

**Heaping Coals of Fire on the Head** (Rom. xii. 20).—The expositions commonly given of this passage are not altogether clear and satisfactory, the reason being seemingly that sufficient attention has not been paid to the usage and idiom of metaphorical language. Metaphors may be cast in the form of proverbial sentences. And this class of metaphor is the more difficult, because there may be no connexion or natural resemblance between the comparison and the thing compared; because the idea intended and implied is to be sought for, not in the terms, but the sum of them, not in the process described, but in the effect produced.

Take for example Hezekiah's message to Isaiah (2 Kings xix. 3). "*The children are come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring forth.*" The one idea expressed is absolute weakness, a time of extremity.

This proverbial or gnomic form of metaphorical illustration abounds in the older Greek poets. Thus in Æschylus (*Eumen.* 694), Minerva, after bespeaking reverence for the Areopagus, utters this warning against innovation of its laws: "If you pollute bright water with foul streams and mud, you will find nought to drink." Again in the same poet (*Agam.* 322) the tumult of a captured city and the cries of victim and vanquished have this abrupt illustration: "If you pour vinegar and oil into the same vessel, you will say that they are at variance, and not friends."

It is plain at once that in each of these two proverb-like figures one main idea only is contained, and that one which is not affected by nor connected with the particular terms used. The poet does not parallel water with law nor mud with innovation; the one thing intended is deterioration of good. So it is with the "oil and vinegar;" neither word illustrates or represents victors or vanquished, the one point made is, the conflict of opposites. And a rule is clearly discoverable for interpreting such metaphorical sentences.

Look now at the passage from the Romans. "*In so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.*"

The words, taken literally, suggest a notion of cruel and barbarous revenge. But in explaining them we are to put aside the actual words, as much as in the above similes from Æschylus; we have simply to search for the main idea involved in the suppressed comparison. That one idea is "overcoming evil with

good." It has been generally agreed that the metaphor is taken from metallurgy, to which reference is constantly made in the Bible; the "melting fire" of the furnace would have been a familiar sight to any Israelite, and suggest a natural comparison to him. Still, while taking this as the basis for exposition, we are to think not of the process, but of the result effected, not of the quickening the fire, but the fusing of the metal beneath; and so, figuratively, of the melting and softening harsh and angry feeling. If we expand the condensed phrase into a comparison, the meaning will be clear at once: "*By charity and kindness thou shalt soften down his enmity, as surely as heaping coals on the fire fuses the metal in the crucible.*"

It will follow, that the idea of drawing down wrath or adding to Divine vengeance (an idea reconcilable neither with perfect charity nor with faith in Divine compassion), or again of kindling remorse in the offender, is noway required by the figurative phraseology of the verse, and is rather opposed to its idiomatic construction.

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**Miss Rossetti's "Time Flies."**<sup>1</sup> This unpretending little book has more life in it than many whose praises have been loudly sounded. To appreciate Miss Rossetti's quaint and subtle prose requires a (very pleasant) process of education. But every true lover of English poetry will find in this book some of the author's most exquisite work—nothing perhaps so memorable as the transcendent "Passing Away,"—but many brief lyrics almost unmatched for their tender yet austere beauty. Those who see in Miss Rossetti, not only the greatest of the distinctively Christian singers of England, but also one of the most wise and sympathetic teachers of catholic Christianity, will find in this book much to be closely and humbly studied. Again we recognise her intense devotion to the Passion of our Lord; the sense of the peril of the soul, the torturing sting of sin, the exceeding breadth of the commandment, the vanity of all things here. "*Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear,*" expresses much but by no means all of her teaching. One is reminded of the passage where Bunyan perhaps reaches his highest point—that most loving delineation of Mr. Fearing, who was however very valiant in Vanity Fair, being no

<sup>1</sup> *Time Flies: a Reading Diary.* By Christina G. Rossetti. London, S.P.C.K.