

## The Lesson Commentary.

LESSON X.]

[SEPT. 4, 1881.]

## THE CREATION.

Exod. 20: 12-21.

The Jewish people had peculiar reasons for cultivating and maintaining honor and reverence for parents. Their whole polity rested on the basis of the family. Their domestic, social, national, and religious life centered at the home. Parents were both civil and religious teachers. They were mayors, magistrates, and priests. All the vicergerency God had on earth, all that represented his authority and government over men, was vested in the fireside. The absolute power of putting their children to death was denied parents by the Mosaic law; but death was the penalty for wanton and persistent defiance of parental authority, just as, among us, death is the penalty for the crime of treason. Deut. 21: 18-21. This recognition of the unequivocal authority of the parent was, therefore, essential to the security of the state as well as the individual. If this was disregarded, it was a virtual casting off of God, and there was nothing left to prevent the nation from drifting back into heathenism, and so forfeiting God's promised blessing. This explains the special promise annexed to this command. It depended on the maintenance of filial obedience whether the Jewish state should be preserved or perish. This was to determine whether their "days should be long upon the land which the Lord their God gave them." The duty of honoring parents is based, not so much on the relation the parent sustains to the child directly, as in the relation he sustains to the child as God's representative. "Through all the earliest developments of the infant and youthful mind, the parent is to the child in the place of God. The same qualities of character, the same obedience, respect, and deference which God requires towards himself, are to be first implanted and developed in the mind toward the human parent." It is a significant fact, that while the duties men owe to each other are termed justice, courtesy, charity, etc., the duties of children to parents are, in most languages, denoted by the same

term used to express man's obligation to God, e. g., *pietas*. Who does not feel that it is more than uncharitable, or unconvincing, or unjust, to withhold from parents love, respect, and obedience? The instincts of nature, the demands of conscience, all the voices of God in the soul, require that children "honor" their parents. If asked how shall this be done? we answer, by love, trust, and obedience, the same feelings and acts due from man to God. When the child's heart is bound to the parent by this threefold cord, the fifth Commandment is obeyed, not otherwise. It would be easy to point out individual duties, but this is not needful; to suggest a principle is far more practical than to offer a precept. Where the purpose exists to fulfill this obligation, little direction will be necessary; where there is not, no directions will avail. In the five Commandments now considered, we have the duties man owes to God and to his representatives. The way is, therefore, ready to note the duties man owes directly to his fellows. Man has certain rights of which no other man may deprive him. Foremost among these are Life, Purity, Property, and Reputation. Each of these God protects by a direct command.

## VI. "Thou shalt not kill."

A divine hand gives to man his life, and the same hand alone, either directly or through divinely-appointed channels, has the right to take it. That God has the right to take the life he has given, none will deny. He has, also, the right to delegate this power. That he has at times done so, is obvious from the fact, that after the giving of the Law at Sinai, he, through the Mosaic Code, provided for the infliction of the death penalty. Governments through their derived powers, have unquestionably a right to deprive, at times, of life. Nor can it be doubted that the law of self-defence, which God has implanted in the constitution of every one, is an indication of the right to take life, if it be the necessary protection against the unlawful invasion of our own, or of those for whom we are responsible. The sixth Commandment is designed to apply to man in his ordinary relations to his fellows. To "kill," in the sense forbidden, is to take life wantonly, with no au-