Leviticus Sermons-Alexander Maclaren

Leviticus 1:1-9
THE BURNT OFFERING A PICTURE AND A PROPHECY

> ‘And the Lord called unto Moses, and spake unto him out of the tabernacle of the congregation, saying, 2. Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, If any man of you bring an offering unto the Lord, ye shall bring your offering of the cattle, even of the herd, and of the flock. 3. If his offering be a burnt-sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish: he shall offer it of his own voluntary will, at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the Lord. 4. And he shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt-offering; and it shall be accepted for him, to make atonement for him. 5. And he shall kill the bullock before the Lord: and the priests, Aaron’s sons, shall bring the blood, and sprinkle the blood round about upon the altar that is by the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. 6. And he shall flay the burnt offering, and cut it into his pieces. 7. And the sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire upon the altar, and lay the wood in order upon the fire: 8. And the priests, Aaron’s sons, shall lay the parts, the head, and the fat, in order upon the wood that is on the fire which is upon the altar: 9. But his inwards and his legs shall he wash in water: and the priest shall burn all on the altar, to be a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the Lord.’— Lev 1:1-9

In considering the Jewish sacrificial system, it is important to distinguish the symbolical from the typical value of the sacrifices. The former could scarcely be quite unnoticed by the offerers; but the latter was only gradually made plain, was probably never very generally seen, and is a great deal clearer to us, in the light of Christ, the Antitype, than it could ever have been before His coming. As symbols, the sacrifices expressed great eternal truths as to spiritual worship and communion, its hindrances, requisites, manner, and blessings. They were God’s picture-book for these children in religious development. As types, they shadowed the work of Jesus Christ and its results.

The value of the sacrifices in either aspect is independent of modern questions as to their Mosaic origin; for at whatever period the Priest’s Code was promulgated, it equally bears witness to the ruling ideas of the offerings, and, in any case, it was long before Christ came, and therefore its prophecy of Him is as supernatural, whether Moses or Ezra were its author. I make this remark, not as implying that the new theory is not revolutionary, but simply as absolving a student of the religious significance of the sacrificial system from entering here on questions of date.

The ‘burnt offering’ stands first in Leviticus for several reasons. It was derived from patriarchal times; it was offered twice daily, besides frequently on other occasions; and in its significance it expressed the complete consecration which should be the habitual state of the true worshipper. Its name literally means ‘that which ascends,’ and refers, no doubt, to the ascent of the transformed substance of the sacrifice in fire and smoke, as to God. The central idea of this sacrifice, then, as gathered from its name and confirmed by its manner, is that of the yielding of the whole being in self-surrender, and borne up by the flame of intense consecration to God. Very beautiful is the variety of material which was permitted. The poor man’s pair of pigeons went up with as sweet an odour as the rich man’s young bull. God delights in the consecration to Him of ourselves and our powers, no matter whether they be great or small, if only the consecration be thorough, and the whole being be wrapped in the transforming blaze.

It is worth while to try to realise the strange and to our eyes repulsive spectacle of the burnt offering, which is veiled from us by its sacred associations. The worshipper leads up his animal by some rude halter, and possibly resisting, to the front of the Tabernacle, the courts of which he dared not tread, but which was to him the dwelling-place of God. There by the altar he stands, and, first pressing his hand with force on the victim’s head, he then, with one swift cut, kills it, and as the warm blood spouts from the mangled throat, the attendant priest catches it in a basin, and, standing at the two diagonally opposite corners of the altar in turn, dashes, with one dexterous twist, half of the contents against each, so as to wet two sides of the altar with one throw, and the other two with the other. The offerer then flays the reeking carcase, tossing the gory hide to the priest as his perquisite, and cuts up the sacrifice according to a fixed method. His part of the work is done, and he stands by with bloody hands while the priests arrange the pieces on the pile on the altar; and soon the odour of burning flesh and the thick smoke hanging over the altar tell that the rite is complete. What a scene it must have been when, as on some great occasions, hundreds of burnt offerings were offered in succession! The place and the attendants would look to us liker shambles and butchers than God’s house and worshippers.

Now, if we inquire into the significance of the offering, it turns on two points—expiation and burning. The former it has in common with other bloody sacrifices, though it presents features of its own, even in regard to expiation. But the latter is peculiar to it, and must therefore be taken to be its special teaching. The stages in the whole process are five: the presentation, laying on of hands,

slaughter, sprinkling of blood, and burning of the whole carcase. The first three are alike in this and other sacrifices, the fourth is modified here, and the last is found here only. Each has its lesson. The offerer has himself to bring the animal to the door of the Tabernacle, that he may show his willing surrender of a valuable thing. As he stands there with his offering, his thoughts would pass into the inner shrine, where God dwelt; and he would, if he were a true worshipper, feel that while God, on His part, already dwelt in the midst of the people, he, on the other hand, can only enter into the enjoyment of His presence by sacrifice. The offering was to be 'a male without blemish'; for bodily defect symbolising moral flaw could not be tolerated in the offerings to a holy God, who requires purity, and will not be put off with less than a man's best, be it ox or pigeon. 'The torn and the lame and the sick,' which Malachi charged his generation with bringing, are neither worthy of God to receive nor of us to offer. When he pressed his hand on the head of the sacrifice, what was the worshipper meant to think? In all other instances where hands are laid on, some transference or communication of gifts or qualities is implied; and it is natural to suppose that the same meaning attaches to the act here, with such modifications as the case requires. We find that it was done in other bloody sacrifices, accompanied with confession. Nothing is said of confession here; but we cannot dismiss the idea that the offerer laid his sins on the victim by that striking act, especially as the very next clause says 'it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him.' The atonement was made, as we shall see, by the application of the blood to the altar; but the possibility of the victim's blood atoning for the offerer depended on his having laid his hands on its head. We may perhaps go farther than 'transference of sins.' Might we not widen the expression, and say 'identification,' or, to use a word which has become so worn by religious controversy that it slips through our fingers unnoticed, 'substitution'? Did not the offerer say in effect, by that act, 'This is I? This animal life shall die, as I ought to die. It shall go up as a sweet savour to Jehovah, as my being should.'

The animal invested with this representative character is next to be slain by the offerer, not by the priest, who only performed that part of the ritual in the case of national or public sacrifices. That was distinctly a vicarious death; and, as inflicted by the hand of the person represented by the animal, he thereby acknowledged that its death was the wages of his sin, and allowed the justice of his condemnation, while he presented this innocent life—innocent because not that of a moral being—as his substitute. So far the worshipper's part goes. But now, when the act of expiation is to be symbolically represented, and, so far as outward sacrifice could, is to be accomplished, another actor appears. The priest comes forward as mediator between God and man, and applies the blood to the altar. The difference between the sprinkling of the blood, in the burnt offerings and in the other sacrifices, which had expiation for their principal object, in some of which it was smeared on the horns of the altar, and, in the most solemn of all, was carried into the holiest place, and sprinkled on the mercy-seat, suggests that the essential character of the burnt offering was not expiatory, though expiation was the foundation on which alone the essential character could be reared. The application of the blood was the formal act by which atonement was made. The word rendered 'to make atonement' means 'to cover'; and the idea conveyed is that the blood, which is the life of the sacrifice, covers the sins of the offerer, so as to make them powerless to dam back the love or to precipitate the wrath of God.

With this act the expiatory portion of the ritual ends, and we may here pause to look back for a moment on it as a whole. We have pointed out the double bearings of the Mosaic ritual as symbolical and as typical or prophetic. In the former aspect, the emphatic teaching of this rite is that 'the wages of sin is death,' that 'without shedding of blood there is no remission,' that God has appointed sacrifice as the means of entering into fellowship with Him, and that substitution and vicarious penalty are facts in His government. We may like or dislike these thoughts; we may call them gross, barbarous, immoral, and the like, but, at all events, we ought not to deny that they are ingrained in the Mosaic sacrificial system, which becomes unmeaning elaboration of empty and often repulsive ceremonies, if they are not recognised as its very centre. Of course, the meaning of the sacrifices was hidden from many a worshipper. They became opaque instead of transparent, and hid the great truth which they were meant to reveal. All forms labour under that disadvantage; but that they were significant in design, and largely so to devout hearts in effect, admits of no reasonable doubt. That which they signified was chiefly the putting away of sin by the sacrifice of innocent life, which stood in the place of the guilty. Of course, too, their benefit was symbolical, and the blood of bulls and goats could never put away sin; but, under the shelter of the outward forms, a more spiritual insight gradually grew up, such as breathes in many a psalm, and such as, we cannot doubt, filled the heart of many a worshipper, as he stood by the bleeding sacrifice on which his own hands had laid the burden that had weighed so heavy on himself. How far the prophetic aspect of the sacrifices was discerned, is a more difficult question. But this at least we know—that the highest level of evangelical prophecy, in Isaiah's wonderful fifty-third chapter, is reached from this vantage-ground. It is the flower of which these ordinances are the root. We need not enlarge upon the prophetic aspect of the sacrifice. The mere negative sinlessness of the victim points to the 'Lamb without blemish and without spot,' on whom, as Isaiah says, in language dyed through and through with sacrificial references, 'the Lord hath made to meet the iniquity of us all,' and who Himself makes 'His soul an offering for sin.' The modern tendency to bring down the sacrificial system to a late date surely sins against the sacred and all-explaining law of evolution, in the name of which it is attempted, inasmuch as it is an unheard-of thing for the earlier stages of a religion to be less clogged with ceremonial than the later. Psalmist and prophet first, and priest afterwards, is not the order of development.

The remaining part of the ritual was, as we have pointed out, peculiar to the burnt offering. In it alone the whole of the sacrifice was consumed on the altar, with the exceptions of the skin, which was given to the priest, and of the contents of the intestines. Hence it

was sometimes called ‘a whole burnt offering.’ The meaning of this provision may be apprehended if we note that the word rendered ‘burn,’ in verse 9 , is not that which simply implies destruction by fire, but is a peculiar word, reserved for sacrificial burnings, and meaning ‘to cause to ascend in smoke or vapour.’ The gross flesh was, as it were, refined into vapour and odour, and went up to God as ‘a sweet savour.’ It expressed, therefore, the transformation of the sinful human nature of the worshipper, by the refining power of the fire of God, into something more ethereal and kindred with the heaven to which it rose. Or, to put the thought in plainer words, on the basis of expiation, the glad surrender of the whole being is possible and will ensue; and when a man yields himself in joyful self-surrender to the God who has forgiven his sins, then the fire of the divine Spirit is shed abroad in his heart, and kindles a flame which lays hold on all the gross, earthly elements of his being, and changes them into fire, kindred with itself, which aspires, in ruddy tongues of upward-leaping light, to the God to whom the heart has been surrendered, and to whom the whole being tends.

This is the purpose of expiation; this is the summit of all religion. One man has realised to the full, in his life, what the burnt offering taught as the goal for all worshippers. Jesus has lived in the constant exercise of perfect self-surrender, and in the constant unmeasured possession of ‘the Spirit of burning,’ with which He has come to baptize us all. If we look to Him as our expiation, we should also find in Him the power to yield ourselves ‘living sacrifices,’ and draw from Him the sacred and refining fire, which shall transform our grossness into His likeness, and make even us ‘acceptable to God, through Jesus Christ.’

Leviticus 10:1-11 STRANGE FIRE

> ‘And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which He commanded them not. 2. And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord. 3. Then Moses said unto Aaron, This is it that the Lord spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh Me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace. 4. And Moses called Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Uzziel the uncle of Aaron, and said unto them, Come near, carry your brethren from before the sanctuary out of the camp. 5. So they went near, and carried them in their coats out of the camp; as Moses had said. 6. And Moses said unto Aaron, and unto Eleazar and unto Ithamar, his sons. Uncover not your heads, neither rend your clothes; lest ye die, and lest wrath come upon all the people: but let your brethren, the whole house of Israel, bewail the burning which the Lord hath kindled. 7. And ye shall not go out from the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die: for the anointing oil of the Lord is upon you. And they did according to the word of Moses. 8. And the Lord spake unto Aaron, saying, 9. Do not drink wine nor strong drink, thou, nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations; 10. And that ye may put difference between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean; 11. And that ye may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the Lord hath spoken unto them by the hand of Moses.’— Lev 10:1-11

This solemn story of sin and punishment is connected with the preceding chapter by a simple ‘and.’ Probably, therefore, Nadab and Abihu ‘offered strange fire,’ immediately after the fire from Jehovah had consumed the appointed sacrifice. Their sin was aggravated by the time of its being committed. But a week had passed since the consecration of their father and themselves as priests. The first sacrifices had just been offered, and here, in the very blossoming time, came a vile canker. If such licence in setting aside the prescriptions of the newly established sacrificial order asserted itself then, to what lengths might it not run when the first impression of sanctity and of God’s commandment had been worn by time and custom? The sin was further aggravated by the sinners being priests, who were doubly obliged to punctilious adherence to the instituted ritual. If they set the example of contempt, would not the people better (or, rather, worsen) their instruction?

Unquestionably, their punishment was awfully severe. But we shall entirely misconceive their sin if we judge it by our standards. We are not dependent on forms as Israel was, but the spiritual religion of Christianity was only made possible by the externalism of the older system. The sweet kernel would not have softened and become juicy without the shelter of the hard shell. Scaffolding is needed to erect a building; and he is not a wise man who either despises or would keep permanently standing the scaffold poles.

We draw a broad distinction between positive commandments and moral or religious obligations. But in the Mosaic legislation that distinction does not exist. There, all precepts are God’s uttered will, and all disobedience is rebellion against Him. Nor could it be otherwise at the stage of development which Israel had reached.

What, then, was the crime of these two rash sons of Aaron? That involves two questions: What did they do? and What was the sin of doing it? The former question may be answered in various ways. Certainly the designation of ‘strange fire’ seems best explained by the usual supposition that it means fire not taken from the altar. The other explanations, which make the sin to have been offering at an unauthorised time, or offering incense not compounded according to the prescription, give an unnatural meaning to the

phrase. It was the ‘fire’ which was wrong,—that is, it was ‘fire which they had kindled,’ caught up from some common culinary hearth, or created by themselves in some way.

What was their sin in thus offering it? Plainly, the narrative points to the essence of the crime in calling it ‘fire which He had not commanded.’ So this was their crime, that they were tampering with the appointed order which but a week before they had been consecrated to conserve and administer; that they were thus thrusting in self-will and personal caprice, as of equal authority with the divine commandment; that they were arrogating the right to cut and carve God’s appointments, as the whim or excitement of the moment dictated; and that they were doing their best to obliterate the distinction on the preservation of which religion, morality, and the national existence depended; namely, the distinction between holy and common, clean and unclean. To plough that distinction deep into the national consciousness was no small part of the purpose of the law; and here were two of its appointed witnesses disregarding it, and flying in its face. The flash of holy fire consuming the sacrifices had scarcely faded off their eyeballs when they thus sinned.

They have had many successors, not only in Israel, while a ritual demanding punctilious conformity lasted, but in Christendom since. Alas! our censers are often flaming with ‘strange fire.’ How much so-called Christian worship glows with self-will or with partisan zeal! When we seek to worship God for what we can get, when we rush into His presence with hot, eager desires which we have not subordinated to His will, we are burning ‘strange fire which He has not commanded.’ The only fire which should kindle the incense in our censers, and send it up to heaven in fragrant wreaths, is fire caught from the altar of sacrifice. God must kindle the flame in our hearts if we are to render these else cold hearts to Him.

‘The prayers I bring will then be sweet indeed If Thou the Spirit give, by which I pray.’

The swift, terrible punishment does indeed bear marks of the severity of that earlier stage of revelation. But it was not disproportioned to the offence, and it was not the cruelty of a martinet who avenged ceremonial lapses with penalties which should have been kept for moral offences. The surface of the sin was ceremonial impropriety: the heart of it was flouting Jehovah and His law. It was better that two men should die, and the whole nation perish not, as it would have done if their example had been followed. It is mercy to trample out the first sparks beside a powder-barrel.

There is a very striking parallel between verse 2 and the last verse of the preceding chapter. In both the same expression is used, ‘There came forth fire from before the Lord, and consumed’ (the word rendered devoured in verse 2 is the same in Hebrew as consumed) . So, then, the same divine fire, which had graciously signified God’s acceptance of the appointed sacrifice, now flashed out with lightning-like power of destruction, and killed the two rebel priests. There is dormant potency of destruction in the God who reveals Himself as gracious. The ‘wrath of the Lamb’ is as real as His gentleness. The Gospel is ‘the savour of life unto life’ and ‘of death unto death.’

Moses’ word to the stunned father is of a piece with the severity of the whole incident. No voice of condolence or sympathy comes from him. The brother is swallowed up in the lawgiver. He puts into words the meaning of the terrible stroke, and expects Aaron to acquiesce, though his heart bleeds. What was his interpretation? He saw in it God’s purpose to be ‘sanctified in them that come nigh Him.’ The priests were these. Nadab and Abihu had been consecrated for the purpose of enforcing the truth of God’s holiness. They had done the very opposite, by breaking down the distinction between sacred and common.

But their nearness to God brought with it not only corresponding obligations, but corresponding criminality and penalty, if these obligations were not discharged. If God is not ‘sanctified’ by His servants, He will sanctify Himself on them. If His people do not set forth His infinite separation from all evil and elevation above all creatures, He will proclaim these truths in lightning that kills and thunder that roars. It is a universal law which Moses sternly spoke to Aaron instead of comfort, bidding him recognise the necessity of the fearful blow to his paternal heart. ‘You only have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.’

The prohibition to Aaron and his sons to show signs of mourning is as stern as the rest of the story, and serves to insist upon the true point of view from which to regard it. For the official representatives of the divine order of worship to mourn the deaths of its assailants would have seemed to indicate their murmuring at God’s judgments, and might have led them to participate in the sin while they lamented its punishment. It is hard to mourn and not to repine. Affection blinds to the ill-desert of its objects. Nadab’s and Abihu’s stark corpses lying in the forecourt of the sanctuary, and Aaron’s dry eyes and undisturbed attire, proclaim the same truths, —the gravity of the dead men’s sin, and the righteous judgment of God. But the people might sorrow, for their mourning would help to imprint on them more deeply the lessons of the dread event.

While the victims’ cousins carried their bodies to their graves in the sand, their father and brothers had to remain in the Tabernacle, because ‘the anointing oil of Jehovah is upon you.’ That oil, as the symbol of the Spirit, separates those on whom it is poured from all contact with death, from participation in sin, from the weight of sorrow. What have immortality, righteousness, joy in the Holy Ghost, to do with these dark shadows? Those whom God has called to His immediate service must hold themselves apart from

earthly passions, and must control natural affection, if indulging it imperils their clear witness to God's righteous will.

The prohibition (verses 8-11) of wine and strong drink during the discharge of the priestly functions seems to suggest that Nadab and Abihu had committed their sin while in some degree intoxicated. Be that as it may, the prohibition is rested upon the necessity of preserving, in all its depth and breadth, the distinction between common and holy which Nadab and Abihu had broken down. That distinction was to be very present to the priest in his work, and how could he have the clearness of mind, the collectedness and composure, the sense of the sanctity of his office, and ministrations which it requires and gives, if he was under the influence of strong drink?

Nothing has more power to blur the sharpness of moral and religious insight than even a small amount of alcohol. God must be worshipped with clear brain and naturally beating heart. Not the fumes of wine, in which there lurks almost necessarily the tendency to 'excess,' but the being 'filled with the Spirit' supplies the only legitimate stimulus to devotion. Besides the personal reason for abstinence, there was another,—namely, that only so could the priests teach the people 'the statutes' of Jehovah. Lips stained from the wine-cup would not be fit to speak holy words. Words spoken by such would carry no power.

God's servants can never impress on the sluggish conscience of society their solemn messages from God, unless they are conspicuously free from self-indulgence, and show by their example the gulf, wide as between heaven and hell, which parts cleanness from uncleanness. Our lives must witness to the eternal distinction between good and evil, if we are to draw men to 'abhor that which is evil, and cleave to that which is good.'

Leviticus 14:1-7:
THE FIRST STAGE IN THE LEPER'S CLEANSING

> 'And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, 2. This shall be the law of the leper in the day of his cleansing: He shall be brought unto the priest: 3. And the priest shall go forth out of the camp; and the priest shall look, and, behold, if the plague of leprosy be healed in the leper; 4. Then shall the priest command to take for him that is to be cleansed two birds alive and clean, and cedar-wood, and scarlet, and hyssop: 5. And the priest shall command that one of the birds be killed in an earthen vessel over running water: 6. As for the living bird, he shall take it, and the cedar-wood, and the scarlet, and the hyssop, and shall dip them and the living bird in the blood of the bird that was killed over the running water: 7. And he shall sprinkle upon him that is to be cleansed from the leprosy seven times, and shall pronounce him clean, and shall let the living bird loose into the open field.'— Lev 14:1-7

The whole treatment of leprosy is parabolic. Leprosy itself is a 'parable of death.' The horrible loathsomeness, the contagiousness, the non-curableness, etc. So the man was shut out from camp and from sanctuary. There was a double process in the cleansing rite, restoring to each.

I. Sketch the ceremonial. Two birds, one slain over a vessel of water so that its blood drained in. Then the living bird was to be dipped into this water and blood, along with cedar, scarlet, and hyssop, and the man sprinkled seven times and the living bird set loose.

II. The significance. This elaborate symbolism was partly intelligible even then. Two birds, like the two goats on the Atonement Day. Did both in some sense symbolise the man? The first one was not exactly a sacrifice. Its death points to the physical death which was the end of the disease, but also in some sense its death symbolised the death by which cleansing was secured.

(a) The purifying water is made by blood added to it, i.e . cleansing by sacrifice.

'By water and by blood.'

(b) The sevenfold sprinkling. The cedar, symbol of incorruptibility; the scarlet, of full vital energy; the hyssop, of purifying. So the thought was suggested of the communication of cleansing, full health and incorruption, undecaying strength; all physical contrasts to leprosy sevenfold.

(c) The free, glad activity. The freed bird. The restored leper.

Leviticus 16:1-19:
THE DAY OF ATONEMENT

> ‘And the Lord spake unto Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron when they offered before the Lord, and died; 2. And the Lord said unto Moses, Speak unto Aaron thy brother, that he come not at all times into the holy place within the vail before the mercy-seat, which is upon the ark; that he die not: for I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy-seat. 3. Thus shall Aaron come into the holy place; with a young bullock for a sin offering, and a ram for a burnt offering. 4. He shall put on the holy linen coat, and he shall have the linen breeches upon his flesh, and shall be girded with a linen girdle, and with the linen mitre shall he be attired: these are holy garments; therefore shall he wash his flesh in water, and so put them on. 5. And he shall take of the congregation of the children of Israel two kids of the goats for a sin offering, and one ram for a burnt offering. 6. And Aaron shall offer his bullock of the sin offering, which is for himself, and make an atonement for himself, and for his house. 7. And he shall take the two goats, and present them before the Lord at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. 8. And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats; one lot for the Lord, and the other lot for the scapegoat. 9. And Aaron shall bring the goat upon which the Lord’s lot fell, and offer him for a sin offering: 10. But the goat, on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat, shall be presented alive before the Lord, to make an atonement with Him, and to let him go for a scapegoat into the wilderness. 11. And Aaron shall bring the bullock of the sin offering which is for himself, and shall make an atonement for himself, and for his house, and shall kill the bullock of the sin offering which is for himself. 12. And he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from off the altar before the Lord, and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small, and bring it within the vail: 13. And he shall put the incense upon the fire before the Lord, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy-seat that is upon the testimony, that he die not: 14. And he shall take of the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it with his finger upon the mercy-seat eastward; and before the mercy-seat shall he sprinkle of the blood with his finger seven times. 15. Then shall he kill the goat of the sin offering, that is for the people, and bring his blood within the vail, and do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it upon the mercy-seat, and before the mercy-seat. 16. And he shall make an atonement for the holy place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions in all their sins: and so shall he do for the tabernacle of the congregation, that remaineth among them in the midst of their uncleanness. 17. And there shall be no man in the tabernacle of the congregation when he goeth in to make an atonement in the holy place, until he come out, and have made an atonement for himself, and for his household, and for all the congregation of Israel. 18. And he shall go out unto the altar that is before the Lord, and make an atonement for it; and shall take of the blood of the bullock, and of the blood of the goat, and put it upon the horns of the altar round about. 19. And he shall sprinkle of the blood upon it with his finger seven times, and cleanse it, and hallow it from the uncleanness of the children of Israel.’— Lev 16:1-19

The Talmudical treatise on the ritual of the day of atonement is entitled ‘Yoma,’ the day, which sufficiently expresses its importance in the series of sacrificial observances. It was the confession of the incompleteness of them all, a ceremonial proclamation that ceremonies do not avail to take away sin; and it was also a declaration that the true end of worship is not reached till the worshipper has free access to the holy place of the Most High. Thus the prophetic element is the very life-breath of this supreme institution of the old covenant, which therein acknowledges its own defects, and feeds the hopes of a future better thing. We do not here consider the singular part of the ritual of the Day of Atonement which is concerned with the treatment of the so-called ‘scapegoat’ but confine ourselves to the consideration of that part of it which was observed in the Tabernacle and was intended to expiate the sins of the priesthood and of the people. The chapter connects the rites of the Day of Atonement with the tragic death of the sons of Aaron, which witnessed to the sanctity of the inner shrine, as not to be trodden but with the appointed offerings by the appointed priest; and so makes the whole a divinely given instruction as to the means by which, and the objects for which, Aaron may enter within the veil.

I. In Leviticus 16:1-19: THE DAY OF ATONEMENT3-10 we have the preliminaries of the sacrifices and a summary of the rites.

First, Aaron was to bathe, and then to robe himself in pure white. The dress is in singular contrast to the splendour of his usual official costume, in which he stood before men as representing God, and evidently signifies the purity which alone fits for entrance into the awful presence. Thus vested, he brings the whole of the animals to be sacrificed to the altar,—namely, for himself and his order, a bullock and a ram; for the people, two goats and a ram. The goats are then taken by him to the door of the tent,—and it is to be observed that they are spoken of as both constituting one sin offering (v5). They therefore both belong to the Lord, and are, in some important sense, one, as was recognised by the later Rabbinical prescription that they should be alike in colour, size, and value. The appeal to the lot was an appeal to God to decide the parts they were respectively to sustain in a transaction which, in both parts, was really one. The consideration of the meaning of the ritual for the one which was led away may be postponed for the present. The preliminaries end with the casting of the lots, and in later times, with tying the ominous red fillet on the head of the dumb creature for which so weird a fate was in store.

II. The first part of the ritual proper (Leviticus 16:11, 12, 13, 14) is the expiation for the sins of Aaron and the priesthood, and his entrance into the most holy place.

The bullock was slain in the usual manner of the sin offering, but its blood was destined for a more solemn use. The white-robed priest took a censer of burning embers from the altar before the tent-door, and two hands full of incense, and, thus laden, passed into the Tabernacle. How the silent crowd in the outer court would watch the last flutter of the white robe as it was lost in the gloom within! He passed through the holy place, which, on every day but this, was the limit of his approach; but, on this one day, he lifted the curtain, and entered the dark chamber, where the glory flashed from the golden walls and rested above the ark. Would not his heart beat faster as he laid his hand on the heavy veil, and caught the first gleam of the calm light from the Shechinah? As soon as he entered, he was to cast the incense into the censer, that the fragrant cloud might cover the mercy-seat. Incense is the symbol of prayer, and that curling cloud is a picture of the truth that the purest of men, even the anointed priest, robed in white, who has offered sacrifices daily all the year round, and today has anxiously obeyed all the commands of ceremonial cleanliness, can yet only draw near to God as a suppliant, not entering there as having a right of access, but beseeching entrance as undeserved mercy. The incense did not cover 'the glory' that Aaron might not gaze upon it, but it covered him that Jehovah might not look on his sin. It would appear that, between verse 13 and verse 14 , Aaron's leaving the most holy place to bring the blood of the sacrifice must be understood. If so, we can fancy the long-drawn sigh of relief with which the waiting worshippers saw him return, and carry back into the shrine the expiating blood. The 'most holy place' would still be filled and its atmosphere thick with the incense fumes when he returned to perform the solemn expiation for himself and the whole priestly order. Once the blood was sprinkled on the mercy-seat, and seven times, apparently, on the ground in front of it. The former act was intended, as seems probable, to make atonement for the sins of the priesthood; the latter, to cleanse the sanctuary from the ideal defilements arising from their defective and sinful ministrations.

This completed the part of the ceremonial which belonged immediately to Aaron and the priests. It carries important lessons. Could there be a more striking exhibition of their imperfect realisation of the idea of the priestly office? Observe the anomaly inherent in the very necessity of the case. Aaron was dressed in the white robes emblematic of purity; he had partaken in the benefit of, and had himself offered, sacrifices all the year round. So far as ritual could go, he was pure, and yet so stained with sin that he dared not enter into the divine presence without that double safeguard of the incense and the blood. The priest who cleanses others is himself unclean, and he and his fellows have tainted the sanctuary by the very services which were meant to atone and to purify. That solemn ritual is intended to teach priest and people alike, that every priest 'taken from among men' fails in his office, and pollutes the temple instead of purifying the worshipper. But the office was God's appointment, and therefore would not always be filled by men too small and sinful for its requirements. There must somewhere and somewhen be a priest who will be one indeed, fulfilling the divine ideal of the functions, and answering the deep human longings which have expressed themselves in all lands, for one, pure with no ceremonial but a real purity, to bring us to God and God to us, to offer sacrifice which shall need no after atonement to expiate its defects, and to stand without incense or blood of sprinkling for himself in the presence of God for us. The imperfections of the human holders of the Old Testament offices, whether priest, prophet, or king, were no less prophecies than their positive qualifications were. Therefore, when we see Aaron passing into the holy place, we see the dim shadow of Christ, who 'needeth not to make atonement' for His own sins, and is our priest 'for ever.'

III. The ritual for the atonement of the sins of the people follows.

The two goats had been, during all this time, standing at the door of the Tabernacle. We have already pointed out that they are to be considered as one sacrifice. There are two of them, for the same reason, as has been often remarked, as there were two birds in the ritual of cleansing the leper; namely, because one animal could not represent the two parts of the one whole truth which they are meant to set forth. The one was sacrificed as a sin offering, and the other led away into a solitary land. Here we consider the meaning of the former only, which presents no difficulty. It is a sin offering for the people, exactly corresponding to that just offered for the priests. The same use is made of the blood, which is once sprinkled by Aaron on the mercy-seat and seven times on the ground before it, as in the former case. It is not, however, all employed there, but part of it is carried out into the other divisions of the Tabernacle; and first, the holy place, which the priests daily entered and which is called in verse 16 'the tent of meeting,' and next, the altar of burnt offering in the outer court, are in like manner sprinkled seven times with the blood, to 'hallow' them 'from the uncleanness of the children of Israel' (verse 19). The teaching of this rite, in its bearing upon the people, is similar to that of the previous priestly expiation. The insufficiency of sacrificial cleansing is set forth by this annual atonement for sins which had all been already atoned for. The defects of a ritual worship are proclaimed by the ritual which cleanses the holy places from the uncleanness contracted by them from the worshippers. If the altar, the seat of expiation, itself needed expiation, how imperfect its worth must be! If the cleansing fountain is foul, how shall it be cleansed, or how shall it cleanse the offerers? The bearing of the blood of expiation into the most holy place, where no Israelite ever entered, save the high priest, taught that the true expiation could only be effected by one who should pass into the presence of God, and leave the door wide open for all to enter. For surely the distance between the worshippers and the mercy-seat was a confession of imperfection; and the entrance there of the representative of the sinful people was the holding out of a dim hope that in some fashion, yet unknown, the veil would be rent, and true communion be possible for the

humble soul. The Epistle to the Hebrews tells us where we are to look for the realities of which these ceremonies were the foreshadowings. The veil was rent at the crucifixion. Christ has gone into 'the secret place of the Most High,' and if we love Him, our hearts have gone with Him, and our lives are 'hid with Him, in God.'

Leviticus 16:22: THE SCAPEGOAT

'And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited… '— Lev 16:22

The import of the remarkable treatment of this goat does not depend on the interpretation of the obscure phrase rendered in the Authorised Version 'for the scapegoat.' Leaving that out of sight for the moment, we observe that the two animals were one sacrifice, and that the transaction with the living one was the completion of that with the slain. The sins of the congregation, which had been already expiated by the sacrifice, were laid by the high priest on the head of the goat, which was then sent away into the wilderness that he might 'bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited' (Lev 16:22). Nothing depends on the fate of the goat, though, in after times, it was forced over a precipice and so killed. The carrying away of expiated sin, and not the destruction of unexpiated sinners, is the meaning of the impressive rite, and, had it been possible, the same goat that was sacrificed would have been sent into the desert. As that could not be done, an ideal unity was established between the two: the one sacrificed represented the fact of expiation, the one driven away represented the consequences of expiation in the complete removal of sin. The expiation was made 'within the veil'; but a visible token of its completeness was given to help feeble faith, in the blessed mystery of the unseen propitiation. What was divided in the symbol between the twin goats is all done by the one Sacrifice, who has entered into the holiest of all, at once Priest and Sacrifice, and with His own blood made expiation for sin, and has likewise carried away the sin of the world into a land of forgetfulness, whence it never can return.

The clear meaning of the rite is thus obtained, whatever be the force of the difficult phrase already referred to. 'Scapegoat' is certainly wrong. But it may be questioned whether the Revised Version is right in retaining the Hebrew word untranslated, and, by putting a capital letter to it, marking it as a proper name ('for Azazel'). The word occurs only here, so that we have no help from other passages. It seems to come from a root meaning 'to drive away,' and those who take it to be a proper name, generally suppose it to refer to some malignant spirit, or to Satan, and interpret it as meaning 'a fiend whom one drives away,' or, sometimes, 'who drives away.' The vindication of such an interpretation is supposed to lie in the necessity of finding a complete antithesis in the phrase to the 'for Jehovah' of the previous clause in Lev 16:8 . But it is surely sacrificing a good deal to rhetorical propriety to drag in an idea so foreign to the Pentateuch, and so opposed to the plain fact, that both goats were one sin offering (Lev 16:5), in order to get a pedantically correct antithesis. In the absence of any guidance from usage, certainty as to the meaning of the word is unattainable. But there seems no reason, other than that of the said antithesis, against taking it to mean removal or dismissal, rather than 'a remover.' The Septuagint translates it in both ways: as a person in Lev 16:8 , and as 'sending away' in verse 10 . If the latter meaning be adopted, then the word just defines the same purpose as is given more at length in Lev 16:22 , namely, the carrying away of the sins of the congregation. The logical imperfection of the opposition in verse 8 would then be simply enough solved by the fact that while both goats were 'for the Lord,' one was destined to be actually offered in sacrifice, and the other to be 'for dismissal.' The incomplete contrast testifies to the substantial unity of the two, and needs no introduction, into the most sacred rite of the old covenant, of a ceremony which looks liker demon-worship than a parable of the great expiation for a world's sins.

The question for us is, What spiritual ideas are contained in this Levitical symbolism? There is signified, surely, the condition of approach to God. Remember how the Israelites had impressed on their minds the awful sanctity of 'within the veil.' The inmost shrine was trodden once a year only by the high priest, and only after anxious lustrations and when clothed in pure garments, he entered 'with sacrifice and incense lest he die.' This ritual was for a gross and untutored age, but the men of that age were essentially like ourselves, and we have the same sins and spiritual necessities as they had.

The two goats are regarded as one sacrifice. They are a 'sin offering.' Hence, to show how unimportant and non-essential is the distinction between them, the 'lot' is employed; also, while the one is being slain, the other stands before the 'door of the Tabernacle.' This shows that both are parts of one whole, and it is only from the impossibility of presenting both halves of the truth to be symbolised in one that two are taken. The one which is slain represents the sacrifice for sin. The other represents the effects of that sacrifice. It is never heard of more. 'The Lamb of God taketh away the sins of the world.' 'As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us.'

I. The perfect removal of all sin is thus symbolised.

Notice

(1) the vivid consciousness of sin which marked Judaism.

Was it exaggerated or right?

The same consciousness is part of all of us, but how overlaid! how stifled!

That consciousness once awakened has in it these elements—a bitter sense of sin as mine, involving guilt; despair as to whether I can ever overcome it; and fearful thoughts of my relation to God which conscience itself brings.

(2) The futility of all attempts to remove these fears.

False religions have next to nothing to say about forgiveness. Sacrifices and lustrations they have, but no assurance of absolution. Systems of philosophy and morals have nothing to say but that the universe goes crashing on, and if you have broken its laws you must suffer. That is all, or only the poor cheer of 'Well! you have fallen, get up and go on again!' So men often drug themselves into forgetfulness. They turn away from the unwelcome subject, and forget it at the price of all moral earnestness and often of all happiness; a lethargic sleep or a gaiety, as little real as that of the Girondins singing in their prison the night before being led out to the guillotine.

It is only God's authoritative revelation that can ensure the cure, only He can assure us of pardon, and of the removal of all barriers between ourselves and His love. Only His word can ensure, and His power can effect, the removal of the consequences of our sins. Only His word can ensure, and His power effect, the removal of the power of evil on our characters.

(3) Still the question, Can guilt ever be cancelled? often assumes a fearful significance.

Doubtless much seems to say that it cannot be.

(a) The irrevocableness of the past.

(b) The rigid law of consequences in this world.

(c) The indissoluble unity of an individual life and moral nature, confirmed by the experience of failure in all attempts at reformation of self.

(d) The consciousness of disturbed relations with God, and the prophecy of judgment. All this that ancient symbol suggested. The picture of the goat going away, and away, and away, a lessening speck on the horizon, and never heard of more is the divine symbol of the great fact that there is full, free, everlasting forgiveness, and on God's part, utter forgetfulness. 'Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow.' 'I will remember them no more at all for ever.'

II. The bearing away of sin is indissolubly connected with sacrifice.

Two goats were provided, of which one was offered for a sin offering, indicating that sacrifice came first; then the removal of sin was symbolised by the sending away of the second goat. There is an evident reference to this sequence in the words 'without shedding of blood there is no remission.' The two goats represent Christ's work; the one in its essence, the other in its effect.

The one teaches that sacrifice is a necessary condition of pardon. Forgiveness was not given because the offerer confessed his guilt or because 'God was merciful,' but because the goat had been slain as a sin offering. There is deep spiritual truth for us in this symbolism. We do not need to enter on the philosophy of atonement, but simply to rest on the fact—that the only authority on which we can be sure of forgiveness at all indissolubly associates the two things, sacrifice and pardon. We have no reason to believe in forgiveness except from the Bible record and assurance.

Was the Mosaic ritual a divinely appointed thing? If so, its testimony is conclusive. But even if it were only the embodiment of human aspirations and wants, it would be a strong evidence of the necessity of some such thing as forgiveness.

The shallow dream that God's forgiveness can be extended without a sacrifice having been offered does not exalt but detracts from the divine character. It invariably leads to an emasculated abhorrence of evil, and detracts from the holiness of God, as well as introduces low thoughts of the greatness of forgiveness and of the infinite love of God.

III. The bearing away of sin is associated with man's laying of his sins on the sacrifice appointed by God.

We have seen that the two goats must be regarded as together making one whole. The one which was slain made 'atonement … because of the uncleannesses of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions, even all their sins,' but that expiation was not actually effective till Aaron had 'laid his hands on the head of the live goat, and confessed over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, … and put them on the head of the live goat, and sent him away into the wilderness.' The sacrifice of the slain goat did not accomplish the pardon or removal of the people's sins, but made it possible that their sins should be pardoned and removed.

Then the method by which that possibility is realised is the laying hands on the scapegoat and confessing the sins upon it. The sins

which are actually forgiven, by virtue of the atonement made for all sins, are those which it bears away to the wilderness.

This answers, point for point, to repentance and faith. By these the possibility is turned into an actuality for as many as believe on Christ.

Christ has died for sin. Christ has made atonement by which all sin may be forgiven; whether any shall actually be forgiven depends on something else. It is conceivable that though Christ died, no sin might be pardoned, if no man believed. His blood would not, even then, have been shed in vain, for the purpose of it would have been fully effected in providing a way by which any and all sin could be forgiven. So that the whole question whether any man's sin is pardoned turns on this, Has he laid his hand on Christ? Faith is only a condition of forgiveness, not a cause, or in itself a power. There was no healing in the mere laying of the hand on the head of the goat.

It was not faith which was the reason for forgiveness, but God's love which had provided the sacrifice.

God's will is not a bare will to pardon, nor a bare will to pardon for Christ's sake, but for Christ's sake to pardon them who believe. 'Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world.' 'Dost thou believe on the Son of God?' 'Through this Man is preached the remission of sins.'

Leviticus 23:33-44
THE CONSECRATION OF JOY

> 'And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, 34. Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the feast of tabernacles for seven days unto the Lord. 35. On the first day shall be an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein. 36. Seven days ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord; on the eighth day shall be an holy convocation unto you; and ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord: it is a solemn assembly; and ye shall do no servile work therein. 37. These are the feasts of the Lord, which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations, to offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord, a burnt offering, and a meat offering, a sacrifice, and drink offerings, every thing upon his day: 38. Beside the sabbaths of the Lord, and beside your gifts, and beside all your vows, and beside all your freewill offerings, which ye give unto the Lord. 39. Also in the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when ye have gathered in the fruit of the land, ye shall keep a feast unto the Lord seven days: on the first day shall be a sabbath, and on the eighth day shall be a sabbath. 40. And ye shall take you on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm-trees, and the boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook; and ye shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days. 41. And ye shall keep it a feast unto the Lord seven days in the year. It shall be a statute for ever in your generations: ye shall celebrate it in the seventh month. 42. Ye shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths: 43. That your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God. 44. And Moses declared unto the children of Israel the feasts of the Lord.'— Lev 23:33-44

These directions for the observance of the great festival at the close of harvest are singularly arranged. Lev 23:33, 34, 35, 36 give part of the instructions for the Feast, verses 37 and 38 interrupt these with a summary of the contents of the chapter, and Lev 23:39 to the end pick up the broken thread, and finish the regulations for the feast. Naturally, this apparent afterthought has been pointed out as clear evidence of diversity of authorship. But a reasonable explanation may be given on the hypothesis of the unity of the section, by observing that Lev 23:33-36 deal only with the sacrificial side of the feast, as worship proper, and thus come into line with the previous part of the chapter, which is occupied with an enumeration of the annual 'feasts of the Lord' (Lev 23:4). It was natural, therefore, that, when the list had been completed by the sacrificial prescriptions for the last of the series, the close of the catalogue should be marked, in Lev 23:37, 38 , and that then the other parts of the observances connected with this feast, which are not sacrificial, nor, properly speaking, worship, should be added. There is no need to invoke the supposition of two authors, and a subsequent stitching together, in order to explain the arrangement. The unity is all the more probable because, otherwise, the first half would give the name of the feast as that of 'tabernacles,' and would not contain a word to account for the name.

We need not, then, include the separating wedge, in Lev 23:37, 38 , in our present consideration. The ritual of the feast is broadly divided by it, and we may consider the two portions separately. The first half prescribes the duration of the feast as seven days (the perfect number), with an eighth, which is named, like the first, 'an holy convocation,' on which no work was to be done, but is also called 'a solemn assembly,' or rather, as the Revised Version reads, in margin, 'a closing festival,' inasmuch as it closed, not only that particular feast, but the whole series for the year. The observances enjoined, then, are the public assembly on the first and eighth days, with cessation from labour, and a daily offering. We learn more about the offering from Numbers 29:12 et seq. , which

appoints a very peculiar arrangement. On each day there was to be, as on other feast days, one goat for a sin offering; but the number of rams and lambs for the burnt offering was doubled, and, during the seven days of the feast, seventy bullocks were offered, arranged in a singular diminishing scale,—thirteen on the first day, and falling off by one a day till the seventh day, when seven were sacrificed. The eighth day was marked as no part of the feast proper, by the number of sacrifices offered on it, dropping to one bullock, one ram, and seven lambs. No satisfactory account of this regulation has been suggested. It may possibly have meant no more than to mark the first day as the chief, and to let the worshippers down gradually from the extraordinary to the ordinary.

The other half of the regulations deals with the more domestic aspect of the festival. Observe, as significant of the different point of view taken in it, that the first and eighth days are there described, not as ‘holy convocations,’ but as ‘sabbaths,’ or, as the Revised Version gives it better, ‘a solemn rest.’ Observe, also, that these verses connect the feast with the ingathering of the harvest, as does Exodus 33:16 . It is quite possible that Moses grafted the more commemorative aspect of the feast on an older ‘harvest home’; but that is purely conjectural, however confidently affirmed as certain. To tumble down cartloads of quotations about all sorts of nations that ran up booths and feasted in them at vintage-time does not help us much. The ‘joy of harvest’ was unquestionably blended with the joy of remembered national deliverance, but that the latter idea was superadded to the former at a later time is, to say the least, not proven. Would it matter very much if it were?

Three kinds of trees are specified from which ‘the fruit,’ that is branches with fruit on them, if the tree bore fruit, were to be taken: palms, ‘thick trees,’ that is thick foliaged, which could give leafy shade, and willows of the brook, which the Rabbis say were used for binding the others together. Verse 40 does not tell what is to be done with these branches, but the later usage was to carry some of them in the hand as well as to use them for booths. The keynote of the whole feast is struck in verse 40 : ‘Ye shall rejoice before the Lord your God.’ The leafy spoils come into view here as tokens of jubilation, which certainly suggests their being borne in the hand; but they were also meant to be used in building the booths in which the whole nation was to live during the seven days, in commemoration of God’s having made them ‘dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt.’ This is all that is enjoined by Moses. Later additions to the ceremonial do not concern us here, however interesting some of these are. The true intention of the feast is best learned from the original simple form. What, then, was its intention? It was the commemoration of the wilderness life as the ground of rejoicing ‘before the Lord.’ But we must not forget that, according to Leviticus, it was appointed while the wilderness life was still present, and so was not to be observed then. Was it, then, a dead letter, or had the appointment a message of joy even to the weary wanderers who lived in the veritable booths, which after generations were to make a feast of mimicking? How firm the confidence of entering the land must have been, which promulgated such a law! It would tend to hearten the fainting courage of the pilgrims. A divinely guaranteed future is as certain as the past, and the wanderers whom He guides may be sure of coming to the settled home. All words which He speaks beforehand concerning that rest and the joyful worship there are pledges that it shall one day be theirs. The present use of the prospective law was to feed faith and hearten hope; and, when Canaan was reached, its use was to feed memory and brighten godly gladness.

The feast of tabernacles was the consecration of joy. Other religions have had their festivals, in which wild tumult and foul orgies have debased the worshippers to the level of their gods. How different the pure gladness of this feast ‘before the Lord’ ! No coarse and sensuous delights of passion could live before the ‘pure eyes and perfect witness’ of God. In His ‘presence’ must be purity as well as ‘fullness of joy.’ If this festival teaches us, on the one hand, that they wofully misapprehend the spirit of godliness who do not find it full of gladsomeness, it teaches us no less, on the other, that they wofully misapprehend the spirit of joy, who look for it anywhere but ‘before the Lord.’ The ritual of the feast commanded gladness. Joy is a duty to God’s children. There were mourners in Israel each year, as the feast came round, who would rather have shrunk into a corner, and let the bright stream of merriment flow past them; but they, too, had to open their heavy hearts, and to feel that, in spite of their private sorrows, they had a share in the national blessings. No grief should unfit us for feeling thankful joy for the great common gift of ‘a common salvation.’ The sources of religious joy, open to all Christians, are deeper than the fountains of individual sorrow, deep as life though these sometimes seem.

The wilderness life came into view in the feast as a wandering life of privation and change. The booths reminded of frail and shifting dwellings, and so made the contrast with present settled homes the sweeter. They were built, not of such miserable scrub as grew in the desert, and could scarcely throw shade enough to screen a lizard, but of the well-foliaged branches of trees grown by the rivers of water, and so indicated present abundance. The remembrance of privations and trials past, of which the meaning is understood, and the happy results in some degree possessed, is joy. Prosperous men like to talk of their early struggles and poverty. This feast teaches that such remembrance ought always to trace the better present to God, and that memory of conquered sorrows and trials is wholesome only when it is devout, and that the joy of present ease is bracing, not when it is self-sufficient, but when it is thankful. The past, rightly looked at, will yield for us all materials for a feast of tabernacles; and it is rightly looked at only when it is all seen as God’s work, and as tending to settled peace and abundance. Therefore the regulations end with that emphatic seal of all His commands, to impress which on our hearts is the purpose of all His dealings with us as with Israel, ‘I am the Lord your God.’

III. We may note our Lord’s allusions to the feast.

There are probably two, both referring to later additions to the ceremonies. One is in John vii. 37 . We learn from the Talmud that on each of the seven days (and according to one Rabbi on the eighth also) a priest went down to Siloam and drew water in a golden pitcher, which he brought back amid the blare of trumpets to the altar, and poured into a silver basin while the joyous worshippers chanted the 'Great Hallel' (Ps 113-118), and thrice waved their palm branches as they sang. We may venture to suppose that this had been done for the last time; that the shout of song had scarcely died away when a stir in the crowd was seen, and a Galilean peasant stood forth, and there, before the priests with their empty vessels, and the hushed multitude, lifted up His voice, so as to be heard by all, and cried, saying: 'If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink.' What increased force is given to the extraordinary self-assertion of such words, if we picture this as the occasion of their utterance! Leviticus gives no preeminence to any one day, but John's expression, 'that great day of the feast,' may well have been warranted by later developments.

The other allusion is less certain, though it is probable. It is found in the saying at John 8:12 : 'I am the Light of the world,' etc. The Talmud gives a detailed account of the illuminations accompanying the feast. Four great golden lamps were set up in the court, each tended by four young priests. 'There was not a court in Jerusalem that was not lit up by the lights of the water-drawing.' Bands of grave men with flashing torches danced before the people, while Levites 'accompanied them with harps, psalteries, cymbals, and numberless musical instruments,' and another band of Levites standing on the fifteen steps which led to the women's court, chanted the fifteen so-called 'songs of degrees,' and yet others marched through the courts blowing their trumpets as they went. It must have been a wild scene, dangerously approximating to the excitement of heathen nocturnal festivals, and our Lord may well have sought to divert the spectators to higher thoughts. But the existence of the allusion is doubtful.

We have one more allusion to the feast, considered as a prophecy of the true rest and joy in the true Canaan. The same John, who has preserved Christ's references, gives one of his own in Revelation vii. 9 , when he shows us the great multitude out of every nation 'with palms in their hands.' These are not the Gentile emblems of victory, as they are often taken to be. There are no heathen emblems in the Apocalypse, but all moved within the circle of Jewish types and figures. So we are to think of that crowd of 'happy palmers' as joyously celebrating the true feast of tabernacles in the settled home above, and remembering, with eyes made clear by heaven, the struggles and fleeting sorrows of the wilderness. The emblem sets forth heaven as a festal assembly, as the ingathering of the results of the toils of earth, as settled life after weary pilgrimage, as glad retrospect of the meaning and triumphant possession of the issues of God's patient guidance and wise discipline. Here we dwell in 'the earthly house of this tabernacle'; there, in a 'building of God … eternal.' Here we are agitated by change, and wearied by the long road; there, changeless but increasing joy will be ours, and the backward look of thankful wonder will enhance the sweetness of the blessed present, and confirm the calm and sure hope of an ever-growing glory stretching shoreless and bright before us.

Leviticus 25:23:
SOJOURNERS WITH GOD

> 'The land shall not be sold for ever: for the land is Mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with Me.'— Lev 25:23

The singular institution of the Jubilee year had more than one purpose. As a social and economical arrangement it tended to prevent the extremes of wealth and poverty. Every fiftieth year the land was to revert to its original owners, the lineal descendants of those who had 'come in with the conqueror,' Joshua. Debts were to be remitted, slaves emancipated, and so the mountains of wealth and the valleys of poverty were to be somewhat levelled, and the nation carried back to its original framework of a simple agricultural community of small owners, each 'sitting under his own vine and fig-tree' and, like Naboth, sturdily holding the paternal acres.

As a ceremonial institution it was the completion of the law of the Sabbath. The seventh day proclaimed the need for weekly rest from labour, and as was the sabbath in the week, so was the seventh year among the years—a time of quiet, when the land lay fallow and much of the ordinary labour was suspended. Nor were these all; when seven weeks of years had passed, came the great Jubilee year, charged with the same blessed message of Rest, and doubtless showing dimly to many wearied and tearful eyes some gleams of a better repose beyond.

Besides these purposes, it was appointed to enforce, and to make the whole fabric of the national wealth consciously rest upon, this thought contained in our text. The reason why the land was not to pass out of the hauls of the representatives of those to whom God had originally given it, was that He had not really given it to them at all. It was not theirs to sell—they had only a beneficiary occupation. While they held it, it was still His, and neither they, nor any one to whom they might sell the use of it for a time, were anything more than tenants at will. The land was His, and they were only like a band of wanderers, squatting for a while by permission of the owner, on his estate. Their camp-fires were here today, but to-morrow they would be gone. They were 'strangers and sojourners.' That may sound sad, but all the sadness goes when we read on—'with Me.' They are God's guests, so though they

do not own a foot of soil, they need not fear want.

All this is as true for us. We can have no better New Year's thoughts than those which were taught by the blast of the silver trumpets that proclaimed liberty to the slaves, and restored to the landless pauper his alienated heritage.

I. Here is the lesson of God's proprietorship and our stewardship.

'The land is Mine' was of course true in a special sense of the territory which God gave by promise and miracle, which was kept by obedience, and lost by rebellion. But it is as really true about our possessions, and that not only because of our transient stay here. It would be as true if we were to live in this world for ever. It will be as true in heaven. Length of time makes no difference in this tenure. Undisturbed possession for ever so long does not constitute ownership here. God is possessor of all, by virtue of His very nature, by His creation and preservation of us and of all things. So that when we talk about 'mine' and 'thine,' we are only speaking a half truth. There is a great sovereign 'His' behind both. So then let us take that thought with us for use, as we pass into another year. What lessons does it give?

It should nurture constant thankfulness. To-day looking back over whatever dark, dreary, sunless days, we all have bright ones too. Does any thought of God as the Fountain of all our joys and goods rise in our souls? Have we learned to associate a divine hand and a Father's will with them? Do we congratulate ourselves on our own cleverness, tact, and skill, saying, 'mine hand hath done it,' or do we hug ourselves on our own good fortune, and burn incense to chance and 'circumstances'? —or, sadder still, are we generously grateful to every human friend that helps us, and unthankful only to God—or does the glad thought come, to gild the finest gold of our possessions with new brilliance and worth, and to paint and perfume the whitest lily of our joys with new delightsomeness, 'All things come of Thee'; 'Thou makest us drink of the river of Thy pleasures'?

Blessed are they who, by the magic glass of a thankful heart, see all things in God, and God in all things. To them life is tenfold brighter, as a light plunged in oxygen flames more intensely than in common air. The darkest night is filled with light, and the loneliest place blazes with angel faces, and the stoniest pillar is soft, to him who sees everywhere the ladder that knits earth with heaven, and to whom all His blessings are as the messengers that descend by it on errands of mercy, whose long shining ranks lead up the eye and the heart to the loving God from whom they come.

Here too is the ground for constant thankful submission. 'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away.' We have no right to murmur, however we may regret, if the Landowner takes back a bit of the land which He has let us occupy. It was the condition of our occupation that He should be at liberty to do so whenever He saw that it would be best for us. He does not give us our little patches for His advantage, but for ours, nor does He take them away at His own whim, but 'for our profit.' We get more than full value for all the work and capital we have expended, and His only reason for ever disturbing us is that we may be driven to claim a better inheritance in Himself than we can find even in the best of His gifts. So He sometimes gives, that we may be led by our possessions to think lovingly of Him; and He sometimes takes, that we may be led, in the hour of emptiness and loss, to recognise whose hand it was that pulled up the props round which our poor tendrils clung. But the opposite actions have the same purpose, and like the up-and-down stroke of a piston, or the contrary motion of two cogged wheels that play into each other, are meant to impel us in one direction, even to the heart of God who is our home. A landowner stops up a private road one day in a year, in order to assert his right, and to remind the neighbourhood that he could stop it altogether if he liked. So God reminds us by our losses and sorrows, of what we are so apt to forget, and what it is such a joy to us to remember—His possession of them all. Blessed be God! He teaches us in that fashion far seldomer than in the other. Let joy teach us the lesson, and we shall the less need 'the sternest' teacher 'and the best,' even sorrow. Better to learn it by gladness than by tears; better to see it written in 'laughing flowers' than in desolate gardens and killing frost.

So, too, there should be a constant sense of responsibility in the use of all which we have. All is His, and He has given all to us, for a purpose. So, plainly, we are but stewards, or trustees, and are bound to employ everything, not according to our own inclination or notion of what is right, but according to what, in the exercise of our best and most impartial judgment, we believe to be the owner's will. Trusteeship means that we take directions as to the employment of the property from its owner. It means too that we employ it not for our own satisfaction and well-being alone, though that is included, and is a part of His purpose who 'delights in the prosperity of His servants.' Thoughts of others, thoughts of the owner's claims, and of bringing back to Him all that He has given to us, increased by our diligence, must be uppermost in our minds, if we are to live nobly or happily here. 'It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful.' And this applies to all we have in mind, body, and estate. A thoughtful expenditure and use of all His gifts, on principles drawn from our knowledge of His will, and for objects not terminating with self, is the duty that corresponds to the great fact of God's ownership of all. If we use His gifts to minister to our own vanity or frivolity, or love of ease, or display; if an 'intolerable deal' of all we have is used for ourselves, and a poor ha' porth' for others; if our gifts are grudging; if we possess without sense of responsibility, and enjoy without thankfulness, and lose with murmuring; if our hearts are more set on material prosperity than on love and peace, knowledge and purity, noble lives and a Father God; if higher desires and hopes are dying out as we 'get on' in the world, and religious occupations which used to be pleasant are stale; then for all our outward Christianity the stern old woe applies,

‘Your riches are corrupted, and the rust of them shall be a witness against you,’ and we need the shrill note of the trumpet of Jubilee to be blown in our ears, ‘The land is Mine.’

II. We have the teaching of the transiency of our stay here.

‘Ye are strangers and sojourners’—pilgrims who make a brief halt in a foreign country. The image has in it an allusion to the nomad life of Abraham and his son and grandson, as well as to the desert-wanderings of the people, and suggests the thought, ‘You are homeless wanderers, not having where to lay your heads, as truly when you have been settled for generations on your ancestral lands, as when you plodded wearily in the wilderness.’ It is a universal truth, ever acknowledged and forgotten, wholesome though sometimes sad to feel, and preached to even frivolous natures by the change in our calendar which a New Year brings.

How vividly this word of our text brings out the contrast between the permanence of the external world and our brief stay in it!

In Israel there would be few vineyards or olive-grounds held by the same man at two, and none at three, successive jubilees. The hoary twisted olives yielded their black berries, say, to Simeon, the son of Joseph, to-day, as they did fifty years ago to Joseph, the son of Reuben, and as they will do fifty years hence to Judas, the son of Simeon. So is it with us all. There is nothing more pathetic than the thought of how generations come and go, and empires rise and fall, while the scene on which they play their brief parts remains the same.

‘The mountains look on Marathon,
And Marathon looks on the sea.’

to-day as they did more than two millenniums ago, only the grass was for a while a little ranker on the plain. Olivet lifts the same outline against the pale morning twilight as when David went up its slope a weeping exile. The pebble that we kick out of our path had thousands of years of existence ere we were born, and may lie there unaltered to all appearance for centuries after we are dead. ‘One generation cometh and another goeth, but the earth abideth for ever.’

And how much more lasting our possessions are than their possessors! Where are the strong hands that clutched the rude weapons that lie now quietly ticketed in our museums? How dim and dark the bright brave eyes that once flashed through the bars of these helmets, hanging just a little rusted, over the tombs in Westminster Abbey! Other men will live in our houses, read our books, own our mills, use our furniture, preach in our pulpits, sit in our pews: we are but lodgers in this abiding nature, ‘like a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night,’ and to-morrow morning vacates his rooms for a new arrival, and goes away unregretted and is forgotten in an hour.

The constant change and progression of life are enforced, too, in this metaphor.

The old threadbare emblem of a journey which is implied in the text suggests how, moment by moment, we hurry on and how everything is slipping past us, as fields and towns do to a traveller in a train. Only our journey is smooth and noiseless, like the old-fashioned canal boat travelling, where, if you shut your eyes, you could not tell that you were moving. We glide on and never know it, and so gradually and silently is the scene ‘changed by still degrees,’ that it is only now and then that men have any vivid consciousness that the ‘fashion of this world is’ ever ‘in the act of passing,’ like the canvas of a panorama ever winding and unwinding on its twin rollers with slow, equable motion. It needs an effort of attention and will to discern the movement, and it is worth while to make the effort, for that clear and poignant sense of the constant flux and mutation of all things around us, and of the ebbing away of our own lives, is fundamental to all elevation of thought, to all nobleness of deed, to all worthy conception of duty and of joy. Everything that is, stands poised, like Fortune, on a rolling ball. The solid earth is a movable sphere, for ever spinning on its axis and rushing on its path among the stars. Ever some star is sinking in mist, or dipping below the horizon; ever new constellations are climbing to the zenith. A long, patient discipline is needed to keep fresh in our hearts the sense of this transiency. Let us set ourselves consciously to deepen our convictions of it, and amidst all the illusions of these solid-seeming shows of things, keep firm hold of the assurance that they are but fleeting shadows that sweep across the solemn mountain’s side, and that only God and the doing of His will lasts. So shall our life pierce down with its seeking roots to the abiding ground of all Being, and, looking to the ‘things that are eternal,’ we shall be able to make what is but for a moment contribute to the everlasting ennobling of our character and enrichment of our life yonder.

Surely these words, too, tell of the true home.

‘Ye are strangers’—because your native land is elsewhere. It is not merely the physical facts of death and change that make us strangers here, but the direction of our desires, and the true affinities of our nature. If by these we belong to heaven and God, then here we shall feel that we have not where to lay our heads, and shall ‘dwell in tabernacles’ because ‘we look for the city.’

What a contrast between the perishable tents of the wilderness and the rock-built mansions of that city. And how short this phase of being must look when seen from above! You remember how long a year, a week, seemed to you when a child—what do the first ten

years of your life look to you now? What must the earthly life of Abel, the first who died, look to him even now, when he contrasts its short twenty or thirty years with the thousands since? and, after thousands and thousands more, how it will dwindle! So to us, if we reach that safe shore, and look back upon the sea that brought us thither, as it stretches to the horizon, miles of billows once so terrible will seem shrunken to a line of white foam.

Cherish, then, constant consciousness of that solemn eternity, and let your eyes be ever directed to it, like a man who sees some great flush of light on the horizon, and is ever turning from his work to look. Use the transient as preparation for the eternal, the fleeting days as those which determine the undying 'Day' and its character. Keep your cares and interests in the present rigidly limited to necessary things. Why should travellers burden themselves? The less luggage, the easier marching. The accommodation and equipment in the desert do not matter much. The wise man will say, 'Oh, it will do. I shall soon be home.' 'Ye are strangers and sojourners.'

III. We have here also the teaching of trust.

Some of us think that such thoughts as the preceding are sad. Why should they be so? They need not be. Our text adds a little word which takes all the sadness out of them. 'With Me'; that gives the true notion of our earthly life. We are strangers indeed, passing through a country which is not ours, but whilst we are sojourners, we are 'sojourners' with the king of the land. In the antique hospitable times, the chief of the tribe would take the travellers to his own tent, and charge himself with their safety and comfort. So we are God's guests on our travels. He will take care of us. The visitor has no need to trouble himself about the housekeeping, he may safely leave that with the master of the house. If the king has taken us in charge, we may be quite sure that no harm will come to us in his country. So for ourselves and for those we love, and for all the wide interests of church and world, there are peace and strength in the thought that we are the guests of God here, 'strangers and sojourners with Him .' Will He invite us to His table and let us hunger? Will He call us to be His guests, and then, like some traitorous Arab sheikh, break the laws of hospitality and harm His too-confiding guests? Impossible for evermore. So we are safe, and our bread shall be given us, for we are sojourners with God.

True, we are strangers, and in our constant movement we lose many of the companions of our march, and the track of the caravan may be traced by the graves on either side. But, since we are 'with Him,' we have companionship even when most solitary, and even in a strange land shall not be lonely. Seek then to cultivate as a joy and strength that consciousness that the Lord of all the land is ever with you, Whoever goes, He abides. Whatever rushes past us like a phantasmagoria, He passes not. Whatever and whoever change, He changes never. Where thou goest, He will go. He will be 'thy shield at thy right hand,' and thy 'keeper from all evil.' So, looking forward to the unknown days of another New Year, we may be of good cheer.

So will it be while we live; and if this year we should die—well, the King of this land, where we are strangers, is the King of the other land beyond the sea, where we are at home. So we shall only be the nearer to Him for the change. Death the separator shall but unite us to the King, whose presence indeed fills this subject-province of His empire with all its good, but who dwells in more resplendent 'beauty,' and is felt in greater nearness in the other 'land that is very far off.' Whether here or there, we may have God with us, if we will. With Him for our Host and companion, let us peacefully go on our road, while the life of strangers and sojourners shall last. It will bring us to the fatherland where we shall be at home with the King, and find in Him our 'sure dwelling, and quiet resting-place, and peaceful habitation for ever.'

Leviticus 25:42: GOD'S SLAVES

> 'For they are My servants, which I brought forth out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as bondmen.'—Lev 25:42

This is the basis of the Mosaic legislation as to slavery. It did not suppress but regulated that accursed system. Certainly Hebrew slavery was a very different thing from that of other nations. In the first place, no Jew was to be a slave. To that broad principle there were exceptions, such as the case of the man who voluntarily gave himself up to his creditor. But even he was not to be treated as a slave, but as a 'hired servant,' and at the jubilee was to be set free. There were also other regulations of various kinds in other circumstances on which we do not need to dwell. The slaves of alien blood were owned and used, but under great mitigations and restrictions.

Of course we have here an instance of the incompleteness of the Mosaic law,—or rather we may more truly say of its completeness, regard being had to the state of the world at the time. All social change hangs together. Institutions cannot be altered at a blow, without altering the stage of civilisation, of which they are the expression. 'Raw haste' is 'half-sister to delay.' What is good and necessary for one era is out of place in another. So God works slowly, and lets bad things die out, by changing the atmosphere in which they flourish.

All servitude to men was an infraction of God's rights over Israel. God was the Israelites' 'Master'; they were His 'slaves.' He was so, because He had 'broken the bands of their yoke, and set them free.' There is, then, here—

I. The ground of God's rights. 'I brought you forth.'

II. Our servitude because of our redemption. 'Ye are My servants.'

III. Our consequent freedom from all other masters. 'Ye shall not be sold as bondmen.'

Leviticus 25:48:
THE KINSMAN REDEEMER

After that he is sold he may be redeemed again; one of his brethren may redeem him.'— Lev 25:48

There are several of the institutions and precepts of the Mosaic legislation which, though not prophetic, nor typical, have yet remarkable correspondences with lofty Christian truth. They may be used as symbols, if only we remember that we are diverting them from their original purpose.

How singularly these words lend themselves to the statement of the very central truths of Christianity—a slavery which is not necessarily perpetual and a redemption effected by a kinsman!

That institution of the 'Goel' is of a very remarkable kind, and throws great light on Christian verities. I wish, in dealing with it, to guard against any idea that it was meant to be prophetic or typical.

I. The kinsman redeemer under the old law.

The strength of the family tie in the Israelitish polity was great. The family was the unit—hence there were certain duties devolving on the nearest male relative. These, so far as we are at present concerned, were three.

(a) The redemption of a slave.

The Mosaic legislation about slavery was very remarkable. It did not nominally prohibit it, but it fenced it round and modified it, so as to make it another thing.

Israelites were allowed to hold Gentile slaves, but under careful restrictions. Israelites were allowed to sell themselves as slaves. If the sale was to Israelites, the slavery was ended in six years or at the jubilee, whichever period came first—unless the slave had his ear bored to the doorpost to intimate his contentment in service (Ex 21:5, 6). This is not slavery in our sense of the word, but only a six years' engagement. If sold to a heathen in Israel, then the Goel had to redeem him; and the reason for this was that all Israelites belonged to God.

(b) The redemption of an inheritance.

This was the task of the kinsman-goel. The land belonged to the tribe. Pauperism was thus kept off. There could be no 'submerged tenth.' The theocratic reason was, 'the land shall not be sold at all for ever for it is Mine!'

(c) The avenging of murder.

Blood feuds were thus checked, though not abolished. The remarkable institution of 'cities of refuge' gave opportunity for deliberate investigation into each case. If wilful murder was proved, the murderer was given up to the Goel for retribution; if death had been by misadventure, the slayer was kept in the city of refuge till the high-priest's decease.

This is the germ of the figure of the Redeemer-Kinsman in later Scripture. Notice how higher ideas began to gather round the office. The prophets felt that in some way God was their 'Goel.' In Isaiah the application of the name to Him is frequent and, we might almost say, habitual. So in Psalm 49:7 , 'None can be Goel to his brother'; Ps 49:15 'God will be Goel to my soul from the power of the grave.'

Job 19:25 , 'I know that my Goel liveth… '

II. Our Kinsman-Redeemer.

The New Testament metaphor of 'Redemption' or buying back with a ransom is distinctly drawn from the Hebrew Goel's office.

Christ is the Kinsman. The brotherhood of Christ with us was voluntarily assumed, and was for the purpose of redeeming His brethren.

He is the Kinsman-Redeemer from slavery,—a slavery which is voluntary. The soul is self-delivered to evil and sin; but blessed be God! this slavery is terminable. The kinship of Christ was needful for our redemption. 'It behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren.' He thus gave His life a 'ransom' for many. Note the objective value of His atonement, and its subjective power as setting us free.

He is the Kinsman-Redeemer of our inheritance. God is the inheritance here. The manhood of Jesus brings God back to us for our—(1) Knowledge; (2) Love; (3) Possession. Heaven is our inheritance hereafter. His manhood secures it for us. 'I go to prepare a place for you.' 'An inheritance incorruptible.' 'The redemption of the purchased possession.'

The Kinsman-Avenger of blood. It is only in a modified sense that we can transfer this part of the Goel's office to Jesus. The old Kinsman-Avenger of blood avenged it by shedding the shedder's blood in retribution. But that was not the kind of vindication (for Goel means also Vindicator) for which Job looked when he used the expression. Resurrection to the vision of God was to come to him 'at the last,' by the standing of his Goel on the earth, and that was to be the true avenging of his death, and his vindication. The great murderer Death is to die, and his victims are to be wrested from him, and their death be proved to be the means of their fuller life. 'Precious shall their blood be in His sight,' and when their slayer is slain they will live for ever, partakers of their Kinsman-Redeemer's glory, because they had been partakers of His death, and His blood had been precious in their sight. Let us cling to our Kinsman-Redeemer in all our life that He may give us freedom and an inheritance among His brethren, and, closing our eyes in death, we may commend our spirits to the 'Angel that redeemed us from all evil,' and be sure that He will 'redeem' our 'souls from the power of the grave.'

Related Resources:

- In Depth Discussion of Kinsman Redeemer - Christ Our Goel - charts, word studies

Leviticus 26:10:
THE OLD STORE AND THE NEW

'Ye shall eat old store, and bring forth the old because of the new.'— Lev 26:10

This is one of the blessings promised to obedience. No doubt it, like the other elements of that 'prosperity' which 'is the blessing of the Old Testament,' presupposes a supernatural order of things, in which material well-being was connected with moral good far more closely and certainly than we see to be the case. But the spirit and heart of the promise remain, however the form of it may have passed away. It is a picturesque way of saying that the harvest shall be more than enough for the people's wants. All through the winter, and the spring, and the ripening summer, their granaries shall yield supplies. There will be no season of scarcity such as often occurs in countries whose communications are imperfect, just before harvest, when the last year's crop is exhausted, and it is hard to get anything to live on till this year's is ready. But when the new wheat comes in they will have still much of the old, and will have to 'bring it forth' to empty their barns, to make room for the fresh supplies which the blessing of God has sent before they were needed. The same idea of superabundant yield from the fields is given under another form in a previous verse of this chapter (ver. 5): 'Your threshing shall reach unto the vintage, and the vintage shall reach unto the sowing time, and ye shall eat your bread to the full': which reminds one of the striking prophecy of Amos: 'Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed.' So rapid the growth, and so large the fruitfulness, that the gatherer shall follow close on the heels of the sower, and will not have accomplished his task before it is again time to sow. The prophet clearly has in his mind the old promise of the law, and applies it to higher matters, even to the fields white to harvest, where 'he that soweth and he that reapeth shall rejoice together.' In the same way we may take these words, and gather from them better promises and larger thoughts than they originally carried.

There is in them a promise as to the fullness of the divine gifts, which has a far wider reach and nobler application than to the harvests and granaries of old Palestine.

We may take the words in that aspect, first, as containing God's pledge that these outward gifts shall come in unbroken continuity. And have they not so come to us all, for all these long years? Has there ever been a gap left yawning? has there ever been a break in the chain of mercies and supplies? has it not rather been that 'one post ran to meet another,' that before one of the messengers had unladed all his budget, another's arrival has antiquated and put aside his store? True, we are often brought very low; there may not be much in the barn but sweepings, and a few stray grains scattered over the floor. We may have but a handful of meal in the

barrel, and be ready to dress it ‘that we may eat it, and die.’ But it never really comes to that. The new ever comes before the old is all eaten up; or if it be delayed even beyond that time, it comes before the hunger reaches inanition. It may be good that we should have to trust Him, even when the storehouse is empty; it may be good for us to know something of want, but that discipline comes seldom, and is never carried very far. For the most part He anticipates wants by gifts, and His good gifts overlap each other in our outward lives as slates on a roof, or scales on a fish.

We wonder at the smooth working of the machinery for feeding a great city; and how, day by day, the provisions come at the right time, and are parted out among hundreds of thousands of homes. But we seldom think of the punctual love, the perfect knowledge, the profound wisdom which cares for us all, and is always in time with its gifts. It was that quality of punctuality extended over a whole universe which seemed so wonderful to the Psalmist: ‘The eyes of all wait upon Thee, and Thou givest them their meat in due season.’ God’s machinery for distribution is perfect, and its very perfection, with the constancy of the resulting blessings, robs Him of His praise, and hinders our gratitude. By assiduity He loses admiration.

‘Things grown common lose their dear delight.’ ‘If in His gifts and benefits He were more sparing and close-handed,’ said Luther, ‘we should learn to be thankful.’ But let us learn it by the continuity of our joys, that we may not need to be taught it by their interruption; and let us still all tremulous anticipation of possible failure or certain loss by the happy confidence which we have a right to cherish, that His mercies will meet our needs, continuous as they are, and be strung so close together on the poor thread of our lives that no gap will be discernible in the jewelled circle.

May we not apply that same thought of the unbroken continuity of God’s gifts to the higher region of our spiritual experience? His supplies of wisdom, love, joy, peace, power, to our souls are always enough and more than enough for our wants. If ever men complain of languishing vitality in their religious emotions, or of a stinted supply of food for their truest self, it is their own fault, not His. He means that there should be no parentheses of famine in our Christian life. It is not His doing if times of torpor alternate with seasons of quick energy and joyful fullness of life. So far as He is concerned the flow is uninterrupted, and if it come to us in jets and spurts as from an intermittent well, it is because our own fault has put some obstacle to choke the channel and dam out His Spirit from our spirits. We cannot too firmly hold, or too profoundly feel, that an unbroken continuity of supplies of His grace—unbroken and bright as a sunbeam reaching in one golden shaft all the way from the sun to the earth—is His purpose concerning us. Here, in this highest region, the thought of our text is most absolutely true; for He who gives is ever pouring forth His own self for us to take, and there is no limit to our reception but our capacity and our desire; nor any reason for a moment’s break in our possession of love, righteousness, peace, but our withdrawal of our souls from beneath the Niagara of His grace. As long as we keep our poor vessels below that constant downpour they will be full. It is all our own blame if they are empty. Why should Christian people have these dismal times of deadness, these parentheses of paralysis? as if their growth must be like that of a tree with its alternations of winter sleep and summer waking? In regard to outward blessings we are, as it were, put upon rations, and ‘that He gives’ us we ‘gather.’ There He sometimes does, in love and wisdom, put us on very short allowance, and even now and then causes ‘the fields to yield no meat.’ But never is it so in the higher region. There He puts the key of the storehouse into our own hands, and we may take as much as we will, and have as much as we take. There the bread of God is given for evermore, and He wills that in uninterrupted abundance ‘the meek shall eat and be satisfied.’

The source is full to overflowing, and there are no limits to the supply. The only limit is our capacity, which again is largely determined by our desire. So after all His gifts there is more yet unreceived to possess. After all His Self-revelation there is more yet unspoken to declare. Great as is the goodness which He has ‘wrought before the sons of men for them that trust in Him,’ there are far greater treasures of goodness ‘laid up’ in the deep mines of God ‘for them that fear Him.’ Bars of uncoined treasure and ingots of massy gold lie in His storehouses, to be put into circulation as soon as we need, and can use, them. Hence we have the right to look for an endless increase in our possession of God; and from the consideration of an Infinite Spirit that imparts Himself, and of finite but indefinitely expansible spirits that receive, the certainty arises of an endless life for us of growing glory; a heaven of ceaseless advance, where in constant alternation desire shall widen capacity, and capacity increase fruition, and fruition lead in, not satiety, but quickened appetite and deeper longing.

But we may also see in this text the prescription of a duty as well as the announcement of a promise. There is direction here as to our manner of receiving God’s gifts, as well as large assurance as to His manner of bestowing them. It is His to substitute the new for the old. It is ours gladly to accept the exchange, a task not always easy or pleasant.

No doubt there is a natural love of change deep in us all, but that is held in check by its opposite, and all poetry and human life itself are full of the sadness born of mutation. Our Lord laid bare a deep tendency, when He said, ‘No man having tasted old wine, straightway desireth new; because he saith the old is better.’ We cling to what is familiar, in the very furniture of our houses; and yet we are ever being forced to accept what is strange and new, and, like some fresh article in a room, is out of harmony with the well-worn things that we have seen standing in their corners for years. It takes some time for the raw look to wear off, and for us to ‘get used to it,’ as we say. So is it, though often for deeper reasons, in far more important things. A man, for instance, has been engaged in some kind of business for years, and at last God shows him, by clear indications, that he must turn to something else. How slow

he is to see it, how reluctant to do it! How he cleaves to the ‘old store’ ! How he shrinks from clearing out the barn, to bring in the new! Or a household has been going on for many days unbroken, and at last a time comes when some of its members have to pass out into new circumstances; a son to push his way in the world, a daughter to brighten another fireside. It is hard for the parents to enter fully into the high hopes of their children, and to accept the new condition, without many vain longings for the old days that can never come back any more. So, all through our lives, wisdom and faith say, ‘Bring forth the old because of the new.’ Accept cheerfully the law of constant change under which God’s love has set us. Do not let the pleasant bonds of habit tie down your hearts so tightly to the familiar possessions that you shrink from the introduction of fresh elements. Be sure that the new comes from the same loving hand which sent the old in its season, and that change is meant to be progress. Do not confine yourselves within any mill-horse round of associations and occupations. Front the vicissitudes of life, not merely with brave patience, but with happy confidence, for they all come from Him whose love is older than your oldest blessings, and whose mercies, new every morning, express themselves afresh through every change. Welcome the new, treasure the old, and in both see the purpose of that loving Father who, Himself unchanged, changeth all things, and ‘… fulfils Himself in many ways, Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.’

In higher matters than these our text may give us counsel as to our duty. ‘God hath more light yet to break forth from His holy word.’ We are bound to welcome new truth, so soon as to our apprehensions it has made good its title, and not to refuse it lodgment in our minds because it needs the displacement of their old contents. In the regions of our knowledge and of our Christian life, most chiefly, are we under solemn obligations to ‘bring forth the old store because of the new’; if we would not be unfaithful to God’s great educational process that goes on through all our lives. It is often difficult to adjust the relations of our last lesson with our previous possessions. There is always a temptation to make too much of a new truth, and to fancy that it will produce more change in our whole mental furniture than it really will do. No man is less likely to come to the knowledge of the truth than he who is always deep in love with some new thought, ‘the Cynthia of the minute,’ and ever ready to barter ‘old lamps for new ones.’ But all these things admitted, still it remains true that we are here to learn, that our education is to go on all our days, and that here on earth it can only be carried out by our parting with the old store, which may have become musty by long lying in the granaries, to make room for the new, just gathered in the ripened field. The great central truths of God in Christ are to be kept for ever; but we shall come to grasp them in their fullness only by joyfully welcoming every fresh access of clearer light which falls upon them; and gladly laying aside our inadequate thoughts of God’s permanent revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ, to house and garner in heart and spirit the fuller knowledge which it may please Him to impart.

So the law for life is thankful enjoyment of the old store, and openness of mind and freedom of heart which permit its unreluctant surrender when newer harvests ripen. And the highest form of the promise of our text will be when we pass into another world, and its rich abundance is poured out into our laps. Blessed are they who can willingly put away the familiar blessings of earth, and stretch out, willingly emptied, expectant hands to meet the ‘new store’ of Heaven!

Leviticus 26:13 EMANCIPATED SLAVES

> ‘I am the Lord your God, which brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, that ye should not be their bondmen; and I have broken the bands of your yoke, and made you go upright.’— Lev 26:13

The history of Israel is a parable and a prophecy as well as a history.

The great central word of the New Testament has been drawn from it, viz. ‘redemption,’ i.e. a buying out of bondage.

The Hebrew slaves in Egypt were ‘delivered.’ The deliverance made them a nation. God acquired them for Himself, and they became His servants.

The great truths of the gospel are all there.

Henceforth the fact of their deliverance became the basis of all His appeals to them; the ground of His law; the reason for their obedience. In the previous context it has shaped the institution of slavery. Here it is the foundation of a general exhortation to obedience. The emphatic picture of the men stooping beneath the yoke, and then straightening themselves up, erect, illustrates the joyful freedom which Christ gives. That freedom is our subject.

I. Jesus gives freedom from the slavery of sin.

Freedom consists in power to follow unhindered the law of our being. So sin is slavery because it is contrary to that law.

When Jesus promised freedom through the truth, the Jews indignantly spurned the offer with the proud boast, which the presence of a Roman garrison in Jerusalem should have made to stick in their throats: ‘We were never in bondage to any man.’ A like hardy

shutting of eyes to plain facts characterises the attitude of multitudes to the Christian view of man's condition. Jesus answered the Jews by the deep saying: 'He that committeth sin is the servant of sin.' A man fancies himself showing off his freedom by throwing off the restraints of morality or law, and by 'doing as he likes,' but he is really showing his servitude. Self-will looks like liberty, but it is serfdom. The libertine is a slave. That slavery under sin takes two forms. The man who sins is a slave to the power of sin. Will and conscience are meant to guide and impel us, and we never sin without first coercing or silencing them and subjecting them to the upstart tyranny of desires and senses which should obey and not command. The 'beggars' are on horseback, and the 'princes' walking. There is a servile revolt, and we know what horrors accompany that.

But that slavery under sin is shown also by the terrible force with which any sin, if once committed, appeals to the doer to repeat it. It is not only in regard to sensual sins that the awful insistence of habit grips the doer, and makes it the rarest thing that evil once done is done only once.

But he who sins is also a slave to the guilt of sin. True, that sense of guilt is for the most part and in most men dormant, but the snake is but hibernating, and often wakes and stings at most unexpected moments. 'The deceitfulness of sin' lies to the sinner, so that for the most part he 'wipes his mouth, saying I have done no harm,' but some chance incident may at any time, and certainly something will at some time, dissipate the illusion, as a stray sunbeam might scatter a wisp of mist and show startled eyes the grim fact that had always been there. And even while not consciously felt, guilt hampers the soul's insight into divine realities, clips its wings so that it cannot soar, paralyses its efforts after noble aims, and inclines it to ignoble grovelling as far away from thoughts of God and goodness as may be.

Christ makes the man bound and tied by the cords of his sins lift himself up and stand erect. By His death He brings forgiveness which removes guilt and the consciousness of it. By His inbreathed life He gives a new nature akin to His own, and brings into force a new motive, even transforming love, which is stronger than the death with which sin has cursed its doers. 'The law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.'

II. Jesus gives freedom from a slavish relation to God.

Apart from Him, God, if recognised at all, is for the most part thought of as 'austere, reaping where He did not sow,' and His commandments as grievous. Men may sullenly recognise that they cannot resist, but they do not submit. They may obey in act, but there is no obedience in their wills, nor any cheerfulness in their hearts. The elder brother in the parable could say, 'Neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment,' but his service had been joyless, and he never remembered having received gifts that made him 'merry with his friends.'

But from all such slavish, and therefore worthless, obedience, and all such reluctant, and therefore unreal, submission, Jesus liberates those who believe on Him and abide in His word. He declares God as our loving Father, and through Him we have authority to become sons of God. He 'sends forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts,' and that makes us to be no more slaves but sons. Sullen obedience becomes glad choice, and it is the inmost desire, and the deepest delight, of the loving child to do always the things that please the loving Father. 'I ought' and 'I will' coalesce, and so there is no slavery, but perfect freedom, in recognising and bowing to the great 'I must' which sweetly rules the life.

III. Christ gives deliverance from servility to men.

We need not touch on the historical connection, plain as that is, between modern conceptions of individual freedom and the influence of Christ's teaching. Modern democracy is rooted in Christ, though it is often unaware of its genesis, and blindly attacks the force to which it owes its existence.

Because all men are redeemed by Christ, because by that redemption all stand in the same relation to Him, because all have equal access to Him, and are taught and guided by His Spirit, because 'we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ,' therefore class prerogatives and subject classes fade away, and there is 'neither bond nor free,' but 'all are one in Christ Jesus.'

> But there are other ways in which men tyrannise over men and in which Christ's redemption sets us free.
>
> There is the undue authority of favourite teachers and examples.
>
> There is the tyranny of public opinion.
>
> There is undue regard to human approbation.
>
> There is the sway of priestcraft.

How does Christianity deliver from these? It makes Christ's law our unconditional duty. It makes His approbation our highest joy. It gives legitimate scope to the instinct of loyalty, submission, and imitation, and of subjection to authority. It reduces to insignificance men's judgment, and all their loud voices to a babble of nothings. 'With me it is a very small matter to be judged of man's judgment.'

It brings the soul into direct communion with God, and sweeps away all intermediaries.

> ‘Not for that we have dominion over your faith but are helpers of your joy; for by faith ye stand.’
>
> So personal independence and individuality of character are the result of Christianity. ‘I have made you go upright.

IV. Christ gives us freedom from the power of circumstances.

Most men are made by these. We need not here enter on questions of the influence of their environment on all men’s development.

But Christ gives us—

> (a) A great aim for our lives high above these.
>
> (b) A foothold in Him outside of them. We are not the slaves of our circumstances, but their masters.
>
> (c) The power to utilise them.

So Christians are ‘free’ in all senses of the word.

The great Act of Emancipation has been passed for us all. Only Christ has rule over us, and we have our perfect freedom in His service. We have been sitting in the prison-house, and He has come and declared ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me to proclaim liberty to the captives.’