

the creative activity of man, in science, art, poetry, philosophy, may be, nay, actually is, felt by us when we watch the sunrise, or contemplate the sunset, or when we let ourselves respond to the beauty or sublimity of nature. If, after all, one of our highest sources of gladness in our reading of the great masterpieces of thought or of art is the sense of fellowship and communion with the great personalities that made them, why should we not allow ourselves to feel that in the presence of the beautiful world in which we live we are in the presence of some one greater than the world? What is to hinder us from feeling that 'the presence of the power which disturbs us with the joy of elevated thoughts' is a presence that can make itself felt by us in nearer and more intimate ways?

It is not without significance that there is a great movement in the world of thought, partly of

revolt against our abstract systems of the interpretation of experience, and partly in favour of a more spiritual interpretation. You have Eucken in Germany, Croce in Italy, and Bergson in France, differing no doubt in many ways, yet all agreed in laying stress on the spiritual, and on those elements of experience which have eluded the grasp of the abstractions of which we are so fond. Yet interpretation must go on, and each generation and each man must do their own work, and all interpretations must themselves be interpreted in the light of the wider experience which indeed they have helped to form. For the world to be interpreted is a world that is in the making, and it is becoming a greater world, as the white radiance of eternity is being stained into many pictures by the creative activity of man in his response to and intercourse with the eternal Spirit.

The Great Text Commentary.

THE GREAT TEXTS OF ROMANS.

ROMANS I. 18.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold down the truth in unrighteousness.

ST. PAUL has enunciated his great thesis in the part of the Epistle preceding the text. There has arrived into the world a new and Divine force making for man's fullest salvation—the disclosure of a real fellowship in the moral being of God, which is open to all men, Jew and Gentile alike, on the simple terms of taking God at His word. This word of good tidings St. Paul is to expand and justify in his Epistle; but first he must pause and explain its antecedents.

Why was such a disclosure needed at this moment of the world's history? Why has St. Paul spoken of 'salvation,' or why does he elsewhere speak of 'redemption,' instead of expressing such ideas as are most popular among ourselves to-day—development or progress? It is because, to St. Paul's mind, man as he is is held in a bondage which he ought to find intolerable, and the first step to freedom lies in the recognition of this. Again, why does St. Paul lay such emphasis

on faith, mere faith, only faith—why does he insist so zealously on the exclusion of any merit or independent power on man's part? It is not only because faith, the faculty of mere reception and correspondence, represents the normal and rational relation of man to God, his Creator, Sustainer, Father. It is also, and with special emphasis, because there has been a great revolt, a great assertion of false independence on man's part; and what is needed first of all is the submission of the rebel, or much rather the return of the prodigal son, simply to throw himself on the mercy of his Father and acknowledge his utter dependence upon Him for the forgiveness of his disloyalty, as well as for the fellowship which he seeks in the Divine life. The fuller statement, therefore, of St. Paul's gospel must be postponed to the un-cloaking of what man is without it. The note of severity must be struck before the message of joy. We must be brought to acknowledge ourselves to be not men only, but corrupt men, doomed men, powerless to deliver ourselves, and ready therefore to welcome in simple gratitude the large offer of God's liberal and almost unconditional love.

I.

1. If Holy Scripture is a revelation of the purposes and mercy of God, it is equally a revelation of God's wrath against sin. It begins with the exhibition of a curse, destined to work itself out until the winding up of the ages. It ends by speaking of another state, in which the extreme malignity of sin meets with a punishment which we cannot understand, while we shrink from any definite realization of it. Christ was once asked, in view of these awful statements, 'Lord, are there few that be saved?' and we know how He gave no direct answer, but an answer which amounted to this: Act in your daily life as if the saved were only few. Strive and labour, and remember the narrow gate and the fallacy of majorities.

'The wrath of God' is an expression with which we are familiar in the Bible, being one of those in which human emotions are attributed to God in accommodation to the exigencies of human thought. It denotes His essential holiness, His antagonism to sin, to which punishment is due. It expresses an idea as essential to our conception of the Divine righteousness as those expressed by the words 'love' and 'mercy.' Wrath, or indignation, against evil is as necessary to our ideal of a perfect human being as is love of good; and therefore we attribute wrath to the perfect Divine Being, using of necessity human terms for expressing our conception of the Divine attributes.

If God is not angry with the impious and unrighteous, neither delights He in the pious and righteous; in things, indeed, which are diverse it is necessary to be moved in both directions, or in neither.¹

2. At the present time there is a deep and almost ubiquitous tendency to ignore the revelation of the wrath of God. No doubt there have been times in the history of Christianity when that revelation was thrown into disproportionate prominence, and men shrank from Christ (as Luther tells us he did in his youth) as from One who was nothing if not the inexorable Judge. They saw Him habitually as He is seen in the vast fresco of the Sistine Chapel, a sort of Jupiter Tonans casting His foes for ever from His presence; a Being from whom, not to whom, the guilty soul must fly. But the reaction from such thoughts, at present upon us, has swung to an extreme indeed, until the tendency is to say practically that there is

nothing in God to be afraid of; that the words 'hope' and 'love' are enough to neutralize the most awful murmurs of conscience, and to cancel the plainest warnings of the loving Lord Himself.

A man cannot violate a natural law with impunity. The most liberal-minded scientific man will see no unfairness in a man suffering if he disregards or violates the well-known laws of nature. Fire will burn, water will drown, pitch will defile, bad air will poison. If a man acts in defiance of these natural and elementary laws, he suffers the consequence. No one sees any unfairness in it. Why should there be any more unfairness in suffering as the result of disregarding and defying moral laws? On the contrary, is it not of more importance that a moral law should be vindicated, that men should learn to obey a moral law, than that even a natural law should be vindicated? But here, at any rate, is the fact, written clearly in God's Word, written over and over again on the page of history—light rejected means wrath revealed.²

3. From our idea of God's wrath let us utterly banish every thought of impatience, of haste, of what is arbitrary, of what is in the faintest degree unjust, inequitable. It is the anger of Him who never for a moment can be untrue to Himself; and He is Love and Light. But He is also, as we find it again in His Word, consuming Fire; and it is 'a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.' Nowhere and never is God not Love, as the Maker and Preserver of His creatures. Nowhere also and never is He not Fire, as the judicial Adversary of evil, the Antagonist of the will that chooses sin. Is there 'nothing in God to fear'? 'Yea,' says His Son, 'I say unto you, Fear Him.'

'God is spirit, light, love,' and then '*our* God is consuming fire.' The difference of expression seems to me to be significant. I always think that the three other sentences include all that we ever know of God as He is. Light and love include all that is suggested by fire without the need of purification. Indeed, the more one reflects on the triad, the more full of depths of meaning does it become. My most serious difficulty is as to the symbolism of fire. . . . Fire seems to me always to have relation to something perishable which has to be removed. So it is that while in the other cases it is said 'God is . . .,' in this case it is said 'Our God is . . .,' *i.e.* in relation to us sinful, corrupted creatures in need of purification through chastening.³

II.

1. The wrath of God, holy, passionless, yet awfully personal, 'is revealed from heaven.' That is to say, it is revealed as coming from heaven, when the righteous Judge 'shall be revealed from

² C. H. Irwin.

³ *Life of Bishop Westcott*, ii. 78, 83.

¹ Lactantius, *De Ira Dei*, v. 9.

heaven, taking vengeance.' In that pure upper world He sits whose wrath it is. From that stainless sky of His presence its white lightnings will fall, upon 'all godlessness and unrighteousness of men,' upon every kind of violation of conscience, whether done against God or against man; upon 'godlessness,' which blasphemes, denies, or ignores the Creator; upon 'unrighteousness,' which wrests the claims whether of Creator or of creature.

We observe the contrast of this Divine revelation of wrath with that of the righteousness of ver. 17. Righteousness and wrath are correlatives, and both are in a way revealed in the Gospel, wrath being the alternative of righteousness. Christ is either Saviour or Judge. Since God's righteousness is revealed by faith, it follows that the correlative truth, the wrath of God, is revealed likewise. It is a present revelation to conscience and in history. This may be called the Christian philosophy of history. It is humanity viewed in broad outline from the standpoint of Divine righteousness.

2. The Divine wrath is revealed in 'the Holy Scriptures,' in every history, by every Prophet, by every Psalmist; this perhaps is the main bearing of the Apostle's thought. But it is also revealed antecedently and concurrently in that mysterious, inalienable conscience which is more truly part of man than his five senses. Conscience sees that there is an eternal difference between right and wrong, and feels, in the dark, the relation of that difference to a law, a Lawgiver, and a doom. Conscience is aware of a fiery light beyond the veil. Revelation meets its wistful gaze, lifts the veil, and affirms the fact of the wrath of God, and of His coming judgment.

Retribution is a great fact, and it is not to be disposed of by being ignored. Moreover, it is a fact the foundation of which is laid not merely on the authoritative word from above, but deeply and broadly in the very nature of things. Men talk sometimes about the conflict between religion and science, or between the Bible and nature; but there, at any rate, there is no conflict, for while Paul, the Apostle, in the name of revelation, links up the wrong-doing of man with the revealed wrath of God, Herbert Spencer, the philosopher, affirms 'to separate pain from ill-doing is to fight against the constitution of things, and will inevitably be followed by more pain.'¹

III.

1. The objects of Divine wrath are set forth in the text under two words, 'Ungodliness' and

¹ H. Howard, *The Raiment of the Soul*, 231.

'Unrighteousness,' which, though seemingly synonymous and in some cases used interchangeably, yet really connote two totally different conceptions. Ungodliness, on the one hand, signifies failure to realize and discharge the obligations due from man to God; unrighteousness, on the other, involves a corresponding default in duty from man to man; while both are represented as deriving their guilt and liability to punishment from the fact that they are committed against the clearest light. Rightly understood, ungodliness and unrighteousness stand in the respective relation to one another of root and fruit.

2. The term ungodliness can perhaps best be construed through its moral opposite. The word for godliness in the New Testament has loyalty for its root idea. Thus it was understood by the Greeks centuries before its use by the Apostle Paul. That it became charged with deeper significance when taken up and employed by the New Testament writers must be conceded; but nevertheless loyalty remains the fundamental conception for which it stands. It therefore signifies the right relation of life to its supreme and sovereign Lord, its adjustment to a higher order, the ranging of it round a new centre, the bending of it to a vaster orbit, and the direction of it to nobler and grander, because unselfish, ends. Now, ungodliness is all this reversed. It is in its essential nature disloyalty to the supreme and sovereign Will.

Three great vices are always expressed in the Psalter in the same terms: Ungodliness, Sin, Pride; and the tenor of every passage throughout the Psalms, occupied in the rebuke or threatening of the 'wicked,' is coloured by its specific direction against one or other of these forms of sin. But, separate from all these sins, and governing them, is the monarchic 'Iniquity' which consists in the wilful adoption of, and persistence in, these other sins, by deliberately sustained false balance of the heart and brain. A man may become impious, by natural stupidity. He may become sinful, by natural weakness. And he may become insolent, by natural vanity. But he only becomes unjust, or unrighteous, by resolutely refusing to see the truth that makes against him; and resolutely contemplating the truth that makes for him. Against this 'iniquity,' or 'unrighteousness,' the chief threatenings of the Psalter are directed, striking often literally and low, at direct dishonesty in commercial dealings, and rising into fiercest indignation at spiritual dishonesty in the commercial dealing and 'trade' of the heart.²

3. 'In unrighteousness,' in a life which at best is not wholly and cordially with the will of God,

² Ruskin, *Rock Honeycomb* (*Works*, xxxi. 121).

'man holds down the truth,' silences the haunting fact that there is a claim he will not meet, a will he ought to love, but to which he prefers his own. The majesty of eternal right, always intimating the majesty of an eternal Righteous One, he thrusts below his consciousness, or into a corner of it, and keeps it there, that he may follow his own way. More or less, it wrestles with him for its proper place. And its even half-understood efforts may, and often do, exercise a deterrent force upon the energies of his self-will. But they do not dislodge it; he would rather have his way. With a force sometimes deliberate, sometimes impulsive, sometimes habitual, he 'holds down' the unwelcome monitor.

The word translated 'hold down' in the R.V. suggests that the ungodly possess the truth and suppress it by their unrighteous living. Lightfoot favours the view that the word means simply 'grasp,' and speaks of their holding and possessing the truth, and all the while living in unrighteousness. Yet another rendering is that of the American Standard Version: 'who hinder the truth in unrighteousness.' However we express it, we note the deliberate, definite, and wilful opposition to truth shown in unrighteous lives, which thereby inevitably and naturally incur the righteous wrath of God.

Highly coloured pictures have been employed in the presentation of the truth of the penalty incurred by man. The emblem of fire is familiar to many whom it has shocked, as setting forth the torture of that state in which antagonism to Love has been reached, and so antagonism to the actual Universe—that Universe which, calm and strong in its tremendous vitality, rolls on and crushes the helpless being who resists it. But it is a question if the emblem does not rather fail on that side where an emblem is intended to fail, and only hints instead of depicting the truth. Human sorrow knows something of the pang we can feel when the current of the Universe flows not with our will. But what would be the state of that being who in confirmed Selfness must be at every point together in complete and malignant hostility with the Universe of Love? We conceive that such a state can be only guessed at through material representations, however vivid, however terrible, however revolting many might call them. In any case we are sure that the philosophical truth stands in no danger from such representations—as concerns its correct apprehension—compared with the danger it may justly dread from men who, recoiling from the representations as coarse and awful, and themselves unable to reach the philosophic truth behind, conclude that the whole threat has arisen from the juggle of a priesthood anxious for their own ends to enslave the mind of humanity. Such persons smilingly and contemptuously abolish a hell that burns on still in the

possibilities of their own nature, which they are too shallow or too ignorant to understand.¹

IV.

1. There are many who hesitate to day to speak of God's wrath. Undoubtedly the subject demands reverence and careful treatment. In the past, crude notions, unworthy of God, have been held, and many things have been said which are shocking alike to conscience and to faith. But that there is something in God, a disposition and an attitude towards sin which involve feeling as well as purpose, we need not fear to maintain. Indeed, the absence of wrath would be a defect in God, for wrath is only another side of love, and punishment of sin is not all harm.

Minds which verily repent
Are burdened with impunity
And comforted by chastisement.
That punishment's the best to bear
That follows soonest on the sin;
The guilt's a game where losers fare
Better than those that seem to win.

2. The wrath of God is the wrath of Divine Fatherhood. The Fatherhood of God is the dominant note of the New Testament Scriptures, as the Sovereignty of God is that of the Old. Fatherhood is the final and completed revelation of the Divine. It is, in fact, the focal point towards which all the scattered rays of revealed truth converge, the point in which they cohere and find their unity. Such being the case, we are bound to interpret every scriptural presentation of the Divine character, every announcement of His purposes and plans for the race, in strict harmony with this latest revelation. Everything must be construed through the conception of Fatherhood, or it will be misconstrued. In accordance with this principle, the 'wrath of God' must be so conceived and presented as not to conflict with His love. Love is the essence of God's mysterious nature; it is the active principle of His being. His omnipotence, His omniscience, His omnipresence, are all the servants of His love. Love is the regulative principle directing and controlling all the Divine activities—creative, redemptive, and retributive. Love and wrath, so far from being mutually exclusive and contradictory terms, involve one another. Indeed, in proportion to the purity and intensity of the Divine love will be the fierce-

¹ G. Wade Robinson, *The Galilean Philosophy*, 103.

ness of its indignation against that which would defeat its ends. There must be this possibility of wrath in love to redeem it from weakness, and there must be love in wrath to redeem both it from revenge and its victim from despair.

The expression, 'the wrath of God,' simply embodies this truth, that the relations of God's love to the world are unsatisfied, unfulfilled. The expression is not merely anthropopathic, it is an appropriate description of the Divine pathos necessarily involved in the conception of a revelation of love restrained, hindered, and stayed through unrighteousness. For this wrath is holy love itself, feeling itself so far hindered because they whom it would have received into its fellowship have turned away from its blessed influence. This restrained manifestation of love, which in one aspect of it may be designated wrath, in another aspect is called 'grief,' or 'distress,' in the Holy Spirit of love; and wrath is thus turned into compassion.¹

3. How are we to escape the wrath of God? 'Nature has no promise for society, least of all any

¹ H. Martensen, *Christian Dogmatics*, 303.

remedy for sin,' says Horace Bushnell. Law condemns but cannot save; it is self-executing, regardless of prayers and tears, and even of efforts at amendment. Christianity alone is the world's hope, and the remedy for its sin and need.

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An Orphic Reference in the Apology of Aristides.

By J. RENDEL HARRIS, LITT.D., LL.D., D.D., WOODBROOKE, BIRMINGHAM.

THE question is sometimes raised as to how far the Orphic doctrines are reflected on and reproduced in the teaching of the early Christians, and the answers given will vary, according as the respondent wishes to prove either that everything Christian is new, or that everything of the kind has been anticipated; the confidence, too, of the replies will often be seen to be in an inverse proportion to our knowledge of what Orphism really was. M. Salomon Reinach, for example, appears to regard the whole story of the Crucifixion as an Orphic projection made through the lens of a passage in Plato's *Republic* about the impalement of the perfectly just man, who should happen to stray into or turn up in a community of unjust men.

I was struck recently by one passage in an early Christian writer, which seemed to betray an acquaintance with Orphic doctrine, and a mixed agreement with and difference from the same. As the writer was a philosopher, or at least calls himself so, and had presumably studied early religious systems, it might seem that the question of a

possible overlapping between Christianity and Orphism had been raised in the mind of Aristides as well as in the minds of others.

Let us first transcribe a passage from Herodotus in which he describes the attitude of the Orphic religions towards life and death.

He is discussing the virtues of the various Thracian tribes, of whom he was a close observer and a great admirer, from whom the Greeks had received a large part of their tradition with regard to Dionysiac and Orphic cults; and in coming to one particular tribe, the Trausi, he notes their peculiar, half-pessimistic, half-optimistic views of life and death, in the following terms:—

v. 3. 'The Trausi perform the same religious rites as the rest of the Thracians, but with regard to the child that is born or the person who dies among them, their custom is as follows: when a child is born the relatives sit round it and wail, recounting all the human sufferings and all the ills which he must go through from his birth; but when a man dies, they sportively and gladly lay him away in the earth, reciting over him the ills