

endeavour to understand their meaning; by full use of literary and historical criticism, of archæology, of comparison of other religions, to bring them into due relation to the circumstances under which they were written, the influences by which they were moulded, the needs they were designed to meet; and then by a principle of proportion and analogy to ascertain their message and their meaning for our own age. How God has worked, is working, and purposes to work, in us and through us, in society, in the world, for the accomplishment of that supreme end when He shall be all in all—this is what we need and desire to learn, that we may “grow by the knowledge of God,” and bear fruit to His glory.

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CHRISTIANS AND SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS.

(1 PETER II. 11—III. 7.)

IN the earlier part of the second chapter of this Epistle Peter describes the ideal greatness of all Christian people, and their place in the invisible and eternal kingdom of God. God is building for Himself in this world a spiritual temple; Christ is the chief corner stone, and we, one by one, as living stones, are built on Him. God has His earthly home in the life of Christian men of all Churches, of every nation, every creed. Every Christian man is a divine temple; according to Paul, God dwells in him: but Peter describes the whole company of saints—all who have received the eternal life which is the gift of Christ—as one great, majestic, glorious temple of the Eternal. And we are a holy, a consecrated priesthood. We have to offer spiritual sacrifices. We are an elect race, holy, a consecrated nation, a people that God has made His own possession, called out of darkness into God's marvellous light.

In these great conceptions of the dignity, sanctity, and

blessedness of all that acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ as the Lord and Saviour of mankind, are to be discovered the true laws of Christian morality, and the inspiration and strength that will enable us to fulfil them.

Peter begins with a general law rooted in his description of the ideal greatness of all Christian men (ii. 11). In this world, all that he has said about us shows that we are "*sojourners*," strangers, not citizens; "*pilgrims*," passing travellers. We are to "*abstain from fleshly lusts*," which would destroy that diviner life in the power of which we belong to God's invisible and eternal kingdom. And considering to what a great race we belong, and that we are priests consecrated to God's service, and are God's temple, we are to have our behaviour "*seemly*," or "*beautiful*," among those who as yet do not share our blessedness; "*that wherein they speak against*" us "*as evil-doers*"—a common reproach against Christian men in early times—they may by our "*good works which they themselves behold*," come to "*glorify God in the day of visitation*." When the light of God begins to break upon them, and their hearts and consciences are moved by the revelation of God in Christ, their knowledge of the moral excellence of those who have received the Christian faith is to add new force to the Christian gospel, and to constrain them to receive it, and so to glorify God. Two great motives, therefore, are alleged to enforce the discharge of two great duties. That life which we have received from God will perish if we indulge in fleshly lusts—we should, therefore, abstain from them: and our lives are to be beautiful and full of good works, that men may be assisted by our conduct to discover the righteousness and power and love of God in Christ.

And now the Apostle passes to a series of special precepts, which are intimately connected with each other, and all of which are indeed varied applications of one general principle. We must try to grasp the general principle first.

Christian men belong, in the power of their higher life, to the invisible and eternal kingdom of God. Yes—but they are surrounded by a great system of laws and institutions of altogether a different kind. Imagine the spirit and temper with which these laws and institutions were likely to be regarded by the Christian men to whom this Epistle was written.

The times were evil. An immense heathen empire extended over the greater part of the known world. It was under the absolute control and direction of one man, and he was sometimes guilty of the foulest vices and the most brutal crimes: sometimes he had gained power by base, treacherous, and bloody cruelties; and sometimes he used his power tyrannically and brutally. The governors, who under him held authority over subject nations, were sometimes guilty of similar tyranny and similar brutality. The Roman rule had many great and noble qualities; and Roman emperors, governors, and magistrates exhibited many great and noble virtues. But the rule was, in its foundation, a military despotism; and the rulers were tempted to commit the iniquities which are almost inseparable from the possession of arbitrary power.

The Jews had always been impatient of foreign control; they were God's elect race, and they resented the authority of heathen princes. They were turbulent and ungovernable, and were only held down by the iron hand of irresistible force. The same temper was likely to spread in the Christian Churches, in which at first there was a large number of Jews, who brought with them their hatred of the Roman power. And Christian men might justify their resistance of political and civil authority by insisting on the greatness and sanctity which God had conferred on them in Christ. Were they not the people of God—God's own possession, a consecrated nation, an elect race, with the immunities of a royal priesthood? What right had a

heathen emperor, heathen governors, heathen magistrates, to exert authority over them? Were they not under the laws of the true and eternal God? What obligation rested on them to honour the laws of a heathen state? And the social economy of the empire—was it not an outrage on the dignity with which God Himself had invested them? They were the sons of the Eternal—and yet they were slaves. It was intolerable. What duty did they owe to heathen masters, who sometimes treated them with cruel injustice? And the social institutions of this heathen society, the obligations which it imposed on them—might not these too be wholly disregarded? Christian wives—especially those who were married to heathen husbands—might they not leave them, if they wished to leave them? Were they bound by any indissoluble ties to men who did not share their kinship to God, and the transcendent greatness which that kinship conferred? If they remained with their husbands, were they under the old obligations which were irksome always, and which now that they had the spirit of Christian freedom were harder to discharge than ever? And Christian husbands—had their wives any serious claims on them? What was marriage? It was an institution belonging to this transitory world,—to this visible order. What obligations could it impose on men who were sons of God and heirs of glory, honour, and immortality?

We can see that general temper which the Christian people were likely to show in relation to all earthly institutions might be justified by an appeal to the most certain and glorious truths concerning the Christian life and the great Christian hope. Those who had passed into the kingdom of God—what allegiance did they owe to heathen emperors and magistrates; what obedience did they owe to human laws? Those who had passed into the invisible and eternal order—how could they be bound by the visible order of society, with the temporary institutions of this

brief and transient earthly life? In the first age there was a suspicion, as has been justly said, that Christian Churches were a kind of Internationalist and Socialistic conspiracy against the empire and against the social order; men spoke against Christians as against "*evildoers*."

Peter meets this temper by charging Christian men to "*be subject to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake*." That is the general law: the special precepts which follow are the various applications of it. The expression which Peter uses is a very remarkable one. In the margin of the Revised Version the word "*creation*" is given instead of "*ordinance*"; and "*creation*" is the word which most exactly represents what Peter said. Now the word "*creation*" is never used in the New Testament, I think, for what is merely human in its origin. Only God creates.

Further: Peter does not say, "*every creation of man*," but "*every human creation*." "*Be subject to every human creation for the Lord's sake*." What is his exact meaning?

When we speak of God's material creations, we speak of the manifestations of His will and power in the material universe, and through matter. The manifestations are incomplete, for matter cannot wholly express the divine thought. The artist, the poet, discovers in mountains, in seas, in clouds, in trees, in flowers, a grandeur, a beauty, a grace, which the actual mountains, seas, clouds, trees, and flowers realize only imperfectly. God's material creations do not fully achieve the divine thought and purpose.

And God's *human creations* to which we are to be "*subject*," are the expression of God's thought and purpose—in the organization of human society—in the political and social order of nations—in whatever earthly institutions are necessary to the existence and perfection of the life of man. His human creations express His mind still less perfectly than His material creations, for men are in revolt against His authority; their selfishness, their covetousness, their

lust, their ambition, their cruelty, interfere with the working out of His great and merciful purpose. But still they are His creations—marred, imperfect, sometimes hardly recognisable as His. We are His creations; but how terribly we misrepresent His thought and will in our personal life and conduct. And the State, Society, the Family are His creations; but they are His human creations—creations which He achieves through the intervention of human life with all its immoralities, of human relations with all their perversities, of human wisdom with all its grievous errors.

The State, Society, the Family—I repeat—are divine creations—institutions which have their root and origin in the divine will. We are so made that we must live in families: we are so made that we must live in an organized society: we are so made that we must be drawn into the unity of national life, under government and under law. Apart from the existence of the Family, of the social order, of the State, the development of man's life is checked; many of his highest powers are unexercised, many of his noblest qualities undeveloped. As these institutions have their foundation in the Divine purpose, we are to recognise and fulfil the obligations which they impose—to discharge the service which they assign to us, "*for the Lord's sake.*"

If the words were taken as they stand—"Be subject to every ordinance of man"—they would debase human life and strip it of all its dignity and freedom. I am not bound by any law, natural or Christian, to submit to everything that man may ordain—to every ordinance of man; but I am bound to submit to every divine institution which is organized and maintained through human agency—though through human weakness, ignorance, and sin, it may grievously fail to realize the divine idea.

Be subject to every institution intended by God to organize and regulate the life of man—acknowledge and

discharge the services it demands. Be subject to the political order—"to the king, as supreme" (ii. 14-17).

Be subject to every institution intended by God to organize and regulate the life of man. Peter addresses the precept even to slaves. In the social order of the ancient world slavery had a large place. It was an atrociously unjust institution. The social order based upon it was iniquitous. But some organization of society was necessary, according to the will of God. Men had terribly missed their way in carrying out His will, but as long as that order existed and there was no possibility of changing it for a better, Christian people were to submit—to submit even to cruel injustice, as Christ submitted (ii. 18-24).

Be subject to every institution intended to organize and regulate the life of man: now he addresses the precept to Christian wives:—they are to discharge the duties of married life (iii. 1-7). And then to husbands: "*in like manner*"—like the wives—like the slaves—like the subjects of political rulers—husbands, too, are to be subject to the institution of marriage. It would have been too great a shock if he had said, in like manner be in subjection to your wives; but the idea of being subject to the obligations imposed by marriage—which is a divine institution, though receiving its form through human laws—is present in the charge to husbands as well as in the charge to wives. Husbands are not to be arbitrary, tyrannical. They are not to suppose themselves at liberty to order everything according to their own will. They are to dwell with their wives "*according to knowledge,*"—having an intelligent perception of what is involved in their relation to their wives, "*giving honour to the woman as unto the weaker vessel, as being also joint-heirs of the grace of life; to the end that your prayers be not hindered.*"

Not in the spiritual and eternal world alone does God reveal His glory. In this material universe we may dis-

cover the manifestations of His eternal power and Godhead—manifestations too coarse to be the vehicle of His finer thought, too infirm to bear the weight of His nobler perfection, but still manifestations, though inadequate, of His eternal power and Godhead. I reverence the material universe as a divine creation.

In the individual life of man, in his intellect, in his moral power and qualities, in his social affections, in his spiritual greatness, God is also revealed; but in many millions of men how imperfectly! The light of the intellect—how dim it is; the moral powers—how feeble, how perverse; the moral qualities—how degenerate; the social affections—how irregular; and the spiritual greatness—ah! too often man is a prince uncrowned—a priest who has been degraded from his sacred functions—a child of God in rags, in a far country, feeding swine, instead of in royal robes in the palace of his Father! But still the individual man is a divine creation, and I reverence him.

And the State—how corrupt, how tyrannical, how unjust sometimes are its rulers, how unequal its laws! Still it is a divine creation, and I reverence it. “The powers that be are ordained of God,” however grievously they may fail to fulfil their trust.

The order of Society—how far it falls short of the divine ideal! But I will not break into revolt; I will endeavour to change its form by changing its spirit. I will discharge the services it demands from me, however inequitable. Any order is better than chaos. I will recognise and honour the divine idea, even when most undivinely realized.

The Family is divine; and let wives fulfil the divine idea of what wives should be, even when husbands forget the will of God: and let husbands fulfil the divine idea of what husbands ought to be, even when wives forget the will of God—each being gracious to the ungracious, gentle to the ungentle, loyal to the disloyal. And the same law extends

to the mutual relations of children and parents : from the child reverence is due to the parent—not because he is wise and just and good ; reverence is due to every man—parent or not—that is wise and great and good : reverence is due to the parent because he is the parent : the relation between parent and child is a divine institution, and the child should be subject to the institution. And to the child the parent owes duties by the same law—to the disobedient child, the ungrateful child, the unloving child. “*For the Lord’s sake*” we must recognise and discharge all the duties and services required from us by the institutions for the organization of human life ; and when for His sake these duties and services are recognised and discharged, we shall have done something towards bringing on the golden age we long for—when all states and all laws shall be just, and the social order shall illustrate the spirit of Christian brotherhood, and the Family shall be the visible symbol of the peace and blessedness of the Home of God.

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*JESUS MIRRORED IN MATTHEW, MARK,  
AND LUKE.*

IV. THE SYNAGOGUE MINISTRY.

THE first thing the average reader of the Gospels has to do in reference to this department of our Lord’s work is to get it fairly into his mind that there was such a thing as a systematic synagogue ministry. With the exception of the narratives relating to visits made to the two synagogues of Capernaum and Nazareth, the Gospels contain only general statements, such as that in Mark i. 39 : “He preached in their synagogues throughout all Galilee, and cast out devils.”<sup>1</sup> Such summary notices, giving no details, make little impression on the mind. You read the words, pass

<sup>1</sup> *Vide* also in *Matthew* iv. 23.