

the element of their moral character, and, in particular, because of their high privileges 'in Christ.' It is not unlikely, moreover, that the angels themselves might be, and are, legitimately called 'sons.' (See, in particular, Job xxxviii. 7.) And hence some expositors are perplexed. Lawson and Storr are driven to maintain that the word 'name' does not refer to 'Son,' but simply means "dignity and power." Delitzsch takes refuge in the idea that the 'name' really meant must be that "which no one knoweth but he himself" (Rev. xix. 12). Bleek again, seeing clearly that the 'name' must be 'Son,' is constrained to suppose that the writer of the epistle either forgot, for the moment, the passages referred to, or did not acquiesce in the interpretation that postulates their reference to angels. But there is no need for such turnings and twistings. There is no real difficulty. Unlike all others, who are, for partial reasons, denominated *sons of God*, Christ is 'Son,' most strictly so called, and therefore emphatically and transcendently. He 'inherits' the name in virtue of identity of nature. All others obtain it by a kind of divine courtesy or grace.

J. MORISON.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

ST. MATTHEW V.—vii.

II. The Style of the Sermon.

WITH the great masters, whether they display their genius in painting, in music, in song, or in less impassioned and rhythmical modes of speech, form and substance are, if not wholly one, yet so closely

connected that to touch the one is to impair the other. The style in which they express their thought is so far part of their thought that, if you translate their conception into other words or forms, it instantly and obviously becomes less perfect than it was. Not only does it lose a portion of its force and beauty, but often it loses the very quality in which its real force and beauty lay. It is the same, yet, O how different! It is the same thought, only in the sense in which Samson was the same man after he had been shorn of the locks that were at once his strength and his crown.

This vital and subtle inter-relation of style and substance, form and matter, which is characteristic of all noble utterance and expression, we find, as we should expect to find it, in the Sermon on the Mount; insomuch that if we fix our attention on any one distinctive quality of its style, we become aware that the secret of its power lies, not simply in any peculiarity of outward form, but in the vital substance which stirs beneath it and within it; not in the body which it has assumed, though this too is part and parcel of its very being, but in the spirit which quickens it, and breathes through it, and gives out the influence by which we are moved. Great thoughts were never expressed in simpler words; yet, somehow, the words not only live, but give life: they have raised and cleansed the whole tone of human society: to use Job's figure, they have taken hold of the corners of the earth, and have shaken much of the ancient wickedness out of it.

The most pronounced characteristics of the style of this Sermon are, perhaps, these three: it is *authori-*

tative; it is *paradoxical*; it is *original*. What most struck those who heard it was that Jesus spake "as one having authority, and not as the Scribes." What most strikes us, as we study it, is its paradoxes—the proverbs in it which (apparently) enjoin impossible duties, duties which Christ Himself did not discharge, which no sane man would think of discharging, lest the world should be given over to the tyranny of the base and the wicked. And what has most struck the world at large is the originality of the Discourse, its utter unlikeness to anything uttered before or since; its immense, almost infinite, superiority to aught that has fallen even from the wisest lips.¹ But each of these distinctive qualities is a quality not of the style only, but also of the substance of the Discourse; as we speak of them, we shall be compelled to pass through the form of the Sermon to the thoughts that burn in it and breathe.

(1.) *The Style is Authoritative*.—"It came to pass when Jesus had ended these sayings the people were astonished at his teaching; for he taught *as one having authority*, and not as the Scribes." But it was not merely the manner of his teaching—though that, no doubt, was very grave and sweet—which conveyed this impression of authority to the listening

¹ "Whatever else may be taken away from us by rational criticism, Christ is still left,—a *unique figure, not more unlike all his precursors than all his followers*, even those who had the direct benefit of his personal teaching. . . . About the life and sayings of Jesus there is a *stamp of personal originality*, combined with profundity of insight which, if we abandon the idle expectation of finding scientific precision where something very different was aimed at, must place the Prophet of Nazareth, even in the thoughts of those who have no belief in his inspiration, in the very first rank of the men of sublime genius of whom our species can boast."—*John Stuart Mill, "Essays on Religion,"* p. 264.

multitude, but the truths He taught: it was more what He said than how He said it, as we may infer from the contrast which the people saw between his teaching and that of the Scribes. True, He spoke in his own name, while they spoke in the names of other and greater men than themselves: they were commentators; He gave a text for commentators. True, too, that they were cold and austere in manner, while He was genial and sympathetic. So that there was a marked difference between his style and theirs. But the great difference was in the teaching itself, in its substance. The Scribes were for ever pottering over their musty parchments, repeating and elucidating dead men's thoughts, citing ancient precedents, seeking to stereotype old ways of thought and conduct, and to crush down whatever was fresh and vigorous with the power of a new and generous life. Above all, they were for ever seeking to enforce an outward law, a law which they read in the letter and not in the spirit, a law which they interpreted, by their own prejudices, for their own aggrandizement. One can well understand therefore that the multitude, oppressed and bound their whole life long by legal enactment and traditional comment, feeling as though the very air were choked with the dust of the past, would listen with delighted astonishment to the words of a Teacher who disdained the technicalities of the Schools, in whose mind even the most familiar truths took forms that were natural and fresh and vital, who spoke of God as a loving Father rather than as an austere and exacting Taskmaster, declared the kingdom of heaven to be among them and within them, and affirmed the truth to be

even more fully present with them than it had been with their fathers. Instead of quoting ancient parchments and appealing to musty precedents, the Lord Jesus pointed them to the flowers that grew in the grass and the birds which flew above their heads, to the bounties of Providence new every morning and the good thoughts and kindly affections which stirred within their own breasts. Instead of seeking to impose an outward law on reluctant necks, He bade them follow the impulses of an inward life. In place of fettering them with rules and maxims, He taught them great simple principles of action and left them to apply them for themselves. For letter, He gave them spirit; for form, life; instead of bidding them defer to authority, He bade them of themselves judge that which is right,—appealing from the outward to the inward, from the past to the present, from rules to principles, from synagogues and courts to the living consciousness of men. If his style was new in its simplicity, its geniality, its freedom from scholastic terms and technicalities, much more was the substance of his teaching new,—new in its freedom, in its power, in its recognition of a present and living Fountain of truth, in its appeal to the moral instincts and intuitions, in its preference of the inward over the outward, of the heart over the appearance, of a willing obedience to a reluctant conformity to commands.

(2.) But if those who heard this Sermon were most sensible of the tone of living power and authority with which Christ spoke, of his vivid stimulating appeal to the authorities of the conscience and the heart, what most strikes, and most perplexes, us as

we study it, is the paradoxes with which it abounds, the proverbial injunctions which appear to contradict not only our own deepest convictions of what is true and right, but also the very example of Christ Himself and of those who had most of his spirit. Nothing in the Sermon, nothing perhaps in the whole New Testament, has more puzzled and "offended" men than such injunctions as these: "Swear not at all: Resist not evil, but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also: If any man sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also; and whosoever shall impress thee to go a mile, go with him twain: Give to him that asketh of thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away." As we consider these words, and such as these, we are tempted—and surely it is no impious motive which tempts us—to say: "These are immoral maxims. Christ Himself did not observe them; we cannot observe them without subverting the social order and yielding the world to the tyranny of the violent, the rapacious, the unjust. He who here says, 'Swear not at all,' often took an oath upon his lips. When He was smitten on the one cheek,¹ He did not turn the other to the smiter, but firmly though gently rebuked him. And how could we submit to every exaction which the fraudulent or the strong would impose upon us, and give to all who ask of us, and lend to all who would borrow, without at once bringing misery and ruin on ourselves and pandering to the evil lusts of our neighbours?"

¹ John xviii. 23.

The objection is a grave one, and needs to be thoroughly answered; for not only is it urged by those who doubt and by those who reject the Christian Faith: it is also felt, and felt painfully, by many who accept that Faith and cling to it. Many a good man has risen from the study of these maxims with a weary brain and a troubled heart, quite sure perhaps that there was a Divine meaning in them, but equally sure that it was utterly beyond his reach.

Now it is not a sufficient reply to this grave objection, although it is a reply with which many are content, to say: "Were *all* men to act on these maxims, as one day all men will, there would be no difficulty, since none would then be covetous or unjust." That is true, doubtless: and, doubtless, our Lord contemplated a time when the whole world would be ruled by the law of love. *But we are not to wait till then before we act on that law.* We are to act on it at once, while there is much that is evil both in our own hearts and in the world around us; and how, while evil is still so strong, can we prudently act on such maxims as these? nay, how can we act on them without injuring the neighbours we are bound to serve, by giving scope to their worst and basest passions?

The true answer to the objection I take to be this:—That our Lord is not here giving us maxims to which we are to render a literal obedience, but is rather giving us principles which we are to apply with discretion; *and that He states these principles paradoxically precisely in order that we may not degrade them into mere maxims and rules.*

The conditions of human life are so complex and subtle that it is simply impossible to lay down maxims, or rules of conduct, binding on all men under all circumstances, the invariable obedience of which will not be attended with the grossest injustice. Laws, for example, legal maxims and rules which are only intended to guard legal rights, are often inequitable in their operation, however impartially they may be administered; and therefore it is that we are more and more giving a large discretion to our judges in order that they may attemper the administration of the law with equity—in order, *i. e.*, that they may not apply an inelastic and inexorable rule to every man's case, but may so vary the application of it as to make due allowance for differences of condition and motive. "One law for rich and poor" used to be a cherished maxim, a popular demand: it is still, strange to say, a popular demand with the very class to which the concession of it would be most injurious. For what can be more radically unjust than that there should be one and the same law for poor and rich? The expense of setting the law in operation might be nothing to the rich man, while to the poor man it might be so formidable as that, rather than incur it, he would put up with a serious loss or wrong. The fine, which a rich man would hardly feel, might be ruinous to a poor man; and, on the other hand, the penalty which a poor man might suffer without much hardship or damage, might involve loss of status, or health, or good name to a man more delicately reared and of a higher social grade.

But if legal maxims and rules are thus unequal in

their pressure, how much more unequal would moral rules be, rules that should affect to define the exact moral right—what every man should do in this case or that? We vary so in character, in position, in culture, in means, and the conditions under which we act are so complex and differ and combine so strangely, that it is impossible to lay down any invariable rule on how a wrong should be met, for instance, or on how much we should give to those who ask of us, or how much and how often we should lend to those who would borrow of us. What we want, what alone will truly help us, is not an inflexible rule, but a large general principle capable of being variously applied, applied reasonably and with discretion, to the different circumstances and exigencies in which we are placed. *Principles* may be just all round, if they are wisely acted on; but definite inelastic rules must be unjust, however fairly applied, simply because they leave no scope for judgment, because they will not stretch and vary till they answer to every man's need. That we should cherish a meek and forgiving spirit, and that we should cherish a generous and helpful spirit, are principles, and are therefore capable of the widest and most varied application; and both these principles Christ lays down: but any conceivable rule about what offences should be forgiven and what not forgiven, or in what forms we ought to help our neighbours and in what we ought not to help them, must inevitably work unjustly, simply because it was a rule, because, *i.e.*, it was precise, rigid, invariable. Hence it is that Christ gives us principles, not rules; and hence too it was that the great Apostle was im-

patient of rules until he could get down to the principles on which they were based.

And yet, partial and unjust as rules are, and must be, in their operation, all history proves that the vast majority of men prefer them to principles. Principles tax thought; they involve responsibility; and, for the most part, men hate the labour of thought and shrink from the burden of responsibility. They would rather have a definite maxim, which points out with precision what they are or are not to do, than be compelled to pause and reflect how a principle impinges on the course of action they propose to take. So marked and strong is this preference that, throughout the whole history of the Church, we see them degrading the broad principles taught by Christ into petty and binding maxims,—laying down rules of worship, for example, which reduce it to a mere ritualism, or laying down rules about what may or may not be done on Sundays, instead of gratefully accepting the principle, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath;” or defining by law their duties to their neighbours instead of acting on what should be called “the golden *principle*” rather than “the golden *rule*,”—“All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.”

How, then, was the Great Teacher so to cast his principles as that they should at once seize on the popular imagination, and at the same time refuse to be ground down into mere maxims and rules? He could only secure these ends, I apprehend, by adopting the method which all the great masters of

human wisdom have freely used; viz., by casting his principles in proverbial and paradoxical forms. Whatever else it may become, *a rule that will not work can never become an accepted rule of human conduct.* When Jesus said, "Swear not at all," although He Himself did not scruple to use an oath; when He bade men, smitten on the one cheek, turn the other also, although He did not do it Himself, He could not fail to awaken attention and surprise. When He threw principles into the form of rules obedience to which was and is impossible, it is at least certain that they would never be adopted *as rules.* Such paradoxes as these were sure to excite thought and prolonged reflection. Men would be, as indeed we see that they are, compelled to consider them, to ask what they mean, *i. e.*, what is the principle that underlies them. And when once they were set thinking, there was no great difficulty in reaching his meaning, if at least they were reasonable, and really wished to find a principle on which they could act. When He who, for the confirmation of our faith, often took an oath, said, "Swear not at all," we may easily see that what He meant was, "Do not you Jews employ the evasive and deceptive oaths common on your lips and allowed by the Scribes: do not swear by heaven, or by earth, or by Jerusalem, or by your heads, supposing that, because you do not mention the name of God, your oath is not binding; it is binding; for you do virtually swear by God, since heaven is his throne and the earth his footstool, since Jerusalem is the city of the great King, and only He can so much as make a single hair of

your head black or white." And, of course, *the principle* of his command—that which is for all men, in all times—is not that they should always, and under all circumstances, refuse to take an oath; but that they should, at all times and under all circumstances, refuse to take evasive and deceitful oaths, that they should be true to their oaths, true even to their word. So again, when He who, on being struck by an apparitor, gently yet firmly rebuked him, bids us, if smitten on the one cheek, turn the other also, we may easily see what it is that He really means. We cannot take his words as conveying a rule on the letter of which we are to act, since, were we invariably to act on it, we should not be shewing a wise love for our neighbour, but should rather pander to his anger and violence. And, therefore, we are compelled to look for a principle in the words till we see their meaning to be, that we are not to meet rage and violence with violence and rage, but with meekness, friendliness, forgiveness.

Anecdotes, as a rule, seem woefully out of place in an exposition; but at this point of my argument two recur to my memory, which will make it clearer than many pages of laborious commentary: and therefore, though still with some reluctance, I will tell them. It is said that many years ago an eminent minister of the Gospel, who had been a great athlete in his youth, on returning to his native town soon after he had been ordained, encountered in the High Street an old companion whom he had often fought and thrashed in his godless days. "So, you've turned Christian, they tell me, Charley?" said the

man. "Yes," replied the minister. "Well, then, you know the Book says, If you're struck on one cheek, you're to turn the other. Take *that*;" and with that hit him a stinging blow. "There, then," replied the minister quietly, turning the other side of his face toward him. The man was brute enough to strike him heavily again. Whereupon the minister said, "And *there* my commission ends," pulled off his coat, and gave his antagonist a severe thrashing, which no doubt he richly deserved. But did the minister keep the command of Christ? He obeyed the letter of the rule; but did he not violate the principle, the spirit, of it?

Hear the other story, and judge. It is told of a celebrated officer in the army that, as he stood leaning over a wall in the barrack-yard, one of his military servants, mistaking him for a comrade, came softly up behind him, and suddenly struck him a hard blow. When the officer looked round, his servant, covered with confusion, stammered out, "I beg your pardon, sir; I thought it was George." His master gently replied: "And if it were George, why strike so hard?"

Now which of these two, think you, really obeyed the command of Christ? the minister who made a rule of it and kept to the letter of the rule, or the officer who made a principle of it, and, acting on the spirit of it, neglected the letter? Obviously, the minister disobeyed the command in obeying it, while the officer obeyed the command in disobeying it.

And here we may see the immense superiority of a principle over a rule. Take a rule, *any* rule, and there is only one way of keeping it, the way of

literal obedience, and this may often prove a foolish and even a disobedient way. But get a principle, and there are a thousand ways in which you may apply it, all of which may be wise, beneficial to you and no less beneficial to your neighbour.

So, once more, with that other command of Christ's to which we have referred, the command about giving and lending. If we make a rule of it, if we give to every beggar in the streets who asks of us, and lend to every lazy rogue who would rather "sorn" on his neighbours than do a stroke of honest work, we shall soon have nothing left either to give or lend; all that will be left us will be the conviction that we have ruined ourselves to injure our neighbours. But if we get at the principle of the command, if we shew a considerate, kindly, generous spirit, if we are ready to deny ourselves that we may help the poor and needy with discretion, though, in this case, the probability is that we shall never acquire great wealth, there is no reason why we should not always have enough for ourselves and a little to spare for our neighbours; there is every reason why we should feel that we are obeying the law of Christ and contributing to the welfare of the world.

Christ gives us in this Sermon, then, principles, not rules; and *He casts these principles in paradoxical forms in order that we may not be able to degrade them into rules.* He wishes to compel us to reflect, not to save us the trouble of reflection; not to spare us the responsibility of choice, but to win us to a right choice. And therefore He speaks to us in proverbs, in paradoxes, to which we cannot give a

literal and exact obedience. We are obliged to search into them for principles by the impossibility of accepting them as rules: and, as we search, we discover that we then do his will, not when we refuse to take a legal oath, but when we cultivate a truthful spirit; not when we turn the other cheek to the smiter, but when we conquer anger and violence with meekness and love; not when we give or lend to every one that asks of us, but when we cherish a generous and benevolent spirit. CARPUS.

ST. PAUL ON GOING TO LAW.

I COR. vi. 1-7.

ST. PAUL here gives his judgment on the litigiousness of the Corinthians. The Greeks, in general, were fond of going to law. They were not only quarrelsome, but they seemed to derive an excitement pleasant to their frivolous nature in the suspense and uncertainty of cases before the Courts. The converts to Christianity seem not to have discarded this taste, and as a habit of going to law not merely involved great loss of time, but was also dangerous to the feeling of brotherhood which should exist among Christians, St. Paul takes the opportunity to throw in some advice on the subject. He has been telling them they have nothing to do with judging the heathen; he now proceeds to remind them that they ought not to go to law before the heathen. He feared that an unseemly wrangling among Christians might convey to the heathen quite an erroneous impression of the nature of their re-