

# נתיבות עולם

עמדו על דרכים וראו ושאלו לנתבות עולם. ירמיהו ו' טז

"THE OLD PATHS."—Jer. vi. 16.

NUMBER 58.]

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 1837.

[PRICE ONE-PENNY.]

WHEREVER there is an internal principle of religion, it will, like all other principles, manifest itself in external acts, and in an external form of rites and ceremonies. It is just as impossible for a living man to continue without giving any signs of life, as for the religious principle to exist without an outward expression. It is the universal law of creation that every vital principle should manifest itself, and therefore, when the Creator himself was pleased to give a religion, he ordained certain rites and ceremonies to give notice of its existence, and to serve as the body in which the soul should reside. Rites and ceremonies, therefore, are not to be despised, even when devised by man, for they are demonstrations of an internal life from which they proceed; but when instituted by God, they are doubly important, because besides being a sign, they have all the authority of a divine command. False religion, however, is not satisfied with this acknowledgement, nor this measure of reverence. It goes still further, and elevates the external sign above the thing signified, by making the external rites the great essentials of religion. Thus, in the time of the Prophet Isaiah, the Israelites thought that the act of sacrifice, and the external observation of the Sabbath and holidays, formed the substance of religion, and therefore God told them, that even these things, though ordained by himself, were not pleasing in his sight, unless they proceeded from the living principle within. "Bring no more vain oblations: incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with: it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting." (Isaiah i. 13.) And again in a subsequent chapter he says, "They seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness and forsook not the ordinances of their God: they ask of me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God." (lviii. 2.) And yet at the same time he shows that this was all mere outside work, and displeasing in his sight. Wherever, therefore, we find a religion, which places external observances above the moral duties, we may be sure it is not of God; and for this reason, amongst others, we believe that the oral law is the invention of men. We had an instance in the subject last considered, the dispensation from oaths. The rabbies disregarded the moral obligation, but

make the mere form of going to a rabbi to get absolution an essential requisite. Another proof is furnished by their doctrine concerning *The meritoriousness of Circumcision*, which is set forth as follows:—

מצות עשה לכל אדם מישראל שימול את בנו וגדולה היא משאר מצות עשה שיש בה צד כרת וגם נכרתו עליה שלש עשר בריחות בפרשת מילה ולא נקרא אברהם שלם עד שימול ובנוכחיה נכרה לו ברית על נתינת הארץ והיא מצלת מדינה של גיהנם כמו שאמרו חכמים שאברהם אבינו יושב בפתחה של גיהנם ואינו מניח ליכנס בו לכל מי שימול ומאוסת היא השעלה שנתגנו בה הגוים שנה' כי כל הגוים ערלים וכל המצר בריחו של אברהם או שמושב עלתו א'עם שיש בידו תורה ומעשים טובים אין לו חלק לעולם הבא

"It is an affirmative precept, binding on every man of Israel, to circumcise his son; and this is greater than any of the other affirmative precepts, for there is a threat of excision attached to it; and further, on account of it, thirteen covenants were made, as is recorded in the chapter of circumcision. Abraham was not called perfect until he was circumcised, and by the merit of circumcision, a covenant was made with him respecting the giving of the land. It also delivers from the judgment of hell, for the wise men have said, that Abraham our father sits at the door of hell, and does not suffer any one that is circumcised to be cast into it. Uncircumcision is despised, for the Gentiles are reproached with it, as it is said, 'All the nations are uncircumcised.' (Jer. ix. 25); and every one who breaks the covenant of Abraham our father, either by not being circumcised or by becoming uncircumcised, has no part in the world to come, even though he possess a knowledge of the law and good works." (Joreh Deah., 260.) Here we have the very same misconception, which God reproved by the mouth of Isaiah; an external act is preferred to holiness of life, and a mere preparation of the body to purity of heart. It is gravely and solemnly asserted that the precept concerning circumcision is greater than all the other affirmative precepts, that is, it is exalted above our duty to God and our duty to our neighbour. The command

ואהבת לרעך כמוך

"Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," is an affirmative precept, and is therefore one

of those to which circumcision is preferred. The command

כבד את אבך ואת אמך

"Honour thy father and thy mother," is an affirmative precept, and has a promise of long life in the land attached to it. It concerns our duty to those, to whom, under God, we owe our existence, and yet the oral law teaches that obedience to it is not so important as to the precept concerning circumcision. We do not mean to deny the scriptural importance of circumcision, nor of any other of the divine institutions, but we do mean to appeal to every Israelite of understanding to judge, which of these commandments is of most importance. Can an Israelite, merely because he is circumcised, though he has no love to his fellow-men, and no reverence for his parents, be acceptable in the sight of God, or can he be more acceptable than a Gentile who obeys these commands? But the sweeping declaration of the oral law, not only teaches men that circumcision is more valuable than love to man, but exalts it even above love to God. The commandment, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, &c.," is an affirmative precept, and is consequently included amongst those which are stated to be inferior to circumcision. This conclusion seems so monstrous, that one is almost afraid of having misunderstood the sense; but Rashi, who must be acknowledged as an authority, goes still farther, and endeavours to prove that circumcision is equal in importance to all the other commandments put together.

שדאי שקלה כנגד כל המצות שבטורה

"It is equivalent to all the commandments which are in the law." (Nedarim, fol. 31, col. ii.) So that there can be no doubt that this is the doctrine of the oral law. Now just let the reader consider the nature of circumcision. It is, in the first place, an external act,—it is, in the second place, an act performed without the will of the infant, and at a time when he can exercise no act of moral responsibility, and yet the mere act is placed above the highest perfection of a created being, love to God and his fellow-creatures. But the oral law does not merely assert this doctrine, but gives its proofs, and the first is, that to the precept of circumcision the threat of excision is annexed. Of course, we admit the fact, for it is plainly said, "The uncircumcised man-child, whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant." (Gen. xvii. 14); but we deny the consequence. There is nothing peculiar to circumcision in the annexed threat of excision. God has pronounced the same threat against every presumptuous sin, as it is written, "But the

soul that doeth ought presumptuously, whether he be born in the land or a stranger, the same reproacheth the Lord; and that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Because he hath despised the Word of the Lord, and hath broken his commandment, that soul shall be utterly cut off; his iniquity shall be upon him." (Numb. xv. 30, 31.) Here we see that presumptuous transgression of any one of God's commandments will be visited with the same punishment denounced against the omission of circumcision, so that the annexed threat is far from proving that this precept is superior to all the other affirmative commandments. On the contrary, it shows that God does not judge by the external act, but by the state of the heart, and that presumptuous disobedience of any commandment, as demonstrating an utter want of love to him, will be visited with the severity of his wrath. It is further alleged, "That Abraham was not called perfect until he was circumcised,"—and this is proved in the Talmud, by the words, "Walk before me, and be thou perfect." But these words do not prove that, even after his circumcision, Abraham was called perfect; they are a command to be perfect, but not a declaration that he was so; and it cannot be urged that by being circumcised he obeyed this command, and thus became perfect, for this would open an easy way of attaining perfection to the most abandoned of mankind. Besides, it is easy to prove that this word "perfect" is also given to the uncircumcised. Long before circumcision was given, it was applied to Noah. "Noah was a just man, and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God" (Gen. vi. 9), where that which is only commanded to Abraham, is asserted to have been found in Noah. God commanded to Abraham to walk with him, and to be perfect; but he declares of the uncircumcised Noah, that he was perfect, and did walk with him. In this respect, therefore, even if the Rabbinic interpretation of the words were correct, circumcision has no superiority over uncircumcision. The next proof, namely, "That by the merit of circumcision a covenant was made with Abraham, respecting the giving of the land," is equally unconvincing. Long before the covenant of circumcision God had promised the land to Abraham, and that repeatedly; and not only had promised it, but had actually made a covenant with him respecting the gift, as we read, "In the same day, the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates." (Gen. xv. 18.) This covenant was made before the birth of Ishmael; and when Ishmael was born, Abraham was eighty-six years of age; conse-

quently, it was made at least fourteen years before circumcision, so that the assertion that the covenant respecting the land was made on account of the merit of circumcision is altogether false. God made the covenant, not because Abraham deserved it, but according to his own grace and mercy, when Abraham had no bodily mark to distinguish him from the surrounding nations. Here again, then, the oral law asserts what is false. But the rabbies were not contented with Scripture proof; they felt that the letter of Scripture was against them, and therefore had recourse to their own invention, and have devised the fable that "Circumcision delivers from the judgment of hell, for that Abraham sits at the door of hell, and does not suffer any one that is circumcised to be cast into it." That this is a regular and wilful falsehood, no one that has reason, and takes the Scripture to guide it, can possibly doubt. It implies that many who are circumcised deserve the punishment of hell, and are led to the very door, but that Abraham interferes, and delivers them from their just punishment. If they did not deserve it, and were not liable to it, there could be necessity for Abraham's sitting in so unpleasant a situation. The guilt of these persons is, therefore, fully admitted, and yet the wise men say, that out of regard to the mere external token of the covenant, God gives up his attribute of justice, and acquits those who deserve punishment. But it implies further, that God does not deal thus to the Gentiles—that to them he exercises all justice, and shows no mercy. Abraham looks on with unconcern when a Gentile is brought to the place of the damned, feels no compassion and exercises none, and the Divine Being himself is made a party in this injustice, and want of compassion. Religion is misrepresented as a mere system of favouritism, and the Judge of all the earth as a doer of wrong. That this is the plain drift of the story is plain from what follows: "Circumcision is despised, for the Gentiles are reproached with it, as it is said, 'All the nations are uncircumcised.'" Here the rabbies plainly tell us, that God despises the works of his own hands, that he disdain the overwhelming majority of his rational creatures, and that not because of their wickedness, or their cruelty, or their idolatry, or their profanity, but because they have not got a commandment which He never gave them. The rabbies themselves will admit that God never gave the Gentiles the commandment of circumcision, how then is it possible that he should blame them, or despise them, or treat them with unmitigated severity, because they have not got what he never gave them? If it had been offered to them, and they had refused, there would have been some ground for such a representation,

but at present there is none. It is not true that God reproaches the Gentiles in the words, "All the nations are uncircumcised;" on the contrary, he is reproaching Israel. The context is, "Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will punish all them which are circumcised with the uncircumcised; Egypt, and Judah, and Edom, and the children of Ammon and Moab, and all that are in the utmost corners, that dwell in the wilderness; for all the nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in the heart." (Jer. ix. 25, 26.) This is very different doctrine from that of the rabbies. God declares that the mere outward sign of circumcision shall not save from punishment; that he makes no difference whatever between the uncircumcised and the circumcised, but that he looks upon the heart, and deals out to all evenhanded justice. He says that he will punish the idolatrous nations, whom he has enumerated, but declares that he will punish the sinners of Israel along with them, and then to obviate the very objection which the oral law urges, and to take away all false confidence in circumcision, he adds, "The nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in heart;" as if he would have said, Do not deceive yourselves, thinking that your circumcision will save you: there is a worse uncircumcision than that of the flesh, the uncircumcision of the heart. This is doctrine worthy of the Divine Being, consistent with his attributes of justice and holiness, and consolatory and encouraging to all his rational creatures; whereas the rabbinic doctrine is dishonouring to God, and contemptuous to all the Gentile nations. If it were believed, no Gentile would have any motive to serve or honour the true God, from whom he could expect neither justice nor mercy. It is equally pernicious and destructive to the moral and spiritual welfare of the Israelites themselves. Any man who believes that his circumcision will save him from hell, will feel himself at liberty to violate other commands without fear. Why should he be holy, or chaste, or honest, or true? His father Abraham is sitting at the gate of hell waiting for him, and will deliver him from the just reward of his delinquencies. We do not mean to attribute such reasoning to all Israelites—far from it; but it is certain that on the minds of the ignorant and superstitious this doctrine must have this effect. Those who are acquainted with the Word of God, or know how to reason, must believe that it is false, but then it is their duty not only to disbelieve it in their hearts, but to renounce it publicly, and to teach the ignorant and uneducated that it is false. Israelites often feel justly indignant at the want of due appreciation which characterises public opinion with regard to the

nation, but let them reflect on the causes, and they will cease to wonder. Mankind in general does not distinguish between the Jews and Judaism, but erroneously attribute, without any discrimination, the errors of the system to the men; and how can they do otherwise, so long as the oral law is still upheld as a divine code of law? Let Israel renounce the errors publicly, and all the causes of misconception will be removed.

But we would ask our readers to go a little farther, and compare the doctrines of Christianity on this subject with those of the oral law. They will find that where the rabbies have erred, the disciples of Jesus of Nazareth have taught the truth. St. Paul admits the importance and the privileges of circumcision. He asks, "What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision?" And answers, "Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God." (Rom. iii. 1.) He does not undervalue God's mercy to Israel, but at the same time he honours God's justice and holiness, by declaring that "God will render to every man according to his deeds: to them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory, and honour, and immortality, eternal life: but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; but glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile: for there is no respect of persons with God." (Romans ii. 6—11.) This exactly agrees with the words of Jeremiah, and with the character of God, as set forth by Moses and the Prophets, and must commend itself to the mind of every reflecting person. Let then those who reject Christianity account for the fact, that where the rabbies are wrong, the preachers of Christianity are right. If all truth come from God, and unassisted human reason must go wrong, how it is that God should have helped Christians to the truth, and left the Jews in deadly error for so many centuries?

Judaism teaches that the Gentiles are despised, simply because they have not got an outward

sign, which God never intended they should have. Christianity proclaims that God is a just Judge. It says, "Circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law; but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision. Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision?" Judaism teaches that Abraham sits at the gate of hell to deliver even the wicked, if they be only circumcised. Christianity teaches that Abraham has no respect to the outward sign, unless it be accompanied by purity of heart. "There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: and there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores. And it came to pass that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried: and in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed; so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence. Then he said, I pray thee, therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: for I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham said unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went to them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." (Luke xvi. 19—31.) Let the reader compare this with the Rabbinic doctrine, and then explain why it is that where the oral law errs, God has given the truth in the New Testament.

---

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.