

THE EXPOSITOR.

THE PARABLE OF THE LABOURERS IN THE VINEYARD.

ST. MATTHEW XX. 1-16.

THE parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard is peculiar to St. Matthew, and is placed by him in a context which is evidently in direct relation to it. A rich young "ruler" (*i.e.*, as we may suppose, like Jairus, the ruler or director of a synagogue), seizing the spirit of Jewish legalism, and thinking that from the new Rabbi he should obtain some new formula with which he was hitherto unacquainted, came to Jesus, and asked Him eagerly "what he should do to inherit eternal life." He was told in reply that if he would be perfect—if he would come up to the highest standard—he must distribute all his wealth among the poor and cast in his lot unreservedly with the band of wandering Galilean peasants and fishermen whom he saw before him. For some reason, which we must not stay now to inquire into, our Lord put before this young man a lofty and severe ideal of duty, to which, for the present at least, he was not equal. Whether at any future time he accepted the terms that were offered him does not appear; but, at any rate, he could not make up

his mind to them at once, and he went away disappointed and crestfallen.

After his departure the conversation turned upon the hindrance that riches oppose to any true discipleship of Christ. And Peter, contrasting, not without some self-satisfaction, the sacrifices that he and his fellow-disciples had made with the unwillingness to part with his wealth displayed by the young ruler, asked what reward he and they were to have. The answer to such a question must evidently cut both ways. On the one hand it must assert the truth that any seeming loss which the disciple undergoes is not really such, but rather a gain. God does not require of his servants any surrender which will not be amply, and far more than amply, made up to them. And, on the other hand, the ambition and self-assertion of Peter must needs receive correction. The first of these two objects is met in the last verses of Matt. xix., and the second in the parable which forms the opening section of Matt. xx. The one is linked on to the other by means of the clause of reservation added to the promise of reward. The reward indeed shall be in highly augmented ratio. It shall be nothing less than the gift of eternal life. But, “many who are last shall be first, and the first last.”

The eye naturally passes from these words to those which conclude the parable that follows, Matt. xx. 16. Here they are almost exactly repeated, and with a less qualified exactness than would appear from our Authorized Version. In this there is an addition that must in all probability be set aside as not part of the original Gospel. The clause, “Many are called, but

few chosen," though undoubtedly genuine in the second place where it occurs, Matt. xxii. 14, is wanting in the two oldest MSS., the Vatican and Sinaitic, with two other important uncials,¹ and also in the two Egyptian versions, a group which is shewn by accumulated evidence to represent the best type of text. The corrupt addition, like so many more, seems to have been early made and soon to have spread, especially over the Syrian and Latin Churches. It is important that this excrescence should be cleared away, as some Commentators have been perplexed,² and others (*e.g.*, notably Stier) have been entirely misled by it in their interpretation of the parable. The genuine text ends with the words, "So the last shall be first and the first last." In these we are to look for the summing up, or moral, of the parable, which we shall come to consider in due course.

There are three points in the parable that it may be well for us to take separately: (1) The hiring of the labourers, (2) the times of the hiring, (3) the payment which they receive.

¹ Z, the Dublin Palimpsest, which contains only 290 verses of the First Gospel, but is of the highest value, indeed second only to \aleph and B, for any passage on which its testimony is extant; and L, the Codex Regius, at Paris, which marks a transition text, sometimes siding with the oldest authorities and sometimes heading the array of later witnesses. The clause was bracketed by Tregelles (before the discovery of the Codex Sinaiticus), and is omitted by Tischendorf (8th edition, not 7th), Westcott and Hort, and McClellan.

² Archbishop Trench among the number: "There is more difficulty in the closing words, 'For many be called, but few chosen.' They are not hard in themselves, but only in the position which they occupy," &c.—"Notes on the Parables," p. 189. This was written before quite so much attention had been paid to text criticism as it has received since, otherwise the difficulty would have found an easy solution.

(1) *The Hiring.* The late Dean Alford begins his comment upon the parable by laying down as its *punctum saliens* that "the kingdom of God is of grace, not of debt." I do not wish to imply that this is not true; but, strange to say, the very opposite might almost be deduced from it. If we take the first set of labourers only, their relations throughout are strictly those of debt. They are hired for certain work, at a certain price. They are to do a day's work at the ordinary rate of a denarius—which, without very much straining, we may paraphrase, with Mr. McClellan, as a "shilling." They go into the vineyard; they fulfil their part of the contract; they earn the promised wages, and they receive them. It is a plain commercial transaction, in which both parties duly perform their share.

It may seem to be somewhat otherwise with the labourers who are sent into the vineyard last. They also receive a shilling, though they have worked but a single hour. We can well understand that this would seem to them to be due to the bounty of their employer. They would hardly expect to receive as much. And yet when we look back at the terms of the contract, here, too, the same element of justice appears. "Whatsoever is right (*δικαιον*) I will give you;" "Whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive." The second of these clauses, indeed, like the latter part of verse 16, seems to be not strictly genuine.¹ It is wanting not only in the group of MSS. mentioned already, but also in the Old Latin translation.

¹ The best critical editors are agreed in its excision. Mr. McClellan, again, appears on the side to which he is, in some important instances, opposed.

It is a later Alexandrine and Syrian reading, which thence passed into the current Constantinopolitan text. The sense, however, is the same. There can be little doubt that the condition, "whatever is right I will give you," which is expressly stated at the hiring of the second party of labourers, is to be extended to those who were sent into the vineyard later. They, too, were to receive what was *just*. Their pay is a *μισθός*,—wages for work done.

Some of the Commentators on the Protestant side have tried hard to evade this conclusion. Starting from the Reformation doctrine of Justification by Faith only, and seeming to see a contradiction of this in an exegesis which would represent the gift of God as in any way earned by the works of man, they have sought to explain away the nature of the gift and to restrict it to merely temporal goods. They have made it out to be the "houses, and brethren, and children, and lands" of Chap. xix. 29, but not the "everlasting life" that is coupled with these earthly possessions. It is sufficiently clear, however, that no such limitation is really possible. The eventide is the Parousia—the second coming of the Son of Man, when all who have served Him will be summoned into his presence, to receive according to that they have done.

Our language is apt to fall into metaphors taken from this very act, the payment of wages. Necessarily and naturally. It is the language of Scripture: "The Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father, with his angels; and then shall he reward every man according to his works;" "God shall render to every man according to his deeds;" "Every man

shall receive his own reward according to his labour ;” “ We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ ; that every one may receive the things done in the body according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad ;” “ The Father, without respect of persons, judgeth according to every man’s work ;” “ I will give unto every one of you according to his works ;” “ Behold, I come quickly ; and my reward is with me, to give every man as his work shall be.”¹

We can afford to let these passages have their full weight all the more as we are less inclined to give a one-sided prominence to the opposite doctrine. For an opposite (or, shall we say rather, complementary ?) doctrine there is, which is equally true : “ By grace ye are saved ;” “ We are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus ;” “ Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness ;” “ Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace ; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed.”²

Both sets of passages are equally explicit. On the one hand the future reward is represented as determined by what a man does to deserve it. On the other hand it is represented, not as owed or earned, but as given out of the manifold mercy and bounty of God, through the reconciliation wrought by his Son.

¹ Matt. xvi. 27 ; Rom. ii. 6 ; 1 Cor. iii. 8 ; 2 Cor. v. 10 ; 1 Pet. i. 17 ; Rev. ii. 23 ; xxii. 12.

² Ephes. ii. 5 ; Rom. iii. 24 ; iv. 4, 16.

These two different points of view seem to be naturally reached according as we follow different lines of thought. If we contemplate immediately and in itself the relation of the work done to the reward received, at once it is seen to be out of all proportion. There is no merit in anything we can do to account for the bountifulness of the promises that God has vouchsafed to us. There is a taint, if not actually on, yet very near to, the best we do. That the stumbling, heartless, inconstant service of earth should meet with such an infinitely glorious return can only be of grace—a free gift, not bought, but bestowed. Yet, on the other hand, if we ask upon whom is that gift to be bestowed? for whom is this grace to be exercised? in what comparative proportions shall it be exercised? then we inevitably fall back upon the question what the man is in himself. If man is a free agent at all (and that he is so is the first postulate of all morals and religion), then it follows that his place must ultimately be determined by the way in which he has used his power of willing.

The contradiction, indeed (so far as there is one), runs through from the very beginning. Man is a creature of circumstances: yet he is free. He is bidden to work in God's vineyard: yet at best his labour will be unprofitable. He will be judged according to his works: and yet by grace he is saved. It is not that works have a merit, directly and immediately, in themselves. But works are the test of what a man *is*—they are the test, the outward visible sign of faith itself. And by what he is he will be classed at the day of judgment.

But if a man were judged simply by what he is—if a severe balance were struck between his good and his evil deeds—no reward would be possible to him at all. That he should receive a reward—and such a reward as he will receive—is an act of grace. Relatively to his fellow-men, to that division and classification on which any system of judgment must be based, salvation is of works. Absolutely, and in regard to the relation between the soul and its God, salvation is of grace.

Perhaps this comes out somewhat more clearly in another parable, which may be used to illustrate this of the Labourers in the Vineyard,—the parable of the Talents. There one servant receives five talents, and by putting them out to trade he gains five talents more. Another, who receives two talents, gains two. But how is the reward proportioned to the merit? Is it at all on the same scale? The contrary is brought out expressly and vividly. “Thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things.” Or, as it appears in a still more precise and definite form in the Third Gospel, he who has gained the ten pounds is made to have rule over ten *cities*, he who has gained five pounds over five. That which is measured on the one hand in terms of retail trade, is measured on the other in terms of regal authority and power. “Not as the offence,” nor yet as the service, “so is the free gift.”

“God doth not need
Either man’s work, or his own gifts.”

And the limit of man’s power to work for Him is not the limit of his grace.

(2) *The Times of Hiring.* The question is frequently raised as to the presence of secondary meanings or applications in Scripture. No doubt they exist, and, in our Lord's words especially, to a very large extent indeed. But the account of them seems to be, not so much that the sacred writer or speaker has in his mind, at one and the same time, two or more different sets of events, but that he penetrates to the single law which binds those events together. The laws of the Divine action are uniform. They are made so in order that we may have the power of forecasting their operation and of acting upon them. God deals upon the same principles with individuals separately and with nations and bodies of men collectively. Hence it is not strange if the parables, which express such deep spiritual truths, should be found to have applications on many sides. There is hardly an end to the possible applications of them.

Thus we are not really compelled to choose, as some Commentators have felt bound to do, between different ways of applying the parable before us. A true interpretation will embrace them all. The master of the vineyard is represented as going out in the early morning, *i.e.*, soon after sunrise, when work began, or, according to our modern reckoning, approximately, at six o'clock, at nine, at noon, at three, and at five. And on each occasion he sends labourers into his vineyard, at the later hours not without reproach to them for standing idle so long.

Those called early, say some, were the Jews; those called later are the Gentiles. Origen maintained that the different hours were rather epochs in

the history of the world, such as the Flood, the Call of Abraham, the Mission of Moses. Bengel would make them periods in the ministry of our Lord Himself, from the first calling of the Apostles to the Ascension and Day of Pentecost; Meyer, periods in the whole Messianic dispensation, from the coming of the Messiah to the Parousia. Others, with Chrysostom and Jerome, say that they refer to periods in the lifetime of individuals. The labourers who are hired in the early morning are those who, "like Samuel, Jeremiah, and John the Baptist, can say with the Psalmist, 'Thou art my God, even from my mother's womb.'" To go into the vineyard at the third hour is to enter the service of God in youth. Noon represents manhood; the ninth hour declining years; the eleventh, old age, when some have even yet heard and obeyed the heavenly call.

There is no need to pick and choose. The summons of God is made at sundry times and in divers manners, both to nations, to bodies of men, and to individuals. The same rule holds good for one as for the other. It is this rule that our Lord expresses in so lively a manner in the parable, not any of the particular cases that come under it. It may be applied to them, but they do not exhaust it. It has been, is being, and will be, fulfilled. It belongs equally to past, present, and future.

(3) *The Payment of the Labourers.* In these ways, then, the parable is instructive. They do not, however, touch its main point. That is reserved for the end. And here the more serious difficulties of the parable begin.

The labourers are called in to receive their day's

wage; and all of them alike, both those who had worked the whole twelve hours and those who had worked only one, receive the sum stipulated for with the first body—the denarius, or shilling. The order, too, in which they are paid is an inverted one. The late comers are called up first, and so on backwards.

Now thus much is clear. The evening, when work ceases and the paying-time comes, is the Great Audit. The master of the house is He in whose name that Audit is to be held, and the *ἐπίτροπος*, or steward, is Christ. We reject as erroneous all interpretations which explain the payment in any other way. It is the gift of eternal life.

There are, however, some points that this parable leaves open. It is not intended to convey any decision as to the relation between the hour of death and the hour of judgment. Both are represented as taking place at the same time, or as immediately following each other. The labourers leave the vineyard, and they are at once summoned into the counting-house to receive their due. The interval, such as we believe there will be, is foreshortened. The parable is silent as to specific information on this head.

Neither is any inference to be drawn from the equality of the sum paid. All the labourers receive the shilling; but it does not therefore follow that future rewards will be equal. The direct contrary is stated in other parables. The servant who trades with the money his lord committed to him and makes ten pounds becomes governor over ten cities: he who has been less successful, but yet successful, has rule over five. The Twelve Apostles are to "sit

on thrones." There are "least and greatest" in the kingdom of heaven, Many are called, but few are raised to any elect or special dignity. These are direct statements made with reference to the particular point of the ranks or gradations in the Messianic kingdom. But here, in the parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard, there is a different purpose. It deals indeed with the question of rank and gradation, but only in a relative sense, as between different individuals or bodies of men. For the purposes of the parable it comes to the same thing, whether equal labour (or what seems to be equal labour) receives reward upon a graduated scale, or seemingly different amounts of labour are paid on the same scale. The point of the parable does not turn upon this. "Whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive."

The real question and the real difficulty lies in the comparative treatment of the different parties of labourers—in the fact that the first are made last and the last first. It is round this sentence that the whole parable hinges. It is not to be denied that there is a difficulty, which cannot be explained as merely accidental. It is part of the intention of the parable, and is just what makes it so instructive.

When it comes to be the turn of the first set of labourers to be paid, they too receive the shilling for which they had bargained. At this they grumble and complain, and they make bold to remonstrate with the master of the house. "These last have spent [or "made," literally, but idiomatically, as our own workmen sometimes say] but one hour, and thou hast made them equal to us, who have borne the burden and heat of the day." The reply that

they receive is quiet and courteous, but absolutely decisive and uncompromising: "Friend, I do thee no wrong; didst thou not agree with me for a shilling? Take up thine own, and go thy way. It is my pleasure to give unto this last even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I please with mine own? Or is thine eye evil because I am good? Art thou envious because I am liberal?" There can be no rejoinder to this. The grounds alleged are beyond dispute: first, the bargain—a shilling they were to receive and a shilling they got; and, secondly, the will and pleasure of the master of the house; his money was his own, and if he chose to give to one and not to another, his right none could question.

We, too, must needs acquiesce in this reasoning. And yet is there not a faintly-heard murmur in our own consciences? Have we not at heart a lurking sympathy with the disappointed workmen? If such a case were to happen in real life, if any one of us were to treat his workmen in this way, we should indeed admit, as we needs must, the justice of the reply; and yet there would be an undertone of remonstrance and doubt as to whether, after all, the men who met with such rigorous measure had not some right on their side, and did not do well to be aggrieved. What shall we say to this? It is not wrong to ask such questions. It is best not to blink difficulties, because by turning back upon and seeking to penetrate deeper into them, we often reach a truer meaning.

Is not this an instance of that wonderful phenomenon which we may, perhaps, venture to call the

irony of Jesus? This is not the only time or occasion that He, the Holy One, spoke in a way that may seem for the moment to a superficial eye to contradict the tenor of his own mission. He disclaimed for Himself the title of "Good." He likened the Christian elsewhere to a fraudulent steward. He drew one of his parables from an unjust and selfish judge, who is wearied, by sheer persistence on the part of the petitioner, into granting what his own sense of right is insufficient to move him to grant; another from the conduct of a man who will do to save himself annoyance more than ever he will do for the sake of friendship. A criticism, shallow with all its ability and learning, has stumbled at these sayings and cast a doubt upon their genuineness.¹ But which of the disciples possessed that finely-tempered and gracious audacity which could invent them? It is not the sinner who speaks, but the deep and thrilling humanity of Him who was "in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."

In the answer of the master of the house something is spoken and something is withheld. The reply is adapted to the nature of the remonstrance. If that had been made in a different manner and spirit we may believe that perhaps less reserve and more confidence would have been shewn. As it is, the answer that is given is absolutely valid and true. It is one side of the truth, and the side that will always be turned against murmurers. It reminds us of the words of St. Paul: "Nay, but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed

¹ Cf. Keim, "Geschichte Jesu von Nazara," I. p. 74, n. 2.

say to him that formed it, 'Why hast thou made me thus?' Hath not the potter power over the clay of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour and another unto dishonour?"¹ A view of destiny stern and severe, but true, though clearly not an exhaustive account either of Divine Justice or Divine Mercy. So here in the parable we have to do only with the apparent aspect of things. The time at which the labourers had been at work is disregarded in the wages which they receive. But time is, as all experience shews, a very imperfect test of the value of labour.² It is only said that the later-called labourers worked for a shorter time, not that their work was essentially of less value than that of those who were called first. The reverse of this is implied: "Whatsoever is right, I will give you." The promise is put upon the ground of justice. It was really, we may be sure, justice, and not partial or capricious generosity, that regulated the reward. This is the unwavering language of Scripture: God will "render to every man according to his deeds; . . . unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, . . . indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; but glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile: for *there is no respect of persons with God.*"³

¹ Romans ix. 20, 21.

² "Finis parabolæ est mercedem vitæ æternæ non tempori quo quis laboravit, sed labori et operi quod fecit respondere."—Maldonatus, quoted by Trench. Dr. Trench criticises this view unfavourably, and no doubt it is mistaken in assigning as the main object of the parable what is really, as it were, only a kind of hidden background to it.

³ Romans ii. 6, 8-11.

Apply the parable, in each of its different senses, and all becomes clear. The Jew was first called. God had made with him a solemn covenant. His were "the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises." His were "the fathers of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came." There was a time when all the rest of the world was standing idle in the market-place, when it could be said, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth."¹ And yet the Gentile kingdoms, even those who were last admitted, would not therefore be at a disadvantage if they were faithful to their calling. Even then the first might be last and the last first.

Or, still more strikingly, within the circle of the Apostles: Peter himself, it was true, had been among the first to receive the summons, and yet he was outdone by one who spoke of himself as "born out of due time, the least of the apostles, and not meet to be called an apostle," who had not only stood idle, but had actually persecuted the Church of God. This relation between St. Peter and St. Paul may be said to be prophetically anticipated in the parable. In it a warning was conveyed to the elder Apostle that, though he had left all to follow Christ, still no primacy was assured to him; and he was at the same time admonished not to look forward in that spirit of jealousy and self-assertion (in his case, perhaps, thoughtless rather than deliberate) which prompted his question, "What shall we have therefore?"

This is the main purport of the parable. In calling attention to the fact that the mention of the time

¹ Amos iii. 2.

at which the labourers had been at work tells us nothing as to the nature and value (*i. e.*, relative or comparative value) of that work, it is not intended that this is more than an incidental feature. We insist upon it only because it is here that the difficulty of the parable and the explanation of the difficulty seem to lie. The judgments of God are not arbitrary, though they might seem so, if looked at through the glasses of human jealousy and ignorance. The first may be last and the last first, and yet justice, infinite and perfect justice, governs the Divine awards. Those who make so bold as to murmur at the lot apportioned to them will be answered as they deserve. The severer side of God's Providence will be turned upon them. They will have the mysteries of Omnipotence unfolded to them rather than the mysteries of Grace. In a truly humble, and gentle, and reverent mind such questions will never arise at all.

And yet, on the other hand, we must not take too exaggerated a view of the character of those who found themselves so unexpectedly levelled and degraded. They, too, receive each the wages that were agreed upon. We must take our stand upon this, and not suffer ourselves to be led away by any comments that, through a narrow conception both of human nature and Divine grace, construe the rebuke into a sentence of complete and final reprobation. All that is meant is the often-taught lesson, that those who are greatest in their own estimation and in that of the world shall be least in the kingdom of heaven. A place in that kingdom, though a much humbler one than they supposed, will not be denied them.

The class of minds indicated in the parable is very similar to that which is exemplified by the elder brother in the parable of the Prodigal Son. There, again, it is a mistake to suppose that, though offending on that one point, the murmurer is unreservedly and utterly condemned. We might almost go so far as to say that in neither case is the murmuring quite of the essence of the parable. The state of things that gives rise to the murmur is the real point. The murmur itself is accessory rather than principal. It serves to "justify the ways of God to men," by introducing a proposition that helps to explain them. At the same time, incidentally, it throws in a touch of true psychology. It is not intended that at the Last Day there will be even the possibility of querulous appeal. But there are some minds the unspoken thought of which would be such an appeal. There are querulous and thankless spirits who do indeed that which is required of them, but in a cheerless, unimpassioned, dull, precise, and mechanical way. Like most formalists they have a good opinion of themselves and of their own place in the sight of God. They are apt to count up their good deeds: "We have borne the burden and heat of the day;" "Lo, these many years have I served thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment." Their religion does not begin in self-abasement. They have never known that peculiarly crushed and helpless feeling that is implied in the word "contrition." They have something of the Pharisaic leaven about them, though they are not quite Pharisees. They are hard and unsympathetic in their judgments, and though they

confess in words their own unworthiness, still at heart they barely escape congratulating themselves that they are not as other men.

Still there is a truth in their plea. They *have* borne the burden and heat. They *have* laboured and suffered. They *have not* been caught in open transgression. They *have* lived decent and respectable lives. And, therefore, we are not led to the paradox of supposing that they will be ultimately excluded from the kingdom of heaven. They are not sent away empty. Nay, they may even receive some consolatory explanation of what seems to them an injustice,—“Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine.”

The parable of the Prodigal is, in this respect, a still further development of this of the Labourers in the Vineyard. It tracks out still more tenderly and delicately the human aspects and relations of these two different modes of service. In the eyes of Him by whom it was spoken nothing was common or unclean. He could raise and dismiss the weeping penitent, but he did not therefore repel the colder Pharisee. He admitted Nicodemus among his disciples. He made his grave in Joseph's tomb.

We fall into opposite errors in reading Scripture and in real life. In the one we allow no kind of merit, no redeeming qualities at all, to that very class of persons who in the other almost monopolize our respect. The truth lies between both extremes. There is room even for the Pharisee in the kingdom of heaven, though from the first he will become last, and from the greatest least. His early call, his life-long service, his regular religious habits, his punc-

tilious payment of his dues, will not prevent him from being forestalled by many whom, living, he had despised. They will be bidden to go up higher, and he will take the lower place with shame. Still he may not murmur at his lot, for he can be no fair judge in his own cause. Rather let him be resigned and prepared for it beforehand, and thankful that he should fare no worse. What he has is sure to be far more than he deserves, and the less mercenary the spirit in which he labours the better it will be for him.

In the highest Christian temper the mercenary element will be entirely wanting. It will be reward enough for him who has it that he should be permitted to work in God's vineyard at all. He will not be casting his eyes this way and that, to see how others are working or when their service begins. He will know that the Lord of the vineyard is no mere contractor who will deal with him after the letter of his bond, but an infinitely kind and loving Father to all who prove themselves his children. God is to us really what we ourselves make Him to be. If we are formalists and legalists we shall be judged by the letter, but to those who love much, much shall be both given and forgiven.

Thus, so far from there being anything partial or unequal in the Divine judgments, they are really the necessary, and, we might almost say, automatic consequences of our own conduct. There may be parts in them that we cannot understand, just as there are parts of our own conduct that we cannot, or at least do not, sufficiently analyse. But these two things are correlative. The seeming anomalies

in the moral government of the world proceed from our ignorance, and not from any failure of Divine justice. That, we may be sure, is absolute and perfect; and if we are wise we shall acquiesce gratefully in its decisions, whether the reasons for them are discovered or concealed. W. SANDAY.

THE VINDICTIVE PSALMS VINDICATED.

PART II.

So far it has been my ungracious task to impugn the various apologies made for the Vindictive Psalms by others. It remains to be seen whether any real solution of the difficulty can be suggested in their stead. The explanation that I have to offer has not the attraction of novelty; perhaps it would be no recommendation if it had. In its main features it may be familiar to some of my readers. I do not know, however, that anything more than its naked outline can be found elsewhere, or that the conclusions to which I have come are in complete accordance with those of any other writer on the subject.¹

It may be as well to state here what those conclusions are; in other words, what it will be my object in the following pages to prove. They are: That the so-called "vindictive" expressions of the Psalms are only seemingly and not really vindictive; that they seem to be vindictive only because we view them from the standpoint of the New Testament,

¹ It would be scarcely ingenuous were I not to express here my obligations to Professor Perowne's Commentary, and to his Hulsean Lectures. Writing as I do several years after I first read these works, I cannot be sure for what ideas I am indebted to them; but I suspect it is for more than I am now conscious of.