

THE LAW OF SERVICE.

WE thank Almighty God that His "blessed Son was circumcised and obedient to the law of man." "He was made of a woman under the law," the Apostle tells us. Circumcision was the sign of it.

What law? The Mosaic ceremonial law? Is that quite adequate? That law has vanished into the dim haze of a half-forgotten memory. It was temporary, and dying from its birth—the shadow only of an eternal reality. It was scarce worth our Lord's while to be initiated, by what, in its unspiritual sense, was a somewhat absurd rite, into an obedience to the equally mechanical rites of an empty ceremonial.

The real Law, of which that outward law was but the shadow, and useful only to train an infantile people to a knowledge of the high and holy and Eternal Law which never passes away—this was the Law under which the Son of Man and the Son of God was born. It is the *Law of Service*.

On the night in which He was betrayed He did several things. Some of these have become dim in the shadow of the great revealing act which established the Sacrament of the Body and the Blood. Here is one: He arose from supper, laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself, poured water into a basin, washed His disciples' feet, and wiped them with the towel.

In a mechanical repetition of this strange sacramental act some few people have, as they fancied, fulfilled its meaning. Itself was the fulfilment in act of much teaching by word. "Whosoever will be great among you let him be your servant, and whosoever will be chief among you let him be your slave." For the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve." He is contrasting the Kingdom of Heaven with the kingdoms of the world, where greatness stands in lordship, in ruling with tyrannous mastery.

The measure of greatness, in this Kingdom of Heaven now revealed, is the measure of Service.

And now beyond all precept, and all power of words He teaches, in this supreme hour, by act done, the infinite sweep of the Law under which all men and all beings stand—willingly and gladly, and so with blessing—unwillingly and rebelling, and so with ruin.

No wonder Peter with even his dim perception of Who He was should be amazed. With our clearer conceptions, knowing Who it was that washed—the Eternal Son of God and Man—were the fact not so old and familiar to us, it would be overwhelming. For it was a menial's office, a slave's office. To the unspiritual

sight utterly debasing. To the scourging, spitting, mocking and crucifixion He was brought by others. Ever so willingly borne, they were still inflicted from without. This washing of the feet was His own voluntary act, this degrading service, a service deliberately chosen!

Let us try to understand it. First, assure ourselves that Christ came to reveal law, not to create it, that His words and works were a revelation of relations, conditions and duties always existing, whether known to us or unknown; that He Himself was the Normal Man under the unbroken and abiding Law of Humanity, that He was not exceptional, nor His Law of the Kingdom of Heaven a new and exceptional Law created for an occasion.

It is pitiful to see how the opposite conception has vitiated so much of our Theology and confused our ideas of humanity in making the Lord's coming an afterthought, as it were, and a breach, and not a continuity of Divine Order in the World—and this against His own plain words and acts. For His teaching and His life were utterly natural, according to a nature (as we call it) in which all laws are Divine.

The Law of Service is stamped indelibly on the lowest as on the highest. The unorganized material serves the plant. By earth and air and rain, by dew and sunshine serving them, the wheat-stalk and the oak alike grow to life and use.

And these serve again the uses of the animal, and nothing lives or is, save to serve some other thing. If we have not discovered all uses yet, if some uses seem even evil and cruel, we have, at least, gone so far as to be able to say that the all-circling Law, even of common matter and unconscious and irrational life, is the Law of Service.

We rise to men and here, from the beginning, the Law is supreme. It reigns in the hut of the savage and in the palace of the king. Wherever the family in any shape exists, wherever the hearthfire burns and the child is born, the Law of Service is the golden girdle that binds the household. The mother *must* serve the child. The father *must* serve the family. Brothers and sisters *must* each serve the other, even in savagery.

The more perfectly the law is obeyed the higher stands the family and the civilization. The distance is far from the hut where the savage mother croons over the savage child her charms and incantations to preserve it from the evil powers, to the Christian home where the mother sings her cradle hymn over the little "member of Christ and child of God," with the baptismal water and the baptismal cross fresh upon its brow. Still the Service is different in degree and not in kind. The Law is the same, only the Law in the latter case is