be written on our hearts. If they are not so written, *we ourselves* reduce them to an outward and commanding law; only when they are within us, the fountain of a new and better life springing up in the centre of our being, can liberty be associated with them. The moment we sink beneath such an inward appropriation of them, that moment they pass anew into an outward stern decree. They cannot perish—they are eternal—they must, in the nature of the case, exist either within us or without us. If they are within us, that is Christian liberty; if they are without

us, it can only be in the form of a command which, not obeyed, brings bondage with it. It may seem, at first sight, as if there were little difference between this view and that answer to our previous course of argument to which it is a reply; but there is a difference, and it lies here: according to that answer the law of the Mosaic dispensation remains still an outward law for the world even in its form, and it ceases to be so for Christians only by being written on their hearts. When they fall from Christianity, they fall again under the form, not less than the principle, of the Mosaic law. According to the argument of these lectures, the law of the Mosaic dispensation has in its form passed away; but the principles from which it flowed remain, and our Christianity consists in having these principles written on our hearts. When we fall from Christianity, we fall not under the form of the Mosaic law, but under the form which the eternal principles of the law naturally assume whenever they cease to live within us. In short, the difference between our state and the state of Israel under the law is this: First, in Israel, God put men under a decretal law. Now, if men are under a decretal law, it is their own doing. In Israel, God placed them under the stern letter that they might rise through it to the spirit. Now He places them under the principle—under the spirit; and if they do not at once appropriate it, if they reduce the spiritual law to a commanding letter, it is their own act. Secondly, this letter includes much more than the letter of the Mosaic

law did. It is not a letter aiming at principles which it did not fully express; it is a letter which is the full and natural expression of the principles.*

Nor is this difference, slight as it may appear, without practical value. For, upon the view which draws no distinction between the form and the principle prior to Christian experience, the texts alluded to can only be explained on the supposition that Christian experience sets a man free from the law as an outward thing altogether; for if the law passes away, both principle and form pass away. Whereas prior to Christian experience, when, in the history of God's dispensations, this distinction between form and principle is drawn, the former alone can be spoken of as passing away. The principle never does so. Even the most spiritually-minded Christian is always under that. The principle is always superior to him, he is never superior to it; and all that he has to do is to adopt it more and more into his heart—to become more and more one with it. It is not, however, upon the advantages which attend looking at the matter in this light that the argument is rested; it is upon the statements of Scripture—statements which, fairly interpreted, make it clear that the Apostle, in the passages referred to, draws his contrast between two different dispensations. Under the one, men had to deal with the law in its outward and limited form; under the other, the form has fallen away.

* * Comp. note, p. 99.

The principle has been drawn out; with the principle we have to deal. We live in the spirit, let us also walk in the spirit.*

In the light of the passages of Scripture which have thus been quoted and explained, we are now in a position to form a correct estimate of the relation in which Christ placed Himself to the whole economy of the law. He destroyed no part of it;

* It may be asked, By what law, upon the view taken above, would you convince worldly men of sin? I answer the question in a note, as the answer involves considerations not yet brought out in the text. The answer would be, (1) As it is the duty of all men to believe in Christ (John xvi. 9; 1 John iii. 23), so it is the duty of all men, whether already Christians or not, to submit themselves to the law of His kingdom. (2) The law to be thus urged home upon them for the conviction of sin would be, not the law as given in the letter of the ten commandments, but also not the moral law in the abstract, the law of nature and conscience. It would be the law of the Old Testament, as taken up and "fulfilled" in Christ, *again reduced to a decretal form*. Thus the sin of fleshly lust would be condemned, not by the letter of the seventh commandment, unless in the case of a very hardened sinner, but by the law, "Whosoever looketh on a woman, to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." In like manner, the sin of violating the Lord's day would be condemned, not by the letter of the fourth commandment—a letter obeyed by none—but by what has yet to be shown is one of the principles embodied in that commandment, the duty of dedicating one day in seven to the worship of God. In both cases, and in all similar ones, the law would be, The principles of Christian life in that outward and commanding form which they must take, when not living in the heart as the principles of a free and joyful Christian service. Where, as in the tenth commandment, no distinction can well be drawn between the form in the Decalogue and the form to which the Christian principle naturally reduces itself, the former would be the law applied. Comp. Rom. vii. 7.

He "fulfilled" it all. He took up those ideas upon which it was grounded and from which it flowed, which it was designed to express in a manner suited to the peculiar condition and circumstances of Israel. He set forth those ideas, no longer in shadow, but in substance; no longer in type and figure, but in reality; no longer in scattered rays, but in the full splendour of a light which shall never fade. No portion of that law is destroyed; but, at the same time, no portion of it is left without the principle being disengaged from the limits which had secured its protection for a time, and in circumstances when, but for these limits, it must have perished.

Thus, in regard to *the arrangements of the law for civil and national life*, Christ came not to destroy but to fulfil. For what was one of the most wonderful characteristics of that old Hebrew commonwealth which, from the days of Moses to those of the Messiah, stood in such marked contrast to all other polities of the time, but that it was a kingdom of which God himself was King, and whose citizens were united to one another, not merely by the ties of a common fatherland and a common language, but by the far deeper tie of acknowledging the same Jehovah as their supreme and righteous Governor? That was the idea of the Hebrew commonwealth, the idea which it was the duty of the people reverently to cherish, and in which they were constantly to live. When, therefore, the Saviour came, He did not destroy that idea; He rather confirmed, perfected, and extended it. He did not make Him-

self manifest only as the great Prophet who was to reveal the will of God in a fuller and clearer manner than that in which it had been revealed before, or only as the great Priest who was to offer up a more perfect sacrifice than had ever bled upon the altar; He made Himself known also as a King. He spoke of the kingdom of God, of the kingdom of heaven, as an actual reality which He had come to establish in the world. He spoke to His people not only in their individual capacity as so many separate items—each, no doubt, possessing a soul to be saved, each with a little world in himself, all whose parts were to be leavened with the heavenly leaven—but He spoke to them in their relation to one another as “fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.” In the same way He still addresses us. He tells us that that city of God, of which the Psalmist was taught long before to say, “Glorious things are spoken of thee, thou city of God,” is now set up upon the earth. He reminds us that we are not only to be united by our birth in one native land, or by the fact that all our interests are bound up together, the rich man’s with the poor man’s, the master’s with the workman’s, the merchant’s with the farmer’s. These may be true feelings, and not to be despised. But for the followers of Christ there is a bond deeper than any of these,—even this, that one Redeemer is our King; that, far above all the kingdoms of this world, we have our part in His righteous, holy, and loving kingdom; that we are members of the same body, branches of the same

vine, sheep of the same sheepfold. Out of that feeling all our relations to one another are to spring, and not until that tie is felt to be a real and living tie have we a right to think, however pure our doctrine, however great the professed earnestness of our zeal, that we are citizens of the kingdom of God. Not until then do we know what that kingdom is, the idea of which the Saviour fulfilled, and which we declare ourselves anxious to extend.

Again, in regard to *the ceremonial obligations of the law*, Christ came not to destroy, but to fulfil. It presents us with an entirely false view of the harmony of the Almighty's dealings when, as we think of the temple worship, and the sacrifices, and the priestly offices of Israel, we simply say, they were abolished when the Saviour came. It is true that, in a certain sense, they were abolished. The command to observe them was no longer binding. The observance of them was soon rendered impossible when the temple at Jerusalem was thrown down, and the "abomination of desolation" stood in that place so long hallowed by the immediate presence of God, and by the prayers, the aspirations, and the sacrifices of His worshippers. Yet, thus abolished, they were abolished only in the outward form, not in the inward principle which they had expressed for centuries. That principle remained, to find only a fuller and a higher expression in the Son of Man, to be in Him translated from the changing to the unchanging, from the temporal to the eternal, from a local habitation in Palestine to a

habitation wide as the world, comprehending the countless millions of every age and of every land. It is true that the priest of Aaron's house no longer ministers at the altar, and that no succession in the lineal line of descent from him is preserved. But that is not because there is no priest in the Israel of God, but because there is one great High Priest, made "not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life" (Heb. vii. 16). It is true that no great day of atonement returns once every year, but it is not because there is now no atonement, but because Christ has, once for all, taken upon Him the burden of our transgressions, and cast our sins into the depths of the sea. It is true that the goat is no longer slain as a sin-offering for us; but it is not because there is now no sacrifice, but because Christ, the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world, has, by His one sacrifice, "perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (Heb. x. 14), and because the incense of His offering continually ascends as a sweet-smelling savour before God. And, finally, it is true that the high priest no longer draws aside the veil, and enters with the blood of atonement into a holy of holies to plead for Israel; but it is not because we have now no intercessor, but because Christ himself has entered into the most holy place, there to appear in the presence of God for us, our all-prevailing Advocate and Intercessor with the Father (Heb. vii. 25). Thus those ideas which lay at the bottom of the ceremonial service of Israel were not destroyed when Jesus

came. They were taken up, they were purified and perfected, and the outward rites were replaced by the fulness which, in preparatory times, they had been appointed to shadow forth.

This is hardly the time to apply these remarks at length to some of the controversies of the present day. But it may be remarked in passing, that if the idea of sacrifice, as commonly understood, is only taken from "the shambles of heathenism,"—if the true idea of it be something altogether in man himself—if there be nothing in the sacrifice of Christ which has reference to a turning away of the wrath of God—if that sacrifice be merely the perfect illustration of entire submission to the Father's will, and if the great revelation of the New Testament be to tell us *that*, then Christ ought to have reversed the language upon which so much has been founded in this lecture, and to have said that He came, not to fulfil, but to destroy.

Lastly, There are *the moral precepts of the law*, and these also Christ came not to destroy, but to fulfil. Not one of the moral precepts of the Old Testament was abrogated or destroyed by the coming of the Saviour. They were rather all confirmed and completed. They were traced back to that great principle out of which they all spring, and which alone can give them body and life—the great principle of love. "Love," accordingly, says the great apostle of the Gentiles, "is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. xiii. 10); and St James, in like manner, referring to one branch of our duty—that which we owe

to man—exclaims, “ If ye fulfil the royal law according to the Scriptures, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye shall do well ” (James ii. 8).

In short, towards all the parts of the law our Lord took up exactly the same position. He did not stand in one relation to one part of it, in another to another. He regarded it all as a shell which had to be broken through that the kernel might be reached. In each part of it there was a shell—that was to be laid aside: in each part of it there was a kernel—that was to be taken up into His own spiritual kingdom, and made binding upon all His subjects. It was His own express declaration, “ Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in nowise pass from the law till all be fulfilled ” (Mat. v. 18). The letter should not remain, as, by the confession of all, in a large portion of the law it has not remained. But the idea, protected and shadowed forth in the letter, should be drawn out and realised, first in Him, and then in the members of His body.

It is of the utmost consequence to observe, that between the view thus taken of the relation of Christianity to the law, and that advocated by those who, holding the abrogation of the Mosaic law, contend, at the same time, that its moral duties are eternally binding because they are moral, there is a wide and important difference. It is true that the moral precepts of the Old Testament, simply as moral, are binding upon us. They rest upon principles of universal and eternal obligation. But this is very far indeed from being the whole truth. On

the contrary, it is a view which, carried out to its logical consequences, must be regarded as a highly dangerous one—as almost fatal to the idea that the Old Testament contains a positive revelation of the will of the Most High, and that it is not simply the result of human speculation. Much more is taught us in the New Testament; for nothing can be clearer than that the duties made binding under the earlier revelation of God's will, are not binding on us only as moral, but are so as fulfilled in Christ. It is of the highest moment to keep this distinction clearly before the mind. We naturally ask, What is the bearing upon us of all God's previous revelation of his will? and it neither seems to answer the meaning of many Bible texts, nor is it satisfactory in itself, to be told that whatever is truly moral in the Old Testament is on that account still valid. Why, the very same thing may be said of heathenism. The heart craves more. What is my connection, it exclaims, with all this wonderful history of Israel, with these dealings of the living God in Israel, with this church of God in former days? Have I nothing to do with these long fortunes of my spiritual ancestry except in one respect, that some moral truths were involved in them—truths which bind all men in all time? Have I no more connection with them than with the heathen? Yes, says the Bible, your connection is of a far closer kind; for all the truths of that dispensation have a counterpart in you, inasmuch as your Redeemer took up their principles into the spiritual kingdom of which you are part. Thus,

I instantly feel I stand in an organic connection with Israel ; I am taught by all their discipline, and all their fortunes touch me.

The distinction is important upon another ground ; for it may happen that there are positive institutions of the Old Testament which seem to be principles of God's revelation of His will to man—principles afterwards taken up and given effect to by the Saviour ; and these principles, which are positive, not moral, can have no obligation for us, if we are thrown back only on considerations of eternal morality. The true method, therefore, of looking at this whole matter seems to be, that no commandments of the Old Testament are binding upon us simply as commandments, but only in so far as the principles, as the ideas, of these commandments are recognised, are fulfilled in the Redeemer. Indeed, upon any other view it will be difficult to show what we have to do with the commandments of the Old Testament at all. When were they, in their form as commandments, imposed upon the Gentiles ? Not certainly during the days of the Theocracy. So far from that, they were, to the very close of the Theocracy, the “ middle wall of partition ” between the Gentile and the Jew. Not, certainly, in their form as commandments, either by our Lord or His apostles. The simplest reading of the New Testament may satisfy any one upon that point. Therefore, if binding upon us at all, it can only be as viewed in the light of that general relation in which our Lord placed Himself to the whole Jewish economy on the one hand, to the whole of the still

more extensive revelation of his Father's will in the Old Testament on the other.

Still further, it will be observed, that to speak of the abrogation of any part of the Old Testament law in such a sense as implies that it is wholly passed away—to speak of any part of it as dead and buried in the grave of Christ—is wrong. However true in one sense, such statements are untrue in another and most important sense. The language is incorrect; it leads to misapprehension, and it ought to be avoided. The law of the Old Testament is not dead, nor does it live only in so far as it is moral. The outward, the limited, the commanding form of it may be said to be dead; but the law itself, in its great principles, never dies. It lives for the believer not less than for the unbeliever, and every principle of it is a rule to him.

Such, then, appears to be the New Testament conception of that relation in which Christ placed Himself to the revelation of God in the Old Testament, and to the double line of thought in it formerly spoken of. Both lines terminated in Him. He took them into His hand as if they had been two golden threads. The first shone in all its brightness, and we can imagine Him standing at the end of it, and with delighted eye following it up through the later Prophets and Psalms, through the Mosaic and patriarchal dispensations, until it entered the garden of Eden. It was the thread in which the Old Testament may be said to have given expression to its own ideal. Christ, therefore, simply adopted it, for

that ideal was the ideal of God, to whom "a thousand years are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night." The second thread did not go so far back. It stopped in the wilderness, and it came down protected and guarded through a troubled time. Christ broke the guard, and behold, there lay before Him another golden thread, bright as the first, and of the same strands. There is no need, He said, of this guard any more. So He twined the two threads into one, passed them through His own great work, and sent them down in double strength and with double brightness through the history of the world to the very end of time.

At this point we might have paused, but the view which has been taken of the relation of the New Testament to the Old, and more especially of the relation of Christianity to the Jewish law, is so important, so intimately connected with the whole light and happiness and freedom of Christian living, that it may be well to add some remarks for the purpose, partly of obviating objections, and partly of pressing it upon your adoption. And,

1. You will see at once, that when it is maintained that the Christian, as such, is no longer under the law, *it is not meant that he is not under law at all*. He is under law, and that not merely the eternal moral law written on the heart and conscience—he is under the law of the Old Testament as that law is fulfilled in the Redeemer, and is expressed in His life and in the practical precepts of the New Testa-

ment. The law, it is true, is written on his heart, but it cannot be written there unless it has also an objective reality. Even in the very highest stages of the Christian life—even in heaven itself, where the will shall have been brought into perfect conformity to the will of God, where every trace of a spirit of bondage shall have disappeared, and where God shall be obeyed in all the freedom of a service with which every tendency of the redeemed heart shall correspond—there will still be law; that law “whose seat is in the bosom of God, and whose voice is the harmony of the world.” But this is something different from the law of the ten commandments, considered in themselves. Take away the light thrown upon these commandments by the higher precepts even of the Old Testament dispensation, and still more by Christianity—take away the enlarged and deepened meaning which they receive from the thought of the principle from which they flow—and it will be at once felt how far short they fall of that high conception of law now alluded to. It is not that, under Christianity, we destroy what is in them; we take it along with us so far as it goes: but it is felt to be an inadequate expression of that perfect righteousness which, objectively viewed, is the Christian’s law. Hence, accordingly, the framers of our Confession of Faith, when they speak of the ten commandments as continuing to be a perfect rule of righteousness, refer not to them alone for their explanation, but to New Testament texts. Nay, they even place the New Testament texts

before those from the Old Testament to which they also refer.* That is to say, they acknowledge that it is only when interpreted in the light of the New Testament, and not when considered in themselves, that the commandments set before us the rule of our duty. Nothing, therefore, can exhibit a more entire misapprehension of the nature of this question than when it is actually thought necessary to express a belief, that those who adopt the views which have now been advocated can surely have no thought of loosening the obligations of all law, and of leaving every man to do that which is right in his own eyes. The very making of such apologies shows how completely they who make them misapprehend not only the views which they condemn, but the whole question at issue. It is the very depth of our sense of the requirements of God's law, under the New Testament dispensation—of its spirituality, its comprehensiveness, its exceeding breadth—that makes us speak as we do. In saying that Christ is "the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth" (Rom. x. 4), we do not mean that there is an end of all law, but that law in a particular and local form has been taken up and widened out into a higher law, in Him who not only exhibits it in its most perfect form, but gives the strength in which alone we can obey, and the spirit in which alone obedience is worthy of the name. In saying, "For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal,

* Chap. xix. 2.

Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet ; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour ; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law " (Rom. xiii. 9, 10), we do not mean that the duties expressed in these commandments are no longer binding, but that they are embraced in that nobler law of love which, given even under the Old Testament, has been enforced on us by considerations, the full affecting power of which was then only partially seen, and could, therefore, be only partially felt. In saying, "But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law" (Gal. v. 18), we are not to be understood as declaring that we own the obligation of no law, but that law has been so brought home to us that "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance," are the natural expression of that Spirit which has in Christ been formed in us. If, then, we are made free from the law, it is only from it as a limited and commanding letter, not from that inward spirit to which it points. If we no longer need "the law," it is only because its great principles are ever before us in their highest form. Then, by the very necessity of the case, the letter falls away : we are beyond the letter ; we are in the presence of something higher than is expressed by the letter ; and what have we to do with its leading-strings when we can walk in the strength of "Christ within us, the hope of glory ?" We are therefore en-

titled to adopt to the full the language of St Paul in Rom. iii. 31, unfortunately mistranslated in the English Bible, "Do we then make void law through faith? God forbid; yea, we establish law."

2. *That any other view is apt to lower the tone of our spiritual life.* Not, indeed, that it is to be denied for a moment that the discipline of law, to which the Christianity of our own land has been so largely accustomed to submit itself, has not contributed to the formation of many of the noblest elements of the national character. Our forefathers who struggled in the days of the covenants for all that is dear to us, were not the legalists they are sometimes represented to have been. Never did men grasp more clearly, or express more fully, the great doctrine of an absolutely free salvation. And they spoke what they believed—believed with a faith which was unshaken by the most cruel persecutions, which could welcome the most lingering and painful deaths. No self-righteous thought marred the purity of their offering, or weakens the force of its undying lesson. They learned much of that martyr spirit, not in the school of legalism, but of law. Yet, while this is true, while it may be admitted that the views commonly held upon the points which have passed under our review are so held as to lead practically to the conclusions now enforced, it is of the highest consequence not only to come to a right conclusion, but to come to it in a right way. There is great force in the remark of Archbishop Whately: "It should be remembered

that the difference between an accurate and an inaccurate statement of any doctrine, and of the grounds on which it rests, is of no slight importance, if not to those who *embrace* the doctrine, at least in reference to such as are disposed to reject or to doubt it. It is giving a manifest advantage to the advocates of error to maintain a true conclusion in such a form, and on such grounds, as leave it open to unanswerable objections.”* It may be added that, when a true conclusion is held upon wrong grounds, it will seldom fail to happen that some little influence from the grounds will so mix with the conclusion as to restrict its application and modify its power. It is so here ; and the urging so much, as is often done, the letter of definite commandments instead of the principle of these commandments, favours at least that tendency of our Scottish Christianity to depend on positive law, which is apt to limit the comprehensiveness, and to destroy the blessed freedom, of our Christian living. It is with principles rather than with precepts that we have to do. The dispensation under which we live is a dispensation of the Spirit. The life which we are to lead is a life where Christ himself is formed in the soul. What we do through faith in Him is right. “Whatsoever is not of faith is sin.” There is a coldness and a harshness about positive commandments which is very different from the blessed warmth of a piety formed mainly by communion with the Redeemer. There is a liberty and

* ‘Essays on Writings of St Paul,’ 2d Series, p. 195.

a joyfulness in the latter to which the former is a stranger. And there is a gentle and loving charity about it, which contrasts greatly with the severity of spirit that so often accompanies a rigorous enforcing of positive rules. That is not the spirit of the Gospel of Christ; and it cannot be doubted that many a true Christian among us, now hampered by unnecessary fears and scruples, would both know more of the freedom, and would exhibit more of the beauty, of Christian living, would he throw himself more loose from the trammels of legal obligation, and, in loving communion with his Saviour, follow Him whithersoever He goeth. After that life it is our duty to aspire, not fearing that, because free from the law, we shall be without law; not distrusting the Spirit of God, as if He were not Himself the best restrainer of excesses committed in His name; but resting assured that in that higher, purer, freer region of the spiritual life alone can our peace be complete and our obedience perfected. Let us not be afraid of liberty, for precisely as we rise in the scale of Christian attainment, does our feeling of liberty increase; and for the abuses of liberty the spirit of true liberty is the only enduring corrective.

LECTURE IV.

WE proceed to the fourth point proposed for consideration.

IV.

THE SABBATH QUESTION IN PARTICULAR.

After what has been already said with regard to the relation of Christianity to the Old Testament in general, and to the Mosaic economy in particular, some parts of this question need not occupy much time ; other parts will still demand careful attention.

1. In the first place, it must be obvious to all who admit the soundness of those views which have been expressed, that the obligation to observe one day in seven as a Sabbath under the New Testament, corresponding to the Sabbath under the Old, cannot be rested upon the fourth commandment, either exclusively or with any special force. We say, with any special force, for the question is not commonly argued by those who are regarded as defenders of the Sabbath upon the ground of the fourth commandment alone. Many other passages of Scrip-

ture are brought in, and that not by way of illustration, but to form new grounds of obligation in addition to the weight due to the commandment, as a commandment binding upon us. It is here, however, that the whole argument, as ordinarily conducted, is unsatisfactory. If the commandment, as given in the law, be binding upon us, that is enough. No further ground of obligation is necessary. Nay, to urge further grounds of obligation in such circumstances, is something like a tacit admission that the commandment is not sufficiently binding. We may urge these other grounds to illustrate, to enforce the obligation; but we ought not, in that case, to rest it upon them. If, therefore, the fourth commandment, as a commandment, be really binding, we ought to be content, so far as concerns the obligation of the Sabbath, with that alone. But, again, if the commandment, as a commandment faithfully and literally interpreted, does not bind us, we are not told upon what principle it is that it and the other passages alluded to are conjoined so as to possess, when thus conjoined, a weight which neither would have separately. Confusion of thought is thus introduced into the argument. There seems to be a want of thorough unity, of thorough consistency, in the statements generally made upon the point by those who urge both the express commandment of the Decalogue, and the other passages of the Old and New Testaments connected with it. Still, it is the fact that both are urged; and hence the words used, that the obligation to observe one day

in seven as a Sabbath cannot be rested upon the fourth commandment with any special force.

That commandment, in common with all the commandments of the Decalogue, was part of an economy which, in its particular form, was designed to serve only a temporary purpose, and which has given place to the higher and better economy under which it is the privilege of Christians to live. It has not, indeed, any more than the other arrangements of that dispensation, been abrogated. It has been "fulfilled," and it must by-and-by be pointed out in what way there is thus contained in the commandment something which bears upon us as well as upon Israel of old. Enough, in the meanwhile, to say that, in its form as a commandment, it exists for us no more. That the actual letter, indeed, is not binding, is admitted, and must be admitted, by all who do not hold that the last day of the week, instead of the first, is the day which ought to be peculiarly dedicated to God. The fourth commandment speaks of the seventh, and not of the first, day of the week. Under the Jewish dispensation, the substitution of one day for another would have been an act of rebellion against Israel's Lord; and the commandment has never been formally repealed. We are entitled to ask where, if the letter is not to be observed, is the statement of the New Testament which repeals that letter? There is none. To say that the example of our Lord and His apostles repealed it, is not enough. It is not merely allowed, it is maintained, by many who urge this example,

that, taken by itself, it is not equivalent to a command. They are unquestionably right in saying so. But if it is not equivalent to establishing a command, is it, it may well be asked, equivalent to the repeal of a command, and that one which was given in such a striking and impressive manner as the fourth commandment was? We might understand the grounding of a new commandment upon such an example, but that it should be enough to repeal an old and most solemnly given commandment, it is impossible to think. Either, therefore, He "who sprang out of Judah," who connected Himself so closely with the Jewish dispensation, and who so solemnly declared, "Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in nowise pass from the law till all be fulfilled," has left His followers under that letter, or He has set them free from it in some other way than by repealing it. But if we are under the letter, the whole Christian church, from a point very near the beginning of the Christian era until now, has been guilty of disobedience to an express command of the Almighty. Surely the special day which God enjoined to be kept holy was "a jot or tittle" of the law. In reality it was much more; but even "a jot or tittle of the law" we have no right to change. At all events, there is change. That is the fact with which we have to deal; and the conclusion is irresistible, that the fourth commandment, in the special form in which it is set before us in the Decalogue, is not binding upon Christians.

It is often said, however, that the commandment refers to one day in seven, rather than the seventh day. It is sufficient to reply, that statements of that nature are calculated to throw suspicion upon our whole interpretation of Scripture. In dealing with the Word of God, simple, straightforward honesty is a qualification imperatively demanded of us : and no one can read the words of the commandment in that spirit without seeing that what it speaks of is not one day in seven, but the seventh day.

Again, it is often said that the commandment is a part of the moral law, and that it must, therefore, be for ever obligatory. If it be meant by this that it is binding because it is moral, not because it is in the Decalogue, that is to give up the question. But if it be meant that, being a moral part of the Old Testament, it is binding, it has been already shown that even what is moral in the law does not bind us simply because it is there, but either because it is, as moral, a part of eternal truth, or because it has been adopted and taken up by Him who is our Lord and Master. Without urging this again, let it be observed rather at present that the duty of dedicating to the worship of God one day in seven is not moral—is not a part of that morality which we at once recognise as such. It is a positive law, a law which must be traced to the authority of the Lawgiver. It is placed, you say, in the midst of the moral law : that does not prove it to be moral in itself. It may illustrate the infinite importance which the Lawgiver attached to the precept. It

may lead us to believe that there are deep reasons, reasons perhaps not fully known to us, why He placed it there. It may suggest to us that it is as intimately connected with our true wellbeing as even the eternal principles of morality; but to call it for such reasons moral, is only to abuse language. Nothing can make the separation of one day in seven from the rest moral, as distinguished from positive; and this, to say nothing of the fact that men should speak not of the separation of one day in seven, but of the seventh day. To call such a separation a part of eternal moral truth is to obliterate all moral distinctions. We are fully entitled to conclude that, in its plain and simple meaning, the fourth commandment does not bind us.

2. It has been argued all along that, although no part of the legal economy is binding upon us in its form, all its parts are binding in their principle, because the relation in which the Saviour placed Himself to the Mosaic dispensation was that of disengaging the principle and letting the form fall. Can, then, the substitution of the Lord's day for the Jewish Sabbath be regarded as this disengaging of the principle, as this fulfilling of the law? The answer must be given in the negative. And let it be remembered that we are dealing at present not only with the fourth commandment alone, but with it as if it stood alone in the Old Testament, the only passage bearing upon the point. Looking at it thus, the substitution of one day for another is not to

disengage the main principle. That commandment proceeded from a far deeper principle. It can hardly be looked at in any other light than as analogous to the hallowing of the first-born both of man and beast, to the offering of tithes and of the first-fruits of harvest, to the appointment of the priesthood. The hallowing of the first-born was not a token that they alone were holy, but that all Israel was redeemed (Exod. xiii. 14). The tithes and first-fruits were dedicated to God, not as if they alone belonged to Him, but as an expression of the fact that the whole land, with all its produce of every kind, was His (Deut. xxvi. 3-15, comp. Gen. xiv. 18-20); and the priests were separated from the people as an order specially set apart for the service of God, not as if they alone were God's, but as a visible and tangible embodiment of the fact that all Israel was a priestly nation (Numb. iii. 12, 45). It is impossible to doubt, therefore, that in the same way the setting apart of one day in seven under the old dispensation proceeded, not from the idea that all days were profane, and that therefore one in each week should be sanctified, but from the idea that all days were God's, and that, in token of this, at a time when the people could not thoroughly comprehend and appropriate the truth in all its extent, one day should be specially given to Him. Although, therefore, the fourth commandment did not formally express the idea of the sacredness of all time, that idea lay at the bottom of it; and, apart from all other considerations, the fact that it did so renders

it impossible to find the "fulfilling" of that commandment in the mere substitution of one day of the week for another as a holy day. The full expression of its principle is, that as we are only stewards of our property, so also we are only stewards of our time—that what is given us of both belongs, equally of right and as a whole, to God. That this is not inconsistent with a special devotion of a set part of our time to holy services, any more than the idea of stewardship of property is inconsistent with a special devotion of only a part of our means to religious and charitable purposes, must surely be obvious to every one. But it is of the utmost practical consequence that this high idea of time should be constantly before us. The opposite argument, so often used by those who are pressing the obligation of the Sabbath, and which proceeds upon the ingratitude of not giving one day in the week to God, when He has given six days in the week to us, is an argument which must go far to destroy all spiritual perception of what Christianity is. The idea of the fourth commandment is not reached by substituting one day of the week for another as a holy day.

Hence, accordingly, the reasoning of the Apostle Paul in his Epistle to the Romans, "one man esteemeth one day above another; another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, unto the Lord he doth not regard

it. For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that He might be Lord both of the dead and living" (Rom. xiv. 5-9). It is not of the slightest moment to the interpretation of this passage whether we understand the Apostle to be alluding, under the word "day," to Jewish Sabbaths or Christian festivals, although there can be little doubt that he has the former mainly in his eye. In either case, the principle by which he determines the question remains unaffected. It is that, as every creature of God is good, so every day is good; that all time is equally sacred; and that he who, out of regard to the Lord, filled with that spirit which sees the Lord in all places, all seasons, and all things, esteems every day alike, exhibits the power of faith in a not less real and true form than he who, out of regard for the Lord, makes distinctions of days. Nay, more, the whole argument of the chapter implies that he occupies a still higher position, has a still deeper and clearer sense of the nature of Christian truth. To regard every day alike, because every day is regarded unto the Lord, is parallel to eating all things, while making distinctions of days is parallel to eating herbs; and he who ate only herbs was the weak, while he who ate all things was the strong, in faith. While this, however, is the case, it surely implies a strange

misunderstanding of the mind and general views of the great Apostle to suppose that, even had he not felt the pressure of any positive obligation to observe one day in seven as an ordinance of God, he would have looked with anything but feelings of the liveliest joy and thanksgiving to such an observance of a holy day as did not flow from a scrupulous and legal spirit.

Again, we shall be led to the conclusion that the observance of the first day of the week instead of the seventh is not the only fulfilling of the fourth commandment to which we are bound, if we attend to the nature of that of which the Sabbath of the Mosaic dispensation was really typical. Let us bear in mind that, as typical of better things to come, it did not stand alone. It was only one of a series of sacred seasons modelled on the same plan, and intended to set forth, though it may be under different aspects, the same great truths. It was accompanied by the Sabbatic year and the year of Jubilee; the one returning every seventh year, the other at the end of seven times seven years, every fiftieth year. There can be no doubt, indeed, that the seventh-day festival was the most important and fundamental of these. Its place in the Decalogue, while the others are only enjoined in the other precepts of the law, is enough to show that. Fundamental, however, though it was, the Sabbath had this in common with all the other positive institutions of the law, that it typified higher things not yet made known in fulness. But these higher things were not the positive ordi-

nances of the New Testament, they were the New Testament dispensation itself as a whole, the kingdom of God, that kingdom which is begun on earth and perfected in heaven. Without going into any general argument upon this point, we have fortunately the means of settling it by the direct teaching of the New Testament in the case of the Passover, and the Feast of Unleavened Bread which followed it. If any sacred season—if any feast of Israel—could be thought to be typical of a positive institution of the New Testament dispensation, we might surely say that this feast was so of the Lord's Supper. Yet how does St Paul speak in 1 Cor. v. 7, 8? "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us; therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." It is not the sacrament of the Supper that is here referred to in the words, "Let us keep the feast;" it is the whole life of the followers of Jesus. Our Paschal Lamb is not slain only once a-year; and, after having participated in the sacred meal, we have not to wait until the next year before the privileges of the season can again be ours. Christ's offering ascends continually in sweet remembrance before God. Not once a-year only, but from year to year, from generation to generation, from day to day, to the very end of time, the one sacrifice avails. Therefore, is the conclusion of the Apostle, if the followers of Jesus may thus be said to have their Lamb always slain for them, their life may be spoken of as one

constant feast. Over the whole of it a festival light is thrown. Christ's people are not only the true Israel of God, not only "the chosen generation, the royal priesthood, the holy nation, the peculiar people," they are that people in the moment of their highest and most heart-stirring festival. What the seven days of the feast, which immediately followed the Passover, were to the Jews of old, their whole life ought to be to them. At every point of it they have far more awakening recollections, far more joyful thoughts, far more precious promises, and far more glorious prospects present to their minds. Thus they keep constant feast. It was the same with the Feast of Tabernacles; and, though it is not needful to spend time in drawing out the comparison, we are distinctly taught by our Lord, in the Gospel of John, vii. 37, 38, that it was typical of no special ordinance of our Christian faith, but of our whole Christian life. The same remarks are also applicable to the Sabbatic and the Jubilee years, the joys and privileges of which to the Israelite are not expressed for us in any formal regulations of a corresponding character, but in the joys and privileges of our whole life as the followers of Jesus. The principle thus applicable to all these positive institutions must be applied to that now before us, and the Sabbath of the fourth commandment be held to have been typical of no special holy day under the Christian dispensation, but of the spiritual rest and service which become the abiding portion of the soul that has found peace in its Redeemer.

This lesson with regard to the Sabbath is further positively taught us in one or two passages of the New Testament. Thus in Col. ii. 16, 17, we read: "Let no man therefore judge you in meat or in drink, or in respect of a holy day, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days, which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ." It seems strange that any should imagine that we have here an allusion to the sacred days of the New Testament dispensation. The connection of "Sabbath days" with "holy day" and "new moon," ought alone to show us that that cannot be the case, to say nothing of the fact that the Lord's day was never at that time called the Sabbath, and that the word could lead to no other thought than that of the Sabbaths of Israel. These days, then, were a shadow of things to come. Christ, and no positive ordinance of our faith, was the substance which they prefigured. Again, in Gal. iv. 10, 11, we read, as a charge against the Galatian Christians: "Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years; I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain." To suppose that the Apostle can be alluding here to the observance of the Lord's day, would be out of keeping both with the immediate context and with the whole train of thought in the Epistle. He is alluding to Jewish Sabbaths, and he sets these, therefore, before us as a part of those lessons of childhood, which, together with their effect, may be said to be typical of manhood, or, at all events, to be taken up into something higher when manhood comes. Once

more, we have an interesting passage bearing upon this point in Heb. iv. 9: "There remaineth therefore a rest," or, as it is more correctly rendered in the margin of the larger Bibles, "the keeping of a Sabbath for the people of God." The keeping of a Sabbath is what, in other verses of this chapter, is called "God's rest" (1, 5, 10). It is that eternal and glorious felicity which is still held out to the believer, to encourage him amidst the difficulties and trials of his earthly pilgrimage. We can hardly doubt that the word is chosen, both because, in the 4th verse of the chapter, the sacred writer had spoken of that "rest of God" as beginning at the close of the six days' work in creation, and because it conveyed ideas of the most holy and delightful kind to those Hebrew Christians to whom he wrote. One might, perhaps, even go farther, and say, that it implies that what is meant by the keeping of a Sabbath must be known by Christians in every age who would understand the figure. But, whether this be so or not, the words prove that the Sabbath of the Old Testament dispensation was typical of no particular ordinance now, but of a far wider and more glorious thought, of Christian joy and privileges uninterrupted and eternal.

The views which have been expressed with regard to the principle which lay at the bottom of the fourth commandment, and the substance of which the institutions of the Mosaic law were types, are confirmed by the whole character of the New Testament dispensation. That dispensation is distin-

guished by nothing more than by its idealism. Let no one shrink from the word, and imagine that what is ideal is not practical. One of the most gifted poetesses of the present generation has said—

“It needs the ideal

To brush the dust an hair's-breadth off the actual.”*

It is the idealism of Christianity which constitutes its great practical power. It is ever in advance of man—in advance of what he is, in advance of the highest thoughts which, apart from it, he could form as to life and duty. Take away from Christianity its ideal character, and you instantly destroy it. You may have high precepts, but you have shorn them of their strength. We shall be able at least to think that there may be something higher, and in that moment it will cease to lift up our hearts by the great thoughts of eternal progress. Christianity is the “kingdom of God,” the “kingdom of heaven” on earth; and the future is but the carrying out of the present. It is true that we are not yet able to attain to that idea; but let us cease to be animated and spurred on by it, and all rules, however high, will soon become a “letter,” a form. Now, to such a conception of Christianity the sanctification of all time is absolutely necessary. It may be our duty, it may be our wisdom, it may be an absolute necessity for us, to have days specially set apart from the world, and dedicated to holy thoughts and deeds, and we may have them in perfect consistency with the principle; but that

* See ‘Aurora Leigh.’

consideration does not touch the present argument. Before us we must hold, as our great aim, the ideal life of Christianity, and in that there is no distinction of days into sacred and profane. All are sacred, not one is profane.

The conclusion, from what has been said, is obvious. The obligation to observe one day in seven as peculiarly holy to God can neither be rested upon the letter of the fourth commandment, nor can it be regarded as the "fulfilling" of the *main* idea which that commandment protects and shadows forth.

3. What, then, are the grounds upon which the observance of one day in seven, as a day to be peculiarly set apart for God, is enforced in Scripture, or are there any such grounds? We hope to show that there are. It is impossible to notice the many different theories which have been broached upon this subject, and it may only therefore be said in regard to them, that the very fact of their existence ought to make men tolerant upon the point. Let us simply endeavour to set forth the light in which the matter seems to be presented to us in the Bible. Call to mind, then, the distinction which throughout these Lectures has been drawn between the revelation of God's will in the Old Testament as a whole, and the Mosaic economy in particular. Nothing can be clearer than that both our Lord and His apostles proceed upon the idea that the latter was not the highest revelation of the Divine will contained in the Old Testament. We have found our Lord, in

what must be regarded as one of His most important sayings, drawing a distinction between a provision of the Mosaic law and what had been established as a higher and better rule at the beginning: "Moses, for the hardness of your hearts, suffered you to put away your wives; but from the beginning it was not so." We have seen that Paul, in speaking in the third chapter of Galatians of the one covenant of God's grace with man, goes back to a point long anterior to the institution of the Mosaic economy; that he does not recognise that economy as, in the strict sense of the word, a covenant; that he speaks of it as something added to the covenant, something intended to shut men up to the covenant which was better than itself. It seems impossible, then, to receive these instructions without the feeling that what the Almighty instituted at the beginning was designed to be a universal rule; that there, before the giving of a law which, viewed simply in itself, does not apply to us, which was designed for a particular nation and a particular time, we may read what was intended for no particular nation and for no particular time, but for all nations and for all times; that there we may see the great lines of that plan upon which God constituted the whole world, and marked out the relations and duties of all His creatures. Then, further, if we find the principles there indicated running through the whole Old Testament; coming to view in the centuries which extended between "the beginning" and the Mosaic economy; hinted at, aimed at, in the Mosaic economy itself, even enclosed in

special provisions of that economy; if, coming still further down to those centuries when, under the progressive teachings of the Almighty by His prophets and His providence, the Jews were beginning to burst the shell of those formal ordinances within which they had been bound, we see the same principles, not passing away, but still insisted on as parts of human duty; if, at a still later stage, in turning to Christ and His apostles, we discover intimations on their part that these principles were also recognised by them; and finally, if, in tracing the progress of the Christian Church, that Church to which the Comforter was promised as an abiding presence, we see her silently, almost unconsciously, yet surely, following in the same great track,—then it must be maintained that we have in all this a Divine rule for our guidance, the obligation of which it is impossible not to acknowledge. Have we anything of this kind in the case before us?

We have the words of Genesis ii. 3: “And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it; because that in it He had rested from all His work which God created and made.” To suppose that these words are spoken proleptically—that is, that they had a reference only to that blessing of the seventh day which was afterwards to be embodied in the fourth commandment—is contrary to the whole spirit of the passage. Nothing can be more simply historical. In the 2d verse, “God ended His work which He had made:” then follows, in the 3d verse, the fact of blessing and sanctifying connected with

the plainly historical fact stated in the words before us, because that in it "He had rested from all His work." Nothing but an express intimation to the contrary could justify any one in viewing these words as aught else but historical.* Thus, then, "from the beginning" we have one day specially distinguished from the rest. It is at once admitted that there is no command, no formal institution, of the Sabbath's rest as a rest to be observed by man. If there were, it would be as impossible to justify the substitution of the first day for the seventh as it is impossible to do so when we rest the observance of the Lord's day upon the fourth commandment. Nor, in that case, would it be easy to see how our Lord himself could have seemed even to interfere with an original arrangement of the Father, whose will He came to do. That paradisiacal state when

* It is true that we are here met by the difficulties which have arisen from geological inquiries. Yet I am not aware that geologists have demonstrated that six natural days—for of such days all fair interpretation requires us to understand the "days" spoken of in the first chapter of Genesis—had *no connection* with the work of constituting the world as it is. Till this is done, the far-reaching consequences of applying other than historical principles of interpretation to the account of the creation may well make us hesitate to abandon the latter. It is enough, therefore, for our present purpose, that, *in some way or other*, six natural days were associated with the creation of the world. We dare not lose sight of the fact that the same statement is given us in the fourth commandment (Exod. xx. 11). Even although we were under the necessity of applying other than historical principles of interpretation to the account of the creation in Genesis, the distinction of one day from the preceding six would still remain as the idea of the Divine mind to which expression was given in the narrative.

the words were spoken was not so much a time of commandments, as a time of principles, and of indications of God's will to those who were eager to obey. It was a time of filial, and not of that servile, obedience which, at least in its formal constitution, the dispensation of the law was.* Throughout the whole patriarchal age, again, we have indications that the number seven was peculiarly sacred, and that time was divided by weeks of seven days (Gen. vii. 4, 10; viii. 10, 12; xxix. 27, 28, 30). It is certainly possible that such a division of time may have been taken from the changes of the moon, but it is far more probable that it would be taken from the seven days of creation and rest; and that the same method of dividing time, so many traces of which are found among the Oriental nations, may have had its origin in the remembrance of the primitive revelation.

Coming still further down, we have the narrative in the 16th chapter of Exodus, 16-30, with regard to the gathering of the manna—a narrative sufficient to show, on the one hand, that the Sabbath had not yet been formally instituted; yet equally sufficient to show, on the other, that that day retained its sacredness in the eyes of the Almighty, and that it was a part of His great plan that men should observe it as a day of rest.

Immediately afterwards, we have the law given from Sinai; and although that law, in itself, was designed, in common with all the other institutions of Israel, to serve the temporary purpose which has

* Gal. iv. 1, 3.

been already spoken of, it is impossible not to feel that the association of the positive institution of the Sabbath with those moral commandments which, so far as they go, express eternal truth—the enforcing of it as they were enforced, and the honouring of it as they were honoured—lends an importance to the institution which it would hardly have otherwise possessed, and shows how intimately it was connected in the mind of the Most High with the moral and religious improvement of His creatures.

Finally, we come in the later history of Israel to the period when, under the leadings of God's providence and the successive revelations of His will given by His prophets, the Sinaitic dispensation was beginning to give way; when its various elements, hitherto one, were beginning to be separated from each other; when the world was to be made ready for a dispensation, not of the letter but of the spirit. Yet even then we find the greatest importance attached to the positive institution before us. The spirit of Isaiah in many passages may be seen in the language of one: "If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable; and shalt honour Him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it" (lviii. 13, 14; comp.

lvi. 1-7, lxvi. 23). Ezekiel, in like manner, looking onward to the establishment of complete salvation, exclaims, "They shall keep my laws and my statutes in all mine assemblies; and they shall honour my Sabbaths" (xliv. 24). It is not urged that passages such as these do anything towards directly proving that there should be a Sabbath under the Christian dispensation corresponding to the Sabbath under the law, for the Sabbath, though more dwelt upon by the prophets than the other positive institutions of Israel, is by no means exclusively mentioned, and the same argument which would prove from such passages its continuance would prove also the continuance of the new moons and of the Feast of Tabernacles (Ezek. xlv. 17; Zech. xiv. 18). But this much may fairly be deduced from them, that, even at the time when the value of the moral, in comparison with the ceremonial, parts of the law was beginning to be more clearly seen, the Sabbath stood out as an institution of peculiar value. Thus throughout the whole Old Testament a special importance is attached to the observance of the seventh day.

We come now to Christ and His apostles. The former was made under the law, and was to fulfil all righteousness. We can only expect, therefore, that He would observe the Sabbath as He observed the feasts, and we find that He did so. Two remarkable expressions of His, indeed, with regard to the Sabbath are recorded—"The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath," and "The Son of

Man is Lord also of the Sabbath" (Mark ii. 27, 28). But it is not possible to lay much stress upon these words for our present purpose, as they appear to refer rather to the spirit in which the Sabbath should be observed than to any question connected with its continued obligation.* This much perhaps, however, may be said, that it is singular to find our Lord, both on the occasion when the words were spoken, and on many other occasions during His life, taking so much care to clear the true nature of Sabbath observance if He thought of it only as a part of that temporary dispensation which was now hastening to a close. The simple fact that He so cleared it, and so explained the spirit of a true observance of it, while at the same time He never indicates that it was near its end, is not without weight in helping

* For the reason stated in the text, which connects itself especially with the words, "Therefore the Son of Man is Lord also of the Sabbath," I have been unwilling to press the verses referred to into the argument. I am not insensible, however, to the fact that I may have thus under-estimated the import of their teaching. Two things are especially worthy of our notice in verse 27—"The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath:" (1) The expression in the original for "was made," ἐγένετο—the very word which our Lord would have used had it been His intention to refer to the primeval and not the Jewish Sabbath; comp. γέγονεν, in Mat. xix. 8, where the force of the word is lost in the English version; (2) The very marked use of the word "man" as compared with the use of "you," the Jews, in Mat. xix. 8, 9. It is almost impossible to avoid the inference from both these peculiarities of expression—peculiarities avoided when the Mosaic law of divorce was in question—that our Lord does here bring the Sabbath into connection not only with Israel but with man; and that He has in His eye not the Sabbath of the Jews, but the Sabbath instituted at the beginning.

to convince us that ~~it was not to pass away~~. At length the Saviour died and rose again. With the events of the resurrection morning the new creation was completed, and the principle which had been "from the beginning" rises once more to view, and in the same way. There is no law, no formal institution of a sacred day, no express enactment introducing a change from the day hitherto peculiarly holy. But by His own appearances on that day, the risen Saviour "blesses the first day of the week and sanctifies it," and holds it in peculiar honour for Himself and all who will enter into His spirit and see with His eyes, just as the Almighty at the first held the seventh day of the week in peculiar honour for Himself and for all who would enter His spirit and see with His eyes. The apostles and the early Christians felt the force of the example. We read in various passages of the New Testament, and in all the records of early Christian antiquity, of meetings for worship on the first day of the week. Christians observed, indeed, the Jewish Sabbath still, just as they observed various other institutions of the Mosaic law, for it was only gradually that their minds were opened to the full extent of the inheritance which had been bestowed upon them. But the observance of the Lord's day was the expression of their peculiar feeling. The latter, however, was not substituted for the Sabbath of the law. It was wholly independent of the law: it was over and above the Sabbath of the law. Gradually this latter fell away. But that power of the spirit

of God in the early Christian Church, that Christian instinct which guided her in the formation of the canon of the New Testament, guided her also in the case before us. Those who are acquainted with the history of the canon know that there is nothing more wonderful than the manner in which, in an uncritical time, the Church separated the canonical books from the multitude of spurious books then in circulation, and that too in such a manner that the results of all later inquiry have only confirmed her decisions. They see in this the clearest possible fulfilment of the promise that the spirit of Christ would guide His disciples into all truth. They may see the same thing here ; and in the simple fact that the Church clung to the Lord's day with an unyielding grasp, and that, amidst all opposition and all temptation to the contrary, she has handed it down to us as one of her most precious institutions, they may behold a striking confirmation of the fact that that institution should continue to the very end of the world, and, for aught we know, beyond it.

In these considerations we may find also the explanation, the justification, the propriety, of the change of day. If we are thrown mainly upon the fourth commandment, that change seems altogether inexplicable. The commandment is precise, definite, and it speaks of the seventh day. But let us go back to a time not of formal commandments, but of principles exhibiting themselves in the relation of the Divine Being to His creatures, and the difficulty ceases to exist. Associating the sanctification

of a holy day with great eras in the Divine procedure, with great moments in the working out of God's own plans, we can understand not only that one day in seven is what is appointed by the Almighty for special blessing, but also that the first day of the week now should be the true counterpart of the seventh day in paradise. It is not so much with the old as with the new creation that Christians have to do. It was fitting first to commemorate the rest of God at the close of the material creation: it is fitting now to commemorate the close of the spiritual creation when, on the morning of the resurrection, Christ entered on His glorious rest.

Thus also we now see the value of the fourth commandment. Taken as it stands, it is no rule for us. But, viewed as a step in the long history of the world—looked at, not in its own light, but in the light of what took place in paradise, and again at the resurrection of Christ—it may be said to embody, among other things, the principle of one day in seven; and in so far as it does this, it expresses the will of God for us as well as Israel. We come to it first as a striking historical testimony to that purpose of God which runs through both the Old and the New Testaments, that one day in seven should be kept holy unto Himself. We satisfy ourselves, by what went before and followed, that that idea is enwrapped in it; and then we feel that that idea, being taken up by Christ along with all the ideas of the Old Testament dispensation, is a divine rule for His people everywhere and in all time.

More, however, has to be said. The purposes and thoughts of the Almighty, revealed to us in the Bible, have reference to the good of man; and we cannot escape the conclusion that if, at the beginning of the first creation, God blessed the seventh, and if Christ, at the beginning of the second creation, blessed the first, day of the week, such blessing must have been grounded in considerations relative, not simply to the Divine thought, but also to our welfare. "Known unto God are all His works from the creation of the world." There may be reasons for the selection of one day in seven, rather than in eight or ten, which we do not see. There may be that in the constitution of man which renders such a choice peculiarly appropriate, although we may not be able to say exactly what it is. The spirit of humility which it becomes us to cherish will at once joyfully acknowledge this, and will feel that its true wisdom is to acquiesce in any indications which may be given by the beneficent Creator, by the loving Father of His people, of what He considers to be needful for them. But we are not left to that. The experience of all men testifies to the fact, and, amidst the complexities of modern society, amidst the increasing demands of the world, that experience is every day teaching its lesson with increasing impressiveness and power. We know that the Lord's day is needed for ourselves—needed as a day when we may lay aside worldly engagements, and enjoy more uninterrupted communion with Him in whom we live our better life. We accept it therefore as

an invaluable means of spiritual improvement. We feel that whatever we are aspiring to, whatever be the ideal system which is at once the aim and the guide of our exertions, we need it.

“ O day most calm, most bright,
The couch of time, care’s balm and bay;
The week were dark but for thy light:
Thy torch doth show the way.”*

While thus good for ourselves, we know that it is proved to be equally good for others. There cannot be a doubt that the sanctification of the Lord’s day amongst us, mingled though it has been with elements which have lowered it in not a few cases beneath its true Christian tone, has been one of the greatest, if not the greatest, means of preserving that amount of piety in the land, which is to this day the greatest strength and ornament of the national character. To preserve its sanctity, therefore, becomes our duty both as Christians and as patriots.

In conclusion, it may be well to note very briefly some of the advantages which are connected with that method of viewing this important subject, which these Lectures are an effort to explain.

1. It is thus presented to us in its true light, as a branch of that far wider question to which it really belongs, the relation of the New Testament to the Old, and of the Gospel to the Law. It helps us to understand the nature of the Almighty’s dealings

* George Herbert.

with the world, as a whole and from the beginning; shows us their essential unity, and yet accounts for that diversity, a perception of which we must have if we would appreciate the lofty requirements and privileges of that ministration of the spirit under which we live.

2. It allows us to interpret many a passage of Scripture, to which we must otherwise give a forced interpretation, in its plain and literal sense. We can see how the law should be so often spoken of in depreciatory terms—so often in terms of adoring admiration; for we see that in the one case it is the letter, the form—that in the other it is the eternal principle—that is before the sacred writer's eye. We see that in that law there is both a temporary and an unchanging element; and while we feel that we are "not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, but unto Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem," we feel also that "the law is spiritual," that it is "holy and just and good."

3. The view taken secures to us the ground of divine obligation for the observance of the Lord's day. For it rests on this, that the whole Bible, from its beginning to its close, shows us that it is a principle of God's arrangements that one day in seven should be sanctified. Of course, those who argue from the fourth commandment have this advantage too. It is only to be observed that, upon

the ground taken in these Lectures, we do not lose it; and the loss of it would be an incalculable loss. It is easy to say, Can you not, out of a mere sense of your spiritual necessities, set apart one day in seven for religious purposes? Supposing that I could, the day would then lose to me its greatest charm. I wish to know that the keeping it as a holy day is a part of my heavenly Father's will—that it is not left to my own discretion—that it is a part of His plan, and not of mine. I do not need to be sternly commanded; but to think every Sabbath morning, "This is the day which the Lord hath blessed;" to think that, for aught I know, it may even now be marked in the courts of heaven; to think that it is not man only but God who gives its stillness to the hallowed hour, is an advantage, is almost a necessity, to the soul. If the Bible had not given us that advantage, we would have had only to submit; but it has given it, and given it in a far more comprehensive and nobler form when it gives it as a principle of the Divine arrangements rather than as a strict and definite command.

4. While the view taken leaves us obedience to the Divine will as a ground of obligation for the Lord's day, it at the same time delivers us from those scruples by which the freedom and joyfulness of so accepting it are limited or destroyed in many minds. These scruples exist, and it is the Church's duty to remove them. It is her duty, not only to guide her members to holy living, but to deliver them from

those petty and vexatious doubts which weaken their faith and disturb their peace. Remember the striking words of St Paul in Rom. xiv. 1, "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations." Not of course that this is to be done at the expense of truth; but if any teaching has a natural tendency to create scruples, that alone would show that there is something in it defective or wrong. Let us look at the matter before us in this light. To rest the obligation of the Lord's day upon the fourth commandment, either alone or mainly, is inevitably to introduce perplexity into the mind. No doubt there are thousands of the very excellent of the earth who do not feel this, but that is simply because, in their own deep and happy Christian experience, they have so transfigured and glorified the law that there remains for them nothing in it except its element of life and liberty. It is not so with thousands of others. You tell them that they must take the fourth commandment as their law—you persuade them to do so, and they do it. What is the consequence? They cannot literally carry it out—they are compelled to modify it. The secret feeling immediately arises in their minds, that they are dealing with a law of God as their conscience tells them they dare not deal with it. They begin to fear that, under the pressure of circumstances, they are modifying it as they have no right to do, that in every modification which they make they may be insensibly humouring themselves when they should only please God,

that they may be yielding more than they ought to the demands of worldly interest or of selfish gratification. The inevitable result of this is to introduce an element of perplexity into the conscience, to raise doubts in the mind, and to leave men to go on in the secret fear that they are violating a commandment of God, while yet, alas! they cannot help themselves. That is not only a wrong, it is a most dangerous state of things. It destroys the simplicity of childlike obedience, it dims the singleness of eye which alone makes the body full of light, it habituates a man to doing what he is doubtful if he should do, it cuts at the very root of the life of faith. Against all that would promote such a state of mind it is the duty of the Church most anxiously to guard. Yet to rest the obligation of the Lord's day mainly on the fourth commandment is, in the present state of society, to create rather than to remove such scruples. In so resting it the Church must either be a party to nourishing what it is one of her first duties to remove, or she must be content to ignore the fact, and she does ignore it, that her teaching is not producing its legitimate and logical consequences. The one course is to be faithless to her high vocation; the other is, from a consciousness of her weakness, to countenance a hollowness of obedience which must speedily and effectually sweep away all obedience that is worthy of the name. This must be in thousands of minds the inevitable result of what is at least most characteristic of the

present tone of teaching upon the point before us. How are we to avoid it? Rest the obligation of the Lord's day upon the ground of the general principle expressed in the whole revelation of God, and not upon the commanding letter of a positive law, with which we have little to do, and to which no man can be faithful. In that instant the chief difficulty disappears. Questions of delicate settlement will remain; we shall still have to determine how far we may go, how far this thing or that thing is inconsistent with the idea of the day. Men will continue to differ upon these points; but there will be two great gains. First, every man in settling these questions for himself will be able to do it honestly, in the light of the principle, and without the fear that he is playing fast and loose with the letter of a positive commandment. Secondly, all, starting with the same principle, will be much more easily brought to agreement as to what the principle demands.

It may be remarked in passing, that there is hardly a stronger evidence of the divine origin of Christianity than that, long before the world had reached its present state, it put us upon this plan—released us from formal and definite laws which we would have been unable to apply, and brought us to principles which are always applicable. You have but to look at the Acts of Parliament which have been passed of late years upon social questions in order to see the force of this. The almost invariable course has been that we have first an act, then

another act to amend the first one, and then a third to amend the emendation. This arises from no fault of our legislators, but from that extreme complexity of society, for which it is almost impossible to provide by rule; and shall we not be permitted to welcome it as one of the most important evidences of the divinity of our faith that, eighteen hundred years ago, it provided for all complexities by casting us upon those general principles which can unloose, and alone unloose, the hardest knot that the world can tie?

5. There is a fifth advantage which must not be omitted in connection with this point. The view here taken really secures to us more of such a Sabbath as we need. For, if it is not admitted that our Lord came to fulfil the law in the sense which has been spoken of, it must be maintained that He came to establish the law in its real meaning—that is, the fourth commandment, in the sense in which God gave it to Israel, must be our rule. But that sense would not meet our wants. It is not indeed true that rest from servile labour constitutes the essence of the fourth commandment. There was to be a “holy convocation” on that day—that is, there was to be religious worship. But there is nothing in the law, and there is nothing in what we know of the practice of Israel, to make us think that a much larger amount of recreation was not permitted on that day than any one interested in religion could allow to be good for us. We really need a

more spiritual Sabbath than ever Israel had, and if we are thrown upon the law for it, it is not there. Men put it there, but that is because they impose their own meaning on the law, and such a course cannot be justified. We have no sufficient means of meeting one who says to us, You bid me be guided by the law; I will be guided by the law, and this recreation is permitted by it. Whereas, let us call his attention to the principle, and we shall be able to say to him, Do you not see that what you are doing is inconsistent with a holy, a spiritual, a religious rest? and we *may* at least secure in this way what in the other way we are sure to lose.

6. It will gain for us the valuable co-operation, in our attempts to preserve the sanctity of the Lord's day, of many of whose assistance we are at present deprived. Thousands who now hold back, or even appear to throw their weight into the opposite scale, would be eager to join us in this great attempt were they not justly afraid that they might, by doing so, be held to homologate a teaching which they feel to be not thoroughly scriptural. To stand by that freedom which is the birthright of Christian men is their first duty, and they instinctively acknowledge it to be so. No considerations of expediency can justify them in even seeming to sacrifice principles which they believe to be divine, and which must therefore in the issue prove themselves to be the highest expediency.

Entertaining views and feelings such as these, we

may cherish the hope that the present controversy will lead only to a good result. The struggle to preserve the sanctity of the Lord's day may be a hard one. In respect both to this, and to many other points of divine truth of an even more momentous character, we have already passed into a troubled and anxious time. Happy they who can "enter their chambers and shut their doors about them—who can hide themselves, as it were, for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast." But that cannot be the privilege of all. May those who are placed in the front of the battle have given to them above everything else a single eye, an open, honest mind, and a determination to abide at every hazard by truth and nothing but truth.

And, finally, as to the particular institution to which our thoughts have been at this time directed, let us prize it more and more. It is to be preserved as a most sacred and precious heritage, for it is one with which are connected the progress and the power of that divine life which we desire to have formed in our own souls, and to see formed in the souls of others.

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

The following Lecture on Confessions of Faith was delivered to the Divinity Students of the University of Aberdeen. It has not been found possible to change, except in one or two slight particulars, the form which, as delivered in the lecture-room, it necessarily assumed.

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH.



GENTLEMEN, — The question of the relation in which we stand to formal theology in general, and, in particular, to such a creed or confession of faith as that which, when we enter upon the office of the ministry, we solemnly declare to be the confession of our own faith, has been of late brought into peculiar prominence. The question is one to which you must turn with anxiety. It concerns more than either your own interests, or the interests of the Church of Scotland. The interests of religious truth itself are inseparably bound up with it. Any one of these considerations would justify me in directing your attention to the subject, and it is unnecessary to mention others. Let us turn, then, to one or two aspects of this great question, and let us endeavour to do so as calmly and as impartially as we can.

First of all, we have to fix exactly the nature of the point with which we are to deal.

It is not whether a Confession of Faith may be easily made too long and too minute, or whether our own Westminster Confession is so. Upon such a point men may well be allowed to differ in opinion. Every Church must desire to comprehend as many Christians as possible within her bosom ; and it is a part of her wisdom therefore, especially in a time of extended education and much independent thought, not to push her articles of faith beyond those limits which she feels to be necessary for the preservation of truth essential to her existence. With such an object in view, it will naturally be a matter of anxious consideration with her where these limits are to be fixed, and some may desire to include within them less than others. But the very raising of this question implies that the most important parts of divine truth may be preserved in such forms of language as mark the creeds of every Church ; and that, and not the length of our Confession, is the momentous point which is now at issue.

Again, we are not to ask how far it is true or false that the Westminster Confession of Faith bears all the marks of having been the production of a narrow-hearted party in a particular country, and at a particular stage of the Church's history, instead of being in perfect harmony with all the great Confessions of the Reformation, and with all the best theology of the early fathers. Those who wish to see this point discussed with great calmness, in the best possible spirit, and with a fulness amply sufficient for the end in view, may consult the pamphlet re-

cently published by Professor Mitchell of St Andrews.* They will there see it proved to demonstration that the Westminster Confession comes from no merely small and local school, but that it expresses the theological views of all the greatest English Reformers, and, by consequence, of all the greatest Continental divines of the Reformed Church with whom, on doctrinal questions, our own Reformers were so much at one.

Once more, we are not to inquire whether there are any doubtful statements in the Westminster Confession upon a few minor points, such as the creation of the world out of nothing in six days, the power of the civil magistrate, the identifying of the Pope with Antichrist. Such statements are, for the most part at least, capable of being satisfactorily explained; and, even if it were not so, there has long been a general understanding in the Church, which seems in accordance with the Acts of Parliament 1690 and 1693, that, if a man holds by the Confession as to its "sum and substance," he does not violate the obligations under which he comes by any difference on such minor and comparatively unimportant matters as these. Whether such an understanding may now continue; whether, if it may, it is sufficient for the security of our faith upon important matters; or whether any new course of action may be rendered necessary by the circum-

* 'Lecture on the Westminster Confession of Faith: being a contribution to the study of its historical relations, and to the defence of its teaching. By Professor Mitchell, D.D., St Andrews. Edinburgh: Thomas Paton.'

stances of the time—are questions of the gravest import, but we are not to interfere with them at present.

These three points then, and such as these, I pass entirely by. The question before the Church at this moment is really, although perhaps not formally, the question whether the retaining of such a Confession of Faith as the Westminster Confession can be justified at all—whether the Church is right in demanding subscription to it as an indispensable condition of entrance into her ministry, or whether so large a portion of that Confession has now become antiquated that our relation to it should be changed. The whole question of the necessity of Confessions of Faith is thus opened up. Ought they to exist? If the propriety of their existence is conceded, can the older Confessions claim perpetual validity; or is the Church, in every age, to construct new ones suitable to the time? If Confessions may claim validity until at least it is proved that they are false, in what relation do those who have signed them stand to Scripture upon the one hand, and to their special determinations upon the other?

That they ought to exist does not appear to be denied by any one. Language is, indeed, sometimes used upon this point which seems to imply that we have, as members of the Church, the same rights which we possess as private Christians, and that for the Church to interfere with these rights is to exercise an unnatural tyranny or dictation. It can hardly be meant, however, that such is really the case.

Were it so, it is evident that the framing of a new Confession in any age would be as objectionable as the retaining of an old one. We have to guard our liberty for the future as well as for the present. But our opinions, or the opinions of others who are now at one with us, may change. What we have fashioned with our own hands this year may, a few years afterwards, be an unsuitable expression of our thoughts. If, therefore, the simple existence of a Confession of Faith coming down to us from the past be an undue interference with our freedom, the same objection might be made to one which we ourselves should frame; and the conclusion would be irresistible that no Confession should exist. Apart from that, however, there is neither tyranny nor dictation in the matter. If we have joined the Church and partake of her privileges, we have been enabled to do so by virtually, if not also formally, saying that we have adopted her creed. She did not force it upon us. We might have remained without her pale, and smiled at her thunders. She did not conceal the terms of her communion, but openly proclaimed them to the world. We accepted them, and she has a perfect right to say to us, You must abide by what you have accepted, or retire. It is true that this right on the part of the Church is subject to an important qualification. The Church is not a voluntary association, entitled to set up any standard that she pleases. It is the very essence of her Protestant constitution that her ultimate appeal is to the Word of God. That is her standard, and she

may not set it aside for an inferior one. He, therefore, who is led by the course of his inquiries to conclusions upon any point which appear to be different from those embodied in her standards, is entitled to have these conclusions tried, not by the standards only, but by the Bible. In like manner, he whose studies conduct him to the conclusion that certain doctrinal statements which he adopts in substance might be expressed in a manner better suited to the forms of thought which mark the time in which he lives, has a just claim to similar treatment. He may be helping the age to understand itself. He may be ready to suggest methods of expressing truth which will make it a more powerful and living thing in the minds of men. He may be undertaking the very highest responsibility, fulfilling the very highest duty, to which the Church has called him. Her charge to her ministers and professors of theology is not simply that they continually re-establish the harmony existing between the Bible and her Confession. In the very nature of the case it implies more. It implies that if on any point that harmony seems to be wanting, they show her her deficiencies, correct her errors, and teach her to regulate her every conviction by the mind of no bypast century but by the mind of Christ. It is a wrong and foolish policy, therefore, to attempt to put down any conclusions of the nature spoken of by angry statements that they differ from the standards, and by summary threats of consequences. To do so is to extinguish as far

as possible that spirit of investigation which it ought to be the effort of all who are interested in Christian truth to keep alive. It is to try a supposed offender by half, and that the least important half, of the bench. The standards themselves need to be constantly re-examined; and only when it is shown that a particular opinion is inconsistent with Scripture as well as them, is that opinion proved to be a heresy. Bearing this in mind, we may at once dismiss any complaint against the existence of a creed, as if it necessarily, and in all cases, interfered with liberty. At all events, such language does not mean that there should be no creed.

It is a more important question whether, allowing that Confessions of Faith must exist, they should do so in the form which they have always assumed; or whether their statements ought to be much more general and indefinite, consisting, it may be, of a few leading truths of the Bible revelation, and that too, as far as possible, in the language of the Bible itself. In their present shape they are often objected to on the ground that they push the forms of logic into departments which ought to be left to intuition and feeling, and that they tend to confound two things essentially different, theology and religion. Now, if this objection be really taken to the *substance*, although, in words, it is made to the *form* of the doctrine, it is at once intelligible; and, if a creed be a very lengthy one, it is, to a certain extent, capable of justification. It is possible to make creeds too long. There is a diversity of view

upon many points consistent with true unity of faith; and if those who argue in the manner spoken of do differ from us upon some of the points formally determined in our doctrinal theology, let them utter their sentiments with boldness and be heard with patience. It may probably be found that they agree with us in all that the Church ought to consider necessary to the expression of the faith, and it would be unfair to demand more. Such, however, is not the meaning of the language. It is a protest against the clearness, the precision, with which doctrinal statements are embodied in our creeds; and viewed in that light it must be regarded as wholly a mistake. The very object of a creed is to be clear, to be precise, to exclude, not to include, variety of view upon the points contained in it; and several considerations prove that object to be both necessary and proper.

1. The nature of the human mind requires it. For, no sooner is a truth presented to the intuitional faculty than the intellectual must seek to apprehend it, to mark it not only in itself, but in its relation to other truths, and to fence it off from the abuses to which it is exposed. To confine us in the statement of theological truth to general language, or to the language of Scripture, is simply an impossibility. In every attempt to show what a statement of the Bible, whether it be the statement of a fact or of a doctrine, means, we must transgress the limits which would be thus imposed upon us; we must adopt those logical forms of thought, those theological ex-

pressions, which are objected to. We cannot restrict a preacher to the use of texts, or require that his sermon shall be a mere grouping of Bible passages together. The very purpose for which he preaches is to explain what these texts mean, to show the sense in which they are understood, and to press that sense home in its practical consequences upon the consciences and hearts of his hearers. That is, he must use what is in principle the language of a creed; and surely it is not to be imagined that a Church may not do what every one of her ministers is compelled, by the very necessity of the case, to do every time he ascends the pulpit. Let us suppose for a moment that the Church could completely forget the past, and that she could start afresh upon her course with nothing but the Bible in her hand. She would start to-day, and to-morrow she would begin to form a creed. The constitution of the human mind, to say nothing at present of the course of history, would compel her to it. She would do it, indeed, in a very different and far inferior way to that in which she has done it; for there can be no doubt that there has been a synchronous development between the growth of the human mind and that of our theology, which synchronism would be destroyed if, with ripened powers in the one field, the Church were to enter a child into the other. But still she would do it. The intellect would begin to work upon the facts. The logical faculty would begin to supply forms for the truth intentionally seen. One truth would require to be placed in its due

relation to other truths. Errors would spring up, how speedily, how rankly, when the calming hand of the past was lifted off the head of the present, it is impossible to say. And a very short time would elapse before the rivers would return to their sources, and we should have our creeds again.

As to the idea which some men seem to have, that the existence of creeds tends to destroy the distinction between religion and theology, it is so entirely unreasonable that it is difficult to know how to reply to it. When has the Church ever said, or implied, even in the most distant manner, that the acceptance of her theological system made the religious man? Her constant lesson has been, that "faith without works is dead;" and that no mere knowledge can ever take the place of the life of love. She has maintained her theology because she believed that, under the blessing of God, it was needed for religion; that, when vivified by the Spirit, religion might not be a mere vapid, mystical phantasm. She has maintained it because she knew that as theology without religion is a body without life, so religion without theology is but a spectre of the mist, large it may be to the eye, but useless for every practical purpose.

Not only, however, does the nature of the human mind thus demand the existence of creeds; it may be further remarked that they are demanded

2. By the course of history. No idea can be more unfounded than that they are the result of

man's wilful over-speculation in the revelation of God, instead of being an absolutely unavoidable phenomenon in the history of the Church. There was a time when there was no formal creed of any length, although even the baptismal formula may, in a certain sense, be spoken of as one. It not only expresses the great truths into which the convert was to be baptised, but it brings out the relation of these truths to one another in such a manner that there is not one later determination of the Church upon the great doctrine of the Trinity which may not be said to be involved in it. It is not, however, a creed in the sense in which we now use the term. The first of that kind is what is commonly called the Apostles' Creed, although it is well known that not less than three centuries passed before it received anything approaching to its present shape. It is an extension of the baptismal formula, and why? Because many sects had sprung up in the Church using the words of that formula, but attaching to them a meaning, not only entirely new, but essentially opposed to what the Church believed, and still believes, to be fundamental lessons of Scripture. Ebionites, Gnostics, Docetæ, and many others were putting their sense upon the language of the Bible. What could the Church do but express hers? It was not that she then, for the first time, constituted the doctrines of the Apostles' Creed as the doctrines of her faith. She had always believed them. They had been involved in all her teaching from the first. But it was necessary for

her now to say what that teaching was, and she did so with no view of uttering all her faith, but with the view only of making clear what it was upon important points disputed or denied. It was a principle of the same kind which led to the next creed of the Church, that of Nicæa, in the early part of the fourth century. The Apostles' Creed had served her purpose for a time, but now even it was used by men who yet explained it in a sense altogether different from that in which it had been understood at the period when it was framed. There was not a phrase of Catholic theology which the Arians were not willing to employ. "When they were asked," says Bishop Bull,* "whether they acknowledged that the Son was begotten of the Father himself, they used to assent; understanding, as is plain, the Son to be of God, in such sense as all creatures are of God, that is, have the beginning of their existence from Him. When the Catholics inquired of them whether they confessed that the Son of God was God, they forthwith answered, Most certainly. Lastly, when they were charged by the Catholics with asserting that the Son of God is a creature, they would repel the charge, not without some indignation, but with the secret reservation of its being in this sense, that the Son of God is not *such* a creature as all other creatures are, they being created by God mediately through the Son, not immediately, as the Son himself." What, in these circumstances, was the Church to do? She saw,

* Quoted in Shedd's 'History of Doctrine,' i. 312, note.

and justly saw, in the teaching of the Arian party, nothing less than the danger of a return to the polytheism of the Pagan world. It was not enough to oppose such an overthrow of Christian truth by the terms of the Apostles' Creed, for it was under these terms that truth was attacked. She adopted, therefore, the famous expression *ὁμοούσιος* as the best method of expressing her real sense of the teaching of Scripture upon the point at issue. The word is not a scriptural one. It is one of the most purely technical in the whole language of theology; but it was not the word that was valuable, it was the idea which the word expressed, and that idea did not belong to the fourth century, or the fathers of the Council only. It was an idea involved in the Apostles' Creed, involved in the baptismal formula of the New Testament, an idea without the definite statement of which the Church had been content so long as it was possible to avoid it, and which at last she did express when, had she not done so, her existence would have been in danger of speedy and complete subversion.

The next creed which meets us is the Constantinopolitan revision of the Nicene Creed. It was made at the Council of Constantinople, A.D. 381,* and its structure, as compared with the Creed of Nicæa, is exceedingly instructive. The latter had enlarged the statement of the Apostle's Creed with regard to the person of the Son, because such enlargement was

* According to Stanley, 'Eastern Church,' p. 149, it was not formally adopted till the Council of Chalcedon, A.D. 431. The historical question is of no moment to the point before us.

rendered necessary by the heresy of Arius and his followers. As yet, however, no controversy had arisen with regard to the third person of the Trinity; and upon this point, accordingly, the Creed of Nicæa simply adopted the language of its predecessor, *καὶ εἰς τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα*. Between the date of the Council of Nicæa, however, and that of Constantinople, other heresies had sprung up, of which the chief was that of Macedonius, who denied the personality and divinity of the Holy Ghost. The Council of Constantinople, therefore, now did what that of Nicæa had not found it necessary to do; and to the simple words *εἰς τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα*, it added the important phrases, *τὸ κύριον, τὸ ζωοποιούν, τὸ ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκπορευόμενον, τὸ σὺν πατρὶ καὶ υἱῷ συμπροσκυνούμενον καὶ συνδοξαζόμενον, τὸ λαλῆσαν διὰ τῶν προφητῶν*. The object of these additions is at once obvious. It was not that the Council had any desire to define the undefinable, but an essential part of what had always been the Church's faith, though undefined, was attacked, and attacked as it could only be, by definitions. There was but one course open to her. She was compelled to meet such definitions by contrary ones, which expressed what she believed to be the truth. She was neither rash nor bold in doing so. It was impossible for her to avoid it; and thus, before the end of the fourth century, the simple statements which had sufficed at first, had grown, under the pressure of circumstances, and even against the express decree of a previous council,* into statements of a kind which,

* That of Ephesus. Stanley, 'Eastern Church,' p. 150.

but for these circumstances, would never have been thought of. To illustrate this more fully, and to supply an unanswerable argument to those who complain of the Church's inexcusable love for such definiteness of statement, it may be worth while, at this point, to turn for a moment to the Westminster Confession. We are immediately met there by the remarkable fact that these definitions of the Nicæo-Constantinopolitan Creed with regard to the Holy Spirit have been in great measure dropped. An important clause indeed—the *filioque* clause—with whose history we need not concern ourselves, is added; but, even with that addition, the following is the short and simple statement of the Westminster Confession upon a point which had received such prominence in an earlier age: "In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity; God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost—the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son."* Could anything more completely illustrate the fact that the members of the Westminster Assembly had no desire to define further than seemed imperatively demanded at the time? Could anything do more to show us that if, on other points, their Confession presents a no doubt very striking contrast to the early creeds, it must have been because special errors of the day seemed to require the statements? Looked at, then, in their true light, the early creeds appear fully capable of justification, and not less entitled to

* Ch. 2, sec. 3.

our admiration than any later ones. Even Dr Candlish has complained of their "abstract, mystical, cold, and unimpressive character," as compared with the character of those which followed the Reformation, and has endeavoured to account for the difference by the suggestion, "that the creeds before the Reformation were framed when the Church was on her way to the cell of the monk, while the creeds since the Reformation were framed when the Church was on her way out of the monk's cell."* The complaint seems as hasty as the explanation. It was the tendency of the Eastern mind to dwell on the more abstract and metaphysical aspects of divine truth. There are such aspects of it, and when error was propagated in connection with them, it was the imperative duty of the Church to meet it; while, at the same time, the doctrine of the Nicene Creed respecting the Son is clothed in language which for warmth and sublimity can hardly be surpassed.

From the ante-Reformation creeds, let us turn to those of the Reformation. Again, as at the beginning of the Christian era, there was a season when it may be said that the Reformed Church had no creed. The Reformation began A.D. 1517, and the Diet of Augsburg, where the first and greatest confession of the Reformation period was presented, did not assemble till A.D. 1530. It was then felt by the whole body of the Reformers that, at that momentous crisis of their history, they should testify what they believed, and the grounds upon which they had

* 'On the Atonement,' 1845, Appendix, Note A.

separated from the ruling Church. They were the more under the necessity of doing so that, in the excitement of the time, innumerable opinions of the wildest and most fanatical nature had sprung up among those who professed to be their followers. Against these it was no less necessary to protest than against the errors of the Church of Rome. The Reformation was hardly in greater danger from its enemies than from its adherents; and to have even tried to go on without a distinct statement of its principles and aims, would have been not only a mistake, but an impossibility. Yet, even then, the first call to the formation of a creed went out, not from the clergy, but from a civil ruler.* It was John of Saxony who summoned four of the leading Reformers to draw up articles of faith. The summons was complied with, and the Confession of Augsburg, the noblest monument of the Reformation, was the result. Ranke, no prejudiced historian, says of it, "And, indeed, it cannot, I think, be denied, that the system of faith here set forth is a product of the vital spirit of the Latin Church; that it keeps within the boundaries prescribed by that Church, and is, perhaps, of all its offspring, the most remarkable, the most profoundly significant." † The Confession itself explains its object, "To set forth the truth amidst the errors of the time, so that the pure doctrine of the divine word might be separated and

* Müller, 'Die symbolischen Bücher der Evang. Lutherischen Kirche,' Einleitung, p. 55.

† 'Hist. of the Ref.,' iii. p. 271.

distinguished from the false." * That it does this in a manner entirely different from that of the earlier creeds, is to be explained by the circumstances which gave it birth. It was around the doctrine of justification, it was against the errors of the Church of Rome, that the controversy raged; and hence it is that the Confession enters at such length upon these points. Without doing so, it would have failed of the very purpose for which it was composed; and the question for all succeeding ages is not whether its decisions are too minute, for less minute they could not have been, but whether they are true.

The same remarks apply to all the Confessions of the Reformed Churches, and to the Westminster Confession among the rest. They apply, indeed, even more strongly to the Calvinistic than to the Lutheran branches of that Church. To such an extent is this the case, that Schweizer, in his valuable work on the Reformed or Calvinistic Theology, finds it impossible to take his materials from the Confessions alone, because there is often a more cautious than distinct expression in them of the peculiarities of the faith which he is to describe. (I. p. 85.) Wherever, accordingly, technical expressions occur, it will be found that they are used as the most appropriate indications of that which, in opposition to errors of the day, the Church believed to be the truth. Again, as in the case of the word *ὁμοούσιος*, it is not the expression that is of importance, it is the

* Preface to the Confession.

idea which is expressed. No minister is expected to speak in the pulpit of forensic justification, or of federal relations. What is expected of him is, that he will preach the great truths of which such language is the symbol, in contradistinction, and, if need be, in direct opposition, to the errors which it is intended to condemn; and again, therefore, the question is not whether such *language* is at variance with the higher intelligence and culture of our age, but whether *the ideas* which are enclosed in it are so. If that intelligence and culture have convinced the Church of the falseness of these ideas, the sooner the words which give expression to them are abandoned the better. But if the Church still believes these ideas to be true, why should she be asked to give up the words in which she has been accustomed to utter them until at least some better words are offered her, which may be substituted in their place?

Creeds, however, are not only thus both psychologically and historically necessary; they are also

3. Necessary as a means of protecting our congregations. It is because these congregations have a common faith that they are so associated as to constitute a Church. Their faith is the very foundation of their union; and that not simply a faith in Scripture, but in a certain sense and meaning which they attach to Scripture, in contrast with others who receive the same Scripture but give it a different interpretation. It must, therefore, from

the very nature of the case, not only be an object to every Church to see that what she believes to be the truth is preached to all her people; but the people themselves have an inalienable right to such care on the part of their appointed guardians. If they change their faith they have the power of saying so, and other creeds will be formed and other Churches constituted. But so long as this is not the case, for the Church to tolerate teaching opposed to her faith would be to seek her own destruction—to make no proper provision for its preservation would be to exhibit indifference, for which she would justly deserve to perish. Nor will it do to say that Scripture is enough. The most opposite opinions have been deduced from Scripture, and every enemy of the Church's creed knows that he must found his opinions upon Scripture or be silent. With what show of reasonableness, then, can it be urged that, upon all which she considers essential to her faith, a Church shall not take every measure of precaution to secure that her authorised teachers shall be faithful? She is not only entitled, she is bound to do so.

To the statements which have been made, the reply is sometimes given, that it is not the doctrine itself, thus expressed in a Confession, which is objected to, but the particular form of the doctrine; and our very warmest friends are driven to urge, as the only compromise which they can establish between their reverence for the past and their just regard for the present, that the doctrine itself is

true, but that the *form* in which it is expressed is antiquated. Now, to this it might be sufficient to answer, We do not know the doctrine except by the form. Take away the words in which an idea is expressed, and what becomes of the idea? But let us rather allow for an instant that a truth may be expressed in different ways, what is it that gives rise to this? Is it a flexibility inherent in the truth itself, by virtue of which we may mould it first into one shape, and then into another? Certainly not. It is the wants of the human mind at the time, rendering *particular aspects* of the truth necessary, taken in connection with that wonderful fulness of the Word of God, which shows itself ever able to meet these wants as they arise. The expression of any one of these aspects is that to which we give the name of a doctrine. Change that expression, and the doctrine is inevitably changed with it. Not that this may in no circumstances be done. Blot out any one class of these wants from the history of the past; convey to us the assurance that the wants will never again be experienced in the future, and then we shall allow that the *form* of the doctrine suitable to them may be laid aside, and shall cast about for another form more adapted to actual necessities. But in view of these wants, brought before us either as facts of the past or of the present, not only is the doctrine true, but that particular form of it is true; and to say that, in these circumstances, the form may be changed, is really only to say that such wants are to be met by a new doctrine altogether.

It is the form that makes the doctrine, and the doctrine is to be found in the form.

In point of fact, it is in the presence of such wants as have been referred to that our theology has grown. It would be a great mistake to imagine that it was elaborated by students in the closet. The doctrine of justification by faith, *e. g.*, is often objected to as bearing even more than others the marks of the schools upon it. Was it then from the schools that it came forth, or was it not rather around it that the deepest struggles of the soul were endured? Was it not the most hotly contested portion of a noble field? The whole period of the Reformation, indeed, when our Confessions received so much of their present completeness, was a period of life and action. Had it been otherwise, those great expositions of Bible truth which were then given in so many different countries, and by so many different men, would not have presented such a wonderful unanimity of view. In the closet men differ endlessly from one another. It is in the battle of life that they are one; and all those periods which have seen the doctrines of our theology assume the completeness which they possess, were periods when the minds of men were stirred to the very depths by the grand questions of sincerely inquiring faith. Were any such new periods to arise, who shall say that these doctrines might not then change? But in what way would they change? The whole experience of the past seems to answer, By addition, and not by subtraction. Nor would the older statements then be valueless.

On the contrary, they would retain all their value ; for they would still meet particular wants, satisfy particular desires, condemn particular errors, to which men are prone. They would still be that bond of a like intelligence and sympathy which would connect the Church of the day, when the new matter was added, with the glorious company of the apostles, the goodly fellowship of the prophets, the noble army of martyrs, the holy Church throughout all the world. They would still give expression to the most important of those relations which exist between the unchangeable Jehovah and that moral nature of man which changes little amongst many changes, and in many years. If they would not be true still, they were never true. If, in the light of the special needs which they supplied, their forms had not still all their reality and value, they were never anything else but a delusion and a shadow.

It may seem, perhaps, that what has now been said ascribes to the forms of doctrinal theology only a historical value. But it is not really so. It would be so only on one of two conditions—either that it could be shown that the forms were false, for even the false conclusions of the past are historically valuable ; or that we could be assured that the wrong conceptions which these forms were designed to meet will never again arise. But, if the forms were true in the presence of the errors which they met, and if the errors might again arise, then the forms are more than historically valuable ; they are a part of our present and real possessions ; they unfold certain

aspects of the truth ; they present that truth to us, as a whole, under a wider and more comprehensive point of view than that under which we should otherwise have known it ; they are ground upon which we can plant our feet, and which we can claim as our own. It is true that there may be many of these old weapons which we are not to be always using, because the particular state of mind against which they were forged may no longer exist ; but, notwithstanding that, they are to be kept clean and burnished, ready to be brought out when a new foe appears with an old face and old harness on.

Thus, then, it appears that even the forms of our doctrinal theology have perpetual validity until it is either shown that they are false, or that the errors which they were intended to meet would not, should they again spring up, need to be met by the very same forms.

Another important point remains to be considered—the relation in which those who have signed a Confession of Faith stand to its special determinations upon the one hand, and to Scripture upon the other. Does a Confession really interfere with the reverence due to Scripture, or with the spirit of free inquiry into its meaning ? An examination of this point will show us that it does not ; for—

1. Even our Confessions themselves must be submitted to constantly renewed investigation. The Roman Catholic Church may establish the decree, “ *Ut nemo suae prudentiae innixus, sacram Scrip-*

turam ad suos sensus contorqueat, aut contra eum sensum quem tenuit et tenet sancta mater Ecclesia, cujus est judicare de vero sensu et interpretatione sanctarum Scripturarum, aut etiam contra unanmem consensum patrum, ipsam Scripturam sacram interpretari audeat.”* Protestantism must, for the vindication of its own existence, take up an opposite position. It maintains, to use the words of our own Confession, that “All synods or councils from the apostles’ times, whether general or particular, may err, and many have erred. Therefore they are not to be made the rule of faith or practice, but to be used as an help in both.”† As it rejects, therefore, on the one hand, that inward light to which enthusiasm would bring the written word into subjection, so also it rejects, upon the other, the supreme authority of the Church. It regards the Bible, and the Bible alone, interpreted in the light of reason, and of those higher spiritual influences which will not be denied to those that ask them, as the final standard of appeal. To Confessions of Faith, and to the decisions of the fathers, whether of the primitive or of the Reformation age, it ascribes only a mediate, and not an immediate, authority. However instructive, however invaluable, they may be as helps to the right understanding of Scripture; however they may assist us in passing across that wide gulf which separates us from the time when, amidst circumstances entirely different from our

* ‘Conc. Trid. Chemnitzii Examen,’ p. 57.

† Ch. 31, sec. 4.

own, Scripture was first given to the world; however we may have even reason to expect that, as the child is the father of the man, so our views, in the living unity of the Church's progress, will, at least in essential points, be found to correspond with theirs,—they cannot be our binding rule. They express not so much what all men in all generations are bound to believe, as what particular men in particular generations did or do believe.* They show us, not whether a particular doctrine is true, but whether it is an article of the Church's past or present faith—the ground of her faith they are not. That ground is to be sought only in the Word of God, in which, hardly of itself more difficult of interpretation than they are, the Almighty has, once for all, revealed His will to man. However true, therefore, we believe the standards of our Church to be—however, by the fact that they are the standards of our Church, we take for granted that they are in perfect harmony with Scripture—it is obvious that this harmony must ever and again be submitted

* The following words of the 'Formula Concordiæ' may be quoted as a clear expression of this fact:—"Ut enim verbum Dei tanquam immotam veritatem pro fundamento ponimus; ita illa scripta (the Augsburg Confession, Apology, &c.) tanquam veritatis testes et quae unanimes sinceramque majorum nostrorum, qui in puriore doctrina constantes permansere, sententiam complectantur, in medium recte producimus." And again it is stated that they owe their existence, among other causes, to the desire, "ut publicum solidumque testimonium, non modo ad eos qui nunc vivunt, sed etiam ad omnem posteritatem exstaret, ostendens, quaenam ecclesiarum nostrarum de contraversis articulis unanimes fuerit esseque perpetuo debeat decisio atque sententia."—Müller, *ut supra*, pp. 571, 572.

to the test of examination and of proof. In every age an imperative obligation is laid upon us to reconstitute our Confessions for ourselves. They become *our* Confessions indeed only in so far as we do so: and we do so, not by renouncing our own convictions and submitting them to a stern rule imposed upon us from without, but by an independent and free examination of them, and by tracing in them afresh the expression of that faith from which they originally sprang, and in which we stand. It is impossible, therefore, to allow that the existence of a standard of faith to which we, as members of a distinct Christian Church, are pledged, should restrain the freedom of our spirit of inquiry. It is in the interest of the Church herself, and not simply in our own interest as students, that we inquire. That Church *must* wish to have continually presented to her the evidence that her faith is in conformity with Scripture. If she has not this wish she must either be dead, or she must have abandoned her fundamental principle that the Bible, and the Bible alone, is the religion of Protestants. With no rash step, therefore, do we enter into this field. We are called into it. We are sent by the Church into it. It is she who imposes upon us the high responsibility of seeing, first, that we really believe her Bible; secondly, that we really have adopted her creed; and her commission to us is, that, with leisure and manifold appliances for the task, we constantly renew the proof of that harmony between these two which she believes to have

existence. We cannot do this unless we have full freedom to inquire.

The principles now laid down have been expressed in a general form. But they are the particular principles also of the Church of Scotland. It is thus that she speaks in the Confession of Faith—
 “The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man’s salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture, unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the spirit or traditions of men.” “The Old Testament in Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek being immediately inspired by God, and by His singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentical; so as in all controversies of religion, the Church is finally to appeal unto them.” “The infallible rule of the interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself.” “The Supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.”* In conformity with the principles so clearly and emphatically laid down, our Church enjoins that the first question put to a presentee before ordination shall be, “Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the

* Ch. 1, sec. 6, 8, 9, 10.

Word of God, and the only rule of faith and manners?" while the second is equally instructive upon the point before us, "Do you sincerely own and believe the whole doctrines contained in the Confession of Faith to be founded upon the Word of God?"* And once more, when a minister is libelled, the "Word of God," as well as the laws and discipline of the Church of Scotland, is appealed to as the ground of his offence being charged as "heinous."† Thus true has our Church been to the great principles of Protestantism.

But not only must our Confessions be thus constantly re-examined, we are bound

2. To prosecute our study of Scripture without being limited by the dogmatic conclusions of the past at all, and there is every reason to hope that such study will not be in vain. It is often indeed said that there is nothing new in theology. It should rather be said that, so long as theology is a living science, a thing not of the past only, but of the present—a science coming home to man's immediate necessities—it must always have something new in it. There is in this respect, as in every other, a close analogy between the relation in which we stand to nature and that in which we stand to the Word of God. Both are equally divine—both are

* The word "doctrines" in this question ought to be "doctrine." The singular is used in Act X. Ass. 1711, which prescribes the questions to be put. Acts, Church Law Society, p. 455.

† 'Styles,' p. 127.

to be studied in the same spirit, and with the same object. When, then, we look at nature we find that she does not change. In the days of our first parents' innocence there lay wrapped up in every atom the same mysterious properties which it possesses now; the same powers were there, although, with every want supplied, it had not yet become the hard task of man to discover them in the sweat of his brow and in the weariness of his brain. But, although nature does not change, man changes. In the progress of humanity new wants are felt, new necessities are experienced, new desires crave supply. And whither does man go? To the same great storehouse of nature where the first generations of the world were nourished: only with a new emphasis he knocks at her door; with new energy he ascends her great "altar stairs;" with new powers of persuasion he bids her unfold her secrets, that she may be to him, with all his wants, the same kind nurse and mother that she was to the men of other days.

Precisely similar is our relation to theology. Its great storehouse continues ever the same. The Word of God does not change. But, as far at least as concerns us, what is even the Word of God, apart from the human spirit into which it is to be received, whose darkness it is to enlighten, whose wants it is to satisfy, whose dispositions and affections it is to mould? It is in the spirit of man alone that that Word becomes a living thing; and, if we do not receive it into our spirits in the state in which they are at any particular moment in the history of the race,

it will be to us something as unintelligible, as dead, as would be the external world to the man who, destitute of the power of sensation, should have knowledge at every avenue quite shut out.

Although, therefore, the Word of God does not change, we have to remember that the world, that the spirit of man, changes. New wants are felt also here; new necessities are experienced; new desires crave supply. And if we regard Scripture as the light of our feet and the lamp of our path—if we believe that it contains not simply the disclosure of a Saviour from sin as its central fact, but innumerable principles deduced from that fact or connected with it, of universal value and of eternal obligation—then these changing circumstances of the world must demand from it not only the repetition of what is old, but the unlocking of new secrets, the bestowal of new gifts, the discovery of fresh resources for the supply of every need.

Apart, however, from these considerations, let us simply ask what course has been actually run by the interpretation of Scripture since the canon of the New Testament was completed? Has there been no progress? Or rather, has there not been constant progress? Do we at this moment see no more in Scripture than was seen by the early fathers of the New Testament Church? Do we not rather see in it an amount of meaning, a fulness of truth, of which it was not possible for them to be possessed, just because those necessities of man and of society to which the Bible appeals had not then en-

larged and widened into their present compass? If it be so when we compare ourselves with the early fathers of the New Testament Church, the same principle must apply to a comparison of ourselves with the fathers of every later age. No one has a right to maintain that, at a certain period of the past, the labour of further inquiry became needless, and the whole substance of divine revelation was brought clearly before the intelligent perception of the Church. No one can fix a date at which not only the citadels of the land, but its whole wide domains, were won. The Confessions of the Reformation may have a peculiar value for us; but to limit us absolutely to them—to say to us, “Thus far shalt thou come, and no further”—is to remove the foundations upon which these Confessions themselves must rest.

What an ample field of inquiry, then, it may be remarked in passing, is, notwithstanding the existence of a definite creed, thus presented to the student of theology. Before him, on the one side, he sees man in all the strange complexity of his nature—humanity in all its infinitely varied history. He sees the world struggling on its career with high aspirations and boundless aims, yet hampered in its efforts after advancement by ignorance and sin. Before him, on the other side, he sees the Word of God, the final and complete revelation of the will of the Most High, containing principles suited both to the individual and the race at every stage of their progress. And it is his task to make himself ac-

quainted with the disease and to apply the remedy. The world and the Bible are the two volumes spread out before him to be read. Both were read by the great minds that have gone before us in a spirit which it may well be our highest aim to imitate. And the more we do so, the more shall we learn not only to speak to the men of our own day in their own language, a thing forbidden by no creed, but we shall the more appreciate that understanding, both of the human heart and of the Scriptures, to which they give expression in the doctrinal statements of our theology.

Once more, a few words may be said upon a proposal which has been lately made, and not a little dwelt upon by the press,—that, while our creeds should be permitted to remain as they are, our relation to them should be changed. It is only necessary to ask what is the meaning of this language, that we may feel justified in repudiating it. It means that we should retain as the formal expression of our faith what is not the true expression of it, and that we should appease our consciences by a formula of subscription which leaves it possible for us to disbelieve what we subscribe. It has been said that this has lately been done by Act of Parliament for the English Church. Such is not the case. A change has certainly been made, owing to the very peculiar, and, in many respects, anomalous position of that Church. But the new formula of subscription will best speak for itself. It is to the following effect:—

“ I, *A. B.*, do solemnly make the following declaration : I assent to the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, and to the Book of Common Prayer, and of the ordering of bishops, priests, and deacons : I believe the doctrine of the United Church of England and Ireland, as therein set forth, to be agreeable to the Word of God ; and in public prayer and administration of the sacraments, I will use the form in the said book prescribed, and none other, except so far as shall be ordered by lawful authority.”

If any man persuades himself that he can subscribe that formula and yet enjoy the liberty of departing from the main tenets and teaching of the Church of England, he can only do so by blinding himself to the rules of common honesty. Our concern, however, is with ourselves ; and it may be said without hesitation, that to alter our relation to the Confession to the extent, or anything like the extent, implied in the demands made for change, would be worse than altering the Confession itself. In the latter case, the Established Church may cease to exist ; in the former, she ceases to be honest. If the time has come when we can no longer adhere to our Confession on what, by general consent, is held to be its essential teaching, then the true conclusion is, not that we should change our relation to the Confession, but that we should exist no more. The maintenance of the Establishment is a very small matter compared with the maintenance of upright consciences, of honest views, of plain, trustworthy statements to the world as to what we believe.

Religion cannot flourish, and the great end of an Establishment cannot be attained, if we do not tell men what we are in such a way that they may know and trust us. If it can be proved that our Confession, in any of its great statements of saving truth, is incorrect, let us be done with it; but let us not put on an appearance of believing what we do not believe. To a scheme of comprehension which shall leave intact the great truths of our faith no valid objection can be made. But if it be meant that the leading truths of that Confession are to be shaken—and unless this is meant the present agitation is certainly without an intelligible aim—the Church will hardly fail to feel that she exists for these truths, and not the truths for her.

In conclusion, and keeping in view those principles of interpretation which have been spoken of as applicable to creeds, we may describe them in the words in which the Dean of Westminster has described the great cathedrals of our ancestors: "They are a safeguard, not a destruction, of the highest ideas of spiritual worship." These noble piles do not limit our idea of the divine. They may do so when falsely interpreted, but it is not necessary that they should do so. They may rather aid us in raising our thoughts to Him who dwelleth not in temples made with hands. It is thus, also, with those creeds which embody the triumphs of past thought in the great world of theology. They neither limit our thoughts nor restrain our progress. If we had no reverence for them, if we did not start on our

course with a full possession of them, we might be the easy prey of every novelty. But they exercise over us their calming power. They bind us to the past. They make us feel, not that we have to discover all truth—a thought which would prostrate instead of strengthening us—but that we have only to take our place in the great march of the Church of Christ, and to see whether, out of the Christian experience of our own time, we have not something to add to truth already known. They thus regulate our freedom, but do not fetter it. They regulate it as the past history of humanity regulates every wise promoter of its progress now; and, even should a time ever come when we may dispense with them, it will not be because we have outgrown them, but because we have learned to hold their truths in greater simplicity, as a mild old age is often marked by the simplicity of childhood, but does not on that account lose the truths laboured for in the middle day of life.

APPENDIX (p. 18).

I MAY be permitted to add here, in illustration of the important fact stated in the text, the following interesting passage from a work, too little known in this country, by the late lamented Henry Craik :—

“It may be interesting to compare the distinct radical notions of the several terms employed respectively in the Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, for the idea of *justice*, or *righteousness*. The Hebrew term denotes *that which is perfectly straight* ; the Latin, *jus*, from *jubeo, jussi*, *that which is commanded* ; and the Greek, *δικη*, *that which divides equally to all—apportions to every one his due*. The thought expressed by the Hebrew root is deeper than that which is conveyed either by the Latin or Greek. The Romans were a military people—a nation of soldiers—and the idea of *rightness* was in their minds naturally associated with that of *obedience to orders*. The Greeks were a people foremost in all that ministers to social enjoyment and civilisation, and *their* idea of *rightness* was that which secured to all the possession of his due. The thought of an antecedent and eternal distinction between right and wrong, apart altogether from the present results of good and evil, runs through the whole system of Old Testament morality, and that thought is graphically presented to us under the image of *that which is perfectly*

straight." And again :—"The great Coleridge deli to trace these ideal meanings in his perusal of the H Scriptures ; and although other languages, to a certa tent, are constructed on the same principle, yet I qu whether any other form of speech contains such an a of ethical meaning inwrought into its very framewor pervading it as a whole." *

* 'The Hebrew Language,' by Henry Craik, pp. 39, 41

THE END.

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