

faith which has Christ set forth in His blood as its object and inspiration. Now what is the meaning of that object? According to the Apostle, it is Christ bearing sin, Christ accepting and making His own in all their tragic reality the responsibilities in which sin had involved us. How, then, can the faith which such a Christ evokes but have the moral characteristics of that propitiation in its very substance? How can it do anything else than treat as absolutely real that righteousness of God to which the propitiation which is its abiding source is the most signal homage? Faith begotten by Christ, set forth as a propitiation in His blood, is faith to which sin is all that sin is to God, holiness all that holiness is to God, law all that law is to God; it is so far from subverting morality that in a world of sinful men it is the one guarantee that can be given for a genuinely good life. It is with such an impression of it on his heart that St. Paul writes: I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is a Divine power to save in the case of every one who has faith; for in it a Divine righteousness is revealed of which faith is the very element.

JAMES DENNEY.

*THE LAW OF RECIPROCITY IN RELIGION.*

THERE is a natural world and there is a spiritual world. Both these worlds are governed by constant and unresting laws. In many ways, as we should reasonably expect seeing that the same Creator formed them both, the laws of these two worlds closely resemble each other. The principal difference is that in the working out of spiritual laws, will and affection and faith play a larger part than in the laws of the lower sphere. With this exception the two sets of laws are so nearly alike that they who rule

their spiritual life according to the laws of the natural world are not likely to go wrong religiously.

Moreover as pure science is the theoretical knowledge of the laws of the physical world and applied science their actual use, so theology is the theory of the laws of the spiritual world and religion the application of those laws to practice. And as in common life—in lighting our fires, for example, or preparing our food—we often avail ourselves of physical laws without having any deep acquaintance with the pure science of those laws, so people are often very practically religious without being profoundly theological, although it is certain that as pure science is eminently useful to applied science so theology is a very strong help to religion.

It is also of importance to observe that while the facts and truths of Nature are unchangeable, the feelings and emotions of scientific men towards Nature greatly differ. Some scientists have very warm feelings towards Nature. They love Nature. Her beauties and wonders fill them with admiration and reverence and awe. Other scientists are cold towards Nature. Their knowledge never kindles into affection. Nature to them is vast, irresistible, yet in no sense an object of affection. But the feelings of scientists towards Nature, whether warm or cold, enthusiastic or indifferent, cannot change a single fact or truth of Nature. Their feelings make an enormous difference in the happiness of the scientists themselves—in their power of entering into and appreciating the spirit of Nature—but to Nature and her facts the feelings of scientists make no difference whatever.

Again, the opinions and controversies of scientists in no wise affect Nature. The process of the formation of scientific opinion is exceedingly interesting, and scientific controversies often do much good. They stimulate attention and clear the air, thus enabling thought to

breathe and move more freely. But neither opinion nor controversy can convert any physical fact into something which in essence it is not, or abrogate a single law of the natural universe.

In like manner the laws and facts of the spiritual world cannot be changed or subverted by any of our feelings or opinions or controversies concerning them. A man's faith indeed makes all the difference in the world to his religion, but it makes no difference at all to the realities of the spiritual world. Nothing could be more foolish than the vain supposition that a truth is necessarily doubtful because I doubt it, or non-existent because I disbelieve it. My doubt or disbelief is of immense moment to me, but to the doubted fact or the disbelieved law it is not of the smallest moment. Let my doubts and disbeliefs be what they may, facts remain facts and laws remain laws. As I cannot believe any object or truth into existence, neither can I disbelieve it out of existence. We clearly see this to be the case in the physical world. When the ancients thought the earth was flat their so thinking did not make it flat. When the Pope put thumbscrews on Galileo for maintaining the motion of the earth the papal thumbscrews had a momentary effect on Galileo, but no effect at all on the motions of the earth. If a man, disbelieving in the law of gravitation, should throw himself from a lofty pinnacle, vainly imagining he would fly and not fall, his disbelieving imagination would have no effect upon the law, but upon himself the effect would be irreparable. Upon our own destiny therefore the influence of our opinions may be incalculable, but upon fundamental truths and universal laws their influence is nothing.

So also is it in the spiritual world. Our opinions concerning religious truths and spiritual facts greatly affect ourselves, but upon the facts and truths they have

no effect. The atheist, for example, says in his heart there is no God; and the agnostic that he knows nothing about a future life. Their not believing and not knowing makes an infinite difference to themselves—a difference as great as darkness from light or blindness from seeing—but to the existence of God and the facts of a future resurrection and judgment it makes no difference at all. We fondly or fiercely debate the verities and the laws of the spiritual world as if forsooth any of them lay within the scope of our decision! What does lie within our decision is the solemn and endless choice whether we will recognize the verities and obey the laws. But with this choice our power ceases. Neither the facts concerning which our choice is made nor the consequences of our choice upon ourselves can in the least degree be modified by any feelings or opinions or beliefs we entertain about them.

“With the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.” This declaration is a simple and strong illustration both of the power of our beliefs upon ourselves and of their utter powerlessness upon universal moral and spiritual laws. The declaration occurs in our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount. Now what is the Sermon on the Mount? It is not a sermon in the ordinary acceptation of the word. It is not merely a good man’s exhortation, or a wise man’s warning, or a clever man’s exposition, or an eloquent man’s oration. It is much more than all these together. For it is the Law-maker’s own declaration of the laws which He Himself has enacted. It is the Omniscient unveiling the hidden facts of the spiritual world and the eternal life of man. In this respect among others the Sermon on the Mount differs from every other sermon delivered in the history of the world. All other sermons are the utterances of fallible men. They are speeches, discourses, exhortations, lectures, expressions of

feeling and opinion. They often contain debatable matter; they are never entirely free from imperfection and mistake. It is altogether otherwise with the Sermon on the Mount. Here is no possibility of error, no misconception of fact, no utterance of mere opinion. The Sermon on the Mount is more even than the expression of our Lord's unerring thoughts. It is the enunciation of indestructible facts and immutable laws.

When, for example, our Lord says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"; "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy"; "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God,"<sup>1</sup> He is not giving utterance to religious sentiments, but announcing truths which eternally and unchangeably are. The kingdom of heaven is the heritage of the poor in spirit by a law as sure as that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles. It is as certain that the merciful will obtain mercy as that the force of gravity diminishes as the square of the distance. Good eyes are not more necessary to natural vision than purity of heart to the vision of God. The blessedness of the meek and the merciful and the pure is in no sense an uncertain or hypothetical blessedness—it is a blessedness resulting from laws whose operation is as constant as the rotation of the earth. It is not a mere matter of belief that the proud and the cruel and the impure will be cursed. They are cursed as certainly as the leper is diseased. Saying the Communion Service does not constitute their curse, any more than reciting a proposition of Euclid makes the laws of geometry. Neither does leaving the Service unsaid remove the curse. The laws of the spiritual as of the natural universe are what they are; our speech does not enact them, and our silence cannot abrogate them. In religion, as in all things, true wisdom patiently seeks till it finds the facts and the laws by which

<sup>1</sup> Matt. v. 3, 7, 8.

the facts are governed. Neither personal feelings nor current opinions, neither conciliar decrees nor conciliar anathemas matter much in comparison with the actual facts and the actual laws of the spiritual universe.

Perhaps the greatest achievement of the nineteenth century was its development of the scientific temper throughout the civilized world. The scientific temper proves all things, and searches diligently among phenomena for the underlying law. It pays little heed to assertions and renders scant homage to authority not founded in law. Its devotion is to truth and to the evidences by which truth is sustained. Gradually and most happily this scientific temper is invading the realm of religion. Its invasion promises to usher in an entirely new reign for Christianity. It is the beginning of a great religious revolution; the sure destruction of the baseless superstitions which, like parasites, have for ages been sapping the strength of the gospel of Christ. What St. Paul did to overthrow Judaism the scientific temper is now doing to overthrow papalism and every manner of Christian superstition. And it is accomplishing this result mainly by the establishment of the scientific method upon the throne of religion. Religion has too long been regarded as a matter of conjecture and emotion and opinion. The scientific method however is leading us to realize firmly that the spiritual world is a world of fact and law, like the natural world. It is also teaching us that just as temporal health and happiness depend on the recognition of natural facts and self-adjustment to natural laws, so eternal salvation and holiness depend on the recognition of spiritual facts and self-adjustment to spiritual laws. The Sermon on the Mount is the codification of a portion of these spiritual laws made by the Christ, the Divine Lawgiver Himself.

Among the laws enunciated in this code of Christ a

striking prominence is given to the law of reciprocity. Men commonly suppose that reciprocity is only a pious precept of religion; whereas it is a law constant in its operation and unvarying in its effects. When our Lord said, "The second commandment is, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,"<sup>1</sup> His saying implied three truths. First, that brotherly self-surrendering love is the Divine ideal of human conduct. Secondly, that as God takes pleasure in man's highest happiness so He enjoins upon him the highest ideals, because it is only through aspiration after the highest ideals that the highest happiness can be attained. Thirdly, that upon the character of our treatment of our fellow men depends God's treatment of us. These three verities are all contained in what St. James calls the royal law of Scripture, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."<sup>2</sup>

The least attended to of these three truths is the last—the truth that as we deal with others God will assuredly deal with us. In the economy of the spiritual world the law of reciprocity prevails. As we judge our fellow men God will judge us. As we bestow our gifts on our fellow men in the same proportion will God bestow His gifts on us. If we are merciful to others God will be merciful to us. If we are exacting in our condemnation He will be exacting. If we forgive men their trespasses against us then will our heavenly Father forgive us our trespasses; but if we forgive not men their trespasses neither will our heavenly Father forgive us. Everywhere and in all things the same measure that we mete to our fellow men God will mete to us.

Manifestly these utterances, repeated by our Lord in so great a variety of forms and with such solemnity of emphasis, are more than beautiful counsels; they are the authentic promulgation of a fixed law. From the dominion

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxii. 39.

<sup>2</sup> Jas. ii. 8.

of this law there is no escape. Sooner or later it will inevitably be applied to every man, and upon its application will depend his final doom.

Nothing is so real as religion; no facts more certain than spiritual facts; no laws more sure in their operation than spiritual laws. Yet how seldom we seriously ponder over these immutable facts and irrefragable laws, charged with consequences of such immeasurable moment to ourselves! To the world at large religion is either an effete superstition or a magical routine or a debatable theory, or at best a reasonable probability and a beautiful belief. Even among its professed adherents how rarely Christianity assumes the majesty of eternal fact and persistent law. Yet heaven and earth will pass away sooner than one of these facts be destroyed or one of these laws abrogated. You could as easily turn the earth backward on its axis as obtain God's bounty for the niggardly, or God's pardon for the unforgiving, or God's mercy for the cruel or the beatific vision for the impure.

Eternal life and happiness are revealed as depending upon three fundamental facts: (1) The free grace and gift of God. We cannot cause ourselves to live either physically or spiritually. All life is derived to us from sources external to ourselves. Eternal life is generated in us by God the Holy Ghost, the Author and Giver of all spiritual life. (2) The maintenance of eternal life depends on our adoption of the necessary means. God gives the seed but we must prepare the soil. God gives the sunshine and the rain, but if we restrict a plant to drought and darkness it will die. God gives children brain power and conscience, but unless they are educated and trained they will lose both their moral light and intellectual strength. Similarly with the seed and power of eternal life. Without its proper soil and culture it will perish. (3) The gifts and acts of God to us depend upon our gifts and acts to our fellow men. As we

do to others God will do to us. As we give to others God gives to us. As we judge others He will judge us. As we forgive we in turn shall be forgiven. Not only so, but in the parable of The Unmerciful Servant we are taught that if after being ourselves forgiven we fail to forgive others then God's forgiveness of us is taken back.<sup>1</sup> Nearly every parable dealing with the Final Judgment is a solemn illustration of this just righteous immutable law of reciprocity everywhere dominant in the spiritual world.

We see an analogous law working throughout the natural world. As men sow they reap. As they judge their fellow men, their fellow men judge them. Even by his fellows the kindly man is kindly judged, and the cruel man with severity. Others' estimate and treatment of us is conditioned by our treatment and estimate of them. The revelation of the gospel is that this law which we see in frequent yet imperfect operation on earth will after death become permanent and complete. We may by faithful allegiance acknowledge the law, or by indifference and disobedience practically deny it; but neither our acknowledgement nor denial will make any difference to the certainty and fixedness of its operation. We may act on the law of religious reciprocity or not as we choose; but whether we act on it or not it will act on us, for our eternal happiness if we obey it, for our unending regret if we slight it.

JOHN W. DIGGLE.