

LECTURE IV

SACRIFICE AS EXHIBITED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Patriarchal and Mosaic Sacrifices

WITHOUT the New Testament the elaborate ceremonial, and even much of the doctrine contained in the Old Testament, would be enigmatical. The gospels and epistles supply the interpretation; and by their light we discover that the law and the prophets represent an economy which prepared the way for the after dispensation, which, as only in course of proceeding, is even yet inadequately comprehended by us. In like manner, the Old Testament throws an interpreting light upon the religious beliefs and practices of all mankind. Separating what is accidental from what is essential, it gathers up and gives vitality and completeness to every element of universal religion in them; and, just as Christianity spiritualises what of Judaism it has adopted, so the Old Testament refines and purifies what of other religions it has assumed.

It is a gross misconception of the old economy that all its ordinances and rites were formally and exter-

nally unlike those of former times, and of nations bordering with Palestine. Many of the traditions, customs, and ceremonies described in the Bible are similar to those which are exhibited in the books of other religions. Coincidences between them are found to multiply every year, and yet these affect the originality of the Hebrew Bible as little as the resemblances between heathen and Christian moral precepts affect the originality of the Gospels. The originality is displayed in the use to which materials which are common to all have been put; ¹ for working with such it is undeniable that the Hebrew authors have produced a very different result. Under their handling, traditions and rites which in heathendom have only a cosmic significance are found to be always purified from old associations, and inspired with new ethical and religious ideas. Even when apparently accommodating themselves to popular notions, it is always to use them in illustration of spiritual truths, or to enforce high moral precepts. In the Bible we find no custom or rite that was essentially or exclusively heathen; we find several forbidden which were harmless, because they might prove a temptation and a snare, and we find that those which have been preserved have acquired quite a new significance, so that though in form they seem

¹ "The Biblical historians were dependent for their materials on ordinary human sources; their inspiration shows itself in the application which they made of them, and the spirit with which

they infused them." — Driver, *Sermons on the Old Testament*, p. 5; Lenormant, *Les Origines de l'Histoire*, vol. i, p. xviii. seq., p. 106 seq., ed. 1880.

to be identical, their real purpose is essentially antagonistic.¹

In fact the Hebrew Bible begins at a much higher point than the scriptures of other religions ever reached. Polytheism, under the treatment of the higher class of minds, was resolved into pantheism, and in some rare instances into theism. The Hebrew Scriptures start from monotheism; they postulate a personal Deity, distinct from and superior to the universe which He has created and governs. This belief, of which tradition makes Abraham the first prophet, is not in Scripture represented as "the outcome of a Semitic peculiarity of instinct."² The language which the descendants of Abraham spoke was fundamentally that of the Canaanites whom they dispossessed, and it was very closely related to that of the Assyrians who conquered and led them captive. But the religion of Abraham, both in form and faith, was not only distinct from but essentially antagonistic to that of the land which he forsook, that of Palestinian tribes among whom he sojourned, and that of Assyria which "as the rod of God's wrath" was to punish his apostate seed. The Semitic disposition in all these instances was peculiarly prone to polytheism, and by the many cults of Semitic polytheism the Hebrews were always very powerfully impressed. Down to the time of their overthrow and captivity

¹ Kalisch, *Commentary on Genesis*, p. 37 *seq.*; Simon, *The Redemption of Man*, p. 152.

² Renan, *Nouvelles Considérations sur le caractère générale des peuples Sémitiques*; Paris, 1859.

they were continually falling away into it. Monotheism therefore as held by the Hebrews was never free from the influence of debasing superstition. It was a belief capable both of expansion and purification, and Scripture in recording the prolonged and severe training under which a people who actually struggled against it were separated from heathenism and educated to purer apprehension of truth, so far from excluding the ideal development in religion, offers itself as a remarkable example of it.¹ Although, however, the original conception became gradually more distinct and more refined, it was never exchanged for another. Even when freed from all that was local in the original faith, the God of Moses, the God of the Prophets, and even of Christ Himself was essentially the God of Abraham.²

Hebrew monotheism is a puzzle to those who would evolve the catholic religion of the descendants of Abraham from a worship as ethnic and tribal as that of any local Bel in the many forms of Baalism. They endeavour to educe it from henotheism, or monolatry, by a long process in which the narrowest conceptions were expanded, and the most superstitious rites were reformed, into the faith and worship of the post-exilic period.³ It does not fall within the scope of this lecture to discuss theories which have been very fairly and effectively handled by one of my learned pre-

¹ Kalisch, *Com. on Genesis*, p. 185.

² Müller, *Physical Religion*, p. 220, 1.

³ Kuenen, *Religion of Israel*,

vol. i. p. 223 seq.; Kuenen, "National Religions," *Hibbert Lecture*, p. 118 seq.; Montefiore, *Hibbert Lecture*, 1892, Lecture I.

decessors, Professor Robertson; but I unhesitatingly adhere to his conclusion, that the origination of the monotheistic conception in the prophets of the eighth century, would be as great a puzzle as its origination in the days of Abraham. By no process of development can we evolve any of the Belim into Jehovah, the lofty and Holy One inhabiting eternity, ruling wisely in heaven and justly upon earth. The prophetic writings of the eighth century are unaccountable unless as the outgrowth of a long previous course of reflection upon higher than heathen beliefs. If Hebrew religion started from the idea, however crudely apprehended, of the unity of God, the Creator and Ruler of the world, then the truths proclaimed by Amos and Isaiah, and the clearer perceptions of these truths expressed by Jeremiah and Ezekiel, are natural developments of the original faith. If otherwise, the prophets are personalities as inexplicable as Abraham himself, and their teaching is indeed "as great a psychological and moral miracle as any of the miracles recorded in Scripture."¹

We do not get rid of the difficulty by bringing the origin of monotheism a little nearer to ourselves. The monotheistic idea in whatever age it emerged was miraculous, or, as described by Prof. Max Müller long ago,² it was "a special Divine revelation." This is the theory clearly formulated and advanced in the Bible. In it, we are confronted at the very outset by the difference

¹ Robertson, *The Early Religion of Israel*, "first edition," p. 165.

² *Semitic Monotheism: Clippings from a German Workshop*, vol. i. p. 373.

between natural and supernatural religion—between general and special revelation. The immense superiority of the Bible to all other sacred books is universally admitted; for the more they are examined and compared with it, the more clearly shines out the fact, that “though the belief in Deity in some form or another is universal in humanity, saving knowledge of Deity is only to be found in the Hebrew Scriptures.” While every other religion, however pure it may have been in some stage of its history, inevitably declined into superstition, and was eventually abandoned by the higher class of minds, the religion of the Hebrews, against their natural disposition, went on developing in its higher representatives purer faith and worthier worship. The authors of the Hebrew Bible believed that this was due to progressive Divine revelations of the truth otherwise inaccessible to the human mind. The Bible professes to record the unfolding of that revelation—special as distinguished from the general—originally communicated in nature and in the constitution of man. The Bible implies and demands the acknowledgment of this universal and primeval revelation, but it will not allow us to regard its own revelation as the natural outgrowth of it. So the religion of the Bible is not the religion of the natural man in a higher stage of development. It is a new and distinct dispensation designed to educate man’s spiritual instincts, purify his natural conceptions and beliefs, and prepare him by ever enlarging disclosures for that manifestation in Christ which has sufficed ever since to sustain him in

his conflict with doubt respecting his origin and his destiny.¹

We are not involved in the discussion of the various theories as to the authorship and construction of the Pentateuch. We examine it, just as we do any other sacred books, in order to ascertain what are the religious conceptions and beliefs contained in it, and what is the purpose which it was designed to serve. It is a composite book, in which at least two streams of narrative, clearly definable by phraseology, style, and spirit, are combined;² but no one will call it a collection of fragments thrown carelessly together. It is an organic production, conceived upon one design, and exhibiting a natural relation of all the parts to each other and to the whole. That it contains very ancient materials all will admit, and when we apprehend how, and to what high ends, these have been manipulated, we feel that the man or set of men "who devised and carried out to so logical a conclusion the plan of it, if tried by the standard of human genius, must have been great men." They have neither disclosed extraordinary secrets, nor satisfied speculative curiosity; they have attempted neither to write history, nor to expound science, in the sense in which these things are understood by us. Their narratives often refer to insignificant persons and events never alluded to by the ordinary historian, and they wrote for a people to

¹ Comp. Boedder, *Natural Theology*, pp. 2, 3, quoted by Prof. Dickson in his examination of Prof. M. Müller's *Refer-*

ences to Miracles, pp. 10, 11.

² Driver, *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, third edition, pp. 109-114.

whom scientific explanations of physical problems would have been unintelligible. Their language is popular and poetic, but their purpose is that of the prophet, for they have recorded the first unfoldings of an ever-enlarging revelation of a Divine purpose of mercy for all mankind. So in the very beginning of their work human evil and Divine good, man's sin and God's salvation confront each other. These two facts are constantly kept before us, and round them as the two poles of an axis the whole Bible revolves. Its one theme appears to be the misery of alienation from God by reason of human sin, the blessedness of reconciliation to God, by means of Divine grace. "From the sin of the first man to the entire ruin of the Hebrew nation, there is recorded a dark unbroken tale of evil; but, above it, unbroken to the coming of Christ, there is a series of announcements of salvation which commences at the very point at which the development of evil is recorded to have begun,"¹ and to make clear to us the foundation and origin of this salvation, and to indicate one or two stages in the revelation of it, the Pentateuch was produced.

So though, like some other sacred books, it begins with a cosmogony, it is in order to enunciate truth which had eluded the grasp of the Hindoo and Chaldean sages, yea of the wisest men in all other religions. To them matter was eternal, the material was confounded with the spiritual universe, and gods and men and all things were evolving from, or being resolved into, the surging

¹ Ackerman, *The Christian Element in Plato*, p. 219.

deep of chaos.¹ In the Bible, matter in all its forms is the creature of One who is eternally distinct from it, and who, as its self-existent and supreme controller, moulds and disposes it to His own purposes. In like manner it carefully separates the truth of the creation of man in the image after the likeness of his Maker, from the conception universal in heathendom of man as physically descended from deity. Then laying hold of one of the universal institutions of mankind, the Sabbath—which, though associated in other religions with lunar phases, may correctly be said to date from creation, seeing that the necessity for it is a fact in the constitution of man—it connects with it the great truths of a completed creation, and of the necessity for constant recreation for man's spiritual nature, and so "it makes the Sabbath a great educator of the Hebrew people and of mankind." Similarly treated is the other primeval and more extensively diffused institution in which we are interested. Sacrifice as we have seen is in all religions taken for granted as a natural part of the economy of life, for it is as much assumed that men will worship God by sacrifice as that they will worship Him at all. In the Pentateuch the universal fact of sacrifice begins to be divinely interpreted, and we begin to apprehend how and for what ends it has been enlisted in the service of God. In all other religions it is efficacious as having power with the gods to prevail; it originates in man and is offered to deity;

¹ Schræder, *Cuneiform Inscriptions and the Old Testament* (1883), on Gen. i.; *Records of the Past* (second series), 1888, i. p. 133 seq.

but from the Pentateuch we learn that sacrifice is effectual, not from any virtue in it, or in them who administer it, but only as a divinely sanctioned means of grace through which God mediates to those who have faith in Him, His forgiveness and blessing.

It is significant that in the Pentateuch sacrifice meets us in immediate connexion with the record of a fall from a state of loving, self-forgetful communion with his Creator, due to man's own perversity. Realising his alienation because of sin, man everywhere and always is afraid of and would hide himself from any manifestation of God. In God's presence he is convicted of sin by his very devices to cover his shame on account of it. This is the doctrine of Genesis, which universal experience has confirmed; and intimately associated with this doctrine is another peculiar to the Bible, namely, that though man has alienated himself from his Creator, the Creator abides eternally faithful to His rebellious creatures. In language symbolic and hieroglyphic, the Creator is described as instructing man that part of the penalty due to his faithlessness must be endured. It is required for his correction, so as to render compact with evil impossible to a nature created originally good. But to encourage him to continue the conflict with evil, final victory over it is promised; and as a pledge of the Divine forgiveness and help, the Lord covers his shame, not by the fig-leaves of his own devising, but by "*coats of skin.*"

The language is not only metaphorical but anthropomorphic, for because of the limitations of human

nature and language, the truth to be conveyed would otherwise be unintelligible by us. There is no anthropomorphism however in the truth itself. God is represented as meeting a want which man had attempted but failed to supply. Man had succeeded in clothing his nakedness, in finding a covering for his body, but he could not succeed in covering his shame because of sin. Neither instinct nor reason could show him a way of quieting his accusing conscience. That was peculiarly God's act, and any action of man's required for its accomplishment was the result of a Divine suggestion made to a creature formed to know God and to receive communications from Him. The expression, "God covered upon them," is remarkable, for it constantly recurs under the Law to describe the design of offerings which were specially intended to atone for guilt. The inference seems logical, and almost inevitable, that the authors of the Pentateuch desire to teach that the first dawning upon the human conscience of the truth that with God is forgiveness, was coeval with the sacrifice of innocent life on behalf of the guilty. And so there was not only supplied "a sacrificial language";¹ there was also suggested "a basis of worship" of the unchangeable God by a creature self-condemned for having changed his relation to Him. Man must abandon his own devices for undoing the effects of his sin and for regaining his lost fellowship with God. He must adopt the Divine method, and follow the Divine leading to whatever consummation it tended. Relief for a guilty

¹ Fairbairn, *Typology*, vol. 1, pp. 440-45.

conscience could not be obtained in any of the ways in which man is prone to seek it. By no act of his own, not even the substitution of the fruit of his body, can he find a covering for the sin of his soul. In all such endeavours the life offered was involved in the common transgression and penalty. Peace of mind would only ensue from faith in a sinless life substituted for a sinful one; in the clothing of innocence for the covering of shame.¹

If this be the truth which the authors of Genesis sought to exhibit, it follows naturally that the first sacrifice recorded by them should bear distinctly impressed upon it the Divine approbation. It is referred to in the epistle to the Hebrews, where we have clearly stated the Christian interpretation of its significance. It would be very hazardous to assert that it was so regarded in primeval times, but we may safely conclude that when the Pentateuch in its present form was first produced, and probably in the very ancient times when the fragments preserved in the early chapters of Genesis found

¹ Compare Cave, *Scriptural Doctrine of Sacrifice*, p. 39.

In some heathen sacrifices the skin of the victim was used to clothe the idol, and sometimes also the worshipper, so that he might be invested with its efficacy and have its life identified with his own. Professor Robertson Smith finds in such heathen rites the origin of the metaphors, "robe of righteousness," "garments of salvation" (*Religion of*

the Semites, pp. 404, 440 *seq.*). The authors of the Hebrew Bible would not assume so polytheistic an idea in their spiritual religion. They founded the metaphors on the official attire of the priests, pure white linen without any leopard skin, such as was worn by the Egyptian priesthood. From the same source St. John derived his figure of the white robes of the saints, for white is the livery of heaven, the symbol of holiness.

their way into the stream of universal tradition, the belief prevailed that a sacrifice presented after the manner and in the spirit of Abel's was acceptable to God. Of that method or way of approaching to God in worship it could be said, as it was said of the Sabbath, "the Lord sanctified it and blessed it." Turning the Divine suggestion of forgiveness into a ground of personal obligation and privilege, Abel brought his offering. Interpreted by later legislation, it could not be classified among the sin-offerings (*chata-ath*), nor among the offerings of consecration (*oloth*), nor among the peace-offerings (*shelamim*), which were in part sacramental. It was eucharistic (*mincha*), but it expressed the thankfulness of a sinful and penitent man. It was the only offering by which he could indicate his sense of helplessness and sinfulness, and in which he could embody his appeal to the faithfulness of his Creator, to whose fellowship he longed to be restored. The New Testament comment upon the action was that "by faith," that is, in trustful surrender to God's majesty and mercy, he "offered a much more excellent sacrifice than Cain."¹ He confided in God so thoroughly, and he longed so earnestly to be made one with Him, that though he may not have conceived of his victim as his representative, he yet, in it or with it, surrendered himself to God. Now, even according to the narrative, Cain did not offer in faith but in discontent. Though the act was religious, he was influenced in performing it by a sinful feeling which was waiting at the door of his heart for

¹ Hebrews xi. 4.

its opportunity against him, as a wild beast lurks for its prey. The interpretation given in the Talmud is that he did not offer his best as Abel piously offered his choicest, but that, taking without selection whatever fell to his hand, he rendered rather than offered it. It was the sacrifice of a heathen, who expected something in return, and was offended because it was not given. The offerer was unacceptable, for he had in him none of the spirit of true worship, and so his offering, as expressing no self-surrender, could not be divinely acknowledged.¹

All through the Pentateuch there is a silent but powerful condemnation of heathen rites and beliefs in the contrasts which are designedly presented to them by ordinances which are exhibited in it as divinely authorised and sealed. So, against the rejected heathen sacrifice of Cain, there is set forth the accepted sacrifice of Abel. It may be said to summarise the faith which underlay the Hebrew religion, and which made sacrifice indispensable in its worship. It is the truth propounded and maintained by the prophets and psalmists,² who, while denouncing the sacrifices of the wicked as abominable, and while railing at hypocrites who dared to substitute offerings for personal devotion, always upheld pure sacrifice as a very valuable means of grace. Our Lord Himself acknowledged the sacrificial law as binding. He partook of the Passover, commanded the healed lepers to offer the sacrifice required for their cleansing, and told his disciples to seek reconciliation with each other

¹ Cave, *Script. Doct. of Sacr.*, p. 49; Maurice, *Sacrifice*, p. 14.

² Psalms li. 20, 21; Isaiah lvi. 7; Jeremiah xxxiii. 17, 18.

before bringing their gifts to God's altar. The Kabalists taught that the advent of Messiah would render sacrifice unnecessary, for He would effect all that could be obtained by means of it, but till then, when reverently and fervently offered, it effected much. Without a proper sacrifice God could not be worshipped becomingly. Without trustful surrender to the Divine mercy in the sacrificer, his sacrifice, however precious, would be worthless, but with this surrender it availed to please God and satisfy his own conscience. So in the beginning of the Hebrew Bible we read that "to Abel *and to his offering* God had respect," and in the close of it, it is predicted of the Messenger of the Covenant that he "shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, *that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.* Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord, as in the days of old, and as in former years."¹

¹ Malachi iii. 4.

According to Magee (*Dissert. and Discourses*, vol. i. pp. 53, 126, 259) Cain, the first-born of the Fall, exhibits the first fruits of the arrogance and self-sufficiency of reason. "He is the first deist displaying in his rejection of the revelation the same spirit which rejected the sacrifice of Christ, on the ground that confession of sin and repentance from it is all that is required for reconciliation." It is a fact clearly established by many quotations from Hebrew and heathen religious literature,

that if deity be pleased with simple repentance, no man has ever been able by repentance to appease conscience and overcome his remorse or condemnation of himself. At the same time, though man has everywhere attempted by expiatory rites to do so, the result has universally and invariably been that expressed by Porphyry, "that there was wanting some effectual method of delivering men's souls which no sect of philosophy has ever yet found." (Augustine, *De Civ. Dei*, Bk. x. ch. xxxii.; Outram, *De Sacrificiis*, ch. xx.)

The first recorded sacrifice is the prelude to the more definite and elaborate types of sacrifice in Mosaic and Levitical worship. The very next mention of sacrifice in the Bible seems more clearly to exhibit its original intention. Noah's sacrifice, consisting of selections from all animals afterwards recognised by the Law as fit for sacrifice, was offered upon an altar, and consumed by fire; whereas Abel's was brought "before the Lord." It was not personal like Abel's, for it represented the sacrifice of the remnant of the whole human race that had experienced a wonderful redemption from universal judgment. In Noah and his house, humanity had been saved, and so from a sense of overwhelming debt, they brought abundance of offerings. Deeply sensible however of unworthiness, and conscious of the evil propensities of a nature which they had inherited and shared with those who had perished, they sacrificed after a manner which seemed to anticipate the ritual of the sin-offering under the Law. Thus, although in the strict sense of the word no sacrifice of atonement is traceable in patriarchal times, it may be correctly said that this sacrifice of thanksgiving "exhibits an elementary and symbolic confession of the necessity for it."¹ And naturally so; for it was offered by those who having seen the severity of the Divine judgment upon sin, drew near with confession of sin and with thanksgiving for their experience of the Divine mercy.

As such it is represented as having been graciously

¹ Cave, *Scripture Doctrine of Sacrifice*, p. 46; Maurice, *Sacrifice*, pp. 26-28; Kalisch, *Com. on Genesis*, pp. 178, 179; Oehler, *Old Test. Theol.*, vol. i. p. 394.

accepted. Pleased with their penitence, submission, and devotion, expressed in their sacrifice, the Lord is said to have "smelled a sweet savour"—literally "an odour of rest," of satisfaction.¹ This expression seems ruder and more archaic than the phrase, "The Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering,"² but we may be sure that in the mind of the writer it had nothing of the idolatrous taint which elsewhere attaches to it, when it is said that the gods, like hungry men, were pleased with the fumes of sacrifice. The most refined writers do not hesitate to employ popular sayings to express spiritual conceptions. The same phrase is used by the Hebrew prophets and the Apostles of Christ,³ who must have abominated its old heathen significance. Genesis, like most antique literary works, is more poetic and pictorial than prosaic and historical; and, like all religious books, it must be read with some exercise of the imagination. If we allow the man of science to speak of the "horns of the moon," and are never misled by a Scriptural reference to the "wings of the morning," "the eyelids of the dawn," we need not infer from the use of this phrase that the writer meant to express by it the Divine satisfaction with the materials of the sacrifice.⁴ And so, whereas the narrative of the Fall ends with a *curse* pronounced upon the whole earth, that of the Deluge closes with a *blessing* upon Noah and his seed, and a Divine promise that the earth should no more suffer for the sins of man.⁵

¹ Compare Zephan. iii. 17, expressing Jehovah's delight in Jerusalem, "*He shall rest in His love*"; Gen. viii. 21. ² Gen. iv. 4.

³ Amos v. 21, 22; Phil. iv. 18.

⁴ Kalisch, *Com. Gen.*, pp. 200-1; Lange, *Com. Gen.*, pp. 323-4.

⁵ Gen. viii. 20-22, and ix. 1-7.

In the same popular language, God is represented as having "established a covenant¹ with Noah." It is the first time we meet the word in Scripture, and we find at once, that while the word is one common to the speech of all men, the idea suggested by it is new and peculiar to the Bible. Elsewhere the invariable idea of a covenant is that of a bargain or compact between parties, fulfilled and expressed by mutual pledges; but in this—the first of several subsequent "covenants" recorded in the Pentateuch—God alone acted, and the pledges were proffered by Him without any demand on His part for a counterpledge. The use of the word marks an enlarged revelation of the Divine nature as merciful and gracious which was communicated to man, and also of the great truth which like a thread of gold runs through all Scripture, binding all the parts of it together, *that the Divine and the human must combine and co-operate in evolving God's eternal purpose of redemption.* The language employed in describing it was also a revelation of the never-failing Divine government of nature, whose universal constancy is unalterable whether by the wickedness or by the entreaties of men.² This is a truth which directly contradicts the belief which is universal in heathen religions, that the government of the world and of man is unstable, ever changing with the caprice of the powers that control them. Another contradiction to heathen doctrine and practice is found in the renewal in even more energetic terms of the original dominion of man over the animals.³ In the

¹ Genesis ix. 9.

² Genesis ix. 10-14.

³ Genesis ix. 2-3.

lower religions, the fear of the beasts, as we have seen, is too much upon man, who finds in them his kinsmen and his gods; but the Hebrews made in the image of God—in respect of their moral and spiritual nature—were instructed to use freely for their necessities and for their comfort the beasts which never were created after the likeness of man. All that were wholesome could be slaughtered by any individual without the consent of the community, not only for religious, but for domestic and personal purposes. The importance generally attached among ancient peoples to the blood as the seal of life was recognised, but even here the Hebrew custom was separated from and elevated above the heathen one. For “the flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat,”¹ that is, the eating of not raw flesh but living flesh was rigorously forbidden, afterwards on the penalty of death. The animal had to be slaughtered before it could be eaten, even in sacrifice. Then all slaying of men, whether in anger or for sustenance, or for sacrifice, was declared a crime against the majesty of God,² which would incur the whole severity of the Divine wrath. Man’s blood could only be shed when God’s law of justice demanded it, for only He who originally gave it, had the right to resume or take it away.³

These tacit but unmistakable contradictions to heathen beliefs and rites, surely indicate that the

¹ Genesis ix. 4.

² Genesis ix. 5-6.

³ Trumbull, *The Blood Covenant*, p. 214; Kalisch, *Com. on*

Genesis, p. 217 *seq.*; Keil and Delitzsch, *Com. on Pent. i.* p. 150 *seq.*; Kurtz, *Hist. of the Old Covenant*, i. p. 104.

religious institutions of the Hebrews were "not common to all their neighbours," in respect of their essential significance and intention. Even when external resemblances occur, they always cover ideas and purposes directly distinct and contrasted. In Genesis there seems to be reflected the difference between the natural development of the human race, and its supernatural or Divine education. Though starting from a common origin upon a common plane, mankind is represented as having very early diverged into two separate streams, which tended in very different directions. The Cainites, proceeding on the level of nature, and guided by human reason, are seen advancing towards material civilisation;¹ the Sethites yielding their religious instinct to Divine control, are being led upward to purer and more spiritual conceptions of faith and duty.² By the comingling and confusion of the two streams,³ the race is represented as having so degenerated, and as having so corrupted the world, that both had to be purified by universal judgment. In the family of Noah the righteous, human history was renewed, but even after the Deluge, and under a dispensation of mercy, man's proneness to obstinate self-assertion broke out. Nimrod succeeded "the giants" of the older world in his defiant attempt to resist the operation of the law of providence.⁴ Yet in this case the rebels were not divinely destroyed; they were allowed "to shatter themselves against universal and unchangeable order," withdraw themselves

¹ Genesis iv. 16-24.

² Genesis iv. 25, 26.

³ Genesis vi. 1-8.

⁴ Genesis xi. 1-9.

from the "covenant" which in Noah and his seed united mankind with God, and go each his own way to their own quarter and destiny. The alliance, however, between God and the human race is represented as being maintained by a succession of "covenants," or ever-enlarging revelations, individual, national, and universal in their scope. The intention of all of them is to instruct men that salvation from the inherited curse can only be obtained by trustful dependence upon the Divine mercy and hearty acceptance of the Divine method. So while the blessing of material sustenance and natural safety was in Noah assured to all the race, the religious blessing or promise, still very indefinite, was restricted to one man and his seed.¹ It is the first intimation of a Divine purpose of redemption for all mankind, and it was revealed to one, who, in direct contrast to Nimrod—the type of unbelieving humanity—showed himself like Abel and Noah a man of unlimited obedience and trustful submission to God. Abraham therefore became the clear type and head of all the faithful, the first representative of the Church, as divinely elected and saved out of a fallen race, that through it all nations might eventually be called and blessed.²

In the stories concerning this patriarch and his successors, as in a series of word-pictures, there is pre-figured the ideal character and aims of humanity as the people of God. We behold them, not making history nor founding a kingdom like the heroes of other nations, but prophesying in action of the kingdom in

¹ Genesis xii. 2.

² Kalisch, *Com. on Genesis*, p. 329.

which God alone is to rule.¹ So as regards worship, Abraham from the first appears as a builder of altars, at each of which he "*invoked the name of the Lord,*"² thus conjoining with the material mode of worship the higher worship of prayer, of which Seth is said to have been the first prophet.³ He did not scruple to rear them upon the sites of old idolatries,⁴ and under trees associated with very cruel superstitious rites,⁵ for the Divine revelations which he had received at them converted them into sacred spots. In the same toleration of one who was animated by a spiritual religion, and was ready to acknowledge the Divine working in every pure mind, he accepted the blessing of one of a succession of priest-kings who appeared to have ruled in Salem down to the wars of the Conquest. For the blessing was not given in the heathen sense, as dispensed by the arbitrary will of a soothsayer able to curse as Balaam was supposed to do, but in the Bible sense of dependence upon God's will. In respect of religion, Melchizedec occupied towards Abraham a relation similar to that which Jethro of Midian occupied towards Moses. He could invoke prosperity upon the deliverer of his people and his territory in the name of the Giver of it. "Blessed be Abraham of the Most High God, and blessed be the Most High God which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand."⁶

¹ Driver, *Sermons and Discourses on the Old Testament*, p. 127.

² Genesis xii. 7, and xiii. 4.

³ Genesis iv. 26.

⁴ Bethel (Genesis xiii. 3).

⁵ Genesis xii. 6.

⁶ Genesis xiv. 19-20. The author of Genesis may have had in view the *prophetic* import of

Afterwards, in a mood of great depression, he is represented as receiving "the blessing" of the Most High God in a very solemn ceremonial in which sacrifices were offered, not spontaneously as were those of Abel and Noah, but because in answer to his hesitating doubt as to the fulfilment of the Divine promise¹ he had been commanded to prepare them. The victims, limited in number, represented such as were afterwards accounted fit for the altar when the land, then to be guaranteed, was in actual possession of his descendants. They were disposed of according to the ritual of a federal sacrifice, well understood in ancient times. The animals were cut in twain,² and the birds, though not divided, were placed over against each other. In the heathen rites the contracting parties passed between the bisected carcasses, indicating what ought to be their penalty if either of them violated the compact. In some cases they joined in eating the sacrifice and in drinking

this meeting of the priest-king of a town destined to be the royal seat of Abraham's seed, and the centre of the worship of Jehovah the Most High. Of its symbolic import as interpreted by the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, he of course could have no conception. Through misapprehension of the use made of it in Hebrews from the days of Clement and Cyprian downwards, the interview has been made more mysterious than there is any occasion for. The emphasis in Hebrews is laid upon his titles "King of

righteousness," "King of peace"; also upon his combination of offices as King-priest, and upon the fact that unlike the Levitical priests, whose genealogies were carefully preserved, neither his father's nor his mother's name was recorded. —Clement, *Strom.*, ii. 5, 21, and iv. 25, § 163; Westcott, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 200 seq.; *Records of the Past*, vol. v. p. 54; Nicol, *Recent Explorations in Bible Lands*, p. 32.

¹ Genesis xv. 2.

² Jeremiah xxxiv. 18.

blood drawn from each other's veins, in token that through this communion in sacrifice they were mystically one.¹ In this rite the Divine condemnation of all such extravagances was marked by their absence. Though called a covenant, it was really a Divine revelation. So the command to institute it was not "prepare for us," but "take for Me"; and of its consummation, when the symbol of the Divine presence passed between the bisected sacrifices, the patriarch was only a passive spectator. Purified thus from all taint of physiolatry, a very common ancient rite is represented as having been once transferred from the religion of nature to that of a spirit: to allay the doubt of a believing man, and to be the pledge of the Divine faithfulness, and of his own election from the condition of a servant into that of a free agent and friend of God.²

Through the successive revelations which had been made to him, the patriarch had reached a point in his spiritual history, when this clearer and deeper insight into the Divine government was felt to involve him in peculiarly sublime responsibilities. He was the witness to the world of God's accessibility to man, and of man's privilege of freely communicating with Him. And such a vocation carried with it the overpowering

¹ The phrase *Kawah-Berith* = "cut a covenant," in Greek *ὄρκια τέμνειν*, and in Latin *foedus icere*, or *ferire* or *percutere*, expresses the chief feature of the ceremonial. The drinking of blood, either by itself or mingled with wine, was in many cases an essential part

of the rite.—Herod., ii. 139, and iii. 8. Sallust, *Catil.*, ch. xxii. Valerius Maximus, ix. 11. For many other authorities see Sykes, *Essay on Sacrifice*, p. 235 seq.

² Kurtz, *Hist. of the Old Covenant*, vol. i. p. 235.

obligation of walking in "the light of God," and of conforming his life to God's will.¹ So at once in deep reverence and submission he received in his body the seal of his call.² In the light of what we know as to the relation of the Bible to the primitive institutions of mankind, we need not be surprised to find in circumcision another instance of a widely prevailing rite being adapted, reformed and applied to quite a new and special purpose. The external form was preserved, but it was used to signify and convey religious ideas which, in their purity and comprehensiveness, were absolutely original.³ By circumcision, at puberty the savage was initiated into the immunities and obligations of his tribe through incorporation with its god, that he might be strong with its generative strength. Among the civilised nations of antiquity various reasons were assigned for it at different periods of their history; but in Egypt, the land with which the patriarch and his descendants were most intimately associated, it came to be regarded as the exclusive badge of the proud prestige of the priestly caste. Among the Hebrews the rite was performed at the earliest period at which an infant could endure it; and if the author of Genesis is to be the interpreter of its significance, it was the solemn seal of a covenant in which a man's whole life, from birth to death, was to be brought under the control of the Most High, to whose nature his must conform. The impulse to receive or submit to it must

¹ Genesis xvii. 1.

² Genesis xvii. 9-15.

³ "Commentary on Genesis,"
The Speaker's Com., vol. i. p. 121.

have been very deeply rooted in their national character ; for all mutilation of the body in the service of religion was abhorrent to the Israelites, and yet, while everywhere else it fell into disuse, this rite seemed to acquire as peculiarly sacred a stronger hold over them. In later ages their conquerors, like Antiochus Epiphanes, rigorously but vainly interdicted it, in the hope of weakening thereby their attachment to their faith.¹ Even then it was secretly practised, till it could be publicly practised without restriction. The Jews never forced it upon others, and they condemned as fanatical any attempt to do so ; but they claimed it as the Divine stamp of their sure descent from one who gave himself to the service of God in such a spirit of loving devotion as to win for himself the pre-eminent designation of "the friend of God."²

This title, applied to Abraham in other portions of Scripture,³ though not specially mentioned in the narrative of his life, probably refers to the very ancient and once widely prevailing rite of blood covenant, which still survives over a wide area of the world. In this ceremony, two persons by having tasted blood drawn from each other's veins, or by having mingled it together, were held to have sealed a compact closer than brotherhood, and more binding than marriage. "A

¹ 1 Maco. i. 51-53, ii. 46 ; Joseph., *Antiq.*, xiii. 9, 1.

² The contention as to the essential sanctity of circumcision which divided the Christian Church, though founded upon the truth

of salvation by grace, was probably due to the fact that originally it was the pledge of Abraham's faith.

³ 2 Chron. xx. 7 ; Isaiah xli. 5 ; James ii. 23.

friend," that is a blood-made friend, "sticketh closer than a brother."¹ A friendship so contracted involved a commingling of lives so real as to be described only in the proverb quoted by Aristotle, "one soul in two bodies." The blood-covenanted must give themselves so thoroughly over to and for each other, as to give their lives for each other's defence, and to assume their obligations when dead. If this be the feeling lying at the root of circumcision, it reveals the piety of Abraham as sublimely above the highest level ever attained in ancient religions. The conception of the rite recalls a childish and immature stage of spiritual experience; and yet it implies a worship of God in love—a service of God for God's own sake—unparalleled save by the devotion which made one of the later psalmists say—what never was said by a Greek to his most beautiful god—"Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee."² So, remembering that Abraham was not educated by the revelation of centuries, and that his religious conceptions were not as pure as were those of Isaiah or even of Moses, we shall not be surprised at his willingness in a time of temptation to sacrifice his well-beloved son, who had been born to a highly privileged destiny.

It was an action which, however it was suggested, has nothing at all like it recorded in the history of religion. All other so-called parallels are of sacrifices intended to appease or conciliate offended or capricious deities; but in proof of his limitless devotion to his friend of

¹ Prov. xviii. 24.

² Psalm lxxiii. 25.

friends, this man was ready to offer up a life which—though according to the ideas of the old world it was indeed his to dispose of—was far dearer to him than his own. The author of Genesis very properly refers the origination of the idea to God, for the impulse to such an act of absolute loving surrender could only be drawn from a Divine source. Moreover, according to his narrative, God did so overrule it as to accept what was good and spiritual in it, while yet He condemned and rejected what in it was heathen and superstitious. The resignation and devotion of father and son were accepted, for in their hearts the sacrifice was complete, but the formal act was effectually and for ever repelled. The Hebrews as a people had thus early deeply engraven upon their religion the conviction that neither the direst necessity nor the intensest piety could justify human sacrifice in the worship of God. Yet, in the cruel times of religious persecution, in the spirit of their forefathers' faith, they were enabled to witness the frightful sufferings of their beloved children really immolated for the glory of God. Undoubtedly, therefore, from a very distant past, and from the heart of a very materially expressed religion, was derived the impulse which made Christian fathers consent to the martyrdom of their daughters for the faith ; and which still sustains Christian mothers when their sons are sacrificed in battle for the defence of their country. It was neither St. Paul nor Isaiah nor Moses who was the first preacher of the truth that we must be ready at the call of duty to yield our dearest treasures of

affection in the love of God ; it was Abraham who, at what he believed to be the call of God, withheld not his son—his only son.¹

Thus in the forefront of our Bible, clearer than was ever given in the typical sacrifices of the law, or even in the predictions of the prophets, we have a foreshadowing—"an analogue rather than a type"—of God's supreme sacrifice for man. In the light of Calvary we see how naturally it fits into this place in the history of revelation, and how, through the shining of this foregleam, the sacrifices of the law, and the ordinances which were written for our instruction, become intelligible and significant to us. Our Lord said once, "Abraham rejoiced to see my day : and he saw it, and was glad."² In a very true sense he did see it when the truth flashed in upon his soul, that by no sacrifice of his own, not even of his beloved son, could he attain to that oneness with God which he longed for. What he really apprehended in that eternal moment of perfect surrender and consequent illumination, only Christ, who used the words, could tell. In Christ, however, we can see that the prophetic significance of one utterance of the patriarch, which, like many such, may have soared far beyond his meaning, has been amply fulfilled. The "Lord" did "provide a Lamb for an offering," and in "the mount of the Lord it was seen,"³ that He who spared the son of His friend, spared not His only begotten and well-beloved son, who gave up Himself for

¹ Stanley, *History of Jewish Church*, vol. i. pp. 45-51.

² John viii. 56.

³ Genesis xxii. 8, 14.

our sakes. He heard the cry in the agony, "Father, if it be possible," and yet He suffered Him to make His soul an offering for sin, to the end that a race, alienated because of sin, might through the power of this passion of Divine love, be vanquished and transformed into friends, all one in the Son, as He is eternally one with the Father.¹

After Abraham's day the references in Genesis to patriarchal worship, though interesting as reflecting very ancient customs, do not exhibit any typical significance. They are quiet but cogent testimonies, however, that the patriarchs were not "legendary heroes," fictitious personages invented in later ages to glorify Israel² as their distinguished ancestors. They certainly are not represented as heroes, for in the narrative they are described as not only falling short of the standard of Israel, but as occasionally appearing to great disadvantage when judged according to the standard of the heathen. In social conduct they are represented as conforming to the people among whom they lived. They build altars, set up and smear pillars, slaughter victims when they make a compact, and plant trees to witness to an alliance that has been contracted, or to a dispute that has been settled. They do not hesitate to invoke the name of the Lord under sacred oaks or

¹ John xvii. 23.

² Montefiore, *Hibbert Lecture*, p. 12. See a very interesting note for his authorities. Against him we may cite Renan: "The prophecies of the ninth century

have their root in the ancient ideal of patriarchal life, an ideal partly created by the imagination, but one which had been a reality in the distant past of the tribe of Israel."—*History of the People of Israel*, vol. i. p. 11.

terebinths, and at some of the chief centres of idolatrous worship. They are described as doing freely what was afterward prohibited by the law and denounced by the prophets on account of the superstitions and idolatries associated with the rites with which the functions were celebrated.¹ Their doing so is very natural, if Genesis reflects an actual condition of things; but if not, then the book of Genesis is a marvel of fiction, and "must take very high rank indeed among the literary forgeries of mankind." In like manner, while sacrificing upon all occasions, there is no differentiation of the sacrifices according to the later classification of the Law. They are designated promiscuously by names which afterwards are carefully employed to specify particular sacrifices. Their dominant motives for sacrifice are gratitude and reverential desire for the favour of God; and though penitence may be assumed as mingled with the actions, no trace is found in any of them either of an atoning sacrifice or of any presentation of the victim's blood, although its sanctity is declared in the Noachic Law. The ideas of the later ritual are all there, but they have not germinated. The patriarchs could not understand the full significance of their religious actions; but they did know that their desire and endeavours to approach to God in a certain way were not resented, but accepted.² And yet, though they had not even a vague presentiment of the truth, which only

¹ Deut. xii. 3, and xvi. 21; *Bible*, Art. "Sacrifice," vol. iii. Amos v. 5, and viii. 13, 14; p. 1076; Cave, *Scripture Doctrine of Sacrifice*, p. 54; Sykes, *Essay* Isaiah lvii. 8; Jeremiah ii. 20.

² Smith, *Dictionary of the on Sacrifice*, p. 270.

maturer experience could awaken, the dispensation which they represented is now seen to have been essential in preparing the way for the Mosaic, just as, without the Mosaic, the later or Levitical stage in the history of revelation would have been impossible.

The patriarchal stage is marked by the Divine revelation of "El Shaddai," mighty in power and rich in blessing, immovable by magic or by bribe, but most accessible and helpful to faith. In the Mosaic stage "El Shaddai" is known and worshipped as "Jehovah," the Eternal, the educator of a peculiar people into a holy nation, to the end that in their obedience and purity and faith all nations might be blessed. The record of this stage begins with the book of Exodus, which, though not claiming to have been written by Moses, does profess to be Mosaic, as dealing with Mosaic times and institutions. It describes the founding of the religion of Jehovah; and it is not an unwarrantable assumption that the first prophet of that religion may originally have formulated those sections of the book which profess to exhibit "the Covenant" as the base of the religion, and to regulate its earliest worship. The revelation of Jehovah was closely associated with the promulgation of the Moral Law, as the germ from which the Mosaic religion and worship unfolded.¹ Exhibited first in outline of all that man owes to God and to his fellow-man, on two tables of stone, that outline was filled up in the original small "Book of the Covenant,"²—"perhaps the most precious archaic literary fragment which the human

¹ Spencer, *De Leg. Rit.*, i. 4.

² Exod. xx.-xxiii.

race possesses." Upon the basis of prohibiting idolatry and all that tends to it; of defending the individual from violation of his person and property; and of declaring the moral responsibilities devolving upon every member of a nation in covenant with the Lord God—one in His nature and holy in His character—the whole edifice of Hebrew legislation, as we have it in this latest edition of the Pentateuch, was gradually and steadily erected, at "sundry times and in divers manners," to suit the ever-altering circumstances of an increasing and advancing people.

As the whole system of Hebrew legislation, through whatever changes it subsequently passed, rested upon the Moral Law and the original Book of the Covenant, so the whole religion from first to last was inspired by the great fundamental truths there revealed.¹ For the ritual Divine authority was claimed; the Divine voice which proclaimed the Ten Words prescribed the sacrifices, and ordained not only the ministers who should perform them, but the times and places and methods in which they were to be offered. Instead of being supposed to bend the will of deity, which was universally the intention of heathen sacrifices, Hebrew sacrificial worship is represented as proceeding from Jehovah's will, and as designed to set forth and further His gracious purpose for His people. The whole system of Mosaic worship was intended to imprint deeply upon the conscience of an ignorant and idolatrous people the essential truths of the unity and holi-

¹ Kalisch, *Comment. on Exodus*, p. 338 seq.

ness of Jehovah, who desired to reconcile them to Himself and make them a blessing to all nations.¹ It was as symbolic as was the worship of any heathen nation; but the design and tendency of its symbolism were in direct opposition to heathen symbolism; and though it freely employed symbols common to heathenism when it could do so without sin, it was for the purpose of guarding against heathen superstition and idolatry by infusing into them a new spiritual significance, and devoting them to high moral ends.²

We have already seen how in Genesis the primitive and widely prevailing observances of the Sabbath and of Circumcision were transformed into symbols of moral and universal truth. In Exodus they are represented as the principal institutions of the Mosaic religion, and in that book special prominence is assigned to the Passover, as of equal importance with them. The Sabbath in the religion of Moses, and subsequently in the religion of Israel, was the basis of the whole cycle of festivals in the sacred year and of the great festival of the Jubilee. Circumcision in pre-Mosaic times, though implied, does not appear to have been universal or compulsory,³ but in Mosaic legislation it became the indispensable seal of the Covenant. In like manner the Passover was made the essential badge of the consecrated nation. In these institutions we have the sacraments of the Mosaic religion, the sensible signs and seals of the Covenant which Jehovah is represented as having made with His

¹ Mañrico, *Sacrifice*, p. 70.

of Moses, bk. iv. ch. vi. 2.

² Warburton, *Divine Legation*

³ Exodus iv. 24.

people. In Circumcision the sacramental action was personal, and it was performed once in a lifetime; in the Passover it was national, and the ordinance was celebrated once a year;¹ in the Sabbath it was universal, and of weekly recurrence. Of the national sacrament, no slave and no stranger could partake; but the Sabbath originating in the physical and moral necessities of man, was the birthright of all the children of men, and of every animal subdued to their service. So as universal it alone found a place in the universal Moral Law, and at once, with additional significance attached to it, it was assumed by Christianity. The other two signs and seals of the Covenant were transformed into the holiest ordinances of our religion, because the truths which they symbolised are essentially Christian. Indeed, for Christians the Passover will always have a peculiar interest and value, since Christ Himself has so interpreted its predictive significance as to transform a national ordinance into a sacrament for all mankind.

The law of the Passover—though supplementary ordinances regarding it were evidently added repeatedly in the history of the nation—is set forth in Exodus as the first and only law of Moses given in Egypt.² Its antiquity has never been seriously questioned, but it is maintained that the character and purpose of the original rite were very different from the description given of them in the Bible. It is asserted that in very ancient

¹ Kalisch, *Com. on Exodus*, p. 356 seq.

² Herzog, *Encyclopedia*, vol. iii. 1757.

times the Passover marked the consecration of the harvest by the sacrifice of the firstlings common among the surrounding heathen, and that the historical idea of redemption from bondage had till a very late time no place—and even then a very secondary place—in its celebration.¹ It need not be questioned that peculiar sacrifices marked the harvest festivals of all ancient pastoral and agricultural peoples. Solar festivals were celebrated when the sun “passes over” into Aries and ripens the grain; and lunar festivals were also kept at full moon when the last fruit was gathered. Eusebius has employed the word “passover” to designate sacrifices which were commonly offered in the ancient world to secure the success of a host setting forth on a military expedition.² In later times, moreover, when Deuteronomy came to be written, it is evident that the Passover had become connected with the harvest festival. By that time a prominent feature in its celebration was the use of unleavened bread hastily made of new meal ground from the parched corn of the first-gathered sheaf. It may be taken for granted that this and several other usages gradually gathered around it in subsequent ages, but there is no possibility of mistaking the fact that the author of the last edition of the book of Exodus gives a very different account of its origin and intention from the description which has been given us of the Arabian firstling sacrifice.

¹ Wellhausen, *Proleg.*, ch. iii. p. 83 seq.

² Philo, *Vit. Moscs.*, iii. 686;

Euseb., *Ecol. Hist.*, viii. 32; Professor Robertson Smith, *Religion of the Semites*, pp. 387 seq., 445 seq.

Even if it be assumed that the Passover was suggested by that heathen rite, and that in one account of it preserved in Exodus reference is made to it in the dedication of the firstlings, we shall find upon examination that the contrasts between the two are more numerous and startling than the resemblances. Coincident in the season at which it was instituted—in the fact that it was partaken of in great haste during night, by worshippers clothed not in festal garments but in ordinary attire, and that nothing of it was left until the morning—the Passover ritual differed from the heathen one in many essential particulars. The victim, unlike that of the heathen, was not sacrosanct, and instead of being devoured alive, was carefully slaughtered. Its blood was not drunk by the worshipper, but sprinkled upon the lintel and doorpost of each house; its flesh was not eaten raw, but after having been roasted with fire; and not a bone in the carcase was broken. It was eaten “with bitter herbs and unleavened bread,” described in every Scripture reference not as “first fruits,” not as the “wholesome concomitants of an Egyptian meal,” but as “bread of affliction,” reminders of “bitter bondage” and cruel oppression.¹ Its name “Pesach,” in no way connected with *πάσχειν*, to suffer, but meaning to “pass over,” or “to spare,” indicates its purpose as the memorial of a great deliverance. It was pre-eminently a sacrifice,² though in the first celebration there were neither priests nor

¹ Deuteronomy xvi. 3; Psalm
Ixix. 22; Jeremiah viii. 14.

² Exodus xii. 27, xxiii. 14-19;
Numbers ix. 7.

altars ; but it was also a sacrament, in which the victim was partaken of by the worshipper, and nothing of it was burned save what was left unconsumed. With the exception of the blood, the whole substance of the victim was to be assimilated by the worshippers, a transaction whose typical import is clearly interpreted in the Christian Passover, the holy communion of the body and blood of Christ. Notwithstanding all the modifications and accretions of later ages, we believe that the essential significance and purpose of the original Passover remained the same. Its institution as described in Exodus was the outcome of ideas wholly unknown in any heathen religion, and to the last it commemorated the first of those "mighty acts" by which Israel was redeemed by Jehovah from bondage and educated into a peculiar people.¹

The Passover meets us appropriately as the introduction to the most solemn transaction at Sinai. Retaining something of the undifferentiated character of patriarchal sacrifices, and yet presenting new features, it was manifestly transitional. It was an essential

¹ Jewish writers lay stress upon the distinctions between the Egyptian Passover and the Perpetual Passover, that is, the Passover as it came to be celebrated in their own land. (For details see Smith, *Dict. of the Bible*, vol. ii. 713 ; Sykes, *Essay on Sacrifice*, p. 275). Notable among these modifications and additions, the Levitical idea of leaven, as producing ferment or corruption, was

conjoined with the original association of the unleavened bread. This was the general conception of the Jews down to the Christian era ; for St. Paul clearly states in 1 Cor. v. 8, the meaning of the symbol. Bähr, in his *Symbolik*, says, "The blood of the lamb cleansed from the corruption of Egypt, and unleavened bread signified the abiding state of consecration in purity."

preparation for the revelation of the Law and for the conclusion of the solemn rites by which the nation was taken into covenant with Jehovah. Abraham covenanted with God for himself and for his house, and perhaps Genesis xli. 1, records a covenanting with God on the part of Israel for all his family. But at Sinai occurred the covenanting in which the whole people assumed the obligations involved in their redemption. For just as St. Paul reminds us that the sacrifice of "Christ our passover" for us, involves our personal consecration and obliges us to become God's saints, so Jehovah's redemption of them under shelter of the paschal blood was inevitably followed by their consecration to a holy vocation. Having given "Egypt for their ransom," having "led them out of the deep as a shepherd leads his flock,"¹ having protected them by hovering between them and danger by day and by night, He brought them into a sanctuary—holy in the estimation of the ancient world long before their fathers went down to Egypt—and there, before an altar prepared from the beginning of the world, they were separated and sanctified as His "kingdom of priests" for the "blessing of all nations."

The revelation of "the Law," "the Testimony," "the Ten Words," "the Commandments," "the Words of the covenant"²—a revelation communicated through the spirit and soul of Moses—marks perhaps, next to the coming of Christ, the most important event in the

¹ Isaiah lxiii. 13.

xxxii. 15, xxxiv. 29; Matthew xix. 17; Mark x. 19; Luke xviii.

² Exodus xxxiv. 28, xxxi. 18,

20; Romans xiii. 9.

history of mankind. In no other religion do we find any suggestion approaching to it in sublimity. Mazdeism professed indeed to be a revelation, but the initial point of the revelation is found in the wish or the requirements of man, not in the nature or will of Deity. In answer to the demand or entreaty of Zarathrusta, Ahura reveals or proclaims the Vendidad, the "fiend-destroying" book of magic spells rather than of moral precepts. In Mosaism, Jehovah, essentially invisible and yet ever revealing, comes down to Israel and calls to them "to hear." It is impossible to exaggerate the moment of the truths of God's unity, supremacy, and holiness; of His eternal intolerance of any attempts to represent Him in the likeness of anything, or to propitiate Him with any other service than righteousness and piety; then deposited in the conscience of one man for mankind. It was a revelation too pure for Israel to receive; it took long centuries of severe correction and discipline to translate it into the shadow of a reality, and to the latest period of their history it towered high above and perpetually rebuked both their belief and their practice. At the time when it was promulgated to them, they were a horde of emancipated slaves, very intolerant of a Divine authority "too moral to coerce them."¹ Therefore the Divine training had to be accommodated to their moral and intellectual capacities. As children have to be educated by the aid of pictures and models, and are made to conform to a framework of compulsory service till they acquire power to know and choose the right

¹ Fairbairn, *Religion in the Life of To-day*, pp. 39, 49.

from conviction, so it required the minute restrictions of their Law and the elaborate symbolism of their religion to instruct them that they must be holy as Jehovah eternally is. The symbolism was carefully subordinated to the great purpose in view; it was used as a skilled orator employs a metaphor, not for the sake of ornament, but because of its fitness to suggest truth. The more it is examined, the more clearly we realise that it was employed in the service of a very spiritual religion, and that it was eminently adapted to wean an ignorant and brutish people from idolatry, and to educate them to truer conceptions and worthier service of God.¹

We have an instance of the use of this solemn and impressive symbolism in the transaction in which they were consecrated as a kingdom of priests.² They could appreciate the sublime dignity of their vocation, for they had been redeemed from bondage to a people among whom the priesthood was supreme, wearing alone of all castes in their circumcision the seal of their consecration and the badge of their supremacy. They were to mediate as the circumcised priests of Jehovah between Him and all nations. He had given them a law which was the charter of all human freedom, and in keeping that law they would not only

¹ "Jehovah was the God of justice. He was jealous in vindicating His own outraged honour, but his severity was the guardian of morality. His sanctuary from the earliest times was the depository of law, and the priest was His spokesman. The

Torah was a deep moral influence. There is good reason to suppose that the priestly *Torah* is the one religious institution which can be correctly attributed to Moses." —Montefiore, *Hibbert Lecture*, p. 44.

² Exodus xxiv. 1-18.

stand fast in the liberty which He gave them, they would bring upon all men "the blessing of faithful Abraham." They had accepted that law in ready, emphatic, repeated professions of acquiescence and obedience; but these were not considered adequate. As originally with Abraham, the Divine covenant had to be concluded over a sacrifice.¹ So, an altar was erected as a suggestive symbol of the meeting-point of Jehovah with the nation, and around it were placed twelve pillars representing the tribes. As the priesthood had not been instituted, and as the laws regarding sacrifice were not yet proclaimed, the ceremonial is represented as bearing traces of transition from the patriarchal type. Neither the "heads of families," nor "the seventy" representative and ruling "elders" of Israel were the slaughterers. The office, which was afterwards performed by the Levites, was upon this occasion entrusted "to young men" who acted under the direction of Moses, by whom alone the purely sacrificial acts were done. The sacrifice consisted of burnt-offerings which were wholly consumed, and of peace-offerings the greater part of which were sacramentally eaten. The blood instead of being allowed to flow upon the desert was carefully caught up, and one half of it was solemnly poured out upon the altar. Then, after Moses had read aloud the Book in which he had written all the words of the law, and after the people had professed their readiness to do and observe all that the Lord had commanded them, he took the other half of the blood and sprinkled it upon the

¹ Psalm 1. 5.

people, or upon as many of them as he could reach, saying, "Lo, the blood of the covenant which Jehovah hath made with you concerning these words."¹

The intention of this sprinkling can only with probability be inferred by collating the narrative with others in the Pentateuch. The so-called parallels cited from classical antiquity are only very superficially related to the subject, and have no real connexion with the essential idea of a sacrifice which sealed a covenant bond between Jehovah and His people.² In the Targums Onkelos and Jonathan, verse 8th in Exodus, 24th chapter, is rendered, "He sprinkled blood upon the altar to expiate the people." This interpretation quite accords with the teaching of the Law of sacrifice, but in the light of that teaching the people can hardly be described as having been sprinkled for the same purpose. The significant feature in the action was the offering of the blood at the altar *for them*, before it was sprinkled *upon them*. Whatever expiation may have been intended was therefore completed when the pure life in the blood was brought into contact with the symbol of Jehovah; and in the sprinkling of the people with it there was communicated to them the efficacy which it had acquired by its dedication.³ It was only in the

¹ Genesis xxiv. 3-11.

² "If the Roman people break this treaty by public concert or by wicked fraud, do thou, O Jupiter, strike them as I do this victim" (*Livy*, i. 24, and xix. 252). The spilling of the wine in the ritual is thus interpreted: "May

the blood of those who first break this league be so poured out" (*Iliad*, iii. 298; *Æschylos*, *Sept. contra Thebas*, 43; *Xenophon*, *Anab.*, ii. 2, 9).

³ Oehler, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. i. 393.

ordination of the priests and in the yearly access of the high priest to the mercy-seat, that persons were sprinkled or anointed with blood. Upon these occasions the blood was taken directly from the altar; on this occasion, though divided between the altar and the people, the blood was the same, and the one idea in both cases was exhibited; namely, the *baptism* of Israel into covenant with Jehovah with the same blood which had made atonement for them. Their consecration was to be in newness of life; Divine energy alone could sanctify them for the office of standing close in the presence of the Most High; and the communication of this energy or inspiration was symbolised to them by their being sprinkled with blood which had acquired all its virtue from its being brought nigh to Jehovah for them.¹

Through consecration in the blood of the Covenant, the tribes were qualified to celebrate the feast which in archaic times generally concluded a covenant sacrifice. Therefore taking portions of the peace-offerings, Moses, Aaron, and his two sons, along with seventy of the elders of Israel, are represented as having ascended the mountain. There, as they were celebrating their sacrament, Jehovah is said to have made Himself known to them, as Christ is recorded to have manifested Himself to His disciples in the breaking of bread. "They saw the God of Israel," but not with the bodily eye. With Deuteronomy iv. 12, and Exodus xxxiii. 20, and similar Pentateuchal texts, reminding us that God

¹ Kurtz, *History of the Old Covenant*, vol. iii. p. 145; Keil and Delitzsch, *Com. on the Pent.*, vol. ii. pp. 156-57.

cannot be seen by the eye, cannot even be comprehended by the mind, but can only be apprehended by the spirit, we may be sure that no similitude was presented to them. It seems, however, to be suggested by the narrative, that the pure blue of the heavens above them lent its influence, as nature sometimes does, to help the spiritual faculty to realise what neither sense nor intellect could apprehend. It was an ecstatic moment in their religious history. Their sacrifice had been accepted, and they had passed beyond the fence with which the sacred mount had hitherto been barred against them. They had entered within the thick cloud that shrouded it; and lo, instead of darkness and deathful fires, everything was bright and clear and calm. They found themselves where it was pure blessedness to be. With marvellous distinctness they were conscious of the Divine Presence, not as inspiring terror but as awaking joy. It was as if they had seen the face of God and lived, for to them it had been revealed that though the external manifestations of Jehovah are dreadful in their majesty, the "secret of the Lord" is love; that although in holiness He is a terror to the uncovenanted and sinful, He manifests Himself to His own consecrated people as a God of peace. As long as they were standing in their sinfulness unbaptized before the mount, the nearness of Jehovah could only disturb them as exciting a "fearful looking for judgment"; but now, when covenanted they were upon the mount in a state of conformity to the Divine law, God, the unchangeable source of all law, was radiant in the

beauty which their saintly psalmists afterwards prayed they might behold as their "exceeding joy."¹

In the Passover which inaugurated the covenant in Egypt, and the sacrifice which ratified it at Sinai, we have the first clear intimation of the doctrine of the efficacy of the blood, which was to play so important a part in the religious training of Israel. The symbolic significance of sacrificial blood to many successive generations of Israelites, and its typical significance to us—so clearly interpreted by our Lord's pathetic references and the teaching of His Apostles—will be considered in the next lecture. Meanwhile it is important to note, that in the very first mention of its application in sacrifice, it meets us, not as the symbol of power ended in death, but as the seal of energy liberated through death. Blood of sacrifice had efficacy to protect Israel from destruction in Egypt, and also to qualify them at Sinai for sacramental communion with Jehovah. Through "the blood of the covenant" Jehovah thus redeemed and consecrated them, baptizing them from out of the common life of all peoples into a Divine vocation as His kingdom of priests.² So when, in the New Testament, we find the expression, now almost world-wide in its use, "the Blood of Christ," the connexion in which it meets us, and the application to which it is put, leave no doubt that it signifies, not the efficacy of His death but of His life to atone. It is intended to suggest the virtue of His whole obedience

¹ Hoffman, *Schriftbeweis*, vol. i. p. 336; Ewald, *History of Israel*, vol. ii. p. 106.

² Zechariah says, chap. ix. 11,

"By the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit."

consummated in absolute self-sacrifice, which could not be extinguished in, yea, not even be "holden of death." For Christ who died passed triumphantly through death, to exercise as long as there is need for it a cleansing and renewing power in humanity. In the Old and New Testaments alike, blood that has been shed for God or in His service is always represented as "living." The blood of Abel which in Genesis is described as "crying out of the ground," is said in the Epistle to the Hebrews still to "speak to us."¹ Therefore, under this "most vivid and pregnant of word images"—the blood of Christ—in which we have epitomised the whole Gospel doctrine of the Divine sacrifice, there is set forth to us the reality of the Divine sacrifice as a living and life-giving power. For the death which Christ endured as the penalty of human transgression—in which by assuming our nature He was involved—freed Him from the limitations of time and space to reign for ever as Prince and Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and the forgiveness of sin.²

Thus it was that in a time of great trial to devout Hebrew Christians, when the old order had changed completely, and the new order, which God was bringing in, was "not sufficiently understood to be welcomed," the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews sought to steady and comfort his countrymen by particular reference to the transactions which we have been considering. He endeavoured to convince them that the institutions from which they parted with such painful regret, were neither complete in themselves, nor original nor inde-

¹ Hebrews xi. 4.

² Acts v. 31.

pendent. They were only shadows, adumbrations of heavenly realities, which were even then being disclosed. The ancient covenant on which they rested all their hopes, was only a temporary and preparatory type of the better and everlasting covenant which was revealed in Christ. That covenant, whose law was written in tables of stone, they never kept but brake; but the law of the new covenant which was being written upon their hearts, would be kept and loved by them as their very life. If they wanted a pledge of its efficacy they would find it in the sacrifice which had ratified and made it operative. For the God of Peace, through the blood of the everlasting covenant—through the virtue of the life which Christ offered for the expiation of the world—had brought Him again from the dead as the great Shepherd of the sheep, to cleanse out from their natures all that was evil, to repair what was decayed, to supply what was defective, and to work in them for ever and ever that which was well pleasing in His own sight.¹

In like manner he interpreted for them the real significance of the Covenant feast at Sinai. For he reminded them that when they gathered together to celebrate the feast of the New Covenant over God's sacrifice of atonement, which has been offered "once for all," they drew near to no terrible mountain in a dreadful desert. They had come to Mount Zion, "the city of the living God," where myriads of the angels and all the saints, instead of dispensing a fiery law, were holding a joyous festival, which they shared with all who were sprinkled with the

¹ Hebrews xiii. 20-21.

more excellent blood of Jesus, the Mediator of the New Covenant. He assured them that this blood really effects what the sprinkling of sacrificial blood under the old Covenant only typified—the cleansing away of guilt. The blood of “Abel the righteous” did testify to all generations God’s readiness to accept the faith of His servant, but it had no power to purify and pacify the conscience of the guilty brother. The blood of Jesus testified and offered forgiveness even to those who shed it,¹ and through that blood all believers have “been sanctified”² to fulfil the vocation for which Israel under the old covenant was confessedly unfit. For through the Eternal Spirit they have been consecrated a royal priesthood fitted to enjoy the fellowship and favour of God, and to mediate the Divine blessing to all who are still without and afar off.³

In interpreting the predictive significance of the covenant at Sinai, the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews gives prominence to the belief that it could not be concluded without the sacrifice of a life. “Where a covenant is, there must also of necessity be the death of him who made it.”⁴ It is a startling

¹ Acts iii. 19.

² Hebrews x. 29.

³ Westcott, *Epist. to Hebrews*, p. 416 *seq.*; Delitzsch, *Com. on Hebrews*, vol. ii. p. 343 *seq.*

⁴ Heb. ix. 18. The account given in Hebrews, ch. ix., differs in respect of additions to it from the narrative in Exodus, ch. xxiv. The writer tells us that along with calves, goats were also em-

ployed as victims, though under the Law they were only offered for sin-offerings. He also indicates that the Book of the Covenant was sprinkled with blood and water by means of hyssop and coccas wool. Josephus (*Antiq.*, iii. 8, 6) agrees with him as to this, so probably he expanded by a reference to traditional data the brief description in Exodus. De-

statement when considered in the light of old-world customs, for in concluding a covenant between man and man, the death of one of the parties was in no way necessary. Among savage and barbarous peoples a compact was sealed by blood drawn from and tasted by the covenanting parties. And among civilised peoples victims might be slaughtered to furnish a basis for the imprecation of the priest upon any impious treaty-breaker. In all these cases the contracting parties were equal; but in the Divine covenant they could not be equal even if man were innocent, and this natural inequality of man is fearfully aggravated since sin and death, its penalty, adhere to him. Man cannot draw near to God, nor even propose to covenant with God, without bringing to light the real character of his sin as meriting death, and separating him from God. He can only be brought into covenant with God under provisions which render his sin harmless. We shall see how in the "transactional liturgy of the law" all this was temporarily accomplished; but it is important to note how carefully the writers of the Pentateuch instruct us, that in applying the word covenant to a Divine transaction

litzsch bids us note that his phrase, "calves and goats," was the writer's standing expression to denote all bleeding sacrifices, just as his other expression, "gifts and offerings," embraced offerings of every description. His reference to the after-sprinkling of the tabernacle and priesthood in connexion with the sprinkling of the nation in the covenant

rite, was no anachronism. He disregarded the precise order of time to group together facts which helped to exhibit and confirm the great idea which he sought to express in verse 18, namely that the old covenant could not be concluded without the shedding and offering of blood (Delitzsch, *Hebrews*, vol. ii. pp. 91-141).

with man, they do so only in the way of accommodation. It is Jehovah who initiates, carries out, and concludes these covenants. By using the phrase, therefore, they seek to impress upon us the grace of God, who in all these transactions was revealing His purpose of salvation, and was preparing for the disclosure of the mystery by which that purpose was to be realised. Before demanding from Israel surrender to His law, He gave them undemanded the token of His good will, in redeeming them from bondage through the blood of the Passover. Before calling them to accept their vocation at Sinai, the blood of expiation was shed for them. His every dealing with them rested upon some foreseen atonement to be effected by a Mediator yet to come, but by a Mediator to be sent forth from Himself. These typical covenants between man and Jehovah—these Divine and human co-operations for the gracious end of deliverance from the primal curse—were prophecies of a scheme which began to be unfolded in the Incarnation. Then was manifested the Divine Mediator, not God and man, but God in man. God-Man; not two, but one; not two separate wills, but two wills blended—"I in Thee, and Thou in Me"—that He "might put away sin" by the sacrifice of Himself, and become "the Author of eternal salvation unto all that obey Him."¹

It may be observed that the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews very explicitly brings out "the grace" displayed in all former covenantings, which were fulfilled in the New Covenant

¹ Hebrews ix. 26; v. 9.

established by Christ, and sealed by the sacred "blood of God Himself,"¹ in the use to which he puts the word *διαθήκη* in chapter ix. It is a word not only more expressive, but much more comprehensive than the Hebrew word "Berith," for it combines the notion of covenant arrangements between two parties, with that of "will" or "settlement," expressed in our word "testament." Both significations were present in the writer's mind; but in verse 15—in which he states that the blood of Christ, representing the self-surrender of a sinless and at the same time endless (*αἰώνιον*) life, that is of a life absolute, divine, and purely self-determined, has the inwardly propitiating, purifying, consecrating power (vv. 18-22), which was wholly lacking in the material sacrifices of involuntary and unconscious victims, and in the external purifications of the law—the idea of covenant passes over into that of a testamentary settlement. And for this cause, "*He is the mediator of a new διαθήκη.*" It was a legitimate and an appropriate application of the Greek word, quite warranted by the reference in chap. viii. p. 10, to the covenant prophesied and promised through Jeremiah. Throughout the Old Testament the blessings which were to accrue from the Divine covenant are often designated by the term "inheritance," a word which exercised on all the writers of the New Testament a very powerful influence. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews leaves us in no doubt as to his apprehension of its significance. In its completeness it is, as in verse 15, the "eternal inheritance," "the good things to come," of chap. ix. 11, "the world to come," of chap. ii. 5, "the rest that remaineth," of chap. iv. 9, "the glorified world of the future." But it is also a present blessing as having been begun to be fulfilled in all who believe (chap. iv. p. 3). This inheritance which God (*ὁ διαθέμενος*) promised or destined for mankind, has been placed in the hands of Christ the Mediator, the fulfiller of the covenant conditions upon which the inheritance is disposed, and the recipient of it on behalf of the race, His brethren,

¹ Acts xx. 28.

whom He represents. Naturally, therefore, before His crucifixion we find Him, in St. Luke xxii. 29, assigning to His disciples "a kingdom," as His Father assigned it to Him, and the means by which this assignment became effective was His redeeming and atoning death, "*the blood shed for you,*" as in St. Luke xxii. 20, "*the blood shed for many,*" as in St. Mark xiv. 24, and as in St. Matthew xxvi. 28, "*shed for many for the remission of sin.*"

In common life an heir can only enter on his inheritance by the death of the testator, but in this case it is an *atoning* death that must intervene, a "*death for the redemption of transgressions under the first testament.*" The testament of Sinai is specified, for it had a universal significance as convicting, not only Israel but all mankind of sin. Universal human sin must be atoned, covered, exterminated, declared forgiven, as Jeremiah had promised, before the inheritance could be enjoyed. So in a far fuller and deeper sense, the saying in verse 16, "where a testament is there must also be the fact of the death of the testator" to secure its validity, applies to this case.

For the death of Christ, the culminating act of His conscious, absolute sacrifice of self in love, was necessary, as the method whereby God's forgiveness and salvation could be brought to a sinful race, and the means whereby alone a sinful race could be purified, qualified, and rendered capable of receiving the "eternal inheritance." His application of the word *διαθήκη* therefore is a very forcible confirmation of what we have said, that the Bible writers in Old and New Testaments alike are careful to impress upon us the lesson that we must not use the word "covenant" as if it expressed a mutual agreement between equal parties. Its proper significance is that of an "ordinance" or "settlement" on God's part for us, realised by the co-operation of the Divine and human: so Christ is the *μεσίτης* or mediator by whom it is executed (cp. Delitzsch, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, vol. ii. pp. 91-124).