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DISCOURSE
PREACHED AT THE ORDINATION
OF
REV. WALTER S. ALEXANDER

OVER THE

First Congregational Church in Pomfret, Conn.,

NOVEMBER 22, 1861.

BY

EDWARDS A. PARK,
ABBOTT PROFESSOR IN ANDOVER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY.

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It may be needless to state that many parts of the following Discourse were omitted in the delivery, and several passages which were delivered are here omitted. The text selected for the Discourse was :

PSALM LXXXIII. 1-5 and 13-18.

KEEP NOT THOU SILENCE, O GOD: HOLD NOT THY PEACE, AND BE NOT STILL, O GOD. FOR LO, THINE ENEMIES MAKE A TUMULT: AND THEY THAT HATE THEE HAVE LIFTED UP THE HEAD. THEY HAVE TAKEN CRAFTY COUNSEL AGAINST THY PEOPLE, AND CONSULTED AGAINST THY HIDDEN ONES. THEY HAVE SAID, COME, AND LET US CUT THEM OFF FROM BEING A NATION; THAT THE NAME OF ISRAËL MAY BE NO MORE IN REMEMBRANCE. FOR THEY HAVE CONSULTED TOGETHER WITH ONE CONSENT: THEY ARE CONFEDERATE AGAINST THEE.—O MY GOD, MAKE THEM LIKE A WHEEL; AS THE STUBBLE BEFORE THE WIND. AS THE FIRE BURNETH A WOOD, AND AS THE FLAME SETTETH THE MOUNTAINS ON FIRE; SO PERSECUTE THEM WITH THY TEMPEST, AND MAKE THEM AFRAID WITH THY STORM. FILL THEIR FACES WITH SHAME; THAT THEY MAY SEEK THY NAME, O LORD. LET THEM BE CONFOUNDED AND TROUBLED FOR EVER; YEA, LET THEM BE PUT TO SHAME, AND PERISH: THAT MEN MAY KNOW THAT THOU, WHOSE NAME ALONE IS JEHOVAH, ART THE MOST HIGH OVER ALL THE EARTH.

DISCOURSE.

THOSE scriptures have been called imprecatory which contain a request, or intimate a wish or even willingness that moral agents be chastised or punished; and also those which express gratitude for the past afflictive event, or even submission to it.¹ Many an amiable Christian reads some of these scriptures with a half-closed eye. The Imprecatory Psalms, in a special manner, are thought to be ill suited for modern times. They may have had their use as a war-trumpet in the shock of an ancient battle, when the soldiers of Israel were not ripe for gentler words; but it is imagined that we are to look upon them now as we gaze at the helmets and coats of mail which are hung up in the museum of antiquities. There are crises in life, however, which bring out the hidden uses of such parts of the Bible as had seemed to be antiquated. Since the commencement of the present rebellion, the Imprecatory Psalms have gained a new meaning in the view of men who had been wont to regard them as unchristian. Now the red planet Mars, which had been unnoticed in our horizon, has reappeared. The lost hymns have been found again. It is a new proof of the inspiration of the Bible, that so many of its forgotten

¹ Even such passages as the following have been classed under the general name of Imprecatory: Psalm iii. 7; ix. 2-4; xviii. 37-43; xxi. 7-11; xxxvii. 12-15; lii. 5-7; lxiii. 9-11; lxiv. 7-9; cxxxv. 8-12.

teachings have been commended to our regard by the martial scenes of the day. The present occasion, therefore, appears to be a suitable one for considering the Imprecatory Psalms. And the design of the present Essay is to examine, first, some of the reasons why these Psalms are often condemned as adverse to the spirit of Christianity; and, secondly, some of the ethical principles which these Psalms illustrate.

On the first topic I remark, in the first place, that we are often inclined to condemn the Imprecatory Psalms, because we overlook the benevolent temper which characterized the writers of the Old Testament, and which was eminently conspicuous in David, the author of the sternest songs. Far too frequently do we fail to recognize that kindly spirit which pervades the Hebrew scriptures, and in harmony with which we ought to interpret the imprecations. When we inquire into the design of some appalling threat, we must keep in view that symbol of a humane temper which is found in the Levitical prescription: "If a bird's nest chance to be before thee in the way in any tree, or on the ground, whether they be young ones, or eggs, and the dam sitting upon the young, or upon the eggs, thou shalt not take the dam with the young: But thou shalt in any wise let the dam go, and take the young to thee; that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days."¹ If men have an enemy, and they behold one of his cattle going astray, or lying down under a too heavy weight, the Mosaic law forbids them to take advantage of him, although he be their enemy, and it commands them to drive back to him his straying ox, and to help the animal that is overburdened.² The Christian scriptures quote some of their most touching rules of benevolence from the Levitical code. It prescribes: "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart; thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, *but thou shalt love thy neighbor as*

¹ Deut. xxii. 6, 7.

² Ex. xxiii. 4, 5.

thyself."¹ The Proverbs of the Jewish nation declare: "Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, lest the Lord see it, and it displease him."² "Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me."³

As we ought to associate the Imprecatory Psalms with the humane spirit of the school from which they emanated, so we ought to interpret them in harmony with the generous temper of David, to whom we ascribe some, and the severest, of them. If his character had been savage, we should be less clearly authorized than now in ascribing a benevolent spirit to his words. By no means do we deny that he committed many grievous offences against the rules of charity; but his lamentation over his bitter foe is of itself a touching proof that in his general character he was clement beyond his times.⁴ "Thou art more righteous than I," was the confession made to him by Saul, "for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil."⁵ It may have been in allusion to his forgiving spirit towards this malicious king and his courtiers, that David sung:

"Yet my prayer also shall be in their evil doings.
When their judges were set free in rocky places
They heard my words; *for they were sweet.*"

"They rewarded me evil for good,
My soul is orphaned.
But as for me,
When they were sick my clothing was sackcloth:
I afflicted my soul with fasting;
And my prayer returned into mine own bosom.
[i. e. I fell on my knees and inclined my head to the ground,
as in 1 Kings xviii. 42.]

¹ Lev. xix. 17, 18.

² Prov. xxiv. 17, 18.

³ Prov. xxiv. 29. See also, Prov. xxv. 21; xxvi. 21, 22; Job xxxi. 29. Commentators have noticed the contrast between Prov. xx. 22, "Say not thou I will recompense evil," etc., and Psalm xli. 10, "Raise me up, that I may requite them," my enemies. But the general spirit of kindness pervading the Old Testament may allow us to interpret the seemingly harsh phrase by the obviously benevolent one. See note on Psalm xli. 10, under the second head of the second division of this Discourse.

⁴ See 2 Sam. i. 19-27. See also 1 Sam. xxiv. 5; 2 Sam. xvi. 10.

⁵ 1 Sam. xxiv. 2-22.

I behaved myself as though he had been my friend or brother.
I bowed down heavily as though he had been my mother."¹

But why need we expatiate on the kindly temper of the Old Testament, when its entire system of sacrifices for sin was a symbol of atoning love, and one of the clearest expositors of those sacrificial offerings was the poet, warrior, and monarch who has been most frequently censured for the severe songs?

In the second place, we are apt to condemn the Imprecatory Psalms, because we often fail to recognize the sentiments of justice which are breathed forth by the New Testament writers, and particularly by Christ himself. The old covenant would not have been so often denounced, if it had been seen to be harmonious with the new. The gospel is thought to be a synonyme for mere gentleness. "Thy money perish with thee," said Peter to the sorcerer.² "God shall smite thee, thou whited wall," said the chief of the apostles to the high-priest.³ And if this expression be deemed a hasty one, he said at his leisure: "Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision;"⁴ and again: "I would they were even cut off which trouble you;"⁵ and still again, in a style like that of the condemned Psalms: "Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil; the Lord reward him according to his works."⁶ We shall have repeated occasion in the progress of this Discourse, to quote similar imprecatory words from the apostle John. He even portrays the martyrs as crying "with a loud voice, and saying: "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth!"⁷ Indeed, the general spirit of the New Testament

¹ Psalm cxli. 5, 6; xxxv. 12-14. See also Psalm xxxviii. 20; cix. 4, 5. Throughout this Discourse the rhythmical quotations of the Psalms are generally taken from Nombert's Translation of Tholuck's Commentary.

² Acts viii. 20.

³ Acts xxiii. 3.

⁴ Phillip. iii. 2.

⁵ Gal. v. 12.

⁶ 2 Tim. iv. 14. See also Gal. i. 8, 9, "Let him be accursed."

⁷ Rev. vi. 10. See also Rev. xviii. 20-24; xix. 1-8.

overawes us by its references to God as a "consuming fire,"¹ into whose hands "it is dreadful to fall,"² for "He that despised Moses's law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment suppose ye shall he be thought worthy who hath trodden under foot the Son of God?"³

As the ancestor of Christ is sometimes thought to have been devoid of kindly feelings, so the Son of David is sometimes thought to have been destitute of sternness. He has been regarded as the antipode, rather than the antitype of the Psalmist. But we are told that in the synagogue on the Sabbath, he "looked round about on them [the Pharisees] with anger."⁴ "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites;" "ye blind guides;" "ye fools and blind;" "fill ye up, then, the measure of your fathers;" "ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?"⁵—such words as these betray a spirit as rigorous against evil as can be found in the Hebrew scriptures. The New Testament quotes in different forms, and in six different instances, one of the most terrific appeals of the Old Testament: "Hear ye indeed, but understand not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, lest they convert and be healed." In two of these instances the New Testament represents these words as quoted by the Saviour himself, and John declares: "These things said Esaias when he saw *his* [the Saviour's] glory, and spake of *him*."⁶ It also deserves a special consideration that the sixty-ninth Psalm, one of the most terrific of all the Imprecatory Songs, is frequently connected in the New Testament with the history of Christ. Compare the ninth verse with John ii. 17; the twenty-fifth verse with Matthew xxiii. 38, also with Acts i. 20; the twenty-second and twenty-third

¹ Heb. xii. 29.

² Heb. x. 31.

³ Heb. x. 27, 28, 29; also xii. 25. See likewise, Matt. xxi. 41; xxii. 7; xxiv. 51; Rom. ii. 5; James v. 3, et al.

⁴ Matt. iii. 5.

⁵ Matt. xxiii. 13, 16, 19, 32, 33. See also Matt. xi. 20–24.

⁶ See Isa. vi. 9, 10; Matt. xiii. 13–15; Mark iv. 12; Luke viii. 10; John xii. 40; Acts xxviii. 26, 27; Rom. xi. 8.

verses with Romans xi. 9, 10; and especially the twenty-first verse with Matthew xxvii. 34, 48; Mark xv. 23, 36; Luke xxiii. 36; John xix. 29, 30. Perhaps there can be no better justification of the spirit pervading the Imprecatory Psalms, than is found in the *immediate collocation* of a verse which we at once refer to our Saviour, with other verses which he and his apostles quote, and thus endorse, although they are among the sternest in the Bible :

“*They give me also gall for my meat ;
And in my thirst they give me vinegar to drink.
Let their table become a snare before them :
And when they think themselves in peace, let it become a trap :
Let their eyes be darkened that they see not,
And make their loins continually to shake.
Pour out thine indignation upon them,
And let thy wrathful anger take hold of them.*”¹

But why need we enlarge on the fact that the gospels and epistles are pervaded by the spirit of justice, since the entire doctrine of the atonement is an expression of the divine purpose to punish sin? When, therefore, it is objected that the Old Testament is rigorous, we reply: It is essentially no more rigorous than the New. When it is objected that David was stern, we reply: The Son of David was stern. When it is objected that both the Jewish and the Christian scriptures are clouded over with imprecations, we reply: These clouds are irradiated with a bow of promise. The severity of Jehovah is explained by his mercy, as this is revealed by Moses and the prophets not less really than by Christ and the apostles.

In the third place, we are apt to condemn the Imprecatory Psalms because we are inclined to overlook the peculiar genius of their authors. More or less clandestinely we are wont to interpret an ancient and an oriental poet, as we

¹ Psalm lxix. 22, sq. De Wette says (Com. ü. Ps. s. 400), that the *Jewish* religion could not inspire different sentiments from these, and that the *Christian* religion was the *first* which cultivated a love toward all men. Is it not singular, then, that the New Testament so often cites, and never censures, the sixty-ninth Psalm?

would interpret a modern and occidental essayist. The eastern minstrel employs intense words for saying what the western logician would say in tame language. The fervid oriental would turn from our modifying phrases in sickness of heart. We shudder at the lofty flights which captivate him. But he and we mean to express the same idea. The occidental philosopher has a definite thought when he affirms, that God exercises benevolence toward good men. Isaiah has essentially the same thought when he cries out: "As the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee."¹ The terms of endearment which the old Hebrews ascribe to Jehovah, appear undignified to men like David Hume. Biblical figures, when introduced into our songs of Zion, are condemned by some critics as too amatory. But our less erotic phrases would have been despised as ungrateful and unfeeling, by the ardent Hebrews.

Now why should we not remember that as the affectionate words of the Old Testament are more intense than an American philosopher would adopt, so the denunciatory words are more unqualified than he would select? Why should we forget that the sensitive orientals would feel chilled by the calculating, reserved style in which we indicate our abhorrence of vice? If the lion were the painter, how should we be portrayed? On the other hand, we are not prepared by temperament or by education for the rank luxuriance of their style in reprimanding vice. Yet they and we mean to express essentially the same idea. We are roused by their unmodified figures to reconsider and to feel anew the *force* of our idea. The western philosophers clothe an exact thought in the precise words: "Good men will rejoice when they see virtue triumphant, even if its prosperity be attended with the just and needed sufferings of the vicious." The Hebrew poet is inflamed with this thought, and he sings:

"The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance:
He shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked."

¹ Isa. lxii. 5.

“The Lord said : I will bring again from Bashan,
 I will bring my people again from the depths of the sea,
 That thy foot may be dipped in the blood of thine enemies,
 And the tongue of thy dogs in the same.”¹

This is a bright painting. It is to be criticised as such. The divine justice is the principal figure. The bathing of the foot, the tongue of the dog, belong to the drapery around the figure. If we ascribe these fringes of the drapery to malice in the painter, we must ascribe Isaiah’s rapturous expressions of the divine love to amativeness in the prophet. But such a criticism is against the artistic rules. They allow us to use bold coloring, but not to prolong our gaze upon it. They require us to move quickly from the signs which are seen, to the truth which is not seen. If we stay our thoughts upon the covering, we lose the substance which is covered up. In Raphael’s fresco paintings of the night we find the lizard, and the bat, and the snail, and the hedge-hog ; but these only set off the main figures, and help to produce the main impression, which is one of serenity and repose. In all the oriental poems, which are pictures, we must be guided by the same principle of criticism. Here and there a symbol may be terrific. We are to look at once from the sign to the thing signified. That thing inspires us with awe. A coiled snake represents eternity. Our danger is that we linger on the snake, that we dissect it, count its fangs, analyze its venom. If our minds would rapidly dart from the image to the idea indicated by it, we should not be repelled by the outward form so much as edified by the inward sentiment. It is, for example, a fact as obvious in modern as it was in ancient days, that the effects of a crime extend to all the relatives of the criminal. This injurious influence results from a law of our mental, moral, social constitution. The western logicians will state it cautiously, guarding it against misconstruction, marking out its metes and bounds, modifying, adjusting, defending it. The inspired poet will not seem to recognize its liability

¹ Psalm lviii. 10 ; lxviii. 22, 23.

to be misunderstood. Innocent himself, he will not appear to suspect others of guilt. All the cruelties of battle he will look straight through, in order to fasten his gaze upon the law of God expressed in Exodus xx. 5. He will paint in bold colors the barbarous usages of his day, without endorsing anything but the providence of God in tolerating them. He will not explain or qualify his word, but let it stand and let it strike. Of the Edomites he sings :

“ Their infants shall be dashed in pieces before their eyes :
Their houses shall be plundered, and their wives ravished.”¹

It is the justice of God, it is not the ruthlessness of men ; it is the grand intent of the Lawgiver, his final, benevolent aim, it is not the petty annoyances of the executioners whom he appoints ; it is the predominant right, it is not the incidental wrong to which the prophet looks. He is courageous, resolute, rapid in portraying the divine justice, and is not called at that moment to describe also the divine mercy. This mercy is too well known to need a representation just here. A mother has been heard to express even joy in the fact that her child was suffering an acute pain. Her joy, however, was in the phenomenon not as *pain*, but as a *sign* of the child's cure from an alarming malady. She made no distinction in her language between pain as an *evil*, and pain as a *premonitory symptom* of good.

A fourth reason, partly involved in the preceding, yet claiming an independent notice, why the Imprecatory Psalms are often condemned, is that we are apt to regard *them* as *teaching* some proposition which *we infer* from them ; and the incidental fact which we think to be involved in them we exalt above the grand aim which they obviously propose for themselves. The fervid expressions of feeling which relate to a single idea, may seem to imply several truths or several errors ; but the impassioned orator, when

¹ Isa. xiii. 16, Henderson's Translation. This is a prediction of the same evil mentioned by the writer of Psalm cxxxvii. 8, 9 ; see pp. 36, 37 of this Essay. For other instances of the same practice in war, see 2 Kings viii. 12 ; Hos. x. 14 ; Zech. xiv. 2 ; Joel xiii. 16 ; Nah. iii. 10.

he gave vent to those expressions, did not mean to include the several truths or errors. He meant to utter one idea; his mind was absorbed with the one idea, and all the other suggestions ascribed to him by ourselves were merely intended by him to set off that one idea, or perhaps were not intended for anything at all, were not even thought of, either as true or false. On the eve of a sanguinary battle we may pray for the discomfiture of rebels who are warring in an evil cause. But we do not pray for their eternal ruin. "Do you believe that if they are discomfited they will be punished forever"? When this question is proposed to us we are startled. We had not thought of it. We do, perhaps, believe or fear that some of our adversaries will receive an everlasting punishment; still this was not the object of our prayer. "But ought you not to have thought of it"? We need not have thought of it *as an event to be prayed for*. "Still, ought you not to have thought of it as an object to be prayed against"? Perhaps not. Perhaps we could not. Perhaps the idea of the present duty in time must have excluded the idea of the retributions in eternity. Besides, ought or ought not, as a matter of fact we did not think of it, and our prayer should not be interpreted as if we did. We must look at facts as they *are*, not as they *might be*.

Now the language of the Bible must be explained according to the laws of ordinary speech. When the fervid Psalmist is entreating for the overthrow of his enemies, he is sometimes represented as interceding for their eternal pain. We need not here discuss the question, whether any of his prayers have any kind of reference to the unending ruin of his foes. It is enough to say now that, so far as his *entreaties* are concerned, they may be explained as having reference to the temporal discomfiture of men who were nuisances to society. The disappointment of intriguers who would lay waste the heritage of God, — this was the burden of his supplications. "The zeal of thy house hath eaten me up," he might have exclaimed in regard to some of his phrases. Absorbed with the hope of defeating in

this world the plan of his own and of God's enemies, he does pray :

“ Give them according to their deeds,
 And according to the wickedness of their endeavors :
 Give them after the work of their hands ;
 Render to them their desert.”¹

If these words had been represented as uttered at the day of judgment, they would point to the eternal retributions then to be awarded. But the context proves that the author of these words is not meditating, like an observer of the comprehensive and complete moral government of God, upon the everlasting penalty which God sees to be needful for the honor of his government through all worlds; but the Psalmist is meditating, like an injured member of society, on the civil chastisements which are needed for the support of the Jewish civil and ecclesiastical law. He is aiming his *desires* at those remedial measures which may benefit himself, and his nation, and his church. His *words* may seem to fly beyond this mark, and to be aimed at those eternal retributions by which the Most High secures the eternal welfare of angels and other orders of intelligences. We are not to interpret the Psalmist's words, however, according to the power which they may have *possibly*, but according to the spirit which is breathed by their author *generally*. We read in our version:² “ Of thy mercy *cut off* mine enemies, and *destroy* all them that afflict my soul.” We read in the Syriac version of the same passage: “ Of thy mercy *put to silence* them that hate me, and *destroy* the enemies of my soul.” This parallelism indicates that the Psalmist is praying for the discomfiture of his adversaries so far forth as they are *injurious*, not so far forth as they are ill-deserving in the view of Him who judges the hidden and intrinsic wickedness of the heart. We read in our version:³ “ In the name of the Lord *I will destroy* them” [all nations]. We read in the Syriac version of the same passage: “ In

¹ Psalm xxviii. 4.

² Psalm cxliii. 12. See Oliver's Translation of the Syriac Psalter.

³ Psalm cxvii. 10, 11, 12.

the name of the Lord *have I destroyed them.*" Such words prove that the Psalmist is speaking of *combinations* formed by wicked men, and annihilated by himself; of *leagues* entered into by the ungodly, and utterly extinguished by himself. He is not speaking of the individual soul which *he* has consigned to the punishment deserved for its inward, secret transgressions. He prays that his enemies may be "destroyed," *so that he may be delivered out of great trouble*; not so that God's justice may be satisfied in their everlasting remorse.¹ He does, indeed, ask that the foe may be "troubled *forever*;"² but we must bear in mind that he also says: "I will dwell in the house of the Lord *forever*;"³ and "Holiness becometh thine house *forever*."⁴ When a band of rebels has been defeated utterly, it may be said to endure an *everlasting* discomfiture. The foe is ruined forever, when his schemes are frustrated so that they will never be revived. "Destroy thou them, O God;" this was the supplication. But the suppliant was thinking of the natural and spiritual good to be attained in this world, and not of the governmental advantage to be attained in other worlds by this chastisement; for he adds: "Let all those that put their trust in thee rejoice, *because thou protectest them.*"⁵ "Consume them in wrath, consume them that they may not be;" this is the prayer, and, viewed by itself, it seems to portend the utmost extremity of punishment; but immediately before it we read: "*Slay them not,*" and immediately after it we read: "Let them know that God ruleth in Jacob; *and at evening let them return,*" etc.⁶

If we ascribe such verses to a desire in their author that his foes be punished without end, we may bring a similar charge against all those philanthropists who pray for the detection of a murderer, and for the infliction of that *conclusive* penalty upon him which will save the State from his

¹ Psalm cxliv. 6, 7.

² Psalm lxxxiii. 17, compared with v. 16: "*that they may seek thy name.*"

³ Psalm xxiii. 6.

⁴ Psalm xciii. 5.

⁵ Psalm v. 10.

⁶ Psalm lix. 11-14.

malign influence. The fact that such a penalty may result in his unending woe, does not prevent the peace-loving citizens from offering their prayer. The fact that Professor Webster deserved a punishment in another world, should not have prevented the magistrates from inflicting on him the penalty which he deserved in this world. As the agony of the patient is not the end for which the physician applies to him the moxa, so the eternal punishment of the criminal is not the end for which the philanthropists desire his capital punishment.

In the fifth place, the Imprecatory Psalms are often condemned because their inspiration is overlooked. When it is *revealed* to men that a particular sinner has been abandoned by Jehovah, they have a right to adopt such a mode of speech with regard to the reprobated one, as we have no right to *originate* in reference to a sinner whom we may simply *conjecture* to have been thus abandoned. We may not devise for ourselves a peculiarity of style, which may yet be fitly prescribed by heavenly wisdom for other penmen. In our present relations it would be inappropriate for us to invent a method of threatening, which men who "spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," employed in relations unlike our own. If we are not inspired to know that our enemies have been judicially given up of God, and if we are not inspired to offer a prayer in opposition to the forsaken ones, then we are in circumstances so dissimilar to those of David that, if we should originate *words* like his, the *meaning* of them would be different from his. The simple fact that he speaks as a supernatural representative of the All-wise Judge, interprets his phrases as phrases cannot be interpreted which are devised by an uninspired man.

It is often asked: Why did not the Psalmist pray that his enemies may be *converted*, rather than "be confounded and put to shame," "turned back and brought to confusion"?¹ We answer: In some instances, it may have been

¹ Psalm xxxv. 4.

revealed to him that his foes were not to be converted. But why did he not express his sympathy for them? We reply: It may have been revealed to him, that indignation was more appropriate than compassion, *at that time*. It is right to be indignant. It is right to be sympathetic. It is right to praise the justice of God. It is right to praise his mercy. If he inspire his friends to express his indignation in a day when his general atonement is not fully revealed, we are not warranted by that fact to invent a similar style of expressing his indignation, when Christ has thrown open for the Gentile as well as the Jew a wide door of promise. The truth expressed in the Imprecatory Psalms is eternal. The sentiment which they breathe was holiness once. It is holiness now. It will be holiness forever. But a holy sentiment is one thing. A sentiment appropriate to peculiar circumstances is a different thing. The style in which that sentiment may be expressed is different still. To condemn inspired men because they wrote in a method not in all respects conformed to the method of uninspired men, is as idle as it would be to arraign Jehovah because he governs his universe in a mode not exactly conformed to our mode of governing a small household.¹

In the sixth place, the Imprecatory Psalms are often condemned because it is imagined that all of them must be explained on one and the same principle. It is forgotten that there may be different grounds on which different songs and *different parts of the same song* are justifiable; and a statement which will prove some one verse of a Psalm to be correct, will not apply to some other. One of the proph-

¹ Calvin, on Psalm cix. 6, remarks: "I know a lady in France who hired a parcel of these [Franciscan] friars to curse her own and only son in these words. But I return to David, who, free from all inordinate passion, breathed forth his prayers under the influence of the Holy Spirit." On verse 12 Calvin says: "David is not rashly excited by any personal anguish to speak in this manner; but it is as God's messenger he declares the punishment which was impending over the ungodly." On verse 20 Calvin adds: "David did not rashly or unadvisedly utter curses against his enemies, but strictly adhered to what the Spirit dictated."

ets, giving a pictorial view of Jehovah's wrath against Idu-maea, reconciles us to it by intermingling a sketch of Jehovah's compassion for the innocent who suffer with the guilty :

"Leave thy orphans, I will preserve them,
And let thy widows confide in me."¹

But it is very certain that this particular development of mercy amid chastisements, is not given in those scriptures which represent the influence of sin as moving upward to parents, downward to children, and laterally to other relatives. This verse of Jeremiah would seem to contradict several verses of other prophets,² if they all had reference to the same chastisement, *viewed in the same relation*.

While some parts of the Psalms may be explained on the hypothesis that their authors had received a revelation of the judicial abandonment of their enemy, other parts may be explained on the hypothesis that their threatenings were uttered with a tacit condition. It is not the way of poets to stop their song and stipulate express conditions. Sometimes they do so, however ; and often where the condition is not formally laid down, it may be silently understood. Woes may be imprecated on the transgressor, *if he remain obdurate* ; and the spirit of the following verses may be supposed to breathe through various Psalms which do not give vent to it in words :

"Oh, let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end! —
God is angry with the wicked every day.
If he [the enemy] *turn not*, he [God] will whet his sword.
He hath bent his bow and made it ready."³

Some of the Psalms imprecate evil on the Jews themselves, for whom an atonement had been revealed. These Psalms cannot be explained in the same way with those

¹ Jer. xlix. 11, Henderson's Translation.

² See the citations on page 11.

³ Psalm vii. 9, 11, 12. The twelfth and thirteenth verses are probably an indirect quotation from Deut. xxxii. 41, 42. Other imprecatory passages in the Psalms are quotations from the Prophets. This fact qualifies their severity.

which imprecate evil on the Gentiles,¹ for whom the general atonement had not been distinctly made known. The feelings of the Psalmist in regard to them may have resembled our feelings in regard to the lost spirits. But why was it not clearly disclosed, that the atonement was to be made for Gentiles as well as Jews? This query is often proposed, and is like another as often suggested: Why did not the Old Testament distinctly recommend all the humanizing usages of modern warfare, and all the refining influences of Christian civilization? These inquiries belong to the same genus with the following: Why did not Christ appear on the earth centuries before he deemed it wise to appear? Why was not the world created ages before God saw fit to call it into being? Why did Jehovah admit any evil into his universe?

Other reasons may be assigned for the complaints against the Imprecatory Psalms, but let us proceed, in the second place, to consider some of the ethical principles which are illustrated by these Psalms.

First, the Imprecatory Songs throw light on the fact that there are times when a man, as a single individual, and for his own personal advantage, should not resist his enemies, and still may resist them as he is identified with the public and in union with God. No benefit may flow to the community from the redress of our private grievances, as such. Other men appear to gain as much as we lose; and if we attempt to rectify the wrong, others must part with what we acquire, and the sum total of suffering is not lessened. At such times we may "take joyfully the spoiling of our goods." But there are emergencies when we are sure that if one member of the body politic suffer unredressed, all the members will receive more harm than good; and what a man should not do to recover his rights as he is a mere

¹ De Wette often reasons (see Com. ü. Ps. s. 400) as if *all* the imprecations were directed against the *heathen*.

individual, he should do to recover them as he is interlocked with the community. He is a single link in the chain. As one link, containing so many ounces of metal, he is of inferior worth; but as "a tenth or ten-thousandth" part of the chain, he is essential to its integrity. One wheel or one band in a complicated apparatus may be of little value, when viewed as so much iron or so much leather; but if the wheel be broken or the band cut, the entire machinery must lie idle. An injured citizen may shrink from the annoyance of a law-suit. It will cost him time and trouble, and bring him neither fame nor money. But it may be needful for the future quiet and safety of the town; therefore he plunges into the public trial with a clear view of the vexation coming from it to himself, and the ultimate security coming from it to the neighborhood.

He who promotes the welfare of other men, advances also the glory of God. He who wrongs other men, wrongs their Maker. They are images of their author, and God is dishonored when his likeness is tarnished. To resist our foes, then, not because they are injurious to ourselves alone, but also because they are injurious to the public, is to resist them because they are enemies to Jehovah. God opposes them as malefactors to society; we should oppose them as he does. If he prefers to pardon his enemies, he has a wise reason for his preference; we should entertain a choice the image of his. And on the same principle, if he prefers to afflict his enemies, the circumstance that they happen to be *our* enemies also should not prevent our entertaining a choice the image of his. He has a solid ground for all that he intends in causing pain or pleasure; we must either have a feeling in the likeness of his benevolence when he afflicts men, or at war with it, or neutral. Man a neutral, when the contest is between a loving father on the one hand, and mischievous children on the other! Man a neutral, when the strife is between an unbounded benevolence and a narrow selfishness! The inspired Psalmist would scorn such a neutrality. He looks above the details of the

combat, and seizes on the great principle of it. "For," he sings :¹

"For lo, *Thine* enemies make a tumult;
 And they that hate *Thee* have lifted up the head.
 They have taken crafty counsel against *Thy* people,
 And consulted against *Thy* hidden ones.
 They have said : ' Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation ;
 That the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance.'
 For they have consulted together with one consent ;
 They are confederate against *Thee*."

Therefore,

"O my God, make them like a wheel (or whirlwind) :
 As the stubble before the wind.
 As the fire burneth a wood,
 And as the flame setteth the mountains on fire,
 So persecute them with thy tempest,
 And make them afraid with thy storm.
 Fill their faces with shame,
That they may seek thy name, O Lord.
 Let them be confounded and troubled forever ;
 Yea, let them be put to shame, and perish.
*That men may know that Thou, whose name alone is Jehovah,
 Art the Most High over all the earth.*"

That one phrase, "*confederate against Thee,*" has suggested to many American Christians the crime of those States which are now "confederate" against our Union. *If we have the temper of the old Jewish songs* we go forth to battle against these States, not in order to secure our personal welfare or any sectional emolument; not in order to preserve our Union as a mere secular empire; but to preserve it as an asylum for the oppressed throughout the world; as the model of a republic to be imitated in other lands; as the embodiment of liberal principles that make the intellect more energetic, the conscience more exact, the affections more generous, the will more resolute. We believe that our national Constitution is fitted to quicken the growth of a real manhood, to enlarge the compass of a pure church, to discipline the virtuous citizen for an ampler

¹ Psalm lxxxiii. 2 - 5, 12 - 18.

reward in heaven than he would reach if he were not trained to think for himself, to govern himself, to develop his own powers, to worship his Maker according to his own conscience. Therefore we station our blockading squadrons at every sea-port, and the mouth of every river; our cavalry and infantry at every highway and railway, where we can prevent the transit of food which may strengthen our foes for their battles. In laying this embargo upon the commerce of the rebels we are not vindictive, *provided that we have the temper of the Psalmist in his imprecations*; for he unfolds the reason for his prayers, thus :

“ Deliver me from the *workers of iniquity*,
 And save me from *bloody men*. —
 They run and prepare themselves *without my fault*. —
Let them know that God ruleth in Jacob —
Let them wander up and down for meat,
Though they be not satisfied, and will stay all night.”¹

Men who are now sending armed regiments to intercept the supplies of food to the Southern rebels, blame the king of Israel for requesting God to do, or submitting to God when he does, substantially the same thing which these objectors are doing themselves. They overlook the emphasis which consists in repetition, and by which the Psalmist makes it evident and prominent, that he has one amiable reason, and only one general reason, for all his imprecations. That reason is :

“ That the heathen may know themselves to be but men : ”²

¹ Psalm lix. 2, 4, 13, 15. “ They had to wander about when evening came, having lost the prey, and, hungry, wake through the night.” — Tholuck. In the same way, we are eager to deprive our enemies of the armor which they use against us, and yet are ready to censure David for entreating that his foes may be deprived of the weapons which they used against the righteous. We forget that, as he compares his adversaries to *lions*, rhetorical propriety requires him to represent them as using the deadly instruments of lions; and, in consistency with this oriental figure, he prays, “ O God, break their teeth in their mouth; the tusks of the *young lions* break in pieces, O Lord.” Should the Psalmist have prayed that the *young lions* be deprived of their *arrows* and *swords*? See Hengstenberg on Psalm lviii. 6. See also the third subdivision of the first head of this Discourse.

² Psalm ix. 20.

“ That they may know that this is *Thy* hand :
That *Thou*, Lord, hast done it.”¹

“ And my tongue shall speak of *Thy* righteousness.”²

“ We will show forth *Thy* praise to all generations.”³

“ Do I not hate them, O Lord, that hate *Thee* ?
And am I not grieved with those that rise up against *Thee* ?
I hate them with perfect hatred,
I count *them mine* enemies.”⁴

In the second place, the Imprecatory Psalms illustrate the principle that private individuals, *as such*, ought not to satisfy their retributive sentiment by inflicting evil on transgressors; but ought to invoke the administrator of law to do what the general good requires, in satisfying this sentiment. The retributive affection is not holy, neither is it sinful; but it is normal, and must be rightly controlled. Its office is to call on the giver of a revered statute to afflict the violator of it with some kind of penal evil. It pays regard to various departments of law; and is more or less exalted, as it is applied to a higher or lower sphere of existence. It operates in the family circle, and demands a domestic chastisement for a violation of domestic rule. The child whose sensibilities are in equipoise, calls on his parents to exercise the needful discipline over his offending brother. The retributive sentiment acts in the social circle, and requires a social evil for the violation of a social law. The companion stirs up his comrades to express the general opinion of their society against their offending associate. The retributive sentiment works in the State, and insists that a civil calamity come down upon the violator of a civil edict. The statesman whose mind is well balanced, demands that there be authority in the commonwealth, and that all infraction of wise laws be visited with pain. The retributive sentiment is yet more conspicuous in man as a moral agent under a

¹ Psalm cix. 17-27; lix. 13.

² Psalm xxxv. 24-28.

³ Psalm lxxix. 6-13.

⁴ Psalm cxxxix. 21, 22. See also Psalm v. 10; x. 12; xii. 9; xxviii. 4, 5. xl. 16; lviii. 11; lxiv. 7, 8, 9; lxxiv. 22, 23; cix. 17, 26, 27; cxlii. 8; cxliii. 12.

moral government; and it is not satisfied unless the moral ruler recompense every sin with the penalty which the sin deserves, and which the public weal demands. This is penalty in the *moral* sense of that term. This is the real, literal punishment. When the guardian is impelled to inflict pain on an erring child or pupil, when a magistrate is moved to let some evil fall upon the offending citizen, these calamities are not equal to the *moral* desert of the criminal; if they were so, *they would never end*. They are imposed because, and so far forth as, they are *naturally* fitted to the outward crime and to the purpose of preventing its recurrence. Domestic, scholastic, social, and civil inflictions of pain are *discipline* and *chastisement*; are proportioned to the *natural* turpitude and to certain *outward* consequences of the crime; but are not *moral* punishments, proportioned to the *moral* demerit of the sin. It is in a secondary and figurative sense that they are termed *penal*, and are said to be graduated according to *desert*. The retributive sentiment, as it energizes not only in regard to the government of God, but also to that of the family, the school, the association of friends, the commonwealth, and as it is inserted in the very make of the soul, illustrates the wisdom of him who has designed us for the domestic, social, political relations. It forms one part of the instinct of government. It proves that human jurisprudence is, in one sense, divine. Civil rule is not the result of a mere social compact. It is not an artificial growth. Its germ is imbedded in the depths of our constitution. A wise law of man is a law of Jehovah. The magistrate is "ordained of God." "There is no power but of God." He who despiseth the civil power (such is the general truth), despiseth not man *as man*, but *as the representative* of the King of kings. Here is the chief sin of disobedience in the family and school, of rebellion in the State. It is resistance to the ordinances of the great Ruler, as underlying the edicts of human rulers. "For," says the Psalmist,¹ "they have rebelled against Thee." Hence when we take a religious view of the present war, the very name *rebel* is

¹ Psalm v. 10.

freighted with associations of guilt. The sound of the word *traitor* is like the sound of the name Judas Iscariot. It wakens, at once, the retributive sentiment.

But this sentiment, like the gentler affections of the soul, is easily perverted. Private individuals usurp the office which belongs to the domestic, social, public guardian. A child chastises his playmates, instead of referring their offence to the master of the household. The inhabitants of a town become indignant against one of their number; their retributive impulse quickens itself to anticipate the interposition of the magistrate, who "beareth not the sword in vain." They assemble in a mass. Such men were once denominated *mobile vulgus*; in an English abbreviation they are called a *mob*. They flatter themselves that they are moved by a high emotion of justice in bringing down the walls of his house upon the head of the offender. They *pride* themselves on having a moral nature too sensitive to endure an atrocious wrong. Now we do not blame them for being indignant against crime; but they ought to control their indignation in agreement with the general principles which were serenely propounded by a town clerk of ancient times: "Wherefore if Demetrius and the craftsmen which are with him, have a matter against any man, *the law is open and there are deputies*; let them implead one another. But if ye inquire anything concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a *lawful assembly*. For we are in danger to be called in question for this day's uproar, there being no cause whereby we may give an account of *this* concourse."

As men are tempted to satisfy their own retributive sentiment, when they should call on a human magistrate to satisfy it for them, so they are inclined to take from the Divine Ruler his prerogative of administering moral penalties. The father should not attempt to meet all the demands of justice, by inflicting on the child all the penalty which is merited by the child's impenitent will. The teacher has no right to recompense his pupils for their sinful preference, and to pain them on account of and in proportion to their spiritual ill-desert.

A magistrate is not a judge over the inward demerit of his fellow men. God is our moral ruler, and all we are brethren.

We do not regard the apostle (in Rom. xii. 19, 20) as directly and precisely *stating*, but we do regard him as indirectly and darkly *implying*, all of the following rules :

“ Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather defer your wrath ;” let your sentiment of *moral* retribution wait on the will of Him who alone is entitled to fill up its demands ; for it is written in Deuteronomy xxxii. 35 : “ To me belongeth vengeance and recompense.” I will weigh out exact justice, and come up to the full requisition for it. Therefore, as it is written in the Proverbs, xxv. 21, 22 : “ If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat ; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink ; for thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head,¹ and the Lord shall reward thee. Thou shalt not afflict him in order to pay him back precisely what his sin deserves, and with the aim to satisfy thy desire that full justice be meted out to him. Still thou mayest *chastise* him ; for love bringeth upon him the melting coals ; for whom the father loveth he chasteneth, and disciplines his chosen ones. But on his incorrigible enemies he *taketh vengeance*. This moral retribution is the office of a king. This full repayment is the prerogative of one who judges the heart. This vindication of the spiritual law is the peculiarity of the Mind who gave the law, and measured its breadth and depth.’²

Now the Imprecatory Psalms lay an emphasis on the truth, that private individuals are not to usurp the place of a magistrate, and take the law into their own hands. These are not wild, disorganizing, Jacobinical songs ; not incendiary appeals to a rabble ; but they are governmental Psalms ; staid, regular, reverential invocations upon the

¹ Baur, of Tübingen, complains that in this phrase the apostle was misled by his passions. But he was making a quotation, and he appends to the quotation the words : “ Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.” To heap coals of fire upon the head of an enemy, was to load him with such kindness as would melt him into shame and penitence. The phrase may have been a common proverb.

² Baur and his school are confident that the Psalmists were vindictive, because the God whom they worshipped was represented by them as revengeful, and men will be conformed to their Divinity. But the apostle declares that God will be vindictive, will exercise vengeance, and therefore he exhorts men *not* to exercise it. The religion of the Bible is *clement*, partly because the God of the Bible is *just*. The *severity* of the sovereign renders it safe for the subjects to be *merciful*.

monarch to wield his own sceptre.¹ It was a favorite phrase of the late Mr. Webster, 'that the *people* of the United States call on their *President* to maintain the honor of the laws.'² In the governmental Psalms, the *people* of the theocracy call on their *Presiding Spirit* to defend his own government. They do not invent ordinances for him, but they refer to *his* ordinances, and plead: "*Thou hast ordained judgment.*"³ If they invoked a god like Mars or Jupiter to fight for them, they would be in danger of cherishing an infuriated spirit. But this is their defence: they trust in the fairness and the charitableness of the divine administration, and remember him who "when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered he threatened not, *but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.*"³ It is safe to invoke the aid of the benignant ruler in honoring those enactments of which David said: "Oh, how love I thy law!" It is prudent to call for the raising of the arm of him who is "very pitiful and of tender mercy," and will never intrench upon the claims of our frail nature. The poetry of David, when he sat on his throne, breathes the same loyalty which adorned his conversation, when he tended his father's sheep. "The

¹ When these Psalms refer to a punishment inflicted, not by *Jehovah* directly, but by *David*, they may refer to it as inflicted by him in the capacity of a *monarch*. The English translation of Psalm xli. 10 is: "But thou, O Lord, be merciful to me, and raise me up, that I may requite them" [my enemies]; Calvin translates the last clause: "*and I will recompense them*"; Hengstenberg, "*so will I requite them.*" The requital is to be a *result* of his deliverance, but is not the final cause of it. Calvin defends the expression, partly on the ground that "David was not one of the common people, but a *king appointed by God, and invested with authority.*" Com. on Psalm xli. 10. It is noticeable that certain words of this Psalm, which is often represented as one of the most objectionable of the Imprecatory Songs, are associated in John xiii. 18 with the history of Christ. De Wette, Maurer, and Hupfeld, do not adopt the mild exposition of Calvin, but needlessly translate the וְאֵינִי אֲנִי מְשַׁלְּם of Psalm xli. 10, "auf dass ich ihnen vergelte," "Ut rependam iis," etc.

² Psalm vii. 6. See Hupfeld's Com. B. I., s. 122. In B. III. s. 254, Hupfeld complains that the Psalmist does not *trustfully* refer all chastisements to the divine justice, without entreating that they may be inflicted upon his enemies. On a similar principle we may ask, why we should not *trustfully* refer all favors to the divine goodness, without entreating that they may be bestowed upon our friends. Why should men *pray* at all? Why not simply *trust*?

³ 1 Pet. xi. 23.

Lord judge between me and thee," he said to his persecuting king, "and the Lord avenge me of thee; *but mine hand shall not be upon thee.*"¹ His songs, when he was prosperous, have the same reverential tone which characterized his words, when he was afflicted. "Let me fall into *the hand of the Lord,*" he said in the moment of his fear, "for very great are his mercies; but let me not fall into *the hand of man.*"² So all the Psalmists appear to be mindful that God is love, that his government is love, and that vengeance is healthful in the bosom of love; and therefore it is seemly to call for the sword of him who never unsheathes it except for some purpose of love. It is a beautiful spirit which the Psalmists manifest, when they invoke the justice of God to befriend the poor, and the faint, and the fatherless, and him that hath no helper:

"Thou didst cause judgment to be heard from heaven;
The earth feared, and was still,
When God arose to judgment,
To save all the meek of the earth."³

In the third place, the Imprecatory Psalms illustrate the duty of acquiescing in the evils inflicted upon a fellow being, when these are the *minor* evils, preventing the occurrence of the *larger*. We may acquiesce in the pain attending the removal of a cataract from the eye; for this pain is a smaller calamity than the blindness which would ensue without it. We may acquiesce in an amputation of the arm; for the loss of a limb is a smaller evil than the loss of life, which would otherwise result. "Ye know nothing at all," said the high-priest to his counsellors, "nor consider that it is expedient that *one* man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not."

In the memoir of Rev. Dr. Channing, the celebrated Unitarian divine of Boston, a man remarkable for the gentleness of his temper, we find him uttering the following words:⁴

¹ 1 Sam. xxiv. 12.

² 1 Chron. xxi. 13.

³ Psalm lxxvi. 8, 9.

⁴ See the Memoir of Channing, Vol. II. 348. See Memoir of Dr. Samuel Hopkins, Section XLIV. J.

“There are some in whose depression I acquiesce. When I read Byron, for example, I have a satisfaction mixed with compassion in hearing from him the tones of gloomy, angry despondence. I mean that my sense of justice is satisfied. I see him receiving a fit recompense of his guilt. He refused to see and walk in the ‘light of life,’ and deserved to walk in darkness. He renounced his allegiance to God and to the everlasting law of duty, and abandoned himself without restraint to self-will and pride; and how fit and necessary was it that he should endure the miseries of a lonely, desolate soul!” If this mild writer can acquiesce in the direst affliction of a fellow man, simply because the affliction is deserved, how much easier is it to acquiesce in the affliction when it is viewed, not merely as merited, but also as essential to the welfare of the community!

Some commentators, desiring to make the Imprecatory Psalms appear as mild as possible, have stopped with the theory that these Psalms are mere prophecies of evil. But we cannot rest satisfied with this explanation. We are *allowed*, however, although we are not *obliged*, to stop with the theory that some of the Psalms, although not all of them, are expressions of acquiescence in the will of God when he chooses to afflict the disturbers of the public peace. We can defend these Psalms, if we adopt a more difficult explanation; therefore we are not compelled to adopt this. But we are authorized to defend some of them not as simple prophecies, indeed, but as prophecies involving a hearty *submission* to the Judge who sends the predicted woes. This element of submission enters into the sentiment of the Psalmist, even when it is not the whole of that sentiment; and it may sometimes exhaust the meaning of one text when it does not exhaust the meaning of the context. The Imperative and the Future Indicative of the Hebrew tongue, the modes and tenses of all languages which can have an optative force, can also denote a *willingness* rather than a *wish*, an *acquiescence* rather than a *request*. “*Let* the heavens be glad,” “*Let* all those that put their trust in thee rejoice,” “*Let* them ever shout for joy;”—

these words breathe a desire for the event. On the other hand: "*Let him alone, and let him curse,*" "*Let them curse, but bless thou,*" "*It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good;*"—these words breathe a simple acquiescence in the event. They are compatible with an earnest longing that the calamity be, if it can be, averted. If our faith be too weak to offer the words "*Let thy will be done,*" as words of entreaty, we are still not frail enough to recoil from them as words of submission.¹ What and who are we, meditating on a chastisement as purposed by our Sovereign, and yet holding back our consent that he execute his own plan? What and who are we, hesitating to acquiesce, not so much in the calamity, as in the ordinance of our Father who deems the calamity useful to the universe?

The citizens of the United States have been fond of saying, that the king of our Israel brought our fathers as a vine out of Egypt, that he cast out the heathen, and caused his chosen plant to take deep root, so that the hills were covered with the shadow of it. If, now, the knife of the marauder be raised against this goodly vine, and be allowed to sever the branches of it, then will not only our own land of promise be desolate, but all other lands will be afflicted; there will be arrayed against each other, not merely two confederacies, but three, or four, or seven; and there will be unremitting war among them; and the cause of freedom will be down-trodden, not on this continent alone, but throughout the world; and the church of Christ will suffer, for it is to our united republic that men look for an enterprising, an aggressive, a practical, a hard working religion. Therefore, as merciful citizens, desirous of liberalizing the despotisms of the Old World, and of Christianizing the heathen tribes, we call on our rulers to arrest this illegal and unreasonable rebellion. If it cannot be stayed without the loss of treasures and blood, *let* the loss come. If it cannot be stayed without inflicting the extreme punishment of

¹ See Matt. xxvi. 42; Luke xxii. 42; Acts xxi. 14; also many passages like Psalm vii. 6 (see p. 208 below); Matt. xxvii. 25.

the law on some ringleader in the revolt, we grieve for the necessity, but the chastisement will "rescue us from robbery in the time of peace, and from piracy in the time of war," and *let it come*. But if he be given up to this fearful punishment, he must endure not only pain but lasting ignominy. Our tears flow for the ignominy, but it will preserve us hereafter from wholesale theft, from perjury, from barbarism; and *let it come*. But if he be doomed to the legal punishment of his crime, his children will be fatherless and his wife a widow. It is a terrible woe. But unless it come, not a few only, but thousands of children will be fatherless; not one only, but hundreds of wives will be widows. *The government must be upheld*; therefore *let* his household be left desolate. But if he expiate his crime on the gallows, his children will become vagabonds and beg. We are saddened at their misery. We forewarned him of it, we entreated him to spare his unoffending offspring. Still, unless treason be now rebuked with all the emphasis which the law allows, every hill and dale will ere long echo and reëcho with the cry of mendicant children. Then let his little ones *be* vagabonds and beg, rather than that all the families of the land be scattered, mothers fleeing with their babes from the *guerilla* hordes which bring famine in their train.

Mistaken men have decided, that if the hundred and ninth Psalm contains a *request* for the chastisement of the malefactor's wife, children, parents, the Psalm is not inspired. Now if we *must* believe that the Psalm is not inspired, provided that it expresses a request for such calamities, *then* it is logical to believe that the Psalm does not express a request for them, but rather an acquiescence in them. The evidence for the inspiration of the Psalm is clearer than the evidence that its apparent meaning is its real one; and therefore *if* it be needful to adopt the alternative that the Psalm is not of divine origin, or else that it does not utter a wish for the woes of the traitor's household, we have a logical right to interpret the Psalm as breathing a spirit not of positive desire for these woes, but of cordial submission to them. Thus:

‘It is the divine plan to afflict the small household of the traitor, and thereby to save the large multitudes who had otherwise been undone by the treason. Therefore, while rivers of waters run down mine eyes, I sing :

“*Let his children be fatherless,
And his wife a widow.
Let his children be continually vagabonds and beg ;
Let them seek their bread also out of their desolate places.*”

‘As he has tempted men to extortion, he may now fitly receive back the influence of his crime ; and accordingly

“*Let the extortioner catch all that he hath,
And let the strangers spoil his labor.*”¹

‘He has stirred up his comrades to inhuman and relentless deeds, and so I rest satisfied with thine arrangement :

“*Let there be none to extend mercy unto him :
Neither let there be any to favor his fatherless children.*”
“*Let his posterity be cut off,
And in the generation following let their name be blotted out.*”

‘It is a law of thy kingdom, that the influence of a crime descends to the son and daughter of the criminal, ascends to his father and mother, and moves not only downward and upward, but also to every side. I am overwhelmed by the appeal which this law makes to all ungodly children, for they bring evil on their parents ; and to all ungodly parents, for they bring evil on their children. The parents of the traitor deserve to be afflicted *for* his crime and *in* his punishment. His father encouraged him in barbarous enterprises, and this is a symbol of the misdeeds for which he deserves to have the iniquity of his children left unpardoned. His mother nourished within him a malignant will, and this is a type of the sins for which the evil-minded woman deserves to have the iniquity of her offspring remain unforgiven. And now, it must be so, — my lips tremble with fear while I resign myself to thy plan : Let the guilty parents receive that expression of thy justice which consists in judicially afflicting their traitorous child :

“*Let the iniquity of his fathers be remembered with the Lord,
And let not the sin of his mother be blotted out ;
Let them be before the Lord continually,
That he may cut off the memory of them from the earth ;
Because that he remembered not to show mercy,
But persecuted the poor and needy man,
That he might even slay the broken in heart.*”

We shudder as we read these words. We have no reason to deny that David shuddered when he was inspired to

utter them. For when he uttered them he was representing the Prince of Peace. He was acting as a symbol of the Meek One, whose office it is to chastise an unforgiving spirit, and to defend the lowly against their oppressors. Even Hengstenberg admits¹ that the author of this Psalm was not only giving us an ideal representation of every "suffering righteous man," but he "had before his eyes, at the same time, the family of David, and especially Him in whom that family was destined to reach its summit." From the hint in Acts i. 20 we have the right to imagine, that the spirit of this Psalm was breathed by the 'gentle Redeemer as he foresaw that Judas would cherish an un pitying temper, and would endure such pains as flow from a selfish, unsympathizing, malignant spirit. For, the spirit of this Psalm is that of compassion toward the suffering poor, as well as of submission to God who rebukes the oppressive traitor :

"For my love they are my adversaries,
But I give myself unto prayer.
And they have rewarded me evil for good,
And hatred for my love."

‘ Therefore,

"Set thou a wicked man over him,
And let the accuser stand at his right hand."’²

‘ With the tenderness of my pity toward the good man who is the *victim* of abuse, I blend an approval of thine ordinance against the cruel man who is the *cause* of that abuse, and I am in sympathy with thy decision that all his crimes be charged upon him :

"When he shall be judged let him be condemned,
And let his prayer become sin."’³

“ For it *is* sin. Let it be *treated* as sin. I consent unto the law that it is

¹ Commentary on Psalm cix.

² This contiguity of the stern to the mild sentiments in Psalm cix. 4 - 6, indicates that the sternness is not vindictive.

³ Psalm cix. 7. This verse has a striking resemblance to Psalm lxi. 27 : "Add iniquity unto their iniquity, and let them not come into thy righteousness"; i. e. Give to their iniquity its appropriate punishment, and let them not enjoy thy pardoning mercy. If any sentiment in the Imprecatory Psalms be hostile to the evangelical spirit, it is this. But the two Psalms, lxi and cix., which breathe this sentiment most obviously, are associated most decidedly with Christ in the New Testament. See the second subdivision of the first head of this Discourse.

good, when it judges the crime *as it is*. How often would I have saved the traitor from offering the prayer which is an abomination unto the Lord; but he would not be saved. How long did I call and wait, but *he would have it just as it now is*. How can I give him up? But even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight. *Let it not be as I will, when I think of his misery; but let it be as thou wilt, when thou comprehendest all things.*”

In the fourth place, the Imprecatory Psalms illustrate the principle, that while we may grieve over an event, viewed in one aspect, that of involving certain calamities, we may rejoice in the same event, viewed in a different aspect, that of involving transcendent blessings. Many a phenomenon in life may be looked at as two-fold; and may be regarded as on the whole a rich favor, but in some of its parts a dire evil. Its complex nature elicits joy and sorrow. We are glad, to have the magnificent city rise upon the ruins of a forest; but we are grieved, that the gorgeous trees can no longer adorn the once undulating ground. We are cheered by the rising of the sun; still we miss the stars, which retire when the morning shines. We hail, with delight, the prosperity of the arts; they bring joys far outweighing their sorrows; yet our railroads, our manufactories, our cathedrals, our capitols are built at the expense of wounds and bruises of beasts and men; at the sacrifice of family comfort and of valuable life. One scale of the balance will not rise, unless the other sink. Not that we delight in the fall of the one scale; but we are gratified by the ascent of the other. When we read the history of a great conflict, our sympathy is aroused for the good and true. As the virtuous combatants prevail, we are exhilarated;—but their success is attended with the anguish of their opposers, still our hearts leap in hilarity at their triumph;—but their gain is purchased by the sighs and dying shrieks of their enemies,—we cannot allay the pain,—we would if we could; but the calamity is less hurtful than the victory is useful, therefore are we enlivened at the ascendancy of the right. We mourn for the Egyptian taskmaster. He was not prepared to meet his Judge. His malignant barbarism made his death only the more grievous. But if he had lived, he

would have plunged the whole civilized race into deep waters. Jerusalem would have remained unbuilt, and the new Jerusalem would have lost myriads of its citizens; therefore we shout: "The *Lord* hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he cast into the sea." The ingenuous child, the delicate woman, the mild philanthropist peruse the narrative of Christian armies fighting against the pagan; of Protestant armies contending with the papal; of civilized armies battling against the savage; and the secret tide of sympathy flows, without ebbing, in behalf of Constantine, and Gustavus Adolphus, and William Prince of Orange, and our Puritan soldiers exposed to the tomahawk and scalping knife of the Indian. What child has read the story of the red men burning the villages, murdering the wives and babes of his pilgrim forefathers, and has not felt a thrill of joy that his ancestors at last overcame the foe who would have devoured them? But the success of the upright is the defeat of the wicked. The honor crowning the noble is attended with the infamy encircling the mean. The very malice of those who are vanquished, adds the sting to their death. We do not revel in their pangs. We are in tears. "The men would have it so." Still, we do exult that the disaster of barbarous tribes is attended with the prosperity of the civilized; that the scale of the virtuous has gone up, while the scale of the vicious has gone down, in one movement of the balance rod; that the sunbeams of religion shine, even if they who love darkness are chagrined by the light. Their pain is not so great an evil, as the triumph of virtue is a good. The ruin of a few malignant men is not so grievous a calamity, as the virtue and the happiness of the world are an affluent blessing.

On a day when the hearts of men failed them through fear; when our national capital was left unguarded; when the army of the rebels was reported and believed to be within a march of thirty hours from Washington; when the venerable chieftain who has just retired from the command of our forces, was hemmed in by intriguing foes; when the

bridges were burned, the railways demolished, the wires of the telegraph cut, so that the friends of our Union could afford no relief, nor even transmit a message to their civil *fathers*; when the city of Baltimore had insulted and stoned and butchered our soldiers, our neighbors, our friends; and in her streets the life of our President elect had just been deemed insecure, the query reverberated through New England: "What can be done?" The spontaneous answer was: "Through Baltimore." The ark of God must be rescued. The archives of the nation must be preserved. The temple of virtue must be kept inviolate. The jewels of our fathers must not be vilely cast away.' "Through Baltimore," was the thrilling watchword of generous men and pitying women and weeping children. And as I stood in a crowd, before a public edifice, in one of our commercial capitals, suddenly I saw a placard hung out on the wall, "Baltimore is to be shelled this day."—"We are glad of it," was the instant shout of sober men, considerate men, humane men. They knew the horrors of the bombardment. Some of them had property which would be destroyed by it. But *the salvation of the people*,—that is the controlling idea. *The triumph of freedom throughout the world*,—that is the dominant thought. In the cannonading of that town, the hearts of many innocent women will be wrung with anguish; many defenceless babes will be torn away from all that might solace their coming years. But *the hope of the world is in the prosperity of this land*. An ambitious and envious city arrays itself against the welfare of mankind. As a selfish town, interfering with the general welfare, it ought to fall, must fall, shall fall.—"We are glad of it," was the irrepressible shout. It came up from the depths of civilized humanity. It came from men, not as individuals, but as the representatives of the race. It came from the constitution of the human soul. God has made men so that they shall feel indignant at high crime, and express their indignation in resolute words and deeds. 'We are glad,' not at the tears and heart-aches of misguided citizens, but "glad" at the triumph of principle, the victory of right,

the rolling onward of the chariot of law through or over every impediment.'

The advocates of a just retribution were afterwards most happily disappointed. There was great joy when they heard that the catastrophe need not come, that the nation could be saved and the city also. Good men will be glad when the arm uplifted for the blow, can accomplish its aim without striking the threatened malefactor. They are never in glee because a blow is struck, but only because after it is struck the general well-being, which otherwise must have been impaired, is now augmented.

It was in anticipation of a similar calamity that the inspired patriot uttered words¹ which have been represented as unworthy of a civilized age, but which may be defended more easily than the words of the crowd in relation to Baltimore. He had seen hung out, on the placard of prophecy, the announcement that Babylon was to be destroyed. The process of destroying it had been commenced when he wrote; and he had read the words foretelling that the ruin would go on to its consummation.² "For I will rise up against them, saith the Lord of hosts, and cut off from Babylon the name, and remnant, and son, and nephew; and I will sweep it with the besom of destruction, saith the Lord of hosts." "Their children also shall be dashed to pieces before their eyes, their houses shall be spoiled, and their wives ravished. Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them. Their bows also shall dash the young men to pieces, and they shall have no pity on the fruit of the womb; their eye shall not spare children."³ While contemplating this massacre of the infants, the Psalmist does not *express* any joy of his own in such a cruelty. He announces the mere fact, that the *Medes and the Persians* will be jubilant when they make an utter end of their annoying and corrupting foe. *The Medes and the Persians* will congratulate each other, as all victorious warriors make themselves happy, when they have so far succeeded in their con-

¹ Psalm cxxxvii. 7-9.

² See Hengstenberg on this Psalm.

³ Isa. xiv. 22, 23; xiii. 16-18, also 19-22.

flict that nothing more can be feared from their opposer. *The Medes and the Persians* will be congratulated by their countrymen at home, as all conquering heroes are, when they have eradicated a fruitful mischief, so that not one germ of it can take life and grow up to afflict the world any more. It is, then, in the foresight of the felicitating words of the *Medes and Persians* that the poet sings :

“ O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed,”

‘ Who hast been already destroyed in part; and the decree has gone forth for thine utter ruin ;

“*Happy* shall he be that rewardeth thee
As thou hast served us ;”

‘ For it has been, and is to be, the order of the divine administration under the old covenant and the new, that ‘ with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again ;

“*Happy* shall he be
That taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones.”

‘ I mourn that thou hast inflicted the same cruelties upon Jerusalem. I mourn that it is the common mode of warfare to murder the infants with their mothers and fathers.¹ I am not happy because the Medes and the Persians will be, as you have been, unpitying. But I look upon their deed as a *sign* that our world is at length to have rest. I look upon their deed, not as a moral act, but as a *symbol* that peace and virtue will prevail when the disorganizing empire of Babylon is laid low. I look *through* the sign, I look *beyond* the symbol, I look *at* the health of the body when the gangrened limb is lopped off by an unsympathizing surgeon. I am not happy in the motive of the Medes and Persians as they fulfil the purpose of God; but I am happy in the motive of God, in the reasonableness and the usefulness of his purpose; for it shall be a benefaction to our wronged humanity when the decree is fulfilled that “Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldee’s excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation.”² As it is right for God to form this decree, so it is right for me to rejoice in it; and all my joy I express, not as the Medes and Persians express theirs, but in breathing forth my *desire* that God would execute his own purpose upon Edom³ as upon Babylon, and that he would show forth the fitness⁴ of his providences in

¹ See Hengstenberg, Tholuck, and Hupfeld, on Psalm cxxxvii. 7-9.

² Isa. xiii. 19, 20.

³ Jer. xlix. 7-22; Ezek. xxv. 12-14; Oba. 8-16.

⁴ The Psalmists make their *sense of fitness* so prominent that it is often mistaken for a *spirit of retaliation*: Psalm vii. 16, 16; xxxv. 8, etc.

meeting one sin with the very chastisement most appropriate to it.⁴ Therefore I pray :

“Remember, O Lord, the children of Edom,
In the day of Jerusalem :
Who said, Raze it,
Raze it, even to the foundation thereof.”¹

Our hearts palpitate with fear as we breathe the words of the hundred and thirty-seventh Psalm. Sitting calmly in our rooms, we should never have inserted such words among the songs of Zion. But they are true to the first principles of the soul, when it is stirred to its lowest depths. They find an echo in the very constitution of trembling orphans, and timid widows, and oppressed men, and defrauded sovereigns, when the hidden fountains of their anxiety are stirred, and when they can have no relief, and the commonwealth can have no peace, unless their malignant enemy be destroyed. As I mingled with the crowd whose emotions of justice prompted them to desire the bombardment of a town rather than submit to the ruin of a nation, I detected in that throng a rude resemblance to another scene sketched by a painter, whose delicate and gentle spirit assures us that his words are humane :

“And a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus, with violence, shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all;” “and no craftsman, of whatsoever craft he be, shall be found any more in thee,” “for thy merchants were the great men of the earth,” “and in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upou the earth.” “*Rejoice over her thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her.*”²

Now he who uttered these words was “that disciple whom Jesus loved.” But Jesus loved him because that disciple chose virtue rather than peace; the holiness of the

¹ In this passage of the Psalmist he, doubtless, *intimates*, although he does not *avow*, his joy in the fulfilment of God’s decree. See Calvin, on Psalm cxxxvii. 8.

² Rev. xviii. 21, 22, 23, 24, 20. Comp. Psalm lii. 6; liv. 7; lviii. 11.

many rather than the agreeable sensations of the few. For he who "did not strive nor cry, neither was his voice heard in the streets," did yet, while on earth, reëcho the principle of the Imprecatory Psalms, and he will reiterate the same "when he shall come in his *glory*, and all the holy angels with him," and "shall sit upon the throne of his *glory*," and say "unto them on the left hand: Depart from me, ye *cursed*."¹

In the fifth place, the Imprecatory Psalms illustrate the principle, that we may pray for a complex event when the blessings involved in it are vividly seen to be far greater than the evils incidental to it; when the evils are vividly seen to be such as cannot be averted, even if we do entreat God to avert them; and when the blessings are vividly seen to be such as may be gained, in fuller measure, if we pray for them, than if we refuse to pray. We do not offer our supplication for the *evils* unavoidably incident to the blessings; but we entreat for the *blessings* only. Nor do we pray for the good forming one part of a complex event, unless we have a clear view of it as overbalancing the calamities which form the other part of it. Nor do we pray for the event as including both the preponderant blessing and the lesser evil, unless we see that we cannot prevent the evil, even if we do bestir ourselves to prevent it.

We have said already, that it is not so difficult to justify an expression of acquiescence in a calamity, as it is to justify an expression of desire for an event including the calamity. We should often prefer to have our own language interpreted in the easier, rather than in the harder way; as breathing a spirit of submission to the evil, rather than as breathing a wish for an occurrence which comprehends the evil. Accordingly, there is a "golden rule" of interpretation, which allows us to explain some words of the Psalmists, as we would wish to have some of our own words explained. But what is here *allowed* is not *required*; and what is permitted *sometimes* is not permitted *always*.

¹ Matt. xxv. 31-41; xxi. 41-44; Luke xxiii. 29, 30.

In interpreting *all* of the imprecations we *may*, in interpreting *some* of them we *must*, adopt the harder method. The element of submission may be recognized as pervading all the Imprecatory Psalms. Some gentler minds may choose to regard it as the sole element which forms the character of some passages in these Psalms. If we gratify the wish of these mild critics to resolve certain passages into expressions of mere acquiescence, we cannot make this concession with regard to other passages.

Nor need we, if we could. For we have already seen, that we may rejoice over a *past* event which comprehends more of a blessing than of a calamity; on the same ground we may wish, and express our wish, for a *coming* event, which, though it contains a sad ingredient, is yet on the whole far more useful than hurtful. So the principle of acquiescence, in one aspect of a dispensation, assumes the form of desire in another aspect of the complex dispensation. We submit to an occurrence, when we place in the foreground its grievous nature, even though it does contain an overbalancing good. We desire that occurrence, when we place in the foreground its overbalancing good, even though it does involve a lighter harm. When we have reason to believe that our all-wise Father regards the event as essential to the common welfare, and when the usefulness of the event depends in any way or degree on our coinciding and coöperating with him, is it wrong that we pray for the event, viewed as unfolding a good which far outweighs the evil? Was it unmerciful, for inspired men to have a preference in unison with that of him who gave the inspiration? Do not his severest inflictions emanate from his mercy to the entire universe? Was it unfeeling, then, for the writers *who knew his wise plans*, to cherish a desire for what he desired? If he did not choose the event as hurtful, neither did they. If he did not choose the evil in and for itself, which was connected with the good, neither did they. If he chose the good, notwithstanding its painful incidents, in despite of them, so did they. In whatever sense he deemed it wise to inflict a woe on men, in that

sense we may suppose that the Psalmists requested him to act according to his own wisdom. They knew that the providences which involved the sorest harm, were designed by their author to nourish a kindly temper among men, and to rebuke an ungenerous, unforgiving spirit. Was it selfish for them in writing their songs to express their choice that He who inspired these songs should fulfil the designs of his own compassion?

Dr. William E. Channing once remarked, that the spirit of the Imprecatory Songs may be indicated by the tones of voice in which they are uttered. If rehearsed with harsh accents, they express a malignity which the inspired men did not feel. If recited in sympathetic intonations, they may signify a desire for that dispensation of Providence which must include some causes of grief, but will certainly preclude more causes of deeper grief. Our pitying accents may intimate that the sweet singer of Israel was praying for the less of two grievances, one of which must needs come; and not for the grievance, as such, but for an advantage which is tied to some necessary drawback; for a rainbow which spans a dark cloud; for a sunset which precedes a sombre twilight; for a rest which presupposes hard work; a victory which implies a war; a resurrection which follows a death. He does not check his song in order to analyze his words, and distinguish between the evil "in itself considered, and the good all things considered;" but our elocution must breathe out this analysis for him when, in the choked utterance of grief, he asks for justice to malefactors:

“Let them be as chaff before the wind:—
 Let their way be dark and slippery:—
 Let destruction come upon them at unawares,
 And let the net which they have hid catch them:
 Into that very destruction let them fall.”

‘I note these melancholy scenes in my prayer; but these are not the *end* for which I pray. My desires fly above *them*, and alight on the glory of the Most High as it blooms out in his giving shelter to the weary. I do name these mournful appendages to the blessing which I crave; but my affections leap above *them*, and rest on the comfort of every man who can

say: "*For I am thy servant,*"¹ "*Because I follow that which good is.*"² The aim of my entreaty is the honor of Him who fits his dispensations to the needs of the race; who makes his rewards *exact, apt, appropriate, pertinent*; and thus cheers the virtuous man in his ways of pleasantness. Therefore I go on with my song:

"But my soul shall be joyful in the Lord:—
All my bones shall say,
Lord, who is like unto thee,
Which deliverest the afflicted from him that is too strong for him."³

In the sixth place, the Imprecatory Psalms illustrate the principle, that in particular emergencies we may give an unqualified statement of one truth, provided that in other emergencies we give an unqualified statement of the antithetic truth. One thing lies over against another. There is a north, and also a south; a zenith, and also a nadir; the positive and the negative pole. Things go in pairs. All things cannot be told in the same moment. We may look intensely upon one object at one time, and may describe it vividly; but at another time we must look at a different object with equal singleness and enthusiasm. The calm philosopher succeeds in a comprehensive survey of the two objects, and in an analysis of the principle that underlies them both. The earnest orator prevails by a lively description of one object at a time. It cannot be expected that an artist, delighting in vivid pictures, will introduce upon his bright canvas any scene which may spoil its unity. He will dash the brilliant coloring upon one piece, and will cast the sombre hues upon a different piece, and will not stop to explain or modify either, so as to weaken the impression of both. The summer and the winter are parts of one year, and depend on one law of gravitation; but the summer is not intercalated into the winter; the frost is by itself; the noontide heat is alone.

There were wise reasons why He who knew what was in men, gave them, first, a law which was their schoolmaster to

¹ Psalm cxliii. 12; cxvi. 16; cxix. 125.

² Psalm xxxviii. 20.

³ Psalm xxxv. 5-10. For other Psalms, indicating that the writers denounce sin *because they pity the poor*, see Psalm x. 9-18; lxxix. 6-9; cix. 16, etc.

bring them to Christ. In that law he laid the foundation of the gospel. But he did not lay there the top stone of it. He left his chosen people to adore his justice toward the heathen, and to bring this attribute into the foreground when they prayed. His justice is right. His grace is right. The justice is presupposed in the grace. But the one-sided critic is impatient of the Imprecatory Psalms, because they are shiing delineations of the justice that punishes the heathen, and do not sketch, with equal brilliancy, the grace that offers an atonement to Gentiles as well as Jews. They are like the cartoons of Raphael, intimating, in a slender sketch, one part of a vast scheme, all the sections of which we are too puny to take in at one glance, and a finished picture of which no man can look upon and live.

After the spring time came the harvest. The nature, spirit, and extent of the atonement are now more luminously revealed. But there are critics on the gospel, who complain that it favors the passive, gentle graces, and fails to stimulate the active, bold virtues. It lowers the aspiring mind into that humility which is near the ground; tones down a brave soul into that meekness which is akin to pusillanimity; lulls a resolute spirit into that obsequiousness which will reward the theft of a coat with the gift of a cloak also; but it forms no manly character, and does not nerve the spirit for hazardous or noble exploits. This is the one-sided criticism of men who listen to the robust phrases of the Imprecatory Psalms, and are *shocked*. What would satisfy them? If we pipe unto them, they will not dance; if we mourn unto them, they will not lament. If the divine word be mild, it is too mild; if it be stern, it is too stern.

Some professed friends of the Bible have confined their view to its unqualified commendations of the gentle virtues and have been thus allured into an incomplete form of ethics. They forbid all war, because we are told to volunteer our escort of two miles for a usurper who demanded only one mile. They disapprove of capital punishment, because we should turn the other cheek to him who has already smitten us on one cheek. They disallow family punishment, and corporeal

punishment, and all punishment.¹ *But where are the Imprecatory Psalms?* These old songs were written with the design of suggesting certain conservative truths to us. Their sentiment was arrayed in burning words, in order to flash upon our eyes a light which we must look at, whether we will or not. They were uttered with a rousing emphasis which was intended to arrest our progress toward a one-sided virtue, and to *make* us consider, willing or unwilling, that the element of justice is involved in a complete love. If we disjoin the tenderer mandates, which are unqualified, from the sterner mandates, which are also unqualified, and if we persevere in keeping them dissevered, and in clinging to the gentle while we recoil from the severe, we throw away one half of the truth; we lose our equilibrium; we extend a reasonable clemency into an unscriptural effeminacy; what was intended to foster a *principle* of benevolence, we pervert into an excuse for an *easy good nature*. This womanish kindness may in still times be a lovely instinct, but in times of peril it may ruin the commonwealth. It has no moral ground. It is an impulse rather than a principle. Therefore let us not flatter ourselves that we have outgrown the main use of the Imprecatory Psalms. They are needed when the souls of men are tried.² They

¹ The very passages of the New Testament, Matt. v. 38, sq.; vii. 1, sq.; Luke xxiii. 34; Acts iii. 17; vii. 60; Rom. xii. 14, 19, sq.; 1 Pet. ii. 23; iii. 9, which Hupfeld (in his Com. ii. Ps. B. III. s. 254) cites as antagonistic to the Imprecatory Psalms, are frequently, and with equal reason, cited as antagonistic to all kinds of punishment.

² While delivering a patriotic address in Boston, on the 16th of October, 1861, Hon. Edward Everett gave a startling narrative of the miseries which have been inflicted on our land by eight or ten leaders of the Southern rebellion. When he had quickened his auditors into a befitting sympathy for the injured people, he gave vent to the words:

“Is there not some hidden curse,
Some chosen thunder in the stores of heaven,
Red with uncommon wrath, to blast the man
That seeks his greatness in his country’s ruin?”

We are informed that at the recital of these verses, the thrill of the assembly was well nigh unprecedented; the “running fire of applause,” which had been elicited by previous words of the orator, now “burst into a volcano of enthusiasm.” Such verses *demand* that he who rehearses them, should feel the tenderest pity for those who are suffering from the ambition of traitors. So unless our

prove the inspiration of that volume which was designed as for all men, so for those men who are bleeding under injuries, and who can relieve themselves by timely courage, and who ought to come *straight up* to their duty of self-defence. At the present day, when it is possible for us to astonish the advocates of a despotic government by demonstrating the power of republican institutions, and when it is also possible for us to exemplify the weakness of these institutions, and to impair their credit throughout the world, we need the stimulus of these Psalms. Their voice comes to us like the sound of a trumpet, calling us back from a pusillanimous non-resistance; an emasculated love of peace rather than of right; a compassion for the criminal rather than for the victims of his crime; a gentleness toward those who *do* wrong, but an indifference toward those who *suffer* wrong. The religion of some men consists in a pity for all *except* the virtuous, trembling poor.

There is a different class of men, equally ill-balanced. The Imprecatory Psalms and kindred scriptures *fill* their vision. They rivet their gaze so long and so sharply upon law, justice, retribution, that they become blinded to the grace which is radiant in the Old Testament as really as in the New. Thus they fortify a hard character. Those words which were intended to build up a reasonable manliness, they distort into an apology for an austere life. But where are the Beatitudes? Where is the thirteenth chapter of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians? Where is the mellow tone of Immanuel: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

Perhaps the Bible would never have inserted the retribu-

sympathies be aroused for the bleeding Protestants, we revolt from the Sonnet of Milton "on the late Massacre in Piemont":

*"Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints, whose bones
Lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold;
Ev'n them who kept thy truth so pure of old,
When all our fathers worshipped stocks and stones,
Forget not."*

Compare these lines with Psalm cxxxvii. 7; Rev. vi. 10; also with pages 35, 38 of this Discourse. An *insulated* imprecation repels men who will be reconciled to it, when they *enter into* such reasons for it as are intimated in Psalm ix. 13-20; x. 2; liv. 3, et al.

tive prayers of the Psalmists, if it had not designed to introduce an appendix breathing the calm sentiments of the Redeemer. Perhaps it would never have reported the melting accents of the Son of David, if it had not already introduced a preface written in the uncompromising style of David's imprecations. No man is prepared to accept mercy, unless he approve of justice. No man is qualified to approve of justice unless he delight in mercy. The terrible threat which startles us, interprets the soft persuasive that charms us. We are appalled by some stern words of David. But he uttered them, because his mind had been subdued by the tenderness of his Son, against whom all opposition is barbarous. We are soothed by the kindly sentiments of the Lord of David. But he uttered them because he had felt the power and the majesty of justice, and he knew our need of some friend of the law, who would deliver us from its grasp. It is very true, that the power of the Bible comes in part from its intensity in impressing upon us one truth at a time. But when we take the full range of its teachings, we find that *combination* gives the durability to its power. It is sharp in its analysis, but also broad in its synthesis. It mingles many rays into one beam. As a whole, it is a model of comprehensiveness. When we are too bold, it overawes us by its denunciations of a wrath which we tremble to portray; and when we are too despondent, it cherishes us with a warmly-breathing love, of which a mother's pity for her first-born is but a chilling emblem.

Although the general style of the Bible is to give one fervid utterance here, and another fervid utterance there, without attempting to adjust the two into a system, yet sometimes it sets off the sterner sentiment by the milder one, in immediate contrast. When God reveals himself in his word, he sometimes causes the Alpine flower to bloom on the verge of the cold precipice. When he publishes his written volume, he sometimes bids the volcano to blaze forth from the midst of an Italian garden.

“ O Lord my God, if I have done this ;
If there be iniquity in my hands ;

If I have rewarded evil unto him that was at peace with me ;
(Yea, I have delivered him that without cause is mine enemy :)
 Let the enemy persecute my soul and take it ;
 Yea, let him tread down my life upon the earth ;
 And lay mine honor in the dust.
Arise, O Lord, in thine anger,
 Lift up thyself because of the rage of mine enemies,
 And awake for me, Thou who hast ordained judgment.”¹

The day will come when we shall learn not to dislocate the Imprecatory Psalms from their appropriate junctures. That will be the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God. Then we shall look upon his purposes as the inspired Psalmists looked upon them. We ourselves shall be, *as it were*, inspired. Then we shall see with our eyes whom God intends to save, and whom he intends to punish. Then we shall be able to comprehend the spirit of the songs, a few of which were sung on Mount Moriah,² and the same may be sung again in the upper temple. We shall see drawn out, in attractive lines, all the lowly graces of redeemed men, and of Christ their Redeemer ; all the patience and sympathy and forgiving love of the children of God and of God himself ; both his and their willingness to do all and to yield all that could be reasonably done or yielded ; and when the Judge stands forth an impersonation of every winning virtue, of the self-denying spirit which God himself has exercised in behalf of creatures and of enemies, then will shine out, resplendent as the face of him who shineth like

¹ Psalm vii. 3-6. See also Psalm cix. 3-6 ; cxxix. 21-24 ; 2 Tim. iv. 14-16. Hupfeld acknowledges that the Old Testament *here and there* rises above its ordinary standard of benevolence, and he specifies Psalm vii. 4 as one example of its kindly spirit. See his Com. on Psalm xli. 10.—It is worthy of remark, that in Psalm vii. 5 the poet employs the same forms of speech for imprecating (if we may use this infelicitous term) evil on himself, *provided that he is guilty*, which he employs for invoking evil on his enemies, *provided that they remain impenitent* (see p. 19 above). It should seem more natural, however, to interpret the words *יְרִיבַי*, *יְרִיבָיו*, and *יְרִיבָיו* as words of cordial resignation, than as words of positive request.

² We are careful not to affirm that *all* the Imprecatory Psalms were sung, either in the service of the Jewish temple, or the synagogue. Perhaps the lxxxii., xciv., cv., cxviii., cxx., cxxv., cxxxv., cxxxvi., may be considered as belonging, more or less fully, to the genus of the Imprecatory Psalms, and these were sung in the Jewish temple. See Bibliotheca Saera, Vol. XVI. p. 202. Hymns and Choirs, p. 26.

the sun, *the love of God*, which cannot secure the well-being of the universe unless the spirit of the Imprecatory Psalms be fulfilled. "Let justice be done," or the universe can have no quiet. "Let justice be done," or heaven itself will be despoiled by traitors. "Justice *must* be done," or the wicked will never cease from troubling, nor the weary be at rest. On that day these oft-repeated Psalms will strike up a blaze of light, illumining the justice and the grace of God; that justice to the few which is benevolence to the many; those retributions on ten thousand which are essential to the safety of ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands. The whole genius of these abused Psalms will then be unfolded by the final event, and will be recognized as compressed in the two words which we use so idly and vainly on earth: Amen, Alleluiah. That sound which the beloved apostle heard in Patmos, was the resonance of these old Psalms:

"I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying Alleluiah:—for true and righteous are his judgments, for he hath avenged the blood of his servants.—And again they said, Alleluiah. And her smoke rose up forever and ever. And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped God that sat on the throne, saying, Amen, Alleluiah. And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunders, saying, Alleluiah; for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him." There shall be no joy in heaven at the misery of rebels; no joy at their sin in resisting so kindly a government; no joy at the *necessity* of penal woe. But there shall be joy that the battle at length is fought; the victory at length is won; the loyal citizens of the empire may now have peace. There shall be joy, because Love, Mercy, and Grace will now reign unmolested; because there will never be again one single act of successful injustice; never again one single triumph of fraud, or envy, or malice, or revenge; and there shall be no more harm to the good man; neither sin nor temptation; neither shall there be any more peril to the cause of truth and charity.



