

נתיבות עולם

עמדו על דרכים וראו ושאלו לנתיבות שלם. ירמיהו טז

"THE OLD PATHS."—JER. VI. 16.

NUMBER 40.]

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 14, 1836.

[PRICE ONE-PENNY.]

THE great test of a man's faith in, and love to, his religion, is his practice. If a man live in open and perpetual transgression of its commands, no profession can satisfy us that he is in earnest, or that he really believes what his creed confesses. Now let the advocates of the oral law examine themselves by this test. They profess to believe in, and to love the law of Moses; and their great boast is, that Moses is their master, and that they are his disciples, but do they prove the reality of their faith by their obedience? They sometimes tax Christians with inconsistency in professing to believe in Moses, and yet in neglecting the observance of certain ceremonial observances; but are they themselves more careful and less guilty in this matter? We do not mean to allude to the weightier matters of the law, love to God and man; that is a question for the conscience, not a subject for controversy, but we refer to some mere external matters, easy of observance, and open to the cognizance of every man. Moses and the prophets have commanded that the priests, the Levites, הכהנים הלוים, should be the teachers of the law, and that from them the people should learn. Moses does not say one word about rabbies or wise men, דוכמים, but restricts the office of teaching to the priests, the Levites: now, do the modern Jews obey Moses in this respect? Who are their teachers of religion, and from whom do they learn? Are the priests and the Levites, the teachers of Israel, as Moses commanded, or are they taught by their rabbies and Chachamim, of whom Moses does not say one syllable?

We assert, that Moses has commanded that the priests, the Levites, should be the religious teachers in Israel, and in proof we refer to the words of Moses himself. In the tenth chapter of ויקרא, Leviticus, he thus writes:—
 וידבר יהוה אל אהרן לאמר: מן ושכר לא תשת
 אהה ובגדך אהך בגמאם אל אהל טועה ולא תחזרו
 דחק עולם לרדודיכם: ולהברל בין הקורש ובין הדוהו
 ובין השמא ובין הסדור: ולהזרות את בני ישראל את
 כל הדחקים אשר רב יהוה אלהים ביד משה:

"And the Lord spake unto Aaron, saying, Do not drink wine nor strong drink, thou nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations: And that ye may put difference between holy and unholy, and between unclean

and clean; and that ye may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the Lord hath spoken unto them by the hand of Moses." Here the nature of the priest's office is clearly defined. It is, in the first place, to go into the tabernacle of the congregation, and there to serve before the Lord: and secondly, to instruct the children of Israel in the difference between holy and profane, clean and unclean, and especially to teach the children of Israel "ALL THE STATUTES," which the Lord had given to Moses. The commission is not only very comprehensive, but very exclusive. If the priests were to teach "all the statutes," there is no room left for rabbies, or Chachamim, or any other description of teacher. The priests are the only divinely-accredited religious teachers in Israel.

If this passage stood alone, it would be quite sufficient to establish the doctrine; but it does not. Moses was particularly anxious to impress upon the Israelites the nature of the priestly office, and therefore repeats the instruction again and again. Thus in the law respecting a dead body found lying in a field, after commanding that the elders and judges should come forth, he adds—

ונגשו הכהנים בני לוי כי במ בוד יהוה אלהיך
 לשחרו ולבך בשם יהוה ועל פייה יהיה כל ריב וכל
 נגע:

"And the priests the sons of Levi shall come near: for them the Lord thy God hath chosen to minister unto him, and to bless in the name of the Lord; and by their word shall every controversy and every stroke be tried." (Deut. xxi. 5.) One should have thought that the elders and judges were enough in such a case. But not so. God had determined that the priests were to teach Israel "all his statutes," and therefore commands that they should be present in this case, that they should give the decision.

Again, when Moses was about to part from Israel, and to leave them his dying benediction, he was directed by the spirit of prophecy to impress upon them the same great truth, and in the most solemn manner.

ולוי אמר הכהן ואורח לאיש חסידך אשר נסיוו
 במסח חריבדו על מי מריבה: הואמר לאביו ולאמו
 לא ראינו את אדונו לא הכיר את בני לא יבי יע
 שמרו אמרדך ובריתך יצדו: יורו משפטך ליעקב
 חודתך לישראל וגו':

"And of Levi he said, Let thy Thummim and thy Urim be with thy Holy One, whom

thou didst prove at Massah, and with whom thou didst strive at the waters of Meribah: who said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own children: for they have observed thy word, and kept thy covenant. *They shall teach Jacob thy judgments, and Israel thy law.*" (Deut. xxxiii. 8-10.) And as this doctrine forms a part of Moses' last words, so also it is found in the last prophetic message which God vouchsafed to Israel. Malachi, the last of the prophets, reminds Israel—

כי שפרו כן יסמרו ועוד הורדת יבקשו סמיו כי
לאכן ידעו בצאתו הוא :

"That the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of Hosts" (Mal. ii. 7): so that if there be any one thing more plain than another in the Old Testament it is this, that the sons of Levi are the divinely-appointed religious teachers of Israel, and that it is the duty of all Israelites to seek instruction from them.

It cannot be said that the priests are not now well known, and that on this account these commands have lost their force; for those who believe in the oral law, profess to know the family of Levi, and in the synagogue, at the reading of the law, the priest and the Levite are called up in a certain order.

בכל קריאה וקריאה כאלו כן קורא ראשון ואחריו
לוי ואחריו ישראל ונאמר ששנים הוא ודעים שששלו

כך עם ראשון קודם לקרוא לפני הזמן גדול ישראל

"At every time of reading, the priest reads first, and after him the Levite, and after him the Israelite. And the simple custom of the present time is, that a priest, even though he be an unlearned man (*amhaarets*), takes precedence in reading before the most learned, who is only an Israelite." (Hilchoth T'phillah, c. xii. 18.) And as the priests are thus supposed to be known, so the oral law expressly maintains that they still retain their priestly office, and are bound to discharge the duties of it, so far as is possible, in the captivity: and therefore requires them to bless the people as Moses commanded. Indeed the firm conviction of the Talmudists on this subject is strikingly exhibited in their assertion, that a priest, although unlearned, or even notoriously wicked, is still not exempted from his obligation to perform this duty.

כך שלא היה לו דבר מכל אלה המונעין שישמית
באים אצלם שאינו הזמן ואינו מדקדק בצורת או
שדיו חסרו סרננים אחריו או שלא היה משאו וסמנו
בצדק היה זה נמשא את כפי ואין מונעין אחר - לוי
שור מצוי עשה על כל כן וכן שרצוי לשיאו כמים
ואין אושר לאדם רשע ודקק רשע וחכמנו מן המצוות:
ואל תחמדו ותאמרו ומה תועיל ברכת הדינים זה -
שאין קבלת הברכה הלא בבחי' אלה ברוך' לה שמו'
ושמו את שמו על בני ישראל ואני אברכים : והדינים

עושים מצות' שנמשא בה וז"ל בה נרמזו מברך את
ישראל כדכחו :

"A priest who has none of these disqualifications for the lifting up of hands, even though he be not learned, nor accurate in the commandments; and although his companions make a mock of him, or his dealings should not be righteous, still he is to lift up his hands [to bless], and is not to be prevented, for this is an affirmative precept binding upon every priest, who is otherwise qualified; and we must not say to a wicked man, Away, thou wicked man, be thou disqualified from keeping the commandments. Do not ask, saying, What profit can there be in the blessing of this simple fellow? for the receiving of the blessing does not depend upon the priests, but upon the Holy One, blessed be He, for it is said, 'They shall put my name upon the children of Israel, and I will bless them.' The priests perform the duty commanded them, and God, in his mercy, blesses Israel according to his pleasure." (Ibid. c. xv. 6.) The existence, then, of the priests, and their continued obligation to perform such official duties as are now possible, are fully acknowledged, yea, it is even asserted that a wicked priest is by no means to be prevented from doing his duty: it has also been plainly proved, from the words of Moses and the prophets, that it is the duty of the priests to teach, and of the Israelites to be taught by them; and no man can deny that the performance of this duty is possible. The destruction of the temple has prevented the priest from sacrificing, but it has made no difference with regard to the possibility of teaching: it is, therefore, a fair question to propose to those who boast in their obedience to the law of Moses, *How is this Mosaic command respecting the teaching of the law fulfilled?* Are the priests the Levites the religious teachers in all Jewish congregations? or have they been excluded from the office assigned to them by Moses? and is it occupied by others to whom Moses did not give it? Every Jew must answer that this command of Moses is utterly disregarded—that the office of the priesthood, as established by Moses, has now scarcely the shadow of an existence amongst the Jews—that the rabbies, Chachamim, and the Melamm'dim are universally the religious teachers—and that hundreds, if not thousands, of the priests are left in utter obscurity, and not a few in destitution. *Jeremiah complained of the heathen—*

כי הברכים לא נשאו :
"They respected not the persons of the priests" (Lam. iv. 16); but it is equally applicable to the adherents of the oral law. Here and there a son of Levi may be a rabbi, and then he has the honour attached to the rabbinical office; but the Mosaic institution of

the priesthood, as the appointed order of religious teachers to Israel, is utterly disregarded. Moses declares, as we have seen above, that it is the priest's office "to distinguish between holy and unholy, and between clean and unclean;" but if a Jew has got a שאלה, a question or a difficulty, it is to the rabbi that he goes to get the decision. Moses says that the priests are appointed by God "to teach Israel all the statutes which the Lord hath spoken to them;" but now men are made rabbies and Melamm'dim who do not pretend to be of the family of Levi: and there are congregations even where there is no Levite nor priest at all, and where, therefore, this command is utterly despised. But the worst feature in this disobedience is, that it is systematic. It is not one of the casualties of the captivity, but it is the deliberate aim of the oral law to degrade the priesthood, as established by Moses, and to set up above it another office, that of rabbi, of which Moses does not say one word. The oral law, instead of deprecating the possibility of an Israelite congregation existing without a priest a son of Levi, quietly lays down the law for doing without them. When prescribing the order in which persons are to be called up to the reading of the law, it says—

אין שם כהן עולה ישראל ולא יעלה אחריו לוי כלל
 "If there be no priest there, then an Israelite is to go up, but no Levite is to follow him." (Ibid., c. xii. 19.) And again,
 ואם אין להם כהן כלל כשגיע שמייה צבור לשים שלום וכו' :

"But if the congregation has no priest at all, when the reader comes to that part of the prayers he is to say," &c. (Ibid., c. xv. 10.) Now if the oral law were anxious to maintain the institution of Moses it could make no such supposition. On the contrary it would urge upon every congregation the indispensable necessity of having a priest of the family of Levi. The supposition shows that its authors cared but little about the commands of Moses, for where there is no priest it is plainly impossible for the people to obey that often-repeated precept to learn the law from the sons of Levi. And yet the authors of the oral law, who care so little for this commandment of Moses about the priests, command the appointment of Melamm'dim, or school-masters, under pain of utter destruction.

מושיבין מלמדי תורה בכל מדינה ומדינה ובכל מלך ושלך ובכל עד ועד וכל עד שאין בה תנוקה של ביה רבן מורימין אז אנשי הדור עד שמושיבין מלמדי תנוקה ואם עד לא הושיבו מורימין את הדור :

"Teachers of children are to be established in every province and district and city. And every city in which there are not school-children the men of that city are to be visited with the Cherem, and if they still neglect, the city itself is to be devoted." (Hilch. Talm.

Torah, c. ii.) When we see them enforce this commandment of their own with such zeal and severity, and yet appear so careless and negligent about the command of Moses, we justly infer that this neglect was intentional, and that the object was to exalt themselves, and to depress that office which God himself had ordained. And this inference is abundantly confirmed by הלכות נבדו רבו, the numerous and minute laws respecting the honour due to a rabbi, whilst the respect due to the family of Levi is almost entirely disregarded, and his office evidently depreciated below that of the former. As, for instance, in establishing the order in which captives are to be redeemed, the oral law says the priest is to be redeemed before the Levite, and the Levite before the Israelite, but then adds—
 במה דברים אמורים בשלום שיהיו שוין בחובתו
 אבל אם היה כהן גורל עם דורשן וממור תלמיד הוסיף
 ת"ח קודם :

"In what case does this hold good? In case that they were both equal in wisdom. But if the high priest be an unlearned man, and an illegitimate child be the disciple of a wise man (chacham), the latter is to have the precedence." (Hilchoth Matt'noth Anium, c. viii. 17.) Here the office of the priesthood and even of the high priesthood itself is put below that of the rabbi or chacham, and the intention of the rabbinites to exalt themselves, and their utter disregard for the law of Moses and his commandments, is especially apparent. The high priest was the chief person in the whole Mosaic dispensation. Without him the blood of the offering could not be carried into the holy of holies on the day of atonement, and yet the oral law says, that if he and an illegitimate child, that is, the least honoured person in Israel, be both in captivity, and the latter be the disciple of a rabbi, he is to be redeemed first. It is needless to add any further proof of the fact that the command of Moses, respecting the family of Levi, is systematically and intentionally transgressed by the authors and adherents of the oral law. The priests, the Levites, have been thrust out of that office which God gave them, and others have been made the religious teachers of Israel who have no right at all to this appointment. How then can the modern Jews pretend to be zealous for the law of Moses? They are living in plain and systematic violation of one of his plainest commands. It will not do to say that the office of rabbi is also of divine appointment. An assertion which nullifies a Mosaic institution must have the most unexceptionable evidence. Its proof must be at least as clear as the original appointment. To persuade any real lover of the Mosaic law that the rabbies have a right to thrust out the family of Levi from their office, and to take it upon themselves,

the express declaration of God is absolutely necessary. And if the rabbies could prove, which they cannot, that they are the lawful teachers of Israel, it would necessarily follow that the Mosaic law has been changed, and then one of the chief dogmas of modern Judaism, the immutability of the Mosaic law, is entirely overthrown. When Moses gave the law the priests were the religious teachers of Israel. Since the dominion of the oral law, not the priests, but the rabbies have been the teachers. Here then is an important, yea, an organic change in the Mosaic constitution. This change then is either unlawful or lawful. If it be unlawful, then the rabbies have no right to be the teachers of Israel. If it be lawful, then to change and alter the Mosaic law is lawful, and then modern Judaism, which teaches that there can be no change, is false. This is the only alternative which modern Jews can adopt,—they must either maintain the immutability of the law at the expense of the rabbinic office, or they must assert the legitimacy of the rabbinic office at the expense of the law. In either case the oral law is convicted of teaching falsehood; and in neither case can the modern Jews make a boast of loyalty to the law of Moses. They charge Christians with disregarding and transgressing the Mosaic law, but let them point out, even in the practice of Gentile Christians, any one apparent transgression more heinous than the expulsion of the family of Levi from the office to which Moses appointed them. The fact is notorious. This family is everywhere neglected and in obscurity, struggling with the cares and business of the world, instead of occupying the station given to them by Moses. Let all the lovers of modern Judaism consider this fact, and then ask themselves how they can pretend to be keeping the law of Moses? Let them remember that they have themselves made a change in the law by appointing rabbies instead of the priests, and that, if they defend this change, they teach the very same doctrine which they blame in Gentile Christians, namely, the mutability and abrogation of the Mosaic law. Of course we do not mean to dictate to Israel in this matter. If they are conscientiously persuaded that the institutions of Moses have been abrogated, they can then consistently maintain the appointment of rabbies, but let

them give up their common, though mistaken, argument against Christianity. But if they believe what they so commonly profess, that the law of Moses is not, and cannot be abrogated, then let them act consistently, renounce the oral law, and restore the family of Levi to the office from which modern Judaism has excluded them for so many centuries. To follow the oral law, and at the same time to obey the written law of Moses in this matter, is plainly impossible. The oral law is for the rabbies and the Chachamim—the words of Moses are for the family of Levi. The Jews may, and of course will, choose as they think best; but, if they determine upon maintaining the rabbinical system, let them not pretend to be followers of Moses. Let them honestly confess that they do not like Moses and his laws, and that they prefer the new and modern religion of the rabbies. The subject is important to all Israel, but especially so to the sons of Levi themselves. God gave them the important charge of instructing the house of Israel in his laws, are they then at liberty to resign their sacred office into the hands of others? Has God dispensed them from obedience to his command? If so, what obligation rests upon them to bless the people? By lifting up their hands and blessing the people, they confess that their office still continues; and, if so, the obligation to perform all its duties continues also. Either the law of Moses is abrogated, or the priests are still the appointed religious teachers of Israel.

The priests have the same alternative as the people, i. e. either to assert the rights and perform the duties of their priestly office, or honestly to acknowledge that they do not believe in Moses, nor care for his religion, but that their religion is that of the rabbies. The responsibility is however much heavier on the family of Levi than on Israelites of another tribe. To the sons of Levi, God committed the honourable office of instructing Israel. They have been set as the watchmen in Israel, and are therefore answerable, not only for their own neglect, but for the error and destruction of the people. It is then high time for them to remember their duty and the zeal of their forefathers in extirpating error, and to show themselves worthy of their high origin, and of their divine appointment, by opposing the errors of the oral law.

London:—Sold at the London Society's Office, 16, Exeter-hall, Strand; by James Duncan, Paternoster-row; and B. Wertheim, 57, Aldersgate-street. This publication may be had by applying at No. 5, No. 7, or No. 13, Palestine-place, Bethnal-green; also at No. 10, New-street, Bishopsgate-street.

Macintosh, Printer, 20, Great New-street, London.