

that Hermas wrote at so early a date that he could not have known the Four Gospels as the elements of the faith of the Church.

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ART. II.—WE HAVE AN ALTAR.

AN EXPOSITION OF HEB. XIII. 10-12.

OF the first part of this passage, "we have an altar," Dean Alford gives a summary of the many different interpretations known to him. It may be well to specify them briefly:

1. He writes: "Some have said that no distinct idea was before him (the writer of the Epistle), but that he merely used the term *altar* to keep the figure he was about to introduce, and this view has just so much truth in it, that there is no emphasis on *θυσιαστήριον*: it is not *θυσιαστήριον ἔχομεν*." This is a valuable remark of the Dean, and one to be always borne in mind in our interpretation of the words.

2. "Others understand by the altar *Christ Himself*." But I ask, How could the victim be the altar on which it was itself offered?

3. "Some understand *the table of the Lord*, at which we eat the Lord's Supper." I remark, This view arises from two misconceptions: one, that the pronoun "we" in our English translation refers to Christians, *we Christians have an altar*, as distinguished from Jews, whereas there is no pronoun in the Greek; on the importance of this I shall enlarge further on; the other misconception, a baseless assumption, is that the elements of bread and wine are offered on the table as a sacrifice. Hence the anomalous expression "Altar-cloths." Who ever heard of a cloth being laid on an altar in either Pagan or Jewish ritual? To this also I shall again refer.

Alford's own view is, "that the Altar is the Cross of Christ on which the Lord suffered." The answer to this too generally held view I give from the "Speaker's Commentary." Dr. William Kay, the writer, says, "It cannot be the cross, that was the instrument by which our Lord's death was effected: but so far was it from being as the altar which sanctifieth the gift, that it stands as the outward symbol of the curse pronounced by the law (Gal. iii. 23) upon the malefactor. The cross was as little the altar as the Roman soldiers were priests." I may add, or as the knife by which the victim was slain was the altar on which that victim was offered.

The Commentary goes on to say, "nor yet can it be understood of *the Lord's table*. It is, of course, true to say that they who continued to serve the tabernacle had no right to partake

of the Lord's Supper, and if verse 10 had stood alone, this might have been what it asserted." The writer seems strangely to have forgotten that the tabernacle service had centuries gone by ceased altogether, and that at the time the Epistle was written there were none "who continued to serve the tabernacle." Dr. Kay's own opinion is that the Altar is "Christ's own Divine-human personality." But this is too transcendental.

I must now refer to the late Bishop Lightfoot, whose view varied at times, and was far from being at any time established.<sup>1</sup> He writes: "It is surprising that some should have interpreted *θυσιαστήριον* in Heb. xiii. 10, 'of the Lord's table.' In my former editions I interpreted *θυσιαστήριον* of 'the congregation assembled for worship,' but I have since been convinced that the context points to the Cross of Christ spiritually considered as the true interpretation." Referring then to the opinion of more than one writer, he says: "It is maintained that *ἔχομεν θυσιαστήριον* should be understood, 'We Jews have an altar.'" This view he considers "attractive, but inadequate to explain the whole context, and is ill-adapted to individual expressions, not to mention that the first person plural and the present tense *ἔχομεν* seem unnatural, when the author and his readers are spoken of, not as natural Christians, but as former Jews."

Again, referring to the opinion that by altar the Lord's table is intended, the Bishop writes: "Some interpreters, from a comparison of 1 Cor. ix. 13 with 1 Cor. x. 16, have inferred that St. Paul recognises the designation of the Lord's-table as an altar. On the contrary, it is a speaking fact, that in both passages he avoids using this term of the Lord's table, though the language of the context might readily have suggested it to him if he had considered it appropriate; nor does the argument in either case require or encourage such an inference. In 1 Cor. ix. 13 the Apostle writes, 'Know ye not that they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel.' The point of resemblance in the two cases is the holding a sacred office, but the ministering on the altar is predicated only of the former. So also in 1 Cor. x. 18, *sq.*, the altar is named as common to Jews and heathens, *i.e.*, the Holy Eucharist is a banquet, but it is not a sacrifice (in the Jewish or heathen sense of sacrifice)."

I repeat Lightfoot's words, "It is surprising that some should have interpreted *θυσιαστήριον* in Heb. xiii. 10, 'of the Lord's table.'" "Surprising" indeed, only we know that men

<sup>1</sup> "The Christian Ministry," pp. 265, 266, note, seventh edition.

bent on propping up an untenable position will go to any lengths. "Surprising," for there is nothing in the epistle from first to last referring to the Lord's Supper, and more especially in the context of the verse. But when men have made up their minds that they will offer a propitiatory sacrifice for sin, or, at least, that they will have some part in the one sacrifice of our Lord, they readily seize on the words "we have an altar," irrespectively altogether of the context, as affording some colour for their determination; and this without any proof in the whole New Testament; or any argument I have ever heard, except, if it can be called argument, some abstract conception that such ought to be, and then the school-boy conclusion, that such is. It is in this way that the passages in 1 Cor. ix. and x. are handled to prove that the Lord's table is an altar. It is assumed that St. Paul in these passages ought to have employed the term altar instead of table, therefore altar and table are interchangeable, and finally, therefore, table means altar.

It is many years since my opinion was formed that the writer of the epistle refers to the tabernacle altar in connection with the great day of atonement. I arrived at this opinion in the following way: It is admitted on all hands that the author is explaining the evangelical teaching of the tabernacle service, which service, however, had ceased many centuries before; yet in his explanation he uses the present tense. In chap. ix. the tabernacle itself is first described with its ordinances; and then we read (R.V.): "Now these things having been thus prepared, the priests go in continually into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the services; but into the second the high-priest alone once in the year, not without blood, which he offereth for himself, and for the errors of the people; the Holy Ghost this signifying that the way into the holy place hath not yet been made manifest, while as the first tabernacle is. yet standing; which is a parable for the time now present, according to which are offered both gifts and sacrifices that cannot, as touching the conscience, make the worshipper perfect, being only . . . carnal ordinances imposed until a time of reformation" (verses 6-10). The Apostle has before his mind the whole tabernacle service as enjoined in the Book of the Law, and writes as if he saw it all carried out. We ourselves constantly use the present tense when speaking of the past.

When my mind fully grasped the importance of this, I applied the principle to the exegesis of the passage before us. Its statements are in the present tense: "We have an altar—they which serve the tabernacle—bodies are burned, blood is brought." As if the writer said: "I see in the tabernacle service an altar, whereof the servers of the tabernacle,—priests

Levites, porters, all who wait on the altar—have no power to eat, for the all-sufficient reason that the entire bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the holy place by the high-priest for sin, are burned without the camp.” Should we not translate ἐξ ἧς *from off which*, and ἐξουσίαν *power*? Ability, not title.<sup>1</sup>

This led me to conclude that ἔχομεν is a technical expression, as the words “we have” are with us, whose import is *there is* or *there are*, and that we should understand the words as *there is an altar—i.e.*, in the service. I examined the use of the word in the New Testament, and found it to occur forty-five times; and in most of these, if not in all—except in three, if not in four cases—no emphasis necessarily appertains to the pronoun “we”—at least such is the rule, whatever exceptions there may be. And the present instance cannot be an exception, as at the time the epistle was written the altar was non-existent, having passed away with the cessation of the tabernacle service.

In the three exceptions referred to the pronoun is expressed—*ἡμεῖς ἔχομεν*. Thus in John xix. 7, *Ἡμεῖς νόμον ἔχομεν*, “We (Jews) have a law.” In 1 Cor. ii. 16, *Ἡμεῖς δὲ νοῦν ἔχομεν*, We (Apostles). Similarly in xi. 16, *ἡμεῖς τοιαύτην συνήθειαν ὄνυχ ἔχομεν*, We (Apostles). The fourth case is peculiar, John viii. 41, *Ἡμεῖς ἐκ πορνείας οὐκ ἐγεννηθήμεν* (R.V.), *ἕνα πατέρα ἔχομεν, τον Θεόν*, “We have one Father, God.” We (Jews). Here the *ἡμεῖς* is evidently understood, brought forward from the previous verb; it belongs to both verbs.

I may instance two other cases, though in each the construction is different. Acts xxi. 23, “We have four men,” *εἰσὶν ἡμῖν ἄνδρες τέσσαρες*; 1 Cor. viii. 6, “To us there is one God,” *ἡμῖν εἰς Θεός*. In both these the pronoun is specific. In most other instances, as I have already said, *ἔχομεν* by itself has the meaning of *there is*, or *there are*. I cite a verse or two. Matt. xxvi. 65, “What further need have we of witnesses?” This may be read, and it is what it means, “What further need is there of witnesses?” 1 John ii. 1, “If any man sin, we have an Advocate.” This is slipshod English. Correct language would be, “If any man sin, he has an Advocate.” But read, “There is an Advocate.” And all is correct as a translation.

Dr. Kay, in the “Speaker’s Commentary,” in a passage already quoted, says: “It is, of course, true to say that they who continued to serve the tabernacle had no right to partake of the Lord’s Supper.” Here is a fine specimen of confusion of

<sup>1</sup> In Westcott and Hort’s revised Greek New Testament, *ἐξουσίαν* is in brackets.

language. The writer in his thought, unconsciously no doubt, substitutes *temple* for *tabernacle*, forgetting that servitors of the tabernacle had ceased to be ages before the epistle was written, so that there were none "who continued to serve the tabernacle" at the time.<sup>1</sup> But, passing this, is it "of course true to say" that they who were serving the temple were not entitled to partake of the Lord's Supper? We are told that "many thousands—tens of thousands—of the Jews believed, and were all zealous of the law"; and no doubt among them were counted the "great company of the priests that were obedient to the faith." Paul himself was made prisoner when observing the law in the temple, waiting until "the offering was offered for everyone of them," himself and his four companions (Acts xxi. 26). It is utterly inconceivable that these many thousands, including the priests and Paul himself, were not entitled to partake of the Lord's Supper. This consideration furnishes one of the strongest arguments, if not the strongest, against the conception that by the altar of our passage we are to understand the Lord's table. This is strengthened by the word "camp"—"the bodies are burned without the camp"—all proving that the reference is to the tabernacle service of the Israelites when encamped in the wilderness, and not in any respect to the temple service, as in the days of the Apostles. There is consequently no contrast or opposition between altar and tabernacle, but perfect agreement, and hence no opposition intended between *altar*, interpreted to be the *Lord's table*, and *tabernacle*, interpreted to be *the temple*. It may be well, for clearness' sake, to repeat that any asserted opposition is purely imaginative, and contrary to the teaching of the Scriptures, as the believing Jews took part in both services—that of the temple and that of the Lord's Supper; while the believing Gentiles took part only in the latter.

The doctrine of the service, or services, on the great day of Atonement is elucidated by, as well as elucidating, the parallelism drawn between the mode of the victim's death and that of our Lord. The body of the former, as being considered altogether unclean, was brought without the camp and wholly consumed in an unclean place: thus in type suffering the penalty of sin, borne by itself, alone. So "Jesus suffered without the gate." He was crucified in the unclean place where the Romans were wont to crucify their condemned. "He bore our sins in His own body up to the tree," and there paid the full penalty thereof—alone.

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<sup>1</sup> Westcott acts similarly in his exposition, which all proceeds on this strange substitution.

The full penalty of sin is banishment from God's presence for ever. If in His "presence is the fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore," in absence from Him is the fulness of misery. St. Jude illustrates this by a striking simile: "Wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever;" planets that have broken from their orbits, wandering off into illimitable space, where no light or heat of the sun can reach them; death for ever their lot; never to return to their orbits. So Jesus felt the fulness of this misery when forsaken by His Father. The iron entered into His soul; it was coldness; it was darkness; it was death; the terrible curse rested upon Him; and from His inmost soul was wrung the cry of deepest anguish, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Why? The answer is, As the Lamb of God He bore the sin of the world; He must needs pay the full penalty thereof.

In language altogether different, and so bold that we should hesitate to use it, did we not find it in the Scriptures, St. Paul in his Epistle to the Galatians (chap. iii.) teaches the same truth. He quotes from Deuteronomy (xxvii. 26): "Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them." This curse is the full penalty. He then declares the glad tidings of deliverance from the curse: "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us, as it is written, Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree." The cross, or stake, being an accursed thing in God's sight, everyone impaled on the cursed thing became thereby accursed, on the principle that whosoever touched a dead body became thereby defiled. Christ thus, as it were, intercepted the curse that else should have fallen on us, becoming thereby "a curse for us."

In the examination of our passage we should not overlook the statement that "Jesus suffered without the gate, that He might sanctify the people through (*διὰ*) His own blood." The doctrine of the blood thus requires consideration. We find this doctrine in the prohibition to eat blood, and, as the reason for the prohibition, "For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh atonement by reason of the life" (Lev. xvii. 11, R.V.). Here are three statements to be carefully noted: 1. The blood is the life. 2. The blood maketh atonement for the soul. 3. The blood on the altar, not as poured out, but as offered on the altar; not dead blood, but living blood: that is, the life offered on the altar is the atonement for the soul.

From the first it was clearly revealed that "death is by sin," sin's penalty. "In the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." The life forfeited, the atonement must be

another life, chargeable with no sin, substituted. This is taught in Leviticus i. in the case of the man who offereth an oblation unto the Lord: "He shall lay his hand upon the head of the burnt offering; and it shall be accepted of him, to make atonement for him. And he shall kill the bullock before the Lord: and the priests, Aaron's sons, shall present the blood, and sprinkle the blood round about upon the altar, that is at the door of the tent of meeting" (verses 4, 5). It is not said that in laying his hand on the bullock's head he transferred his sin to the bullock; he merely identified himself with the victim who was thus substituted for him, so that the victim's life—the blood upon the altar—would be accepted in lieu of the offerer's, an atonement for him.

More fully is all this taught in the ordinance of the great day of atonement (Lev. xvi.) to which our passage especially points. On that day the high priest acted in a double capacity—as representative of the people to God, and as representative of God to the people. As the former he killed "the bullock of the sin offering, which is for himself," and the goat of the "sin offering that is for the people." And as the latter, he laid "both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confessed over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, even all their sins; and he shall put them upon the head of the goat." He took of the children of Israel two he-goats for a sin offering, the two being regarded as one. With the blood of the bullock, which was for himself, and with the blood of the goat, which was for the people, each at different times, he went within the veil, and sprinkled the blood upon and before the mercy seat, thus making the atonement: "And there shall be no man in the tent of meeting, when he goeth in to make atonement in the holy place, until he come out, and have made atonement for himself, and for his household, and for all the assembly of Israel."

The complete effect of the atonement was symbolically declared by the subsequent proceeding. The goat to which all the sins of the people had been transferred was led into the wilderness and there let free, not to return, bringing back the sins from the land of oblivion. Thus was anticipated the terms of the new covenant, "Their sins will I remember no more."

All this met its fulfilment in our Lord. Thus Isaiah wrote (liii. 6), "The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." And the first testimony borne to Him after He entered on His ministry was this by John the Baptist: "Behold the Lamb of God, Who beareth the sin of the world" (John i. 29, margin). And onward through His ministry He bore that load, until,

as St. Peter expresseth it, "Who His own self carried up our sins in His body to the tree" (1 Peter ii. 24, margin R.V.). Two considerations here should not be overlooked: 1. Jehovah and Jesus are one, so that Jehovah laying our iniquity upon Him, was Jesus voluntarily assuming it. 2. Sickness, which is virtually death begun, is of the penalty of sin. When, therefore, our Lord healed diseases, He is stated to have taken them upon Himself, afterwards to pay the penalty on the cross, and there to offer the atonement in the presentation of His blood. Thus St. Matthew (viii. 16): "He healed all that were sick, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying, Himself took our iniquities and bare our diseases." This is the doctrine of the blood—of the substituted life—according to the Scriptures.

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*(To be continued.)*



#### ART. III.—THE CHRISTIANS OF ST. THOMAS.

TWO works have lately been published which between them may serve to enlighten a dark page in Church history, and may give a clearer conception of the Christians of St. Thomas than that which is generally entertained. The Rev. Alex. J. D. D'Orsey's "Portuguese Discoveries, Dependencies, and Missions in Asia and Africa"<sup>1</sup> appeared a few months ago, following upon Mr. G. M. Rae's "Syrian Church in India."<sup>2</sup>

The first thing to do is to realize the geographical position of Malabar. All educated Englishmen know that it lies on the west coast of the Indian Peninsula, and few know more. If they would glance at the map—which Mr. Rae gives them no opportunity of doing—they would see further that it lies about as far south of Goa as Bombay lies north of that city, and that it is nearly opposite to Madras, which is situated on the east coast of the peninsula. How did Christianity make its way there? If we listen to local traditions, we shall believe that the Apostle Thomas planted it. These traditions are more or less accepted by Mr. D'Orsey, who gathers from them and other notices that St. Thomas converted a colony of Jews settled on the coast of Malabar, which thus became the cradle of Christianity in India. Mr. D'Orsey thinks that it may be true that the Apostle was so successful a Christian missionary as to have stirred up the hatred of the Brahmins, and to have been martyred by them at Meliapore. He thinks

<sup>1</sup> London: Allen and Co., pp. 434.

<sup>2</sup> Edinburgh: Blackwood and Sons, pp. 388.