

in Christ's robe, and his refusal to give it the sanction of his adherence.<sup>1</sup> Hence his noble efforts to bring about a better understanding between Eastern and Western Churches in the Reunion Conferences at Bonn. The fruits of his lifelong struggle for truth and unity are not lost by his death. The richest of them are still to come. And every Christian, by endeavouring to avoid all bitterness, and to acquire more perfect knowledge of the truth for himself and others, can do something to hasten and to increase the harvest.

ALFRED PLUMMER.

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ART. II.—THE "TWO IMMUTABLE THINGS."

HEB. vi. 17, 18.

περισσότερον βουλόμενος ὁ Θεὸς ἐπιδειῖται τοῖς κληρονόμοις τῆς ἐπαγγελίας τὸ ἀμετάθετον τῆς βουλῆς αὐτοῦ ἐμεσίτησεν ἕρκω, ἵνα διὰ δύο πραγμάτων ἀμεταθέτων, ἐν οἷς ἀδύνατον ψεῦσασθαι τὸν Θεόν, ἰσχυρὰν παράκλησιν ἔχωμεν οἱ καταφυγόντες κρατῆσαι τῆς προκειμένης ἐλπίδος.

"God, being minded to show more abundantly unto the heirs of the promise the immutability of His counsel, interposed with (or rather, *gave security by*) an oath, that by *two immutable things*, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have a strong encouragement, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us."

A GREAT deal of difficulty has been found or made in this passage, especially as regards the "*two immutable things*," through or by means of which it was intended that we, who have fled for refuge to take hold of the hope laid before us, should have a strong encouragement. It seems to me that commentators have steadily and resolutely closed their eyes to the real argument of the writer, and have sought, and sought in vain, for the "*two immutable things*" in the immediate context. The original promise to Abraham was made in Gen. xii. 3, containing the words, "In thee shall all the families of the earth be

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<sup>1</sup> That this refusal had nothing to do with any doubts about the Vatican decrees is shown by the following extract from a letter to Dr. Nevin in 1879:—"I have only three weeks ago published a lecture (*Allgemeine Zeitung*, April 6, 7, 8), in which I state in so many words that nobody possessing a scientific culture of mind can ever accept the decrees of the Vatican Council. Having devoted during the last nine years my time principally to the renewed study of all the questions connected with the history of the Popes and the councils, and, I may say, gone again over the whole ground of ecclesiastical history, the result is that the proofs of the falsehood of the Vatican decrees amount to a demonstration. When I am told that I must swear to the truth of those doctrines, my feeling is just as if I were asked to swear that two and two make five, and not four."

blessed." This promise was repeated for the seventh and last time after Abraham had exhibited his faith by "not withholding his son, his only son," and was then solemnly confirmed by an oath: "By Myself have I sworn, saith the Lord;" when almost the same words reappear which we read in the original promise: "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Gen. xxii. 18). But between the beginning of the twelfth and the twenty-third chapters the promise was repeated no less than *five* times, Gen. xii. 7; xiii. 14-17; xv. 1-21; xvii. 1-19 (along with the institution of circumcision as a token of the covenant); and xxi. 10-14; though without the comprehensive words above quoted, which undoubtedly possess the highest interest for *us*, though probably such was not their position in the mind of Abraham. These occur only in the first and last definite promises on the part of God.

It is quite evident that the *oath* of God is one of the immutable things thus mentioned by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, but how can the promise, seven times repeated and once confirmed by an oath, stand on a level with the one oath solemnly sworn in "confirmation of it," and be reasonably looked upon as the other immutable thing? Indeed, if the promise had in itself been an immutable thing, it could scarcely have needed the confirmation of an oath at all. Surely the promise cannot stand on the same level as the oath, and we must seek elsewhere for the *other*, I do not say the *second*, immutable thing. Nor do I think we shall have much trouble in seeking and finding it.

It is to my mind very strange that it has never occurred to anyone to inquire whether God gave Abraham any other security, "in which it was impossible that God should lie," besides that of the oath, distinctly mentioned by the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews. But if we look carefully over the history of Abram, as related in the Book of Genesis, we cannot avoid observing that God *did* give such additional assurance to him, and that at his own request. In Gen. xv. 5, *sqq.*, we read:

And He brought him forth abroad, and said: Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and He said unto him, So shall thy seed be. And he believed in the Lord; and He counted it to him for righteousness. And He said unto him, I am the Lord that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it. And he said: *Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?* And He said unto him: Take me an heifer of three years old, and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon. And he took him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each half over against the other: but the birds divided he not. . . . And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him. . . . And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a

smoking furnace, and a flaming torch that passed between these pieces. *In that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram.*

It is plain, then, that God first gave Abram, at his own request, the assurance of a covenant made with sacrifice, and afterwards, when his name had been changed to Abraham, unasked, the further security of an oath, thus granting him the security of "two immutable things, wherein it was impossible that God should lie." We must remember, too, that God regularly acted as a man of the day in his dealings with men, and that a man's bare word or promise was not considered as of much value among the men of those early days, whose main dependence was either upon oaths or covenants ratified by sacrifice, or both.

For Scripture illustrations of this reliance on covenants made by sacrifice, we cannot find anything stronger than the covenant above cited, made by God with Abram (Gen. xv.), and the remarkable endeavour of the Jews to renew their covenant with God described in Jer. xxxiv. 18-20 :

And I will give the men that have transgressed My covenant, which have not performed the words of the covenant which they made before Me, when they cut the calf in twain, and passed between the parts thereof, the princes of Judah, and the princes of Jerusalem, the eunuchs, and all the people of the land, which passed between the parts of the calf : I will even give them into the hands of their enemies, and into the hands of them that seek their life : and their dead bodies shall be for meat unto the fowls of the heaven, and to the beasts of the earth.

Add to these the expressions in Ps. l. 5 : "Gather My saints together unto Me, those that have made a covenant with Me by (*lit.* over) sacrifice ;" and I think the importance of covenants made or ratified by sacrifice will be fully established, even without relying on Heb. ix. 18 : "Wherefore even the first covenant is represented as not having been inaugurated without blood."

As regards heathen sacrifices for purposes of assurance in historical times, I may cite a passage from Livy (xxi. 45), in which, after relating the promises made by Hannibal to his auxiliaries, he goes on to say :

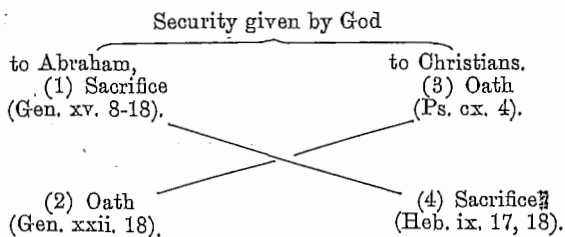
And that they might know those promises to be safe and certain, holding a lamb with his left hand, and a flint in his right, he prayed Jupiter, and all the other gods, that if he did not keep his promise, so might they slay him as he slew the lamb. After the prayer he cleft the head of the animal with the flint.

Covenants made by oaths are very numerous. It will be sufficient to mention those made by Abraham and Isaac respectively with Abimelech at Beersheba (the well of the oath) in Gen. xx. 22-32, and Gen. xxvi. 26-33.

Having thus seen that God gave to Abraham and his successors, and thus to ourselves, the descendants of the faith of

Abraham (Rom. iv. 16), the assurance of *two* immutable things, (1) a covenant made by sacrifice, and (2) an oath, I think we shall find that the argument of the Epistle to the Hebrews will develop itself in this way, viz., that God has given Christians the similar security of an oath and a covenant made by sacrifice, but in the converse order to that in which he gave them to Abraham, the oath being that in Ps. cx. 4: "The Lord sware and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedech," and the sacrifice being that of Christ Himself (Heb. ix. 16, 17). Thus the Christian covenant is also guaranteed by "two immutable things, in which it is impossible that God should lie."

The relation between the security given by God to Abraham and that given to Christians, may be represented in the form of an "inverse chiasm."<sup>1</sup>



The question of the sacrifice indicated in Heb. ix. 17, 18 cannot be fully gone into here, but will be further investigated in an article, "Covenant *versus* Testament," already advertised to appear in the CHURCHMAN.

Let me now translate the whole passage (Heb. vi. 13-18), taking the Revised Version as my basis, but altering several expressions, both for the sake of terseness and also in order to bring out the argument, as I understand it, with greater force.

For God, on making the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by none greater, sware by Himself, saying: Surely blessing will I bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And thus, having patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men swear by the greater; and an oath for assurance is to them the end of every dispute. Wherein God, wishing to exhibit more abundantly to the inheritors of the promise the immutability of His counsel, gave security by an oath; that by two immutable things [of which the oath was the second and the earlier sacrifice the first], in which it was impossible that God should lie, we might have a strong encouragement, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us.

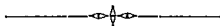
I have avoided the words "interposed" and "mediated," as they are not proper legal terms, but merely clumsy attempts to

<sup>1</sup> An inverse chiasm is when of four things related together the first corresponds to the fourth, and the second to the third.

render the original, in the first case by an ordinary term, and in the second by a servile literal translation. I have done this on the strength of two passages quoted in Thayer's "Grimm's Lexicon," one from Josephus, Ant. iv. 6, 7: "These things they said, swearing oaths, and making God guarantor (*μεσίτην*) of what they were promising," and the other from Philo, de Spec. legg. II. 7: An unseen God undoubtedly acts as guarantor or surety (*μεσίτης*) to an unseen matter."

But be that as it may, I hope I have demonstrated that God actually did give Abraham the security "of two immutable things, in which it was impossible that God should lie," first, that of a covenant made or ratified by sacrifice, and, second, that of an oath solemnly sworn by Himself, and that the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews mentions expressly only the second of these two things, expecting his readers to be well versed in the history of Abraham, and to bear the first of them in mind, without needing to be specially reminded of it.

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#### ART. III.—FRENCH TRANSLATIONS OF THE BIBLE.

**F**INALITY in translation is not to be attained—at least, in this generation. Of the great European languages, not one has settled the form in which the inspired text of the Hebrew and Greek is to be placed before the unlearned. English is still on the anvil. I received lately a prospectus of a proposed translation in the vulgar tongue, such as people ordinarily speak, and newspapers write. In Germany Luther's translation is undergoing revision. In Holland, Italy, Spain, and Portugal new translations are in progress. Considering how much hidden meaning is extracted from the original, which is not patent on the surface, it may probably end in a plurality of translations obtaining a currency, which, from one point of view, though not every point of view, is to be regretted. Other causes are at work. An edition of the English New Testament is threatened with distinct utterance on the Baptist question, and the words "John the Dipper" and "total immersion" will take the place of "Baptist" and "Baptism." In the French versions we have the startling variation in the rendering of the word "priest" in the New Testament as applied to the officers of the Christian Church—"sacrificateur" in one case and "prêtre" in the other. This brings me back to the direct subject of my essay.

The French language is spoken in the greater part of France,