THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS.

XVI. The More Excellent Ministry (Chap. ix. 11–14).

In these remarkable sentences the priestly ministry of Christ is described in contrast to that of the Jewish high priest, the aim being to show that the former ministry is, as stated in chap. viii. 6, a more excellent one both in its nature and in its result.

Between things contrasted there must be some resemblance. Hence, to facilitate comparison, the essential facts which form the basis of the doctrine of Christ's priesthood, His death as a sacrificial victim and His ascension into heaven as one whose blood had been shed, are here stated in terms suggested by the transactions on the great day of atonement, involving a parallelism between Christ and Aarôn which at each point is at the same time a contrast in Christ's favour. This mode of stating the truth is dictated by the apologetic aim, and serves well the purpose of conveying rudimentary ideas on the subject to ill-instructed minds. But of course it has its drawbacks. It involves obscurity at points where the parallelism is faint, and provides in a very inadequate measure for the expression of the highest truth. In this respect teaching by types is like teaching by parables. It is good to begin with, but ill fitted to be the last word.

These remarks find illustration in the passage now to be considered, which bristles with difficulties of all sorts, uncertainty in the text, doubtful connexions of clauses, expressions to which it is not easy to assign an intelligible meaning, and phrases suggestive of lofty thoughts, where the mind of the writer seems to break away from the trammels of typology and soar into the serene region of spiritual truth. In the circumstances I deem it best to state as plainly as possible the views which commend themselves to my own

mind, without discussing at length others with which I am unable to agree. At one point only shall I depart from this attitude, *viz.* in connexion with the expression "through the eternal Spirit," which I regard as the most important in the whole epistle, and as at once needing and justifying the most careful exposition, both positive and defensive.

Verses 11 and 12 I render as follows: "But Christ, appearing[1] as High Priest of the good things to come,[2] did, through the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation, and not through blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, enter[3] in once for all into the holy place, so obtaining eternal redemption."

The ministry of Christ is here set forth as the more excellent, in comparison with that of Aaron, in whom the Levitical priesthood culminated, in four respects: (1) because He entered into the true sanctuary through a more perfect tabernacle; (2) because He entered "through His own blood," not through blood of goats and calves; (3) because He thereby obtained, not an annual, but an "eternal redemption"; (4) because on that account He needed to enter only once (ἐφάπαξ).

The very first of these four particulars makes us conscious of the difficulties created by the typological parallelism.

[1] παραγενόμενος expresses the idea of appearing on the stage of history; but we need not confine its meaning to the advent of Christ, or to His life on earth, though it includes this, but with Alford understand it as referring to "the whole accomplished course of Christ summed up in one," from His incarnation to His entrance into heaven as a Priest after the order of Melchisedec.

[2] Instead of μελλόντων, Codex B has γενομένων, which, true to their critical principles, Westcott and Hort have admitted into their text. This reading is probably an ancient error of the eye, caused by παραγενόμενος going before.

[3] I render εἰσῆλθεν "did enter in," instead of "entered in," to make clear the dependence of all the clauses following "did" on the clause containing the main affirmation. Others connect the clauses differently. Thus among recent writers Mr. Rendall construes the sentence as follows: "Christ appearing, not through blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, as High Priest of good things which came (γενομένων) through the greater and more perfect tabernacle," etc.

The suggestion seems to be that as Aaron on the great day of atonement entered into the holy of holies through the first division of the tabernacle, so Christ entered into the celestial most holy place through something corresponding thereto. We may indeed very excusably doubt whether that can be intended, seeing it is part of the author's doctrine that by Christ the distinction between holy place and most holy is abolished. But the veil might exist for Christ entering, and be abolished by His entering. Assuming then that Christ is conceived of as entering in through something corresponding to the first division of the tabernacle, the question arises, What is the something? I am inclined to agree with those who think that we have nothing here but a form of thought dictated by the parallelism between Christ and Aaron. You may fill it in, if you please, by the lower or first heavens, or by the place of God's visible presence, where He is manifested as an object of worship to angels and spirits of just men made perfect, as distinguished from the proper abode of God, whom no eye hath seen or can see, the celestial holy of holies. I for my part prefer to leave it vague. Were I to yield to the temptation to become definite, I should take up with the antiquated view of the worthy Fathers who saw in Christ's body or human nature the greater and more perfect tabernacle through which our High Priest passed into the celestial sanctuary. Whatever one may think of its truth, it has at least the merits of intelligibility and moral interest. It is much easier to think of Christ's human nature as a tabernacle through which He entered into glory, than to form a definite conception of the heavens as divided into a holy and a most holy place. Then there is something fine in the idea that our Lord's human nature and earthly history were to Him what the transit through the first division of the tabernacle was to the Jewish high priest, *viz.* the condition of His gaining an entrance into the most holy place, the heavenly sanctuary,

as the great High Priest of mankind. On this view, the space between the two veils becomes an emblem of the life of Jesus on earth between His mysterious advent as the holy Child and His no less mysterious exit when He ascended into heaven, and His career between these two points answers to the solemn passage of Aaron through the first tabernacle to the second on the day of annual atonement. I feel the beauty of this thought, while not prepared to affirm that it is the one intended; though in view of the representation of Christ's flesh as a veil in chap. x. 20, it cannot be said to be foreign to the writer's typological system. Acceptance of it is of course not facilitated by the description of the better tabernacle as not of this creation (*οὐ ταύτης τῆς κτίσεως*).[1] The body of Christ was of this creation, just like the bodies of other men. From this difficulty some take refuge in the glorified, spiritualized body of Christ, only to encounter trouble in another direction from the question, In what sense can it be said that Christ passed through His glorified body? The only possible solution is to say that *through* means *with*, not implying local transition, but a condition under which a particular action is performed.

At the next point in the comparison the typological parallelism brings us in front of a new difficulty. Aaron entered into the inner shrine of the tabernacle with the blood of sacrificial victims in his hands. Is it suggested that Christ took His blood with Him into heaven? No such crude idea ever entered the writer's mind. Does

[1] Though I have adopted here the rendering of the Revised Version, I am by no means sure that the words above quoted should not be rendered "not of common structure." Dr. Field, in *Otium Norvicense*, remarks on this passage, "By *ταύτης* I understand *vulgaris, quæ vulgo dicitur*." After giving several examples of this usage, which he thinks has been overlooked by lexicographers, he adds: "This being understood, there is no occasion to take *κτίσις* in any other sense than that in which *κτίζειν* is commonly applied to a city (3 Esd. iv. 53: *κτίσαι τὴν πόλιν*) or to the tabernacle itself (Lev. xvi. 16: *οὕτω ποιήσεις τῇ σκηνῇ τῇ ἐκτισμένῃ αὐτοῖς*)."

the parallelism then fail at this point? In some respects it certainly does. In the Levitical system, blood-sprinkling within the sanctuary was an essential feature in sacrifice. In connexion with the better ministry there is no blood-sprinkling, except in a figure which has no value save as the symbol of a spiritual truth. Blood belongs to this world, and can find no place in heaven. But an analogy can be established between Christ and Aaron by conceiving of blood as the means of gaining admission into the sanctuary. The blood in either case may be regarded as a key opening the door of the holiest. It is in the light of this idea that the phrases, "not through blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood," are to be understood. The writer seizes hold of the one point at which parallelism in the matter of blood is possible, and skilfully adapts his mode of expression (διά) to the state of the case.

Thus far of the parallelism, but now of the contrast: "not by blood of *goats and calves*, but by *His own* blood." To feel the force of this distinction we must understand that the comparison lies not between the *bloods*, but between the *victims*. Blood, whether of man or of beast, is a material, corruptible thing. Chemically considered, I suppose, there is not much difference between them. But what a difference between the victims! In the one case a bullock or a goat, in the other Jesus Christ Himself. There is really no comparison here. "His own blood" takes us into a region of thought where typological conceptions serve no purpose, save to make a crude religious system a foil to show off the grandeur of spiritual truth. We pass *per saltum* from the ritual to the ethical; from a brute beast slain involuntarily without foreknowledge, and without capacity to consent to or appreciate the reason of its dying, to a holy, loving Man, who laid down His own life deliberately, freely, devotedly, animated by an eternal spirit of goodness. Without knowing much of theology one can understand

that the two kinds of sacrifice must have very different values in the judgment of God. How the Levitical sacrifice could have any value or any effect it is not easy to see; but that a self-sacrifice like that of Jesus has immeasurable value, however it is to be theologically formulated, for God and for man, one instinctively feels. The difficulty experienced by theologians in their attempts to express its worth in terms of theory is due to the vastness of its significance. Therein is revealed a "many-coloured wisdom of God."[1]

What virtue our author ascribed to Christ's sacrifice appears from the words which set forth the third and chief point of contrast between His ministry and that of Aaron: "obtaining *eternal* redemption" (*αἰωνίαν λύτρωσιν εὑράμενος*). This is what results from the entrance of Christ into the sanctuary through His own blood, *i.e.* as one who had Himself been the victim. When we come to consider the two following verses, we shall see more clearly why that fact should have so momentous a consequence. For the present we may confine our attention to the exact force of the contrast between the two ministries at this point. It is this: By his sacrifice of bullocks and goats the high priest of Israel procured for himself and for the people an *annual* redemption; by His sacrifice of Himself Christ procured an *everlasting, perennial* redemption. The blood of bulls and goats taken within the veil and sprinkled on the mercy-seat procured, not by its intrinsic virtue, but by positive Divine appointment, remission of certain offences against the Levitical religious system, with the effect of restoring offenders to right theocratic relations for the time being, so giving the people a fair start, as it were, for another year. The blood of Christ shed freely and lovingly on Calvary, and conceived as taken up by Him into heaven, procured by its transcendent essential merit perpetual re-

[1] Eph. iii. 10: *ἡ πολυποίκιλος σοφία τοῦ Θεοῦ*.

mission of all sin, took away the whole sin of the world, and so gave mankind a new start, not for a new year, but for a new, unending era of grace. Such is the contrast: on one side, an annual, partial, putative redemption; on the other, an eternal, complete, real redemption. There is no room to doubt where the superiority lies.

The final point of comparison is the number of entries into the most holy place. The high priest of Israel went in once a year, our great High Priest went in once for all. To the legal, ceremony-loving mind the advantage in this respect might seem to be with the Levitical priesthood. What a fine, imposing service was that annual solemnity of expiation! With what pious delight the devout worshipper anticipated its return, with all its hallowed associations! How pleasant and comforting to have the year divided by sacred seasons! and what a blank would be created by their discontinuance! Tell him not of the insufficiency of those annual atonements: all he knows is that he finds much pleasure in them, and real satisfaction to his conscience in their periodic cancelling of the sins of each past year. Very natural feelings these. It comes natural to men in all ages (yes, even in this Christian era, when we ought to have outgrown such childish practices) to observe "days and months and times and years." But such attachments to sacred times in no case settle the question as to the worth or unworth of religious institutions. In particular, it by no means followed that because the day of atonement was an institution to which the pious Israelite fondly clung, therefore it was fitted to perfect the worshipper as to conscience, or to deal thoroughly with the problem of sin. On the contrary, the annual repetition of the solemnity was a standing testimony to its insufficiency. It needed to be repeated, because at no time did it fulfil the end of its existence. Repetition is not indeed in all cases evidence of insufficiency. The repetition of the

passover did not show that it came short of its purpose. It was a commemorative festival, and its repetition served to keep alive the memory of the exodus. The same remark applies to the feast of tabernacles, which commemorated the wilderness life of Israel. But the annual atonement was not commemorative of redemption achieved once for all. There was in it a remembrance of sin, not of redemption from sin, every year. It was a fresh act of expiation. Therefore in this case repetition implied insufficiency. The atonement for sin was not, like the deliverance out of Egypt, a thing done thoroughly once for all; therefore it had to be done over and over again.

We pass now to vers. 13, 14. The purpose of these sentences is to justify the ascription to the one sacrifice of Christ virtue sufficient to procure for sinful men a real and eternal redemption. They contain the writer's fullest statement as to the nature of Christ's sacrifice, his final answer to the question, What has this Man to offer?

"For if the blood of goats and bulls, and ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled, sanctifieth unto the cleanness of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through an eternal spirit offered Himself without spot unto God, purge our conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"

The point chiefly to be noted in ver. 13 is, that, while in the previous part of the argument mention is made only of the victims slain on the day of atonement, here, besides these, a reference is made to the legal provision for removing uncleanness contracted by accidental contact with a dead body. The reason readily suggests itself. Both things, the blood of victims on the day of atonement, and the ashes of the red heifer, are named together, because the two combined formed the complete legal provision for removing uncleanness, however contracted, *from the whole people of Israel.* The one dealt with the defilement of *sin,*

the other with the defilement caused by contact with *death*. By thus uniting the two, our author protects himself from a possible charge of dealing partially with the subject under consideration. And while doing full justice to the law he has an eye to the glory of the gospel. He is preparing the way for the presentation of Christ's sacrifice as dealing effectually with the whole question of moral defilement in all its aspects. He mentions both the blood of sacrificial victims and the ashes of the heifer, because he means to exhibit Christ's blood as serving both the purposes for which these two kinds of legal purification were respectively provided, so proving itself to be a perfect cure for moral evil. On this view the mention of the two Levitical remedies for defilement over against the one remedy under the gospel suggests a subsidiary argument for the superiority of the priestly ministry of the new covenant.

Another point in ver. 13 is worthy of notice. Both the Levitical remedies for uncleanness are spoken of as availing merely for the purity of the flesh. The statement is strictly applicable to the ashes of the heifer, for the sole design of that peculiar institution was to make a man technically clean whose person had come into contact with a carcase. But it may seem rather depreciatory to say of the blood shed on the day of atonement that it availed only to the purifying of the flesh, seeing the express purpose of the sacrifices offered on that day was to make atonement for the sins of Israel. Yet practically, and in effect, the representation is correct. These sacrifices did not purge the conscience, but only the persons of the worshippers. Grave moral offences they did not even profess to deal with, but only with technical offences against religious ritual. And their effect was just that which followed application of the ashes of the heifer, the removal of technical disability to serve God. A man who touched a dead body was not allowed to approach the tabernacle till he had been sprinkled with

holy water mixed with a portion of the ashes. In like manner the whole people of Israel were regarded as formally disqualified for the service of God by the accumulated "ignorances" of the past year, till the blood of victims had been duly applied for the purpose of purgation.

In ver. 14 Christ's sacrifice in its infinite worth and eternal validity is set over against these legal provisions for the purification of Israel. We have to note (1) on what the virtue of Christ's sacrifice is made to depend; and (2) what its effect is represented to be.

1. The reason why the sacrifice of Christ possesses transcendent virtue is given in these words, "Who through an eternal spirit offered Himself spotless to God" (ὃς διὰ πνεύματος αἰωνίου ἑαυτὸν προσήνεγκεν ἄμωμον τῷ Θεῷ); where stress must be laid on each of three particulars: Christ offered *Himself;* in offering Himself He presented a *spotless* offering; He offered Himself *through an eternal spirit.* I arrange them thus, because through the explanation of the first two particulars I hope to feel my way to the sense of the third and most difficult one.

First, then, Christ's sacrifice possesses incomparable worth and virtue because the victim was HIMSELF. The ἑαυτόν before the verb is emphatic, and is one of the words to be written here and throughout the epistle in large letters. In this one fact is involved that Christ's sacrifice possessed certain moral attributes altogether lacking in the Levitical sacrifices: voluntariness and beneficent intention, the freedom of a rational being with a mind of his own and capable of self-determination, the love of a gracious personality in whom the soul of goodness dwells. Christ's sacrifice was an affair of mind and heart—in one word, of *spirit.*

Christ's sacrifice possesses incomparable worth and virtue, secondly, because in Himself He presented to God a *spotless* sacrifice—spotless in the moral sense. He was a perfectly

holy, righteous Man, and He showed His moral purity precisely by being loyal and obedient even to the point of enduring death for righteousness' sake. The victims under the law were spotless also, but merely in a physical sense. Christ's spotlessness, on the contrary, was ethical, a quality belonging not to His body, but to His spirit.

We are now prepared in some measure to understand the third ground of the value attaching to Christ's sacrifice; *viz.* that He offered Himself *through an eternal spirit.* Putting aside for a moment the epithet "eternal," we see that Christ's sacrifice was one in which *spirit* was concerned, as opposed to the legal sacrifices in which flesh and blood only were concerned. The important thing in connexion with the latter was the simple fact that the blood was shed and sprinkled according to the rubric. The important thing in Christ's sacrifice was, not the fact that His blood was shed, but the spirit in which it was shed. Then, further, we have no difficulty in determining the ethical character of the spirit in which Christ offered Himself. It was a *free, loving, holy* spirit. But the writer, it is observable, omits mention of these moral qualities, and employs instead another epithet, which in the connexion of thought it was more important to specify, and which there was little chance of his readers supplying for themselves. That epithet is *eternal.* The apparent purpose it is meant to serve is, to explain how it comes that the sacrifice of Christ has perpetual validity, how it obtained *eternal* redemption. It meets a state of mind that might express itself thus: "I see the difference between a brute beast slain by the priest and a sacrifice in which the priest is himself the victim, a difference arising out of the introduction of the elements of will and intention; but how that one sacrifice of Himself offered by Christ, though presented through a free, loving, holy spirit, avails to procure an eternal redemption, so that no more sacrifices are needed, I do not see." The epithet

"eternal" suggests the thought: the act performed by Jesus in offering Himself may, as a historical event, become old with the lapse of ages; but the spirit in which the act was done can never become a thing of the past. The blood shed was corruptible; but the spirit which found expression in Christ's self-sacrifice is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, and in its eternal self-identity lends to the priestly deed imperishable merit and significance.

This fitly chosen phrase thus makes the one sacrifice of Christ cover with its efficacy all prospective sin. But it does more than that. It is retrospective as well as prospective, and makes the sacrifice valid for the ages going before. For an eternal spirit is independent of time, and gives to acts done through its inspiration validity for all time. In this respect it might be said of Christ, that though He offered Himself in historical fact after the world had been in existence for some thousands of years, He offered Himself in spirit "before the foundation of the world." It does not follow from this that the value of His sacrifice was the same in all respects before and after its historical presentation. It was the same for God, but not for man. The sacrifice that was to be influenced God's attitude towards the world from the first. But the mystery hid in God was hid from man for ages, and during that long period the beneficent influence of the Christ's eternal spirit could reach men only through the reflected moonlight of Levitical sacrifices, serving as aids to faith in Divine redeeming grace till the era of reformation arrived.

One virtue more must be ascribed to this magic phrase, "through an eternal spirit." It helps us over the difficulty created by the fact that Christ's real self-sacrifice took place on earth, and yet ideally belongs to the heavenly sanctuary. The contradiction, it will be observed, is similar to that I had occasion to note in reference to the altar of incense. Like it, this apparently hopeless antinomy is,

when rightly viewed, easily soluble. When we think of Christ's sacrifice as offered through an eternal spirit, we see that we may place it where we please, in earth or in heaven, on Calvary or on high, as suits our purpose. Do you insist that Christ's proper offering of Himself took place in the celestial sanctuary after the ascension, even as Aaron's proper offering was the blood-sprinkling within the most holy place? I reply, Be it so: but it took place there through an eternal spirit which gave to it its value; and if we want to know what that spirit was, we must look to the earthly life of obedience and love culminating in the crucifixion, wherein it found its perfect manifestation. Through this eternal spirit Christ offered Himself before He came into the world, when He was in the world, after He left the world. All this the author of our epistle understands full well, and here in effect teaches; though the apologetic method of his writing requires him to relegate the priestly work of Christ, for the most part, to heaven.

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(To be concluded.)