

O How Love I Thy Law!

"The Law is holy, just and good . . . The Law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin"
—Rom. 12:14

BY BROTHER ROBERT ROBERTS

HOW MUCH THE excellence of human life depends upon law! We do not at first realize how much! We grow up under the feeling that the best thing for us is to be just let alone to follow the bent of our own sweet will. We learn at last that this is just the *worst for any man or nation*. The dictum of Christ and Paul is found correct:

"In the flesh dwelleth no good thing" (John 6:63, Rom. 7:18).

Modern literature is impregnated with false notions on this subject. Man is supposed to be innately good and rational, requiring only a proper "self-evolution." *Disastrous results come from this theory* when it is acted on in either public or family life.

A lawless community, or stubborn and rebellious children bring misery when the hand of repressive discipline and kindly culture is absent. Human nature in itself is only a bundle of potentialities, which cannot be developed except by *firm discipline under the wise administration of good laws*. The best men are those that have seen the most trouble, along with the possession of knowledge.

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BUT WHAT IS LAW? In the abstract, it is a *rule of action made obligatory*; but its value must depend not only upon its obligatoriness, but upon its nature. Unless a law is calculated to evoke results of well-being, its obligatoriness will be a calamity. Its enforcement will oppress—and destroy instead of blessing. Hence the importance of devising laws and rules that will work out for good.

But who is able to do this? It evidently requires a very far-sighted acquaintance with human nature and its needs to be qualified to prescribe a law which in all points will work out individual and social well-being. The world knows much of law of one kind or another. That it has not attained to the law that it needs, is manifest from its evil state, and the ceaseless law-tinkering and agitation for law-tinkering going on in every country.

Among all the systems of law that have appeared among men, there is *only one that makes any admissible claim to be Divine*; and that is the system known as the **LAW OF MOSES**. Of this we have the most ample information in the Bible, apart from which we could have no reliable knowledge of it, for Jewish tradition and Rabbinical gloss tend rather to obscure than to reveal its features. We could wish for nothing fuller or more satisfactory on the subject than we get in the Bible.

Christ says that God spoke to Moses (Mark 12:26), and that Moses gave the Law (John 7:19), and that the books containing it are his writings (John 5:46-47) and that it is easier for heaven and earth to pass than one tittle of the Law to fail (Luke 10:17).

This is decisive against a whole world of speculation or doubt. We may trust absolutely, on Christ's authority, to the unmixed divinity of the Law given by the instrumentality of Moses. We are certain not to be deceived or disappointed in *Christ's* view of the case: who can say as much for the merely speculative critics of these late days?

If the Law of Moses were not divine, there could be no object in considering it. A merely human conception of what was suitable for an age long gone by would be of no practical interest to men of our age, and of no value for guidance in a state of things so radically different. If it could be

shown there were good things in it, they could only appear good on a principle that would leave us at liberty to discard or modify them according to our particular bias.

Moses, in that case, would be down on our own level; and we probably should not feel disposed to submit our judgment to his on the mere score of antiquity, but probably the reverse, as we should naturally hold a later and longer experience to be a better guide than the experience of Moses at so early a time.

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IT IS AS a divine system that its study becomes so important. There is something in a work of God for us profitably to exercise our faculties on. A divinely prescribed rule of human action must be wise; and a ritual system that is divinely declared to be *an allegory of the principles and the purposes before the divine mind in His dealings with the human race*, cannot but be interesting and profitable when worked out by the clues divinely supplied (as they are in the later writings of inspiration, by the apostles).

The study of the Law of Moses on this basis will lead us to share the intense admiration of it expressed in various parts of the Bible—panegyrics that otherwise appear as the mere extravagances of sentimentalism. Such for example as the language of the Psalmist (Psa. 119:97-72-113; 19:9-11)—

“O, how love I Thy law; it is my meditation all the day!”
"The law of Thy mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver."
"I hate vain thoughts, but Thy law do I love."
"The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they
than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by
them Thy servant is warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward."

Moses himself speaks thus on the subject—

"Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the Lord my God commanded me.

"Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.
"For what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this
Law which I set before you this day?" (Deut. 4:5-8).

Paul in another way utters the same praise—

“The Law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good . . . The Law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin" (Rom. 7:12-14).

That the Law should be strenuously enjoined on Israel is natural in view of its divine character. Before leaving them, Moses was very earnest in his entreaties that they should be obedient. He impressed upon them that their well-being depended upon it—

"I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil; in that I command thee this day to love the Lord thy God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that thou mayest live and multiply . . .
"I call heaven and earth to record this day against you that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing:—therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live"
(Deut. 30:10-19).

Such later sayings as the following are the natural corollaries of the subject—

"Whoso keepeth the law is a wise son: but . . . he that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination" (Prov. 28:7-9).

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THESE THINGS concern the Law as a rule of action during the present mortal life. But we learn from apostolic teaching that there was (1) a *deeper meaning*, and (2) a *more far-reaching aim*. The deeper meaning is briefly expressed in the statement of Paul, that—

"The Law was a shadow of **good things to come**."

The more far-reaching aim is revealed in the declaration—

"The Law entered that the offence might abound—that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God" (Rom. 5:20; 3:19).
—statements that are unintelligible until we discover that *the object was to make man feel his native powerlessness*, and that he might be placed in a position in which salvation should be a gift by favor of God on the condition of faith leading to obedience.

We look at these two points a little more closely. Their separation will simplify and help the study. We find that the "shadow" feature of the Law had two aspects:

First, the figurative exemplification of the *actual situation of things between God and man*—as when Paul alleges that the Tabernacle was—

"A figure for the time then present" (Heb. 9:9).
—and explains the solitary entrance of the high priest once a year into the holiest of all with the blood of animals to be a signification by the Holy Spirit that (Heb. 9:8)—

"The way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was yet standing."

And *second*, the foreshadowing, or showing beforehand in an enigmatical manner, the purpose of God as to *the method by which He would open the way for free communion with Himself* on the part of sinful man. This second aspect of the matter is plainly affirmed in the statement that:

"The Law was a shadow of good things to come."
—that the Law was—

"The form of knowledge and of the truth" (Rom. 2:20).
—and that the body (or substance) of the Law-shadows "is of Christ" (Col. 2:17). Further, that the promulgated righteousness of God by faith in Christ without the Law was "witnessed by the Law" (Rom. 3:21). This view of the matter enables us to understand how Christ could say that he had come to fulfil "the Law and the Prophets," and that—

"Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the Law, till all be fulfilled."

Keeping carefully distinct these two elements of the typical Law—which might be described as the present and the future significance of the general shadows—we shall be the better able to see what the Law was designed to teach without falling into the mistake sometimes made of attributing to the Law a power which it did not and never was intended to possess.

We shall find it was a shadow both of the *ruptured relations* of God and man and of the *means by which He should restore* those ruptured relations in His own time; but not having in itself the justifying efficacy that some in Paul's day imagined (Acts 15:5, 24; Gal. 5:4, 4:21-31). On the contrary, was a purely *temporary institution* destined to pass away when its mission should be

accomplished in silencing man and developing God's righteousness in Christ (Gal. 3: 19-21; 4:3-5; Rom. 3:19-20; Heb. 7:18-19; 8:7-13; 10:3-4).

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OVER-ARCHING the whole as a rainbow, is that larger mission of the Law, which men are so liable to omit or fail to appreciate, namely a *clearing of the way for the manifestation of the kindness of God*.

This is the last lesson we learn: The beauty we last perceive. Naturally so; it belongs to *God's* point of view; and our own point of view is our first, and for a long time, our only point of view. God's kindness is full and bountiful and unconstrained, but in the matter of admitting created beings to a participation in His open friendship and divine nature, it has its limitations and conditions of so strict a character that *one act of insubordination on the part of Adam sufficed to put an end to it*.

The work of restoration is being carried out on the basis of this principle being vindicated. There must be no boasting, says Paul. *Most reasonable*. Boasting is barbarism, even between man and man who are equal. What is it towards God, who is the Fountain of all being? God will be head. He is so, and it is only reasonable that the fact should be recognized.

Where is there any monarch or human official of any kind who would consent to work where his authority was challenged or dignity affronted? If this is a tolerable principle of action amongst fellow-mortals, is it not absolutely indispensable with God, Who is the Author of our life and the Strength and Support and Wisdom of all creation?

Yet it is a principle that man ignores in his pride. It is a principle that God asserts by bringing all men under condemnation first of all. He has done this by the Law of Moses. *Unless there is forgiveness, there can be no salvation*. Forgiveness is favor (grace), and God requires the honor of "faith" towards Himself as a condition of the favor.

"Where is boasting then? (enquires Paul) "It is excluded. By what Law? Of works? Nay, but by the law of faith."

"It is of faith that it might be by grace . . . that God in all things may be glorified . . . that **no flesh should glory** in His presence . . . as it is written. He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord" (Rom. 3:27; 4:16; 1 Cor. 1:31).

The principle is perfect in its reasonableness and ravishing in its beauty: for it secures the highest happiness of which man is capable (either in his corruptible or his incorruptible state), when he bows before God in grateful and reverential submission, and at the same time it admits of the great Increase finding pleasure in man. There is, therefore, a depth of true philosophy unsuspected in the words of Paul—

"The Law entered **that the offence might abound**. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might **grace reign through righteousness** unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 5:20-21).

In a new and brilliant light appears that other Scripture:

"God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that He might have mercy upon all . . . the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments, His ways past finding out!

"For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been His counsellor? Or who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed to him again?

"For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to Whom be glory for ever. Amen"—Rom. 11.
