

THE
CONSECRATION OF THE PRIESTS.

EXODUS xxix.

THE priestly office is one of no mean import. God would have a priest to minister to Him (Exodus xxviii. 1). No one could take that place except as "called of God" (Heb. v. 4). God alone could call the priest who would answer to His glory, and, when the time came for His doing so, the One saluted by Him as "Son" was saluted also as "Priest" (Heb. v. 5, 6). God has taken pains to impress us with the

greatness of the office and the person called to fill it.

It suited also the glory of God to associate with His priest a priestly house. God who chose the living stone in all its preciousness is now bringing the other stones, thus building up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to Him by Jesus Christ (1 Peter ii. 4, 5).

God is doing this at present. He is not merely saving souls: He is building up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood. This house concerns His glory and the glory of Him who has glorified God. The sight that David got of the pattern of the earthly house (1 Chron. xxviii.) made his soul long, yea even faint, for Jehovah's

courts (Psalm lxxxiv.). Surely our hearts may well burn as we learn from God's own word His thoughts about His spiritual house, suited, as it must be, to the glory of Him who is building it, and as Son is over it.

Our present object is to go over some of the salient points in Exodus xxix., forming, as it does, part of the interesting passage concerning the typical consecration of the priests; and in doing this there will be frequent occasion to refer to the anti-types in the first epistle of Peter and the epistle to the Hebrews.

Let us observe at the outset, that when "Aaron and his sons" are mentioned in this passage they are a type of Christians in their priestly character—a character ever connected

with and dependent on Him with whom they are associated. It is not Aaron with his sons, but his sons with him: everything is connected with the Head.

All Christians belong to the priesthood. It is not now a priestly house holding a place between God and His people (although man has sought to make it so), but living stones, each and all of whom are being built up "an holy priesthood." As those who have been washed from our sins in the blood of Christ, we can join in the song to Him who has done it, and has made us kings and priests to God and His Father (Rev. i. 5, 6).

The priesthood is one among many characters appertaining to Christians, and is itself of a double character.

As a "holy priesthood" they minister to God, offering up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to Him by Jesus Christ (1 Peter ii. 5; Heb. xiii. 15). As a "royal priesthood" they show forth to others the praises of Him who has called them out of darkness into His marvellous light (1 Peter ii. 9). They always bear the character of priests, though they may not always be in function as priests. How often we might be enjoying our priestly character when through failure we are not! The more we consider what the priestly character means, the more sensible must we be of this failure. It involves, as will be seen later on, communion in the thoughts, motives, affections, and interests of Christ as High Priest, as well as of

God, in His person and work. What a communion is this! May the present contemplation of it help towards its realization.

When in the passage before us Aaron is mentioned alone, he is a type of Christ Himself, as in the preceding chapter, and in verses 5 and 6 of this chapter. It is well to note at the outset how the Spirit of God thus brings Him before us, not only as the centre and head of the priestly company, but alone in a pre-eminence marked out by actual contrast with what belongs to the company. Aaron's garments (*v.* 5) form a feature of this pre-eminence. They were described in the previous chapter as "holy garments . . . for glory and for beauty." He alone had "the robe of

the ephod, and the ephod and the breastplate"; he alone was girded with "the curious girdle of the ephod"; his head alone bore "the mitre" and the "holy crown [diadem] upon the mitre." The anointing oil was *poured* upon him alone before the sacrifice *without blood*; it was *sprinkled* upon the priests after the sacrifice *with blood*. How precious to mark such pre-eminences, and to note how they have been verified in Him whom we see already "crowned with glory and honour" (Heb. ii. 9); upon whom, moreover, before the blood of the cross had been shed, the Holy Ghost descended, and of whom it could then be said, "Him hath God the Father sealed" (John vi. 27).

But side by side with these pre-

eminences is the association already referred to of Aaron's sons with himself. If that which marks out Aaron alone is precious, so also is that which so blessedly associates them with him; for with us as priests everything depends upon the One with whom in grace we have been so wonderfully associated.

Turning now to the detailed description of what concerns the priestly company, we may note how, in the consecration, everything was done for the priests. They did nothing for themselves—not even clothe themselves. The word "*thou*" addressed to Moses, as in the opening verse, "This is the thing that *thou* shalt do," runs through the whole passage: it is "*thou,*" "*thou,*" "*thou,*" said

verse after verse to the one acting on God's behalf, till all is done. As it was God who called the priests, so He charged Himself with all that had to be done in the consecration. To be a priest is no question of attainment, but of God's sovereign will and work.

It is blessed to be able, as here, to contemplate that in which God Himself does all. The word "*thou*," of Exodus xxix., beginning with verse 1, and repeated no less than thirty-seven times, has thus a deep interest for us.

Side by side with the offerings prepared for sacrifice, we find Aaron and his sons brought to the door of the tabernacle of the congregation (literally 'tent of meeting') where

Moses was to “*wash them with water.*”

Purity is essential to God’s priesthood—a moral purity. There is no reference here to cleansing from the guilt of sins, for that is ever by blood; here it is moral purity, and the cleansing is by *water*.

But how can water cleanse? Job raised the question: “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?” (Job xiv. 4.) He had already said that even snow water could not cleanse him. (Job ix. 30.) Where shall we find an answer to Job’s question, and an explanation of God’s type of *washing with water*? A mighty question it was, and a mighty answer was given to it on the cross, where not only the blood, but the

water flowed from Christ's side *in death*. God's figure of water-cleansing is explained on the cross: it is *a cleansing by death*; the very idea of water, as observed elsewhere, "being bound up with that of death—the absolute destruction of the thing that is impure—yet of death so accomplished in Him who stood for us as to be to us not condemnation,* but cleansing." Of the two things that flowed from the side of Christ in death—blood and water—Christians of the present day know but little about the water; yet therein is

* Water, as a figure, means death and judgment (as in the flood, and Red Sea). But to us death and judgment, as accomplished in Christ, have become the way of salvation and cleansing: so with the figure.

involved the whole truth of the ruined state of man (not only *guilty*, but *lost*), and God's resource in view of that ruin. No child of Adam "born like a wild ass's colt" (Job xi. 12), "shapen in iniquity," "conceived in sin" (Psalm li. 5), "flesh" essentially as being "born of flesh" (John iii. 6), could be brought as such into God's priesthood. He must be *washed with water* at the very start—type surely of that absolute change of condition involved in our being born of God, based upon the setting aside in death on the cross, not here of the guilt of sins, but of the man to whom the guilt belongs—his nature, his condition, yea, himself, as a child of Adam. The first man must go if his place is to be taken by what is of

God—not of the flesh, but of God. Of this the washing with *water* is a figure.

This portion of the type is thus most important. At the very threshold of God's meeting-place the persons of the priests were washed with water—a washing never repeated, though the hands and feet of the persons so washed had constantly to be cleansed at the laver (Exodus xxx. 19).

This reminds us of what the Lord said to Peter in John xiii. (New Translation.) “He that is washed all over” (the first washing of the person once for all) “needs not to wash save his feet” (the subsequent maintenance by repeated washing of corresponding purity in the walk).

It is as those whose bodies have been thus “washed with pure water” that we are exhorted to draw near in our priestly* character in Hebrews x. 22.

In the next verse (8) we have the clothing—coats, girdles, and bonnets—described in the previous chapter as “for glory and for beauty.” God will have His priests clothed suitably to the marvellous light of His presence.

* This cleansing by water is a foundation truth, not only as to our priestly character but as to our salvation. We have been saved, as stated in Titus iii. 5, “by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost”; saved, as Peter says (1 Peter iii. 20), “through water,” like the eight souls of Noah’s day. The washing of our feet as figured in John. xiii. is necessary for our having part with Christ in His present heavenly place, for without it, as Christ said to Peter, “thou hast no part with me.”

Christ has already been thus clothed (crowned with glory and honour, as in Hebrews ii. 9), and it is for us now to be morally a testimony to it; we shall surely be soon in the actuality of it as clothed upon with our house which is from heaven (2 Cor. v. 2). What a prospect this is—a clothing fashioned like unto His own body of glory!

It is beautiful to see how the finish in glory and beauty constitutes the very first thing mentioned as to Aaron's sons (xxviii. 40). God sees us from the very start as being in Christ, connected with Him in His glory and beauty. As will be seen later on, the garments share in the sprinkling with the blood and the anointing oil. The glory and beauty

bear the character and value of the precious blood of Christ, made good as before God, and morally in the power of the Holy Ghost. The garments are perhaps connected with the royal character of the priesthood, who are to show forth the praises of Him who has called them out of darkness into His marvellous light. Faith apprehends this now, and seeks by the Holy Ghost to answer morally to it.

Then come the sacrifices, the needed foundation of all that accompanies; and in each one of them we find expressed, by the laying on of their hands, the identification of Aaron and his sons with the offering. The identification is twofold in character; for it represents not only Christ's

identification with our place of sin, but our identification with Him in the sweet savour of His offering.

First, there was the bullock of the sin-offering (verses 10-14), in which sin was dealt with by God according to His own nature; then the ram of the burnt-offering (*vv.* 15-18), from which ascended to God the sweet savour* of the work in which He was glorified; and lastly there was the ram of consecration (*vv.* 19-28), in which the priests had their part in the offering up of the sacrifices, as

* The Hebrew word for burning, in the sweet savour offerings, is the same as that for the burning of incense, and quite distinct from the corresponding word for burning in the case of the sin-offering.

well as in the communion represented by the eating of them.

The blood of the ram was in the first place put upon the tip of the right ear, and upon the thumb of the right hand, and upon the great toe of the right foot of Aaron and his sons—type, as has often been pointed out, of their consecration to God in respect of hearing (the ear) action (the hand) and walk (the foot), and this according to the perfection of consecration in Christ's sacrifice as measured by the blood. It helps us to understand the bearing of 1 Peter i. 2, where our election, through sanctification of the Spirit is said to be "unto obedience," the obedience referred to being nothing else than the obedience of Christ—to obey as He obeyed, both

as respects the principle of it (His heart's delight) and the measure of it, the movement of every inward spring being consecrated to God. Law obedience is on the principle of seeking favour thereby. The obedience of Christ was that of One who was in the fullest favour. To that kind of obedience we are set apart.

But the verse (1 Peter i. 2), just referred to does not stop at the obedience of Christ; it goes on to the "sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ" as that to which we are set apart. And so does the type in Exodus xxix. To understand the import of this, let us mark the difference as well as the essential link between the disposal of the blood of the bullock and of that of the two rams.

The former was poured beside "the bottom of the altar" (*v.* 12), telling surely of the foundation upon which all rested. The latter was sprinkled round about "upon the altar" (*vv.* 16 and 20), whence ascended the sweet savour, telling of God's acceptance of that work, wherein He was not only vindicated but glorified. It is important to note this, because, in the sprinkling of Aaron and his sons in verse 21 with blood and oil, the blood was of that which had been put "upon the altar," typifying, not merely a cleansing from guilt, but acceptance in all the positive preciousness of the blood of Christ. It is the only instance of anything placed upon the altar being removed; and it was removed to be sprinkled along with

the oil on Aaron and his sons—a precious type of the identification of the priestly family with the sweet savour to God of Christ Himself in death. No type perhaps brings more vividly before us the measure and character of the acceptance in which God sets His priests. The “sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ” is thus a sprinkling not only *from* guilt, but *to* the positive favour of God, according to the measure of His acceptance of Christ.

We have thus *three characters* of the blood before us, viz., that of the sin-offering poured beside “the bottom of the altar” (the foundation of everything): that of the consecration-offering placed upon the ears, thumbs, and great toes of the priests (Christ’s

consecration become our standard) : and that of the burnt-offering, and consecration-offering sprinkled round about "upon the altar," wherewith the priests were sprinkled (the positive value of that which cleanses become the measure of our acceptance). How blessed to have the blood of Christ presented in each one of these characters, yet how common the tendency to view it in only one of them, viz., that of cleansing!

In the sprinkling it was not only blood but oil—type surely of the Holy Ghost shed forth after the sacrifice. As already remarked Aaron himself had been anointed before the sacrifice; but not without blood or until the blood had been shed could Aaron and his sons be anointed. Christ in

glory received the Holy Ghost for this, shedding it forth (Acts ii. 33) in fulfilment of the type now before us.

The fact that the garments share in the sprinkling has already been referred to.

From verse 22 we have the filling of the hands of Aaron and his sons with the portions of the ram of consecration, and with the meat offering to be waived before the Lord, and burnt upon the altar for a sweet savour. This filling of the priests' hands is what gives the name of consecration, the actual meaning of the Hebrew phrase translated *to consecrate* being *to fill the hands*. It was not only the preparation of a priesthood, but an introduction to priestly service.

God receives from the hands of His priests what He Himself has provided — what, speaking as it does of Christ in His life and death, is to Him a never-failing sweet savour. It was that they might minister to God in these things that the priesthood was formed with Aaron as its head and leader: it suited the glory of God to have such a company.

This offering up of the sacrifice at the consecration was moreover a thing to be performed thenceforward in connection with the peace-offerings of the people of God. It thus linked the priestly character in an important way with the public presentation of Christ to God in the worship of His saints according to His own thoughts and delights.

How great is our failure in this! How slow we are to rise above our own blessings, forgetting that our calling as priests involves a fellowship by the Holy Ghost with Christ Himself in the objects and fruits of His work! Sacrifices thus offered are acceptable to God by Jesus Christ (See 1 Peter ii., and Hebrews xiii. 15, 16).

What a portion this is! No wonder that God should seek to have a priestly company thus to minister to Himself and to share with Christ His priestly joys.

From verse 26 reference is made to the portions of the ram of consecration to be *eaten*; viz., the breast by Moses (*v.* 26) and the flesh with the meat offering by Aaron and his sons (*v.* 32).

Eating here means feeding in communion. The opportunity is taken by God (*vv.* 27 and 28) to assign * to Aaron and his sons by a statute for ever two portions from the people's heave offerings (the breast and right shoulder) which in the consecration offering were assigned, the one to Moses, and the other to the altar. What were the portions of Christ as Mediator (represented by Moses) and of God Himself (represented by the altar) were thus, together with the meat offering, assigned to the priests, so as to constitute them sharers in communion of the heart joys of Christ in connection with that which formed the food of the people of God. This

* Compare Lev. vii. 31-35, and x. 14 and 15.

is most important. If the people's eating of their peace-offerings represents the saints feeding in communion on the work of Christ, the priestly eating represents an entering in that communion into the joy of Christ Himself in His own accomplished work, and the joy of God in Him who has accomplished it. It is a character of communion into which, alas! we are slow to enter. May it be ours to prize it more.

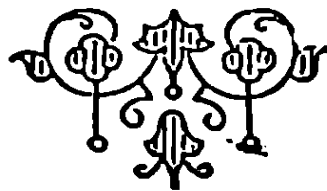
There are many other interesting matters closely connected with what we have been dwelling on, such as Aaron's service in respect to the incense and the lamps (Exodus xxx.), the rending of the veil, and our association with Christ within (Heb. ix. and x.), and the eating of the sin-

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offering, in which our portion goes beyond the type (see Lev. vi. 30 and Heb. xiii. 10); but these and other things of like interest are beyond our present scope.

A. M. M.

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"CHRISTIAN FRIEND" OFFICE,
15 AND 16, PATERNOSTER SQUARE, LONDON, E.C.