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A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

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*THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS.*

## XVIII. SHADOW AND SUBSTANCE (CHAP. X. 1-18).

WHAT might seem the last word is not quite the last. The writer makes a fresh start, not as having any absolutely new truths to utter, but with intent to reassert old truths with a power and impressiveness befitting the peroration of a weighty discourse. The "for" with which the chapter begins does not imply close connexion with what goes immediately before, as if what follows were a continuation of the argument written, as it were, at the same moment; it expresses merely a general connexion with the drift of the preceding discussion, the value of Christ's one sacrifice as compared with the valuelessness of oft-repeated Levitical sacrifices. We may conceive the writer making a pause to collect himself, that he may deliver his final verdict on Leviticalism in a solemn, deliberate, authoritative manner. This verdict we have here: rapid in utterance, lofty in tone, rising from the didactic style of the theological doctor to the oracular speech of the Hebrew prophet, as in that peremptory sentence: "It is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins." The notable thing in it is, not any new line of argument, though that element is not wanting, but the series of spiritual intuitions it contains, stated or hinted, in brief, pithy phrases: the law a shadow; Levitical sacrifices constantly repeated inept; the removal of sin by the blood of brute beasts impossible; the only sacrifice that can have any real virtue that by which God's will is fulfilled. The passage reminds one of the postscript to Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, written in large letters by the apostle's own hand, in which, in the same abrupt, impassioned, prophetic style, he enumerates some of his deepest convictions: the legal

zealots hollow hypocrites; the cross of Christ alone to be gloried in; circumcision nothing, the new creation everything; the men who take this for their motto, the true Israel of God.<sup>1</sup>

The first important aphorism in this prophetic postscript, if we may so call it, expressed in a participial clause, is that the Levitical law had but a shadow of the good things to come (*σκιά*), and not the substance of them (*εικών*). The terms *σκιά* and *εικών* are fitly chosen to convey an idea of the comparative merits of Leviticalism and Christianity. A *σκιά* is a *rude* outline, such as a body casts on a wall in sunshine; an *εικών* is an *exact* image. But a shadow is, further, a likeness separate from the body which casts it; whereas the image denoted by *εικών* is inseparable from the substance, is the form of the substance, and here, without doubt, stands for it.<sup>2</sup> The difference in the one case is one of degree, and points to the superiority of the Christian religion over the Levitical; in the other it is a difference in kind, and points to the absolute worth of Christianity.

The idea that the law had only a shadow, hinted for the first time in chap. viii. 5, there in reference to the cosmic tabernacle as a shadow of the true, heavenly tabernacle, is here repeated to account for the insufficiency of the legal sacrifices. How can a shadow serve the purposes of the substance? The statement is made with special reference to the ceremonies connected with the annual atonement, as is evident from the second clause of ver. 1, and its truth in that view might be illustrated

<sup>1</sup> Gal. vi. 11-18.

<sup>2</sup> The Greek patristic commentators understood by *σκιά* the first sketch of a picture before the colours were put in, and by *εικών* the picture when it was finished. Canon Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 1889, remarks (p. 304): "The word contains one of the very few illustrations which are taken from art in the N.T. The 'shadow' is the dark, outlined figure cast by the object—as in the legend of the origin of the bas-relief—contrasted with the complete representation (*εικών*) produced by the help of colour and solid mass."

by going into details. In its comprehensive reference as an atonement for the whole people ; in the sin offering presented by the high priest for himself, before offering for the people ; in the dress worn by the high priest on that occasion ; in the proximity of the solemn season to the feast of tabernacles, which followed four days after, and to the jubilee, which began on the evening of the same day—the religious ceremonial of the tenth day of the seventh month bore a shadowy resemblance to the transaction by which the sin of the world was really atoned for. It foreshadowed an atonement for all, by a perfectly holy Person, humbling Himself unto death, and procuring for men true liberty, peace, and joy. But how rude and barely recognisable the resemblance ! The atonement, annual, partial, putative ; the holiness of the priest, not real but ritual ; his humiliation an affair of dress, not an experience of temptation, sorrow, and pain ; the feast of tabernacles, a halcyon period of *seven days* ; the year of jubilee, a twelvemonth of freedom, preceded and followed by fifty years of servitude, not an unending era of freedom and gladness. Looking at a shadow on a wall, you can tell that it is the shadow of a man, not of a horse or a tree ; but, of what particular man, even if it were your own brother, you know not. Who, reading the sixteenth chapter of *Leviticus*, could guess what the ideal redemption would be like ?

The law, having only a shadow, is not able<sup>1</sup> through its sacrifices to perfect worshippers, by communicating to them the sense of forgiveness : such, in brief, is the next aphorism. Admirers of Leviticalism might reply, “ Perhaps not by a single sacrifice, or by the ceremonial of one sacred season ; but repetition might help, the system as a

<sup>1</sup> The reading *δύναται* (ver. 1) has more diplomatic evidence in its favour than the singular *δύναται* ; but it is intrinsically so improbable, as to lead Bleek to remark, “ Even if it had been found in the autograph of the author, I should have regarded it as an accidental mistake on his part.” Whatever reading we adopt, the sense remains the same.

whole might bring satisfaction." "No," rejoins our author, "repetition does not mend matters; on the contrary, it is part of the shadowiness, it but serves to proclaim the ineffectual character of the sacrifices repeated. 'Since otherwise would they not have ceased to be offered, on account of the worshippers having no longer any consciousness of sin, being once for all purified?'<sup>1</sup> But (so far is that from being the case, that, on the contrary, in them is a remembrance of sins year by year' (vers. 2, 3.) A remembrance, mark, not an atonement; an acknowledgment that there is sin there to be atoned for, but not an effectual dealing with it such as can satisfy the conscience: nor at least the enlightened conscience, for the unenlightened might be well enough content." "The annual atonement"—the latter might say, "cancelled the ritual errors of the year past—that was what it was intended to do; what more is needed?" "Ritual errors," replies the enlightened conscience—"mere artificial offences against a code of arbitrary rules! What I want to be rid of is sin, real sin, offences against the moral law, which alone give me serious trouble." The conscience that takes up this attitude has broken with Leviticalism, lives in a wholly different world, and accepts as an axiom needing no proof, and admitting of no dispute, the blunt, downright assertion which follows: "For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sin" (ver. 4).

Here, at last, is the whole truth, declared without periphrasis or qualifying clauses, by one to whose illuminated Christian consciousness it is as clear as noonday that the

<sup>1</sup> Most commentators read ver. 2 as a question. In some texts the negative is omitted, so that the sentence reads, "The sacrifices would then have ceased to be offered, on account of the worshippers having been cleansed once for all, and having no more conscience of sins." Mr. Rendall thinks both transcribers and translators have missed the meaning, and renders: "For these sacrifices would not have ceased to be offered by reason of those who serve having been cleansed once for all, and having no more conscience of sins."

very notion that sin can be removed by the shedding or sprinkling of a beast's blood is monstrous and absurd. How refreshing to him, weary of elaborate argumentation, to have an opportunity of uttering in this direct way his spiritual intuition on the subject under consideration! And who does not feel that there is more force in this plain statement of conviction than in the lengthened argument foregoing, skilful and persuasive though it be? To every spiritually intelligent mind it is self-evident that sin cannot be removed by the blood of beasts, or even by blood at all, viewed simply as blood, whether of man or of beast, but only by a holy will revealing itself through an act of self-devotion, and sanctifying, not through the mere blood shed in death, but by the holy, loving mind revealed in dying. Such is the thought the writer has in view when he makes the round assertion above quoted, for he has not forgotten his great word, "through an eternal spirit"; and accordingly he goes on to unfold this very thought, employing as the vehicle yet another Old Testament oracle, taken from the fortieth Psalm.

"Wherefore, coming into the world, He saith: Sacrifice and offering Thou didst not wish, but a body didst Thou prepare for Me. In whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin Thou hadst no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I am come (in the roll of the book it is written of Me) to do Thy will, O God."

This oracle, as it stands in the Hebrew text, is an echo of the great prophetic maxim, "to obey is better than sacrifice." Instead of "a body didst Thou prepare for Me," taken by our author from the Septuagint version, the original has, "Mine ears hast Thou bored or opened"; the meaning being, "Thou hast no pleasure in sacrifices, but Thou hast made Me obedient, and Thou hast pleasure in that." Thus read, the oracle might seem to point to the total abolition of sacrifice. As read by our author, it points to the super-

session of one kind of sacrifice by another of a higher type. "He taketh away the first, that He may establish the second" (ver. 9). So he points the lesson, after re quoting the passage. He finds in it a reference to the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross. He assumes it to be Messianic, and conceives of Messiah as uttering the words put into His mouth on entering the world an eternal spirit incarnate. The Christ, having assumed flesh, says: "Lo, I come, that in this body which Thou hast prepared for Me I may do Thy will, O God, by offering Myself as a sacrifice." From a critical point of view, the use made of the oracle may seem questionable; but on the spiritual side it is unquestionably grand, provided we interpret the writer's meaning sympathetically. We must understand him as teaching, not merely that it pleased God by a sovereign act of His will to supersede one kind of sacrifice by another, the blood of beasts by the blood of the Man Christ Jesus, but that Christ's self-sacrifice stood in an inner, intimate, essential relation to God's will, conceived of, not as sovereign only, but as an embodiment of the moral ideal, and that its virtue lay in its being a perfect fulfilment of that will. Interpreters bent on emptying all the great words of this epistle of ethical contents, as if jealous lest its author should appear more than a common, contracted Jewish Christian, do their best to reduce the significance of this last great word to a minimum, by conceiving of Christ's sacrifice as standing, in the writer's view, in a purely external relation to the Divine will. According to them, all he means to teach is, that Christ's offering of Himself is the true and final offering for sin, because it is the sacrifice which, according to the prophecy in the book of Psalms, God desired to be presented. In this way he is made to appear inferior in spiritual insight to the psalmist, who, it is admitted, set obedience to the general moral will of God above sacrifice. I have no sympathy with such cynical

exegesis. I think that when the writer conceives of Christ come into the world as saying, "Lo, I am come to do Thy will, O God," he means something more than, "I am come to suffer in this body, since that is the way by which it pleaseth Thee to redeem man"; and that when he remarks, "In which will we have been sanctified, through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (ver. 10), he means that it is God's will that sanctifies through the offering, and not merely that it is God's will that we should be sanctified in this particular way. His doctrine is, that Christ's self-sacrifice was a perfect embodiment of Divine righteousness, and on this account possesses sanctifying virtue. God is well pleased with it, and out of regard to it pardons sin. In short, the will of God in this text serves the same general purpose as the eternal spirit in chap. ix. 14, that, *viz.*, of accounting for the value of Christ's sacrifice. I attach great importance to my interpretation of the two texts, because I believe that the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews had really surmounted Judaism, did really understand Christianity, had valuable light to throw on the momentous question, Why Leviticalism should be superseded by a new religion, a satisfactory explanation to offer why the blood of Christ should have more virtue than the blood of beasts.

In the following three verses (11-13) we have a pictorial representation addressed to the spiritual imagination, graphically depicting the contrast between the Levitical priest and the great High Priest of humanity. The picture might be named "The Sacerdotal Drudge and the Priest upon the Throne." The contrast is carefully worked out, that it may be as vivid and impressive as possible. The portrait of the Jewish priest in particular is minutely drawn, every word contributing to the pictorial effect. "And *every* priest<sup>1</sup> *stands day by day* ministering, and

<sup>1</sup> In the best texts is found ἀρχιερέως (high priest), the objection to which



offering *often* the *same* sacrifices, such as can *never* take away<sup>1</sup> sins." First, "every" (πᾶς) suggests the idea of a multitude, and that is one note of imperfection, already remarked on in an earlier part of the epistle.<sup>2</sup> Every priest *standeth* (ἕστηκεν): the attitude is servile, and as such is in contrast to the regal attitude of sitting on a throne ascribed to the exalted Christ. "Day by day" (καθ' ἡμέραν), a third mark of inferiority. The work never gets done, the wearisome round of duty is daily gone through by the sacerdotal drudge, without any result, and the poor official, as you look at him with the eye of the spirit, becomes an object of compassion to you, as if he were some criminal doomed to fruitless labour in the treadmill. "Offering the same sacrifices" (τὰς αὐτὰς θυσίας): yes, ever the same, no change from day to day, from year to year; evermore the same tale of lambs, and rams, and bullocks, and goats, slain and offered in the same stereotyped fashion as prescribed by rigid rule. "Often" (πολλάκις) are these same sacrifices offered. Had the service been confined to a few occasions, coming round at distant intervals, the sameness of the ritual would have been less felt. But as each day summoned the priest to his sacerdotal duties, his office would become in course of time unspeakably wearisome to him, and the only comfort available to the hapless official would be a beneficent stupidity, rendering him gradually insensible, as human ears grow insensible by custom to the unmelodious sounds emanating from a factory. "Sacrifices such as can *never* take away sin" (οὐδέποτε). Here was the most fatal defect

is, that what is said of the Levitical priest applies to the ordinary priests rather than to the high priest, for it was not the high priest that offered the daily sacrifices. But in a rhetorical statement strict accuracy is not aimed at. The main point is, that there was periodic repetition of sacrifice under the Levitical system, in the high priest's department as well as in the ordinary priests'.

<sup>1</sup> περιελείν, literally "to strip off all round," implying thorough work.

<sup>2</sup> vii. 23.

of all. These Levitical sacrifices, daily repeated in the same invariable manner, were of no real value. They were utterly unfit to do the very thing for which sacrifice exists. They could not divest the sinner of his sins, although the priest should live to the age of Methuselah, and offer the same sacrifices every day of his almost interminable life. This combination of *ever* and *never* is very pathetic to the reflecting mind. Ever, ever, ever at work; never, never, never doing any real good. What a dismal existence! How welcome death, coming as a kind friend to take the melancholy official from the treadmill to the grave, making his place vacant for his son and successor!

Turn your eye now from the sacerdotal drudge, and fix it on the Priest on the throne. This Man has a different career and destiny. "This one, having offered *one* sacrifice for sins, for ever sat down on the right hand of God, thenceforth waiting till His enemies be made the footstool of His feet." This Priest too had His experience of drudgery; but it had a glorious end and a magnificent result. He was a priest, but He is a king; a priest for ever indeed, but of the regal type. He standeth not daily offering over and over again the same sacrifices; He offered Himself once for all, and then sat down on a celestial throne. He who on earth was as one that serveth is now ministered unto; He that humbled Himself is exalted. His work too, however arduous and painful, was not like that of a criminal in the treadmill, but rather like that of a warrior in a campaign. He had His battle, and then His victory; He had His cross, and then His crown "of full, and everlasting, and passionless renown."

How it came about that Christ got done with His priestly work, so far as sacrifice was concerned, and in due course entered into glory is thus explained: "For by one offering<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *μία προσφορά* might be taken as nominative to the verb, which would give us this contrast: all the Levitical sacrifices together were never able to take

He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (ver. 14). His one offering serves all the purposes of all the sacrifices under the law: sanctifies, *i.e.* places men in covenant relations with God, like the "blood of the covenant" inaugurated at Sinai; perfects, *i.e.* keeps those covenant relations intact, maintains uninterrupted fellowship with God, the end which all Levitical sacrifices, offered daily, monthly, or yearly, vainly sought to effect. Surely a sufficient reason for the cessation of Christ's priestly work, in so far as it was servile! If the one sacrifice secured all that was wanted, why offer more? Why work for working's sake? The earnest man does no work aimlessly. He will spare no pains to accomplish a desired end; but that done, he will rest from his labours. One can indeed conceive a man of heroic spirit heaving a sigh when the toil and struggle are past. There was such an elevation of mind, such a buoyancy of spirit, such a blessed satisfaction of conscience connected therewith, that, despite the drudgery and the strain upon the powers of endurance, he could almost wish he had the same work to do over again. "All things that are, are with more spirit chased than enjoyed." Yet, if inactivity be distasteful to the moral hero, not less so is an idle, aimless busybodyism. And then it is to be remembered that, though the particular task be ended, there may be other work to do. The case is so with men on earth; but how is it, it may be asked, with Christ in heaven? What new work is there for Him to do? Does not His whole occupation now consist in sitting on a throne? and is not that, to speak with reverence, as monotonous as the mechanical, never-ending routine of the Levitical service? Can we imagine the eager, adventurous, enthusiastic spirit of Jesus content with that passive existence in heavenly glory? Surely He must remember

away sin; Christ's one sacrifice, on the contrary, hath perfected for ever those whom it sanctifies.

almost with regret that sublime career on earth, and be tempted to wish that He were back again in the arena of conflict, to go through His course of suffering once more!

Such thoughts, though bold, are not impious, for they do homage to the heart of Christ; yet, while natural, they are not well founded. For Christ's celestial state is not so passive as at first it seems. He too has new work to do, which occupies His mind, and shuts out regret that the old work is at an end. "He ever liveth to make intercession." He watches the progress of the world's history and the development of His kingdom. He uses His power to promote the triumph of good over evil. From the invisible heights of heaven, whence all below is in full view to the eye of His "eternal spirit," He not only surveys, but conducts the fight between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness. And up yonder His breast heaves with the varied emotions naturally awakened by the chequered course of the battle. By sympathy with His friends He fights His own battles over again with His own old foes, superstition, hypocrisy, unbelief, unrighteousness. No need therefore to look back to the long distant, ever-receding past, as if all the interest of His eternal existence were wrapped up in those memorable thirty-three years. The present is full of thrilling interest for Him, the present, I mean, of this world's history. His eyes see, His ears hear, His heart is interested in the things of earth. Earth is a very minute object seen from the skies; but the omniscient eye of Christ is a telescope of unlimited magnifying power, which can make the earth to His view just what it is to ours, a large world, full of exciting grand dramas going through their several acts, and filling His breast with strong emotions, such as we feel when we read of battles fought, of empires perishing, of slavery and other iniquities receiving their death-doom. And the future of the world is a source of intense interest to the

King on the throne, not less than the present. He watches with eager, expectant eye the progress of that great struggle between good and evil, whose final issue shall be the triumph of the good over the evil. He has great expectations as well as great recollections, pleasures of hope as well as pleasures of memory. The final issues of things, whereof the beginnings were in His own earthly life, rising there like a mighty river in an untracked mountain region, are in His view; and He looks for them with patient yet unflagging confidence, waiting for the end, for the final victory of the Divine kingdom: "expecting till His enemies be made His footstool." He has had longer to wait than it entered into the mind of the writer of this epistle to imagine; but hope deferred maketh not *His* heart sick.

The picture of the sacerdotal drudge and the Priest on the throne would have made a most impressive close to the discourse on the priestly office of Christ. One may be inclined to say, After that, not another word. Yet there is another word, intended to substantiate the statement, that by His one offering Christ perfected for ever the sanctified, bringing them nigh and keeping them nigh to God. There was no logical necessity for this being done, for the position has been proved over and over again, and one is tempted to wonder that a writer of such consummate tact should spoil the artistic effect of that fine picture by re quoting Jeremiah's oracle of the new covenant, and pointing its moral anew. But he is writing for Hebrew Christians, not for us, and he is more concerned about convincing them than about the artistic finish of his discourse. He fears lest, after all he has said, Levitical rites should still hold possession of their minds, and he makes one last effort to break the spell, at the risk of being thought tedious. It is one of very many indications, that have been pointed out as we came upon them, in how benighted a condition were the first readers as to the whole subject of Christ's priesthood and

the claims of Christianity to be the final religion. And, of course, if the elaborate argument going before failed to convince them, this last touch would not succeed. It would be so easy to raise objections. The argument is: The oracle promises complete pardon of sin, but where such pardon is there is no longer offering for sin. To which two objections might be taken. First, the oracle makes no mention of a sin offering as the ground of forgiveness: why should not its meaning be—an amnesty for the guilty past, the heart regenerated, therefore no more sin done, therefore no further interruption of the friendly relation subsisting between the covenant people and their God? Abolition of Levitical sacrifice may possibly be involved, but what indication is there that another kind of sacrifice was to take its place? Next, is not the promise of perpetual forgiveness too strictly interpreted? Perpetual forgiveness, sin remembered no more: is this not an ideal? Will there not in reality under the new covenant, as under the old, be new sin committed even by men who have the law written on their heart, therefore need for new acts of forgiveness, and therefore naturally for new offerings for sin? So we have the dilemma: either the new covenant points to no new kind of offering, or it does not preclude a plurality of sacrifices. How difficult for men living in different worlds of thought to convince one another by argument! The spiritual guides of a transition time have a difficult and comparatively thankless task to perform. They are compelled by the necessities of their position to use old forms of thought as the vehicle of new ideas; and their reward is, that the new element in their teaching makes it unacceptable to their contemporaries attached to the past, while the old element, on the other hand, makes it uninviting and obscure to men of later generations.

We have made small progress indeed in the understanding

of this epistle if we have not discovered in it, under its Levitical forms of thought, many great moral and religious truths. But much more than this is involved in a thorough insight into its meaning. Some of the most important truths it teaches have grown through long familiarity trite. The "new covenant" is a commonplace in theology. That Christ's offering of Himself had a value that could not belong to the sacrifice of a beast is now a truism. That Christianity is "better," presents a higher type of religion, than Leviticalism is at this date axiomatically clear. Understanding of this epistle means power to realize that none of these now familiar truths were commonplaces for its author. It was the vivid perception of this fact that many years ago opened my eyes to the thrilling interest and abiding value of this New Testament writing, and awakened in me a desire to unfold its significance to others. I do not think that one who makes it his specific aim to interpret the *spirit* of the book undertakes a superfluous task. Many men of greater learning by far than I lay claim to have applied their powers to the elucidation of its text, and have done much to make the meaning of every word and phrase clear. But, while the work of verbal exegesis has been almost brought to perfection, the interpretation of the spirit is far from complete. Too many learned commentators write as if the ideas of a new covenant, atonement through self-sacrifice, a forerunner, etc., had been as familiar to the writer and his first readers as they are to themselves; and as if the doctrine that Christianity was the religion of good hope, because it for the first time brought men nigh to God, was a matter of course to all parties. Even the pregnant remark, that "that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away," is lightly passed over, as if its applicability to the ancient constitution of Israel and the venerable Levitical priesthood was called in question by no one. Even Bleek, still our foremost com-

mentator on the epistle, often disappoints in connexion with the interpretation of the spirit.

This leads me to remark, at the close of my exposition of the doctrinal part of the epistle, what I have again and again remarked in its course, that successful interpretation of the spirit of this sacred writing depends, above all, on a right conception of the religious situation of the first readers. Was it that of men who had no real insight into the nature and worth of Christianity as the final, perennial religion, and into its characteristic truths? or was it that of men who, while fairly well-grounded in the Christian faith, were sorely tempted to apostasy by outward trial, and disappointment as to the second advent, and stood in need of aids to steadfastness, including among these a restatement of familiar Christian doctrines, such as that of our Lord's priesthood? I have gone on the supposition that the former of these alternatives is the true one, and conceived the attitude of the first readers towards Levitical rites to have been similar to that of the Judaists, with whom Paul contended, towards circumcision. The view we take on this question affects, not only our interpretation of many texts, but still more our idea of the man who wrote the texts. On it depends whether we conceive of him as a theologian or as a prophet, as a doctor or as an apostle, as a philosophic student or as a moral hero. If my view of the situation be right, then he belonged to the nobler categories, and was a man like-minded with Paul, the vindicator of the independence of Christianity against legalists, who assailed it. He was one who, with prophetic boldness and apostolic inspiration, asserted the antiquation of the old covenant and worship against men holding on desperately to these, and dared to apply the maxim, "the decadent old must pass away," to institutions that had lasted more than a thousand years, writing to men who probably regarded his views as little short of blasphemy.



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It requires an effort of historical imagination to realize the situation which called forth this great epistle. It much helps one when he is himself in a transition time and in sympathy with the changes it brings. One can then divine the spirit in which the epistle was written, understand the attitude of its author towards the past, and his enthusiasm for the new in the present, and appreciate the heroic moral basis of his religious character. Learning can do much for the interpretation of the letter; but when spiritual affinity is lacking, learned labour may end in a scholastic commentary on a biblical writing from which the soul has fled.

The task I undertook was to expound the doctrinal part of the epistle with reference to its central idea. That task I have in a very imperfect manner performed. A hasty sketch in two papers of the drift of the hortatory section following will form a fitting conclusion to this series.

A. B. BRUCE.