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A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

“THE WRATH OF THE LAMB.”

(REVELATION VI. 16.)

THE wrath here spoken of is not that of the last judgment. That is a judgment—a calm judicial decision of the mind, and therefore, as far as I know, it is never described under the metaphor of wrath. The scene here I take to be that great revolution in the affairs of men which, in the view of the seer, should come, when the kingdom of Christ shall displace the heathen nations. It has the same root as the great Messianic prophecy of the second psalm, where, after long reticence, the wrath of God at length breaks forth, and asserts against the old *régime* the sovereignty of His Anointed.

It is not the historical bearings, however, but the paradox of the passage, that I am here concerned with. The first thing which strikes us about the expression is its extreme dramatism. There is nothing so dramatic, in my opinion, as the sight of an emotion contrary to the nature. When a man who has always hid his griefs bursts into tears, when a man, like Arnold, who has always veiled his anger, gives way for once to passion, we are impressed with something like a sense of tragedy; it is a bitter day in summer; it is a storm upon a lake. Some such impression in an intensified degree rises here. “The wrath of the Lamb”; it is a conjunction of the greatest possible contrasts, a meeting of the two points not only the furthest removed in nature, but the furthest removed in human imagination. From a literary point of view, the attention of the reader is arrested by the exhibition of something which seems to alter the natural relation of objects, and to join things together which hitherto had been kept asunder.

Yet, after all, it is the philosophic and not the literary paradox that forms the main interest of this passage. The

Lamb is the type of the sacrificial Divine love. Being Divine, it is infinite. How can there be a limit to infinite love? How can we think of the love of God as interrupted even for a moment by a thing called wrath? Can we any more conceive a limit to the *love* of God than we can conceive a limit to the power of God? If you were told that there was a moment in the life of the Eternal in which He lost consciousness, you would say "Impossible!" You would feel it to be a contradiction in terms that the Eternal should lose a moment. Is it any less a contradiction that Infinite Love should lose a moment? Is it any less a contradiction to suppose that there should pass over the boundless heart of God the obscuring power of a cloud of wrath, by which the movements of that heart are restrained and bounded?

Now, strange to say, the answer comes, not from the outside, but from the expression itself. "The wrath of the Lamb"; the phrase is as peculiar as it is dramatic. Why does St. John not say "the wrath of the lion"? Remember that in St. John's view Christ has two aspects—a lamb and a lion. Why does he not simply say that Christ has here put off His lamb-like appearance and put on the appearance of a lion? Because he does not mean that. He is not speaking of the wrath of a lion, and therefore he will not depict it. The state of mind he is describing is the wrath of a lamb—a particular kind of wrath. He is considering a mode of anger which is not an interruption of love, but itself a phase of love. The wrath of the Lamb is the wrath of love itself. Instead of being a barrier to the heart, it is one of the wings by which the heart flies. It is no more an interruption to Divine love than the haze is an interruption to the heat of the morning. The wrath clouds the love; the haze clouds the morning; but both the one and the other have grown out of the very thing they obscure. They are manifestations of that which they

seem to hide. There is an anger which is incompatible with the absence of love, which could not exist unless love existed before it. There is a wrath which belongs distinctively to the Lamb, which can only have its home in the sacrificial spirit. That is the wrath which the man of Patmos sees.

Here, then, is the subject which rises before us—the difference between the wrath of the Lamb and the wrath of the lion, between the anger of love and the anger of nature. Now, it seems to me that there are three distinct points of difference between them. And first, I would observe that the wrath of the Lamb, or sacrificial spirit, differs from the wrath of the lion in being purely impersonal. The wrath of the lion says, "I, king of the forest, have received an affront; some one has presumed to do an unkindness to *me*." The wrath of the Lamb says, "An unkind thing has been done." It keeps the "me" out of the question altogether. It looks at the deed in itself. It refuses to consider the sense of personal injury as a main feature of the case. You have a son who has defied your authority, exceeded his allowance, spent his substance in riotous living. You are incensed at this act of individual disrespect. You resolve to bring him to his senses; you say, "We shall see whether he or I shall be master here." Now, that is quite a legitimate mode of anger, and quite a legitimate ground for it; but it is not the wrath of the Lamb. It is not immoral, but it is *non-moral*. It is neither good nor bad. It is simply an appetite of nature like any other appetite—like hunger, like thirst, like weariness. It neither makes a man a sinner nor a saint. But it is possible for a father in these circumstances to be filled with indignation on a different ground altogether. It is possible for him to see in his son's delinquency, not an act, but a principle. It is possible for him to feel, not that an insult has been offered to his pride,

but that an injury has been done to the universe. It is possible for him to experience, not the sense of a wounded self-love, but an anger from the fact that love itself has been violated. This is the wrath of the Lamb.

Is there any test by which a man can know whether his wrath is leonine or lamb-like? I think there is one infallible test. If at any time your blood is boiling with indignation over an injury you have received, just put to yourself one question. Would your indignation be the same if you were not a recipient but a spectator? Would you have the same sense of wrong, the same boiling of the blood, if, instead of being offered to *you*, the injury had been done to a poor creature frequenting the lanes and alleys? Are you able at such a moment, by an act of sympathetic imagination, to put yourself in the position of another, and that other one of the lowliest? Are you capable of forgetting all that is implied in that phrase, "He did it to *me*"? Then you have passed the Rubicon that divides the secular from the sacred, that separates the wrath of the lion from the wrath of the Lamb. If I am not mistaken, this is Christ's own test. "Inasmuch as ye did it unto the least of these, ye have done it unto Me." The Son of Man has reached a splendid impersonality in His judgment of the world. Though Himself at once the greatest and the most wronged of all, He refuses to measure the wrong by His own feeling of pain. He casts Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple. He throws Himself into the position of the meanest, the lowliest. He identifies Himself with the neglected hungry, the untended sick, the unsheltered stranger, the oppressed prisoner. If He says "depart from Me," it is no personal wound that stings Him; it is man's disregard of man. This is a wrath that could only have existed where sacrifice had preceded it. It was the indignation of one who had emptied himself into the life of those below. It was the anger of a spirit

that had burst the boundaries of its own individual being, and felt its heart throb with the sensation of the common pain.

I pass to a second point of difference between the wrath of love and the wrath of mere nature. And it is this: The wrath of nature must begin by tearing out pity; the wrath of love is a wrath created by pity. In the former case, our indignation is stimulated by hiding the prospective photograph—by shutting our eyes to the possible goodness which the bad man may yet attain. In the latter case, the indignation is stimulated by exactly the opposite process—by bringing out the prospective photograph, and considering what the man might be made to become. Here is a radical difference between the wrath of the lion and the wrath of the Lamb. The one is born from the drying of tears; the other is itself the product of tears. The one is produced by stamping out the old fires; the other is made by fanning them. The one comes from the extinction of endearing memories; the other arises from the increased kindling of these memories—from a sense of lost possibility and a conviction of unutilized power.

The truth is, if I understand the doctrine of the Bible, that the love of God never pauses—not even over the scene of punishment. Remember what the Bible doctrine of punishment is. It is not that God exercises vengeance on the sinner; it is, that the law exercises vengeance on its own violation. Many a father says to his children, "I am leaving the room for awhile; take care you don't go too near the fire; if you disobey, you may get burnt." Is that a threat? No; it is a warning. Suppose one of these children does disobey and does get scorched, who is the deepest sufferer? It is the father himself. That is the philosophy of Calvary, and it is a deep philosophy. Why do we call it a mystery that the Divine should share in the penalty of the sin committed by

the human? To my mind, if you start from the fatherhood of God, it is the least mysterious of all things; it is a law of nature, a doctrine of the heart. A father's judgment on a refractory child, if he be a good father, is at no time a personal matter, and therefore is at all times to himself a penalty. There is an anger which love alone can feel, which lovelessness cannot feel. As long as this wrath continues, final exclusion has not come. The time of final exclusion is the time when a man ceases to have any interest in the misdeeds of his brother, when he can say to the delinquent, "Sleep on and take your rest." There are people in this world whose worst word against us would fall harmless on your ear and mine; it would fail to waken this wrath. And why? Because we have lost all respect, all care for their opinion. They do not make us sore, because there is no love. One spark of love would make us sufferers in their sin, and therefore bring us nearer to the power of forgiving them. The wrath of the Lamb is opposed to laughter, but it is not opposed to tears.

This brings me to a third point of difference between the two kinds of wrath. They express their feeling in a different formula. The wrath of the lion says, "I must have satisfaction"; the wrath of the Lamb says, "Justice must be satisfied." There is all the difference in the world between giving me satisfaction in a quarrel and satisfying my justice in a wrong. In the one case, the party that did the injury must make the reparation; no substitute can stand in his room. But in the other case, the immediate demand is for the repair of the wrong itself. If possible, it should be borne by the delinquent; if impossible, mind and heart alike demand a substitute. In the moral world, all debts are transferable. The first instinct of moral indignation is, not to avenge, but to repair; vengeance itself is only contemplated as a social reparation. The wrath of the Lamb is always a redemptive wrath. Its first impulse

is to buy back what has been enslaved, to restore what has been wrongfully taken, to set at liberty what has been bruised. The wrath of the lion will be satisfied if he hears the delinquent is dead; the wrath of the Lamb pauses not until it learns that the delinquency itself has been wiped away.

And this renders powerfully suggestive that theological epigram which represents Christ as paying the debts of humanity. Nothing in a short compass could more completely describe the facts of the case. When the Son of Man came into this world, He found it impoverished by the unpaid debts man owed to man. He found that the blind, the deaf, the lunatic, had been left without asylums. He found that the sick had no hospitals—none at least existing for the sake of their sickness. He saw that destitute children, weak and delicate children, received no blessing from the world, had no home provided for them. He perceived that there was no refuge for the outcast, no place for repentance in the order of society. He observed, above all, that for no man was there any sin-bearer, that every soul had to carry its own moral burden into the silent land. And the Son of Man's heart boiled over with the indignation of love. He felt, as a matter of course, that He was heir to these debts. They had been accumulating for generations; every age had added to them. No man living could defray them—no combination of men. He alone had the capital, the resources; it was inevitable He should pay. In whatever other ways the sin of the world fell upon Him, and there were many, it fell upon Him here. He became heir to the indignation the debtors did not feel, to the judgment they did not deliver, to the obligations they did not discharge. His wrath was proportionate to His love—no greater, no less. It was the measure of His heart—the length, breadth, height, and depth of it; and because it was the measure of His heart, it was the measure of His debt to man.

"Upon the wicked He shall rain snares"; so writes one of the Psalmists of Israel in description of the wrath of God. It is, to my mind, one of the most felicitous descriptions in the Bible. For, I know of no symbol so suggestive of the wrath of God as the bursting of a rain-cloud. What is the bursting of a rain-cloud? It is the protest against cold—the explosion which comes from the contact with a frigid vapour. Even such is the wrath of God. It is not interrupted warmth; it is warmth resenting the attempt to interrupt it. It is love asserting itself, vindicating itself. It is the heart struggling to master limits not its own, and running over into the enemy's ground. "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar." Who utters these violent words? It is the apostle of love himself—the man of Patmos. The fire of his youth is still there, more intensely there; but it comes from a new source. In Samaria, it was the voice of pride; in Patmos, it is the cry of pity. The burning bush has now God in the midst of it; the wrath of the lion has become the wrath of the Lamb.

GEORGE MATHESON.