

ART. II.—OUR LORD'S PRESENT WORK AS HIGH-
PRIEST OF HIS CHURCH.

IN treating of this subject we have already seen that the present work of Christ for His Church, as described in Holy Scripture, is properly sacerdotal. We have also gathered,¹ from an examination of the sacrificial and sacerdotal system of the Jews, that His priestly ministry in heaven, if it corresponds with the institution which was divinely framed to represent it on earth, is without an altar and without a victim, and deals only with sacrificial blood, once for all shed and once for all offered or presented before the throne of God.

In the present paper we propose to inquire how far the conclusions which we have drawn from the typical institution are borne out, by the inspired commentary on that institution contained in the Epistle to the Hebrews. In this case we are not left to put our own interpretation upon the type. The Author of it has Himself interpreted it for us. Let us see, then, what His interpretation of it is, and in what manner He Himself applies it to the Christian verity.

With respect to the second of the points to be considered, the absence of a victim from the Most Holy Place, there is no room for difference of opinion. Neither directly nor indirectly, by no hint or allusion, much less by any plain assertion, does the inspired writer intimate that the heavenly Antitype differed at all in this respect from the earthly type. No passage from this Epistle has, so far as we are aware, been quoted in support of the theory that our Lord retains the "victim state" in heaven. So glaring a contradiction of the type finds no countenance here. Accordingly, it is in other parts of the New Testament that foundation is sought for that theory. The one inspired treatise on the whole subject is eloquent by its silence.

As regards the first of our three points, the absence of an altar from the inner sanctuary, we might fairly repeat what has been now said with reference to the second. No sentence of the Epistle to the Hebrews can be adduced which can even be construed into a suggestion that our Lord ministers before an altar in heaven, any more than the high priest did so in the Most Holy Place of the earthly tabernacle. Here again the analogy of the type is strictly adhered to.

There is, however, one passage (the only one in the Epistle in which an altar is spoken of in connection with the sacrifice

¹ The December CHURCHMAN.

of Christ) which deserves attention, not only because it has been largely made use of in the discussion of the general subject, but because we believe that it fully corroborates the view which we are taking. It occurs in the last chapter of the Epistle,¹ and in the course of the practical exhortations which the author deduces from the doctrine which he has laid down. He is cautioning his readers against being carried away from the doctrine of Christ, which like Himself is unchangeable, "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever," by doctrines "divers," with all the manifoldness, the varying shades and chameleon-like hues of error, and "strange," or foreign to the truth of the Gospel. He instances, as an example of what he means, the distinction drawn by Jews between different kinds of food, and the religious value which they set on some of them. It is "a good thing," he says, "that by grace the heart be strengthened, and not by meats, in which those who walked were not benefited." And then, as an inducement to them to follow his advice, and to renounce these and all other carnal ordinances of Judaism, to break completely with that system which, having served its divinely-appointed purpose, was even now tottering to its downfall, he illustrates for them, by a reference to the typical ordinance and its Christian counterpart, which had been the chief subject of his letter, the entire separation, nay, the antagonism, which in this respect exists between the Gospel and the law. "We have an altar," he proceeds—we are not without an altar—but it is one "of which they who serve the tabernacle"—the Jewish priests—"have no right to eat." I spoke of sacred food. What food more sacred in the estimation of a Jew than the flesh of victims offered upon God's altar, of which the priests alone were permitted to eat? But there was one altar—the holiest, the most sacred of them all—the altar at which the high priest ministered on the great day of atonement, of which not even the Jewish priests, much less Jewish worshippers, were permitted to partake.

"For the bodies of those beasts whose blood is brought into the Most Holy Place by the high priest for sin, are burnt without the camp."² Of many altars, of the one brazen altar, under many names given to it corresponding to the many purposes which it served; of the altar of burnt offering; of the altar of peace offering; in some cases even of the altar of sin offering, the priests were allowed to eat. A portion of the victim offered on those altars was theirs by right. But there was an altar—the altar of sin offering—on that day of which the service specially typified, as we have seen, the

¹ Hebrews xiii. 10.

² *Ibid.* xiii. 11.

sacrifice of Christ, in which the priests had no share at all. Both of the animals then offered for sin were burned without the camp. Of their flesh no portion was eaten by the priests.¹ That was the altar to which our Christian altar corresponds. "Wherefore"—in strict accordance with and in fulfilment of the type in this particular—"Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate."² If then we would be partakers of the altar on which He suffered, we must not be afraid or ashamed to quit the once sacred but now doomed city and commonwealth of Israel, and to cast in our lot with Him. "Let us go forth, therefore, unto Him without the camp" (of Judaism), "bearing His reproach. For here" (there is a touch of mournful pathos in the words as they well up from the heart of one who foresaw the destruction of that city which was "beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth") "here have we no continuing city, but we seek the one which is to come."³

What, then, is the real bearing of this passage upon our present argument? So far from Christ presenting His most sacred body, so far from His offering Himself in that sense continually before the Eternal Father in heaven, in the view of the writer of this Epistle, based upon the requirements of the fore-ordained type, He never so, in that character and under that aspect, presented His body to God at all. On no altar in Holy or Most Holy Place, on no altar within the court of the Tabernacle, nor even within the hallowed enclosure of the camp of Israel; but in a spot in the unhallowed wilderness without, is the type of the Cross reared on Calvary, outside the walls of Jerusalem, to be found. Holier a thousand times than camp of Israel or city of Jerusalem, holier a thousand times than court of Tabernacle or of Temple, than Holy or Most Holy Place, holiest of all holy places that earth ever knew; yet not as such, but as the place of separation, of ignominy, of death, is Calvary here set forth to our view:

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, by being made a curse for us. For it is written, Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree.⁴

He made Him to be sin for us, Who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.⁵

We speak and think commonly—and who would wish it otherwise?—of the Cross as an altar. Yet, strictly speaking, Christ's sacred body, when regarded as a sacrifice for sin, was not offered upon any altar at all. The truth is, that His one all-sufficient and all-embracing sacrifice gathered up into itself and fulfilled all the three principal kinds of Jewish

¹ Leviticus xvi. 27.

² *Ibid.* xvi. 12.

³ *Ibid.*, xvi. 13, 14.

⁴ Galatians iii. 13.

⁵ 2 Corinthians v. 21.

sacrifice, each of them representing a distinct and necessary idea—the Sin-offering, the Burnt-offering, and the Peace-offering. Regarded as the Sin-offering, of which the chief idea was atonement, His holy body was given up to God without the gate, His precious blood was brought into the Most Holy Place. Regarded as the Burnt-offering, of which the chief idea was self-sacrifice—the surrender of the whole man to God—He gave Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God, “for a sweet-smelling savour,”¹ upon the Cross, which may in this respect be called the antitype of the altar of Burnt-offering. Regarded as the Peace-offering, of which the chief idea was fellowship, the sacrificial meal, the feeding of the now reconciled worshipper on the flesh of the sacrifice by which reconciliation had been procured, His body is the spiritual food and sustenance of His faithful people in the Holy Supper, and whenever and however else they are partakers of the benefits of His death. This man giveth us His flesh to eat. But in all this manifold exhibition of the virtue and significance of the one great sacrifice of the Cross, there is nothing to suggest the presenting of the body of Christ as a sacrifice to God at an altar in heaven; nothing, therefore, to support that view of Christian worship, resting upon such a supposed presentation, with which we are concerned.

Altar, then, of sacrifice and sacrificial victim are alike beyond the scope of this part of our investigation. With neither of them, directly and actively, has the work of our Lord for us in heaven, as described in the type, or in the commentary upon it, to do. To the consideration of His most precious Blood, and of His dealing with it there, by type and antitype alike, we are shut up. To that, therefore, our third point, in studying the inspired commentary of the Epistle to the Hebrews, we now come.

Following closely the lines of the type, the writer of the Epistle thus describes the fulfilment of it by our Lord :

Christ being come, a High Priest of the good things to come, by the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation, neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood entered in once for all into the Most Holy Place, and obtained eternal redemption for us.²

It is beside our present purpose to discuss at any length the meaning of “the greater and more perfect tabernacle” heresproken of. The view of some commentators that the “true tabernacle,”³

¹ Ephesians v. 2. Compare Genesis viii. 21, where the expression in the LXX., *ἀσμη εὐωδίας*, is the same as that here used by St. Paul; and observe that in verse 20 Noah's sacrifice is said to have been a “burnt-offering.”

² Hebrews ix. 11, 12.

³ *Ibid.* viii. 2.

as it is elsewhere called, is the glorified body of Christ in which God meets with man, the Most Holy Place beyond being the unapproachable Deity, in which Christ as God dwells with the Father, apart from other objections, which might be urged against it, appears to contradict the ruling of this Epistle, that the Most Holy Place is "heaven itself."¹ Another view which identifies "the true Tabernacle" with that heaven in which God manifests Himself to saints and angels in beatific vision, and through which Christ passed locally into the Most Holy Place, the heaven of heavens, the light inaccessible, which is the proper dwelling-place of God, is perhaps less open to objection. We prefer, however, to regard "the true tabernacle" as the Church on earth—not local or visible, but spiritual—in which the seven golden candlesticks give forth their light,² and the incense of prayer and praise ascends unceasingly, and the table of shewbread is spread continually, in which all Christians, "a royal priesthood,"³ minister before God; and the Most Holy Place as the heaven where Christ, our High Priest, is now, and we shall be with Him hereafter, from which already the veil is taken away, into which even now we have "boldness to enter by the blood of Jesus,"⁴ as "in heart and mind we thither ascend, and with Him continually dwell."⁵ But whichever of these views we take, or whatever other interpretation we put upon that clause of the verse, the fact remains that it is by His blood, and by His blood only, that Christ is here said to have entered into the Most Holy Place. The inspired commentary claims for the type in this respect an exact fulfilment. Two other typical ordinances are referred to in the verses which immediately follow—the ordinance of the red heifer, by which ceremonial defilement incurred by contact with death was removed;⁶ and the inaugural rites by which the first covenant was solemnly ratified.⁷ But both these are referred to solely to elucidate and confirm the value and the necessity of blood in the work of cleansing and atonement. They are employed as foils to magnify the transcendent preciousness of that blood, with which Christ entered once for all into the Most Holy Place. They are adduced, not as isolated or abnormal examples, but as instances of a universal law, which pervades and governs the whole typical institution:

Almost all things are by the law purged with blood, and without shedding of blood is no remission.⁸

And this law, as the writer, returning after these illustra-

¹ Hebrews ix. 24.

² Revelation i. 20.

³ 1 Peter ii. 9.

⁴ Hebrews x. 19.

⁵ Collect for Ascension Day.

⁶ Hebrews ix. 13.

⁷ *Ibid.* ix. 19-21.

⁸ *Ibid.* ix. 22.

tions to his main argument, insists, was not one of preparatory discipline or of temporary obligation. It clothed itself, indeed, for the time in the garb of "carnal ordinances," imposed till the season of rectification;¹ but it had its root in that eternal necessity, that only law, which is the nature and the will of God.

It was necessary that the delineations of things in the heavens should be purified with these, but the heavenly things themselves with sacrifices better than these.²

Even into "the heavenly things themselves" man's sin had entered—the voice of a brother's blood crying from the ground; the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah waxen great before the face of the Lord; the hire of labourers, kept back by fraud, entering into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth; the sins of the brethren brought before God by the accuser day and night continually,³ until the Champion of our race signalized His return to heaven by casting him forth from thence. All these things made it necessary that even that eternal abode of spotless purity should be purified for man. Even there the eternal law obtained and must be obeyed; and, therefore, with His own blood He entered there for us.

"*With His own blood;*" but how "with it"? This is a question which cannot, we think, be precisely answered. The manner of presentation is not revealed to us, and we may not, therefore, presume to define it. The notion that the sacred Blood of Christ was carried by Him, separate from Himself, into heaven, and there remains as it was poured out, incorruptible in the presence of God, though it has the support of some great names, both ancient and modern, appears to us to be a materialistic conception, unworthy of so sublime a transaction. We cannot picture to ourselves those sacred hands, outstretched as they were in attitude to bless as He ascended up on high, as bearing some golden bowl or crystal vase,⁴ in which that holy blood was to stand for ever before the throne of God. We cannot bring ourselves to suppose that He literally sprinkled, as well as literally placed, it there. Nor are we prepared to accept the explanation that our Lord presents continually His precious blood, as it is gathered up into His glorified body, before His Father in heaven. This, as we have seen already, would flatly contradict the type, in which the blood, not as living in the body, but as having passed from it in death, was the means of atonement. It would not help the view of the Holy Communion against which we are contending, for as we have also seen, it would form no pattern for that

¹ Hebrews ix. 10.

² *Ibid.* ix. 23.

³ Revelation xii. 10.

⁴ Hence, as a friend reminds me, the origin of the legend of the "Holy Graal."

Holy Sacrament in which the body and blood of Christ are separately represented, and separately given and received. It would require that in the commentary before us, Christ should be said to have entered into the Most Holy Place, not by His blood only, but by His body and blood, or by Himself, or some similarly inclusive phrase. Enough for us to know, that "by" — "by means of," "by virtue of," "by," as a necessary condition fulfilled, His own blood, shed once for all on earth, He entered in once for all into the Most Holy Place; enough, that He returned to the Home which He had left, as One that had undergone death since He left it; enough, that He, Who from all eternity could have said, "I am the first, and the last, and the Living one," could now add, "and I was (became) dead."

But whether this interpretation of the clause, "by His own blood," be adopted or not; whatever view we take of what it is that our Lord presents, and in what manner He presents it, our main argument remains unshaken. The commentary repeats emphatically the sentence of the type, that the presentation, whatever and however it be, is not continuous, but once only and once for all.

Much stress has, indeed, been laid on one verse in the Epistle, in which, as it is alleged, the necessity of a continuous offering on the part of Christ in heaven is distinctly asserted.

"Every high priest," so the verse runs, "is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices; wherefore it is of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer."²

That it is in heaven that He must "have somewhat to offer," it is said, is clear, because it is of His ministry as heavenly, in contradistinction to earthly, that the writer is treating; for it is added immediately, "for if He were upon earth He would not be a priest at all, seeing there are those who offer the gifts according to the law."³ What, therefore, this verse must be held to affirm, they tell us, is that, inasmuch as priesthood and oblation are correlative terms—to be a priest is to have something to offer, and to offer it—Christ, Who is a Priest in heaven and not on earth, must have something to offer continually there. And seeing that He is said, elsewhere in this Epistle, to offer Himself, it is *that*, His most holy body and blood, that He continually offers to God on high.

To this argument it has been thought sufficient by some writers to reply that it rests upon an inaccurate translation of the words, which, so far from conveying the meaning thus put upon them, are an example of the "fine precision" of the Greek language, and do properly say "it is of necessity that

¹ Revelation i. 17, 18

² Hebrews viii. 3.

³ Hebrews viii. 4.

this High Priest also have somewhat to have offered once for all ;¹ thus in reality denying that very continuity of offerings which they are quoted to support. That this may be the meaning of the Greek, no one, we presume, would venture to deny : that it must be, few, we think, would venture to affirm. What, however, the meaning really is, must be ascertained, not by a grammatical disquisition on an ambiguous phrase, but by a comparison of the fuller statements of the same author, on the same subject, and in the course of the same argument. The inspired writer will be his own best interpreter. In the verse in question he is merely stating generally that, as a necessary condition of His Priesthood, our Lord "must have somewhat to offer." Elsewhere he explains what that somewhat is, and whether His offering it is repeated, or is once for all. Turning then to the other places in this Epistle, in which the words "offer" and "offering" are used with reference to our Lord, and leaving out as foreign to our purpose the statement that "in the days of His flesh He offered prayers and supplications,"² we find them to be these :

Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice (the Greek word here is a little different,³ but the variation does not affect the argument) first for his own sins and then for the people's ; for this He did once for all, when he offered up Himself.⁴

For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh ; how much more shall the blood of Christ, Who through the Eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God ?⁵

For Christ entered not into a most holy place made with hands, the figure of the true (the antitype of the ideal), but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. Nor that He should offer Himself often, as the High priest entereth into the most holy place every year with blood of others, for then must He often have suffered since the foundation of the world ; but now, once for all, in the end of the world (at the end of the ages) hath He been manifested for the putting away of sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment, so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many, and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time, without sin unto salvation.⁶

By which will we are sanctified by the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices which can never take away sins. But this man after He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God, from henceforth expecting till His enemies be made His footstool. For by one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.⁷

¹ It is *τι ὃ προσένεγκε*, not *προσφέρει*.

² 1 Hebrews v. 7.

⁴ Hebrews viii. 27.

⁶ *Ibid.* ix. 24-28.

³ *ἀναφέρω* instead of *προσφέρω*.

⁵ Hebrews ix. 13, 14.

⁷ *Ibid.* x. 10-14.

What, we ask, could possibly be more clear or more conclusive than this? By what precision of language, or frequency of iteration, or aptness of comparison, could a writer have put his meaning more entirely beyond the reach of misapprehension? How could he have more plainly said, what, indeed, he does in so many words say repeatedly, that the offering of Christ, whether it be the offering of "Himself," or the offering of His body, or the offering of His blood; whether it be His offering on earth, or His offering in heaven, was offered once and once only? And by what more cogent comparison could he have illustrated his meaning? The offering of the Jewish high priest was offered daily or yearly. In sharpest contrast to this is set the offering of Christ, which was never repeated at all. To claim for it repetition is to vitiate the comparison and dissipate the entire force of the contrast. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews denies as emphatically repetition of the offering in heaven, or re-presentation, as he does repetition of the sacrifice on earth. He gives express and positive contradiction to the idea, which had already been negatively contradicted, by the absence of all room for it in the type. "Nor yet," he writes, in one of the passages which we have just quoted, "that He should offer Himself often" (where? on the cross, on earth? No; but before the throne in heaven; for he adds immediately :) "*as the high priest entereth into the holy place, year by year, with blood not his own.*"¹ And why not? Because "else must He often have suffered, since the foundation of the world." So then, in the view of the writer, and therefore of the Holy Ghost by whose inspiration he wrote, *to offer often, is to suffer often.* He knows of no offering by Christ of Himself, or of His blood, in heaven, but such as is an integral part, an immediate consequence, of His sacrifice on earth. And, as though to put this truth, that our Lord's offering of Himself, in its entirety and completeness, was one and one only, he adds to the Jewish type a proof and illustration, drawn from the common lot and experience of mankind: "As it is appointed unto men once to die . . . so Christ was once offered."²

By the law of nature men die once, and once only. Christ, as man, submitted to that law, and died once, and once only. In that one death He was "offered once for all to bear the sins of many." That offering can no more be repeated in any of its parts, for it is in all its parts one necessary and coherent whole, than men can die commonly a second time.

If now we return, with all this wealth of comment upon it,

¹ Hebrews ix. 25, Revised Version.

² *Ibid.* ix. 27, 28.

to the writer's earlier sentence, "It is necessary that this High-Priest also have somewhat to offer," we can be at no loss to determine what meaning he intends us to put upon it. The "somewhat" is His own body, offered once for all upon the cross on earth, and also His own blood, offered once for all, as a part of the one great complex act, before the Throne in heaven. In making this offering, He was not "a Priest on earth," in the sense which the writer denies. For though the cross was set up on earth, and the oblation begun there, it is not of earth locally that he is speaking. It is on a heavenly and spiritual, in contradistinction to an earthly and material tabernacle and ministry that he is insisting.¹ Such a tabernacle and ministry were Christ's when He offered Himself once for all on the cross, and then "appeared" (openly, not veiled like the Jewish high priest in a cloud of incense²), in the presence of God for us. This was the "somewhat" that He had to offer.

One other proof is furnished by a passage already adduced from this Epistle, that we are not warranted in assuming any active dealing by the great High Priest with His blood, now in heaven; that though the virtue of it as once presented lives on and is pleaded continually, yet the presentation of it has ceased for ever. Contrasting in yet another particular the Jewish priests with the High Priest of our Christian profession, the writer urges that whereas they "stand daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices," "He, when He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God."³ The point of contrast to which we draw attention is the *standing* of the many priests, and the *sitting down* of the One Priest. To *stand* before the Lord,⁴ or before His ark,⁵ or in His house,⁶ was a phrase in common use to denote the ministry of a Jewish priest. But our Saviour Christ is not a Priest only, but a King as well. By the requirements of the ancient prophecies which we have considered, He is "a Priest upon His throne."⁷ When He entered the courts of heaven, He accepted the invitation and obeyed the mandate of Jehovah, "Sit Thou on My right hand, till I make Thine enemies Thy footstool."⁸ "We have such an High Priest, who sat down on the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens."⁹ The Mercy-seat, which was the seat or throne in the ancient Tabernacle of Him "Who dwelleth between the cherubims,"¹⁰ gives place in

¹ See Hebrews viii. 1, 2. ² Leviticus xvi. 13, with Hebrews ix. 24.

³ Hebrews x. 11, 12.

⁴ Deut. x. 8; xviii. 7.

⁵ Judges xx. 28.

⁶ Psalm cxxxiv. 1.

⁷ Zechariah vi. 13.

⁸ Psalm cx. 1. The reference to this in Hebrews x. 13, "from henceforth expecting," is obvious.

⁹ Hebrews viii. 1.

¹⁰ Psalm lxxx. 1; xcix. 1. Compare Exodus xxv. 22.

the antitype to the throne of glory in the heavenly Temple, which is a "throne of grace" also, the throne which Isaiah saw in that Temple in the vision which called him to his office,¹ the throne which is pre-eminently the Throne of God. On that throne, as He Himself testifies, "I overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne,"² our High Priest is sitting. There God hath "set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come."³ There He "sat down." There He sitteth still. But this is not the attitude of a priest re-presenting continually his sacrifice. Then would He rather have stood daily ministering, as those Jewish priests stood.⁴ Here is no pattern and no warrant for Christian priests re-presenting continually, after His example, His most sacred body and blood, upon Christian altars in the Church below.

Here, then, we pause at present. In a concluding paper we hope to complete the negative argument as against the view which we deprecate, and also to show, so far as Holy Scripture reveals it, in what the sacerdotal function of our Lord in heaven consists. Our conclusion, so far, is, that the commentary agrees with the type, as how should it not do? seeing that from one and the self-same Spirit, now putting wisdom into the heart of man to furnish forth the type, and now giving light to the understanding of man to indite the commentary, both type and commentary proceed. With consentient voice, addressing themselves to the eye in visible symbols, and to the ear in audible words, they say to us, "By one offering," once for all offered, begun on the Cross here, completed before the Throne there, "He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified."

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¹ Isaiah vi. 1.

² Revelation iii. 21.

³ Ephesians i. 20, 21.

⁴ In the session of our Lord at the right hand of God lies the answer to the argument, that inasmuch as He is still within the Most Holy Place, and has not yet come forth again, as He will do at the last day, therefore He is to be regarded as doing still what the high priest did then, viz., dealing actively with His blood. But the New Testament, so far from affirming, emphatically denies that this is so. It reminds us that at this point the type of Aaron ceases to apply, and that the truer type of Melchisedek takes its place. He is a priest still, but now a priest upon His throne.

