

The stability of any building is destroyed when its foundation is rendered insecure, just as the life of a tree is destroyed when its tap-root is cut.

It behoves men, therefore, to be on their guard when they are told that it is only the "form" and not the "fact" of revelation that is affected. There can be no shadow of doubt that if the "parenthetic setting" of Deuteronomy is of the time of Manasseh or Josiah, the credentials of the Mosaic revelation are virtually obliterated, they are rendered so indistinct that it is impossible to discover them. But the credentials of the Mosaic revelation cannot be destroyed without those also of the Christian revelation being impugned, for Christ said that Moses wrote of Him; and if he did not, or it was not Christ of whom he wrote, then either St. John has misrepresented his Master, or, most certainly, it has been reserved for the so-called criticism of this age to do what His own was unable to do, and convict Christ of falsehood, *i.e.*, of sin.

STANLEY LEATHES.



ART. II.—THE SERVANT OF CHRIST.

NO. IX.—THE GOLDEN RULE.

THERE is no honour done to our blessed Lord by any laborious attempt to prove that everything that He taught was absolutely new. Just as He did not come speaking and revealing the language of heaven, but used the words and ideas of His own country, and wove them all into the eternal speech like which never man spake before, so He took the great simple moral truths which had been made known to men in past ages, placed them in their true proportions, freed them from the growth of corruptions and misunderstandings which had obscured them, added what was new where it was necessary to His purpose, laid stress by His employment of paradox and parable on what was most important, and so unfolded for us the mind of God.

This principle of our Lord's method is illustrated for us by the Golden Rule. Something like it had been understood by a few of the wisest and best men in different lands and in different ages. We believe that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ; and we believe that the Word of God, before His incarnation, was present in varying degrees of clearness in the hearts and minds of all who anywhere sought for God. But never till the Lord Jesus Christ spoke on the hills of Galilee was the royal law set forth in all its comprehensive fulness and perfect beauty as the true way of life.

In the time before Christ there was once a great Hebrew expounder of the law named Shammai, whose fame for learning and wisdom was enormous. And there was a foreign inquirer who came to Jerusalem. He had heard long moral lessons about what he ought to do and what he ought not. What he wished for now was something short. He was seeking for the whole law in a nutshell. He went to Shammai, and asked to be taught the complete duty of man. "Be brief," he said; "tell me while I am standing on one foot!" The proud old rabbi turned away in anger. But there was another teacher in Jerusalem of no less reputation, whose name was Hillel. Of Hillel the foreigner made the same demand. Hillel was a better man than Shammai; he saw that the inquirer was not playing him a trick; there was an earnest zeal in his question which deserved an answer. The sage turned to him and said with benignity: "Whatever thou wouldest that men should not do to thee, that do not thou to them. All our law is summed up in this saying." And so the Gentile was satisfied, and became a proselyte, and worshipped the God of Israel.

But Hillel was not the first to give this great maxim. More than three hundred years before our Lord there was a pious Jew who wrote an interesting little tale of the captivity, the adventures of Tobit and his son Tobias. In one part of the Book of Tobit the careful Jewish father is giving instructions to his young son before he sets out on his journey from Assyria into Media. "Do that to no man," he said, "which thou hatest."

But yet farther back. Half a century before the time of Tobit there was living at Athens the illustrious philosopher Aristotle. Like Hillel, he was asked a deep question: How should we act towards our friends? "As we would that they should act to us," was the reply of Aristotle, the noble answer of a soul illumined by the universal spirit of God.

But, again, half a century before Aristotle himself, was born at the same famous city of Athens, rich mother of brilliant sons, the celebrated orator Isocrates. Much the same lesson was taught by him as by Hillel. Whatever would be disagreeable to ourselves, that, if we would be perfect, we must refrain from doing to others.

And yet earlier still. Five hundred and fifty years before our Lord lived the immortal prophet of China, Confucius. "True reciprocity," he insisted, "consists in not doing to others what you would not want done to yourself."

All these are but so many proofs that the light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world was shining in the world's darkness. Hillel caught glimpses of that light, and

the writer of Tobit, and Aristotle, and Isocrates, and Confucius. They were not themselves that light, but, like a greater than themselves, of that light they came each of them in his own degree and to his own people to bear witness. The wisest of their teachings and sayings pales before the teachings and the sayings of Him of whom it is recorded that all men wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth.

For these sayings are at best only commands not to do what is hurtful. They are not like the golden rule of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself; for that tells us not only not to do what is hurtful, but also actually to do what is positively pleasing. "*All things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them.*" This is indeed an all-embracing principle. This is a motive not merely for self-restraint, but for all our actions. It is all things that it speaks of, and all men, and whatever we do. Wherever we have any dealings at all with other people it guides our conduct. Never had such an idea entered men's heads before. Even the saying of Aristotle, which comes nearest to its beauty, only refers to friends. Our Lord Jesus Christ refers to everybody. Well indeed has it been called "The Golden Rule."

And still higher thoughts come into our minds about this truest of all principles of action, when we consider for a moment how it is put. "*Therefore,*" says our Lord. To what preceding statement does He refer? What reason does the statement give for acting on the rule? His last words immediately before spoke of the philanthropy of God Himself. "*How much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?*" "*Therefore,*" He goes on. God gives His good things in answer to our aspirations, if only what we desire is really for our good. It is man's highest blessedness to be like God, to be perfect, even as our Father in heaven is perfect; and, therefore, in this point also, we must try to resemble His revealed glory. It is only what is good that we ought to desire for ourselves. It is only what is good that we ought to wish our neighbours to do for us. It is only what is good that we ought to do to them in correspondence to what we wish from them for ourselves. So perfect and beautiful an idea none of the heathen or Jewish moralists had approached. "*This is the law and the Prophets,*" said our Lord; but it was a summary to be derived, not, hitherto, a maxim for daily use. The other sayings are wanting in the completeness of our Lord's precept. Still further do they fall below it if we look at the ground on which the precept rests. And even yet more at fault are they as to the power given to perform it. Their command is "*Thou shalt not be disagreeable,*" our Lord's is

"Thou shalt be loving." Their precept is for friends, our Lord's touches all men. Their ground is mere prudence, our Lord's is that, as God gives all good gifts to us, we must in gratitude love what belongs to Him. They could point to no power at all which should enable men to carry out their principles; our Lord reveals that grace and strength of God which can be had even by the weakest of us in prayer at His throne. Without Him I can do nothing; *I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.* Yes, in spite of selfishness and self-interest, and the pervading atmosphere of the world, even in all things, whatsoever he would that men should do unto him, even so can the servant of Christ do unto them.

Need we be urged to remember that what is good for us and what is good for them is implied throughout this teaching? To extend it beyond this would be wicked. With all the wishes of those whom we meet we cannot comply, nor ought we to desire that they should comply with all of ours. Those wishes may be foolish, they may be frivolous, they may involve self-indulgence or what is unfitting. That would be harmful. We might wish men to flatter us; how could we suppose that God would think it right that we should flatter them? We might wish men to do all our work for us, and allow us to be idle; how could it possibly be right for us to humour them in the same way, however much we loved them? No! The rule is only safe when our own will has first been purified and brought into subjection to the law of Christ, so that we wish from others only that which is really wholesome, good and true. Reciprocity in evil or in folly is plainly altogether foreign to the holy and Divine thought of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Few men have been more thoroughly pervaded with Christian feeling and principle in daily life than our own King Alfred. On one occasion his forces had been defeated by the swarming hordes of the heathen Danes, and he had retreated to Somersetshire. A beggar came one day before his little wooden fort at Athelney, and asked for alms. The Queen, his wife, told Alfred that they had only one small loaf left, which was not enough for themselves and their friends. All but those two had gone out in search of food, and in that wild and waste country there was little hope of success. But Alfred told the Queen to give to that poor Christian one half of the loaf. He who could feed five thousand men with five loaves and two small fishes could certainly make that half of the loaf sufficient for more than their necessities. The Queen obeyed, and the poor man was relieved. And God did not forget that labour of love, for the little loaf was soon replaced by a great

store of fresh provisions, with which Alfred's people, beyond all their hopes and expectations, returned.

The best man in the whole history of France was King Louis IX., better known by that title of saint which he so well deserved. He was once returning home by sea with his Queen and children. There was a storm. Some of the planks of his ship started with the violent blows of the waves. He was very nearly wrecked. The captain came, and earnestly begged the King to go into another vessel which was in company with the ship on which they had embarked. It was calmer now, but if another storm came on he feared their own would go to the bottom. No, said the King; he would stay where he was. Those who were with him, most assuredly, were as fond of their lives as he could possibly be of his. If he left the ship, they would also leave it; the other was not large enough to receive them all, so they would all be drowned. He would rather intrust his life, and the lives of his wife and children, in the hands of God than be the occasion of making so many of his brave subjects perish. I think there was more there than would have been done by the most enlightened heathen, even according to the precepts of Confucius, or Isocrates, or Aristotle; more than a Jew would have done even if he had followed the exalted teaching of Tobit or of Hillel.

There was a wise and good Frenchman, who has only lately passed away, a member of the Reformed Church, that Church with which Bishop Cosin recommended Englishmen abroad to communicate, rather than with the corrupt Church of France. When his father died, he became entitled to a large share of property. But he had a brother who was far less well off than himself. So he and his wife made up their minds that as they had already more than enough, they would hand over to the brother this superfluous share which had thus newly become theirs.

I give these little homely instances in order to show that high as the golden rule undoubtedly is, yet it can be carried out by a heart that is really given to God. Whosoever we have any dealings with our neighbour it would be well to act on the motto of that wholesome novelist whose memorial adorns the crypt of St. Paul's Cathedral, and put ourselves in his place. If our neighbour is of lower birth or position than we, we must think how we ourselves should like to be told, "*Stand by, for I am better than thou.*" If our neighbour is a servant, we must think in what style we should desire a master or a mistress to speak to us supposing we were suddenly subjected to such employment. If you enjoy your day of rest, see that you do nothing to prevent others from having for themselves that inestimable privilege. If our neighbour is a dissenter, we

must imagine for a moment that the Dissenters formed the National Church, and that we were only members of one of the many small sects, and consider how we should wish ourselves to be treated. If we belong at any time to the ruling political party, we must fancy ourselves reduced to opposition, and reflect in what way we should desire our interests and principles to be handled. If we have great power in our hands, we must try and picture to ourselves how we should wish to see that power used if we were one of those men or those institutions whom that power can make or mar. If we belong to any plausible and exemplary charitable society, we must put ourselves in the place of the defenceless poor, and reckon up in our mind what rage and indignation and gnashing of teeth would be ours if, whenever misfortune had overtaken us, and we needed a little Christian charity, our whole poor pitiful life, full of errors and sins, as we know it to be, was to be at the mercy of the ill-informed and malicious gossip of our neighbours, which gossip was to be remorselessly recorded in a book, and fixed with a number, and put into an index for future reference. If anyone is a smart master of epigram, and loves to make men's ears tingle with his brilliant wit or his masterful snub, let him remember how tyrannical is such use of caustic humour, and try to reproduce in his own self-complacent mind the poisonous venom which his cruel shaft has left to rankle in some modest and harmless breast. If anyone is so certain of all his own beliefs, down to the minutest detail, that he is sure that everybody who disagrees with him is wrong, let him endeavour, at any rate, to represent to himself how he would feel if they also, believing like himself in the Lord Jesus Christ, should, with equal superiority, call him heretic, and no Churchman, or some other sobriquet of unchristian contempt. Or if we are speaking of anybody behind his back, and gloating over his faults, and making merry with his eccentricities and mistakes, well would it be to pause a moment in the midst of our laughter, and think how we should wince and shudder if we could hear him at that moment doing the same by ourselves.

Who amongst modern Christians pays enough attention to the golden rule? Who makes all the excuses for his friend that he makes for himself? Who judges others by the easy standard which he sets up for his own conduct? And yet what depth of sympathy do we not owe to each of the sons and daughters of our loving and gracious Father in heaven? "Every single one of our kind," it has been said by one whose words command a hearing,¹ "is made in the image of God, street-arab and all alike. Each is a soul, a spirit, a Divine

¹ Carlyle.

apparition. Round the mysterious self of each, under all the outward differences of position, there has grown to each the same simple garment of flesh or of senses, woven not of men, but of the loom of heaven; whereby each is revealed to his like, and dwells with them for a short space of years in real union, and only seeming division; and" (according to the chances which his fellow-men give him) "each alike sees and fashions for himself a universe with azure starry spaces and long thousands of years. . . . All this comes equally into the mind of each, deep-hidden under that garment of flesh; swathed in he may seem and almost inextricably overshadowed with the false lights and forms and colours with which men have surrounded him, but all the same he is the son of heaven and worthy of a God" (else God would not have let him be born). ". . . Stands not each one of us alike in ever-stretching vistas of immensity, and where one eternity joins another? Each feels alike; to each alike has power been given to know and to believe; nay, does not the Spirit of Love, whom none have ever smirched or fettered, look through each of us at times, though but for moments, free in its celestial brightness? Well said St. Chrysostom with the lips of gold, 'The true Shekinah is man': where else" (unless it be in the audience-chamber itself) "is God's presence manifested not to our eyes only, but to our hearts, as it is in each and all of our fellows?" All are of the same dignity, all have the same rank, all may have the same worth, for all have the same mystery, and the same breath of God.

When once we have felt this, and that for all alike Christ has died if they will only believe it, that all alike He loves if they will only know it, then it is with quite other eyes that we look on the sins and follies that disgrace our human comrades. We begin to feel an infinite love, an infinite pity. "Poor wandering wayward man," we say with Carlyle, "is it not greatly the fault of thy brothers that thou art so tired and beaten with stripes, and failest so miserably? Whether thou bearest the royal mantle or the beggar's gaberdine, art thou not beset with the weariness and cares which others cause thee? 'O my brother, my brother!' we cry when we see the drunkard, the spendthrift, and the profligate, why can I not shelter thee in my bosom, and wipe away all tears from thine eyes? What can I find to do for thee that I may better thee, and remind thee of what thou art? Thus the din of many-voiced life is no longer a maddening discord, but a melting one; like inarticulate cries, or sobbings of a dumb creature, which in the ear of heaven are prayers; the whole creation groaning and travailing in pain together, waiting for the adoption of sons. And man, with his mad wants and mean endeavours,

becomes dearer to us, and even for his sufferings and his sins" (when we think of God in Christ), "we call him brother with no feigned lips."

If we love our Father in heaven it is easy to love our fellows, because they are dear to Him who is so good to us. That which belongs to one whom we love entwines itself with natural tendrils round our very heart of hearts. I think I see some of us (I am adapting words I once heard from Bishop Boyd Carpenter) going at times to some quiet country church-yard or silent crypt, and there, alone and apart from all eyes, our head droops and the unbidden tear starts, and the spot is more sacred to us perhaps than another. What is it that we find? Only a stone, only a gentle mound in the mown grass, only a few flowers, only a few ashes below the soil. Yet that place belongs to the memory of one we loved, and love it we must. Or who is there amongst us who has not some little private secret drawer, or box with careful lock, and sometimes we steal alone to our room and unfasten that little hiding-place which looks so common, and take out reverently some treasure which is perhaps more precious to us than gold? What is it? Only perhaps a little lock of hair, only a withered violet, only possibly a faded packet of old letters quite out of date, only perhaps a little baby's shoe. Yet there are old voices and memories connected with those slight things which makes their value to us quite inestimable. And as we look at them the sunny scenes come back of the days that are no more, and there is a magic in them which surpasses the wand of the magician. We love them for the sake of the beloved to whom they once belonged, to whom we feel they still belong!

So should it be with the things that belong to the living God, the men whom He has created in His own image. They belong to Him, they are His, they speak to us of Him, they are living witnesses to us of His love, His providence, His care. Him we cannot see, but we can see the human creatures which He has made. Them we must love, because He loves them, and we love Him. Them we must pity, because He pities them. For them we must think, and feel, and pray, and labour, because He, our own tender, heavenly Father, is working for them, too, and slumbers not nor sleeps in His ceaseless, unremitting care for their souls and bodies. "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets." So said our Master. But since He said those words we can add yet a stronger reason, for this is why He who said them died upon the cross!

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