THE MELCHIZEDEK OR HEAVENLY PRIESTHOOD OF OUR LORD.

PART I.

THE general idea of the priesthood is fulfilled in Christ and in His Church. Upon that point it is unnecessary to say more. But we shall form a very imperfect impression of the priestly character both of our Lord and of the members of His body, if we do not inquire more particularly into the time when the priesthood of the former began, as well as into those characteristics by which, while it "accomplishes" the idea of the Aaronic priesthood, it is yet exalted above it. Only thus, too, shall we be able to understand the priesthood of the Church, the nature of which is entirely dependent upon that of the priesthood of her Lord.

Turning then to these points, the first question to be answered is, When did the real Priesthood of our Lord begin? With His life on earth, with the cross, or with His resurrection and glorification? The question has been spoken of by Prof. Davidson as if it possessed little more than a historical interest in connexion with the Socinian controversies; and as if, when separated from them, it ceased to have the importance which it once possessed in the estimation of the Church.[1] It seems to us, on the contrary, one of the most urgent questions to which we can turn our thoughts; and one the answer to which, if grounded solely in critical and exegetical inquiry, cannot fail to exercise a commanding influence over the manner in which we either conceive to ourselves, or state to others, the plan of our salvation. When then did the priesthood of our Lord begin?

[1] *On the Hebrews*, pp. 146, 147.

This question cannot be satisfactorily answered without first endeavouring to form some clear idea of what is meant by the sacred writers, when they speak of our Lord as a priest "after the order of Melchizedek," and not of Aaron; and we are the more called upon to inquire into this point because, in the only passages of Scripture in which the priesthoods of Melchizedek and of our Lord are compared with one another—in Psalm cx., and in the Epistle to the Hebrews—the comparison is obviously regarded as of the greatest possible interest and moment.

To the psalmist it is the very centre or kernel of his Psalm, that Psalm upon which our Lord so emphatically set His seal in Matt. xxii. 43–45, and which in the New Testament is more frequently quoted than any other single portion of the ancient Scriptures. In the words of Perowne, who makes also the last remark, the language of the fourth verse, "The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent; Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek," "contains the great central revelation of the Psalm. How weighty it is, and of how vast import, may be inferred from the solemnity of the introduction, 'Jehovah hath sworn,' and this is carried to the very highest pitch by the addition of the words, 'and will not repent,' *i.e.* the decree is absolutely immutable. It is the solemn inauguration of the Messiah in time to the priestly office. It is the first intimation of the union of the kingly and priestly functions in His person." [1]

Professor Forbes, in his recently published studies upon the structural arrangement of the Psalms, which throw so much fresh light upon their meaning, takes a similar view. "Ps. cx.," he says, "closes the Davidic trilogy, Ps. cviii. recounting the Divine promises to Israel's king and people, Ps. cix. 'the sufferings of the Christ,' and Ps. cx. 'the glories that should follow.' Its strophical arrangement,

[1] Perowne, *in loc.*

consisting as it does of seven verses, accords with the usual division of the *seven*, three verses on either side being arranged around a central verse (ver. 4), which forms the connecting heart of the whole." [1]

The writer of the Epistle again is not less impressed with the weight and grandeur of the theme. No sooner does he enter upon that high priesthood of Christ, which is mainly to engage his thoughts, than he turns to this special characteristic of it, in connexion with each of the two prerequisites essential to the vindication of any priesthood that can be recognised as true. For, first, the fact that our Lord did not take upon Himself the high priesthood, but was *called of God* to it, is proved by this, that in Ps. cx. God had addressed Him in the words, "Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek"; while secondly, His ability to *sympathize with us*, gained through His learning obedience by the things which He suffered, so that, "having been made perfect, He became, unto all them that obey Him, the Author of eternal salvation," culminates in the statement that He was "named of God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek" (chap. v. 6, 10). Nor only so. When, at a later point, the same writer would describe the perfection of our hope by setting forth the glory of Him who has entered as our Forerunner within the veil, he does it in the words, "Having become a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek" (chap. v. 20). Once more, a large part of chapter vii. is occupied with the same topic, the priesthood after the order of Melchizedek being there explained to be a priesthood in every way greater in its nature, and more efficacious in its results, than one after the order of Aaron. Our conception of the priesthood of Christ must thus be largely dependent on our conception of the priesthood of Melchizedek.

A single sentence may recall the only circumstances

[1] Forbes, *Studies in the Book of Psalms*, p. 160.

known to us of this mysterious personage. In Gen. xiv. 18–20, when Abram was returning in triumph from his overthrow of the five kings by whom Lot, his nephew, had been attacked and spoiled, it is said, "And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was priest of God Most High. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth: and blessed be God Most High, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him a tenth of all." Who this Melchizedek was it is as needless to inquire as it is impossible to determine. One of the most important facts connected with him indeed is, that we know nothing of his genealogy. Had there been any revelation as to this, the writer of the Epistle could not have reasoned as he does. He turns, therefore, directly to the greatness of the man and of his priesthood.

First, to that mystery wrapped up in his name in which, following the analogy of so many names of the Old Testament and of the name of Christ Himself, he sees a Divine revelation regarding him, a revelation pregnant with most important inferences as to both his person and his work, and more especially as to the great ends to be accomplished by his priesthood. He is "king of righteousness," and then also "king of peace." He is the embodiment, so far as it is possible for man to be it, of the two greatest blessings that were to flow to men through Him of whom, in that very aspect, the Psalmist and the Prophets had spoken so often and in such glowing terms (Ps. lxxxv. 10; Isa. xi. 4–9). Righteousness and peace meet in him. The righteousness, too, precedes the peace. The personal precedes the governmental. Because Melchizedek reigns in righteousness he "also" reigns in peace.

Secondly, Melchizedek is free from all those limitations of sense and time, of beginning and ending, which are inseparably connected with the thought of human descent.

When it is said that he is "without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life," nothing but an intolerable bondage to the letter can press a strictly literal interpretation. The words "without genealogy" are alone sufficient to show the direction in which the writer's thoughts are running; and the appellations employed by him are simply designed to lead us out of that region of the material and the temporal, within which the Jewish religion moved. In themselves they are of no more value than any others by which the same end might have been effected. Their influence is negative and privative. They transcend sense and time; and, no sooner do we leave sense and time behind us, than we are in the real which underlies the phenomenal, in the region of spirit and eternity. The principle is similar to that appearing in our Lord's words in John xii. 32 (words to which we shall by-and-by refer more particularly), "And I, if I be lifted on high out of (not 'from') the earth will draw all men unto Me!" Then, when this shall be the case, the bonds which confined Him during the period of His tabernacling in the flesh shall be snapped asunder; He will rise above the limitations involved in the particular form of His past humanity, and will become an inmate of that spiritual and unlimited sphere which is at once His rightful home and His seat of unrestricted power. Then, too, He will draw "*all* men" unto Him. It is not otherwise with the priesthood of Melchizedek. Dissociated from the thought of an earthly parentage, and from the beginning and ending of earthly life, it belongs to the real and the true which are beyond and behind all that we see. It springs out of eternity; to eternity it returns; when it rises before us we have no thought of either space or time.

Thirdly, Mechizedek was a priest anterior to the Judaic period, when the distinction between Jew and Gentile

had not yet been introduced. Perowne has noticed that Melchizedek's was a Gentile priesthood;[1] and there can be no doubt not only that it was so, but that the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews was fully cognisant of the fact, and that he attached great importance to it. He shows this by the manner in which he contrasts him with Abraham and his descendants. The main point, however, is not so much that Melchizedek was a Gentile. That is simply an introduction to the leading thought, which is that, being a Gentile, he was above the limited sphere of the Jewish economy, with its temporary provisions and aims, and that he belonged to a higher and better, a more spiritual and universal, sphere than that within which, for purposes subsidiary to the welfare of mankind, Israel had been confined. The principle thus proceeded on has a striking illlustration, in the words with which our Lord replied to the Pharisees who urged, in relation to divorce, that Moses had commanded to give the wife a bill of divorcement, and to put her away. "He saith unto them, Moses for your hardness of heart suffered you to put away your wives; but *from the beginning* it hath not been so" (Matt. xix. 8). There is a Divine order older, larger, more universal, more enduring than that of Moses, and one therefore in which the ultimate purpose of God is more directly manifested. The economy brought in through Moses was a limitation of that better plan, rendered necessary by circumstances, and temporary in duration. For the real plan of God we must look to His dealings with mankind before the days of Moses, when the limitations were introduced. The same principle is applicable to the point with which we are now dealing. As the sacred writer had beheld in Melchizedek the head of a spiritual and eternal, so he now beholds in him the head of a universal, priesthood. It is of the utmost consequence to him, not simply that Mel-

[1] On Psalm cx. 4.

chizedek was heathen, but that he belonged to a date when the distinction between Jew and heathen was unknown, when he could exercise a priesthood wide as the world, and when no member of the human family was excluded from participation in his priestly blessing.

Fourthly, as a priest, Melchizedek is higher than any priest of the line of Aaron. After what had been said, this point, it may be thought, might have been left to be inferred by the readers of the Epistle. But it was too important to be left to inference. Hence the words of Heb. vii. 4–10. In the moment of his triumph, flushed with victory, returning from the slaughter of the kings, Abraham, the patriarch, he that had the promises, gave Melchizedek "a tenth out of the chief spoils." What a token of submission on the one side! what a proof of greatness on the other! Nay, more. In the act of paying these tithes, Abraham *acknowledged* the universalism of that priesthood to which he offered homage. "The sons of Levi that receive the priest's office have commandment to take tithes of the people according to the law, that is, of their brethren"; and beyond them the sons of Levi might not go. It would have been unlawful for them even to receive a tithe from those who did not belong to "the people," and with whom therefore they were connected by no religious ties. But both Abraham and Melchizedek knew that there was no such restriction in their case. The former owned an element of universal supremacy in the latter. The latter, conscious of the dignity of his position, "received" the homage of the former. Still further, not only did Abraham thus pay tithe to Melchizedek, but, "so to say, through Abraham even Levi, who receiveth tithes, hath paid tithes; for he was yet in the loins of his father, when Melchizedek met him." It was a perpetual and ever present proof of the honour put by the God of Israel upon His priestly tribe, that the people were tithed for their support. Here the

head of the priestly tribe itself may be said to have paid tithes in Abraham, and to have confessed his inferiority to him to whom he paid them.

Lastly, Melchizedek "blessed," that is, pronounced his priestly blessing upon Abraham, and in him upon Levi, Aaron, and the whole line of the Aaronic priesthood, and "without any dispute the less is blessed of the greater."

In all these respects then the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews beholds the pre-eminent greatness of the priesthood of Melchizedek when compared with that of Aaron. It is more difficult to determine whether he also beholds in it the two spiritual characteristics of priesthood, of which he speaks in different passages of his Epistle,—that a true priest is ordained of God, and that he is able to sympathize with those on whose behalf he acts. The probability is, however, that he does; for, as to the first of these, he speaks of Melchizedek as "priest of God Most High," that is, as appointed by Him, and drawing his authority from Him; and, as to the second, it seems most likely that, when he refers to the blessing bestowed on Abraham, he has also in his mind, though he does not expressly mention it, that bringing forth of bread and wine which, in the narrative of Genesis, illustrates the human-hearted compassion of the priest for the exhausted warrior and his band of followers.

The considerations now adduced are of themselves sufficient to show that the priesthood of Christ could not have begun before His Glorification. Previous to that time, He was not in a condition to fulfil the requirements of the Melchizedek priesthood. He had been born "of the seed of David according to the flesh." He was in the strict sense of the word a Jew. He had "taken hold of the seed of Abraham" (Heb. ii. 16). He had declared that He was "not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. xv. 22). He was still involved in all the

restrictions alike of the material human body which He had assumed, and of the world of sense in which He moved; and, as it was only at His Glorification that these restrictions were laid aside, so it was only then that He could be a priest in that immaterial, spiritual, universal sense which the priesthood of Melchizedek had been designed to typify.

The question before us may however be approached also from the other side; and it may be argued that although subsequent to this Glorification, our Lord was a priest after the order of Melchizedek, He was still during His life on earth a priest in general, or, more particularly, a priest after the order of Aaron. The first of these two suppositions need not be discussed, for no priesthood of such a general kind existed, no claim to it was ever made; nor, if made, could it have been even for a moment recognised. In the very idea of priesthood lay also the idea of conformity to a plan appointed by God and acknowledged by man. Such a plan did not then exist except in the order of Melchizedek and the order of Aaron. If our Lord was a priest during His earthly ministry He must have been so as belonging to one or other of these two orders. But we have seen that, so long as He tabernacled in the flesh, He could not belong to the former. Could He then have belonged to the latter? This question must be answered in the negative. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews has indeed placed the matter beyond dispute when, referring to the words of Ps. cx. 4, he says, "For He of whom these things are said belongeth to another tribe, from which no man hath given attendance at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord hath sprung out of Judah; as to which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priests" (Heb. vii. 13, 14). These words alone are fatal to the supposition that our Lord could ever have been an Aaronic priest or high priest. By the strictest and most solemn sanctions

the priesthood in Israel was confined to the members of the tribe of Levi. Had our Lord claimed to be an Aaronic priest the claim would have involved a positive breach of the Mosaic law, and would have been a violation instead of a fulfilling of "all righteousness." That our Lord never was an Aaronic priest is further demonstrated by the fact that if, in that capacity, He had made His great sacrifice upon the cross, then in the same capacity He must have presented it to His Father within the veil. It is not only in the highest degree unlikely that He should do the former of these acts as the priest of one order, and the latter as the priest of another order, but the supposition is at variance with the necessary sequence of the different priestly transactions regarded as a whole. Not the slaying of the victim, but the presenting of the blood, was the priestly act, and if therefore our Lord ever acted as an Aaronic priest, it must have been when He presented Himself with His offering to the Father within the heavenly sanctuary. Then must His Aaronic priesthood have appeared in its true force and culminating power. But this is precisely what the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews is most concerned to deny. One of the leading points of his argument is, that with heaven, with the true tabernacle, the Aaronic priest had nothing to do. It was the distinguishing characteristic of the class of priests to which he belonged that they "served that which is a copy and shadow of the heavenly things." As Prof. Davidson has said, "the Aaronic priest ministers in the sanctuary of this world, the figure of the true, ix. 1, 23; if he could penetrate into 'heaven,' the true tabernacle, he would cease to be an Aaronic or figurative priest, he would be in the true presence of God, into which he could enter only in virtue of having made a true atonement, which no Aaronic priest could accomplish."[1] The conclusion is irresistible. Our Lord never was a priest after

[1] *On Hebrews*, p. 149.

the order of Aaron, but only after the higher and more glorious order of Melchizedek.

From this point of view, therefore, we are again brought to the conclusion formerly arrived at. No one, so far as we are aware, has ever argued that the Melchizedek priesthood of our Lord could be taken back to any part of His life of humiliation and suffering upon earth. If therefore He was a priest then, He must have been one after Aaron's order. This He at no time was or could be; and the only remaining conclusion is, that His priesthood began when He was glorified.

At this point, however, a most important difficulty arises, and one that has been much felt by eminent theologians. Let Freeman, in his able book on *The Principles of Divine Service*, be its exponent. Referring in a note[1] to the writings of Dr. Jackson, he says,—

"Similarly, Dr. Jackson (*Priesthood of Christ*, ix. chap. iv. 3) says 'Betwixt a priest complete, or actually consecrated, and no priest at all, there is a mean or third estate or condition, to wit, a priest *in fieri*, though not *in facto*, or a priest *inter consecrandum*, before he be completely and actually consecrated.' And again, chap. xi. 5, 'During the time of His humiliation He was rather destinated than consecrated to be the Author and fountain of blessedness unto us.' This excellent writer, however, has involved himself in a difficulty, by insisting that Christ was not qualified to *act*, nor did act, as a priest at all, until after His Resurrection, appealing to Heb. v. 8–10. But though the seal of the Father's acceptance of His Priesthood was finally set by His Resurrection, it is unquestionable that His offering Himself upon the cross was a proper act of Priesthood. It was at once the act by which He consecrated Himself for His Priesthood ('For their sakes I sanctify Myself,' St. John xvii.), and by which He saved and sanctified the world (' that they also may be sanctified')."

Freeman's own view, accordingly, as explained partly in the text with which the above remarks are connected, and partly in an additional note,[2] seems to be, that the idea of dedication and offering entered into the incarnation, and

[1] Vol. i., p. 168. [2] p. 409.

into every act of the obedient sonship; that by His presentation in the temple "our Lord did, in a mystery, prefer His claim to the priesthood of the world as the 'First born among many brethren,'" although He "did not by that action enter upon His priestly office"; that there is "some appearance" also of our Lord's having at His baptism a more special designation to His priesthood; and that "doubtless" all the actions of our Lord's ministry did more immediately pertain to His priesthood, and were "to be in due time gathered up into it as actions of especial power for man's salvation." All this, however, it is allowed did not make our Lord actually a priest. "Not until the very close of His ministry in the flesh did our Lord solemnly and by a set and suitable action enter upon His Priesthood." It is obvious that both Dr. Jackson and Canon Freeman have been met by the difficulty of which we have spoken, but they have not solved it. They cannot abandon the idea that on the cross our Lord made a priestly offering to God; but the former invents the fiction of a mean between priest and no-priest; the latter simply cuts the knot by alleging that Jesus *was* a Priest upon the cross, without laying down any clear line of distinction between that last great action and all the previous actions of His earthly life. The simple question, it will be seen, is this, Can we hold with the Church in all ages, and in harmony with the deepest convictions of the Christian heart, that in His death upon the cross Jesus as a Priest offered Himself in sacrifice; and yet that, as a Priest after the order of Melchizedek, His priesthood only began with His Glorification? Let the answer we are now to give this question not be too summarily dismissed. We ask for it only fair consideration. If correct, it hangs together with other important views of Christian truth.

The question then, as proposed above, must be answered in the affirmative, and it is St. John who supplies the

materials for the answer. In a text already referred to, and which we must translate otherwise than either the Authorized or the Revised Version, in chap. xii. 32, the beloved disciple gives the words of our Lord as follows: "And I, if I be lifted on high out of the earth, will draw all men unto Myself." The translation "lifted up" is far too weak for the word ὑψωθῶ. It ought to be rendered "lifted on high," and the preposition ἐκ may not be translated "from." It ought (with the margin of the R.V.) to be rendered "out of." So given, the words of Jesus can have but one meaning, that His Glorification begins not with the Resurrection but with the Crucifixion. It is so indeed throughout the whole of the fourth Gospel. The facts of the Crucifixion and the Glorification go together, and cannot be separated from each other. The dying Redeemer is glorified through death, the glorified Redeemer dies that He may, by the path of death, find true glory. The same point is illustrated not by single expressions only, but by the structure of the Gospel as a whole, while by nothing perhaps is it more confirmed than by the striking words in which the Evangelist records the death of the Redeemer, "And He bowed His head, and delivered up His spirit" (chap. xix. 30). "No one taketh away His life from Him, but He lays it down of Himself. He has power to lay it down, and He has power to take it again" (chap. x. 18). In a moment such as that we have less the extremity of shame than the extreme of glory. The Crucifixion then is the beginning of the Glorification of Jesus, and it is so on precisely the same lines of thought as those which conduct us to the glory of Melchizedek. As the glory of that ancient high priest is grounded on the fact that he is without father or mother, without beginning of days or end of life, without the limitations of the material, the tangible or the visible, so the Glorification of Christ begins in His being lifted on high out of the earth, out of the same material, tangible, and

visible sphere, from the thought of which the priesthood of Melchizedek is free. The Crucifixion breaks the bond to earth; it is the introduction of the full reign of spiritual and heavenly power.

Christ then was a High Priest after the order of Melchizedek, and after that order alone. And it is in this light that He is brought before us alike in Ps. cx. and in the Epistle to the Hebrews. It was impossible for the readers of the Psalm to connect, in any shape or form, the Priesthood of the great Prince and Deliverer to come with the order of Aaron. To their minds that order had its well defined boundaries and its own peculiar prerogatives, and no one could be a priest of two orders. The writer of the Epistle takes up the thought, and expressly tells us that if Christ were on the earth He "could not be a priest at all, seeing there are those who offer the gifts according to the law" (chap. viii. 4). He could not therefore have offered gifts according to the law; and, in the language of Delitzsch, "His sacerdotal ministration is as far exalted above the law as the new covenant, of which He is Mediator, is superior to the old covenant to which the sanctuary belongs."[1] Again we read in the same Epistle that "having been made perfect, He became unto all them that obey Him the Author of an eternal salvation; named of God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek" (chap. v. 10). In other words, it was after He had been "made perfect" that God named, or rather addressed, Him in the manner described.

To return to the question with which we started, When did the Priesthood of our Lord begin? It is well known how much inquirers have differed upon the point; but the cause of the difference is plain. Such writers as Tholuck, Riehm, Hofmann, and Delitzsch seem substantially to admit that Christ's High Priesthood began with His Glori-

[1] *Commentary on Hebr.*, in loc.

fication; but they cannot allow that the death upon the cross was not "an essential part of His High Priest's work, performed in the outer court, that is, in this world"; and they are thus driven to the expedient of saying that, high-priestly as that act was, the Priesthood of Christ only attained its completeness after His Resurrection. But the distinction between incompleteness and completeness cannot be maintained, and the true solution appears to be that contained in our Lord's own words in the Gospel of St. John, that His priesthood, the priesthood elsewhere so pointedly described as one "after the order of Melchizedek," began when He was "lifted on high out of the earth," and was set free from all restrictions of the flesh and sense and time.

One point must still be noticed. In what light, it may be asked, does this view place the whole of our Lord's earthly life between the Incarnation and the Cross? The answer is, It was the preparation for His work of Him who was both Victim and Priest. On the cross He was the true Paschal Lamb, and that lamb, it is well known, was separated from the flock days before the sacrifice, that, in one way or another, it might be made ready for its fate. On the cross He was also the true Priest, and His whole previous experience was His preparation for the priestly acts that were there and thereafter to be transacted. Onward from the Incarnation, through the humiliations pains and sorrows of His condition in this world, to the instant when in spirit He bade farewell to earth and took His place upon the cross, He was "learning obedience through the things which He suffered." He was realizing in the ever increasing fulness of its meaning what it was to be the "Sent" of God, and what it was, not by Divine insight alone, but by human fellowship, to sympathize with the wants of those who were longing after peace, but who, ignorant of His Father and their Father, knew not where

to find it. In this course of life He was "made perfect," and, thus made perfect, He entered upon that Priesthood which, in the true meaning of the words, contains the thought of everything most full of love to God and of love and tenderness to man.

We have occupied so much time with this discussion that we must reserve for another paper consideration of the work of the Heavenly High Priest; and all therefore to be done now is to mark as briefly as possible the leading characteristics by which the Heavenly High Priesthood is distinguished.

1. It is one and unchangeable. Of the Levitical priests it is said, "And they indeed have been made priests many in number, because that by death they are hindered from continuing; but He, because He abideth for ever, hath His priesthood unchangeable" (Heb. vii. 23, 24). It was a weakness of the legal priesthood that, held by mortal men, the office had to be continually surrendered at the call of death. Therefore these priests needed to be "many in number," so that, as each in succession died, another might be found ready to take his place. There was thus in that priesthood the element of change which imprints its stamp of vanity upon all human things. At the moment when "old experience" best fitted him for the discharge of his varied and often difficult duties, the priest of Aaron's line with his long gathered fitness was borne to the grave. At the moment when he had succeeded most completely in inspiring with confidence those who received the benefit of his priestly ministrations, his eyes closed upon their necessities and his ears to their cry. But it is not so with the Heavenly High Priest. In Him the thought of "many" is fulfilled in that of one, the thought of the changing in that of the unchanging, the thought of a past to be cherished by the memory in that of the same living and abiding presence—"Jesus Christ, the same yesterday

and to-day, yea and for ever" (Heb. xiii. 7, 8). The worshipper under the better covenant might thus recall every instance of consolation given to the mourner, or guidance to the perplexed, or strength to the weak, known either to himself or learned from the history of others, and might feel that the same fountain of grace was open in all the fulness of its blessings to himself. In a spirit of unchanging trust he might build upon an unchanging Rock of ages.

2. It is spiritual. On this point the Levitical system had failed to satisfy the conscience. Under it were "offered both gifts and sacrifices that cannot, as touching the conscience, make the worshipper perfect, being only (with meats and drinks and divers washings) carnal ordinances, imposed until a time of reformation" (Heb. ix. 9, 10). For a time it had served an important purpose. While the Jewish people were educating from the outward to the inward, from the carnal to the spiritual, while they were as yet unable to comprehend the true nature of God and of the worship which He required, it had inspired powerful, though still imperfect, notions of the disastrous consequences of forsaking, and of the glorious results of serving, Him. But the state of things then instituted could not continue. The education of men must advance, God must be better known, and the idea of sin be deepened. Thus the whole Judaic system would necessarily break down. "The blood of bulls and of goats cannot take away sin," and a spiritual answer must be given to a spiritual need. That answer is given in the priesthood and in the priestly office of Christ. Identified with His spiritual offering, the offering of the will, believers offer up their wills to the Father of their spirits, and in His perfect offering they are accepted. By His offering they that are sanctified, or rather they that are being sanctified, are perfected for ever.

3. It is universal. The blessings of the Levitical system were confined to Israel. No stranger, unless first naturalized, might be partaker of its benefits. Human feeling was kept in the isolation of a narrow groove. The idea of universal love could find no way into the heart which rather developed on the lines of its own selfish tendencies, and, mistaking the spirit of the economy under which Israel lived, exclaimed, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy" (Matt. v. 43). In the High Priesthood of Christ all distinctions between man and man fall away. He is not like Aaron the son of Israel. He is like Melchizedek a Son of man. In Him "there can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond or free, there can be no male and female" (Gal. iii. 28). Not, indeed, that such distinctions as lie in nature and providence are in themselves obliterated. But beneath them there is the common bond of a common love, in which all learn to feel for, to sympathize with, and to help, one another, for all are "one man in Christ Jesus."

4. It is everlasting. The priests of Aaron's line were made "after the law of a carnal commandment." The High Priest of the Christian faith is made "after the power of an endless life" (Heb. vii. 16). God Himself hath sworn to him, "Thou art a priest for ever." In what particular sense we are to understand the "everlasting" character of our Lord's work as Priest will have to be inquired into when we come to speak of the nature of His work in heaven. In the meantime it is enough to dwell for a moment on the fact that He is an everlasting Priest. His Priesthood endures through all the rolling years or ages of the Christian economy. Nay, it endures throughout eternity. It might be thought that, at last, when the end of life's pilgrimage is reached and the number of the elect is gathered in to the safe protection of their heavenly home, there would be no need of a priesthood or a priest. But

such is not the teaching of the New Testament. Rather are we taught that in Him, as Priest, must we always stand accepted before God. Throughout eternity the love of the Father must flow forth to us "in His name." Therefore in the visions of the Revelation of St. John He is clad in priestly robes; and, in similar robes, in garments washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb, His redeemed there either stand singing their song of grateful thanksgiving, or are guided by Him unto fountains of waters of life (chap. vii.).

Such then is the one, spiritual, universal, and everlasting Priesthood of our Lord, as in His person and office He fulfilled the idea of the priesthood of Aaron, and was Himself a Priest after the order of Melchizedek. It is possible that some may ask, Why all this dwelling upon a topic so remote from us? or, if it is to be dwelt upon, why not take the simple explanation, that Christ is a High Priest after the order of Melchizedek, because that mysterious personage was both priest and king?

The latter part of this question may be answered first. Melchizedek's kingship is subordinate to his priesthood. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews no doubt notes the fact that he was a king; but in all his discussion regarding him, in all the particulars in which he points out the greatness of his person and work, he compares him not with the kings but with the priests of Israel. A similar order of thought marks the Revelation of St. John. It may be that, in the vision of the glorified Lord in the first chapter of that book, there are traces of His kingly rule, but those of His priesthood unquestionably predominate. In like manner, when it is said in chap. i. 6 of the same book, "And He made us to be a kingdom, to be priests unto His God and Father," the principles everywhere marking the structure of the book, require us to see in the latter the more important, the climactic, clause. Pro-

phecy had spoken in the same strain when it foretold of the man whose name is The BRANCH, that He should be "a Priest upon His throne" (Zech. vi. 13). Priestliness is the atmosphere and the bond of the kingdom, and in it lies the glory of the king.

As to the former part again of the question we are now answering, let it be remembered that the "Melchizedek" and the "heavenly" Priesthood of our Lord are synonymous expressions, the first only illustrating, and enabling us to comprehend more fully, what is implied in the second, and there will be no complaint of labour thrown away in the effort to comprehend it, for in the heavenly priesthood of our Lord, as we have yet to see in other particulars, lie the roots of the Church's life, as well as the responsibility and power of her action in the world and for the world's good.

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