

*CHRISTUS CONSUMMATOR :**LESSONS FROM THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS.*

V. THE NEW COVENANT.

“Now hath He obtained a ministry the more excellent, by how much also He is the Mediator of a better covenant, which hath been enacted upon better promises.”—HEB. viii. 6 (Rev. Ver.).

“We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle.”—HEB. xiii. 10 (Rev. Ver.).

THE attitude of a Christian is, as we have seen, twofold. It is an attitude of attainment, and an attitude of expectancy. He has been admitted to fellowship with the unseen order in the fulness of its infinite grandeur; and he is looking for the open manifestation of the victorious Presence of his Lord. This inspiring faith, this far-reaching hope, are bound together for each one of us by the obligation of personal duty. Each one of us has a work to do in that infinite kingdom of God which is opened to our entrance. Each one of us is charged in his measure to hasten the full revelation of its glory. We look through the temporal to the eternal. But for the present we have to live our little lives under the conditions of earth. We strive to gain the largest vision of the Divine counsels, to feel the intense reality of our connexion with the world about us, to watch in thought the stream of consequence which flows from our actions; and then strengthened and humbled we go back as it were into the shrine of our own souls, and know that in that last depth of being we are alone with God. We are alone, and yet not alone, for there also Christ is with us, Christ the Fulfiller, to bring to its true perfection the fragment of service which answer to our powers. He not only bore His blood, the virtue of His offered life, into heaven for the salvation of the nature which He had taken to Himself, but He applies it personally to

each believer on earth, to purify and to sustain, to begin and to complete that union with Himself for which man was made.

As the Hebrews grasped this truth which the Apostle set before them, they could not fail to find that what they had lost by their exclusion from the commonwealth of Israel was given back to them in fact, and not in figure. As Israelites they had rejoiced from early youth to enter the court of God's house; as Israelites, they had known in maturer age every consolation of the appointed sacrifices. But now, when they entered little by little into the meaning of the Gospel, they saw that they were become partakers in a better covenant than that made with their fathers, in a better sacrifice than those which the Law established, "partakers in Christ," "partakers in the Holy Ghost." They were indeed, what Israel was designed to be, a nation of priests. The offering for the people's sin was for them given back as the support of life.

The lessons which were thus taught, taught most impressively through the symbols of the Old Testament, to men tried by the sorrows of the first age, are for us also. The individual soul as it turns to God requires to be assured of the personal right of approach to Him, and then of the power of continuous fellowship with Him. This assurance is given to us in a form suited to the circumstances of our life in the two Sacraments of the Gospel—the Sacrament of Incorporation, and the Sacrament of Support. In these we have, according to our need, the revelation of our union with Christ and the revelation of His impartment of Himself to us.

But we cannot fail to be struck by the way in which the writer of the Epistle deals with these Sacraments. We should have expected that he would contrast them in their significant forms with the typical Levitical rites

to which they answered; that he would show how even outwardly the Christian has in them far more sure seals of God's grace than the Jew; that he would point out that what was necessarily limited and local in the old dispensation had been made universal in the new. As it is, he barely touches on the external element of the Christian Sacraments. It lies behind his teaching; but he strives above all things to fix the thoughts of his readers upon the ascended Christ who works through the Sacraments, lest they should rest in ritual observances, and faint or fail in the effort to gain a closer personal fellowship with Him.

There are, however, two remarkable passages which enable the student to perceive, as I have already indicated, the deep meaning of the Mystical Washing, and of the festal meal of the Eucharist. *Let us draw near*—near to the Holy place—the Apostle writes, *with a true heart in fulness of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our body washed with pure water.* And again, *We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle.*

The first passage shows that by our covenant rite we are made not only a people of God, but also priests of God.

The second passage shows that while the sin-offering in the Day of Atonement was wholly consumed by fire, our common sin-offering is made our common peace-offering, our Eucharist, a Feast upon a Sacrifice.

Twice only in the Pentateuch is mention made of the sprinkling of the blood of sacrifices upon men; once at the solemn ratification of the covenant when, the people were united to the Lord; and once when Aaron and his sons were hallowed for the priesthood. In the latter case the sprinkling with blood was united with a washing with water. Here then we have the complete parallel with the words of the Epistle. To a Jew familiar with the

Mosaic record, their meaning was distinct and decisive. They set forth that the Christian is made, as I said, not only a citizen of the Divine kingdom, but also a priest of God; that for him access to heaven is open; that he has boldness to offer the sacrifices of word and deed; that he accepts the duty of consecration.

The interpretation of the second passage which I have quoted has been disputed, but I think that the general sense is clear. The writer is meeting a difficulty found in the supposition that Christians had not what the Jews had. *We have*, he replies *an altar*, an altar with a victim, for the two are not separated, *whereof they have no right to eat who serve the tabernacle*. We have, that is, more, infinitely more, than the Law allowed to those who ministered to figures of the eternal truth. We have Christ crucified, Christ upon the Cross, a victim and an altar, a victim who suffered for the world without the camp, and who then, marvel of marvels, gave and gives Himself for ever as the support of His people in a Holy Eucharist. No priest in old time ever tasted such an offering. But He who died for us lives for us. He who bore our sins gives us of the fulness of His strength. And, to go one step further, on Him and in Him we can bring to God the sacrifice of ourselves.

So then, we repeat, our covenant rite, our Baptism, brings us into a personal relation to Christ. No one stands between the believer and the Lord. Our Sacrificial Feast, our Eucharist, offers to us the virtue of Christ's life and death, His Flesh and Blood, for the strengthening and cleansing of our bodies and souls.

Let us look at these thoughts a little more closely.

As baptized, confirmed Christians, priests of God, we can come directly to the Father. No earthly symbol, no mortal representative, intervenes any longer as the necessary means through which we may draw near.

As baptized and confirmed Christians, priests of God, we can offer up to Him a sacrifice of praise and active love, the natural fruit of hearts touched with His grace. No fear checks the thanksgiving which is the echo of His word. No weakness stays the effort which is the answer to His summons.

As baptized, confirmed Christians, priests of God, we acknowledge that we are "*holy, partakers of a heavenly calling,*" dedicated to God without reserve, *bearing branded* upon us, in St. Paul's vivid image, *the marks of Jesus*, as bondmen devoted to His perpetual service.

But while this is so; while nothing can alter the responsibility which is laid upon each soul, and which we have voluntarily acknowledged; while we must severally, as if there were none other, draw near to God and bring Him the offering of ourselves, and acknowledge the debt which is as large as life; our approach, our sacrifice, our dedication, are all *in Christ*. Not one step, not one act, not one confession, can be made without Him. *We are become partakers of Christ*. That is the gift of God. And while the Epistle recognises, as we have seen, the priesthood of Christians, this human priesthood falls almost out of sight before the supreme fact of the priesthood of Christ. Our common priestly work is done only through Him. *Through Him we offer up a sacrifice of praise to God continually*. Our will makes it our own. His co-operation makes it acceptable.

We are become partakers of Christ, if, it is added, we hold fast the beginning of our confidence firm unto the end. A Divine fact, such is the paradox of life, is made dependent on human endeavour. We can see then how the institution of the Eucharist meets the sad sense of infirmity and failure. Our covenant rite cannot from its nature ever be repeated. But we know how often and how grievously we have fallen short of our obligation. Is the covenant

then, we are driven to ask, fatally broken? When the fear rises before us, we recall, almost regretfully, the provisions which men have made, with or without the sanction of God, to bring, through sacrifice peace to the troubled conscience. While we do so, the Apostle lifts up our thoughts to the Lord, Crucified, Risen, Seated at the right hand of the Father, and in the light of that vision of *Jesus Christ, the same yesterday and to-day, yea, and for ever*, we can say triumphantly, *We have an altar*. All that the consolatory ceremonial of the Old Dispensation accomplished for Israel, all that men have sought to make clear to themselves by vain speculations and worldly forms, is ours in spiritual and abiding simplicity. *We have an altar* wherein the truths which were represented by the sacrificial system of the Law are realised in a living verity. *We have an altar*, whereon we can lay "ourselves, our souls and bodies," a reasonable service.

Once again then we are brought to Christ the Fulfiller—*Christus Consummator*—in whom each believer finds the root and the accomplishment of his individual destiny.

So, we have reached the limit which we set to ourselves. We have dared to look upon great trials in the light of the Epistle to the Hebrews, and we have seen that the help which availed the Hebrews in the first age is sufficient for us.

We have looked upon suffering, and we have seen that by the will of God suffering is for fallen man the way to perfection. We cannot indeed, with our feeble sight, discern how this or that sorrow and shame contributes to the end; but disciplined in patience, we can leave in the Father's hands the fulfilment of His own law which we have recognised, and for our part labour to hasten that issue.

We have looked upon failure and weakness, and we have seen that Christ, as He accomplished the destiny of man on earth, pleads the cause of man in heaven with unflinching

compassion and absolute sovereignty, uniting the offices of priest and king, perfect man and perfect God.

We have looked upon the sad spectacle of divided Christendom, and we have seen that by the ascension of Christ we are brought into a spiritual fellowship, in which the powers of heaven and earth are united, a fellowship transcending every test of sense; and from the contemplation of notes of that universal communion, we have learnt to keep hope fresh while we guard with watchful reverence the convictions which separate us in the sphere of visible work.

We have looked upon the chequered course of the individual life, and we have seen that for each one of us is provided that objective assurance of our right of approach to God which is the solid foundation of religion, that objective assurance of the renewed gift of Christ's flesh and blood, which is able to sustain and to purify us in the effort to reach His likeness.

At every prospect of great trial, as we dwelt patiently upon it, we have seen the figure of Christ to rise above the darkness—of Christ the Fulfiller—not only to give comfort, but to enlarge hope, not only to support the sufferer under the pressure of transitory affliction, but to show to the believing soul that, in a world such as this,

“ Failure is but a triumph's evidence
For the fulness of the days.”

And we have seen all this, so far as we have been allowed to see it, by entering a little more closely than is commonly done into the difficulties of a troubled congregation of the apostolic times. Thus we have found that the words of the inspired writer who guided the Hebrews to higher things, speak to us with the directness and the power of life. We have found on a narrow field of inquiry what the Bible is: an interpretation of the eternal, intelligible to every man

through all time in the language in which he was born. We have found that nothing has befallen us which our fathers have not borne victoriously in other shapes and made fruitful in blessing. We have found, I think, that to those who will raise their eyes to Christ the Fulfiller, the Revelation of the Father, made known to us more completely from generation to generation by the Holy Spirit, nothing in human experience can come as an unwelcome surprise. He, Son of man, Son of God, will bear, He has borne, though we see it not through the mist of days and years, all things to their goal, *Christus Consummator*.

Such thoughts carry with them a grave, a noble responsibility. The character of a generation is moulded by personal character. And if we have considered some of the temptations of the first Christians; if we know a little of the terrible environment of evil by which they were encircled; we must not, as we too often do, forget how they conquered the world. It was not by any despairing withdrawal from city and market; not by any proud isolation in selfish security; not by any impatient violence; but by the winning influence of gracious faith, they mastered the family, the school, the empire. They were a living Gospel, a message of God's good-will to those with whom they toiled and suffered. Pure among the self-indulgent, loving among the factious, tender among the ruthless, meek among the vainglorious, firm in faith amidst the shaking of nations, joyous in hope amidst the sorrows of a corrupt society, they revealed to men their true destiny and showed that it could be attained. They appealed boldly to the awakened conscience as the advocate of their claims. They taught as believing that He who had stirred their heart with a great desire would assuredly satisfy it.

They offered not in word but in deed, the ideal of spiritual devotion, and "the soul naturally Christian," turned to it as the flower turns to the light, drew from it, as

the flower draws from the light, the richness of perfect beauty.

Yes; that was the secret of their success; and it is the secret of our success. The words are true now as they were when addressed by Zechariah to the poor remnant of Jews struggling to rebuild their outward temple: *Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.* Not first by material change, not by intellectual culture, but by spiritual sympathy will our work be done. Let us take to ourselves the charge of our Epistle, the counsel of Divine fellowship—fellowship with God and man, fellowship with man in God. *Let us draw near unto the throne of grace. . . Let us hold fast the confession of our hope. . . Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works,* and it shall not be long said that the victories of faith are ended.

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THE REVISED VERSION OF THE OLD
TESTAMENT.

THE SECOND BOOK OF SAMUEL.

i. 18. The song of *the bow*. This, if the text is sound, is the most probable explanation of the phrase לְלַמֵּד בְּנֵי לְיִמְד בְּנֵי יְהוּדָה קֶשֶׁת, *to teach the children of Judah [the] bow*. David's elegy was called *the bow*, from the mention of Jonathan's bow in *v.* 22; and it was to be taught to the people in order that the memory of Saul and Jonathan might be handed down to posterity. Cf. Deut. xxxi. 19; Ps. lx. title. The A.V. follows the Targum in explaining the phrase to refer to the practice of archery; but this is improbable, as the bow was already in general use, and such a direction would be out of place here. The word *τόξον* is however