

of the Johannine writings was removed. Probably Acts was at this time complete. It has now lost its last three quaternions, and two leaves out of the last remaining quaternion, evidently owing to a loosening of the binding, —perhaps after long liturgical usage, followed by careless treatment as rubbish.

JOHN CHAPMAN.

NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING ON LAWLESSNESS.

A FAVOURITE position taken by modern Agnosticism, although not always frankly and freely presented, is a practical denial of the idea of sin; of sin as it is set forth in Holy Scripture in its nature and effects, of sin in its mischief and madness, of sin as it has been wept for, struggled against, and triumphed over by countless generations of Christian souls through the grace and power of the Redeemer.

How is it then? Is there no such thing as moral evil? Can any sane man, with elementary conceptions of the difference between right and wrong, deny its presence, its force and fateful issues? "No," says the Agnostic, "I do not go so far as that, my contention rather is that the special idea of sin is a creation of the brain of ecclesiastics and theologians. What Christians call sin in the individual I prefer to describe as a neglect of the necessary conditions of his life, it is a going over the boundary line set by utility, and if he does thus transgress, he must pay the inevitable penalty." Beneath these high-sounding phrases with which those who know the drift of Agnostic sentiment are only too well acquainted there is an underlying truth. And in so far as there is this truth Christians will already find it expressed for themselves. For there is no maxim, no idea, no suggestion in moral philosophy that is just and wise which is not caught up, illustrated, purified, and consecrated in and through the Christian Faith. All that is true in

this Agnostic idea is therefore already expressed in many a pregnant phrase and passage in the pages of the New Testament.

St. John declares that sin is lawlessness.¹ He emphatically identifies the two concepts. The term law, as he and his brother Apostles use it, means, by derivation, a line straightly drawn. St. Paul is most explicit, for he combines with this figure the conception of transgression. Sin, according to the teaching of this Apostle, is the crossing of a boundary line, or rule, set finally by the authority of God. Sin is the assertion of the selfish will against Divine enactments. It is a violation of the Divine law of man's being. It is a general term which combines in itself all possible failures to fulfil obligations to self, to others, to God. Agnostics and Christians are then on common ground in the admission of moral evil, and therefore of a moral law. They differ in this stupendous regard, that the Christian believes also in God as Law-giver and Judge, in one awful Being in Whom resides the great prerogatives of sanction whether of reward or punishment, and therefore in One who will by no means clear the obstinately guilty.

If the New Testament be carefully examined, the idea of lawlessness stands revealed, and it is as a picture, ominous, terrible. It is a term by which those are described who receive their dismissal at the last from the Lord. They are to depart from Him because they work lawlessness.² It is a task of His angels to remove men of such type out of His kingdom before they are delivered to punishment.³ Lawlessness is linked with hypocrisy in Christ's scathing condemnation of scribes and Pharisees⁴; His people are warned that when this spirit and temper are abroad its effect will be the chilling of love. Again, St. Paul, in a quotation from the thirty-second Psalm, re-echoes the

¹ 1 St. John iii. 4.

² St. Matt. vii. 23.

³ St. Matt. xiii. 41.

⁴ St. Matt. xxiii. 28.

blessed estate of him whose acts of lawlessness are forgiven.¹ He shows the contagion of such a mind and temper;² he warns his Corinthian converts against that saddest of inequalities in marriages, when there is disunion in faith, which he indicates by the antithesis of righteousness and lawlessness.³ He bids the Thessalonians beware that its insidious spirit, though held in check awhile, is even now at work, and that a time will come when the lawless personality will stand revealed until his destruction at the presence of the Lord.⁴ It is, indeed, according to St. Paul, the crowning work of the Redemption that men should be delivered from all lawlessness.⁵ Hatred of lawlessness is quoted by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews as a Messianic attribute in a citation from the 45th Psalm.⁶ It must have been among the bitterest sufferings of the Saviour that He was destined to fulfil the ancient prophecy of being reckoned among the lawless ones⁷; whereas it was indeed by such that He was crucified and slain.⁸ Such is the picture, dark and ominous in its outlines, of lawlessness as it is exposed in the writings of the New Testament.

With no less clearness is exhibited in its pages the opposing concept of Law. Its dignity and force appear to be enhanced by the two-fold source, Hebraistic and Roman, of the idea. The Law was the general title of the Old Testament Scriptures, apart from its subdivisions, it was for the Jew the ascertained will of Jehovah for a Covenant people. The earlier conceptions of Law as understood and enunciated later by jurists were almost as deeply religious as with the Hebrews. No student of Roman jurisprudence can fail to observe how closely its origins are linked with

¹ Rom. iv. 7.

³ 2 Cor. vi. 14.

⁵ Tit. ii. 14.

⁷ St. Luke xxii. 37.

² Rom. vi. 19.

⁴ 1 Thess. ii. 7.

⁶ Heb. i. 9.

⁸ Acts ii. 23.

the worship of the gods. But, while the Law to the Hebrews was intensely national, the sweep of Roman Law was expansive, adapting itself in the Christian even to Imperial needs. The Jew thus rested in the Law as the embodiment of his highest religious privileges, the Roman found in it the security of his political status. In Pauline literature the two conceptions appear to be often blended, and it is a commonplace difficulty with students to ascertain in some characteristic instances which of the two the Apostle has in his mind's eye. There is little doubt, however, that his general conception of Law was vastly enhanced by the addition to his Jewish ideas of all that his conscious acceptance of Roman citizenship brought with it to him in times of stress and need.

Thus students of the New Testament, it is important to observe, are not left with a merely negative idea; for while the character and consequences of lawlessness are pitilessly drawn, they also derive from those same scriptures a Christian conception of Law in general, and laws in particular, intelligible, broad, and dignified. Undoubtedly its breadth and dignity are due to the fact that St. Paul, if not other apostolic writers, did not shrink from superadding all that was just and true in elementary Roman jurisprudence to purely Jewish codes.

Justice has never yet been done to the greatest of English theologians as an interpreter of Scripture. In his first book of the *Ecclesiastical Polity* Richard Hooker shows the marvellous sweep and supremacy of Law. Wherever the eye is turned—there Law obtains. In the world of nature, in the world of humanity, among angelic beings, in the divine Society there is alike the presence and operation of Law. Remove Law in any sphere at any point, and there follow inevitably disorder, confusion, chaos. Created matter only continues to exist through it. Human societies suffer quick disintegration without laws. They

are essential to the very welfare of the Church of God. Once more Hooker shows, as with a fine philosophic instinct, so with a reverent appreciation of scriptural teaching, that at the back of all Law, whether natural, human, or ecclesiastical, is God. He sees no other source for Law save the Divine and Eternal Being. "The seat of Law," says he, "lies in the bosom of God."

As in the world of matter, He is the first Great Cause and providential Director, so in the sphere of morals He is the paramount and final authority. This is nothing less than the persistent teaching of Christ and His Apostles. It was pathetically illustrated by them in their attitude towards the civil arm. When any human law violated conscience, then they, as we to-day, were bound to resist.

But it is well to note, at this juncture, with what care and jealousy they observed whether conscience was actually violated by concession, or how far prejudice and antipathies in any crisis were permitted to enter in a sphere from which they should be excluded.¹

Nothing can be more pathetic than the attitude of the early Christians towards the law of the land—the law of Imperial Rome. The final human arbiters of law were a Tiberius or a Caligula—monsters of lust and iniquity. Regarded from this human origin the law which they administered would appear poisoned at its source. The resistance which the early Christians offered was truly passive; it was the resistance not of the arm but of the knee. "I will therefore that prayers and intercessions be made for all men, for kings and all that are in authority,"² the object being that Christian lives might be spent in godliness and quietude.

Herein lies no note of rebellion, no cry of anarchy, but first and foremost a call to prayer, then a counsel of sub-

¹ St. Matt. xvii. 27.

² 1 Tim. ii. 1.

mission when it might be ; or if this might not be, then, but not to be hastily or greedily grasped, the martyr's crown.

No Christian can be a pessimist. There will always be in every Christian heart some echo of the poet's line :

God's above, all's right with the world.

The present time is not worse than the past, but it seems more anxious because more restless. And there certainly is one note of our day which is as ominous as it is audible. There is current to-day not only a contemptuous disregard of Law, but in some quarters an actual hatred of it. The signs of such hatred are patent in almost every department of human life and experience. They are conspicuous in family life. It is difficult sometimes to hold a brief for modern parents. But some externally Christian households seem guided by an inversion of the apostolic precept : " Parents obey your children, for this is just and right." The bitter cry of the superseded father or mother finds expression from time to time in letters, written with a prudent anonymity, to the daily press. Often the correspondents are themselves to blame for the melancholy situation. Yet the experience of the " thankless child," insubordinate, even contemptuously defiant, once rare in our English homes, is not so now. The pain of it, sharper than the serpent's tooth, is wide-felt, and is to-day threatening the welfare of the social fabric, because it weakens it at its base in the family.

Again, there is the question of service.

Here, too, is observed an almost passionate *ἀνομία*, at any rate a deep dislike to the exercise of authority by superiors. This feeling is now so widespread that domestic service appears likely to be revolutionized in England as it already is in the United States. Our young men and women will enter no sphere where they can be described by the hated term " servants." And yet, despite its associ-

ation, that is the title by which the Messiah was prefigured; this the title claimed as one of high dignity by the Apostles of the Lord. Again, the present writer holds no High Tory brief for masters and employers; they have the grave defects of their class; he is only concerned to show that according to New Testament teaching the work done "under authority" is a good and dignified thing, while, according to the spirit of the times, it is irksome and odious.

The issue is still more anxious if one turns to the question of civil rule and authority. For while we are complacently assured that the people of this land are at heart law-abiding, and that the French Revolution could never find a counterpart here, it may be that our department of secret intelligence would have some surprises for us. For lawlessness is in the air, and when it is in the air, the occasion for its exhibition is never far off. The tragedies which within recent history have befallen those uneasy heads that wear the crown of Russia, Italy, and Austria, and still more significantly the heads of the Great Republics of France and the United States, may at any moment, as we open our daily papers, be near us.

Sin is the transgression of the law.

The anxious question for Christian people is whether they may not be making some unconscious contribution to the lawless spirit of the age. If the charge be indignantly denied, there is an aspect of the question which demands a very grave consideration. Most of the readers of this magazine will be in the position not of those who are under authority but of those who daily exercise it. Then, as often as we do not act with absolute fairness, as often as we lack a tender consideration for those over whom we are set in the providence of God, our injustice, or our harshness provokes the very spirit of lawlessness which we deplore.

There is a pregnant phrase which St. Paul often uses when he treats of social life, and the mutual duties which

men owe one to another—as husband and wife, parent and child, master and servant, presbyter and people, ruler and subject. The phrase is “in the Lord.” A devout consideration of its meaning, a steady application of it to the facts of society removes at once the anarchical spirit—and the despotic temper.

All difficulties vanish in the light shed by the one Perfect Example of Him who came not to do His own will, but the will of the Father who sent Him ; and the most momentous truth of the Christian Religion is that its Founder is not only the Pattern of His disciples, but through His Spirit their eternal source of strength.

B. WHITEFOORD