

LECTURE II

"It is witnessed of Him, Thou art a Priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek."—HEB. vii. 17.

THE Ascended and Glorified Lord is in Heaven. In what light are we mainly to regard Him, and what is the most essential characteristic of the work in which He is there engaged? Theologians have generally answered the first of these questions with the reply that, as on earth, so in heaven our Lord is Prophet, Priest, and King. But they have not uniformly observed this order,¹ nor does it commend itself either to the reason of the case or to the language of Scripture.

The reason of the case suggests a different arrangement; for that office ought certainly to have the pre-eminence assigned to it by which, more than by either of the other two, our Lord accomplishes the main object of His Coming; and there is no difference of opinion as to what that object was. It was to reunite God with man and man with God; to open up the way by which sinful creatures may return with confidence to the Holy One from whom they have alienated themselves,

¹ Thus Calvin brings the priestly office of Christ last.—*Institutio C. R.*, lib. ii. cap. 15.

and so to remove every obstacle standing in the way of love and fellowship between them, that God may be acknowledged as a Father, and men be children in a Father's house. To effect these ends is peculiarly the office of the priest. The prophetic and kingly offices of Christ are indeed also necessary to the production of the result. From the first we must be taught in whom we are to believe, and to teach is the prophet's work. From the first we must obey the command "Believe," and to command is the prerogative of the king. Even when we believe, however, the object of our faith is the Lord Jesus Christ in all that He is and does. Even when we obey, obedience can only be reasonable when the grounds upon which it is enforced are understood. At the very beginning of our Christian life, therefore, we must learn to know the Lord in that priestly character which embraces the most essential particulars of His work; and, if it be so, such knowledge is still more necessary in the later stages of our Christian progress. Whatever be the relation of the glorified Lord to men in their natural condition, His primary relation is to the members of His Body. In them His eternal purpose is fulfilled, and the actings of His heavenly life have special reference to them. Upon them, and upon them alone, the fulness of His prophetic gifts is poured. In them, and in them alone, the affections are awakened which form a meet answer to His kingly rule. But Christians are what they are by being in Christ as their Priest, by whom they draw near to God, and in whom the chief end of their being is accomplished. Know-

ledge of Him in that office thus precedes their full experience of Him in the other offices discharged by Him on their behalf. In the order of thought our Lord is Priest in heaven before He is Prophet or King. His prophetic and kingly offices are but the further issues of what He accomplishes as Priest.

The teaching of Scripture confirms this conclusion. In two at least of the most important books of the New Testament, the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Revelation of St. John, the glorified Redeemer is set before us as peculiarly the Priest or High-priest of our confession. In the first of these books the matter is so plain that nothing need be said regarding it. In the second the opening vision, in chap. i., of the glorious Person spoken of as "like unto a son of man" is admitted by almost all, if not even all, commentators to be the representation of a priest. Some traits of royal dignity mingle with the description, and fittingly belong to Him who is King as well as Priest. But the particulars ascribed to Him, giving the key-note of all that is to follow, and one or other of which is taken up again in each of the seven Epistles representing together the universal Church, are sufficient to show that He who sends these messages to the churches desires to be especially known and listened to in His priestly character.

The supereminent importance of the priestly office, as compared with every other position of authority, had indeed been long impressed with the utmost clearness upon the history of God's ancient people. More than any other it had penetrated to the heart of their

national and religious existence. The conceptions attached to it, though at a lower spiritual stage than that reached under the Christian dispensation, were the fundamental and regulating principles of the whole economy of Israel. The first proclamation of the Almighty by Moses to the tribes assembled at Sinai was "Ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."¹ This was their calling and the inspiration of the religious system under which they lived. Only when this end had been attained could they occupy the position, enjoy the privileges, and discharge the duties that had been assigned to them. Failing in this, they would have failed in everything.² Thus, without being first a priestly, Israel could not have been a kingly people; for in the fact that Jehovah was its King much more was implied than that it was ruled and protected by the Divine power. The righteous reign of the Heavenly King was to be reflected in it.³ In no other way than as living in God its King could Israel be kingly; and before, therefore, it could be so it needed to be in the true sense of the word priestly. As with Israel's kingly, so also with its prophetic function. The people were to be a prophecy to the heathen by what they themselves were, if not by actual missionary preaching. Their national existence, the holiness and happiness of their obedience, the success which crowned their arms, the plenty which smiled

¹ Exod. xix. 6.

² "In the priests the ideal of the nation culminated; they were in every sense its representa-

tives."—Perowne, Introduction to *Commentary on Psalm cx.*

³ Comp. Deut. xvi. 18, 19.

from their vineyards and oliveyards and fields,—these and all the other outward features of their lot were to be their message to the surrounding nations.¹ And this prophecy they could not utter with effect until the end of their priestly relation to God had been attained. The priestly function, in short, lay deeper in Israel's constitution and history than either the prophetic or the kingly. Only as priest could Israel be prophet or king.

In strict conformity with this is the remarkable statement of the Epistle to the Hebrews, that "the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law."² Under the word "law" the whole Old Testament economy is embraced;³ and the statement is that, so essentially, so fundamentally, had the idea of the Aaronic priesthood entered into Israel's life that, when that priesthood was "changed," the life of the people was necessarily changed along with it.⁴ There can be no doubt, therefore, that the idea of the priesthood was the leading, forming, and controlling idea of the Old Testament dispensation.

If it was so then, we may naturally expect it to be so under that New Testament dispensation which proceeds upon the same lines, bringing with it only the full accomplishment of what had been formerly presented in type and shadow. But the Epistle to the

¹ Comp. Deut. iv. 6-8.

² Heb. vii. 12.

³ Comp. ver. 11; chap. viii. 6.

⁴ The word "changed" in Heb. vii. 12 deserves to be marked. The sacred writer does

not say "brought to an end." Priesthood remains though it is changed. 'Ἐπ' αὐτῆς (later reading) ought also to be noted—not "under it," but "upon it" as a basis (ver. 11).

Hebrews is again decisive upon this point. The priesthood of Christ, together with the privileges and duties of the priestly office, as transferred to those who are united to Christ in faith, is the leading theme of the Epistle,—the spring out of which both its doctrinal and its practical teachings flow. Nor is this the case simply because the Epistle was addressed to a people familiar with priests and sacrifices. The object of the writer is not to pass from these to ideas of a different kind, for which it may be said that ancient arrangements had prepared the way. It is to confirm the ideas by which these arrangements are pervaded and explained, while it is at the same time to show that in Christ they had been transferred from an outward, material, and temporal, to an inward, spiritual, and eternal sphere. Blot out such ideas from the Epistle, or regard them as an accommodation to ignorant or childish conceptions, and the teaching of the writer would either become unintelligible or would leave us no alternative but to reject his canonical authority.

Thus then we reach the distinguishing characteristic of our Lord's life in heaven. Whatever work He may then engage in, whatever glory may surround Him in performing it, one work, one glory, chiefly meets our eye when we penetrate within the veil. We may often think of the exalted Redeemer as Prophet and King. We have mainly to think of Him as Priest. To Christ, therefore, as Priest in heaven, and to the functions discharged by Him in that office, these lectures will be devoted. The subject is one that ought

to lead us into the very heart of the Christian dispensation, and to its most important bearing upon our privileges, our responsibilities, and our work as Christians. One or two preliminary remarks are necessary.

1. Whatever is said in Scripture of our Lord as High-priest may be used in illustration of what is said of Him as Priest. The duties and responsibilities of these two offices cannot be separated from each other. It matters not that, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, the work of Christ is mainly typified by that of the Jewish high-priest, and that the ritual of the Great Day of Atonement, more than that of any other holy day of Israel, lies at the bottom of the sacred writer's description of His service. In their essence the two offices of priest and high-priest were one. The holders of the two were indeed of unequal rank, but there was no fundamental difference between them. The office of the priest simply culminated in that of the high-priest, and all that was demanded of the latter was a sharper and more definite expression of what was demanded of the former. If the limitation of his office to the tribe of Levi and the descendants of Aaron showed that the priest was the possession of God in a deeper sense than the ordinary Israelite, this principle of Divine possession only received a still clearer illustration in the case of the high-priest by the restriction of his office to the first-born of Aaron's house through successive generations. If the ordinary priest was to be free from all uncleanness, but was permitted, notwithstanding this, though under the penalty of being unclean until

the evening, to touch the dead body of a relative, such touching of the body of even his father or mother was strictly forbidden to the high-priest,¹ while the general prescriptions for ceremonial purity were in his case more numerous and strict. If the ordinary priest was to be holy, and to have that feature of his office symbolically set forth by his garments, holiness was still more strikingly symbolised by the special vesture of the high-priest, and by the golden plate worn on his forehead, with the words HOLINESS TO THE LORD inscribed upon it. Finally, the consecration of the high-priest was effected in the same way as that of the priest, although it was more elaborate and minute. In all these respects the high-priesthood was simply a more marked expression of what was involved in the ordinary priesthood. Commentators, accordingly, have found it impossible to distinguish between the two terms as used in the Epistle to the Hebrews. Even when the high-priest performed duties beyond the province of the priest, it was as a priest that he performed them. He was only the first of the priesthood, just as the services of the Day of Atonement did not essentially differ from those of the other sacred services of the year, but were rather their culminating point. In everything pertaining to calling, privilege, and work, the commonest priest who ministered at the altar occupied the same ground as Israel's greatest, most unique, and most honoured functionary. In Christ as High-priest, therefore, not less than in Christ as Priest, the nature of His Priesthood is to be sought.

¹ Lev. xxi. 2, 11.

2. The Priesthood of our Lord was never a priesthood after the order of Aaron. That it is not so in His exalted and glorified condition is at once admitted by all inquirers. But the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews has made it equally clear that it was not so during His earthly life. Referring to the exalted Lord, he says of Him on one occasion: "Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all, seeing there are those who offer the gifts according to the law."¹ It is not necessary to suppose that, in these words, the temple is thought of as still standing, or the Aaronic line of priests as still ministering within its precincts. The writer has in view the Levitical institutions in themselves, and his object is to show that such was the nature of Christ's Priesthood, and such its essential characteristics, that it was impossible to associate with Him, in any circumstances, the thought of a priesthood of the Aaronic line. That priesthood was one "according to the law," and the law was no more than a type or shadow of "the heavenly things" with which the High-priest whose glory he would illustrate had to do. The idea, therefore, of our Lord's having been at any time possessed of an earthly or legal, or, in other words, of an Aaronic priesthood, was altogether incompatible with His true nature and work. Again, on another occasion, referring to the words of the Psalm so often quoted by him, the same writer says: "For He of whom these things are said belongeth to another tribe, from which no man hath given attendance at the altar. For

¹ Heb. viii. 4.

it is evident that our Lord hath sprung out of Judah; as to which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priests.”¹ These words are fatal to the supposition that our Lord could ever have been an Aaronic priest. The same person could not, in the nature of the case, even at different periods of his life, have belonged to different orders. His connexion with either depended upon conditions inherent in his personality, which could not be transferred without that personality being completely changed. By the strictest and most solemn sanctions, too, the priesthood in Israel was confined to the members of the tribe of Levi. Had our Lord claimed to be a priest of that house, the claim would have involved a positive breach of the Mosaic law, and would have been a violation instead of a fulfilling of “all righteousness.”

That our Lord never was an Aaronic priest is further demonstrated by this, that if, in that capacity, He had made His great sacrifice upon the cross, then in the same capacity He must have presented it to His Father within the veil. It will not be contended that He could have died as a priest of one order and yet brought His death before God as a priest of a different order. Any such supposition would be at variance with the meaning of the different priestly actions and their relation to each other. These were too closely bound together to be separated. If, therefore, our Lord was an Aaronic priest on earth, He must have been the same when He entered heaven, and all will at once reject such

¹ Heb. vii. 13, 14.

an idea. Even more may be said. Distinguish the different priestly acts from one another, and it will not be disputed that the presentation of the offering is the more important of the two. In every ordinary sin-offering (that on the Day of Atonement forming no exception to the principle), not the slaying of the victim but the presentation of the blood was the essentially priestly act; and if, therefore, our Lord ever performed what was the priestly function in its deepest meaning, it must have been when He presented Himself with His offering in the heavenly sanctuary. That was the moment when His Aaronic priesthood, if He ever possessed it, must have appeared in its clearest light and highest potency. But this is precisely what the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews is most concerned to deny. One of the leading points of his argument is, that with heaven, with the true tabernacle, the Aaronic priest had nothing to do. It was the distinguishing characteristic of the class of priests to which he belonged that they "serve that which is a copy and shadow of the heavenly things."¹ "The Aaronic priest ministers in the sanctuary of this world, the figure of the true, ix. 1, 23; if he could penetrate into 'heaven,' the true tabernacle, he would cease to be an Aaronic or figurative priest, he would be in the presence of God, into which he could enter only in virtue of having made a true atonement, which no Aaronic priest could accomplish."² The conclusion is

¹ Heb. viii. 5.

² Davidson on Hebrews, p. 140.

which these words are taken
deserves careful study.

The whole Extended Note from

irresistible. Our Lord never was a priest after the order of Aaron. His priesthood is only after a higher and more glorious order. The unity of His Person and Work cannot be preserved unless every priestly function discharged by Him is brought under the notion of another order than that of Aaron. The point now considered is thus not one of mere curiosity or minor importance. We shall see more clearly, as we proceed, that a distinct recognition of the non-Aaronic character of our Lord's Priesthood is essential to a clear perception of the nature of the Christian dispensation in its most inward and peculiar characteristics.

3. A third question immediately suggests itself, to which an answer must be given before we turn directly to the qualifications of the heavenly High-priest and to His priestly work. When did the Priesthood of our Lord begin? Was our Lord at any period of His earthly life a Priest, or did He only enter upon His Priesthood when He entered heaven? The question is one which since the days of Grotius has engaged the attention of not a few of the most eminent theologians and commentators. It has justly done so; for, as may afterwards appear, the answer to be given it has a vital bearing on our construction of a dogmatic theology, and particularly on our conception of the great doctrine of the Atonement. In the meantime we have to do with it only in its critical and historical aspect.

The difficulty of the question arises from the fact that, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, there are two classes of texts which it is not easy, at first sight, to bring

into perfect harmony. On the one hand, there are those which seem to declare with a clearness not to be misunderstood that our Lord was a priest only after the order of Melchizedek, and that His Melchizedek priesthood is connected with heaven alone. Such are the words in which our High-priest is said to have been solemnly "addressed" or "saluted"¹ as "a high-priest after that order," at a moment subsequent to the time when He had been "made perfect," at a moment when He had accomplished His earthly mission, and had been exalted to the glory of His reward.² The same designation is again applied to Him when He is thought of as One who had "entered within the veil," and had "become" what He then was.³ Again, in contrast with the word of the law which makes men who have infirmity high-priests, the word of the oath which was after the law is declared to make the Son who is perfected for evermore High-priest;⁴ and this "word of the oath" has no place in relation to "the law." It belongs only to a season of which the Gospel either in promise or fulfilment is the leading thought.⁵ And, to quote only one passage more, Christ's having come as "a High-priest of good things to come" is closely associated with conditions expressly referring to His

¹ Heb. v. 10. Not as in Authorised Version "called," or in Revised Version "named."

² Comp. ver. 7-9.

³ Heb. vi. 20. "From this passage it is clear that the eternal High-priesthood of the Lord 'after the order of Melchizedek,'

King and Priest, followed on His exaltation to the throne of God in His glorified humanity."—Westcott *in loc.*

⁴ Heb. vii. 28.

⁵ *Ibid.* It might here be well to translate "which is" rather than "which was" after the law.

exalted state, those of "the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation," and "His own blood," with which He "entered once for all into the Holy Place, having obtained an eternal redemption."¹ The teaching of these and other similar passages of the Epistle to the Hebrews is so distinct as to admit of only one conclusion,—that the order of Melchizedek is the only order of priesthood to which our Lord belonged, and that that order has no connexion with earth.

On the other hand, there is not a little in the same Epistle which sets before us the sufferings and especially the death of Christ as priestly acts, thus leading to the inference that Christ was a Priest when He endured them. "Wherefore in all things," we read, "it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High-priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people";² where the words "through death," coming almost immediately before, seem to render it impossible to separate from the death of Christ the "propitiation" spoken of. Again, even in one of the passages already quoted for the first view, it is the death of Christ upon the cross which it is natural to think of as the proper contrast to the death of "goats and bulls."³ And, once more, the same thought may appear to be prominent in the statements, "But now once at the end of the ages hath He been manifested to put away sin by the sacri-

¹ Heb. ix. 11, 12.

² Heb. ii. 17; comp. ver. 14.

³ Heb. ix. 15.

fice of Himself"; "By which will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all"; "Wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate."¹ To all this may be added, as not without force in a controversy of the kind, the conviction of the Christian Church in every land and age, that the death of her Lord upon the cross was an offering in which He was not merely a Victim but a Priest, and, as a Priest, was engaged in carrying out that mediatorship between God and man which always has been, and must be, the leading function of any priesthood either in its lowest or its highest form. Must we then abandon this idea as has been done by some?² Or is no reconciliation of the two views now stated possible? Various solutions have been proposed.

It has been suggested that, during His earthly sufferings and at His death, our Lord is to be regarded as a "destinated" rather than as a "consecrated" Priest;³ but for such an idea Scripture obviously supplies no warrant. To a somewhat similar effect is the notion that our Lord was indeed in Himself a High-priest on earth while learning obedience by the things which He suffered, but that He did not become *fully* High-priest until, through that obedience, He had been perfected.⁴ It is enough to reply to this, that the conception

¹ Heb. ix. 26; x. 10; xiii. 12.

² See *e.g.* the words of Kurtz in his able *Excursus* on the point. *Hebräer Brief*, p. 152; comp. Davidson on Hebrews, p. 151.

³ Jackson, *Priesthood of Christ*, ch. xi. 5.

⁴ Hofmann, *Schriftbeweis*, ii. 1, 402.

attempted to be established of our Lord's gradually filling up His Priesthood to what it actually and really was, or, as it might perhaps be expressed, "verifying by actual fulfilling of its offices His true Priesthood,"¹ is exposed to various objections. It is difficult to understand what is meant by a priesthood ideally possessed but actually involved in a process of "becoming"; nothing is gained by it, for an ideal priesthood is a real priesthood; and it is inconsistent with such language as that in which we are told that our Lord "having been perfected *became* the author of eternal salvation," where the word "became" must be expressive of one definite act.² Nor does the proposal to meet the difficulty by the supposition that our Lord may have been a priest on earth, though a priest after the order of Melchizedek only after He passed into the upper sanctuary, meet the case. We cannot understand the priesthood the thought of which it would thus be necessary to introduce. Not belonging while on earth to the order of Aaron, nor to that of Melchizedek till He had no more connexion with earth, to what order did our Lord belong upon the cross? We are no nearer a solution of the difficulty. Once more, the idea of "fulfilling" different orders of the priesthood has been substituted for that of belonging to them. At each of two different stages of His history, before and after His Glorification, our Lord "fulfils" a priestly order, and is thus at each a priest, though in a different aspect. "As High-priest

¹ Davidson, u.s., p. 152.

² Heb. v. 9. Ἐγένετο follow-

ing τελειωθείς seems to leave no doubt that it must be so.

Christ fulfilled two types; and we must therefore distinguish two aspects of His High-priestly work: (1) as the fulfilment of the Levitical High-priesthood, and (2) as the fulfilment of the royal High-priesthood of Melchizedek—the first before His Session (as High-priest), and the second after His Session (as High-priest-King)."¹ Two lines of priesthood are by this view placed in the same relation to our Lord, and He "fulfils" them both, though on each occasion in a different aspect,—that after the order of Aaron as Priest, that after the order of Melchizedek as Priest-King. Not even thus do we surmount the difficulty now dealt with; for (1) such a view lays too great an emphasis upon the kingship of Melchizedek, and assigns too subordinate a position to the priesthood of him who, though King of Salem, was "Priest of God Most High";² and (2) it places our Lord in the same relation to the two orders spoken of. But, according to the teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews, that relation is not the same. Our Lord no doubt "fulfils" the order of Aaron, just as He fulfilled the whole Old Testament economy, yet not in the same sense as that in which He may be loosely said to "fulfil" the earlier order. Strictly speaking He does not "fulfil" both orders. He *fulfils* the lower because He *is* of the higher.

Is there then no other means of meeting the difficulty? no common thought which may take up and

¹ Westcott on Hebrews, p. 227.

² "The kingly trait combined

in the Melchizedek priesthood is little insisted on." Davidson on Hebrews, p. 78.

harmonise the two views by which it is occasioned? no way by which to accept the teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews, that our Lord's only Priesthood is unconnected with this earth, and yet to hold, as demanded by the ineradicable instinct of the Christian heart, that in His death upon the cross our Lord was a Priest offering Himself, as victim, a sacrifice for sin? Let the answer now to be given to this question not be too summarily dismissed. Fair consideration alone is asked for it. If correct, it hangs together with other important views of Christian truth.

The question then must be answered in the affirmative; and it is our Lord Himself who, in words of His recorded by the fourth Evangelist, supplies the answer. In a text already referred to, and which must be translated otherwise than either in the Authorised or the Revised Version, the beloved disciple gives the words of His Divine Master as follows: "And I, if I be lifted up on high out of the earth, will draw all men unto Myself."¹ The translation, "lifted up," is too weak for the original,² which ought to be rendered "lifted up on high"; and the preposition employed³ is not to be translated "from," but (with the margin of the Revised Version) "out of." So given, the words of Jesus can have but one meaning, that His Glorification begins not with the Resurrection but with the Crucifixion. This is indeed one of the lessons of the fourth Gospel to be learned both from individual texts and from its general structure. The "glory" so often spoken of

¹ John xii. 32.² ὑψωθῶ.³ ἐκ.

there includes not only that of the Resurrection but of the supreme act of love manifested on the cross; while the structure of the book¹ demands that the facts of the Crucifixion and Resurrection be considered as one whole. The dying Redeemer is glorified through death: the glorified Redeemer died that He might, in the path of death, find glory. The same point is illustrated by the striking words in which the Evangelist records the death of Jesus, "And He bowed His head, and delivered up His spirit."² "No one taketh away His life from Him, but He lays it down of Himself. He has power to lay it down, and He has power to take it again."³ Instead of the extremity of shame, a moment such as that brings with it a weight of glory. According to our Lord's own teaching the Crucifixion is thus the beginning of His Glorification, and the sacrifice upon the cross falls within the sphere of a superearthy or heavenly priesthood.

In the considerations now adduced we seem to find that common thought in which the two different aspects of the beginning of our Lord's priestly work, marking the Epistle to the Hebrews, are harmonised and unified. His priesthood begins with His Glorification, but of that Glorification the death upon the cross was part. The sacrifice which He then offered, the spirit of self-surrender in which He offered it, the loving submission to the Father which it illustrated, and the issue which it was to promote, were really "glory."

¹ John xviii.-xx form a complete section.

² John xix. 30.

³ John x. 18.

God's thoughts are not as our thoughts, nor His ways as our ways; and we have been looking at the death which Jesus died from the Divine rather than the human point of view.

It may perhaps be objected that the explanation now offered rests too much upon one passage of Scripture; that, if true, we might have expected allusion to be made to it in the Epistle to the Hebrews; and that it is inconsistent with that language of St. Paul, in which the cross of Christ is regarded as humiliation rather than exaltation, and as shame rather than glory. The first of these objections has no weight. The words upon which dependence has been placed are the words of our Lord Himself, and the only question regarding them is, Have they been properly interpreted? That there is a certain force in the second objection may be allowed. Yet it may be replied that by the writer of this Epistle the death of Christ is always regarded, even when he does not expressly say so, as a glory; that he dwells less upon it as a penal offering than as a consummation of the past, bringing us into a perfect communion with God; and that he is so much occupied with the great offering itself, by which the redeemed are for ever perfected, that the question as to the moment of Christ's entering upon His Priesthood probably never occurred to him in the form in which it presents itself to us.¹ Add to which that our right to take this view is confirmed by the singular affinity between this Epistle and the writings of St. John. Lastly, it may be urged in

¹ Davidson on Hebrews, p. 151; Farrar on Hebrews vii. 27.

reply to the third objection that, although St. Paul generally looks at our Lord's death from its side of humiliation and shame, he too sees the background of glory upon which it rested. He could not have gloried in a cross in which he saw no glory. He could not have declared to the Coriuthians that he had determined to know nothing among them save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified, had he not felt that that subject was the power of God and the wisdom of God to all who would receive the message.¹

To return directly to the question before us, When did the Priesthood of our Lord begin? We have already seen, at least in some degree, how much inquirers have differed upon the point, but the cause of the difference is plain. Such writers as Tholuck, Riehm, Hofmann, Delitzsch, Davidson, and Westcott admit with more or less distinctness that the High-priesthood of our Lord began with His Glorification; but they cannot allow that the death upon the cross was not "an essential part of His High-priest's work, performed in the outer court, that is, in this world," and they are thus driven to the expedient of saying that, High-priestly as that act was, the Priesthood of Christ only attained its completeness after His Resurrection. This distinction, however, between incompleteness and completeness cannot be maintained; and the true solution appears to be suggested by our Lord's own words. It began upon the cross, and the cross was the beginning of His glory.

¹ Comp. Dr. Matheson's deeply interesting work, *Spiritual Development of St. Paul*, p. 162.

One point must still be noticed. In what light, it may be asked, does the view now taken place the whole of our Lord's life between the Incarnation and the Cross? The answer is, It was the preparation for His priestly work. On the one hand, He was Victim as well as Priest. He was the true Paschal Lamb, and that Lamb had to be separated from the flock days before the Paschal Feast that it might be made ready for its fate. On the other hand, He was to be a merciful and faithful High-priest for ever, sympathising with all the trials and sorrows of His people, and "able to succour them that are tempted."¹ Through His whole earthly life, therefore, He had to learn by personal experience the nature of human weakness, and to bear the burden of human woe, so that, even after He had returned to His Father's house on high, the members of His Body still on earth might know that they had in Him a Brother, not only possessed of Almighty power, but touched with a feeling of their infirmities. For both these parts of His priestly work then our Lord was prepared by His earthly life. Onward from the Incarnation, through the humiliations and pains of His condition in this world, to the instant when in spirit He bade farewell to earth and took His place upon the cross, He was "learning obedience through the things which He suffered." He was realising in the increasing fulness of its meaning what it was to be the "Sent" of God, and what to sympathise, not by Divine insight alone but by human fellowship, with all our varied wants, in order that

¹ Heb. ii. 18.

having been thus gradually perfected, He might enter upon a priesthood which embodies everything most full of love both to God and man.¹

From these preliminary considerations we may now turn directly to the Priesthood or High-priesthood of our Lord in heaven. It is one after the order of Melchizedek, not of Aaron; and so frequently, and with such a marked solemnity and awe of manner,² does the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews refer to it under this aspect, that it will be well to look briefly at his teaching on the point. What is said of the priesthood of Melchizedek may throw light upon that of Him to whom he was "made like."³

A single sentence may recall the only circumstances known to us of this mysterious personage. In the Book of Genesis we are told that, when Abram was returning in triumph from the overthrow of the five kings by whom Lot his nephew had been attacked and spoiled, "Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was priest of God Most High. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth: and blessed be God Most High, which hath delivered thine enemies

¹ Those who wish to prosecute the inquiry as to the time when our Lord's Priesthood began may be referred to Riehm's chapter upon it in his *Lehrbegriff des Hebräer Briefes*, to a valuable Excursus by Kurtz in his *Commentary upon Hebrews*, p. 148, and to Davidson's Extended Note

already spoken of.

² Heb. v. 6, 10; vi. 20; vii. 17, 21.

³ ἀφωμοιωμένος, not merely made like, but made like as a copy to an original; comp. chap. viii. 5; also Keil, Kurtz, etc., on Heb. vii. 3.

into thy hand. And he gave him a tenth of all." ¹ Who this Melchizedek was it is as needless to inquire as it is impossible to determine. One of the most important facts, indeed, connected with him is that we know nothing of his history either before or after that moment when, like a sudden flash of light, he comes out of the unseen, fills the eye for an instant, and passes into the unseen again. Had any further revelation regarding him existed, the writer of the Epistle could not have reasoned as he does.

There is, no doubt, another passage of the Old Testament upon which his reasoning rests, the only other in which the name of Melchizedek occurs, but one regarded by the Jewish thought of our Lord's time as so central that "it is more frequently cited by the New Testament writers than any other single portion of the ancient Scriptures." ² In Psalm cx. the Psalmist is filled with the contemplation of Him in whom the highest hopes of His people were to be accomplished, and he celebrates His coming in the words, "Jehovah hath sworn and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek." ³ The Psalm begins with the thought of royal dominion and the triumphant overthrow of enemies. It ends with the thought of the nations and their princes crushed beneath the power of one who, even in the thirsty East, will always find "a brook in the way" at which he may drink and recruit his strength. In its very centre the words occur, "Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek." Messiah shall come, the great Priest-King, surrounded

¹ Gen. xiv. 18-20.

² Perowne on Psalm cx.

³ Ver. 4.

by His youthful warriors, plentiful and beautiful as drops of morning dew, clothed in "holy vestments," the white robes of the priesthood. But how strange a priesthood! Not that familiar to the Jews, and which they had been accustomed to regard with so much reverence, but another a higher and more glorious. How often must they have wondered what was meant; till now at last, in the light of our Lord's Ascension,¹ the meaning was made clear, and the most remarkable prophecy of the Psalms was seen to be fulfilled in Him who had gone victorious into the heavens, after a life of suffering and death on earth.

Upon these two passages of Scripture the reasoning of the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews rests. At one moment he argues from considerations the force of which had been deeply impressed upon the Jewish people by the providential arrangements of the Almighty with their fathers; at another from the positive statements of Scripture as to the person of whom he speaks, and at yet another from its silence. But, whatever be the point from which he starts, he has one aim before him—not merely to establish the superiority of the priesthood of Melchizedek over that of Aaron, but to bring out its different and independent character, that character which belonged first and essentially to the High-priest of the Christian dispensation, although it had been shadowed forth, as in a preparatory copy, in His Melchizedekian forerunner. In order, therefore, to understand the Priesthood of our Lord, we have to pass

¹ Comp. Acts ii. 34-36.

beyond the Old Testament arrangements for the Levitical priesthood, and to think of a still more ancient and famous "order." For this purpose the following points ought to be kept in view.

1. The object of the priesthood of Melchizedek. This was indicated by the mystery of his name. Every one knows how deeply such mysteries were impressed upon the history of God's dealings with His people, from the first book of the Old Testament to the last book of the New Testament Canon. We may not always be able to acknowledge the full weight of the argument connected with them; but it would be wrong to say that it has no weight. We may see in it one of the ways by which men were taught in ages different from our own.

Following then the analogy of so many names appointed by God for use under the old covenant, of the name of Jesus Christ Himself, and of names given by our Lord to some at least of His Apostles, the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews beholds in the name "Melchizedek" a Divine revelation regarding the man, a revelation pregnant with the most important inferences as to both the person of whom he speaks and the ends to be attained by him. He was not merely a priest, but a priest-king. Nothing of the kind had been known before. There had been kings, but few of them had exhibited the priestly character. There had been priests, but they had wanted kingly power. The one had, for the most part, shown little desire to do good; the others, however eager to do good, had possessed no means of carrying out their wishes. Here was a new

combination,—king and priest in one, the kingship sanctified, and the priesthood made effective. Not only so. . . By his very name this Melchizedek, who had shadowed forth the Messiah to come, was “king of righteousness,” and also “king of Salem, which is king of peace.” The two designations expressed alike what he was, and that part which in the providence of God he had been raised up to play. He was the embodiment, so far as it was possible for man to be it, of the two greatest blessings which were to flow to the human race through Him of whom, in that very aspect, the Psalmist and the Prophets had spoken in the most glowing terms.¹ The outward ceremonial observed by him as a priest, and the outward glory surrounding him as a king, sank into insignificance when compared with the moral and religious benefits he secured for men. Righteousness and peace met in him, and were dispensed by him to all who would accept his services or acknowledge his rule. The righteousness too preceded the peace. The foundations of the happiness of his priestly reign were laid in the holy dispositions and devout affections of his subjects. Because Melchizedek reigned in “righteousness,” he “also” reigned in “peace.”

2. The priesthood of Melchizedek belonged to an age anterior to the Judaic period, when the distinction between Jew and Gentile had not yet been introduced. Attention has before now been called to the Gentile character of his priesthood;² and there can be no doubt

¹ Psalm lxxxv. 10; Isa. ix. 4-7, xi. 4-9.

² Pfeleiderer, *Paulinism*, chap. ix. i.; Porowne on Psalm cx. 4.

not only that it was Gentile, but that, fully cognisant of the fact, the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews was deeply impressed by it. The main point, however, to be attended to is not that Melchizedek was a Gentile. That is simply introductory to a far more important thought—that, having exercised his office before Judaism existed, he was above the temporary provisions and aims of the Jewish dispensation, and that he belonged to a more spiritual and universal economy than that in which, for purposes subsidiary to the welfare of mankind, Israel had been placed. The principle lying at the bottom of this reasoning is strikingly illustrated both by our Lord and by St. Paul. By our Lord, in His language to the Pharisees, when they urged, with relation to divorce, that Moses had commanded to give the wife a bill of divorcement, and to put her away. Then Jesus said to them, "Moses for your hardness of heart suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it hath not been so."¹ By St. Paul, when, in his Epistle to the Galatians, he argues that the law which came four hundred and thirty years after the promise, could not disannul the covenant confirmed beforehand by God, so as to make the promise of none effect.² In both cases there was a Divine order, older, larger, wider, and more enduring than that of Moses, one therefore in which the ultimate purpose of God had been more directly manifested. The economy brought in through Moses was a limitation of that plan, rendered

¹ Matt. xix. 8.

² Gal. iii. 17; Comp. Bruco, *Expositor*, 3d series, vol. x. p. 91.

necessary by circumstances and temporary in duration. For the real plan of God we must look to His dealings with men before the days of Moses, when the limitations were introduced.

The same principle is applicable to the point before us. Melchizedek was a priest in that earlier and better age, when no regular line of priesthood had been constituted, when the qualifications fitting any one for the office were individual and personal rather than ceremonial, when the father of the family, when the head of the tribe, when perhaps even any single individual might act as priest, and might become the religious guide and counsellor of all who desired his aid. Such a time there really was in the history of the world. It seems to be a mistake to imagine that, either amongst the ancestors of the Jews, or in heathen nations, no one could be a priest without belonging to a particular line. This idea was later, and in the judgment of the writer whose argument we are now considering, a judgment confirmed by the analogy of Scripture, it marked a lower not a higher stage of development than the earlier view. Melchizedek was thus the priest of humanity, not of Judaism alone. He belonged to a date when he could discharge the duties of a priesthood wide as the world, and when no member of the human family was excluded from the benefits of his priestly rule.

3. Melchizedek was free from those relations of family and tribal descent, of beginning and ending, of sense and time, which were inseparably connected with individuals belonging to this world. The reasoning

upon this point is indeed drawn from the silence, not the positive assertions of Scripture. But in the circumstances that silence was enough. That one claiming the position of an ordinary priest might have his claim recognised, more was necessary than that he should be supposed to possess the qualifications of our common humanity and of priestly lineage. Men needed to *know* that he did so, and to be able to lay their hand upon the proof. When, accordingly, the Most High God says of such or such an one, He is My Priest, giving us at the same time no information upon these points, our ignorance of them is, so far as we are concerned, equivalent to their non-existence. It may thus be said without hesitation of Melchizedek, in whose case all of them were absolutely unknown, that he was "without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life." Nothing but entire indifference to the spirit and meaning of the passage as a whole can demand a strictly literal interpretation of the particular statement. The words "without genealogy" are of themselves sufficient to indicate the direction in which the writer's thoughts are running, and to show that the different appellations used by him are designed simply to lead us out of that region of the carnal and the temporal in which the Jewish religion moved. Any other characteristics by which the same end might have been effected would have been of equal value. Their influence is, no doubt, at first negative and privative. They transcend sense and time; but by that very circumstance they gain a posi-

tive weight. No sooner do we leave sense and time behind us than we are in that sphere of the real which underlies the phenomenal, of the ideal which the visible only imperfectly expresses. We have entered the region of spiritual and eternal things. Our ignorance of the circumstances alluded to is not thought of as due to our distance from the period when they occurred. The darkness resting upon them is part of the Divine plan. It was never intended that we should know them because, if known, they would confine us to a lower range of thought than that which is beyond the darkness, and to which we can ascend only through the darkness. Thus, the priesthood of Melchizedek, dissociated from the thought of an earthly parentage, and from the beginning and ending of earthly life, belongs to the real and the true which lie behind all we see. It springs out of eternity; to eternity it returns; when it rises before us we have no thought of the boundaries of either space or time.

4. The three particulars now mentioned illustrate a still more important characteristic of the priesthood of Melchizedek—its spirituality. The Levitical priests were made after “the law of a carnal commandment”; Melchizedek was made after “the power of an endless (or rather of an indissoluble) life.”¹ The Levitical priesthood was constituted through observance of the manifold prescriptions of an external and burdensome ceremonial; Melchizedek’s priesthood through a living power inherent in his personality, and flowing not from

¹ Heb. vii. 16.

the letter but the spirit.¹ As with the ancient priest himself, so also with his work. No rite or ordinance is mentioned in connexion with him such as had always been thought essential to the idea of priesthood; and this is the more worthy of notice when we remember that in the Book of Genesis Melchizedek is represented as having brought forth bread and wine to Abram and his band of followers.² The writer of the Epistle cannot have regarded that act as sacrificial in the ordinary acceptation of the term, or as equivalent to the slaughter of a victim. Had he done so he would have used language leading more directly to the thought of sacrifice. In nothing, however, said of Melchizedek is there the slightest allusion to death; and the reason can only be, partly, that Melchizedek could not, like his Antitype, give himself to death; partly, as has been suggested, that it is "his purpose to present Melchizedek as priest, not in sacrificing, but in blessing, that is, in communicating the fruits of an efficacious sacrifice already made."³ Because, in short, he is the prefiguration of a priesthood in heaven into which death does not enter, no sacrifice of death is spoken of in connexion with him. We know him only as a priest "of whom it is witnessed that he liveth."⁴ The priesthood of Melchizedek is thus simply a priesthood of life, of spiritual and Divine life with God. It has no connexion with what the writer to the Hebrews elsewhere

¹ Comp. Bruce in the *Expositor*, 3d series, vol. x. p. 195.

² Gen. xiv. 18.

³ Westcott on Hebrews, p. 201.

⁴ Heb. vii. 8. It will be seen in the next lecture that this is not inconsistent with the idea of an offering of life in heaven.

calls "carnal ordinances."¹ It is a priesthood of "blessing" and of quickening to persons fainting and ready to die.

5. The priesthood of Melchizedek was further distinguished by every general characteristic which could enhance its glory. In particular, it was one, unchangeable, continuous, and royal. It was one. The Levitical priests were "many in number." Melchizedek was one. We read, it is true, of his "order," but of that order he is the single representative until Jesus came. Our Lord even was not, strictly speaking, his successor. His Priesthood was rather the perfect embodiment of all that His prototype had shadowed forth, the original pattern upon which His forerunner had been moulded. Melchizedek had neither predecessor nor successor in office, or, if he had, we do not know them, and the strain of the passage forbids our thinking of them. He gathered up into his single person, so far as was possible to a merely human personality, the whole idea of priesthood. In itself as well as numerically, his priesthood was one.

Thus one, it was also unchangeable. Absolute unity is in the nature of things unchangeable. A succession of individuals will vary with the varying traits of character and work produced in the course of generations by the ever-changing circumstances of the world. No flight of time brings with it any difference in our conception of that which can only possess its internal oneness by being the expression of some essential reality,

¹ Heb. ix. 10.

always abiding amidst accidental and temporary change. The more therefore these ideas can be embodied either in persons or institutions, the greater the glory that belongs to them, and the greater their value to creatures ever prone to fear that there is nothing either within or around them on which they can depend.

One and unchangeable, the priesthood of Melchizedek was further marked by uninterrupted continuity. It could be disturbed by no outward incident, not even by that law of death which everything of earth obeys. Having neither beginning of days nor end of life, Melchizedek "abideth a priest continually,"¹—"continually," not exactly "for ever." The first of these two phrases is relative, the second absolute. The meaning is not necessarily that the priesthood spoken of is everlasting; but that, as long as there was any function to be discharged by it, nothing could interrupt its task.

Yet again, the priesthood of Melchizedek was royal. The Jewish view of royalty spoken of in the previous lecture ought to be here before our minds. According to it royalty was not simply elevation in rank, dignity, and splendour. It was power,—power to protect friends and to overthrow enemies. No power of this kind belonged to the Levitical priests. Notwithstanding their religious privileges, they were only citizens of the state. They could persuade or remonstrate, sacrifice or pray. They could instruct the people in times of peace, or in war they could accompany the armies of Israel to the field. But their province was

¹ Heb. vii. 3.

to serve and not to rule, to submit to authority, and, except in matters specially provided for by Divine appointment, not to control their brethren. The priesthood of Melchizedek was royal, and whatever he desired as a priest he could accomplish as a king.

6. Once more, both the Levitical priesthood and the whole Jewish economy acknowledged its inferiority to Melchizedek and bowed before him. The striking scene from the Book of Genesis appears to be especially quoted in order to illustrate this. Two figures are there introduced to us, and both are representative—the one, “priest of God Most High,” representing the priestly idea in the purest form in which men were at the time capable of receiving it; the other, Abraham, “the patriarch,”¹ “he that hath the promises,” the illustrious father of the faithful, in whose loins was even then the priestly tribe which was afterwards to occupy so commanding a place in Jewish history. These two persons meet. Nay, more. The particular moment at which they meet is to be noted in order that the full meaning of the scene may be understood. It was when “Abraham was returning from the slaughter of the kings,”² when he had proved himself to be the vindicator of the oppressed, and was flushed with victory. Yet even at that moment, with

¹ It is unfortunate that the Revised Version should have failed to give the emphasis of the original to the position of the word “patriarch” in Heb. vii. 4, the true translation, as we should say, being “unto whom

Abraham gave a tenth out of the chief spoils—and *he* the patriarch.” “A whole argument about the dignity of Abraham is condensed into the position of one emphatic word” (Farrar, *in loc.*).

² Heb. vii. 1.

no compulsion, with no commandment binding him, such as afterwards bound the people to pay tithes to the sons of Levi, he voluntarily gave to Melchizedek "a tenth out of the chief spoils." What a token of submission on the part of the one! What a proof of greatness in the other! Then Melchizedek "blessed" Abraham, that is, not merely uttered for him his friendly wishes or his prayers, but pronounced upon him his priestly blessing, and, along with him, upon Levi, Aaron, and the whole line of the Aaronic priesthood. Could there be the slightest hesitation in the mind of any one as to the superiority of the earlier to the later priesthood? The law is universal that "the less is blessed of the better."¹

Two characteristics of the priesthood are not indeed distinctly mentioned in the account given us of Melchizedek—his appointment by God to his office and his human sympathy. Yet the first of these is indicated with sufficient clearness in the statement that he was "priest of God Most High"; for every Jew knew well that he could not have been so had he not been commissioned by Divine authority. The second again appears in what is said of the blessing bestowed on Abraham, for, whatever else that blessing may include, it seems designed to illustrate the human-hearted compassion of the priest when he supplied the wants of the patriarch and his exhausted warriors.

Such then is that priesthood of Melchizedek in which the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews beholds reflected

¹ Heb. vii. 7.

the Priesthood of our Lord in heaven. And now, combining the characteristics spoken of with the positive statements of Scripture, and with the fact that the Priesthood of our Lord, like every other part of the Christian system, fulfils the imperfect ideas of the ancient economy of Israel, we learn what the heavenly Priesthood of our great High-priest is. In the first place, we have to mark the more general characteristics of that Priesthood. The Work in which its duties are discharged must be reserved for another Lecture.

The more general characteristics of our Lord's heavenly Priesthood.

1. The foundation of our Lord's Priesthood is the constitution of His person, and not regularity of descent from others. No doubt it is "after the order of Melchizedek," but the peculiar language of the sacred writer is sufficient to prove that its fundamental ideas pass from our Lord to Melchizedek, and not from Melchizedek to our Lord.¹ Melchizedek illustrates rather than lays down the principles of the line to which he belongs. These in their originality are to be found in the exalted and glorified Lord; and the first of them is that the heavenly High-priest is what He is personally, not by succession. He is the Son, and this connexion between His Sonship and His heavenly Priesthood is brought out with remarkable force in the Epistle to the Hebrews. The very opening of the Epistle witnesses to the fact. Few will doubt that the whole Old Testament dispensation, and not merely words spoken

¹ Compare p. 83.

“in the prophets” in the narrower sense of that term, are there contrasted with the higher dispensation brought in “at the end of these days.” If so, it must be the priestly arrangements of both dispensations that the writer has particularly in his eye; for, immediately afterwards, in drawing out the contrast between the past and the present, he fixes upon the priestly work of Christ as the leading and most essential characteristic of the Christian age, “who being the effulgence of His glory and the very image of His substance, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when *He had made purification of sins*, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.” The “purification of sins” was the work which Jesus, in passing on to His exaltation, accomplished; and He accomplished it as the “Son” whose eternal pre-existence and glorious position both in creation and providence are described in the preceding participial clauses.¹ Thus, in the Sonship of our Lord the foundation of His High-priestly work is laid. The same truth is not less clearly brought out in a later passage in which, calling us to consider Christ, “the Apostle and *High-priest* of our confession,” and contrasting Him with Moses, in whom the whole ancient economy was summed up, the writer closes his comparison with the words that Christ was faithful “as a Son” over His house.² And, to refer only to one other passage, it is thus that when comparing the high-priests appointed by “the law” with the High-priest of the Christian Israel he describes the latter as a “Son.”³ In

¹ For connexion comp. Keil *in loc.*

² Heb. iii. 1-6.

³ Heb. vii. 28.

all these passages, too, it is to be particularly observed that Christ is spoken of not simply as the Incarnate, but as the exalted and glorified Son. In the first He has "sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high": in the second He "hath been counted worthy of more glory than Moses," where the tense of the verb leads directly to the thought of His continually existing glory: in the third He is the Son "perfected for evermore." It is unnecessary to enlarge upon the point. No truth appears more clearly upon the face of the whole Epistle than that neither the pre-existent nor the incarnate Sonship of our Lord (although both are proceeded on and implied), but His Sonship in His now glorified condition constitutes Him to be our High-priest. The two conceptions of Son and Priest cannot, in His case, be separated from each other. Because He was to be the High-priest of humanity He assumed our human nature, and was afterwards elevated in that nature to the throne of the heavenly Majesty. Because He had assumed our human nature, and had been so elevated, He was fitted for His priestly function.

Nor is it difficult to conceive how it should be so. Our Lord was to be the one Mediator between God and man, thus fulfilling the office of a priest. But to effect a real mediation He must Himself be both Divine and human; and no inspiration, however high, can make a creature Divine. Impartation of nature alone can do so. No prophet of the Old Testament, therefore, no angel of God even, could have been a mediator in the highest sense of the term. He alone could be so who was the

Son "in the bosom of the Father,"¹ who also "became flesh and dwelt among us," and who in His two natures was lifted into that all-embracing spiritual world from which He can penetrate to the spirit of man as man, through the limitations and conditions of earthly circumstance. Whatever our Lord effects for His people in His heavenly Priesthood He effects by reason of the very constitution of His nature as the ascended and glorified Lord. His Priesthood is not merely an office conveyed to Him by the gift of God. Nor does He merely draw upon the resources of His Eternal Godhead in order that He may form the Divine life within us. "He bears the name of Mediator because He *is* what it expresses."² There is nothing arbitrary or artificial in the arrangement of the economy of grace. Its gifts are no other than the natural and necessary result of what He who is its substance *is* in relation to the Father upon the one hand, and to man upon the other. In Himself He fulfils the mediation at which priesthood aims. He is *the*³ Mediator, the bond in which the mediation is actually accomplished and realised. Out of that truth every other truth connected with "so great salvation" flows. Hence, accordingly, the importance of maintaining, and of urging with persistent earnestness, as essential to any just thought of salvation, the twin truths of the Divinity and the glorified humanity of our Lord. Religion, if it have any meaning, means a union between God and man, penetrating to the very

¹ John i. 18.

² Wilberforce on the Incarnation, chap. vii.

³ Wilberforce, u.s.

foundation of man's being. Redemption is a state into which we are introduced with the full concurrence and co-operation of our nature, and where we become what we are through the processes of actual life. Those, therefore, who abandon either the doctrine of the Divinity or of the glorified Humanity of our Lord, do not simply abandon doctrines in the statement of which they believe that they see the imperfect working of the human intellect. They abandon facts essential to the conception of a perfect religion. They hand us over to a religion of nature and humanity, to a religion which may be good (that is for them to prove), but from which all thought alike of Revelation and of God must needs be gradually excluded. This aspect of the case ought to be fairly faced, and not evaded, as, at one time from prejudice, at another from self-interest, it so often is.

2. In its sphere of action, our Lord's Priesthood belongs to the heavenly region which the whole New Testament regards as that of the ultimate development of man. "That is not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; then that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second man is of heaven."¹ The heavenly, the ideal, is that to which our nature points, and to which it continually aspires. In the Priesthood of our Lord these longings of the soul are met. He Himself is heavenly; He ministers in a heavenly sanctuary; He offers Himself "through eternal spirit" to the Father who must be worshipped in spirit and in truth; He calls His people with a "heavenly

¹ 1 Cor. xv. 46, 47.

calling"; He bestows upon them a "heavenly gift"; He enables them to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Him. The most essential characteristic of His work is not that He treads this earth of ours, engages in its labours, bears its burdens, encounters its temptations, and drinks its cup of sorrows. He does all this, it is true, and it was necessary for Him to do it in order that He might be prepared for His work in heaven. But, these things done, His real work is heavenly. It starts from a heavenly as distinguished from an earthly world. It belongs to a heavenly world, is wrought out in a heavenly world, leads to a heavenly world. While the Redeemer comes to us, made in all things like unto His brethren, He comes chiefly as the embodiment of a higher sphere, as One who, uniting us to Himself in a real, not a fictitious union, makes us members of a heavenly family gathered together in that House which is His own, and citizens of a heavenly City of which He is at once the Foundation and the Light. In His work as High-priest, and from the beginning to the end of that work, our Lord is not first of earth and afterwards of heaven. In this capacity He is first of heaven; and then He carries out His work on earth, in the meantime by His Spirit, afterwards by His personal presence, that He may change earth into the heaven of which He is Himself the only full and adequate expression. Herein, accordingly, lies the noblest trait of practical Christianity—its idealism. It is a system which no earthly reed can measure, an ocean which no earthly line can fathom. The ages press on in their effort to

realise the blessings of a perfect civilisation and brotherhood of man. They have as yet unfolded no thought not contained in the heavenly Priesthood of our Lord, and they have discovered no aim which does not proceed directly from His heavenly life. They never will. In the very nature of the case what is thus ideal or heavenly must always be in advance of human effort. From it we must ever draw our loftiest inspirations, and procure for our activities their wisest guides.

It needs the ideal to brush an hairbreadth's off
The dust of the actual.

The loftiest aspirations of humanity have been realised in the Son of man. Because they have been so we believe and hope that they will be realised in humanity as a whole.

3. Our Lord's Priesthood fulfils the idea of all priesthood, and more particularly of the priesthood instituted under the earlier economy of the Law.

(1.) It is marked by Divine appointment and human sympathy. "For every high-priest, being taken from among men, is appointed for men in things pertaining to God . . . who can bear gently with the ignorant and erring, for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity,"¹ and thus was it with our Lord. "He also glorified not Himself to be made a High-priest;" nor did He so receive His office from men, or so do their will, that it should be possible to say of Him that He was simply the reflection of the longings and yearnings of the

¹ Heb. v. 1, 2.

human heart. He was appointed by Him "that spake unto Him, Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee: as He saith also in another place, Thou art a Priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek,"¹ The Father "sent" Him. No word fell from His lips which He did not hear from the Father. No work was done by His hands which was not the Father's work. In all His labours and sufferings there is a sense in which we may say that we behold the labours and sufferings of the Father. Not merely Christ but God, in whose love it is so difficult to believe, hath loved us; and, if we rejoice in the thought that Christ is love, His mission in every one of its particulars proclaims that God is love. While thus sent of God, our High-priest is also full of sympathy. He is "touched with a feeling of our infirmities." No suffering child of man can have a more bitter cup to drink than that which drew from Him His "strong crying and tears"; and when, therefore, His people cry or weep, He enters into their sorrows as His own. What is done to them, He testifies of Himself, is done to "Me."² Divine appointment, human sympathy! In these are to be found two of the most important characteristics of a perfect priest.

(2.) Our Lord's Priesthood elevates into the spiritual sphere the ideas that were only outwardly and carnally expressed in Israel. Was the priest of the Jewish economy the property of God in a deeper sense than the ordinary Israelite? It was thus in the highest possible degree with Him of whom it was declared by

¹ Heb. v. 5, 6.

² Matt. xxv. 40; Acts ix. 4.

the voice from heaven, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,"¹ and who said of Himself, "I and My Father are one."² Was it necessary that the Jewish priest should be free from every personal defect and uncleanness? Christ was "holy, guileless, undefiled, separated from sinners," One who was able to offer Himself "without blemish unto God."³ Did the priest of old require to be not only free from ceremonial defilement but to be positively cleansed? Christ could say of Himself, "Which of you convicteth Me of sin?" "I do always the things that are pleasing to Him that sent Me."⁴ Or, finally, were Israel's priests not only divinely appointed but consecrated to their office? Even upon earth Christ was not only the "Sent" of God, but was consecrated by the fullest and most perfect unction of that Spirit who descended upon Him at His Baptism, abode with Him then, and abides with Him for ever.⁵

(3.) As with the person of our great High-priest, so also with His priestly service. In every essential particular it rises far above the priestly service of Israel, and is the fulfilment of the service which Israel enjoyed. As contrasted with the Levitical system it is inward instead of outward, thus meeting those deeper wants of man to which the earlier system had failed to penetrate. The gifts and sacrifices laid by the Israelite upon God's altar could not, "as touching the conscience," make the worshipper perfect, being only (with meats

¹ Matt. iii. 17.

² John x. 30.

³ Heb. vii. 26; ix. 14.

⁴ John viii. 46, 29.

⁵ John i. 32.

and drinks and divers washings) carnal ordinances imposed until a time of reformation.”¹ They had indeed served an important though a temporary purpose. While Israel was as yet unable to comprehend the true nature of God and of His worship, they had inspired powerful convictions as to the evil consequences of forsaking, and the blessedness of serving Him. But it was necessary that the true nature of God should become better known, and that existing ideas of sin and holiness should be deepened. Thus the whole Jewish system was doomed to break down. “It is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins,”² or the observance of an outward ceremonial become a substitute for inward righteousness. In the case of spiritual and free beings nothing can take away the sin or impart the righteousness but identification with One who is absolutely acceptable to God, and whose labours, sufferings, and self-surrender to the will of God may, through union with Him, be made also theirs. Dumb animals incapable of thought and without intelligence or freedom could never meet that necessity; and a spiritual answer was wanted for a spiritual need. That answer is given us in Christ, whose action at every step He took was spiritual, voluntary, free,—so that in His perfect will we may offer our wills to the Father, and in Him be accepted and complete.

As contrasted with the Levitical priestly service that of our Lord is also unchangeable. One great weakness of the Levitical priesthood lay in this that,

¹ Heb. ix. 9, 10.

² Heb. x. 4.

held by mortal men, the office had to be continually surrendered at the call of death. There was thus in it that element of change and defeat by which the stamp of vanity is imprinted upon merely human things. At the moment when "old experience" best fitted him for the discharge of his varied and difficult duties the priest of Aaron's line was borne to the grave. At the moment when he had most completely succeeded in inspiring with confidence those who received the benefit of his ministrations his eyes closed upon their necessities and his ears to their cry. It is otherwise with the heavenly High-priest. In Him the thought of "many" is fulfilled in that of one, the thought of the changing in that of the unchanging, the thought of a past to be cherished by the memory into that of the same living and abiding presence. Nay more. The human spirit longs after the possession of life which shall rest upon something deeper than any outward promise, upon something which shall have the witness in itself, conveying with it an inward token that it shall never change. How could it obtain this through men whose own death showed that they had not themselves obtained that life, and that they therefore could not be the means of transmitting it to others? Such a gift He alone can bestow who can still say to us, with the same present power as that with which He first spoke the words in Bethany, "*I am* the Resurrection and the Life: whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die."¹

¹ John xi. 25, 26.

As contrasted with the Levitical priestly service that of our Lord is universal. The blessings of the Levitical system were confined to Israel. No stranger, unless first naturalised, could share in them. Human feeling could flow only in the narrowest groove, and the effect produced upon the mass of the people, however inconsistent with the economy under which they lived, found expression in the words, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thy enemy."¹ With the Lord Jesus Christ as the Priest of the better covenant all differences between races and classes disappear. He is not like Aaron the son of Israel: He is the Son of man. "In Him there can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free, there can be no male and female."² Not indeed that the distinctions lying in nature and providence are in Him obliterated, or that His Church will be like a large garden, full it may be of luxuriance, but of luxuriance produced only by many thousand specimens of the same flower. In one sense all the old varieties will continue to exist, and the Greek, the Jew, the bond, the free, the male and female will still be marked by those peculiarities of position or of character which may show to what great division of the human race they belong. But all are saved in the same way. The fancied righteousness of the Jew does not profit him. The long-continued alienation of the Gentile does not injure him. The learned and the ignorant, the powerful and the weak, the rich and the poor, meet in a brotherhood of equal privilege and

¹ Matt. v. 43. .

² Gal. iii. 28.

gratitude and love. The same foundation is laid for all. The same preparation in kind, although it may be different in degree, is bestowed on all. Beneath every distinction there is a common bond in which all are taught to feel for, to sympathise with, and to help one another, for all are "one man in Christ Jesus." Well might St. Paul exclaim that this universalism of the Christian faith, which proceeds directly from the universalism of Him in whom, as the High-priest of humanity, it is summed up, was the mystery which "in other generations was not made known unto the sons of men."¹ It was a "mystery" in St. Paul's days. It is hardly less a mystery in ours. Earth is longing for its fuller manifestation. The poor and the miserable are crying for it. The very wildness of effort often made to reach it is a testimony to the belief in its existence somewhere. And it does exist. But it exists as a revelation; and as a revelation only given in the heavenly High-priest.

Nor is the Priesthood of Christ less universal when thought of in relation to the infinitely varied wants of individuals than when viewed in connexion with the different races of men. As the great High-priest of humanity the exalted Lord feels for every want, and is ready to pour the balm of His consolation into every wound from which the humblest of His people suffers. We go to a mother, a sister, a brother, with whatever grieves us, trifling though it may be: the Redeemer stretched forth His hand towards His disciples and said,

¹ Eph. iii. 5, 6.

“Whosoever shall do the will of My Father which is in heaven, he is My brother, and sister, and mother.”¹

Finally, as contrasted with the Levitical priestly service that of our Lord is everlasting. The priests of Aaron's line were made “after the law of a fleshy commandment”; our High-priest was made “after the power of an indissoluble life.”² The contrast is striking; for the word “fleshy” is not the same as “carnal,” and its use forbids the thought that any moral weakness of the Levitical priesthood was in the writer's mind. The members of that priesthood were simply of the dust, and they returned to dust again. Our High-priest has as His own peculiar prerogative a life in the possession of which He lives His priestly life for ever; not only throughout the years or ages of the present Christian economy but throughout eternity. Perhaps it might be thought that when the completed number of the elect has been gathered in to the safe protection of that heavenly home into which nothing that defileth enters, there will be no need either of priesthood or of priest. But such is not the teaching of the New Testament. We are rather taught there that in our Lord as Priest we shall always stand accepted before God, and that whatever progress towards perfection awaits us in the heavenly state must be made in Him.³ We can never either stand or advance in our own strength. We can never forget to whom we owe the continu-

¹ Matt. xii. 49, 50.

² Heb. vii. 16.

³ Expiati jam indigebunt con-

summari per Jesum Christum a quo gloria eorum dependet.—Thomas Aquin. Migne's Ed. iv. 222, col. 1.

ance, as well as the first bestowal, of our blessedness. Throughout eternity the love of the Father must flow forth to us "in the name" of Jesus, as much as it flows forth to us in that name now. He has made known to us the Father's name, and He will also continue to make it known "that the love wherewith the Father had loved Him may be in us, and He in us."¹ Therefore does the Seer of Patmos behold the glorified Lord in heaven clad in priestly robes; and in similar robes, in garments made white in the blood of the Lamb, His redeemed there either surround Him with their songs of praise or follow Him whithersoever He goeth.

4. The end which our Lord's Priesthood accomplishes is the end of all priesthood,—the bringing sinful creatures nigh to God and preserving them in constant fellowship with Him. No truth is more deeply impressed upon the Epistle to the Hebrews than this, that to secure for us a confident and joyful access into the immediate presence of the Almighty is the ultimate issue of the work of Christ on our behalf. "As a forerunner² Jesus Himself entered for us within the veil." That they may in like manner draw nigh is "the better hope" of Christians and the most essential characteristic of their privileges. Realising it their ideal state is reached.³ When most impressed with the Majesty of Him who is from everlasting to everlasting, they can approach Him in the spirit of

¹ John xvii. 26.

Expositor, 3d series, vol. x. p. 48.

² See the excellent remarks of Professor Bruce on this word in

³ Heb. vii. 19; x. 22; iv. 16; xii. 22.

adoption crying, Abba, Father. There is no veil, there is no separation of apartments in the heavenly tabernacle; and raised to an even higher dignity than that of Israel's greatest functionary, who could enter into the Most Holy Place only once a year, the humblest follower of Christ may dwell there, beholding the glory of God, and resting beneath the shadow of His wings. This is indeed the "perfection" so often spoken of in the Epistle to the Hebrews, both in our Lord's case and ours,—not mere glory after shame, repose after battle, or rest after the race of life is run, but man's nature and condition brought to their ideal end; God united to man and man to God, in perfect, uninterrupted, and joyful fellowship.