

The Ecclesiastical System of Moses.

It would require a treatise to discuss with any propriety so large a subject as this. In this paper only some of the more general principles can be stated and illustrated.

The first thing that arrests attention is the exceedingly elaborate and symbolical character of this religious system. Accustomed to our very simple ritual under Christianity, perhaps this elaborateness oppresses us somewhat unduly. One or two considerations may help to relieve us of this feeling. 1. A symbolic form of service was absolutely necessary in those days, when education was so limited, and the very mind of man required the immediate aid of sight and sound in the apprehension of religious truths,—when men even wrote, for the most part, in hieroglyphics. For much the same reason that Christ spoke to the people in parables, putting spiritual truth into incident and picture for the aiding of mind and memory, God, in those older days, put His truth into symbols and ceremonies. The unseen God was behind a cloud. Divine truth was apprehended through tabernacle and sacrifice. 2. Elaborate as the ecclesiastical system of Moses may seem to us, it was really a movement towards simplicity. In comparison with the ritual of Egypt, or the surrounding heathen nations, it contrasts most favorably in its simplicity. Heathen religions, having many gods, have many ceremonies whose minuteness makes them irksome in the extreme. 3. We must not credit the system of Moses with the after-additions of Rabbis; and we must not forget his religious system was most intimately blended with social and political arrangements, and it is difficult to separate, even in thought, those bearing directly on religion.

There appear to have been three great theological facts and truths which the ecclesiastical system of Moses was intended to teach, and to preserve in full view of the people. 1. The unity and spirituality of God. 2. The sanctification of all life to His service; and, 3. The great fact of sin, and mode of redemption. The first

only of these can be considered and illustrated in this paper.

1. *The Unity and Spirituality of God.* This most essential truth was their great national truth: as the depository of it, they had been chosen out from other nations; they had a right to a national existence only as they faithfully preserved and upheld it. In the midst of polytheistic nations they were called to believe in one God, who made heaven and earth. In the midst of idolatrous nations, they were called to make no image of their God, copying no likeness of things in heaven or earth. Their idea of Him must be—*the Spirit, the "I am."*

How did their ecclesiastical system conserve the idea of the Divine Unity? They had one place and one worship. No diversities were permitted among the different tribes; all took their places around one centre, that centre the tabernacle of God. They all united in the same worship. This was seen much more clearly in after years, when they were settled in their own land. They had one city—Jerusalem; to it the eye of every Israelite turned; and three times a year, from the most distant parts, the nation assembled in Jerusalem, to unite in one worship of the one God, and therein revive their national belief in the one living and true God. Then in their whole system there was an extraordinary unity and harmony, the unity that comes out of every part manifestly tending toward the same result. In Tabernacle and Temple no rival deities asked for different kinds of worship. The old Temple service spoke to true hearts as do the nobler Gothic cathedrals and churches of our land: all parts blend in one general lifting up of our hearts; pinnacles and lesser spires seem to meet in the great spire that points away to God—the one God.

Then how did Moses' ecclesiastical system conserve the truth of the Divine spirituality? Partly by its symbol—a cloud, which was a fold drawn over Him who was too glorious, too spiritual, to be seen by mortal eyes. Partly by the idea of mystery which gathered about that Holy of Holies where the symbol of God rested over the mercy-seat. Its veil only the high-priest might take aside, and even