

## THE ATTITUDE OF CHRISTIANS TO THE OLD TESTAMENT.<sup>1</sup>

To make anything of so large a subject as this, in the very brief compass of such a paper as I have been asked to read, it will be convenient to start from some well known and widely accepted statement on the subject which will suggest the chief points for discussion.

Such a statement is given in the seventh of the xxxix. Articles, the doctrine of which is common to all the great Reformed Churches, and would be accepted, with slight modifications, by Lutherans. The chief points are :—

1. *The Old Testament is not contrary to the New.* This proposition is directed against ancient and modern Gnosticism. It is certainly implied in the statement of Jesus, that He came not to destroy, but to fulfil or fill up. In its negative form it is, therefore, quite unimpeachable by all who accept Christianity as an historical religion, and accept the faith of Jesus as their own faith. To turn it into a positive statement is not so easy; and it is when we turn to the positive statements of the Article that we begin to find matter about which Christians are not agreed.

2. And here the positive statement begins. *Both in the Old and New Testament everlasting life is offered to Mankind by Christ, who is the only Mediator between God and Man, being both God and Man. Wherefore they are not to be heard, which feign that the old Fathers did look only for a temporary promise.* This doctrine too, was, up to the time

<sup>1</sup> This paper was prepared and read to introduce a friendly discussion at a Conference representing very various types of Christian thought.

when the Article was composed, practically agreed upon in all the Christian Churches. It corresponds with the old saying, *Novum Testamentum in vetere latet Vetus Testamentum in Novo patet*. But it is not easy for modern thinkers either to agree with or to differ from it, without qualifications. Taken as it stands, it is open to one obvious and grave objection. It appears to assume that in the Old Testament religion, as well as in the New, the subject of religion is the individual soul. The Old Testament, it is assumed, would be contrary to the New unless the hope of the individual believer were the same in both. But, as matter of fact, the subject of Religion in the Old Testament is not the individual but Israel, as a corporate unity. The promises of the Old Testament are primarily addressed to Israel, not to the individual soul. Throughout the larger part of the Old Testament religion offers felicity to the individual only in the felicity of a nation accepted with God. I do not say that the individual element is absent even in the older parts of the Old Testament. But it is altogether subordinate to the national aspect of religion. The Psalmists sometimes attain the persuasion, which the Book of Job strives after without reaching a satisfactory conclusion, that in the love of God the happiness of the individual is secured; but this is a transcendental conviction which is nowhere reduced to a regular part of the Old Testament system. The statement of the Article and of Protestant theology generally on this head is, in fact, a polemical statement. Its gist lies mainly in the negative. It is denied as against certain so-called Judaizers that "the Fathers looked only for a temporary promise." That is certainly true, if temporary promise means, as in the Article it plainly does mean, a promise of temporal (as distinct from everlasting) life and felicity to the individual believer. The Old Testament does not promise this. It teaches the individual to place his hope in the mercy of God

to Israel, which is an eternal not a temporary thing. This hope was enough, as we see in the case of Isaiah, to enable the believer to rejoice in tribulation, to maintain his confidence and faith in God amidst the most crushing national calamities. But the Old Testament did not give, like the New, a complete solution of the mystery of present affliction to the individual as part of his training for eternal life. If we say that the hope of the individual in the Old Testament went beyond his own life, and in so far was transcendental, we shall not be wrong. Nay, we may go farther and say that the Old Testament hope was directed in such a way that it would have been a vain hope had God not been preparing the New Testament hope to follow it. But this is not the same thing as to say that to the individual the hope of Old and New Testament were the same.

What, then, shall we say to the further position that the Old Testament hope was a hope in Christ? Here, again, if the proposition means, as its authors no doubt intended it to mean, a conscious hope in Christ, modern study of the Old Testament forbids us to assent. To find Christ in the Old Testament the old theology has to introduce the system of allegory, or at least a theory of types and symbols. But the symbolic meanings postulated for the ceremonies and words of the Old Testament are not proved from the Old Testament itself, but read into it from the New. This is not fair exegesis. It is absurd to assume that, side by side with the written Word there ran through the Old Dispensation an unwritten system of interpretation which made that Word mean something different from what lies on its surface.

In fact, if we look at the thing carefully, we shall see that the claim of continuity with the Old Testament revelation which New Testament Christianity makes for itself has a different formula from that of the Article. We

must remember that the New Testament belongs to an age in which people did not trouble themselves about exact historical exegesis. When the New Testament affirms that the prophets spoke of Christ they refer to the application which these words naturally suggested, not to their Old Testament hearers, but to Christian readers. The point, therefore, is not that the Old Testament writers promised salvation in Christ, but that they promised—no matter in what form—a salvation which is only realized in Christ. In this, as in other respects, the coming of Christ not only fulfils but fills up the prophetic outline. The prophets conceived the salvation of Israel under the only form which lay within their historical horizon, *i.e.* in *national* form. But what gave the form value to them was that, under the form, they pictured to themselves the forgiveness of sin, the moral reconciliation of man with God, the realization of his gracious Kingship. Christianity offers the same blessings in Christ, but in a very different form. It therefore, fulfils the essence of the Old Testament promise, and in this sense the Article is right; but it has not hit the right expression of the truth aimed at.

3. But the Old Testament notoriously contains not only prophetic promise, but an elaborate system of law. The third proposition of the Article, *Although the Law given from God by Moses, as touching Ceremonies and Rites, do not bind Christian men, nor the Civil precepts thereof ought of necessity to be received in any commonwealth; yet, notwithstanding, no Christian man whatsoever is free from the Commandments which are called Moral*, refers to this; and, according to the usual Protestant formula, divides law into Ritual, Civil, and Moral. The Rites and Ceremonies do not bind Christian men; the Civil precepts are not necessary to be accepted in a Christian commonwealth; the Moral commands are still binding. There is an air of precision about this statement which has given it great vogue, but it really

covers rather than answers one of the most difficult questions in the relation of Christians to the Old Testament.

Taken together with the previous statement, it implies that the Old Testament may be divided, as Paul divides it, into Law and Promise; and it is also implied, again with Paul, that it was in the Promise, not in the Law, that the vital force of the dispensation lay. Thus far modern enquiry agrees with the Protestant formula, and even places it in a new and striking light. Paul, arguing from that construction of the Old Testament history which was accepted in his own day, and of course raising no question of historical criticism, teaches that the Promise of salvation is older than the law of works, and always contained the vital element apprehended by the Old Testament faith. Modern research has shewn that, as a matter of fact, the Law is a much more modern thing than the Jews themselves in the time of Christ supposed; and enables us to assign more precisely its place in that Divine plan of which, according to the teaching of our Lord and his disciples, the Old and New Testament revelations are continuous parts.

The Old Testament represents this plan as seeking the realization of the Kingship of Jehovah in Israel. Jesus accepts this ideal in his gospel of the kingdom of heaven, *i.e.* the Kingdom of God; but He accepts it with a difference which it is necessary to understand.

The nation of Israel in the time before the great Assyrian troubles did live under a present sense of the Kingship of Jehovah. That Kingship was expressed not in a code, but in living institutions in which actual exercise of Jehovah's executive and judicial Kingship was realized. Jehovah went forth with the host of Israel. His Spirit gave wisdom to their kings. His oracle gave sentence at the sanctuary. He received their gifts at the altar and answered them with blessing. This simple faith was broken down when the whole order of ancient Israel was crushed in the

disastrous advance of the Assyrian empire to the Mediterranean sea-board. The prophets alone were able to see that the subjugation of Israel by the servants of a strange god was no less a proof of the present Kingship of Jehovah than the nation's earlier felicity had been. Jehovah was now manifesting Himself as the righteous judge, punishing sin, yet reserving a remnant of grace, that his kingdom might not vanish for ever, but might still be preserved for an ideal consummation in the future. This Theodicea received its most striking confirmation in the return from exile. But the history of the restored Jerusalem was such as to shake faith once more. The state of slavery continued. Disasters and sufferings followed in unbroken succession. According to theory, these disasters were due to sin. But it was difficult to accept this theory as sufficient. For the righteous suffered with the wicked; nay, it was sometimes possible for the perplexed nation to complain that they suffered not for their sins but actually because they claved to Jehovah: "For his sake they were killed all day." Various solutions of these difficulties were sought, and can still be read in the Book of Job and in certain Psalms. But the solution which may be called *official*, was that embodied in practical form in the work of Ezra and, his successors, the Scribes. It held that national obedience, if perfect, must be accompanied by the manifestation of the kingdom of Jehovah. It was, therefore, above all things, necessary to systematize the whole duty of the Israelite; duties moral, social and ceremonial, were all codified in the Torah or deduced from it by the interpretations of the Scribes. The business of Israel was to set fast the Torah, and, when this was effected, the deliverance would come. But with the establishment of the Torah, the living prophetic word of Jehovah ceased. There was now no practical sense in which God's kingship in Israel was a present kingship. He had

left his Law, but He was not present to execute it. The kingdom of God, which was still a present reality to the prophets became to the Scribes an ideal of the future. Under the Hasmonians the gloom of the present had been for a moment dispelled, and an effective presence of God in Israel seemed about to be realized; but these hopes failed, and in the time of Christ the kingdom of God seemed farther off than ever.

Jesus in his doctrine of the kingdom returns above all to the faith of the prophets, that the kingdom of God is not a thing lying in the far future, but an object of present faith. His doctrine of the fatherly providence of God, which forbids the believer to take thought of the morrow, implies that happiness in God and his sovereignty is a present possession. The sum of all the good things of the kingdom lies in the forgiveness of sins, which can be realized *now*. Thus the kingdom becomes a spiritual thing which those who have the Spirit of Christ can realize as a present good. The *peace* of God is a peace that keeps, not the land of Israel, but the hearts of men; and it can be constantly and joyfully realized through faith in the fatherly providence of God, childlike humility, and the exercise of prayer, in which by the Spirit every member of the kingdom enjoys access to the King who is now also his Father. The organization of the kingdom, in consequence, can only be conceived as a hidden order by which all things work together for good to them that love God. In what sense, and under what conditions, Jesus held that this spiritual order, at present grasped by faith alone, would ultimately become visible to all eyes, is one of the most difficult of New Testament problems; but there is no question that the essence of his gospel was present peace in the forgiveness of sins—peace, not as a subjective feeling, but as admission to the peace and order of the spiritual kingdom.

On this doctrine the Torah at once loses the place

which it held in Judaism and can no longer be thought of as the condition the observance of which would secure the inbringing of the future glory. To the details of ceremonial observance Jesus was rather neutral than hostile; his polemic against the Pharisees had for its point that the strictest observance of legal precepts does not necessarily include that childlike obedience and love of the heart which alone has religious value. But this being granted, it merely required the experimental proof that the Spirit of Christ could manifest itself unmistakably in men beyond the pale of circumcision to cause Christianity to drop the whole system of legal observances as superseded in Christ.

But as the whole Old Testament was taken over by the Christian Church as a holy book, it was necessary to find an expression for the attitude of Christians to the Law, which they still read as God's word.

Paul's formula (Gal. iii.) is that the Law came in *from the side*, and served as a pædagog—*we might almost say a nurse*—to watch over the infant heir of the promise. This profound view is in thorough accord with the history. The law formed a religious habit in Israel which, while it cramped, yet helped to preserve in the national consciousness, the element of spiritual faith in the prophetic word. It prevented Israel from losing its grip of the order of the kingdom of God; and thus, when all the other ancient religions were merging in a compound of atheism and grovelling superstition, a field was found in Palestine where the teaching of Christ could take root and fructify, and from which the good seed was spread abroad to fill the world. But its work was done as soon as the higher teaching took its place.

Now it is plain that Paul's doctrine about the Law does not contain any distinction between moral, civil, and ceremonial elements. The characteristic of Judaism—that is of the religion of Israel after Ezra—was the formulation of



all parts of the religious life in a code of laws, so that the man who fully followed these laws could feel assured that he was living in harmony with the revealed plan of salvation. The very essence of this scheme was that civil and ceremonial duties were placed under the same positive sanctions with moral duties. The system of the Law could only stand or fall as a whole, and Paul teaches that it is replaced in all its parts by the new principle of faith, in which the assurance of acceptance with God is no longer sought by reference to an outward rule, and in which right actions are done not because they are commanded in a book, but because the new life demands them. Sin is to the Christian not breach of a law, but an action that mars the play and growth of the new and heavenly life.

On this view no command is binding on Christians simply because it is found in the Old Testament. Old Testament and New Testament morality correspond in so far as the Old Testament dispensation was all along a training towards Christian life; but the correspondence of two stages of life related to one another as childhood and manhood is not such that everything permitted to the child would be becoming in the man, or everything forbidden to the child unbecoming in the man. To us the Old Testament law is of perpetual value, because it explains the historical basis on which Christian morality was built, and the ethical presuppositions of the society to which the New Testament was addressed. Christianity infuses a new spirit and principle into moral life. But all moral life has a traditional element, or, rather, presupposes certain fixed social conditions and established moral habits. The conditions and habits which the New Testament presupposes are those formed by the Law; and thus to know the Law is the condition of understanding the life of primitive Christianity, from which modern Christian life has been produced in continuous development.

Had time permitted, it would have been useful to examine the historical causes that have led to that distinction of moral, civil, and ceremonial laws, which has played so large a part in practical controversy about the use of the Old Testament. But this is impossible at present; and, in closing, I shall simply state one or two practical conclusions as to the use of the Old Testament to Christians.

To the theologian the fundamental use of the Old Testament is historical. On the one hand its ideals and promises are the historical presuppositions on which Jesus built his ideal. In them religion took a line of aspiration which could only be satisfied by the gospel. And on the other hand the legal parts of the Old Testament are the key to the social and ethical system from which Christianity went forth, and from which it carried over many ethical habits quite opposed to those of Pagan morality. On both sides the New Testament cannot be understood without the Old.

I think that this historical view should have a much larger place in Christian teaching than is usually assigned to it. It is not really more difficult, and it is infinitely more tangible, than the abstract theories of the relation of the two dispensations usually current. But it will be asked whether on this way of studying the Old Testament, its practical use for edification to the unlearned can be made as simple and direct as on the old methods. I think that it can.

In the first place, the direct edification derived from Bible reading lies less in individual doctrines and precepts than in the fact that, in reading the utterances of the prophet's hope or the psalmist's faith, we feel ourselves lifted above the petty interests of earthly and transitory things, into a region where man holds direct converse with things unseen and eternal and with a personal and loving God. In this sense the Old Testament is as fruitful on the new theory as on the old: "Our fathers trusted in thee, they trusted and were not put to shame." The more strictly historical

our study of the Old Testament is, the more clear and forcible does this aspect of Israel's religion become.

Then, again, it will always remain true, that spiritual and moral principles, like material organisms, are more easily understood in their germinal form. The religion of Isaiah, if we do not overlay it with a mass of traditional exegesis, represents fundamental aspects of all true religion in an elementary shape; the Psalms express the utterance of faith in its simplest embodiment. It requires no philosophy to feel this; and all experience shews that the Christian individual, whose own life runs through stages in many respects parallel to the history of the Church, can often find the precise message which his soul requires most readily in the elementary utterances of the Old Testament. Nor is there much risk that the devotional reading of the Old Testament will Judaize the Christian. For the ideal parts of the Old Testament are those which speak most directly to the heart of faith, and they are the very parts from which Jesus and the Apostles drew the support of their spiritual life.

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THE BOOK OF ISAIAH. CHAPTERS XL.-LXVI.

IV. JEHOVAH, GOD OF ISRAEL, THE FIRST AND  
THE LAST.

IN Chapter xl. the Prophet, in order both to comfort and to teach his people, set before them Jehovah, their God, the Incomparable, with sarcastic sidethrusts at the idols. Here it was the immeasurable power of Jehovah, the Creator, the Sustainer of creation, who shewed his might in commanding the movements of the stars and breaking up the most powerful combinations of men, that was made prominent. In comparison of this Being, or rather from the point of view of his consciousness of Himself, all things

recede into nothingness. And to confirm this conception of God the Prophet names Him the Holy One: "To whom then will ye liken me, saith the Holy One (*Kadosh*)?" Obviously, however, such a view of Jehovah, though it excludes all others from being thought of as gods, is not yet complete. For though this incomparableness or matchlessness of Jehovah, according to which He is God alone, was represented as shewing itself in sudden and destructive interferences in the world of mankind (xl. 23, 24), no account was presented of his general relations to the world. The Prophet proceeds to furnish this in Chapter xli. some verses of which may be quoted.

1 Keep silence before me, ye isles; and let the peoples renew their strength; let them draw near; then let them speak; let us come near together to judgment. 2 Who hath raised up from the east; calleth (him) in righteousness to follow him; giveth nations before him, and treadeth down kings; maketh their sword as dust and their bow as driven stubble? 3 He pursueth them, and passeth on safely,—a way with his feet that none hath trod. 4 Who hath wrought and done it? who calleth the generations from the beginning;<sup>1</sup> I, Jehovah, am the first, and with the last I am He.

5 The isles have seen it and are afraid; the ends of the earth tremble; they draw near and come (together). 6 They help every one his neighbour, and every one saith to his brother, Be of good courage. 7 So the carpenter encourageth the goldsmith, and he that smootheth with the hammer him that smiteth the anvil, saying of the soldering, It is good; and he fasteneth it with nails that it may not totter.

8 But thou Israel my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham that loved me; 9 thou whom I took from the ends of the earth, and called thee from the corners

<sup>1</sup> This is not clear English, but perhaps it expresses the original. The question, Who hath wrought? is not answered, the answer is self-evident, and the prophet appends in apposition to *who?* a larger definition of Jehovah, which generalizes the idea involved in the question. The sense will be little different if we suppose the question to be real and to receive an answer in the end of Verse 4.

thereof, and have said unto thee, Thou art my servant, I have chosen thee and not cast thee away; 10 fear not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God; I strengthen thee, yea I help thee, yea I hold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. 11 Behold all they that are incensed against thee shall be ashamed and confounded, they that strive with thee shall be as nothing and shall perish. . .

21 Produce your cause, saith Jehovah; bring forward your strong reasons, saith the King of Jacob. 22 Let them bring forward and declare unto us what shall happen. The former things, What are they? declare (them) that we may consider (them) and know their issue; or shew us things to come. 23 Declare the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are gods; yea do good or do evil, that we may be dismayed, and behold it together. 24 Behold ye are of nothing, and your work of nought; an abomination is he that chooseth you.

25 I have raised up from the north, and he is come; from the rising of the sun one that calleth upon my name: and he shall come upon princes as upon mortar, and as the potter treadeth clay. 26 Who hath declared it beforehand that we may know? and beforetime that we may say, He is right? yea there is none that declared, yea there is none that shewed, yea there is none that heard your words. 27 I first give to Zion (one saying), Behold! behold them! and to Jerusalem one that bringeth good tidings. 28 And when I look there is no man, and among these there is no counsellor, that when I ask of them can return an answer. 29 Behold all of them, their works are vanity and naught, their molten images wind and confusion.

The passage is connected with the preceding by the phrase "renew their strength." Chapter xl. ended with saying, "They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength," a word of encouragement and hope to Israel; this Chapter begins with, "Let the peoples renew their strength," a challenge and threat to the idol-worshipping nations. The Lord challenges the nations to enter into a plea with Him, to come with Him before a tribunal,

that decision may be given between them. This is a mere form of speech, a favourite forensic figure, employed for the purpose of setting forth in a lively manner the cause of the Lord and his people on the one side, and the cause of the idol-worshippers and their gods on the other. The point in dispute is not specially referred to; any one can gather it when he considers who the disputants are. Nor, of course, is there any real tribunal before which the plea is argued, not even, as Rosenmüller suggested, the tribunal of Reason. The arguments which the Lord uses on his side are two: the raising up of Cyrus and his victorious career; and the prediction of this beforehand. Both of these things He claims to have done.

Verses 2, 3 have been somewhat differently rendered by different writers, though the general meaning is plain. The great subject spoken of is Cyrus. It is probable that the first clause of verse 2 is to be taken by itself, "Who raised up from the East?" just as verse 25, "I have raised up from the North and he is come"; the person raised not being named in either case. Others make the second clause relative, "Who raised up from the East (the man) whom righteousness calleth to follow it (or, Him)?" The order of words in the second clause is rather against this; and the idea that Righteousness calleth Cyrus to follow *it* is unnatural and hardly justified even by Chapter lviii. 8, while the Lord's calling of Cyrus to follow Him has its supports in Chapter xlv. 2, 13: "I will go before thee," and "I have raised him up in righteousness." On the other hand there is a want of concinnity in the expression, "whom Righteousness calleth to follow Him" (lit. to his foot), in this that the caller is one and the person followed another. If the relative construction be adopted, the best rendering would be: "Whom He calleth in righteousness to follow Him." To render the word "righteousness" here by "victory" or "success," is not to translate this prophecy, but to

write a different one. The questions here and in verse 4 may be taken as those in Chapter xl. 12, 18, requiring no answer, the answer being obvious, or the answer may be supposed given in the last clause of verse 4.

Verses 5-7 give a grotesque picture of the condition of the terror-stricken idolaters before Cyrus, their coming together for mutual help and encouragement, and their excited and assiduous manufacture of new idols—the gods by whom they expect to be delivered; see in illustration the passage Chapter xlvii. 12-15.

Verses 8-19. But Israel also is alarmed, and the Lord assures his people that they have nought to fear, for they are his servant, whom He has irrevocably chosen, and whom He holds fast by the right hand of his “righteousness,” just as He has called Cyrus, before whom they are alarmed, in “righteousness.” All they that oppose them shall perish.

In verses 21-29 the Lord returns to his controversy with the idol-gods (verses 21-24) and their worshippers (verses 25-29), for they are one. He challenges the idols to shew their godhead by predicting what will happen. This general demand is then broken into two, either to shew what former prophecies they had given forth, that they might be compared with their fulfilment and be seen to be prophecies, or to prophesy now things to come; or finally, to give any sign of vitality and power by doing aught, good or evil. They are silent, however; and therefore He pronounces his verdict upon them: “Behold ye are of nothing, an abomination is he that chooseth you.” The concluding verses (25-29) recapitulate the two arguments which the Lord uses in his own behalf, his raising up of Cyrus, and his having predicted his career; and, as the last verse shews, they are spoken with reference to the idol-worshippers: “Behold all of them, vanity and naught are their works” (*i.e.* their idols, the works of their hands). The

idol-worshippers are frequently challenged, as having gods among them and being their prophets, to utter or to shew that they have ever uttered some prediction, *e.g.* xliii. 9, xliv. 7, xlviii. 14.

A different sense is put upon the phrase "former things" in verse 22 by some interpreters, *e.g.* Delitzsch. They consider the phrase to mean not "former prophecies" or "things formerly predicted," but things still future though lying in the near future, and "former" in respect of other more distant future things. The question, though not of much importance in itself, has a bearing upon the position among events occupied by the Prophet. A comparison of the various passages makes it difficult to accept Delitzsch's view. First, the word "declare" does not mean in itself to *predict*; it derives this meaning from the connexion (comp. Chap. xlviii. 20). Again, to offer the idols the choice of predicting the near or distant future would really, in the sense which the Prophet attaches to "predict," be to give them no choice; the one is as difficult as the other. And in answer to Delitzsch's approving quotation from Hahn, that the "former things" denote "the events about to happen first in the immediate future, which it is not so difficult to prognosticate from signs that are discernible in the present," it must be said that to "prognosticate from signs discernible" is not what the Prophet means by "prediction," and neither what he claims for Jehovah nor what he demands from the idols and their worshippers; and to deny to the idol-worshippers the power of doing this would be to rate their intelligence a great deal lower than in many cases it must have been. And, finally, the interpretation referred to is contrary to the usage of language in this prophecy. The phrase occurs various times, and always in the sense of former predictions or things formerly predicted. In Chapter xlii. 9, "the former things, behold they have come, and new things do I declare." The "new things" are the



things over which all creation takes up a "new song," namely, the Restoration of Israel and the evangelizing of the nations through the Servant, who is a "covenant of the people, and a light of the gentiles." The "former things" are things now already accomplished. Again, in Chapter xliii. 9, "Let all the nations be gathered together, who among them will declare such a thing? or let them shew former things; let them give their witnesses that they may be found in the right. Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord." The phrase, "Who among them will declare such a thing," *i.e.* the Restoration of Israel from the North and South (verse 6) means, "Who will give such a prediction of the future?" and this is set in contrast to, "or let them mention former things," *i.e.* former predictions, and bring forward witnesses to shew that they actually uttered such predictions (comp. Chap. xlv. 8). Finally, in Chapter xlvi. 3, it is said, "The former things I have declared from the past. . . . suddenly I did them and they came to pass. . . . I shew thee new things from now" (comp. verse 14 *seq.*).

The "former things," then, are things formerly predicted; and the choice given to the idols and their worshippers is either to point to such former predictions that they may be verified by comparison with events, or to shew things still in the future, for Jehovah can both refer to former predictions and predict "new things." It is probable that these former things are not instances of prophecy in the general history of Israel; they are prophecies belonging to the circle of events now transpiring; they are the earlier events in the great train of occurrences, the "new things" of which are the Restoration of Israel and the conversion of the nations. The Prophet indicates as much explicitly when he makes the Lord say, in reference to Cyrus: "Who declared this from former times?" (Chap. xli. 26.) And the same appears even more clearly

from the passage Chapter *xlvi.* 14 *seq.* It is an interesting question, When were these predictions in regard to Cyrus and Babylon uttered? or To what is it that the Prophet refers? Such predictions certainly do not belong to this Book. On the contrary, the events predicted are already partly fulfilled, so far fulfilled indeed that the Prophet sees their complete fulfilment and argues from it. The passages have an interest as indicating where precisely the Prophet stood in the march of events, what "former things," already virtually accomplished, lay behind him, and face to face with what "new things" he felt himself to be standing. This new and greater evolution, at the starting point of which he stands, the Prophet indicates by the word *now*, of which he makes such frequent use, *e.g.* Chapter *xliii.* 1, where the transition is made from Israel's present condition of "a people robbed and spoiled" to her universal restoration from every corner of the earth; similarly *xliv.* 1; so *xlvi.* 16, "And now hath Jehovah sent me with his spirit;" and *xlix.* 5, where the Servant of the Lord feels his failure to be a thing lying behind him, and his great double task in Israel and among the nations about to be crowned with success.

To come, however, to the main idea of the Chapter. It is evident, to begin with, that from the more abstract delineation of Jehovah the God of Israel, given in Chapter *xl.*, the Prophet descends in this Chapter into the field of history and events. It is the march of Cyrus and other great transactions now occurring that engage his attention. In a dramatic way he introduces Jehovah, God of Israel, putting two questions to the idol-worshippers, "Who raised up from the East?" and "Who declared it from afore-time?" This is but the Prophet's manner of expressing his own thought of Jehovah. His own consciousness of Jehovah, God of Israel, interprets these events to him; and he exhibits this consciousness in a dramatic way before his

people to elevate their minds to the same lofty plane of thinking of their God as he himself occupied, that he might inspire them with hope and faith: for the events occurring are in truth working out their salvation, only faith on their part is essential to secure it: "Oh that thou wouldst hearken to my commandments, then should thy peace be as a river" (xlviii. 18). The Prophet is not interested in *proving* anything about Jehovah to his people. Prophecy in his day was far beyond the stage of seeking to prove; this indeed was not at any time its task. He unfolds before them his thought of Jehovah; if it were only also the thought and feeling of his people, how near and full their salvation would be! Ewald inscribes the Chapter, *The false gods and their people*; Delitzsch, *The God of the world's history, and of Prophecy*. The two inscriptions supplement one another. Ewald's, however, instead of expressing the primary thought, expresses rather what is the immediate antithesis of it, the idea which the primary thought suggests as the other side of it. This reflection of the primary thought certainly receives expression towards the end of the Chapter, where the idea is suggested that the nations, having no true God as the source of light and life to them, have no destiny or future before them, at least no future which they will be able to develop out of the powers within themselves; for the Prophet considers the source of all development among a people to be the Deity among them. The nations have a destiny, but they must receive help from without in order to reach it. And this idea is what leads immediately in the next Chapter to the thought of Israel's destiny and task, who is the servant of the Lord: "Behold my servant, I will put my spirit upon him, he shall bring forth judgment to the gentiles." While Delitzsch's definition, however, expresses more truly the primary thought of the Chapter, his exposition is defective in making the "world's history" and "prophecy" two

unconnected things, two independent proofs of Jehovah's Godhead. They are rather one, or two sides of the more general truth, that the Lord is "the first and the last." He initiates, and He winds up, all the movements of history. This is the idea under which the prophet desires his people to place the march of Cyrus and the revolutions attending it. But this great God who is "the first and the last" is the God of Israel, who saith not to the seed of Jacob seek ye me in the waste, in uncertain and undetermined conditions, "Jehovah doeth nothing, but he revealeth his secret to his servants the prophets" (Amos iii. 7). Jehovah is the absolute, the Holy One, but He has become the Holy One of Israel—contradiction almost as it seems. The great movements in history are not sporadic exhibitions of the power of a Being who has given no clue that can lead to the comprehension of Him. They are steps in the evolution of a great purpose, and this purpose has been revealed to Israel from of old, for Israel is the Lord's servant in carrying it out. If Jehovah is the first and the last, He foresees his own great operations; it is, however, his relation to Israel that makes Him prophesy them. Thus events and prophecy go hand in hand, the one is but the reflection beforehand of the other; both are but one manifestation of the God of Israel, the first and the last, and of his designs of grace with the world. Therefore the Prophet when he insists on the fact that the Lord prophesies usually couples his operation also with it; *e.g.* Chapters xliii. 9 *seq.*, xliv. 6 *seq.*; especially Chapter xlviii. 12-16:

Hearken unto me, O Jacob; I am the first; I am also the last. All ye assemble yourselves and hear; which among them hath declared these things? He whom Jehovah loveth will do his pleasure on Babylon. I, even I, have spoken; I have brought him, and his way shall prosper. . . . I have not spoken in secret from the beginning.

when the Article was composed, practically agreed upon in all the Christian Churches. It corresponds with the old saying, *Novum Testamentum in vetere latet Vetus Testamentum in Novo patet*. But it is not easy for modern thinkers either to agree with or to differ from it, without qualifications. Taken as it stands, it is open to one obvious and grave objection. It appears to assume that in the Old Testament religion, as well as in the New, the subject of religion is the individual soul. The Old Testament, it is assumed, would be contrary to the New unless the hope of the individual believer were the same in both. But, as matter of fact, the subject of Religion in the Old Testament is not the individual but Israel, as a corporate unity. The promises of the Old Testament are primarily addressed to Israel, not to the individual soul. Throughout the larger part of the Old Testament religion offers felicity to the individual only in the felicity of a nation accepted with God. I do not say that the individual element is absent even in the older parts of the Old Testament. But it is altogether subordinate to the national aspect of religion. The Psalmists sometimes attain the persuasion, which the Book of Job strives after without reaching a satisfactory conclusion, that in the love of God the happiness of the individual is secured; but this is a transcendental conviction which is nowhere reduced to a regular part of the Old Testament system. The statement of the Article and of Protestant theology generally on this head is, in fact, a polemical statement. Its gist lies mainly in the negative. It is denied as against certain so-called Judaizers that "the Fathers looked only for a temporary promise." That is certainly true, if temporary promise means, as in the Article it plainly does mean, a promise of temporal (as distinct from everlasting) life and felicity to the individual believer. The Old Testament does not promise this. It teaches the individual to place his hope in the mercy of God

to Israel, which is an eternal not a temporary thing. This hope was enough, as we see in the case of Isaiah, to enable the believer to rejoice in tribulation, to maintain his confidence and faith in God amidst the most crushing national calamities. But the Old Testament did not give, like the New, a complete solution of the mystery of present affliction to the individual as part of his training for eternal life. If we say that the hope of the individual in the Old Testament went beyond his own life, and in so far was transcendental, we shall not be wrong. Nay, we may go farther and say that the Old Testament hope was directed in such a way that it would have been a vain hope had God not been preparing the New Testament hope to follow it. But this is not the same thing as to say that to the individual the hope of Old and New Testament were the same.

What, then, shall we say to the further position that the Old Testament hope was a hope in Christ? Here, again, if the proposition means, as its authors no doubt intended it to mean, a conscious hope in Christ, modern study of the Old Testament forbids us to assent. To find Christ in the Old Testament the old theology has to introduce the system of allegory, or at least a theory of types and symbols. But the symbolic meanings postulated for the ceremonies and words of the Old Testament are not proved from the Old Testament itself, but read into it from the New. This is not fair exegesis. It is absurd to assume that, side by side with the written Word there ran through the Old Dispensation an unwritten system of interpretation which made that Word mean something different from what lies on its surface.

In fact, if we look at the thing carefully, we shall see that the claim of continuity with the Old Testament revelation which New Testament Christianity makes for itself has a different formula from that of the Article. We

must remember that the New Testament belongs to an age in which people did not trouble themselves about exact historical exegesis. When the New Testament affirms that the prophets spoke of Christ they refer to the application which these words naturally suggested, not to their Old Testament hearers, but to Christian readers. The point, therefore, is not that the Old Testament writers promised salvation in Christ, but that they promised—no matter in what form—a salvation which is only realized in Christ. In this, as in other respects, the coming of Christ not only fulfils but fills up the prophetic outline. The prophets conceived the salvation of Israel under the only form which lay within their historical horizon, *i.e.* in *national* form. But what gave the form value to them was that, under the form, they pictured to themselves the forgiveness of sin, the moral reconciliation of man with God, the realization of his gracious Kingship. Christianity offers the same blessings in Christ, but in a very different form. It therefore, fulfils the essence of the Old Testament promise, and in this sense the Article is right; but it has not hit the right expression of the truth aimed at.

3. But the Old Testament notoriously contains not only prophetic promise, but an elaborate system of law. The third proposition of the Article, *Although the Law given from God by Moses; as touching Ceremonies and Rites, do not bind Christian men, nor the Civil precepts thereof ought of necessity to be received in any commonwealth; yet, notwithstanding, no Christian man whatsoever is free from the Commandments which are called Moral*, refers to this; and, according to the usual Protestant formula, divides law into Ritual, Civil, and Moral. The Rites and Ceremonies do not bind Christian men; the Civil precepts are not necessary to be accepted in a Christian commonwealth; the Moral commands are still binding. There is an air of precision about this statement which has given it great vogue, but it really

covers rather than answers one of the most difficult questions in the relation of Christians to the Old Testament.

Taken together with the previous statement, it implies that the Old Testament may be divided, as Paul divides it, into Law and Promise; and it is also implied, again with Paul, that it was in the Promise, not in the Law, that the vital force of the dispensation lay. Thus far modern enquiry agrees with the Protestant formula, and even places it in a new and striking light. Paul, arguing from that construction of the Old Testament history which was accepted in his own day, and of course raising no question of historical criticism, teaches that the Promise of salvation is older than the law of works, and always contained the vital element apprehended by the Old Testament faith. Modern research has shewn that, as a matter of fact, the Law is a much more modern thing than the Jews themselves in the time of Christ supposed; and enables us to assign more precisely its place in that Divine plan of which, according to the teaching of our Lord and his disciples, the Old and New Testament revelations are continuous parts.

The Old Testament represents this plan as seeking the realization of the Kingship of Jehovah in Israel. Jesus accepts this ideal in his gospel of the kingdom of heaven, *i.e.* the Kingdom of God; but He accepts it with a difference which it is necessary to understand.

The nation of Israel in the time before the great Assyrian troubles did live under a present sense of the Kingship of Jehovah. That Kingship was expressed not in a code, but in living institutions in which actual exercise of Jehovah's executive and judicial Kingship was realized. Jehovah went forth with the host of Israel. His Spirit gave wisdom to their kings. His oracle gave sentence at the sanctuary. He received their gifts at the altar and answered them with blessing. This simple faith was broken down when the whole order of ancient Israel was crushed in the



disastrous advance of the Assyrian empire to the Mediterranean sea-board. The prophets alone were able to see that the subjugation of Israel by the servants of a strange god was no less a proof of the present Kingship of Jehovah than the nation's earlier felicity had been. Jehovah was now manifesting Himself as the righteous judge, punishing sin, yet reserving a remnant of grace, that his kingdom might not vanish for ever, but might still be preserved for an ideal consummation in the future. This Theodicea received its most striking confirmation in the return from exile. But the history of the restored Jerusalem was such as to shake faith once more. The state of slavery continued. Disasters and sufferings followed in unbroken succession. According to theory, these disasters were due to sin. But it was difficult to accept this theory as sufficient. For the righteous suffered with the wicked; nay, it was sometimes possible for the perplexed nation to complain that they suffered not for their sins but actually because they claved to Jehovah: "For his sake they were killed all day." Various solutions of these difficulties were sought, and can still be read in the Book of Job and in certain Psalms. But the solution which may be called *official*, was that embodied in practical form in the work of Ezra and, his successors, the Scribes. It held that national obedience, if perfect, must be accompanied by the manifestation of the kingdom of Jehovah. It was, therefore, above all things, necessary to systematize the whole duty of the Israelite; duties moral, social and ceremonial, were all codified in the Torah or deduced from it by the interpretations of the Scribes. The business of Israel was to set fast the Torah, and, when this was effected, the deliverance would come. But with the establishment of the Torah, the living prophetic word of Jehovah ceased. There was now no practical sense in which God's kingship in Israel was a present kingship. He had

left his Law, but He was not present to execute it. The kingdom of God, which was still a present reality to the prophets became to the Scribes an ideal of the future. Under the Hasmoneans the gloom of the present had been for a moment dispelled, and an effective presence of God in Israel seemed about to be realized; but these hopes failed, and in the time of Christ the kingdom of God seemed farther off than ever.

Jesus in his doctrine of the kingdom returns above all to the faith of the prophets, that the kingdom of God is not a thing lying in the far future, but an object of present faith. His doctrine of the fatherly providence of God, which forbids the believer to take thought of the morrow, implies that happiness in God and his sovereignty is a present possession. The sum of all the good things of the kingdom lies in the forgiveness of sins, which can be realized *now*. Thus the kingdom becomes a spiritual thing which those who have the Spirit of Christ can realize as a present good. The *peace* of God is a peace that keeps, not the land of Israel, but the hearts of men; and it can be constantly and joyfully realized through faith in the fatherly providence of God, childlike humility, and the exercise of prayer, in which by the Spirit every member of the kingdom enjoys access to the King who is now also his Father. The organization of the kingdom, in consequence, can only be conceived as a hidden order by which all things work together for good to them that love God. In what sense, and under what conditions, Jesus held that this spiritual order, at present grasped by faith alone, would ultimately become visible to all eyes, is one of the most difficult of New Testament problems; but there is no question that the essence of his gospel was present peace in the forgiveness of sins—peace, not as a subjective feeling, but as admission to the peace and order of the spiritual kingdom.

On this doctrine the Torah at once loses the place

which it held in Judaism and can no longer be thought of as the condition the observance of which would secure the inbringing of the future glory. To the details of ceremonial observance Jesus was rather neutral than hostile; his polemic against the Pharisees had for its point that the strictest observance of legal precepts does not necessarily include that childlike obedience and love of the heart which alone has religious value. But this being granted, it merely required the experimental proof that the Spirit of Christ could manifest itself unmistakably in men beyond the pale of circumcision to cause Christianity to drop the whole system of legal observances as superseded in Christ.

But as the whole Old Testament was taken over by the Christian Church as a holy book, it was necessary to find an expression for the attitude of Christians to the Law, which they still read as God's word.

Paul's formula (Gal. iii.) is that the Law came in *from the side*, and served as a pædagogues—we might almost say a nurse—to watch over the infant heir of the promise. This profound view is in thorough accord with the history. The law formed a religious habit in Israel which, while it cramped, yet helped to preserve in the national consciousness, the element of spiritual faith in the prophetic word. It prevented Israel from losing its grip of the order of the kingdom of God; and thus, when all the other ancient religions were merging in a compound of atheism and grovelling superstition, a field was found in Palestine where the teaching of Christ could take root and fructify, and from which the good seed was spread abroad to fill the world. But its work was done as soon as the higher teaching took its place.

Now it is plain that Paul's doctrine about the Law does not contain any distinction between moral, civil, and ceremonial elements. The characteristic of Judaism—that is of the religion of Israel after Ezra—was the formulation of

all parts of the religious life in a code of laws, so that the man who fully followed these laws could feel assured that he was living in harmony with the revealed plan of salvation. The very essence of this scheme was that civil and ceremonial duties were placed under the same positive sanctions with moral duties. The system of the Law could only stand or fall as a whole, and Paul teaches that it is replaced in all its parts by the new principle of faith, in which the assurance of acceptance with God is no longer sought by reference to an outward rule, and in which right actions are done not because they are commanded in a book, but because the new life demands them. Sin is to the Christian not breach of a law, but an action that mars the play and growth of the new and heavenly life.

On this view no command is binding on Christians simply because it is found in the Old Testament. Old Testament and New Testament morality correspond in so far as the Old Testament dispensation was all along a training towards Christian life; but the correspondence of two stages of life related to one another as childhood and manhood is not such that everything permitted to the child would be becoming in the man, or everything forbidden to the child unbecoming in the man. To us the Old Testament law is of perpetual value, because it explains the historical basis on which Christian morality was built, and the ethical presuppositions of the society to which the New Testament was addressed. Christianity infuses a new spirit and principle into moral life. But all moral life has a traditional element, or, rather, presupposes certain fixed social conditions and established moral habits. The conditions and habits which the New Testament presupposes are those formed by the Law; and thus to know the Law is the condition of understanding the life of primitive Christianity, from which modern Christian life has been produced in continuous development.

Had time permitted, it would have been useful to examine the historical causes that have led to that distinction of moral, civil, and ceremonial laws, which has played so large a part in practical controversy about the use of the Old Testament. But this is impossible at present; and, in closing, I shall simply state one or two practical conclusions as to the use of the Old Testament to Christians.

To the theologian the fundamental use of the Old Testament is historical. On the one hand its ideals and promises are the historical presuppositions on which Jesus built his ideal. In them religion took a line of aspiration which could only be satisfied by the gospel. And on the other hand the legal parts of the Old Testament are the key to the social and ethical system from which Christianity went forth, and from which it carried over many ethical habits quite opposed to those of Pagan morality. On both sides the New Testament cannot be understood without the Old.

I think that this historical view should have a much larger place in Christian teaching than is usually assigned to it. It is not really more difficult, and it is infinitely more tangible, than the abstract theories of the relation of the two dispensations usually current. But it will be asked whether on this way of studying the Old Testament, its practical use for edification to the unlearned can be made as simple and direct as on the old methods. I think that it can.

In the first place, the direct edification derived from Bible reading lies less in individual doctrines and precepts than in the fact that, in reading the utterances of the prophet's hope or the psalmist's faith, we feel ourselves lifted above the petty interests of earthly and transitory things, into a region where man holds direct converse with things unseen and eternal and with a personal and loving God. In this sense the Old Testament is as fruitful on the new theory as on the old: "Our fathers trusted in thee, they trusted and were not put to shame." The more strictly historical

our study of the Old Testament is, the more clear and forcible does this aspect of Israel's religion become.

Then, again, it will always remain true, that spiritual and moral principles, like material organisms, are more easily understood in their germinal form. The religion of Isaiah, if we do not overlay it with a mass of traditional exegesis, represents fundamental aspects of all true religion in an elementary shape; the Psalms express the utterance of faith in its simplest embodiment. It requires no philosophy to feel this; and all experience shews that the Christian individual, whose own life runs through stages in many respects parallel to the history of the Church, can often find the precise message which his soul requires most readily in the elementary utterances of the Old Testament. Nor is there much risk that the devotional reading of the Old Testament will Judaize the Christian. For the ideal parts of the Old Testament are those which speak most directly to the heart of faith, and they are the very parts from which Jesus and the Apostles drew the support of their spiritual life.

W. ROBERTSON SMITH.

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THE BOOK OF ISAIAH. CHAPTERS XL.-LXVI.

IV. JEHOVAH, GOD OF ISRAEL, THE FIRST AND  
THE LAST.

IN Chapter xl. the Prophet, in order both to comfort and to teach his people, set before them Jehovah, their God, the Incomparable, with sarcastic sidethrusts at the idols. Here it was the immeasurable power of Jehovah, the Creator, the Sustainer of creation, who shewed his might in commanding the movements of the stars and breaking up the most powerful combinations of men, that was made prominent. In comparison of this Being, or rather from the point of view of his consciousness of Himself, all things