

SCRIPTURE STUDIES OF THE HEAVENLY
STATE.

III. THE DAY OF JUDGMENT.

(2 *Corinthians* v. 10.)

WE have seen in our previous paper that, in the view of St. Paul, the resurrection of the dead is not an act but a process. The immortality of the soul, as he understands it, is not something which is to burst upon the spirit in full perfection at the hour of death; nor yet is it something for which the spirit is to wait in a dreamless sleep until the empire of death shall be over. It is a growth, a development, a progress from dawn to noonday. In the life of the saint it begins before death, on this side of time, in the very heart of material things. The new life is sown on earth, but it is sown in corruption. When death comes, it is raised in glory. Death roots up the obstacle to its growth, and sets it free. But to be free is not *fulness* of joy; it is only the road to fulness of joy. When you have removed the barrier to spiritual communion, you have opened up man's path to spiritual wealth; but the wealth can only be reached by following that path. The soul that has been set free is as yet but a child. It has received the power to know, but not the fact of knowledge. It is ripe for study, but it is not yet ready for the world of action. Its time for manifestation will come afterwards; for the present it must be hid. Therefore it is that, to St. Paul, death is not the goal of man's spirit. The life into which death ushers it is but an intermediate stage of its being. Its goal lies in a future day of revelation, manifestation, disclosure, analogous to that which in the natural life ushers the child into the world of men—a day whose coming to each soul will be sooner or later in proportion to its nearness to the Centre of being: "Every man in his own order; Christ the first-fruits, afterward they that are Christ's."

Now it is this final stage in the process of Resurrection that we desire here to examine. We wish to consider what is meant by that phrase so constantly on the lips of Christendom—"the day of judgment." We do not ask what it means now. We want to know what it signified to the men who first used it. We all know what it meant to us in our childhood. It was a symbol of terror, a thought of dismay. It was the assembling of a high court of Justiciary in a definite point of space, and at a fixed period of time—a period which was to be begun, continued, and ended within the limits of a natural day. There was to be a setting of literal thrones, and an opening of actual books. There was to be an audible pronouncement of a legal sentence, by which some were to be acquitted and some condemned; and the sentence was to be prefigured, before its utterance, by the relative positions of the accused on the right hand of the Divine Judge and on the left. All this most of us can vividly remember to have been the impression of our early years. It is the idea conveyed in Mediæval paintings, and it is still perhaps the prevailing view of the uncultured masses. Yet we think it quite certain that this is not the view of St. Paul, not the view of the New Testament writers, not the view of those Hebrew Scriptures on which the New Testament is avowedly based. This is not one of those cases in which a man needs to clothe old thoughts in a modern dress. It is the old dress of the thought that we specially wish to find. We want to get back, not forward. We seek for the original vesture in which this idea was clothed, and we are convinced that, if we can find that vesture, we shall have no need to adapt the idea to any system of modern thought. We are convinced that, when we have traced back the conception to its root in the primitive heart of Judaism, we shall find it to rest upon a basis which is independent of all time, and to be really but the prophecy

of what Mr. Arnold has so eloquently presaged—the triumph of the Eternal Power that makes for righteousness.

For if we are not mistaken the root of the Jewish idea of judgment will be found in the Book of Judges, and in that state of things which the Book of Judges indicates. In this document the Children of Israel are introduced to us under a form of government peculiarly theocratic. They have no king but God, no law but the mandates of God. As long as they obey those mandates they are safe; when they disobey, anarchy supervenes and they become the prey of their enemies. Then in the providence of God there are raised up great men to rule them, to set and keep them right. They are in the highest sense of the word, representative men; for they stand as the representatives of the King of kings. They are called *Judges* because their rule is to be an administration of that justice which is the leading attribute of the God of Israel. They are to reign by the authority of God, and by that alone. They are to reign until they have put all enemies under their feet, and no longer. With the close of anarchy is to close the need for all human authority; the earthly judge is to resign his delegated commission and God Himself is again to be all in all.

Here, then, is the origin of the idea—"a day of judgment." It meant to the Jew a reign of justice, a government in which God was represented in the highest attribute known to Judaism. That this was the earliest view of the subject will be seen by consulting a very ancient poem in which the aspirations of the national mind are bodied forth. In Psalm ix. verses 7 to 9, we read: "The Lord shall sit for ever; he hath prepared his throne for judgment. He shall judge the world in righteousness; he shall minister justice to the nations in uprightness. So may the Lord be a high tower for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble." Here we have an actual definition of what

the Jew meant by a day of judgment. It was to him identical with a reign of Divine Justice, a reign in which wrongs would be redressed and rights vindicated, in which the poor would be protected from the oppression of the rich, and the decisions of earthly tribunals would be purified from the partiality that waits on power. And ever, as the Jewish history rolled on, men sought for this ideal age more and more. They sought it in the future, but they saw its model in the past. Their eyes reverted to that period of the national life when none was judge but God, and the man whom God had chosen to represent Him; when the government of Israel was a theocracy, and the only dominant force was the law which made for righteousness. If we turn to Isaiah i. verses 26, 27, we are very powerfully reminded of this. In that magnificent vision of future glory with which the Prophet comforts the heart of the Jewish nation, he directs her eye backward rather than forward: "I will restore thy judges as at the first; afterward thou shalt be called the city of righteousness; Zion shall be redeemed through judgment." The day of judgment which looms before the eye of the Prophet is the age of a restored republic in which, as of yore, the best men shall rise to the surface and rule. It is a government in which each man will rise in his own order, that is, according to the measure in which each has had a previous development. Every man will give an account of his past deeds by the place he takes in the new republic. He who comes soonest to the front will thereby give evidence that he has been all along nearest to the great Centre of being; he that is most in the rear will thereby prove that his union with the Centre of life has been a process of labour and difficulty. The kingdom of Divine Judgment to which Judaism looks forward is at the same time a kingdom to which she looks back with longing eye. In the day of the Judges she sees a model for the day of the Lord. In a

government where men started with equal rights and equal chances, and only became unequal through the difference of their own mental development, she reads the fitting type and symbol of that kingdom of God whose gradations in rank are to be regulated by the character of the moral life. It is in strict accordance with this thought that Daniel speaks of judgment being "given to the saints of the Most High." It is no less in accordance with it that St. Paul exclaims, "Know ye not that the saints shall judge the world?" A nation weary of priestly caste and respect for mere hereditary privilege was longing for an age and for an empire in which a man would be great or small by reason of himself alone; for a kingdom in which he would appear no longer under a mask, no longer in a position which had been artificially created for him, but in his own natural garb and in the only place which his past experience had fitted him to fill. It is an ideal such as this which breathes in the words of the Apostle: "We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."

Now, let us clearly understand the difference of the view here presented to that which commonly prevails in the Christian Church. In the popular view, the day of judgment is that final event of the world's history which comes at the close of the millennial reign; in the exposition we have attempted, the day of judgment is the millennial reign itself.¹ Indeed it is not too much to say that the one phrase is almost a literal translation of the other. The judgment of God is the reign of God; and the day of God's judgment is proverbially millennial; one day is in his sight as a thousand years. The judgment-seat of Christ is in truth identical with what the Jew understood by the king-

¹ Though that reign is doubtless culminated by a final act of judgment. Rev. xx. 11. 1 Cor. xv. 24.

dom of heaven. When he looked forward to a time in which the Son of Man should come in his power, and sit upon the throne of his glory, he was really contemplating not a modern court of assize, but a realization of his old Messianic ideal, a fulfilment of that ancient vision which prophesied the coming of a perfect King, the advent of a pure government, and the gathering of all the nations around a common centre of peace and justice. That was what the first Christians understood; that was what St. Paul understood, by the judgment-seat of Christ—the bringing in of a reign of everlasting righteousness. Yet, let it not be thought that from such a view there is excluded any essential element of our popular conception. On the contrary, it includes and involves all that is worth preserving in our present mode of representation. The kingdom of God is, in a higher than the common sense, a veritable day of judgment. It is a time of crisis, a time of sifting, a time when the Book of Life is opened to reveal its final result. It is the season in which men are to give an account of themselves, to prove by their deeds what is in them, to take the respective positions for which their past has fitted them. It is an age in which nations as well as individuals are to give an account of themselves, in which the division between the destinies of good and bad races is to be as widely marked as in the separation between the sheep and the goats, and in which the result of their different developments is to be as clearly discernible as is the distinction observed between the right hand and the left. Let us briefly examine these points as they are presented in that passage of St. Paul which we have placed at the head of this article.

It will be found, we think, that there are two leading ideas in this passage—that of revelation, and that of separation. The first is indicated in the words: “We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ.” Be it observed

that St. Paul does not say there is a time coming when a Divine Throne shall be set for judgment. He takes it for granted, with the writer of Psalm ix., that this throne has been set already. The judgment-seat of Christ was, to Paul, set in a very special sense at the hour of Christ's first coming; this was to him, as to the fourth Evangelist, the real beginning of the kingdom of God. It is written in St. John's Gospel, "*Now is the judgment of this world;*" and the inference seems clear that, in the view of that Evangelist, the setting of the great throne dates, for the Christian at least, from the birth of Christianity. Such also is the view of St. Paul. To him the kingdom of Christ, the judgment-seat of Christ, has been already established. Christ is even now the Head of all angels and principalities and powers, and has received a name before which every knee must bow. But that which St. Paul still misses in the world is a *revelation* of the judgment-seat, or headship, of Christ. He felt, like St. John, that the glory of Christ's reign was hid under a cloud; we did not yet see Him as He *is*. There is the same thought in the mind of the Apostle when He cries, "When Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall we also appear with Him in glory." What St. Paul desires is not an addition to the *fact*, but an addition to the *revelation*. He longs to see the judgment-seat unveiled. He thinks that the unveiling of the judgment-seat would be an era of revelation; a revelation of the dead to the living, a revelation of the living to the dead, a revelation of Christ to all. He seems to say that here things do not appear as they are; they seem to be as they are not. Good is really triumphant over evil every hour; yet, to the outward eye, it appears as if evil were triumphant over good. It cannot be said that, to the eye of sense, the saints judge or rule this world. It cannot be said to be a maxim of worldly politics that the survival of the strongest means the survival of goodness. We must still

aver with the inspired writer, "We see not yet all things subdued unto him."

Now it is just this that Paul desires to see. He is looking forward to a time when Christ shall *appear* to be what He really is—the Ruler of the world and the Judge of men. He is in search of a visible manifestation of the presence and power of God. He wants to behold the day in which men shall be revealed in their natural attitude of subjection, in which the veil that hides their dependent condition shall be withdrawn, and they shall be discovered in the posture of subjects standing before the throne of their Sovereign. This is the sense in which the Apostle says: "We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ." He demands for his Lord an acknowledgment of his glory. He claims from the world a recognition of the fact that it is subject every moment to his will. He says the time must come when that fact shall be made patent. The world shall yet be seen in its naturally suppliant attitude. Men shall yet be beheld ranged in front of the great throne of the Theocracy. Every knee shall yet bow to the empire of Divine Goodness. Every tongue shall yet confess that the Lord of righteousness is the King of kings. That is St. Paul's meaning in the passage before us. He sought, he looked for, a new revelation of the fact that Christ is King.

Shall we ask in what form he expected the revelation to come? Was it to be literal or only spiritual? St. Paul would have smiled at the alternative implied in such a question. To him what we call "only spiritual" would have been at all times the most literal of all things. He would have told us that a revelation which was less or more than spiritual would be a contradiction in terms. No doubt he expected that the message addressed to the spirit would clothe itself in a human form; but of the nature of that form he is unwilling to speak. To attempt to break his silence would be to speculate, and speculation is not our

aim. We are simply trying to ascertain what meaning we of modern times are to attach to certain Scriptural phrases which custom has made familiar to us as household words. We are anxious above all things to import nothing *into* these passages. Our aim has rather been to divest them of that association with modern ideas which they have acquired in the course of ages. We have tried to throw ourselves back into intellectual sympathy with the past, in order to discover what the words would mean to the age and to the men upon whose ears they first fell. We do not, therefore, seek any theory; we only desire to know what was the original thought which these words conveyed and were intended to convey. We have now arrived at one of these thoughts. We have found that when the Apostle spoke of Christ as "appearing" to us, or of us as "appearing before the judgment-seat of Christ," he was thinking above all other things of the drawing aside of that veil which hides from us the plan of the Universe. He was in search of a light in which he might see things as they were. He wanted to catch the rhythm of that music to which creation keeps time, to hear the measure of that march which men call the order of Nature. He sought a lifting up of those clouds which were still round about the heavenly throne; for, like the Psalmist, he knew that the habitation of that throne was a world of righteousness and judgment, and that when the clouds lifted this world would be disclosed. The prophecy of Christ's appearing is the promise of a new revelation.

The second leading idea contained in this Pauline picture of the day of judgment is that of *separation*. It is given in the words: "That every one may render an account of the things done in the body, whether they be good or bad." The thought in this passage is clearly that of a sifting process which is to make a division between those things that hitherto have stood side by side. The good and the bad

acts of life grow together until the harvest, and then the reapers are sent to divide between them. Men will take their places in the new republic according to their deeds; the most developed will come soonest and nearest to the front. It will be as natural for the morally strong to rise in this new republic above the morally weak as it is in the present world for the physically strong to rise above the physically weak. The law of survival will then be regulated by goodness, and the element which gives to one soul the superiority or empire over another will be its possession of a higher degree of goodness. The separation in the destinies of individual souls will itself be the rendering of their account.

That there is nothing fanciful in this view, that this is really the sense which St. Paul attached to his own words, will be clearly seen if we turn for a moment to 1 Corinthians, iii., where he is dealing in detail with the same subject. He tells us that there is coming a day which is to try the works of men. The mode of trial is to be the revelation of a new experience; and the mode of revelation is to be fire. The fire is evidently spiritual, and it is by nature benevolent, not destructive. This appears from the fact that it is to try "*every man's work*" without distinction. Its element of destruction is merely incidental. It only destroys because there are in the Universe certain things which are combustible, and therefore incapable of permanence. It is the same element of which our Lord speaks in Mark ix. 49, where He says, "Every one shall be salted with fire"; the same as that of which the writer to the Hebrews says, "Our God is a consuming fire." In the view of the Apostle, it exists specially for the benefit of the saints, and is meant to strengthen their saintship. It hurts only in proportion as saintship is weak. Where there are works of gold and silver, it will refine and purify them; where there are works of wood or hay or

stubble, it will burn them, in order that their possessor may learn what and how much he lacks, and begin anew. In this remarkable passage St. Paul points out the fact, that there are degrees in the heavenly order. The relative rank of each soul is to be determined by a fiery ordeal which is to prove its capacities, and assign it its legitimate sphere. What that ordeal is to be the Apostle does not tell; it is probable he did not know. But there can be little doubt that, in whatever form it presented itself to his mind, it was realized by him as a fire of sorrow. It was to try every man's work in the same way in which Christianity itself must try it. The method of the Cross has all along been a method of fire—"near the Cross, near the fire." It has shaken the earth and the heavens that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. He who came after the Baptist was to baptize with fire. In that baptism of fire lies the distinctive power of Christianity. To this religion, more than to any other, has been assigned the mission of dividing between the real and the unreal. To this more than to any other has been committed the task of separating the natural from the artificial, the false from the true. The fiery trial of faith has been to all minds, as it was to the Apostolic mind, "more precious than gold which perisheth." The emblem of the day of judgment has, to the Christian consciousness, been an emblem of endearment; every saintly soul has owed its salvation to the fire of God. When St. Paul says "the fire shall try every man's work, the day shall declare it, for it shall be revealed by fire," he is not announcing to his countrymen any new experience, but simply a consummation of their daily experience. To them the Light of the world was at the same time the Fire of the world. The Christ whom they worshipped revealed the pure gold; but He did so by consuming the alloy. The day of judgment, though not manifested, had already begun; and it began not with the enemies, but with the *house*

of God. To be tried by the Divine fire, to be judged by the New Dispensation, was in its essence a privilege, not a penalty; and, therefore, it was first of all the prerogative of the saint. To the new fire of judgment, with its Divine power of separating between the false and the true, he was ever looking as the ally of his spiritual nature, ever saying with the saint of an older day, "Search me and try me."

The separating principle, then, which is characteristic of the day of judgment, is conceived by the first Christians to be already in operation. That theocratic kingdom which is called the day of the Lord, though its throne is not yet unveiled, and its sceptre is not yet displayed, is even now an historical fact in the Universe. The birth at Bethlehem was the dawn of God's judgment-day, the inauguration of a kingdom in which the best are to rule. That kingdom is yet to be manifested; but its principle is already at work in the world, and its principle is the power of separating between the false and the true. Accordingly we find that, in the account of our Lord's teaching which has come down to us, the day of judgment is spoken of in terms which at first sight might seem contradictory. Sometimes it is spoken of as if it had already come: "*Now* is the judgment of this world." Sometimes it is alluded to as if it were to come in the life of that generation: "There are some standing here who shall not taste of death until they see the kingdom of God come with power." And sometimes, finally, it is described as an event still in the far future, whose advent cannot be looked for until there has intervened an age of great tribulation: "The end is not by and by." The truth is that in our Gospel narratives the great day of the Lord is conceived of as consisting in a *series* of judgments, reaching from the dawn of Christianity to the consummation of all things. Each of these judgments is marked by one common symptom—a pro-

cess of separation between elements that have hitherto been undistinguished. Three classes of such judgments or separations may be pointed out. They may perhaps be described as individual, social, and national. The first is the separation of the wheat from the chaff. It is announced by the Baptist as that which is to form the distinctive feature of Christ's first coming: "Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner, but will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." It is in this sense that Christ speaks at times of the day of judgment as something which in his incarnation had been already fulfilled: "Now is the judgment of this world." His first coming was to begin the great work of separation, and it was to begin in the individual soul. It was to divide between the wheat and the chaff, between that which was natural and that which was artificial in the heart of each man. It was to reveal to human nature that there was in it something which was perishable, and something which was eternal; a life bounded by the interests of the day and hour, and a life above all changes and beyond all boundaries. In the presence of the Son of Man the soul was to learn what was and what was not eternal. It was to see humanity stripped by the fire of God of all that the world calls glory, despised, rejected, forsaken, mocked, scourged, crucified, yet remaining in its abasement King over all. In that vision the wheat was to be separated from the chaff, the life of a man was to be distinguished from the abundance of the things he possesseth. It was to be told what was and what was not the secret of immortality—how much a human soul could lose without losing that which made it a soul. Humanity surviving Calvary is the wheat outliving the chaff. This is the *first* day of judgment.

The second is the separation of the wheat from the *tares*. It is a more pronounced division than the first. That was

individual, this is social. That only reached to the difference between the real and the apparent; this relates to the severance of the false from the true. That was to have its fulfilment in Christian experience at the hour of Christ's first coming; this is only to begin to shew itself "at the end of the age," *i.e.* at the fall of the Jewish commonwealth. It is then that the reapers are to divide those elements which have grown together until the harvest. It is then that a Christian society is to stand out in the world as a distinct thing. It is then that the divergence is to be clearly marked between the Church of the Old Testament and the Church of the New. Before this time they had been confounded by the Gentiles, and sometimes even by themselves. But with the fall of Jerusalem there could be no more confusion. Christianity would then stand alone and speak for herself. She would be freed from the reproach of Judaism. She would be separated from the narrowness and exclusiveness which obscured the revelation of her universal charity. She would be dissociated from that reverence of angel and archangel which tended to rob the soul of the joy of direct communion, and would be ushered into that sense of glorious liberty which comes from being in contact with the Object of our worship. The division of the old society from the new is the *second* day of judgment.

But there is a *third*, a final stage of the kingdom of God. It is described as the division of the sheep from the goats, and is distinguished from the other two in being a separation, not of thoughts in the individual soul, nor of societies in the order of the world, but of *Nations*. "Before him shall be *gathered all nations*," are the striking words in which it is portrayed. *Gathering* is not a single act but a series of acts; it suggests a gradual process worked out by time and development. And, indeed, throughout the New Testament this seems to be the prevailing conception

of that last great stage of judgment called the kingdom of Christ. The view of these Scriptures appears to be that the city of God, which is to be the nucleus of the nations, is growing day by day; that it is gradually gathering into itself and around itself all beings and all things that are worthy to rule; that the dead are coming into it, each man in his own order; that the living are centring round it, each nation in its own place and time. The very conception of the Divine Headship is that of a body which is ever expanding, which is daily adding to itself or evolving from itself new members of the great theocracy, and new powers of the world to come. The kingdom of God is ever coming; the throne of the judgment is ever being unveiled. It is coming with clouds, because it works by a process of gathering, and therefore it is unseen by any single eye. But in the dispensation of the fulness of time, when He shall have gathered together all things unto Himself, the vision of the Divine Empire will be complete; the throne of judgment will emerge from the clouds and darkness that are round about it, and the Messianic promise of the second Psalm will be fulfilled—"I will give thee *the nations* for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession."

GEORGE MATHESON.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM ILLUSTRATED FROM THE PRINTING-OFFICE.

IV. CONCLUDING SUGGESTIONS.—It seems difficult to quit the subject without some remark as to the practical bearing of the considerations that have preceded, and the general view of textual criticism which one influenced by them must adopt. As a consequence the present article can have but little direct connection with the defining portion of its