

The Last Testament.

ADVANCE SHEETS OF THE GREAT CONTROVERSY BY ABILEY & JOHNSON, LL.D., KINDERLIN HEIGHTS, TENN.

CHAPTER XIII.

ECONOCLAST.

"And such trust have we through Christ that God will not that we are sufficient of our selves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; who, also, hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life."—2 Cor. iii. 4-6.

"And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, which they are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance; for where a testament is, there must also, of necessity, be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead; otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth."—Heb. ix. 15-17.

I appear again before this convention for the purpose of breaking idols. When I survey the vast assemblage before me, and my ear catches the echo of the confusion that exists throughout the world, my indignation rises, and I feel that the time has come to break all the idols worshipped by the people of God, bury them by the wayside, and then march on with the triumphant hosts to the conquest of the world. The great idol, the father of all the smaller ones, is compounded of equal parts of the law of Moses, human tradition, and the gospel of Christ. It is generally "called the identity of the two covenants," but the name is changed and varied according to the temple in which it is worshipped, and the high-priest who presides over the homage that is paid to it. It is an easy task to break this idol. Paul speaks in unmistakable terms of the two covenants (Gal. iv. 21), and no process of logic or ecclesiastical logerdom can make them one! He also declares that the first has been abolished or done away (2 Cor. iii. 1-8; Heb. viii. 1-18), and no power in the universe can bring it back into force! Where now are the scattered fragments of your beloved idol? Echo, borne upon the cold and pulseless wind, answers, "Where?"

It being settled by incontestable testimony that there is only one covenant or testament in existence, and that it is a new covenant, we can proceed to the examination of it. We may legitimately ask, Who is the author of this testament? What does it embrace? When, and where, did it begin?

Before proceeding to answer these questions, I propose to settle another important point. It is this: What is the meaning of the word testament, or covenant? Many people speak of the New Testament without comprehending what it is, or what it offers. A testament is simply a will; the words will and testament may be used interchangeably. This is easy enough for any one to understand. The New Testament is, therefore, the will of God concerning men. You will notice that Paul declares that in order to enforce the provisions of a will, or testament, the death of the testator must be brought in or declared. There are some peculiarities about wills or testaments with which all intelligent persons are familiar. It is a fact that I wish to state with all possible emphasis, that every important characteristic of a human will or testament may also be seen in the divine will. God adapts himself to us, and speaks to us in language suited to our comprehension. There are many things we know concerning testaments, testators, and administrators, for they touch us in every-day business life. Our constitution, our laws, and our customs unite in guaranteeing to every man the right to make a will or testament, and thus determine what shall be done with his earthly possessions after he

shall have gone to the grave. They guarantee to him the incontestable and inalienable right to begin at the age of twenty-one and make as many wills or testaments as his fancy or judgment may suggest. They guarantee to him, in spite of this, the right to use his possessions as he pleases after making his will. They guarantee him the right to make any changes in his will or to supplement it in any way he chooses. They guarantee to him the right to make his will conditional or unconditional. They decree that a testament cannot be enforced until the death of the person who makes it, and that after this only can it be probated and executed according to his desire. They further guarantee that no power can make any changes in a will after the death of its author. If he places conditions between the legacy and the legatee, no earthly power can legitimately remove them. If he does not place conditions in his will, no earthly power can legally introduce them and require submission to them. You know these statements to be true in the affairs of this life. Why may they not be true in reference to the things that pertain to the life beyond the grave? It is a fact that you cannot and will not deny, that a testament may be changed repeatedly during life. Neither can you deny that after death it must stand without change, supplement, or amendment, and must be executed to the letter.

In order to make a testament that will stand in law certain things are absolutely necessary. I will name them: (1) The testator must be of proper age; (2) He must be in his right mind; (3) He must have something to give; (4) He must be explicit, leaving no room for doubt, making it conditional or unconditional as his desire may dictate; (5) There must be competent witnesses; (6) It must be admitted to probate; (7) If there are conditions they must be performed in the precise manner required. A person of improper age cannot make a will or testament. A person of an unsound mind cannot make a will or testament. A testament without a consideration is not worth the paper on which it is written. A will that is obscure cannot stand the fire of antagonism, and therefore cannot be executed. A will without a sufficient number of competent witnesses is null and void. A testament is prophetic; it relates to what shall be after the death of the person making it. He can therefore, at pleasure, make changes in it, or make gifts entirely independent of it, or, if he chooses, make an entirely new one. The right to make gifts independent of the will lasts until death, but the moment the testator dies the will is forever sealed, and must therefore stand. A will cannot be probated without witnesses, and when once probated it cannot be changed or abolished; it must stand forever! All these things are true in reference to the testaments of men. They are equally true in reference to the testament of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

I affirmed that a testament must stand, after the testator's death, just as it is written, and that if there are conditions added to its provisions they must be performed without addition or subtraction. Allow me to illustrate: I own ten acres of land. Law says it is mine. Custom says it is mine. I have the power to control it during my natural life, and also to say to whom it shall go at my death. I sit down in the presence of competent witnesses to write my will. I have the power to make it conditional or unconditional. I choose to make it conditional. I decide what the con-

ditions shall be: (1) A wire fence six feet high on the north side; (2) An iron picket fence six feet high on the west side; (3) An oak plank fence six feet high on the south side; a common rail fence six feet high on the east side; (4) At the completion of the fence according to the specifications, the legatee is to take possession, and it is specified that he shall have, own, and control the land as long as he keeps the fence in good repair and the land in a good state of cultivation. Now who will affirm that the legatee can be brought into the possession and control of the land without the exact performance of the conditions? Who will affirm that he could complete three sides of the fence according to the requirements, and then take possession of the land? Who will affirm that he can maintain his right to the land without the performance of all the conditions laid down in the will through his entire life?

It is an established fact that Jesus, while making His will, lived under the "first covenant," and that it continued in force until the ratification of the new testament by His death on the cross (Col. ii. 11-14; Heb. viii. 1-18).

Jesus was of proper age to make a testament (Luke iii. 23). He also had the power to do whatever He desired (John x. 17, 18). Did He have anything to give? If so, what? Did He have enough to meet the wants of all men in all ages? Let Him speak for Himself: "Even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matt. xx. 28). Again, "And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life" (John v. 40). "The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John x. 10). He came with the riches of heaven to the poor and needy of earth. Hear the triumphant refrain of the great apostle of the Gentiles: "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich" (2 Cor. viii. 9). Hear Him again: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief" (1 Tim. i. 15). Jesus Christ brought these things for you; they are incorporated in His will; He calls on you to accept and perform the conditions to-day; will you do it? He is plain, full and explicit in His requirements, and there is absolutely no excuse. There were competent witnesses to the will or testament of Jesus Christ. Both the Old and New records unite in declaring that the testimony of two or three witnesses is sufficient to establish any question of fact (Deut. xvii. 6; 2 Cor. xiii. 1). Jesus, the Christ, came as the last, yea, the final remedy for sin; hence, in order to make His testimony overwhelmingly convincing, He chose twelve competent witnesses (Matt. x. 1-15). Hear His word concerning them: "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain; that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in My name, he may give it you" (John xv. 16). Again: "As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world" (John xvii. 18). After His resurrection He said to them, after having given them their commission: "And ye are witnesses of those things" (Luke xxiv. 48). On the day of Pentecost, after having preached to the people, they triumphantly proclaimed: "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we are all witnesses" (Acts ii. 32). Again at Solomon's porch, Peter declared that God had raised up Jesus: "Whereof we are witnesses" (Acts iii. 15). It is a fact that cannot be successfully contradicted that after the death of the testator everything depends on the witnesses. Human law recognizes this universally. Jesus also recognized it. He called the twelve Apostles. He taught them during His entire life. They knew His will. They knew His manner of life, but He did not leave them alone. He sent power of God upon them that they might be inspired, illuminated, taught, until it was absolutely impossible for them to make a mistake. Their words were truly, undeniably, incontestably the words of God, of Christ, of the Holy Spirit! Who will deny it? Who will dare to tread so close to the great loving heart of Divinity and open doubt or question? Away with your doubts! Away with your questions! Away with the crumbling remains of your idols! God has spoken, Jesus Christ, the Great Testator, has spoken, the witnesses have spoken, let humankind listen, believe and obey! Do you call for proof? Listen: "For it is not ye that speak but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you" (Matt. x. 20). Again: "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (John xiv. 26). Again: "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of me: and ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with Me from the beginning" (John xv. 26, 27). Again: "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts i. 8). Again: "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts ii. 4). In the face of this testimony who will affirm that the twelve witnesses made any mistakes? Who will affirm that they failed to uphold the provisions of the will or testament of Jesus Christ? Who will affirm that it is safe to disregard their testimony and seek elsewhere for the way of salvation? Did Jesus put conditions in His will? If not, and God is no respecter of persons, it is a decree and not a will! If it has no conditions, what necessity was there for the Apostles? If there were no conditions, what necessity was there for the Church? In order to settle the matter beyond dispute I appeal to the record: Let the Master speak: "Not every one that saith unto Me; Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. vii. 21). Hear the Apostle Peter: "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him" (Acts x. 34, 35). Hear the Apostle Paul: "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; and being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him" (Heb. v. 8, 9). Hear the Apostle John: "Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city" (Rev. xxii. 14). This settles, settles forever, the question of conditions in the will of Christ. No man can deny it

without denying the plain and unequivocal statements of the record.

What were the conditions? This is an important question. Indeed, it transcends all others, and, when compared to it, they are as nothing. Before proceeding with the answer I wish to submit a few preliminary considerations that will assist in properly understanding it. Returning to our fence illustration, I remark that many different parts or pieces enter into the different sides, and many details enter into it in order to its completion according to the specifications, but when it is completed, it, in brief, comprehends the four sides designated. It is so with the plan of redemption developed in the testament of Jesus Christ. Many things enter into it; the goodness and love of God, the gift of Jesus Christ, preaching, penitence, the fear of punishment; yet it can all be successfully summed up in four conditions. What are they? Let the Bible answer. What is the first condition? "I said, therefore, unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins" (John viii. 21-24). What is the second condition? "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke xiii. 1-5). What is the third condition? "Whosoever, therefore, shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. x. 32-33). What is the fourth condition? "Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John iii. 5). Who is the author of these statements? Jesus the Christ. Who were the witnesses that He made them? The twelve apostles. Where are they found? In the will or testament of the Son of God. Is one condition more important than another? Is one side of the fence more important than another? Where is the man who will affirm it? Bring him out, I want to look him in the face.

When did Jesus Christ make His will? During His life on earth He began with His ministry and continued unto His death. During His public ministry He dispensed rich gifts, as He clearly had a right to do. He also imposed such conditions as the immediate circumstances required. He said to the impotent man: "Rise, take up thy bed and walk" (John v. 1-8). He said to the man sick of the palsy: "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee" (Matt. ix. 1, 2). He said to the sinful woman: "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace" (Luke vii. 36-50). He said to the penitent thief on the cross: "To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Luke xxiii. 39-43). Who will affirm that these incidents are precedents for us, seeing they were never so used by the Apostles? Who will affirm that Jesus intended to have us consider these as examples of conversion recorded for our guidance? If I begin to write my will to-day, and continue to write for three years, I will have a perfect right to make any gifts that I desire to make, and this would form no precedent for my executors to bestow similar gifts under similar circumstances. What the testator does himself and what he directs his executors to do are absolutely and unalterably different. We must not appeal simply to what Jesus did, but what he commanded the witnesses to do. The testator personally controls everything until his death. The moment he expires his personal acts sink into insignificance, and the executors must deal only with what is expressed as his