

OF THE
L A W S
OF
ECCLESIASTICAL POLITY.¹

THE FIRST BOOK.

CONCERNING LAWS AND THEIR SEVERAL KINDS IN GENERAL.

THE MATTER CONTAINED IN THIS FIRST BOOK.

- I. The cause of writing this general Discourse concerning Laws.
- II. Of that Law which God from before the beginning hath set for himself to do all things by.
- III. The Law which natural agents observe, and their necessary manner of keeping it.
- IV. The Law which the Angels of God obey.
- V. The Law whereby man is in his actions directed to the imitation of God.
- VI. Men's first beginning to understand that Law.
- VII. Of Man's Will, which is the first thing that Laws of action are made to guide.
- VIII. Of the natural finding out of Laws by the light of Reason, to guide the Will unto that which is good.
- IX. Of the benefit of keeping that Law which Reason teacheth.
- X. How Reason doth lead men unto the making of human Laws, whereby politic Societies are governed, and to agreement about Laws whereby the fellowship or communion of independent Societies standeth.
- XI. Wherefore God hath by Scripture further made known such supernatural Laws as do serve for men's direction.
- XII. The cause why so many natural or rational Laws are set down in Holy Scripture.
- XIII. The benefit of having divine Laws written.
- XIV. The sufficiency of Scripture unto the end for which it was instituted.
- XV. Of Laws positive contained in Scripture, the mutability of certain of them, and the general use of Scripture.
- XVI. A Conclusion, shewing how all this belongeth to the cause in question.

¹ [Of this title it may not be improper to remark, that it by no means conveys the same idea with the phrase commonly substituted for it, Hooker's Ecclesiastical Polity. It does not profess to deliver a complete scheme or system, but only to contain a methodized course of observations on those portions of Church government, which seemed at the time most to require discussion.]

I. **H**E that goeth about to persuade a multitude, that they are not so well governed as they ought to be, shall never want attentive and favourable hearers; because they know the manifold defects whereunto every kind of regiment is subject, but the secret lets and difficulties, which in public proceedings are innumerable and inevitable, they have not ordinarily the judgment to consider. And because such as openly reprove supposed disorders of state are taken for principal friends to the common benefit of all, and for men that carry singular freedom of mind; under this fair and plausible colour whatsoever they utter passeth for good and current. That which wanteth in the weight of their speech, is supplied by the aptness of men's minds to accept and believe it. Whereas on the other side, if we maintain things that are established, we have not only to strive with a number of heavy prejudices deeply rooted in the hearts of men, who think that herein we serve the time, and speak in favour of the present state, because thereby we either hold or seek preferment; but also to bear such exceptions as minds so averted beforehand usually take against that which they are loth should be poured into them.

[2.] Albeit therefore much of that we are to speak in this present cause may seem to a number perhaps tedious, perhaps obscure, dark, and intricate; (for many talk of the truth, which never sounded the depth from whence it springeth; and therefore when they are led thereunto they are soon weary, as men drawn from those beaten paths wherewith they have been inured;) yet this may not so far prevail as to cut off that which the matter itself requireth, howsoever the nice humour of some be therewith pleased or no. They unto whom we shall seem tedious are in no wise injured¹ by us, because it is in their own hands to spare that labour which they are not willing to endure. And if any complain of obscurity, they must consider, that in these matters it cometh no otherwise to pass than in sundry the works both of art and also of nature, where that which hath greatest force in the very things we see is notwithstanding itself oftentimes not seen. The stateliness of houses, the goodliness

¹ [Injured, ed. 1594.]

of trees, when we behold them delighteth the eye; but that foundation which beareth up the one, that root which ministereth unto the other nourishment and life, is in the bosom of the earth concealed; and if there be at any time occasion to search into it, such labour is then more necessary than pleasant, both to them which undertake it and for the lookers-on. In like manner, the use and benefit of good laws all that live under them may enjoy with delight and comfort, albeit the grounds and first original causes from whence they have sprung be unknown, as to the greatest part of men they are. But when they who withdraw their obedience pretend that the laws which they should obey are corrupt and vicious; for better examination of their quality, it behoveth the very foundation and root, the highest well-spring and fountain of them to be discovered. Which because we are not oftentimes accustomed to do, when we do it the pains we take are more needful a great deal than acceptable, and the matters which we handle seem by reason of newness (till the mind grow better acquainted with them) dark, intricate, and unfamiliar. For as much help whereof as may be in this case, I have endeavoured throughout the body of this whole discourse, that every former part might give strength unto all that follow, and every later bring some light unto all before. So that if the judgments of men do but hold themselves in suspense as touching these first more general meditations, till in order they have perused the rest that ensue; what may seem dark at the first will afterwards be found more plain, even as the later particular decisions will appear I doubt not more strong, when the other have been read before.

[3.] The Laws of the Church, whereby for so many ages together we have been guided in the exercise of Christian religion and the service of the true God, our rites, customs, and orders of ecclesiastical government, are called in question: we are accused as men that will not have Christ Jesus to rule over them, but have wilfully cast his statutes behind their backs, hating to be reformed and made subject unto the sceptre of his discipline. Behold therefore we offer the laws whereby we live unto the general trial and judgment of the whole world; heartily beseeching Almighty God, whom we desire to serve according to his own will, that both we

BOOK I. and others (all kind of partial affection being clean laid aside)
Ch. ii. 1, 2. may have eyes to see and hearts to embrace the things that
in his sight are most acceptable.

And because the point about which we strive is the quality of our laws, our first entrance hereinto cannot better be made, than with consideration of the nature of law in general, and of that law which giveth life unto all the rest, which are commendable, just, and good; namely the law whereby the Eternal himself doth work. Proceeding from hence to the law, first of Nature, then of Scripture, we shall have the easier access unto those things which come after to be debated, concerning the particular cause and question which we have in hand.

Of that law which God from before the beginning hath set for himself to do all things by.
II. All things that are, have some operation not violent or casual. Neither doth any thing ever begin to exercise the same, without some fore-conceived end for which it worketh. And the end which it worketh for is not obtained, unless the work be also fit to obtain it by. For unto every end every operation will not serve. That which doth assign unto each thing the kind, that which doth moderate the force and power, that which doth appoint the form and measure, of working, the same we term a *Law*. So that no certain end could ever be attained, unless the actions whereby it is attained were regular; that is to say, made suitable, fit and correspondent unto their end, by some canon, rule or law. Which thing doth first take place in the works even of God himself.

[2.] All things therefore do work after a sort, according to law: all other things according to a law, whereof some superior, unto whom they are subject, is author; only the works and operations of God have Him both for their worker, and for the law whereby they are wrought. The being of God is a kind of law to his working: for that perfection which God is, giveth perfection to that he doth. Those natural, necessary, and internal operations of God, the Generation of the Son, the Proceeding of the Spirit, are without the compass of my present intent: which is to touch only such operations as have their beginning and being by a voluntary purpose, wherewith God hath eternally decreed when and how they should be. Which eternal decree is that we term an eternal law.

Dangerous it were for the feeble brain of man to wade far into the doings of the Most High; whom although to know be life, and joy to make mention of his name; yet our soundest knowledge is to know that we know him not as indeed he is, neither can know him: and our safest eloquence concerning him is our silence, when we confess without confession that his glory is inexplicable, his greatness above our capacity and reach¹. He is above, and we upon earth; therefore it behoveth our words to be wary and few².

Our God is one, or rather very *Oneness*, and mere unity, having nothing but itself in itself, and not consisting (as all things do besides God) of many things. In which essential Unity of God a Trinity personal nevertheless subsisteth, after a manner far exceeding the possibility of man's conceit. The works which outwardly are of God, they are in such sort of Him being one, that each Person hath in them somewhat peculiar and proper. For being Three, and they all subsisting in the essence of one Deity; from the Father, by the Son, through the Spirit, all things are. That which the Son doth hear of the Father, and which the Spirit doth receive of the Father and the Son, the same we have at the hands of the Spirit as being the last, and therefore the nearest unto us in order, although in power the same with the second and the first³.

[3.] The wise and learned among the very heathens themselves have all acknowledged some First Cause, whereupon originally the being of all things dependeth. Neither have they otherwise spoken of that cause than as an Agent, which knowing *what* and *why* it worketh, observeth in working a most exact *order* or *law*. Thus much is signified by that which Homer mentioneth, Διὸς δ' ἐτελείετο βουλή⁴. Thus

¹ ["De quo nihil dici et exprimi mortalium potis est significatione verborum: qui, ut intelligaris, tacendum est; atque, ut per umbram te possit errans investigare suspicio, nihil est omnino mutendum." Arnob. Adv. Gentes, I. 31. See Davison on Prophecy, p. 672, first edit.]

² [Eccles. v. 2.]

³ John xvi. 13-15. [Ὅταν δὲ ἔλθῃ ἐκεῖνος, τὸ Πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας,

ὁδηγήσει ὑμᾶς εἰς πᾶσαν τὴν ἀλήθειαν· οὐ γὰρ λαλήσει ἄφ' ἑαυτοῦ, ἀλλ' ὅσα ἂν ἀκούσῃ λαλήσει,..... Ἐκεῖνος ἐμὲ δοξάσει, ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ ἐμοῦ λήψεται, καὶ ἀναγγελεῖ ὑμῖν. Πάντα, ὅσα ἔχει ὁ Πατήρ, ἐμὰ ἐστὶ· διὰ τοῦτο εἶπον, ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ ἐμοῦ λήψεται, καὶ ἀναγγελεῖ ὑμῖν. And c. xiv. 15: Πάντα, ἃ ἤκουσα παρὰ τοῦ Πατρὸς μου, ἐγνώρισα ὑμῖν.]

⁴ Jupiter's *counsel* was accomplished. [Il. A. 5.]

much acknowledged by Mercurius Trismegistus, τὸν πάντα κόσμον ἐποίησεν ὁ δημιουργὸς οὐ χερσὶν ἀλλὰ λόγῳ¹. Thus much confess by Anaxagoras and Plato, terming the Maker of the world an *intellectual* Worker². Finally the Stoics, although imagining the first cause of all things to be fire, held nevertheless, that the same fire having art, did ὀδῶ βαδίζειν ἐπὶ γενέσει κόσμου³. They all confess therefore in the working of that first cause, that Counsel is used, Reason followed, a Way observed; that is to say, constant Order and Law is kept; whereof itself must needs be author unto itself. Otherwise it should have some worthier and higher to direct it, and so could not itself be the first. Being the first, it can have no other than itself to be the author of that law which it willingly worketh by.

God therefore is a law both to himself, and to all other things besides. To himself he is a law in all those things, whereof our Saviour speaketh, saying, "My Father worketh "as yet, so I⁴." God worketh nothing without cause. All those things which are done by him have some end for which they are done; and the end for which they are done is a reason of his will to do them. His will had not inclined to create woman, but that he saw it could not be well if she were not created. *Non est bonum*, "It is not good man "should be alone; therefore let us make a helper for him⁵." That and nothing else is done by God, which to leave undone were not so good.

If therefore it be demanded, why God having power and ability infinite, the effects notwithstanding of that power are all so limited as we see they are: the reason hereof is the end which he hath proposed, and the law whereby his wisdom hath stunted the effects of his power in such sort, that it doth not work infinitely, but correspondently unto that end for which it worketh, even "all things χρηστῶς⁶,

¹ [C. 7. § 1.] The Creator made the whole world not with hands, but by *reason*.

² Stob. in Eclog. Phys. [This seems to refer to the following: Ἀναξαγόρας, νοῦν κόσμον ποιῶν [κοσμοποιῶν] τὸν Θεόν. Stob. ed. Canter. p. 2: Πλάτων. . . "νοῦς ὁ Θεός. . . "τούτου δὲ πατρός καὶ ποιητοῦ, τὰ

"ἄλλα θεῖα ἔγγονα." . . Ibid. p. 5.]

³ Proceed by a certain and a set Way in the making of the world.

[οἱ στοιχοὶ νοερὸν θεὸν ἀποφαίνονται, πῦρ τεχνικόν, ὀδῶ βαδίζον ἐπὶ γενέσει κόσμου. Ibid. 5.]

⁴ John v. 17.

⁵ Gen. ii. 18.

⁶ Sap. viii. 1; xi. 20.

"in most decent and comely sort," all things in "Measure, Number, and Weight."

[4.] The general end of God's external working is the exercise of his most glorious and most abundant virtue. Which abundance doth shew itself in variety, and for that cause this variety is oftentimes in Scripture exprest by the name of *riches*¹. "The Lord hath made all things for his "own sake²." Not that any thing is made to be beneficial unto him, but all things for him to shew beneficence and grace in them.

The particular drift of every act proceeding externally from God we are not able to discern, and therefore cannot always give the proper and certain reason of his works. Howbeit undoubtedly a proper and certain reason there is of every finite work of God, inasmuch as there is a law imposed upon it; which if there were not, it should be infinite, even as the worker himself is.

[5.] They err therefore who think that of the will of God to do this or that there is no reason besides his will. Many times no reason known to us; but that there is no reason thereof I judge it most unreasonable to imagine, inasmuch as he worketh all things κατὰ τὴν βουλὴν τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ, not only according to his own will, but "the Counsel of his "own will³." And whatsoever is done with counsel or wise resolution hath of necessity some reason why it should be done, albeit that reason be to us in some things so secret, that it forceth the wit of man to stand, as the blessed Apostle himself doth, amazed thereat⁴: "O the depth of "the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how "unsearchable are his judgments," &c. That law eternal which God himself hath made to himself, and thereby worketh all things whereof he is the cause and author; that law in the admirable frame whereof shineth with most perfect beauty the countenance of that wisdom which hath testified concerning herself⁵, "The Lord possessed me in the beginning of "his way, even before his works of old I was set up;" that law, which hath been the pattern to make, and is the card

¹ Ephes. i. 7; Phil. iv. 19; Col. ii. 3.

² Prov. xvi. 4.

³ Ephes. i. 11.

⁴ Rom. xi. 33.

⁵ Prov. viii. 22.

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to guide the world by; that law which hath been of God and with God everlastingly; that law, the author and observer whereof is one only God to be blessed for ever: how should either men or angels be able perfectly to behold? The book of this law we are neither able nor worthy to open and look into. That little thereof which we darkly apprehend we admire, the rest with religious ignorance we humbly and meekly adore.

[6.] Seeing therefore that according to this law He worketh, "of whom, through whom, and for whom, are all things¹;" although there seem unto us confusion and disorder in the affairs of this present world: "Tamen quoniam bonus mundum rector temperat, recte fieri cuncta ne dubites²:" "let no man doubt but that every thing is well done, because "the world is ruled by so good a guide," as transgresseth not His own law, than which nothing can be more absolute, perfect, and just.

The law whereby He worketh is eternal, and therefore can have no show or colour of mutability: for which cause, a part of that law being opened in the promises which God hath made (because his promises are nothing else but declarations what God will do for the good of men) touching those promises the Apostle hath witnessed, that God may as possibly "deny himself³" and not be God, as fail to perform them. And concerning the counsel of God, he termeth it likewise a thing "unchangeable⁴;" the counsel of God, and that law of God whereof now we speak, being one.

Nor is the freedom of the will of God any whit abated, let or hindered, by means of this; because the imposition of this law upon himself is his own free and voluntary act.

This law therefore we may name eternal, being "that order which God before all ages hath set down with himself, for himself to do all things by."

III. I am not ignorant that by "law eternal" the learned for the most part do understand the order, not which God hath eternally purposed himself in all his works to observe,

¹ Rom. xi. 36.

² Boet. lib. iv. de Consol. Philos.
[p. 105, ed. Lugd. Bat. 1656.] pros. 5.

³ 2 Tim. ii. 13.

⁴ Heb. vi. 17.

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but rather that which with himself he hath set down as expedient to be kept by all his creatures, according to the several condition¹ wherewith he hath endued them. They who thus are accustomed to speak apply the name of Law unto that only rule of working which superior authority imposeth; whereas we somewhat more enlarging the sense thereof term any kind of rule or canon, whereby actions are framed, a law. Now that law which, as it is laid up in the bosom of God, they call *Eternal*, receiveth according unto the different kinds of things which are subject unto it different and sundry kinds of names. That part of it which ordereth natural agents we call usually *Nature's* law; that which Angels do clearly behold and without any swerving² observe is a law *Celestial* and heavenly; the law of *Reason*, that which bindeth creatures reasonable in this world, and with which by reason they may most plainly perceive themselves bound; that which bindeth them, and is not known but by special revelation from God, *Divine* law; *Human* law, that which out of the law either of reason or of God men probably gathering to be expedient, they make it a law. All things therefore, which are as they ought to be, are conformed unto *this second law eternal*; and even those things which to this eternal law are not conformable are notwithstanding in some sort ordered by *the first eternal law*. For what good or evil is there under the sun, what action correspondent or repugnant unto the law which God hath imposed upon his creatures, but in or upon it God doth work according to the law which himself hath eternally purposed to keep; that is to say, the *first law eternal*? So that a twofold law eternal being thus made, it is not hard to conceive how they both take place in all things³.

¹ [So edd. A, B, "conditions," K.] 1886.

² [Uniformly written "*swarve*" in the early edd.]

³ "Id omne, quod in rebus creatis fit, est materia legis æternæ." Th. I. 1, 2. q. 93, art. 4, 5, 6. [1 hom. Aquin. Opp. xi. 202.] "Nullo modo aliquid legibus summi Creatoris ordinationique subtrahitur, a quo pax universitatis administratur." August. de Civit. Dei, lib. xix. cap.

12. [t. VII. 556.] Immo et peccatum, quatenus a Deo juste permittitur, cadit in legem æternam. Etiam legi æternæ subjicitur peccatum, quatenus voluntaria legis transgressio pœnale quoddam incommodum animæ inserit, juxta illud Augustini, "Jussisti Domine, et sic est, ut pœna sua sibi sit omnis animus inordinatus." Confess. lib. i. cap. 12. [t. I. 77.] *Nec male scholastici*, "Quemadmodum," inquit,

[2.] Wherefore to come to the law of nature: albeit thereby we sometimes mean that manner of working which God hath set for each created thing to keep; yet forasmuch as those things are termed most properly natural agents, which keep the law of their kind unwittingly, as the heavens and elements of the world, which can do no otherwise than they do; and forasmuch as we give unto intellectual natures the name of *Voluntary* agents, that so we may distinguish them from the other; expedient it will be, that we sever the law of nature observed by the one from that which the other is tied unto. Touching the former, their strict keeping of one tenure, statute, and law, is spoken of by all, but hath in it more than men have as yet attained to know, or perhaps ever shall attain, seeing the travail of wading herein is given of God to the sons of men¹, that perceiving how much the least thing in the world hath in it more than the wisest are able to reach unto, they may by this means learn humility. Moses, in describing the work of creation, attributeth speech unto God: "God said, Let there be light: let there be a firmament: let the waters under the heaven be gathered together into one place: let the earth bring forth: let there be lights in the firmament of heaven." Was this only the intent of Moses, to signify the infinite greatness of God's power by the easiness of his accomplishing such effects, without travail, pain, or labour? Surely it seemeth that Moses had herein besides this a further purpose, namely, first to teach that God did not work as a

"videmus res naturales contingentes, hoc ipso quod a fine particulari suo atque adeo a lege æterna exorbitant, in eandem legem æternam incidere, quatenus consequuntur alium finem a lege etiam æterna ipsi in casu particulari constitutum; sic verisimile est homines, etiam cum peccant et desciscunt a lege æterna ut præcipiente, reincidere in ordinem æternæ legis ut punientis."

¹ [Eccles. III. 9, 10: "I have seen the travail which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it. He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find

out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end."

Compare the use which Lord Bacon has made of the same text, *Advancement of Learning*, b. ii: "Knowledges are as pyramids, whereof history is the basis. So of natural philosophy, the basis is natural history; the stage next the basis is physic; the stage next the vertical point is metaphysic. As for the vertical point, *Opus, quod operatur Deus a principio usque ad finem*, the summary law of nature, we know not whether man's inquiry can attain unto it." Works, I. p. 104, 8vo. London, 1803.]

necessary but a voluntary agent, intending beforehand and decreeing with himself that which did outwardly proceed from him: secondly, to shew that God did then institute a law natural to be observed by creatures, and therefore according to the manner of laws, the institution thereof is described, as being established by solemn injunction. His commanding those things to be which are, and to be in such sort as they are, to keep that tenure and course which they do, importeth the establishment of nature's law. This world's first creation, and the preservation since of things created, what is it but only so far forth a manifestation by execution, what the eternal law of God is concerning things natural? And as it cometh to pass in a kingdom rightly ordered, that after a law is once published, it presently takes effect far and wide, all states framing themselves thereunto; even so let us think it fareth in the natural course of the world: since the time that God did first proclaim the edicts of his law upon it, heaven and earth have hearkened unto his voice, and their labour hath been to do his will: He "made a law for the rain¹;" He gave his "decree unto the sea, that the waters should not pass his commandment²." Now if nature should intermit her course, and leave altogether though it were but for a while the observation of her own laws; if those principal and mother elements of the world, whereof all things in this lower world are made, should lose the qualities which now they have; if the frame of that heavenly arch erected over our heads should loosen and dissolve itself; if celestial spheres should forget their wonted motions, and by irregular volubility turn themselves any way as it might happen; if the prince of the lights of heaven, which now as a giant doth run his unwearied course³, should as it were through a languishing faintness begin to stand and to rest himself; if the moon should wander from her beaten way, the times and seasons of the year blend themselves by disordered and confused mixture, the winds breathe out their last gasp, the clouds yield no rain, the earth be defeated of heavenly influence, the fruits of the earth pine away as children at the withered breasts of their mother no longer

¹ [Job xxviii. 26.]² [Jer. v. 22.]³ Psalm xix. 5.