

power of the infinite will—the infinite good-will—of God. Hence, for instance, not even the most affectionate of holy fathers or mothers would wish God to overturn his infinitely wise method of administering the affairs of the universe in order to rescue their dearly beloved and lovely daughter from a watery grave. Neither would they, or could they, wish that He should break into shivers the moral constitution of the human heart and conscience, in order to convert their prodigal son from the error of his way. But, nevertheless, they earnestly desire their daughter's rescue and their son's conversion, and who shall say that the desire is either sinful, selfish, or absurd? If it be a right desire to cherish, *why, in the name of all that is right and reasonable, should it not be lifted up to Him, who is not only glorious in holiness, and fearful in praises, but truly unfettered in his hands, and ever doing wonders?* Why should the child be forbidden to ask from his Father, when it is certain that He will append to all his particular petitions the all-embracing one, the prayer that is inclusive and comprehensive of all prayers—"Not my will, but thine, be done!"

J. MORISON.

PRINCIPLES, NOT RULES.

ST. LUKE xxii. 35, 36.

AT last I have found a passage of which I have long been in search, not for my own sake indeed, but for the sake of many whose spiritual condition and wants differ from my own. In common with most modern Commentators, I have frequently affirmed that the

Lord Jesus Christ came not to give men exact and binding rules of conduct, but large general principles, capable of the most flexible and various application. Rules of conduct *are* to be found among his sayings, indeed: as, for example, when He bade his disciples, if smitten on the one cheek, turn the other also; or when He bade them, if any man took their coat, let him also rob them of their cloak; or when He bade them give to every one that asked an alms of them, or go out on a journey unprovided with any change of clothing and with an empty purse. But these rules—so at least it has been contended—were not meant for a literal, and still less for an universal, obedience, since our Lord Himself did not obey them, nor his Apostles: nay, more, these rules were thrown into a paradoxical form, a form in which a literal and universal obedience was simply impossible, in order that we might see that they were not mere rules, and be compelled to search for the principles which underlie them.¹

But there are many good men who distrust an appeal to “mere reason,” although they admit reason to be among the choicest gifts of God. They assume it to be the enemy, rather than the friend, of faith, although they admit that to an irrational creature faith is simply impossible. And to such an argument as I have just sketched, they are apt to reply: “After all it is *only* an argument, only an appeal to reason, which we profoundly distrust. It carries no authority with it. Before we can weigh it and yield to it, you must produce some text, some Scripture,

¹ This argument is developed at some length in an article on “The Sermon on the Mount,” which appeared in THE EXPOSITOR, vol. i. pp. 132-42.

which sanctions it, and gives it the stamp of a Divine authority."

Even they themselves, indeed, do not render a literal obedience to the rules laid down, as they imagine, in the New Testament. When smitten on the right cheek, so far from turning the left to the smiter, they prosecute him for assault and battery. If a man sues them at the law, and they are sentenced to lose a part of their estate, they do not present him with the rest of it, but carry an appeal to a higher court, and endeavour to get the sentence reversed. Having food and clothing, they are not therewith content, but try to get education and amusement also, and perhaps to amass a modest fortune. They do not give to every one that asketh of them, but refer the beggar to a Charity Organization Society, or even, if he be a sturdy and habitual beggar, hand him over to the police. So far from lending to every one that would borrow of them, they often "turn away" from them, buttoning up their pocket as they turn. When they engage in any Christian or philanthropic enterprize, they do not go out on it without purse or scrip or shoes: on the contrary, they take a full purse with them, if they can, and a scrip capable of holding more contributions than they are likely to obtain, and wear out their shoes in hunting up subscribers.

Nevertheless, they are not altogether at ease in their minds. Their conscience pricks them at times, as well it may. They doubt whether they would not be more truly Christian were they to render a more literal obedience to the commands of Christ. And, in a measure, I suppose we can all sympathize

with them. We, too, have our occasional misgivings as to whether the rules that fell from the lips of Christ do not condemn many of our modern methods of action, whether we should not be better and happier, though poorer, men were we to do even as He said.

Now we have sins enough to answer for without adding on imaginary sins. Our hearts are sore burdened at the best; we need not impose burdens on them which God does not mean them to bear. And therefore it is that I have long been looking for some clear authoritative deliverance from the lips of Christ Himself that might relieve those who hold themselves bound to a literal obedience which yet they find it impossible to render, by shewing *that our Lord Himself did not intend his own rules for a literal and universal obedience*; but did intend that we should look through them to those great *principles* of justice, compassion, trust in God, and brotherly kindness, of which they were passing illustrations. And here, at last, is that clear authoritative deliverance.

For observe what it is that our Lord is here doing. He is not simply, as in the Sermon on the Mount, repealing rules and laws given by them of old time. He is not simply both supplanting and fulfilling them by the inward and spiritual principles to which they gave an imperfect and temporary form. He is *repealing a rule which He Himself had given* to his disciples only a few months ago, although, as they confess, that rule had worked very well. He is *replacing* it by a new rule, a rule the very opposite of that which He had previously given them; a rule which no sane and reflective man can possibly sup-

pose He intended them to obey *as a rule*, since it is alien to the very spirit, to the whole drift, of his teaching.

Here, then, we have a clear and convincing proof that the rules given by Christ were not intended to become ordinances of perpetual observance; that He did not mean men to render them a literal, and still less a perpetual and universal, obedience; that we must interpret them, as all other of his utterances, by aid of our own common sense and spiritual insight; that what we are to obey in them is the sacred and eternal principles which they illustrate.

And this conviction grows on us the more we study these remarkable verses. In the first of them (*Verse 35*) our Lord reverts to the first missionary journey of the Twelve. When the second year of his ministry was drawing to a close, He sent them forth to teach and to preach in all the cities of Israel. They were, He told them,¹ to take no money in their purses, not even the copper coins familiar to the poor; to carry no scrip, or travelling-bag, containing provisions and other conveniences for the journey, and no change of clothes or sandals; but to set off as they were, with nothing but a staff in their hands, casting themselves wholly on the kindness of men and the providence of God. This was to be their rule for the time, and I am not concerned to deny that, for the time, they felt bound to render it a literal obedience. It may be that Christ thought it well to startle a selfish and indifferent world into attention, by presenting it with a spectacle such as it had never seen, or imagined, before. It may be that

¹ Matt. x. 9, 10.

the Twelve drew all men's eyes upon them, and shewed that a new spirit of love and meekness and unselfish devotion had come into the world, by walking among them penniless yet content, and by submitting to any wrong or insult they chose to inflict. Such a spectacle could not fail to impress the world; it may have disposed many to believe that they who could do such things as these must have a message of love and peace and good will for their neighbours.

But even if the Twelve, for a time, rendered a literal obedience to these rules, it does not follow that the rules were designed for a constant and universal observance. Their trust in God, their meekness, their devotion to noble ends—these indeed are for all time; but not the modes in which they exhibited them. And it would be, as Stier calls it, “a mere fanaticism of the letter” of Scripture, were we to bind these rules on the consciences of modern missionaries and ministers of the gospel. Take the spirit of Christ's injunction, say that no minister should waste his time and energies, and that no Church should compel or permit him to waste them, in securing a provision for the external wants and comforts of life; say that every minister and missionary should be so devoted to the service of God and man as to be bent on serving them at all costs and all risks; and you may very safely argue that the words of Christ are still binding. But read them as a rule, say that no minister or missionary is to have a purse, or a change of clothes, or more than one pair of boots, and you simply expose the words of Christ to ridicule and contempt. Nor only so. You also insist on retaining a rule which He Himself has repealed,

and on pushing aside the rule, which yet is equally binding, with which He replaced it. For at the close of his ministry, in view of the dark and troublous days that were coming on them, He gave the Twelve a new rule: "*But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip; and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one.*" Formerly, they were to go forth penniless, unprovided with aught but a staff, and to bear with meekness whatever wrongs or insults the world might inflict on them. Now, they are to put money in their purse, to pack their scrip with provisions and conveniences, to exchange their staff for a sword—not to submit to, but to defy and conquer, the hostility of the world.

Now, obviously, it is quite impossible that we should render a literal obedience to *both* these rules. Even a minister, or a missionary, cannot both take, and not take, a purse with him, cannot both submit to wrong and insult and resent them with the sword. And it is hardly less obvious that even the Twelve never attempted to obey the latter rule literally. When do we meet *them* with a full purse, or even trying to fill it? When do we see them anxiously accumulating a store of provisions and comforts, carrying a scrip that should render them independent of the bounty whether of man or of God? And how could the servants of Him whose kingdom is not of this world fight with the sword? No sensible man can well suppose that Christ meant the apostles to leave the table at which they had just eaten their Last Supper with Him, and go out into the market to buy swords; or, having bought them, to wield

them in his service : for only a few hours after these words were uttered St. Peter did strike at Malchus with a sword, and only received a rebuke for his pains. The first of these rules may have received a literal obedience for a time ; but at what time could the second of them have been obeyed after the letter with the consent and approbation of Christ ? And if this new rule was not intended for a literal obedience even by the Twelve, it is very certain that it cannot be meant for an universal and perpetual obedience. Our Lord could not have meant that we should all fill our purses, and arm ourselves with weapons of war, in order to prepare ourselves for his service. And yet this new rule is just as binding as the old one. It would be just as reasonable to argue that we are to accumulate and to fight for Christ, as it is to argue that we are to dispense with purse and scrip and shoes, and turn the other cheek to the smiter, and to give to every one that asketh of us.

The simple fact is—as by this time surely even the veriest stickler for a literal interpretation of Scripture must see—that even when He threw his teaching into the form of rules, Christ did not intend us to take them as rules, but as picturesque and paradoxical illustrations of principles. Here is the proof. *Christ Himself repeals a rule which He Himself had given, and replaces it with a rule the very opposite of that which He had given ; nay, replaces it with a rule which never was, and never will be, literally obeyed.* And thus He drives us to look for the principles which underlie his words. He teaches us that as there are times when we are to

win upon the world by unselfishness and an unresisting uncomplaining submission to wrong, in short, by *not* resisting evil, so also there are times in which we *are* to resist, to strive against it manfully, to arm and nerve ourselves for the defence and furtherance of the Faith. If at times we are to be *meek* for the truth, at other times we are to be *valiant* for the truth.

Much, therefore, as we love to get definite rules by which we may guide ourselves mechanically and without thought, Christ refuses to give us such rules; nay, perplexes us and compels us to thought by seeming to give us rules on which we cannot act, or rules one of which contradicts the other. And is it not well that He should refuse us? Rules breed customs, and customs breed corruption. One of our own poets warns us that our modes of action must be continually adapted and re-adapted to the changing conditions of the time, lest even "one *good* custom should corrupt the world," losing all its life and force by constant and mechanical repetition. Whereas, if we have principles instead of rules, we are obliged to use our common sense in applying and in varying our application of them; we are compelled to observe and reflect, to let our thoughts play freely around them, to learn and grow wiser by experience. And all these—observation, reflection, the use of good sense and experience—are educational influences of the highest value. It is by these we live, and keep our principles alive, and help to give life to the world around us.

CARPUS.