

tant influence on his life. The one was the sudden death of his friend and fellow-student Alexis. Some say this young man was assassinated in Erfurt, and others that he was struck dead by lightning at Luther's side. The other was that, as Luther was returning from Magdeburg to Erfurt, when near the latter city, he was overtaken in a fearful thunder-storm, and as some think, his friend Alexis was struck down by his side. He was so much alarmed that he then and there made a solemn vow that if the Lord would spare his life, he would become a monk, and thus dedicate himself to God. I think it most probable that Alexis was struck by lightning.—*Lutheran Observer*.

The Reading of the Law.¹

BY LYMAN ABBOTT.

The scene which has been selected for our study to-day has been so admirably described by Dr. Cunningham Geikie² that I make no apology for transferring his graphic description of this column instead of attempting one of my own:

"God had commanded through Moses that the tribes should, as soon as practicable, assemble at Shechem, in the center of the land, to renew their allegiance to him and to hear once more the proclamation of the conditions on which he gave them the country. Accordingly, all the nation, including the women and children, and even the multitude of other races which had come up with them from Egypt, were led on a stupendous pilgrimage from the banks of the Jordan at Gilgal to the valley between Mounts Ebal and Gerizim, in the midland hills. It was a spot sacred in the history of Israel, for there Abraham and Jacob had in turn pitched their tents, and there the latter had bought the field in which they were to bury the mummy of Joseph, as he had commanded their forefathers hundreds of years before. The well that Jacob had dug was also before their eyes, and the oak beneath which he had buried the idolatrous images and ear-rings of his encampment. The valley itself, perhaps the most beautiful spot in Palestine, was worthy of the great national act they had assembled to perform. Running north and south, with a width of from a quarter to half a mile, it is hemmed in between the twin mountains

Ebal and Gerizim, the summits of which are two miles apart in a line. Bright rivulets, fed, as the natives say, by no fewer than eighty springs, run down the slopes and sparkle over the sunny glen; gardens musical with many birds surround the walls of Wablus, the modern representative of Shechem, which nestles close under the shadow of Gerizim; figs, walnuts, mulberries, oranges, lemons, pomegranates, vines, and plums filling the scene with rich luxuriance, the more striking by its vivid contrast with the barren, stony mountains around. Gerizim, on the south side of the valley, towers 1,000 feet above it in a huge dome of chalk hollowed into many caves at its foot, and surmounted by dark-blue limestone, rising in ledges and shelves to the summit. Ebal, on the north side, rises in a gentler

slope of steel-blue rock, with precipitous cliffs atop, 200 feet higher than Gerizim; its north side, like that of the other hill, rich in springs from the dip of the strata; but its south side, even when richly covered with corn in summer, dependent on rain and irrigation for its fertility. Thousands of flowers of every color springing up amongst the grass, in the valley itself and on the slopes, in the meadows and on the open ground, make the spot still more delightful. Wherever water reaches, either naturally or otherwise, it is paradise; but above that limit the barrenness is well-nigh complete. Yet it is a wondrous valley in the thirsty East.

"Having selected huge stones and made them smooth with a coating of plaster, Joshua caused an abstract of the law to be inscribed on them, and then set them up on Mount Ebal. An altar of unhewn stones was next raised close by them, that their erection might be consecrated by burnt sacrifices and peace-offerings. The tribes which had sprung from the lawful wives of Jacob then took up their place on Mount Ebal, while those descended from the handmaids of Leah and Rachel, with Reuben, stood on the slopes of Mount Gerizim; the priests, with the Ark, occupying the valley between the two hills, surrounded by the elders, officers, and judges of the nation. The whole law as given by Moses was now read aloud to the vast multitude—those on Mount Ebal responding with a loud Amen to the rehearsal of the curses for disobedience, and those on Mount

Gerizim similarly to the recital of the blessings for obedience. Such a scene, transacted about twelve hundred years before the first Punic war, and one thousand years before Socrates, is unique in the history of the world, for when did any other nation thus pledge itself to a high religious life as the recognized condition of its prosperity? Even the curses pronounced are peculiar to Israel; for they are directed not only against idolatry, but against disobedience to parents, inhumanity to the blind, to strangers, widows or orphans, or the removal of the landmarks of a neighbor. Modern legislation is slowly striving toward a standard so generous, pure and lofty."

With this description, I content myself with a very brief suggestion of the practical lessons it conveys to us in our own time and for our own life.

1. God is a law-giver. The theologians of the past century placed perhaps too great an emphasis on this fact; we are therefore in danger of placing too little emphasis upon it. Law is the essential condition of well-being; lawlessness is disintegration and death. Obedience may not be the highest virtue, but it is the first virtue. Obedience to law is the first condition of a righteous childhood;¹ of good citizenship;² of acceptance with God.³ We are to obey his law not because we like it, not because we see it is for our interest to do so; not prompted by hope nor impelled by fear, but because it is his law and we are his children. Liberty is not lawlessness; it is such sincere, simple, genuine, habitual, native obedience to law that law has ceased to be a statute without, to which by force of will we conform, and has become a nature within, from which without conscious effort our life proceeds.

This is the liberty to which we are called by the gospel; the liberty of the Psalmist, to whom God's law was not a regulation imposed from without, but a life developed from within. "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes."

2. The law for us is as simple though a profound and far-reaching one. It is all comprised in one word—"love." Confucius left the laws he prescribed for the government of mankind in a system so

voluminous that it constitutes the life-study of the learned class in China. God put all the fundamental laws for the government of his people on two pieces of stone, such that Moses could carry them down the pathless steeps of Sinai one under each arm; and Christ condensed these "ten words" into one word—"love." Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and soul, and strength; and thy neighbor as thyself: this is the law we are to repeat at our Shechem, and, in the words of the Book of Common Prayer, are to "engrave on our hearts."

3. Israel signalized its entrance on the promised land by a solemn rededication to a life of obedience to the law of God. The religion of obedience is the foundation of national well-being. This was the foundation which Alfred the Great laid, on which England was built. This was the foundation which the Puritan fathers in New England laid, on which America was built. For want of this foundation the French Republic perished before its founders had died. Let it be ours to see that our country does not become removed from its foundation, that our State without a Church does not become a State without the religion of obedience and allegiance to God.

4. A purpose and pledge of obedience to God's law is the true and only safe inauguration of every work and every life: the nation, the family, the individual. If in your time you have never recited God's law of love and pledged yourself to obedience to it, do so now. If you never have done this as an individual, do it to day. Shechem is long since reached by you. Build your altar; read God's law; dedicate yourself and yours to obedience.

5. The altar and the stones with the law upon them went together. Neither prayer without obedience nor obedience without prayer is religion; but prayer and obedience.—*Christian Union*.

I was once in a large company where very severe things were spoken of an absent gentleman, when a person seasonably observed that though the Lord was pleased to effect conversion and edification by a variety of means, he had never known anybody convinced of error by what was said behind his back.—*John Newton*.