

substance, as leading to fantastic and arbitrary applications of Divine words, and robbing them, in so doing, of all their interest and life. But it remains true, as I trust these notes have not failed to shew, that however directly historical and personal in the first instance, they have, for that very reason, a wider range. Any Church, at any time, may look into these pictures of spiritual excellence or decay, as into a mirror, and see in one or other of them its own likeness. The soul of each individual disciple may learn to behold in them his own besetting temptations, the rebuke or the encouragement which he himself most needs, the rewards to which even he may rightly and reverently aspire.

E. H. PLUMPTRE.

THE VINDICTIVE PSALMS VINDICATED.

PART IV.

IN two preceding papers upon this subject¹ I have addressed myself, almost exclusively, to the proof of this one proposition, that prayers for the temporal and even capital punishment of the wicked, while unlawful and unjustifiable on the lips of Christian men, were nevertheless, under certain conditions, perfectly lawful and perfectly natural on the part of those to whom life and immortality and a judgment *to come* had not been brought to light. I have endeavoured to prove such prayers to be a necessary and commendable result of the partial revelation vouchsafed to the Jewish people; of the purely temporal eco-

¹ See *THE EXPOSITOR* vol. iii. pp. 101-118, 185-203.

nomy under which they lived. And I am not without hopes that, to some of my readers at least, this point may now seem to be sufficiently established, and to need no further witness.

And yet, up to the present moment, the crowning argument in its favour, the argument which, as it seems to me, settles this question conclusively and for ever, has barely been hinted at. For indeed the lawfulness and perfect propriety of the prayers in question may be proved in a very summary and decisive way. It is proved by the fact that such prayers are recorded in Holy Scripture, and recorded as receiving the solemn and express ratification and approval of God.

It is, I think, a consideration which is constantly overlooked in the discussion of the Vindictive Psalms that we have both imprecations and comminations outside the Psalter, imprecations and comminations similar in kind to those of the Psalter and certainly not less terrible in degree, and yet that these imprecations and these comminations have received, distinctly and unmistakably, the seal of the Divine approval. It follows, consequently, that for those who admit the inspiration of Scripture, these latter afford a complete and triumphant justification of the former, for obviously, no one who admits that the latter are right can logically maintain that the former are wrong.

It remains for us, therefore, in the present paper, to consider some of the prayers for vengeance which are found elsewhere in the Old Testament. It will, perhaps, be sufficient for our purpose if we notice two of these, the two which are the most characteristic

of their class, viz., the imprecation of Elijah on the soldiers of Ahaziah (2 Kings i. 10-12), and the curse of Elisha on the children of Bethel (2 Kings ii. 24): And I cite these, not merely because they strengthen my position and make (as it appears to me) assurance doubly sure, but also because of the direct and important bearing which they have on another branch of the argument—which, indeed, is the next link in the chain—the argument that the Psalmists, in their comminations and imprecations alike, only denounce and desire the *equitable and proportionate* punishment of the wicked. It is obvious, of course, that this point can only be conclusively established by a detailed examination of the vindictive passages, but it must also be obvious that such examination can lead to no certain and reliable results, unless we first secure a correct standard by which to try these passages; unless, that is to say, we first know what were, and what were not, under the Jewish economy, the fitting and adequate retributions of sin. And this question, the prayers for temporal punishment found outside the Psalter (taken in connection with the judgments which followed them) will, in some degree, assist us to determine.

Now, in considering these two confessedly perplexing passages, the first point to be remarked is that they present us with real imprecations; that is to say, they each contain a prayer addressed to God for some vengeance, some judgment, on the prophets' enemies. As to the latter—the curse of Elisha—there can be no manner of doubt. That the prophet prayed for the precise judgment which befell these children,—death by wild beasts,—we are not per-

haps warranted to conclude, but that he invoked the vengeance of God to punish their insolence is certain, and that he devoted them to some sort of *destruction* hardly admits of question. Every curse is ultimately, and whether so expressed or not, an appeal to a Higher Power, and in this case it *was* so expressed, for he cursed them "in the name of the Lord." But it is not quite so clear and obvious that the words of Elijah were imprecatory, the words which our Translators have rendered "*Let* fire come down from heaven." The LXX. translates the verb as a future, "Fire *shall* come down" (καταβήσεται). And it must be admitted that the original word (תִּרְד), though a shortened form, has not necessarily, in the opinion of grammarians, a jussive force. Indeed, the self-same word occurs immediately afterwards (with Vau conversive) as a past—"there *came down* fire," &c. At the same time the following considerations go far to prove that it should here be rendered (as in the Authorized Version) as an imperative:—

(1) The Versions favour this translation. The Vulgate, *e.g.*, and Jerome both have "*descendat ignis.*" (2) Josephus represents Elijah as *praying* for the destruction of the companies. (3) The disciples of our Lord, John and James, evidently believed that Elias *commanded* fire to come down from heaven (Luke ix. 54). (4) The words of Elijah are apparently an echo, a verbal *retaliation*, of the words addressed to him. The captain, or the spokesman, of the party had said, "*Man of God, . . . come down.*" The Prophet, taking the words out of his lips, replies, "If a '*man of God*' [am] I, '*come down*' fire," &c.

(literal translation). The former cried, "The king hath *said*, 'Come down.'" Elijah, contrasting his own mandate with the king's, "answered and *said*, . . . Come down fire," &c. With an imperative the echo is perfect, while a future considerably impairs the parallel. (5) The position of the verb (פָּרַד אֵשׁ) favours, if indeed it does not necessitate, an imperative rendering. To this may be added—and this with most readers will be sufficient by itself—that "the translation of the Authorized Version is preferred by the best Hebraists."¹ We may safely assume, therefore, that these words are a strict and proper imprecation.

And, this point being established, let us consider in the second place that the judgments for which the two prophets prayed, equal, if, indeed, they do not far exceed, in point of severity anything recorded in the Book of Psalms. We may possibly find expressions which to some may seem to run almost parallel with these (*e.g.*, Psa. lix. 13; Psa. cxxxvii. 9), but we shall look in vain for anything which goes beyond them. Indeed, it is difficult to conceive what could go beyond them. We can hardly imagine a more terrible petition than that whole "companies" may die an instant death by fire, or that little children may be torn to pieces by wild beasts.

But that these expressions equal in their seeming vindictiveness anything found in the Psalter will be clear if we consider who were respectively the victims of these awful judgments and what they had done to provoke them. In the latter case they were children,

¹ "The Speaker's Commentary," vol. iii. p. 2.

“*little* children,”¹ whose only crime was that they “mocked” a prophet of the Lord. In the former they were comparatively innocent men; men, that is to say, who, whatever their other sins may have been, were at the time this judgment befell them merely executing a behest of their king—a behest which it would have been almost certain death to them to have disputed. It is true that “every soldier’s duty is the king’s, *but* every soldier’s conscience is his own,” and it may be thought that the companies detailed to this service—required, as it would seem, to lay sacrilegious hands upon the Lord’s prophet, to bring him by force, if need be—ought to have repudiated the impious commission whatever the risk. But against this it may fairly be urged that “the first duty of a soldier is obedience,” and that in this particular case, so far as appears from the sacred narrative, there was nothing to make disobedience a positive duty. These soldiers were simply despatched by their sovereign lord to bid the man of God come down, and, therefore, it was not theirs to make reply or curiously to inquire what might be the issues of their mission.

¹ It has been contended by some writers (*e.g.*, Kitto, in his “Bible Illustrations”) that these mockers were young men. But the epithet “*little*” is decisive against this view. If it be urged that “Solomon calls himself a ‘little child’ when he was certainly a young man,” the answer is that this was obviously the language of hyperbole and self-depreciation. Nor is there much force in Kitto’s remark that “although those who came out against the Prophet are called ‘little children,’ the ‘little’ is dropped where the forty-two who are slain are mentioned,” for it would have been a somewhat unusual repetition, had it been inserted. There *may* be some significance in the fact that “even the word for children (נְעָרִים) is then changed to another” (יְלָדִים), but it is too slender a foundation to build upon.

Nor can it be said that there was anything in their demeanour and address which called for this terrible chastisement. Their demeanour—and especially would this be the case with the second company—was most respectful. They recognize the office and work of Elijah; they address him as a “man of God;” they simply recite their message, “Thus hath the king said, Come down quickly!” The men themselves, therefore, we are justified in saying, were not flagitious sinners. The conduct which cost them their lives does not strike us, any more than does that of the children of Bethel, as being in any high degree criminal.

And yet, such as they were, both soldiers and children, and such as their crimes were, if crimes they can be called, the prophets prayed in both cases for their destruction; they imprecated upon them a capital punishment at the hand of God. It is not too much to say therefore, especially when we consider the sort of men against whom the imprecations of the Psalms were directed,—Doeg, Ahithophel, Alcimus, “tyrants,” “workers of iniquity,” “bloody men,”—that the Psalter contains no imprecations which, for their seeming vindictiveness and ferocity, are at all comparable to these.

But we have now to remark that these two imprecations, fierce and truculent as at first sight they seem to us to be, have nevertheless received the express sanction and approval of Heaven. In the most emphatic way God has countersigned them. There are those who maintain that God must also have *inspired* them, and there is much to be said in favour of this view, especially in the case of Elijah.

It seems hardly probable that either prophet would have presumed, on his own authority, without a Divine prompting, to fulminate such curses as these. And the prophet last mentioned would appear to have been under Divine guidance throughout the whole of the transaction. It was "the angel of the Lord" (verse 3) that sent him to meet the first messengers of Ahaziah. It was "the angel of the Lord" that subsequently sent him with the fourth party of messengers to Ahaziah himself (verse 15). Is it at all an improbable conclusion that the same angel inspired him to call down fire from heaven upon the two bands of messengers that were destroyed? And if so, then Almighty God was not merely the executor, but also the author of these imprecations. We are not concerned to prove, however, that these prayers were inspired: it is enough for us to know that they were approved and accepted. And this we do know. Upon this point there is no room for doubt. The fires of heaven, the she-bears out of the wood, were respectively the response of the Supreme Arbiter of life and death to the prayers of Elijah and Elisha. God has justified these prayers by answering them, and justified them, as we are bound to believe, because they were just. The fulfilment they received proves their lawfulness and propriety. We may not suppose that the most merciful God would accomplish such a holocaust of human beings—over one hundred men, made in the image of God and all of them dear to God and precious in his sight—merely to gratify the pique or the pride even of the greatest of the prophets. And the forty and two children, the

very hairs of their heads were all numbered by the Eternal Father, and if He sent fierce she-bears to devour them, to tear their flesh and steep their hairs in blood, it must have been because it was just and right that it should be so. "The curse causeless," we know, "shall not come" (Prov. xxvi. 2). But this curse *did* come, therefore it cannot have been causeless. We are forced to the conclusion, accordingly, that *these* prayers for capital punishments, at any rate, must have been both lawful and commendable. And if these were lawful, who shall presume to say that similar, but much milder, much less terrible, prayers in the Psalms were unlawful?

But this is not all. We are not left to *infer* the justice and fitness of these prayers from the fact that the All-Wise and All-Holy has answered them, but it so happens that we can understand for ourselves their necessity and propriety. Let us take the prayer of Elijah first. It is not difficult to see, surely, that the glory of God and the good of humanity may have been subserved by those devouring flames. The "swift destruction" by the act of God of over one hundred men—one hundred innocent men, if you please,—may have been absolutely necessary, in those impious days, as a signal manifestation of God's hatred of idolatry and of his determination to crush it. It may well be that nothing less appalling would rouse a nation which had witnessed unmoved, or at any rate unconverted, the flames of Carmel. Once before at Elijah's bidding the fires of God had descended and "consumed the bullock, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust,

and licked up the water that was in the trench" (1 Kings xviii. 38). But the idolatrous people that saw the portent, nevertheless persevered in idolatry. The licentious and brutalizing cultus of Baal and Ashtaroth was now more openly followed than even in the preceding reign. Ahab had, it is true, favoured the gods and the prophets of his foreign wife, but he had also consulted the professed prophets of the Lord. It was reserved for his son altogether to ignore the religion of his race and country and to send across the border to the oracle of the Philistines, just as if there were no God and no prophet in the covenanted land. The cause of true religion, consequently, was now in greater jeopardy than ever. If the whole country was not to follow the example of the Court, and cast off all allegiance to the God of Abraham, there must be a second sign from heaven, but of a sterner character. The last great portent had utterly failed. But what if it now took the form of a chastisement? What if it consumed idolaters, instead of wood and stones and dust? Surely, men would then learn that there *was* a God in Israel, a God stronger and more terrible than the foul idol of Ekron. This holocaust, then, may have been needed, and probably nothing less awful would have availed the least, to stem the perilous tide of idolatry. Men, we repeat, who had witnessed with their own eyes, as "all Israel" had, the miracle of Mount Carmel,—in the opinion of the later Jews the grandest of all the displays of Divine power,—and had thought, no long time afterwards, to silence, perhaps to slay, the Prophet whose mission had received this

signal attestation, were not likely to be much impressed by anything less fearful. One good reason then, at least, can be discovered why Elijah was permitted, perhaps was inspired, to pray for the destruction of men's lives. And as to the victims of this visitation, it may be quite true that these detachments were composed of comparatively innocent men. But what of that? They were, at any rate, commissioned to seize the prophet of Jehovah and in so far they were the representatives of the national apostacy and the open enemies of the God of Israel. Were their lives to be considered in comparison with the cause of morality and religion? For aught we know, their death may have conduced in a high degree to the best interests of the nation and of the world. It may have been expedient that these should die "that the whole nation" should "perish not" (St. John xi. 50). They may have suffered, as we know one did in after times, not because they had sinned, but "that the works of God should be made manifest in" them (St. John ix. 3). Besides, it is to be remembered that Ahaziah, in sending so large a force—fifty men—to apprehend Elijah, had practically defied the power of God and challenged Him to a trial of strength. "Who is that God," he had virtually said, "that shall deliver you out of my hand?" And that he sent a second company, and even a third, after the utter destruction which had overtaken his former messengers, shews in a very striking way the extent and daring of his impiety. Here was a man, the anointed of God, who would wage war with God *à outrance*. There was

no help for it, consequently, but for God to shew forth his power. He *must* take up the challenge and vindicate his claim to allegiance or stand dishonoured in the eyes of his own subjects. And we see in this fact a second reason for Elijah's prayer. We see that that prayer was forced upon him by the exigences of the situation; and that, terrible as it was, it was for the good of the many and for the glory of God.

And the curse of Elisha is capable, unless I am much mistaken, of an equally complete vindication. True, it has a peculiarly spiteful appearance. To the casual observer it seems as if the Prophet, irritated by the gibes of a troop of rude and thoughtless children, had straightway devoted them all to instant death. Indeed, with such difficulties has the narrative seemed to be beset that some writers of eminence¹ have been constrained to defend it on the ground that probably the sacred text, in its present state, does not preserve the whole of the circumstances; in other words that there must have been something which is not recorded, or which, if recorded, has now lost its original signification, to account for such a curse and such a punishment. I shall hope to shew, however, that there is no need to have recourse to any such supposition; that even if there was a "disproportion between the punishment and the offence," still the curse was appropriate and the vengeance necessary and just and salutary.

And to prove this, it will only be requisite, I imagine, after what has already been advanced, to

¹ Mr. Grove, *e.g.*, in Smith's "Dictionary of the Bible.

take into consideration the place, the time, and the circumstances of the transaction. As to the first : it was on the town of Bethel that this vengeance fell. Now, Bethel, it is true, had its school of the prophets, and amongst its inhabitants, no doubt, were some of the seven thousand who had not bowed their knees unto Baal ; but, still, the place as a whole, there can be little question, was given to idolatry. For there, for a long time past, the worship of the calf had been established, and it would therefore presumably be a stronghold of the superstitions with which the prophets were commissioned to do battle.¹ It is reasonable to suppose, accordingly, that the Lord's prophets would be regarded there with the greatest hostility. During the lifetime of Elijah this had not dared to shew itself. The powers with which he was invested were too much dreaded to permit any open display of hatred or opposition. But now that he is taken out of the way, and there is no further fear of his avenging arm, it breaks out in the presence of his obscure and untried successor. The place is so completely hostile to the ancient faith that the children, less discreet than their parents, display openly the hatred with which they have been imbued at home. The gibes which *they* fling at Elisha are but the reflection of their parents' unexpressed but bitter animosity. It is not to be supposed for a moment that the opprobrious words they uttered were the outcomes of mere rudeness ; they were a deliberate insult and defiance of the

¹ The *paronomasia* found in Hosea iv. 15 ; v. 8 ; x. 5, where Beth-El "house of God," is designated Beth-Aven, "house of nothing," is no slight indication of the character and cultus of the place.

new prophet of the Lord.¹ The same words might possibly have had but little significance elsewhere: they were only too significant at Bethel.

But let us consider, in the next place, *when* it was that these children's taunts, the natural product of their parents' teaching, were uttered. It was after the fiery sign which had been given them on Mount Carmel. It was also after the terrible fires of God had consumed over one hundred men at a stroke. So that both portent and punishment alike had failed of the desired effect. Despite the severe lesson they had learned, the heart of the people of Bethel was not turned back again; it was still rebellious and revolting. And now of late another sign from heaven had been granted them. The Bethelites can hardly have been ignorant of the assumption of Elijah. The sons of the prophets who were in their midst had foretold it. And the news could not but have reached them from Jericho that the great Prophet's body was missing, and, after diligent search, could nowhere be found. But a few days before he had been amongst them, in company with Elisha. They hear meanwhile that he has been taken up to

¹ The ingenious suggestion of Abarbanel (adopted by some modern writers) that the words "Go up, go up" (עֲלֵה, עֲלֵה), contained an impious reference to the recent ascension of Elijah,—bidding Elisha, in fact, to take himself off after his master,—is effectually negatived, as I venture to think, by the occurrence of the same word *twice* just before. "And he *went up* (עָלָה) from thence, . . . and as he was *going up*" (עֹלֵה), &c. These words, standing where they do, make it almost certain that the "go up" refers to Elisha's "going up," and not Elijah's. It is much more credible, however, that the term "bald-head" (קַרְקַר) was employed to insinuate how unlike he was to Elijah (whose long shaggy hair seems to have been his most marked feature, 2 Kings i. 8, *Heb.*), and how unfit to be his successor.

the skies in a chariot of fire. To confirm the report, Elisha re-appears at their gates—and alone. It is at this moment, as if to testify their disregard for the dispensations of God and their determination not to recognize another prophet, that the children, revealing the thoughts of their parents' hearts, go forth, possibly are sent forth, to mock him to his face.

But in order to form a correct estimate of these events we must remember, not only the precise juncture at which they happened, but also the age, the period of Israel's history. It was emphatically a crisis. The nation was still halting between two opinions. The question whether Jehovah should be recognized and worshipped as the God of the Jews, or Baal, was still trembling in the balance—and with it the hope for the future of the world. The vigorous ministry of Elijah had no doubt decided many, but it had by no means broken the power of the false gods and of their immoral and degrading worship. Truth, religion, probity, purity, all were at stake. Should the hand on the dial of civilization and humanity be put back ten degrees, or forward?—this was the question. For the bold Prophet, whose voice alone had witnessed openly for the truth, was now among them no more. The great bulwark against the inroads of the Phœnician superstition was removed. Would the nation, now that they had, or thought they had, the fires of God to fear no longer, throw itself into the arms of Baal? Would the elect people, following the example of its rulers, deny and dishonour the God of their fathers? These were the questions awaiting a settlement on the day that Elisha appeared at the gates of Bethel.

And now let us consider the capacity in which he appeared amongst its inhabitants. He had been appointed prophet; he had inherited the mantle and the mission of Elijah. To him it was given to carry on the single-handed warfare against falsehood and impurity which his great master had waged. But as yet the people understood it not. He was not recognized as a prophet of the Lord. The nation did not know, what the schools of the prophets knew, that the spirit of Elijah rested on Elisha. He must have credentials to shew them. The mockery with which he was greeted shews how much he needed them. Gainsayers must be taught, and taught in an unmistakable way, that he had been anointed to be Elijah's successor. It was for this reason no doubt, among others, and not because of any petty irritation at the jeers of little children, that, when he found his authority questioned and defied, he called down upon the Bethelites—for the curse fell upon the parents as much as upon the children—the just judgment of God. It was that all Israel might know that Jehovah had not left himself without witness, and that the son of Shaphat was established to be his Prophet.

And what if the establishment of his authority, together with the rebuke of idolatry and the testimony to the sovereignty of God which were effected at the same moment, involved the loss of human life? What if it cut off two and forty children and brought mourning into many a home? Were these things to be considered for an instant when the very existence of the one true religion was at stake? The penalty may seem heavy as compared with the

offence, but it must be remembered that, even if it were so, it was all the more calculated to effect the object contemplated. The nation would thenceforth know that there was a prophet among them, and one not to be trifled with or despised. The very severity of the chastisement may therefore have been one element in its fitness; it may have served to stamp it as a public example,—to make it a warning for all time. It may have been what it was in order to teach all those who should come after the guilt of despising the messengers of the Most High.¹

We find, then, that the apparent disproportion between the punishment and the offence, which has been such a stumbling-block to the reader and the expositor, is at once explained if we remember that the sentence of death was pronounced against these little children not because of their own sin alone, nor yet because of their parents' sins (though it is easy to see that this is a case in which the sins of the parents *were* visited upon the children), but because of the flagrant impiety, the persistent idolatry, the determined rejection of Jehovah and his servants the prophets, of which the nation at large was guilty, and of which these children's jeers and insults were the latest and most significant expression: and hence we conclude that this summary act of vengeance, hardly as it may have borne on a few,

¹ We possess, unless I am greatly mistaken, a clue to the interpretation of the curses, both of Elijah and Elisha, and a complete justification of each, in the terrible commination of the Son of Man (Matt. x. 14, 15), "Whosoever shall not *receive you, nor hear your words*, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. Verily I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrhah in the day of judgment, than for that city." Yet Sodom and Gomorrhah were destroyed by *fire from heaven*.

may have been for the general good ; it may have contributed—who knows how largely ?—to the progress of the world, to the advancement of truth and purity and religion.

And now let us compare these two imprecations—imprecations, be it remembered, which God has justified, and imprecations the justice of which it is permitted us to see for ourselves—with those of the Psalms. Wherein do the latter differ from the former ? Are those seemingly cruel and vindictive ? So are these, but in a much higher degree. Do those pray for the temporal punishment of the *wicked* ? So do these, and more ; they pray for the destruction of those whom we should hardly designate by that name. Do those ever *seem* to desire an excessive punishment,—one altogether disproportionate to the offence ? The latter *do* this beyond question ; they desire, *i.e.*, a punishment which, relatively to the offence which provoked it, is excessive, though not excessive relatively to the object aimed at. In what, then, it may be asked, do they differ ? They differ, as it seems to me, only in the following respects. First, it is on record that God has approved and fulfilled the former, whilst we have no such record that He has either approved or fulfilled the latter, though of course He *may* have done so. Secondly, in the case of the former, we know the circumstances under which they were uttered, and can therefore judge for ourselves of their propriety or otherwise, while, in the case of the latter, we do not know, and are therefore deprived of this means of vindicating them. Thirdly, if, in the case of the former, the imprecations only had been recorded ; if Holy Scripture,

that is to say, had been silent as to their ratification by God, and had supplied us with no data for proving their fitness, then there are no imprecations in the Psalter which would have presented us with anything like the same difficulty; none which would have worn the same appearance of malignity and cruelty; none which would have been so universally reprobated or so emphatically condemned.

But it may, perhaps, be urged here that the imprecations of the two Prophets were directly and immediately inspired, and that therefore they have a sanction and justification which those of the Psalmists have not. But the answer to this is, first, that we have stronger reasons for believing in the inspiration of the latter than of the former; for, while it is merely a conjecture, though a probable one, that the curses of Elijah and Elisha were suggested to their minds by God, an inspiration is distinctly claimed for some of the imprecations of the Psalmists;¹ and, secondly, that if the former *were* inspired, then we need have no misgivings in holding the inspiration of the latter, which are seemingly so much less vindictive. Or, it may be alleged that, after all, there is a malevolent tone about the denunciations of the Psalms which we are not conscious of when we read those of the Prophets. But it must be remembered that the former are often given in detail,—and it is sometimes in the detail that the vindictiveness seems to lie,—and, furthermore, that they stand out the more prominently and, so to speak, catch the eye because they are unrelieved by any precise statement of the circum-

¹ See THE EXPOSITOR vol. iii. p. 46.

stances which provoked them. Nor is it to be forgotten that men who are crying to God for a vengeance which they cannot be sure that He will take, or will only take in answer to fervent prayer, will naturally manifest a warmth and an importunity very different from the calm confidence of those who know, as the Prophets must surely have done, that their petitions will have an instant fulfilment.

The conclusion to which we are inevitably conducted by this examination of the imprecations of Elijah and Elisha, and the comparison which we have instituted between them and those of the Psalmists, is obvious. Indeed, the whole review reduces itself to two inexorable syllogisms, which may be stated in the following shape:—

1. Prayers for the temporal punishment of the wicked are found in Scripture, proceeding both from Psalmists and from Prophets, and whatever difficulties attach to the former class, attach in a far higher degree to the latter. But God has justified the latter. *A fortiori*, it is not for us to condemn the former.

2. Prayers for punishments which seem to us excessive and disproportionate are found both in the Psalter and in the Historical Books, and the disproportion is much greater in the latter than in the former. But a knowledge of the facts of the case (which the Historical Books supply) enables us to justify the latter as strictly fair and equitable. It is not for us, therefore, in the ignorance of facts (in which the Poetical Books, as a rule, leave us) to deny that the former may have been, and probably were, fair and equitable also.