

CHRISTUS CONSUMMATOR.

LESSONS FROM THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS.

III. THE KING PRIEST.

“Having then a great High Priest, who hath passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we have not a High Priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but one that hath been in all points tempted like as *we are, yet* without sin. Let us therefore draw near with boldness to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and may find grace to help us in time of need.”—HEB. iv. 14–16 (Rev. Vers.); vii. 26; viii. 1.

No thoughtful person can seriously regard the circumstances of his life without feeling the need of forgiveness and the need of strengthening. He looks back upon the past and he sees not only failures, but unnecessary failures. “He has done what he ought not to have done, and he has not done what he ought to have done.” He looks forward to the future, and he sees that while the difficulties of duty do not grow less with added years, the freshness of enthusiasm fades away, and the temptation to accept a lower standard of action grows more powerful. Perhaps in the words of Hood’s most touching lyric, he thinks “he’s farther off from heaven Than when he was a boy.” At any rate, he does feel that in himself he has not reached and cannot reach that for which he was born, that which the spirit of divine discontent within him, a discontent made keener by temporal success, still marks as his one goal of peace. For when Augustine said, *Tu nos fecisti ad te, Domine, et inquietum est cor nostrum donec requiescat in te*, he proclaimed a fact to which every soul bears witness in the silence of its self-communings. We know that we were made for God; we know that we have been separated from God; we know that we cannot acquiesce in the desolation of that divorce.

We know, I say, that we have been separated from God. The sense of this separation makes itself felt in two ways.

When we reflect what God is and what we are we shrink from His presence ; and we confess that we are unworthy to do Him service. At the same time, by a splendid contradiction, we still seek instinctively for some way of access by which we may draw near to Him, and for some channel of grace through which our sin-stained tribute may be brought before His throne.

So it has been that men in every age have made priests for themselves, to stand between them and their God, to offer in some acceptable form the sacrifices which are the acknowledgment of sin, and the gifts which are the symbol of devotion. The institution of the priesthood has been misused, degraded, overlaid with terrible superstitions, but in its essence it corresponds with the necessities of our nature. Therefore it has been interpreted and fulfilled in the Bible. And we can yet learn much from the figures of the Levitical system in which the priesthood of *this world* was fashioned by the Spirit of God in a form of marvellous significance and beauty. The law of the priestly service in the Old Testament is indeed a vivid parable of the needs, the aim, the benediction of human life. Day by day, morning and evening, the broad lessons of atonement and consecration were read with simple and solemn emphasis ; and once in the year, on the Great Day of Atonement, "the Day," as it was called, the lessons were set forth in detail with every accessory of majestic ritual, so that the simplest worshipper could hardly fail to take to himself with intelligent faith the warnings and the consolations of the august ceremonial. On that day, as will be remembered, the High Priest, after elaborate cleansings, for himself, for his family, and for the people, arrayed in white robes, entered, in the virtue of a surrendered life, into the dark chamber, which God was pleased to make His dwelling place, and offered incense in the golden censer, and sprinkled the blood, and uttered aloud, according to tradition, on that occasion only,

the most sacred Name; and then, after completing the purification of the whole Temple, he dismissed into the wilderness the scape-goat on which he had laid the sins of the people. On that day, though but for a passing moment, Israel in their representative appeared before the revealed presence of the Lord their God. On that day they received from Him most directly the assurance of forgiveness and blessing—*mercy and grace to help in time of need.*

Now we can, I think, all understand what must have been the consolation, the strength, the joy, with which that service inspired the faithful Jew. How it must have spoken peace in the name of Jehovah to the troubled conscience, and brought vigour to the trembling; how, as the passing weeks added weight to the burden of remembered sins, the people must have looked forward to the message brought again from the innermost sanctuary of Truth, that the divine compassion was as vast as their distress; how in the power of that visible pardon they would, within a few days, join in the Feast of Tabernacles, "the holiest and greatest" of all their festivals, and show for a brief space the gladness of social life fulfilled by the gift and in the sight of God.

We can understand all this; and therefore, when we make the effort, we can understand what the Hebrew Christians must have felt when they found themselves at last excluded from all share in this consolation, this strength, this joy, which they had known from their childhood.

Here was a trial which reached to the very foundation of their spiritual life. It was not only that they were condemned to suffering; that might be a beneficent chastening of sons. But they seemed to be bereft of the appointed assurance, given in a form suited to the conditions of earth, that God was accessible to man.

This was a distress which called for a deep-reaching remedy; and the writer of the Epistle meets it as he meets all distress. He does not direct his readers as he might

have done, and the fact calls for careful thought, to the outward institutions of the Christian society; he does not show how provision had been made by the love of God to bring the power of the Gospel to bear on the whole range of human life, outward and inward; he does not point out how sacraments as revelations of the eternal go immeasurably beyond types which are prophecies of the future. He leads the Hebrews in their forlorn loneliness at once to Christ, to *Jesus, the Son of God*. He recognises with tender sympathy, he alone we must notice of the apostolic writers, the grace and the splendour of the old order; he dwells with reverent memory on the significance of the ritual which he had known; and then he shows how to the Christian every symbol had become a truth, every shadow a reality, every imaged hope a fact in a perfect human life; he shows how the sacrifice of Christ was efficacious for ever, "one act at once;" how the humanity of Christ was a new and living way to the Father; how on the divine throne placed above the opened heavens, was seated One who was Priest *according to the power of an indissoluble life*.

In doing this he carries forward the line of revelation which we have already considered. The work of Christ on earth was the preparation for His work in heaven.

He who fulfilled the destiny of man, under the conditions of the present world; He who interpreted the discipline of suffering; He who bore humanity through death to the presence of God—not as one man of men, but as the Head of the whole race; did all this *that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest*, and that He might apply to those whom He was *not ashamed to call brethren*, the virtue of His Life and Passion, and reconcile in a final harmony the inexorable claims of law, and the infinite yearnings of love, a Priest and yet a King.

For indeed at first and at last the kingly and princely

offices cannot be kept apart. He who makes atonement must direct action. He who demands the complete service of every power must hallow the powers of which He claims the ministry. The ruler who consecrates, the priest who rules, must, in the words already quoted, be *merciful and faithful*; He must have absolute authority and perfect sympathy; authority that He may represent God to man, sympathy that He may represent man to God. And such is Christ made known to us, King and Priest, *Priest after the order of Melchisedek*, in whose mysterious person the old world on the edge of a new dispensation met and blessed the father of the faithful. Therefore the writer of the Epistle once again is able to appeal to the human conscience to justify the Gospel. Therefore he can say, when he has shown what Christ is, *able to save to the uttermost with royal power, ever living to make intercession with priestly compassion; such a High Priest became us*—we with our poor faculties can see how He answers to our wants—*holy in Himself, guileless among men, undefiled in a corrupt world, separated from sinners in the conflict of this visible order, and made higher than the heavens . . . a Son perfected for evermore.*

Yes, the apostolic words are true for us, true while there is one sin to vex the overburdened conscience, one struggle to strain the feeble will, *such a High Priest became us*. And it is well for us to turn again and again with reverent devotion to Him as we know, and that we may know better, our faults and our weakness.

We need not dwell long upon His authority. Son of God in His own essential nature, He vindicated His Sonship among men. He brought humanity at each stage of His advancing life into perfect fellowship with God, offering a perfect service as well as a perfect sacrifice, and then at last—most marvellous paradox—He offered Himself in death upon the cross, and living through death, His earthly

work ended, He entered on the glory of His eternal priesthood, and *sat down on the right hand of God*.

That single phrase "*sat down on the right hand of God*," on which the writer of the Epistle dwells with solemn emphasis, marks the unique dignity of the ascended Christ. Priests stand in their ministry; angels stand or fall prostrate before the Divine Majesty; but the Son shares the Father's throne. As Priest, as Intercessor, He reigns still, reigns in His glorified manhood.

There is our reassurance. Our Priest is King, and our King is Priest. *The Son of God* is also *Jesus*, the Son of man. His tender compassion is infinite even as His authority. We know now that what Ezekiel saw in a vision has become for us a fact. We see by faith upon the sapphire throne not the shadowy likeness of a man, but One who is true man; One who was *made in all things like unto His brethren*; One who was *tempted in all things after our likeness*; One who has known the bitterness of every human trial, and who knows the secret of their use; One whose sympathy goes out to every suffering creature as if he were alone the object of His regard; One whose love kindles to responsive warmth the faintest spark of faith.

We can feel then how the Hebrews through their apparent loss were brought to an immeasurable gain, and how we may learn a little better through their example what our King-Priest is for us.

If human priests compassed with infirmity could inspire confidence in the worshipper, then Christ, if we will lift our eyes to Him, a thousandfold more. Their compassion was necessarily limited by their experience, but His experience covers the whole field of life; their gentle bearing was tempered by the consciousness of personal failure, but His breathes the invigorating spirit of perfect holiness. They knew the power of temptation in part by the sad lessons of failure; He knew it to the uttermost by perfect victory.

They could see dimly through earth-born mists something of the real hideousness of evil ; He saw it in the undimmed light of the Divine purity. And He is tenderest, not who has sinned, as is sometimes vainly thought, but who has known best the power of sin by overcoming it. His love is most watchful who has seen what wrong is in the eyes of God.

Can we not then boldly proclaim that here also the Gospel covers the facts of life, of our life? that in the prospect of the conflicts and defeats which sadden us, and which we dare not disguise or extenuate, *such a High Priest became us*, strong with the strength of God, compassionate with the affection of a friend?

We must cling to both these truths, and wrestle with them, and win their blessing from them. We need the revelation of Christ's Majesty, and we need the revelation of Christ's Tenderness. We need more, I think, than we know, to come each one of us into the presence of the glorified Lord and rest in His light.

In this individual approach to the throne of grace lies for us severally the promise of the fulfilment of our destiny ; But "earth's children cling to earth," and there are many among us who feel keenly the very trials which the Hebrews felt ; who long for some visible system which shall "bring all heaven before their eyes," for some path to the divine presence along which they can walk by sight, for recurrent words of personal absolution from some human minister, for that which shall localise their centre of worship ; who labour, often unconsciously, to make the earthly the measure of the spiritual ; who shrink from the ennobling responsibility of striving with untiring effort to hold communion with the unseen and eternal ; who turn back with regretful looks to the discipline and the helps of a childly age, when they are required to accept the graver duties of maturity ; required to listen, as it were, like Elijah on

the lonely mountain, when the thunder of the earthquake is stilled and the violence of the fire is spent, for the still small voice.

These are not, I know, imaginary temptations; but if we are tried and disquieted by their assaults, the writer of the Epistle enables us to face them. He brings Christ near to us and he bring us near to Christ. He discloses the privileges to which we are all admitted by the ascended Saviour. He gives an abiding application to the Lord's words, *He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father*. And he does this without hiding one dark trait in the prospect of life. The connexion in which the text stands gives it a startling force. The apostolic author has recalled without reserve, the sad history of Israel's failure. He has painted a vivid picture of the penetrating severity of the Divine judgment, and then, drawing an unexpected conclusion from this revelation of unbelief and weakness and retribution, he continues: *Having therefore a great High Priest who hath passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we have not a High Priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but one that hath been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with boldness unto the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need.*

Every word must go to the heart of those who have known what life is, an inexorable order capable of being transfigured by love. Every word has a practical force. Never was the charge to hold fast our confession more urgently needed. Never was the encouragement to come directly to Christ more fitted to still the griefs of failure, and to nerve the misgivings of weakness. Never was the twofold necessity of rising out of themselves without losing themselves more impressingly forced upon men by the contrast between their ideal and their attainment, their

destiny and their position; never was the Spirit more openly claiming acceptance for growing Truth.

As then we have known a little of the power of our Faith; as we have felt the want of forgiveness and the want of support; as we have learnt a little more clearly with advancing years the grievousness of sin and the perils of life, *let us, each in our place, hold fast our confession.*

Let us draw near with boldness to the throne of grace—giving utterance to every feeling and every wish—that we may receive mercy—receive it as humble suppliants from the Lord's free love—and may find—find as unwearied searchers—grace to help in time of need.

That access is ever open to the foot of faith. That mercy is unailing to the cry of penitence. That grace is inexhaustible to the servant who offers himself wholly to the Master's use.

BROOKE FOSS WESTCOTT.

THE REVISED VERSION OF THE OLD
TESTAMENT.

THE FIRST BOOK OF SAMUEL.

THE Books of Samuel present serious difficulties to the translator, and it is scarcely possible to study them without coming to the conclusion that in a large number of cases these difficulties arise from the corrupt state of the Massoretic text. The examination of the parallel passages in the Books of Chronicles and the Psalter confirm this conclusion; and when we turn to the Septuagint, we find that a multitude of its renderings can hardly be explained except on the hypothesis that the translators had before them a Hebrew text differing very considerably from the Massoretic text. The oldest form of the LXX. is found in the Vatican MS. known as B: the Alexandrine