

I maintain that it is ordained as part of the penalty of sin, and that Scripture teaches us to connect it with the agency of the Evil One.

Here, then, is the matter of dispute, the subject of contention, between Michael and the Devil. Fain would Satan see the mournful work of death completed upon the fallen hero of Israel, the almost faultless servant of God; but Michael knew that God had provided some better thing, some special reward even in this world, for that faithful servant: therefore he said, "The Lord rebuke thee."

RAYNER WINTERBOTHAM.

*AN ANCIENT SOLUTION OF A MODERN
PROBLEM.*

ST. MATTHEW XII. 15-21.

AMONG the unsolved problems of the New Testament few, if any, recur more frequently to our thoughts than this: Why did the Lord Jesus habitually forbid those whom He had healed to blazon abroad the miracles of power and grace which He had wrought upon them? There are, no doubt, other problems far more important than this; but there are few which come back upon us so often. On page after page of the Gospel narratives we read that He straightly charged those whom He had healed to hold their peace, to tell no man, on no account to make Him known.

Many solutions of the problem have been proposed, which are good so far as they go; but, lacking authority, they also lack conclusiveness. Still, we listen to them with respect if they sound reasonable.

and many of them are perfectly reasonable. When, for example, we are told that Christ bade men hold their peace because He did not wish to provoke the hostility of the rulers of the Jews before his time was come; or, because those who had so newly come to Him were not competent as yet to bear witness to Him; or, because it was more for their spiritual health that they should silently reflect on the meaning of the wonders He had wrought than that they should publish them abroad; or, because it was better that they should save their strength for action and not fritter it away in mere talk:—we have nothing to object; we admit that any one of these solutions may be the true key to the problem, or that at least much may be said for any one of them. And yet, even if we accept them all, we are not satisfied. We do not feel that the question is closed. We expect to hear it re-opened at a future day, and think it highly probable that some larger and more conclusive answer to it will be found. And we do well to accept such answers as these with diffidence, even if they be our own: for no answer can be more than a provisional solution of the problem until the voice of Inspiration authoritatively end and crown the debate.

But is such an inspired solution to be had? It is; although, to our shame, it has long been overlooked. In the passage before us, St. Matthew gives an authoritative reply to the question which has often perplexed our thoughts. He tells us that once, when Jesus was followed by a great multitude, and had healed them all, He charged them that they should not make Him known; and this He did, affirms

the Evangelist, "*that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: Behold my Servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my Spirit upon him, and he shall shew judgment to the nations; he shall not strive, nor cry, neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets: a bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking wick he shall not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory: and in his name shall the nations trust.*" This is St. Matthew's solution of the problem; and if we study it carefully we shall not only find one of the vexed questions of the Christian Scriptures laid to rest, we shall also gather from it a divine hope and comfort. His words unfold before us a glorious prospect—the ultimate victory of the single and righteous Will of God over all the impure and conflicting wills of men; they also assure us that, till that day of triumph break upon the world, we are led and taught and upheld by a Master the kindest, the gentlest, the most gracious men ever had.

Let us mark, then, (1) what St. Matthew's solution of the problem is; and (2) what comfort and hope it suggests for us and for all men.

I. According to St. Matthew, the Lord Jesus charged men not to make Him known *in order that* a prophecy of Isaiah's might be fulfilled. On Isaiah's prophetic soul, dreaming of things to come, there had dawned a vision of the elect and beloved "Servant" of God, of the ideal Man, Minister, Son of Jehovah (Isa. xlii.). To him it seemed that this elect or ideal Servant, come when and how He might, must be animated and clothed with the

Divine Spirit; that his supreme aim and object would be to establish right on an earth smitten and vexed with manifold intolerable wrongs; that He would pursue this end with a Divine simplicity, gentleness, patience,—not contending angrily for pre-eminence, not trumpeting forth his claims to homage in street and market-place, but binding up the bruised reed, fanning to flame the smoking wick; gradually, gently, but surely winning his way with men by force of love and meekness, until at last they would make his will their will with cheerful and unforced accord, and the eternal righteousness of God, as revealed in Him, would gain a complete victory over all the wrongs of time. This was the gracious yet august Figure which rose before the Prophet's mind as he strove to conceive what the ideal Minister of God must be like; and to this elect Servant he heard the voice of the Heavenly Majesty saying, "I, the Lord, have called thee to righteousness, that I may take hold of thy hand, and make thee the Light of the nations, to open the blind eyes, to bring prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness from the house of restraint." In short, the true Servant of God, elect and beloved, will be animated by the very spirit of God Himself; and therefore his work will be to bring back a divine righteousness to wronged and suffering men, and to make that righteousness the law of the whole earth. And the special "note," or characteristic of his ministry will be a steadfast gentleness, an unflinching patience which will not suffer Him to despair of any man, however weak and sinful; a holy tranquillity and simplicity which

will keep Him at the farthest remove from the passion, the ostentation, the rude and selfish violence of the man who seeks notoriety for himself rather than the welfare of those whose notice and applause he solicits.

Is not that a true ideal? does it not commend itself to our reason? If God be love, must not the ideal Servant of God—in St. Paul's expressive phrase, "truth in love," *i.e.*, put the truth before men in winning, gentle, affectionate forms? If the proclamation of truth, the reign of righteousness, be his aim, will He not pursue that aim with a Divine gentleness and simplicity? How else can He be, and shew Himself to be, truly Divine? how else the chosen Minister, the beloved Son of the God who does not *force* Himself and his will upon us, but veils Himself behind the laws and forces of the universe, behind the natural sentiments and affections of the human heart, behind social influences and the kindnesses of friends; so that we have to discover Him, to find Him out, and to learn that we live, not by these natural ministries alone, but by the living quickening words which proceed from his mouth, and which give these natural ministries their vitality and efficacy?

Now this lofty prophetic ideal St. Matthew affirms to have been incarnated in the man Christ Jesus. *He* was the elect Servant, beloved of Heaven. On him the Spirit of God descended and abode. It was his task, his mission, to announce the Divine good-will to men, and to establish righteousness on the vexed and groaning earth. And here was the proof: He had the

distinctive note, or characteristic, of the ideal Minister. He did not strive, nor cry; his voice was not heard in the streets. He was no blatant champion fighting in a set field before myriads of spectators, and shouting as he fought. He was no loud-voiced tribune of the people "courting the most sweet voices" of the mob, posing himself in the eyes of the multitude and doing his good deeds to be seen of men,—strutting the stage, and ranting and mouthing out his incorruptible love of virtue, his resolve to see justice done. He was quiet, and calm, and gentle, as true greatness ever is. He condescended to men of low estate without "condescension." Nothing human was alien to Him,—no broken-down publican bruised with compunction for his treasons and extortions, no miserable harlot in whom the flame of pure love was all but quenched. Whoever needed Him was welcome to Him; the more they needed Him, the more welcome were they. So gentle was He, so in-obtrusive and unostentatious, so far from craving the applause of men, that when the sick, the sinful, the outcast had found healing, forgiveness, virtue in Him, He charged them to tell no man of it. And here, in this modesty, this reticence, this divine simplicity, St. Matthew saw the characteristic manner of the elect Servant and beloved Son of God whom Isaiah had depicted.

So that *now*, whenever the question is raised, "Why did the Lord Jesus charge those whom He had healed and saved not to make Him known?" we have at our command an authoritative and inspired reply. It was because He was the ideal

Minister of God, the ideal and perfect Man and Servant and Son whom Isaiah foresaw. Or, to go to the full depth of the reply: it was because He was Divine; because, therefore, his works must be characterized by a Divine modesty and simplicity: because the Redeemer, like the Creator, of men must needs veil his glory, not flaunt it in the eyes of men; because all great forces are gentle, calm, gradual in their operation: because He came to be, not as the momentary lightning, which rends and slays and roars exultingly over the strokes with which it stabs the earth, but like the gentle friendly light which, though it comes so noiselessly and imperceptibly that it is long before it wakes us, nevertheless transfigures the face of the earth and sets in motion all the wheels of Nature and of human life.

II. We have to mark the suggestions of Hope and Comfort with which St. Matthew's solution of this problem is rife. Men groan under the burden of many sorrows. But if there be some that press upon us more sharply, there is none which lies upon us with a more constant and weary weight than the burden of this *unintelligible* world. We believe that God is good, and that He must therefore be causing all things to work together for the good of his creatures. We see that man is a creature of capable and well-nigh godlike faculties, with large discourse of reason, with a heart that easily melts into tenderness or flames into heroism. In some few favoured specimens of the race we see to what serene heights of dignity, goodness, serviceableness, peace, humanity may rise. And yet, for the most part, men are borne down into the very dust by a

throng of petty cares and carnal cravings, at war with each other, at war with themselves, their best faculties uncultivated, their purest affections seldom evoked: nay, so untoward are the present conditions of human life, that it is still true that much wisdom brings much sorrow with it, and our best affections are avenues through which the enemies of our peace deliver their most fatal assaults. To the great bulk of men life hardly seems worth having, in the eye of reason, and immortality appears but a perilous endowment, so steeped are they in misery and corruption, or so insensible to that which should fill them with misery and shame.

Yet what help is there? what prospect of relief? Finding their present conditions intolerable, the wiser and more aspiring sort of men have always fled for refuge to the future; they have run for shelter and relief into the Sanctuary of Hope. Poets and statesmen and prophets have vied with each other in depicting the golden close of the world's troubled story in an age of universal purity and concord and peace. Nor are their hopes altogether woven of such stuff as dreams are made of. The elect Servant of God, Christ the Saviour, came to make them real and true. From Him we learn, as also from the Prophets and Apostles, that the hopes of men have not deceived them. He has taught us to see the pure, tender, stedfast Will of God working in and through all the tangled mass of the impure, conflicting, hostile wills of men, and has assured us that in the end the will of God shall be done on earth even as it is in heaven.

And it is this secret of hope, for ourselves and for

the world at large, which is once more disclosed in the passage before us. Isaiah and Matthew combine to proclaim that Christ, the Beloved of God and man, has come into the world to shew "*judgment*" to the nations, and that He will not pause in his sacred task "*until he sends forth judgment unto victory.*" Now this word "*judgment*" has a history, and a history which compels us to read it in a sense far other than that in which it is commonly taken. As used by the Prophets and the Psalmists it is one of the many names for the law of God. The *mishpât*, or "*judgment*," which Christ came to announce to men, is the will of God viewed as the rule of human life. The word sets forth the absolute rightness, or righteousness, of that Will, and lays emphasis on the fact that it is quick with a judicial energy in virtue of which it is capable of executing itself, condemning and chastising the world that it may save the world from its sins. So that when we read of Christ that He came to shew "*judgment*" to the nations, we are to understand that He came to reveal the righteousness, or right will, of God to man, in order that they might no longer go about to establish their own righteousness, but might submit to the righteousness of God. And when we read that Christ will work on, unceasing and unceasing, "*until he send forth judgment unto victory,*" we are to understand that his righteousness will at the last prevail over all the unrighteousness of men, that the nations will submit to the pure will of God and make it their own.

This is our hope. Heaven is to come down to earth. God is to return and dwell with men. The

nations, saved from their self-will, their corruptions and conflicts and miseries, are to take sanctuary in Him, to find life and peace in Him. Men are not always to be in bondage to care and fear and sorrow because they are sinful and unclean. A day will come in which a great voice out of heaven will be heard proclaiming, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." And as this Voice from heaven dies away, there will rise a great shout, or song, from the nations of the saved,—*"Hallelujah! for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth."*

But to most of us this hope commonly seems as distant as it is great. Now and then, perhaps, in our more raised and spiritual moods, we catch glimpses of it, and set our faces toward it, and some faint reflection of its splendour falls and kindles in our upturned faces. But, ordinarily, it is far away, dwarfed by distance, and sheds no sensible light of courage and cheerful anticipation into our souls. We want, we crave, a nearer refuge from the cares and miseries of life, from the thoughts that fly low and brood over the sins and degradations of the world. Is there, then, no present, no immediate comfort to be had? Yes, there is. For He, who is to lead forth "judgment unto victory," is even now "shewing judgment" to the nations. Christ did not cease from his work of redemption

when He went up on high, to resume it at some far distant day when He is to come again. He is still with us, and still carrying on his work, still teaching men the good-will of God, and inclining them to respond to it and adopt it. He is even now shewing that Will to us, and inviting us to make it our refuge, our sanctuary, our hope. No matter how sinful we have been, no matter how weak we are, no matter how many are the evil passions and habits with which we have to contend, Christ offers Himself to us as our Saviour and Friend. He comes with the halo of many peaceful victories round his brow. He has proved again and again that He is "able to save unto the uttermost all them that come unto God by him." How many bruised reeds, trodden under foot of man, has He bound up, raised, and quickened into new life! How many smoking wicks, how many hearts in which the light of spiritual life seemed to have clean gone out, so that they had become an offence in the nostrils of the Pharisee, has He fanned into a clear and ardent flame! How many even of the basest and the vilest has his gentleness made great! And He is as accessible to-day, as meek, as gentle, as considerate, as quick to discern any faint single spark of true life as when, clothed in flesh, He dwelt among men. It is still true that He does not strive nor cry, nor lift up his voice in the streets, as one who would use men to win fame for Himself or to enhance his glory. He comes to us as gently and kindly as the light, to open our closed eyes on a new day of hopeful service, and tranquil activity, and peaceful rest. He comes to us in the secret places

of the soul when good thoughts arise within us, when we long to be better than we are, when we feel well-nigh hopeless of the deliverance from that which is wrong and base and hard, for which we nevertheless sigh. We may put Him to the proof at any moment ; and the moment we do go to Him, this elect and beloved Son of God will give us power to become the sons of God and to make his will our will amid all the changes and conflicts of time.

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THE VINDICTIVE PSALMS VINDICATED.

INTRODUCTORY.

IF I may hope that the defence of the 109th Psalm, which appeared in THE EXPOSITOR for November 1875, has commended itself to my readers, they will possibly be curious to learn whether any similar apology, or any apology at all, can be offered for the imprecations contained in other Psalms. They will probably be asking, "Can the fierce and vindictive expressions which disfigure other portions of the Psalter, in any case or cases, be identified as *quotations*—quotations by the Psalmists of the curses of their enemies?"

The answer to this question is, I had almost said unhappily, very simple. It is that, with the insignificant exceptions of Psa. xxii. 8 and Psa. xli. 8—in both of which instances, it will be observed, we have taunts or reproaches, rather than maledictions, and in both of which the reproachful words are distinguished as citations by our Authorized Version ; and also with the exception of Psa. xli. 5, where the