

PRIVATE REVENGE:

A SERMON

Preached in Trinity Church, Washington, D. C., Sunday, May 8, 1859,

BY

REV. C. M. BUTLER, D. D.,

RECTOR.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST OF THE WARDENS AND VESTRY.

WASHINGTON:
HENRY POLKINHORN, PRINTER.
1859.

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CORRESPONDENCE.

VESTRY ROOM, TRINITY CHURCH,

WASHINGTON, *May 9, 1859.*

REV. AND DEAR SIR:

The sermon on "Private Revenge," delivered by you last evening in Trinity Church, contains new and striking views of its evils, and of the absolute necessity for the welfare of society that punishment for wrong should rest with God, and the ministers of the law. Believing that the circulation of this sermon in the community, would tend to correct public sentiment in a most important particular, we respectfully request a copy for publication.

J. M. BRODHEAD,
E. L. CHILDS,
FITZHUGH COYLE,
JOS. H. BRADLEY,

JOSEPH F. LEWIS.
CHARLES B. MAURY.
L. D. GALE,
D. W. MIDDLETON,
W. B. TODD.

REV. C. M. BUTLER, D. D.,

Rector Trinity Church, Washington, D. C.

WASHINGTON, *May 16, 1859.*

DEAR BRETHREN:

I am gratified to find that the sermon on "Private Revenge," recently delivered, meets with your approbation; and that in your kind judgment its publication would "tend to correct public sentiment in a most important particular." The same solemn sense of duty which led to its preparation and delivery, constrains me also to consent to its publication.

Truly, your friend and pastor,

C. M. BUTLER.

To J. M. BRODHEAD, E. L. CHILDS, &c.

PRIVATE REVENGE.

Proud and haughty scorner is his name who dealeth in proud wrath.

PROVERBS, XXI: 24.

What a magnificent utterance is this! How the rich Saxon words ring out a clear, wise, and momentous meaning! Every word weighs like purified gold, and sparkles like a clean cut diamond! "Proud and haughty scorner is his name who dealeth in proud wrath!"

"Proud wrath!" It would be difficult to put two words together which would more truly express the anger of hearts self-willed, pampered by self-indulgence, and made arrogant by prosperity and power. Pharaoh's wrath was proud when he pursued Israel with his chariots and horses. Saul's was proud wrath when he aimed his javelin at David. So was Naaman's when he turned away in a rage from Elisha's humbling direction to go wash in Jordan. So was Ahab's when Naboth refused to give to him his vineyard.

What and whence is this proud wrath?

It is not moral indignation because of wrong committed against self or others. It does indeed strive to make itself seem to be this: for this feeling of moral reprobation for wrong doing, is not unrighteous. It is no part of religion to extinguish our sense of natural justice. This feeling is not only compatible with holiness, but is one of its highest expressions. God is just, and hates injustice. If we are created in his image, we will share his hatred. When Christ, arraigned before Pilate, was wantonly and cruelly smitten by one of the officers, he

answered, with indignant dignity: "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou me?" Holy Paul, about to speak before the council, when Ananias commanded that he should be smitten on his mouth, retorted: "God shall smite thee, thou whited wall! for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?" This holy indignation, proud wrath affects to be. It deceives itself. It says, with Jonah, "I do well to be angry." It is a most striking tribute to justice and holiness, that proud and evil anger must cajole itself into the conviction that it is right, before it dare give itself free way.

It is from *wounded self-love* that proud wrath proceeds. It is the rage of a selfish and evil heart. It may be excited by that which is evil, or by that which is right and righteous. Saul's proud and envious rage against David was excited by the very beauty and excellence of his character and conduct. Ahab and Jezebel had no just cause of anger against Naboth. Even when roused by injustice, it is itself unjust, because it seeks selfish gratification and revenge. It is rage, because, whether justly or unjustly, its selfishness is thwarted, or its pride wounded. This acrid humor of proud wrath issues from the wound, not because it is always inflicted by a poisoned arrow; but because the body itself is corrupt and tainted. Its essential character is this—that it is rage, because of wounded self-love, mortified pride, disappointed ambition.

Such is proud wrath.

But why is he who dealeth in it a proud and haughty scorner?

The definition of a scorner is that he is one who mocks at goodness, makes light of the distinctions of good and evil, and ridicules a conscientious fear of God and devotion to his service. It is that degree of evil which they reach who graduate in the highest class of iniquity. The Psalmist indicates the degrees of sin preparatory to this: "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the wicked, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful." First, the

sinner adopts evil principles. He *walketh* in the *counsel* of the wicked: Then he associates with and joins in the deeds of sinners. He *standeth* in the way of sinners: Then he *sits* in the seat of the scornful. He scoffs at goodness. He makes a mock at sin.

Now they who *deal*—*i. e.*, practically indulge—in proud wrath, are not common scorers, but proud and haughty scorers. There are some cowardly and sneaking scorers. They sneer at goodness. They extenuate guilt. They aplogize for revenge. They vindicate it in theory, and would practice it, but for the fear of temporal consequences. They make “I dare not” wait upon “I would.” But they who deal in proud wrath are proud and haughty scorers, because they put in practice their evil principle. And this is the difference between the vulture in the egg and the fledged, full-grown vulture at his prey. It is the difference between Pharaoh cowering in the midst of the threatenings and judgments of God, when they were present and impending, and the same Pharaoh proudly glittering in his war chariot, breathing revenge against the Israelites, and leading on his army in hot haste for their capture or extermination.

Now he who “*dealeth* in proud wrath” *practically*, and therefore most *flagrantly* and emphatically, scorns and sets at naught God’s laws and threatenings. Even if the victim of his rage deserves what he gets, yet, as inflicted by him, it is a high-handed transgression. He seeks not justice but revenge. He indulges selfishness and commits sin. He sets at naught God’s threatenings against sin. Moreover, he assumes to take from God his prerogative of avenging wrong. “Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.” It is a presumptuous interference with God’s administration. It is an attempt to

“Snatch from His hand the balance and the rod,
Rejudge His justice, be the god of God.”

Notwithstanding such is the true character of proud wrath, yet the world is prone to admire it in some of its forms and

manifestations. When it commits wrong, it is indeed less likely to be admired than when it resents injustice. But even in the former case, if it be connected with splendid gifts of intellect, with dazzling power, and with success that seems like fate, and if it use great swelling words of glory and of honor, it drags down the admiration of the world in base homage at its footstool. If it be the proud wrath of an Alexander, subjugating the world; or of a Napoleon, trampling the vineyards of Italy; the sense of wrong is lost in admiration of the power and genius displayed in its commission. And when this proud wrath is employed in resisting wrong, by nations or by individuals, it fascinates the human heart to the same stern admiration with which it gazes upon the flash of the lightning, and the terrible beauty of the storm, regardless of the wrecks and ruins that they leave behind. It is not alone with the "children of the sun" that "revenge is virtue." It was ever regarded as such by the Pagan world. It was because it was forbidden by Christianity that it was denounced by them as a cowardly and contemptible religion—unfit for men. But admire it as men will, it is but the first-born child of evil pride. It is the progeny of the serpent. "It is the subtlest serpent with the haughtiest crest." There is a sort of devilish beauty about some serpents in their gliding grace, their vivid changing colors, and their haughty flexile heads. Such, if there be *any*, is the beauty of revenge. It is like that of him who is an "archangel ruined." It is the perversion of a glorious attribute. It is the fallen angel of justice.

Yet let us not be so unfair to this proud wrath as to forget that it is *justice* of which it is the perversion and contortion. Revenge is, says Lord Bacon, *a kind of wild justice*. In the case of private and personal revenge, the moral reprobation of it cannot fasten upon the just doom which it sometimes inflicts upon its victims. It must lay hold upon the motives and feelings and conduct of him by whom it is inflicted. If the mind be directed chiefly and intently upon the righteous retribution which revenge frequently achieves, in forgetfulness of the

motives of the deed, and of its inevitable defeat of the true ends of justice, a true moral sentiment will be cheated into approval. But an act is right or wrong, just or unjust, according to the motive and spirit in which it is conceived and executed. If it come from selfishness, hate, revenge, cruelty, or wanton carelessness of inflicting pain and ill, it is evil, be its consequences what they may. It is the selfishness, the arrogance, the impatience with God's slow, calm, and majestic justice, the contempt for his threatenings and his mode of procedure, which makes him who dealeth in proud wrath and in private personal revenge, a proud and haughty scorner.

And let it ever be remembered that proud wrath, even when inflicting a deserved doom, never can achieve the true ends of justice. If this were deeply felt, many persons who now carelessly approve of revengeful acts, because they inflict deserved retribution on the offender, would be led to see that they are as evil in their results as in their motives. We all have a tendency, I think, to approve of "proud wrath," when it wreaks what seems just retribution; but when we see that it never can accomplish the true ends of justice, we shall be cured of that delusion.

Let us look at its effects on the offender; on the community; on the administration of justice; and on the avenger.

The object of punishment, so far as it refers to the offender, is not merely that he shall suffer so much pain, so much penalty as the just repayment of his wrong-doing. Such a commercial view of a balance of accounts—of the settlement of debt incurred by wrong done, by an equivalent of penalty inflicted—is false and low. Justice, in dealing with the criminal, is to do the work of love. Justice is the minister of mercy. Its object when it punishes is not primarily to inflict pain, but to make the guilty one see and feel his wrong-doing; and to make him see and feel it, and repent of it, and amend it, and make reparation for it, through the sufferance of shame and pain. It is, in short, to make him feel how wrong, how evil, how disastrous, it is to violate law. Now, that he may see this, that which

punishes him must be seen by him to be holy, just, void of personal passion, and right and righteous in character and conduct. This effect cannot be accomplished if he suffer never so justly from proud wrath. It will not have on him the effect of justice. Coming, as he knows that his punishment does, from wounded self-love, from pride, passion, and revenge, it will seem to him to be, what indeed it is, as done by his foe, evil, wrong, and injustice. It will not bring him to a right mind. It will but inflame and madden him the more. Looking back upon the deed that has provoked the revenge, it will seem to his perverted mind, in the tumult of his anger, to be its vindication. Looking at the revenger, it will seem to make future vengeance upon him a virtue and a duty. Thus proud wrath can never achieve the true ends of justice—a conviction and confession of guilt, a reparation of wrong, and a purpose of amendment. Punishment does not then stand before his soul in the venerable form of justice, sad even in its sternness, and pitiful even in its infliction of penalty, and which appeals to his moral nature, and gains his conscience: but it is the hateful, scowling, and furious demon of revenge, which rouses the kindred devil in his own heart, and makes him hurl back “firebrands, arrows, and death.” He who suffers the just penalty of his evil deeds, will be likely to profit by the suffering, only when he sees that the justice which inflicts it is passionless and impersonal. It must come from law, “whose seat is the bosom of God,” and not from revenge, whose throne is the heart of the Devil. It must be administered by the public ruler, who is the minister of God to execute wrath; and not by the private sufferer, who is but the minister of his own personal hatred. It must be seen to be the viceroyalty of Heaven. Hence the dignity of law, of courts of justice, and of rulers. While they are a terror to evil works, it is to the end that offenders may see how awful justice is—that God is behind it and in it—that it is God himself in the manifestation of his holiness—and that they may thus be led, by the stern love which goes forth in the form of justice, to resort to that pitying love, which, in the form of

mercy, saves the guilty—whom first it punishes in order that it may save.

But even if this proud revenge work no harm to its victim—if it make him no more evil than he was before—if it send him beyond the reach of human good or ill—if his death be to him a merciful visitation—yet its effect upon the community is wholly evil. It corrupts the moral sentiment of society. It teaches men to feel that *mere justice* at the hands of God's commissioned ministers, is not enough to satisfy their proud demands. Much more does it teach them to be unwilling, if human laws, in themselves, or from their imperfect administration, refuse them justice, to leave their case in the hands of God. It creates a false sentiment that *honor* demands that a man should perpetrate a crime, if no more than justice is meted out to him, or still more peremptorily if justice be evaded or delayed. It is easy to see how demoralizing and dreadful the prevalence of such sentiments in society must prove. They bring the sense of shame—which should act only on men for evil-doing—to act upon them for well-doing, or for not doing evil. Hence communities grow dissatisfied with the infliction of mere justice—so much more awful than revenge—upon offenders, especially when they have been high-handed, cruel, and atrocious criminals. Hence they strive to put the sharp poison of their personal and private revenge even on the point of the venerable sword of magistracy and judgment. Hence mobs howl under prison windows and execute Lynch law. Hence in the circles of the moral and religious, will be heard approval of those who would not wait for the slowly rising, or who have struck down the uplifted, sword of magistracy, and who have plied the dagger or fired the revolver of the assassin. Thus is the moral sentiment of the community horribly corrupted. It learns to approve what it should abhor—private revenge, and to despise what it should venerate—public justice. Such are its evil effects upon the offender, and the community.

Does it secure justice, or a satisfactory substitute for justice, to him who has suffered wrong?

We have already intimated that the design of the law in reference to him who has suffered wrong, must be a restoration of his rights, or a just satisfaction and compensation for his wrongs. In case of injury to property, an equivalent value, or restoration, will secure the ends of justice. For injuries to his good name, verdicts which constitute his *vindication*, and an adequate punishment of the offender, are all that justice can accomplish. For wounds to his feelings, for the ruin of his happiness, for poison dropped into his heart, which will rankle there while life endures, human justice can restore or give nothing that will seem or be to him an equivalent and a satisfaction. He must look to a higher tribunal for this perfect compensation. Human justice, always insufficient fully to compensate the injured, is peculiarly powerless to satisfy wrongs which bruise the heart. Its nearest approach to such satisfaction, is to punish the offender by penalties proportionate to the wrong, and by such compensation, if any such there be, to the injured as will constitute an offset to the wrong inflicted upon the heart. This liability to suffer injustice for which there is no possible human compensation, is one of the conditions of our disordered state — one of the trials of our earthly probation. Human law cannot remove it. Now suppose that one has suffered in this way, under wrongs the most cruel which can be inflicted upon man; smarting under the anguish of his heart-wounds; dissatisfied because human law has not assigned all the penalty which it might and ought to have done, insufficient though even that would be, for the enormous injury which he has sustained; or dissatisfied because human law could not by any of its penalties satisfy his wounded heart—suppose that he determines to anticipate its tardy action, and to inflict justice on the offender, and secure justice for himself, by his own avenging hand. Can he thus accomplish the true ends of justice? We have seen that in its effects upon the offender, such a course defeats those ends. Does it secure justice to the wronged? Can he thus snatch a satisfaction which unjust law refused to give? Or a larger satisfaction than that which was all tha^t

just law could bestow? If so, in what does it consist? Not in the verdict of a jury, or the decision of a court, which, free from all personal feeling, speaks in awful and unimpassioned tones its moral reprobation of the wrong, and comes to the wounded one as the very oracle of the conscience and the sense of justice of universal man, and thus furnishes a sublimer consolation than even precious human sympathy or worthless gold could bring. Not in this high alleviation is his satisfaction found—for this he has rejected. Then it must be that his satisfaction consists in the indulgence of revengeful feeling and in the commission of a revengeful deed.

Ah! what a fatal mistake is this! What a jugglery of the Devil this, that has made synonymes of the words “revenge” and “satisfaction!” My friend, if your enemy inflicts upon you a wrong, and you seek only justice in return, he can give you but one wound; but if he stings you into revenge, he pierces you with a thousand; and all of them are poisoned. Oh, it is a most fatal delusion that revenge is a satisfaction to the feelings of the wronged!

Does the injured man suffer from a sense of wrong? That cannot be removed by vengeance. If it were a real wrong, the sense of it, as such, will remain after it is ~~wronged~~. Nay, to palliate the revenge one will strive to keep up a vivid feeling of the wrong. Does he suffer from a dread of shame, if he should leave the wrong unavenged? Ah! that sense of shame from the sneers of the world is but a pin-prick to the fiery shafts of agony with which the shame of his own conscience shall pierce him through! But at least will not the joy of executed revenge, the grim complacency, if not the smiling peace of a soul avenged, constitute a counterbalance to these woes, and be a true and sufficient satisfaction? Oh, no! There is no satisfaction, either good or evil, no joy, fiendish or human, in revenge, after the first delirium of that wine of hell is exhausted. It may be sweet to the taste; but it is fire in the bones, and in the veins, and in the vitals. The flavor passes; but the fire burns forever. The revenge abates nothing of the

avenged

wrong. It does ^{not} remove the better feeling of the wrong. It brings no compensation of self-approval. Above all, it adds to his already troubled heart the awful agonies of remorse. An enemy inflicts upon him a curable wound; and he pours into it the fiery poison of indulged revenge, which renders it incurable. Ah! the pungent and the blood-red cup which he drinks, thinking it to be fierce ecstasy, he finds to be fiercer horror! Revenge, satisfaction? Ask him who starts from troubled dreams, in which the murdered man, on whom he wreaked sweet vengeance, throttles him, if *that* is *satisfaction*! Ask him, when the vivid vision of his victim, pale and bleeding, comes and stands between him and the brightest scenes which he can summon before him, if that be *satisfaction*! Ask him if the pointed finger of the world, and the hum which greets him, in which the words "*honor*" and "*murder*" are heard in rival eagerness, constitute *satisfaction*! Oh, the terror of the remorse and shame which proud wrath indulged bring into an immortal spirit! If it be only remorse, and pass not into penitence, then there is no creature out of hell more miserable.

"The mind that broods o'er guilty woes
Is like the scorpion girt with fire,
In circle narrowing as it glows,
The flames around their captive close.
So writhes the mind remorse has riven:
Unfit for earth, undoom'd for heaven;
Darkness above, despair beneath,
Around it flame, within it death."

Or, even if the remorse pass into penitence through Almighty grace, it is penitence in the anguish of its contrition, rather than in the peace of its pardon. Ah! we can see the offender whom we have pardoned, with a peaceful spirit, and murmur praise to God for his restraining grace; but the offender whom we hate, or on whom we have wreaked revenge, wakens a hot and angry anguish in our heart. A living enemy we can bury from our thought, in our forgiveness, our forgetfulness, or our contempt; but a dead enemy, murdered, is never buried. Put

an enemy out of the way—destroy him by the dagger or the revolver? Nay, you do by this means substitute an occasional sight of him outside of your soul, by the perpetual vision of him in your soul, triumphing over your poor revenge by the million-fold vengeance with which, through remorse, he forever stabs your heart. Never—oh! never—has the Evil One more cruelly deceived the hearts of men than when he has persuaded them that vengeance was *satisfaction*.

We see, then, that revenge never can achieve any of the true ends of justice. Its victim, instead of being made to feel that he suffers from a holy power, high above him, which may rouse him to shame, and through it lead him to repentance, knows that he suffers from a low power on his own level, and is thus fired with reciprocal anger and revenge. The community is perverted in its moral sentiment, and taught to despise the law on which alone its own security can rest. Justice is administered to neither party; for in its place the offender suffers the lower penalty of private vengeance; and the infatuated wronged one adds to the injuries inflicted by an enemy, the unspeakable injuries which he inflicts upon himself. Proud wrath never can do the work of justice. Lucifer cannot wield Gabriel's sword. Private revenge defeats the end of justice in each particular case; and, if it should universally prevail, it would drive justice from the world. It not only in every case strikes down and hacks her two-edged sword; but by wounding her, mars her majestic beauty, and drains the life-blood of her awful power.

If these things are so, it becomes Christian citizens to talk, and act, and live, and administer justice, as if they were. If Christ's doctrines of the duty of personal forgiveness, and the sin of personal revenge, be practical and moral rules, and not unattainable and romantic moral ideals, let Christians at least do them the homage of admitting their obligation, however they may distrust their ability to realize them in their practice. My Brethren, I do but utter the solemn and unexaggerated conviction of my conscience, when I declare, that however

much evil influence on the community he may exert, who, under whatever circumstances of enormous provocation, strikes down a foe, it is far less than that of the Christian who stands by his side and says, "I approve of the deed; I would have done the same." The one murders only a man: the other murders the moral sense of the community. The one removes a single life: the other taints and poisons the air which is the breath of all lives. The one strikes down but a single culprit: the other unnerves the arm of law, whose office is to strike down all culprits. The one destroys a human offender: the other destroys a divine principle. In short, while in the one case it is only the guilty that is punished, in the other it is Justice herself that is gibbeted. Oh, let the Christian leave the approval and the sanction of this evil spirit of revenge, to those who know nothing of the grandeur of the life of Jesus in the heart. That he may not yield a cowardly assent to the seemingly brave and noble, but in reality base and selfish sentiments of a Godless world, in reference to revenge, let his heart be fortified in advance with the true spirit and the right principle and feeling with which to meet injuries inflicted upon himself, and with which to judge of the true mode in which they should be treated in the case of others.

Let not the Christian suppose that because it is his duty, and the prompting of a truly Christian sentiment, to pity him who has suffered awful wrong, and to judge charitably of his deed of revenge in view of terrible and maddening provocation, that it is therefore equally a Christian sentiment and duty, to desire that he should escape the just judgment of the law. How can an awful sense of the sin and shame of yielding to passion and revenge be kept up in a community, if no judgment is seen to fall upon it? A true Christian sympathy will indeed prompt the follower of Christ to minister the balm of sympathy to him who, stung by wrong, has rushed into revenge—especially if he has been hurried into the deed against his previous convictions, principles, and feelings. But even in the moment of his profoundest sympathy; when he feels most how dreadful

was the provocation; when he realizes how fearfully he would have been tempted to have done the same; even on the very edge of life to which he has followed his sinning brother, hand in hand and heart to heart; in the midst of the human weaknesses which start back appalled from the contemplation of a shameful death, and the human ties, then tightening painfully about the heart of the victim of his own passion, which draw him back to life; even in that hour when his affection clings to him, and his pity weeps over him, and his sympathy shudders at his doom; even then he will silence in his heart the sensibilities that clamor for his acquittal, and tenderly resign him to the hands of justice, and sob forth, from his heavy heart, assent to that punishment which is no less the expression of love than it is of law. Is it asked, "how with such pitifulness of heart he can sanction or desire this cruel doom?" It is because he has so large a love! It is because it is a love which, while it covers the poor culprit at his feet with the robe of charity, and speaks to him in tones of brotherly compassion, embraces also the whole brotherhood of man, which, without the law and the penalty which consigns his guilty brother to a shameful doom, would be given up to a human hell of ungoverned passions; and which, taking in its sweep the interest and glory of the Universe, which to be happy must be holy and governed by holy law, reaches the Almighty and perfect God, whose glorious love is but the blending of a mercy which is infinite, with a justice that is inflexible. Such is Christian love and pity. It is never dissociated from justice. Justice never is so lovely and venerable as when she pronounces a sentence in pitying tones, and executes a penalty with a heart, which, fainting in its task from sympathy, is yet nerved, by duty, to its calm discharge. Even Pagan virtue, which could discern no holy God behind human law, imparting to it divine significance and sanction, could yet see and admire in Junius Brutus, giving up his own son to the Lictors against the entreaties of friends and the yearnings of parental love, how sublime and glorious is law, when—like the triumphal car of a Roman victor moving

to the Capitol of the world, surrounded by chained and weeping captives—it takes its majestic way to the temple of Eternal Justice, amid the subjugated and the captive sensibilities and emotions of the heart. Surely Christian law should be administered with no less mastery over human weakness than Pagan law.

And let no Christian man think that it is mean, or unworthy of his manhood, that he should be content with justice, and forego personal revenge, even where justice cannot be obtained. Let no man hold up the Christian principle of declining personal revenge, and seeking only public justice, as other than a noble and lofty principle. It leaves him the full feeling of moral indignation against wrong. It gives him the opportunity to utter his solemn protest against injustice. It opens to him the only retaliation worthy of Him, the law of whose life is love—that of giving the offender up to justice, that she may convict him of wrong, and lead him, through shame, into penitence and righteousness. Why should revenge be thought noble, and this lofty spirit of unselfish loyalty to the law of love, be thought mean? Why is revenge counted noble? It is easy to yield to it. It is purely selfish. It does no good to the perpetrator or the victim. It is the expression of pride. It is the act of hate. It inflames the evil of him who suffers. It leaves remorse to the perpetrator. Revenge, noble? It is utterly hateful, selfish, deadly, devilish! What is there to be admired in that which is wholly evil in its origin, and wholly disastrous in its results? But the Christian spirit—how noble, how unselfish, how truly manly! It achieves the ends of justice and benevolence, while it foregoes all those of personal and selfish gratification and revenge. It masters anger by love. “Greater is he that ruleth his own spirit than he that taketh a city,” or killeth a citizen. It does reverence to the awful attribute of justice, while at the same time it pays homage to the higher law of love. It is being angry, and sinning not. It is being merciful, and yet not tolerating iniquity. Mercy and truth meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other in his soul; and *holiness* is their one name.

Let the Christian also have a very strong conviction of the evil of personal revenge; of its hatefulness in itself and in the eye of God; and of the sin of ever yielding to its base suggestions. He must not, for a moment, be led by the world's code of honor to believe that there is any class of wrongs which free him from his Christian duty to meet all wrong with that lofty magnanimity, which as earnestly demands justice as it eschews revenge. He must not admit that because a wrong touches him in the tenderest point, and is incapable of being avenged by human justice, that he may be its avenger. If it is Christian, magnanimous, and manly, to forego private revenge for wrong, then the more aggravated, the more maddening to human pride, and passion, and affection, the wrong committed is, the more Christian, magnanimous, and manly it is to conquer self, and submit to God, and leave retribution to Him in whose hands alone it is all unmixed with vengeance. Without being guarded and strengthened by this previous settled conviction, he will be caught up and hurried by sudden passion into evil and revenge. If his moral sense is cheated into a theoretical approval of the lawfulness or excusableness of revenge under any circumstances; if he has not the barrier of a fixed principle and conviction against it always erected in his inmost conscience; if he fail to erect that barrier through any doubt, or any equilibrium between his judgments and his feelings—he may be sure that the sudden onrush of passion, under awful wrong, will hurry him into deeds of selfish, personal, and self-tormenting vengeance.

Nay, let the Christian not only have a very strong conviction of the evil of personal revenge; but one no less strong that, good Christian as he may be, there is yet that in him which, under certain aggravated wrongs, would be stung into ungovernable madness, but for this previous, settled, and most solemnly vowed purpose, never to yield to revenge; and that even then, there is that in him which, call on God as he may, trust in God as he may, nay, receive aid from God as he will, will yet be roused into an almost frenzy of indignation, of struggle,

and of agony, which it will be a mighty triumph of grace to keep from passing into revenge: Oh, Brethren, there is enough of evil humanity in us all to be roused into a Devil's vindictiveness, under enormous wrongs, but for the mighty grace of Jesus. Let us know it! Let us pray to be delivered from aggravated temptation. Let us, through prayer, and watchfulness, and self-knowledge, and conscious weakness, and full reliance on promised strength, be ready for it, should it come. In the sufferance of some wrongs—such as a good name filched from us—a heart twined into our own, torn from us—a wife violated or seduced—a daughter fascinated from the peaceful home of her youth, and trampled upon in the domestic hell into which she has been lured: In the first anguish of wrongs like these, tell no human heart—not even the highest Christian heart—to be at peace! Tell it to be submissive, to cling to the skirts of God's mercy; but mock not its tumultuous anguish by telling it to be at peace! It must feel the storm while it submits to its pitiless pelting. It must *lie to*—it must let itself be driven with bare poles before the shrieking blast—it must be swerved with a stiff helm off from the beckoning shore, haunted by the foul and fiendish wreckers of immortal souls, which seems to furnish a harbor of safety and of rest in revenge, but which lures only to destroy; and then it must be allowed to toss, and plunge, and struggle onward, amid the seething waves, until God shall graciously say to the tempest, "*Peace, be still!*"
