

to follow the reading of the LXX.; and this accords excellently with the natural rendering of the first clause of v. 17, *and the Lord hath done unto him.*

xxx. 2. *And all*, supplied from the LXX., is clearly necessary.

20. It is hard to see what sense this verse makes as it stands, and the reading of the Vulg., with which that of the LXX. in the main agrees, might have been given in the margin: "And he took all the flocks and the herds, and drove them before him; and they said, This is David's spoil." David not only recovered his own property, but took a rich booty besides.

xxxi. 9. *The house of their idols* should surely be *the houses of their idols.* See Ewald's *Gr.*, § 270. But LXX. and 1 Chron. omit בית, *the house of.*

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THE EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS.

XIV.

THE CROSS THE DEATH OF LAW AND THE TRIUMPH OVER EVIL POWERS.

"Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross; and having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it."—Col. ii. 14, 15.

THE same double reference to the two characteristic errors of the Colossians which we have already met so frequently, presents itself here. This whole section vibrates continually between warnings against the Judaising enforcement of the Mosaic law on Gentile Christians, and against the Oriental figments about a crowd of angelic beings filling the space betwixt man and God, betwixt pure spirit

and gross matter. One great fact is here opposed to these strangely associated errors. The cross of Christ is the abrogation of the Law; the cross of Christ is the victory over principalities and powers. If we hold fast by it, we are under no subjection to the former, and have neither to fear nor reverence the latter.

I. *The Cross of Christ is the death of Law.*

The law is a written document. It has an antagonistic aspect to us all, Gentiles as well as Jews. Christ has blotted it out. More than that, He has taken it out of the way, as if it were an obstacle lying right in the middle of our path. More than that, it is "nailed to the cross." That phrase has been explained by an alleged custom of repealing laws and cancelling bonds by driving a nail into them, and fixing them up in public, but proof of the practice is said to be wanting. The thought seems to be deeper than that. This antagonistic "law" is conceived of as being, like "the world," crucified in the crucifixion of our Lord. The nails which fastened Him to the cross fastened it, and in His death it was done to death. We are free from it, "that being dead in which we were held."

We have first, then, to consider the "handwriting," or, as some would render the word, "the bond." Of course, by law here is primarily meant the Mosaic ceremonial law, which was being pressed upon the Colossians. It is so completely dead for us, that we have difficulty in realising what a fight for life and death raged round the question of its observance by the primitive Church. It is always harder to change customs than creeds, and religious observances live on, as every maypole on a village green tells us, long after the beliefs which animated them are forgotten. So there was a strong body among the early believers to whom it was flat blasphemy to speak of allowing the Gentile Christians to come into the Church,

but through the old doorway of circumcision, and to whom the outward ceremonial of Judaism was the only visible religion. That is the point directly at issue between Paul and these teachers.

But the modern distinction between moral and ceremonial law had no existence in Paul's mind, any more than it has in the Old Testament, where precepts of the highest morality and regulations of the merest ceremonial are interstratified in a way most surprising to us moderns. To him the law was a homogeneous whole, however diverse its commands, because it was all the revelation of the will of God for the guidance of man. It is the law as a whole, in all its aspects and parts, that is here spoken of, whether as enjoining morality, or external observances, or as an accuser fastening guilt on the conscience, or as a stern prophet of retribution and punishment.

Further, we must give a still wider extension to the thought. The principles laid down are true not only in regard to "*the law*," but about all law, whether it be written on the tables of stone, or on "the fleshy tables of the heart" or conscience, or in the systems of ethics, or in the customs of society. Law, as such, howsoever enacted and whatever the bases of its rule, is dealt with by Christianity in precisely the same way as the venerable and God-given code of the Old Testament. When we recognise that fact, these discussions in Paul's Epistles flash up into startling vitality and interest. It has long since been settled that Jewish ritual is nothing to us. But it ever remains a burning question for each of us, What Christianity does for us in relation to the solemn law of duty under which we are all placed, and which we have all broken?

The antagonism of law is the next point that these words present. Twice, to add to the emphasis, Paul tells us that the law is against us. It stands opposite us fronting

us and frowning at us, and barring our road. Is "law" then become our "enemy because it tells us the truth"? Surely this conception of law is a strange contrast to and descent from the rapturous delight of psalmists and prophets in the "law of the Lord." Surely God's greatest gift to man is the knowledge of His will, and law is beneficent, a light and a guide to men, and even its strokes are merciful. Paul believed all that too. But nevertheless the antagonism is very real. As with God, so with law, if we be against Him, He cannot but be against us. We may make Him our dearest friend or our foe. "They rebelled . . . therefore He was turned to be their enemy and fought against them." The revelation of duty to which we are not inclined is ever unwelcome. Law is against us, because it comes like a taskmaster, bidding us do, but neither putting the inclination into our hearts, nor the power into our hands. And law is against us, because the revelation of unfulfilled duty is the accusation of the defaulter and a revelation to him of his guilt. And law is against us, because it comes with threatenings and foretastes of penalty and pain. Thus as standard, accuser and avenger, it is—sad perversion of its nature and function though such an attitude be—against us.

We all know that. Strange and tragic it is, but alas! it is true, that God's law presents itself before us as an enemy. Each of us has seen that apparition, severe in beauty, like the sword-bearing angel, that Balaam saw "standing in the way" between the vineyards, blocking our path when we wanted to "go frowardly in the way of our heart." Each of us knows what it is to see our sentence in the stern face. The law of the Lord should be to us "sweeter than honey and the honeycomb," but the corruption of the best is the worst, and we can make it poison. Obeyed, it is as the chariot of fire to bear us heavenward. Disobeyed, it is an iron car that goes crash-

ing on its way, crushing all who set themselves against it. To know what we ought to be and to love and try to be it, is blessedness, but to know it and to refuse to be it, is misery. In herself she "wears the Godhead's most benignant grace," but if we turn against her, Law, the eldest daughter of God, gathers frowns upon her face and her beauty becomes stern and threatening.

But the great principle here asserted is—*the destruction of law in the cross of Christ*. The cross ends the law's power of *punishment*. Paul believed that the whole burden and penalty of sin had been laid on Jesus Christ and borne by Him on His cross. In deep, mysterious, but most real identification of Himself with the whole race of man, He not only Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses, by the might of His sympathy and the reality of His manhood, but "the Lord made to meet upon Him the iniquity of us all"; and He, the Lamb of God, willingly accepted the load, and bare away our sins by bearing their penalty.

To philosophise on that teaching of Scripture is not my business here. It is my business to assert it. We can never penetrate to a full understanding of the rationale of Christ's bearing the world's sins, but that has nothing to do with the earnestness of our belief in the fact. Enough for us that in His person he willingly made experience of all the bitterness of sin; that when He agonised in the dark on the cross, and when from out of the darkness came that awful cry, so strangely compact of wistful confidence and utter isolation, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" it was something deeper than physical pain or shrinking from physical death that found utterance,—even the sin-laden consciousness of Him who in that awful hour gathered into His own breast the spear-points of a world's punishment. The cross of Christ is the endurance of the penalty of sin, and therefore is the unloosing of the grip of

the law upon us, in so far as threatening and punishment are concerned. It is not enough that we should only intellectually recognise that as a principle—it is the very heart of the Gospel, the very life of our souls. Trusting ourselves to that great sacrifice, the dread of punishment will fade from our hearts, and the thunder-clouds melt out of the sky, and the sense of guilt will not be a sting, but an occasion for lowly thankfulness, and Law will have to draw the bolts of her prison-house and let our captive souls go free.

Christ's cross is the end of law as *ceremonial*. The whole elaborate ritual of the Jew had sacrifice for its vital centre, and the prediction of the Great Sacrifice for its highest purpose. Without these principles being admitted, Paul's position is unintelligible, for he holds, as in this context, that Christ's coming puts the whole system out of date, because it fulfils it all. When the fruit has set, there is no more need for petals; or, as the Apostle himself puts it, "when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part is done away." We have the reality, and do not need the shadow. There is but one temple for the Christian soul—the "temple of His body." Local sanctity is at an end, for it was never more than an external picture of that spiritual fact which is realised in the Incarnation. Christ is the dwelling-place of Deity, the meeting-place of God and man, the place of sacrifice; and, builded on Him, we in Him become a spiritual house. There are none other temples than these. Christ is the great priest, and in His presence all human priesthood loses its consecration, for it could offer only external sacrifice, and secure a local approach to a "worldly sanctuary." He is the real Aaron, and we in Him become a royal priesthood. There are none other priests than these. Christ is the true sacrifice. His death is the real propitiation for sin, and we in Him become thank-offerings, moved by His mercies to present ourselves

living sacrifices. There are none other offerings than these. So all law as a code of ceremonial worship is done to death in the cross, and, like the temple veil, is torn in two from the top to the bottom.

Christ's cross is the end of law as *moral* rule. Nothing in Paul's writings warrants the restriction to the ceremonial law of the strong assertion in the text, and its many parallels. Of course, such words do not mean that Christian men are freed from the obligations of morality, but they do mean that we are not bound to do the "things contained in the law" because they are there. Duty is duty now because we see the pattern of conduct and character in Christ. Conscience is not our standard, nor is the Old Testament conception of the perfect ideal of manhood. We have neither to read law in the fleshy tables of the heart, nor in the tables graven by God's own finger, nor in men's parchments and prescriptions. Our law is the perfect life and death of Christ, who is at once the ideal of humanity and the reality of Deity.

The weakness of all law is that it merely commands, but has no power to get its commandments obeyed. Like a discrowned king, it posts its proclamations, but has no army at its back to execute them. But Christ puts His own power within us, and His love in our hearts; and so we pass from under the dominion of an external commandment into the liberty of an inward spirit. He is to His followers both "law and impulse." He gives not the "law of a carnal commandment, but the power of an endless life." The long schism between inclination and duty is at an end, in so far as we are under the influence of Christ's cross. The great promise is fulfilled, "I will put My law into their minds and write it in their hearts"; and so, glad obedience with the whole power of the new life, for the sake of the love of the dear Lord who has bought us by His death, supersedes the constrained sub-

mission to outward precept. A higher morality ought to characterise the partakers of the life of Christ, who have His example for their code, and His love for their motive. The tender voice that says, "If ye love Me, keep My commandments," wins us to purer and more self-sacrificing goodness than the stern accents that could only say, "Thou shalt—or else!" could ever enforce. He came "not to destroy, but to fulfil." The fulfilment was destruction in order to reconstruction in higher form. Law died with Christ on the cross in order that it might rise and reign with Him in our inmost hearts.

II. *The Cross is the triumph over all the powers of evil.*

There are considerable difficulties in the interpretation of verse 15; the main question being the meaning of the word rendered in the Authorized Version "spoiled," and in the R. V. "having put off from Himself." It is the same word as is used in iii. 9, and is there rendered "have put off"; while a cognate noun is found in verse 11 of this chapter, and is there translated "the putting off." The form here must either mean "having put off from oneself," or "having stripped (others) for oneself." The former meaning is adopted by many commentators, as well as by the R.V., and is explained to mean that Christ having assumed our humanity, was, as it were, wrapped about and invested with Satanic temptations, which He finally flung from Him for ever in His death, which was His triumph over the powers of evil. The figure seems far-fetched and obscure, and the rendering necessitates the supposition of a change in the person spoken of, which must be God in the earlier part of the period, and Christ in the latter.

But if we adopt the other meaning, which has equal warrant in the Greek form, "having stripped for Himself," we get the thought that in the cross, God has, for His greater glory, stripped principalities and powers. Taking

this meaning, we avoid the necessity of supposing with Bishop Lightfoot that there is a change of subject from God to Christ at some point in the period including verses 13 to 15,—an expedient which is made necessary by the impossibility of supposing that God “divested Himself of principalities or powers,”—or the other necessity of referring the whole period to Christ, which is also a way out of that impossibility. We thereby obtain a more satisfactory meaning than that Christ in assuming humanity was assailed by temptations from the powers of evil which were, as it were, a poisoned garment clinging to Him, and which He stripped off from Himself in His death. Farther, such a meaning as that which we adopt makes the whole verse a consistent metaphor in three stages, whereas the other introduces an utterly incongruous and irrelevant figure. What connexion has the figure of stripping off a garment with that of a conqueror in his triumphal procession? But if we read “spoiled for Himself principalities and powers,” we see the whole process before our eyes—the victor stripping his foes of arms and ornaments and dress, then parading them as his captives, and then dragging them at the wheels of his triumphal car.

The words point us into dim regions of which we know nothing more than Scripture tells us. These dreamers at Colossæ had much to say about a crowd of beings, bad and good, which linked men and matter with spirit and God. We have heard already the emphasis with which Paul has claimed for his Master the sovereign authority of Creator over all orders of being, the headship over all principality and power. He has declared, too, that from Christ's cross a magnetic influence streams out upwards as well as earthwards, binding all things together in the great reconciliation—and now he tells us that from that same cross shoot downwards darts of conquering power

which subdue and despoil reluctant foes of other realms and regions than ours, in so far as they work among men.

That there are such seems plainly enough asserted in Christ's own words. However much discredit has been brought on the thought by monastic and Puritan exaggerations, it is clearly the teaching of Scripture; and however it may be ridiculed or set aside, it can never be disproved.

But the position which Christianity takes in reference to the whole matter is to maintain that Christ has conquered the banded kingdom of evil, and that no man owes it fear or obedience, if he will only hold fast by his Lord. In the cross is the judgment of this world, and by it is the prince of this world cast out. He has taken away the power of these Powers who were so mighty amongst men. They held men captive by temptations too strong to be overcome, but He has conquered the lesser temptations of the wilderness and the sorer of the cross, and therein has made us more than conquerors. They held men captive by ignorance of God, and the cross reveals Him; by the lie that sin was a trifle, but the cross teaches us its gravity and power; by the opposite lie that sin was unforgivable, but the cross brings pardon for every transgression and cleansing for every stain. By the cross the world is a redeemed world, and, as our Lord said in words which may have suggested the figure of our text, the strong man is bound, and his house *spoiled* of all his armour wherein he trusted. The prey is taken from the mighty and men delivered from the dominion of evil. So that dark kingdom is robbed of its subjects and its rulers impoverished and restrained. The devout imagination of the monk-painter drew on the wall of the cell in his convent the conquering Christ with white banner bearing a blood-red cross, before whose glad coming the heavy doors of the prison-house

fell from their hinges, crushing beneath their weight the demon jailer, while the long file of eager captives, from Adam onwards through ages of patriarchs and psalmists and prophets hurried forward with outstretched hands to meet the Deliverer, who came bearing his own atmosphere of radiance and joy. Christ has conquered. His cross is His victory; and in that victory God has conquered. As the long files of the triumphal procession swept upwards to the temple with incense and music, before the gazing eyes of a gathered glad nation, while the conquered trooped chained behind the chariot, that all men might see their fierce eyes gleaming beneath their matted hair, and breathe more freely for the chains on their hostile wrists, so in the world-wide issues of the work of Christ, God triumphs before the universe, and enhances His glory in that He has rent the prey from the mighty and won men back to Himself.

So we learn to think of evil as conquered, and for ourselves in our own conflicts with the world, the flesh, and the devil, as well as for the whole race of man, to be of good cheer. True the victory is but slowly being realised in all its consequences, and often it seems as if no territory had been won. But the main position has been carried, and though the struggle is still obstinate, it can end only in one way. The brute dies hard, but the naked heel of our Christ has bruised his head, and though still the dragon

“Swings the scaly horror of his folded tail,”

his death will come sooner or later. The regenerating power is lodged in the heart of humanity, and the centre from which it flows is the cross. The history of the world thenceforward is but the history of its more or less rapid assimilation of that power and consequent deliverance from the bondage in which it has been held. The end can only be the entire and universal manifestation of the victory

which was won when He bowed His head and died. Christ's cross is God's throne of triumph.

Let us see that we have our own personal share in that victory. Holding to Christ, and drawing from Him by faith a share in His new life, we shall no longer be under the yoke of law, but enfranchised into the obedience of love, which is liberty. We shall no longer be slaves of evil, but sons and servants of our conquering God, who woos and wins us by showing us all His love in Christ, and by giving us His own Son on the Cross, our peace-offering. If we let Him overcome, His victory will be life, not death. He will strip us of nothing but rags, and clothe us in garments of purity; He will so breathe beauty into us that He will show us openly to the universe as examples of His transforming power, and He will bind us glad captives to His chariot wheels, partakers of His victory as well as trophies of His all-conquering love. "Now thanks be unto God, which always triumphs over us in Jesus Christ."

ALEXANDER MACLAREN.

THOUGHTS.

I. Shame on account of God's Displeasure with us.—The story told in the 12th chapter of Numbers, and especially the striking words ascribed to God in the 10th verse ("If her father had but spit in her face, should she not be ashamed seven days?") startle us out of the easy mind with which we accept the pardon of sin. We stand rebuked for having less shame at meriting the displeasure of the just and loving God, than at exciting the contempt or incurring the condemnation of men like ourselves. God demands that the shame we feel on account of sin shall have the same blush and burning in it that we should have, did some one on just cause show his reprobation of our conduct by spitting in our face. Shame before God must betray something of the poignancy and agitation, something of the heart-felt humiliation of our shame before men. It is not to be of a