

Volume 20—Studies in the Scriptures—September, 1941**THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT.**

“Thou shalt not commit adultery” (Exo. 20:14). The virtues of purity are the basis of the domestic relations, and as the family is the foundation of human society, the class of duties here involved are second only to those which preserve man’s existence. Hence it is that immediately following the Commandment which declares the sacredness of human life, there is that which is a hedge about the highest relationship of creaturehood—safeguarding the holy function of the procreation of life. Nothing is more essential for the social order than that the relationship upon which all others are subsequently based should be jealously protected against every form of attack. The Commandment is a simple, unqualified, irrevocable, negative: “thou shalt not.” No argument is used, no reason is given, because none is required. This sin is so destructive and damning that it is in itself sufficient cause for the stern forbidding.

This Commandment plainly intimates that God claims *the body* as well as the soul for His service. “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Rom. 12:1). “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof . . . if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live” (Rom. 6:12; 8:13). “The body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body . . . Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid . . . glorify God in your body, and in your spirit” (1 Cor. 6:13, 15, 20). For a Christian this foul sin is sacrilege: “Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you!” (1 Cor. 6:19). If Christ was indignant when He saw the house of God turned into a den of thieves, how much more heinous in His sight must be that wickedness which debases the temple of the Holy Spirit into a filthy sty!

“Thou shalt not commit adultery.” This prohibition is designed to guard the sanctity of the home, for strictly speaking “adultery” is a crime which none but a *married* person can commit—“fornication” being the name of it when done by one who is single. As the One with whom we have to do is ineffably pure and holy, He requires us to depart from all uncleanness. This Commandment respects more especially the government of the affections and passions, the keeping of our minds and bodies in such a chaste frame that nothing impure or immodest may defile us. It requires the proper discipline of those inclinations which God has implanted in order to the increase of the human species. Therefore are we to avoid everything that may be an occasion of this sin, using all proper means and methods to prevent all temptations thereto.

How *God* regards sins of uncleanness has been made clear by many passages in His Word. This sin, even on the part of an unmarried man, is called “great wickedness against God” (Gen. 39:9); then how much more inexcusable and intolerable is it on the part of a married person! The temporal punishment meted out to it under the civil law of Israel was no less than death—the same that was meted out to murder. Job calls it “a heinous crime, a fire that consumeth to destruction” (31:11, 12). Much of this wickedness is practiced in secret, but though its perpetrators may escape the judgment of man, they shall not escape the judgment of Heaven for it is written “whoremongers and adulterers God shall judge” (Heb. 13:4) “Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers shall inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 6:9, 10).

“The sin of adultery is scarcely less enormous than that of murder. The latter destroys man’s temporal existence, the former destroys all that makes existence a boon. Were all to take the license of the adulterer, men would, in due time, be reduced to the degradation of wild beasts” (R. L. Dabney). To prevent this sin, God has instituted the ordinance of marriage: “to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband” (1 Cor. 7:2). The sin of adultery is therefore the violation of the marriage covenant and vow, and so adds perjury to infidelity. Immorality is a sin against the body: 1 Corinthians 6:18. God’s displeasure against this sin is seen in the fact He has so ordered it that nature itself visits the same with heavy penalties in every part of man’s complex being: “Be not deceived: God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption” (Gal. 6:7, 8).

Though marriage be the Divinely appointed remedy for the sin of sexual uncleanness, that does not grant man the license to make a beast of himself. “Let it not be supposed by married persons that all things are lawful to them. Every man should observe sobriety towards his wife, and every wife, reciprocally, towards her husband; conducting themselves in such a manner as to do nothing unbecoming the decorum and temperance of marriage. For thus ought marriage contracted in the Lord to be regulated by moderation and modesty, and not to break out into the vilest lasciviousness. Such sensuality has been stigmatized by Ambrose with a severe but not unmerited censure, when he calls those who in their conjugal intercourse have no regard to modesty, the adulterers of their own wives (Calvin).

Let no man flatter himself with the idea that he cannot be charged with unchastity because he has abstained from the actual deed while his heart is a cesspool of defiling imaginations and desires. Because God’s Law is “spiritual” (Rom. 7:14) it not only forbids the gross outward acts of filthiness, but it prohibits and condemns unchastity of heart as well—all unlawful imaginations and contemplations. As there is such a thing as heart murder, so there is *heart adultery*, and he who commits speculative uncleanness and prostitutes his thoughts and imaginations to the impure embraces of lust is guilty of transgressing this Commandment. “Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart” (Matt. 5:28). Therefore we find the Apostle did not content himself with saving that it is better for a man to marry than pollute himself with a harlot, but “it is better to marry than to *burn*” (1 Cor. 7:9)—harbour consuming passion.

Although the sin of “adultery” is alone specifically mentioned in this precept, the rule, by which these Commandments are to be interpreted obliges us to understand that all other kinds of uncleanness are prohibited under that of this one gross sin. Everything that defiles the body is here forbidden: adultery is expressly mentioned because all other moral pollutions tend thereto. By the wickedness of that which all men know to be wrong, we are exhorted to abominate *every* unlawful passion. As all manner of chastity in our thoughts, speeches and actions is enjoined by the perfect rule of God, so whatever is in the least contrary and prejudicial to spotless chastity and modesty is here prohibited. *Every other sexual union save that of marriage is accursed in God’s sight.*

This Commandment forbids all degrees or approaches to the sin prohibited, as looking in order to lust. Its force is, You shall in no way injure your neighbour’s chastity or tempt to uncleanness. It requires that we abstain from immodest apparel, indelicate speech, intemperance in food

and drink which excites the passions, everything which has any tendency to induce unchastity in ourselves or others. Let young people especially fix it in mind that all unclean conduct *before* marriage on the part of man or woman is a wrong done *against* the marriage to be. Though this commandment be expressed in the form of a negative prohibition, yet positively it enjoins all the opposite duties, such as cleanliness of the body, filling the mind with holy objects, setting our affection on things above, spending our time in profitable occupations.

Rules and Helps for avoiding such sins: (1.) Cultivate a habitual sense of the Divine presence, realizing that, "The eyes of the LORD are in *every* place, beholding the evil and the good" (Prov. 15:3). (2.) Keep a strict watch over the senses: these are the avenues which instead of letting in pleasant streams to refresh, only too often let in mud and mire to pollute the soul. Make a covenant with the eyes (Job 31:1). Stop the ears against all filthy conversation. Read nothing which defiles. Watch your thoughts, and labour to promptly expel evil ones. (3.) Practice sobriety and temperance (1 Cor. 9:27). They who indulge in gluttony and drunkenness generally find their excess froth and foam turn into lust. (4.) Exercise yourself in honest and lawful employment: idleness proves as fatal to many as intemperance to others. Avoid the company of the wicked. (5.) Be much in earnest prayer, begging God to cleanse your heart (Psa. 119:36).

"Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?" (James 4:4). This refers to the sin of *spiritual adultery*: it is love of the world estranging the heart from God, carnal lusts enticing the soul and drawing it away from Him. There is more than enough in God Himself to satisfy, but there is still that in the believer which desires to find his happiness in the creature. There are *degrees* of this sin, as of the natural: as there may be physical adultery in thought and longing which terminates not in the overt act, so the Christian may secretly hanker after the world though he become not an utter worldling. We must check such inclinations when our hearts are unduly drawn forth to material comforts and contentment. God is a jealous God, and nothing provokes Him more than that we should prefer base things before Himself, or give unto others that affection or esteem which belongs alone to Him. Leave not your "first love" (Rev. 2:4), nor forsake Him to whom you are "espoused" (2 Cor. 11:2).—A.W.P.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

19. *Anxiety Forbidden*: Matthew 6:32, 33.

Let us summarize the verses which have already been before us in that section of our Lord's Address which is completed at the end of Matthew 6. In verses 19-24 Christ forbade the practice of covetousness, and in what follows He struck at the root from which that sin proceeds, namely, distrust and excessive care for the things of this life. First, He tells us that such worry is *needless*: the bounty of God assuring supplies (v. 25). Creation is a pledge of our preservation: He who gives life will maintain it, He who provides a body will not deny it food and raiment. Second, He shows us that such worry is *senseless*: the providence of God unto inferior creatures evidencing it (v. 26). If God provides for the fowls of the air, will He suffer His own children to starve? Third, He proves it is *useless*: the impotency of man demonstrating it (v. 27)—since no anxiety or industry of ours can increase our stature, much less can worrying improve our earthly estate. Fourth, He announces it is *faithless* (vv. 28-30). Since God clothes the herbs of the field, will He suffer His dear people to lack suitable covering?

None but the Divine Physician could have opened up so impressively the hideous nature of this disease. In that Divine diagnosis we are given to behold the excuselessness and the heinousness of this sin which is so prevalent among professing Christians. Distressing ourselves over the obtaining of future supplies, worrying in connection with securing the necessities of temporal life—so far from being a trivial infirmity which we need not take seriously to heart—is a sin of the deepest dye which should humble us into the dust before God. Worrying over tomorrow's food and clothing is needless, useless, senseless, faithless, and therefore it is utterly excuseless. Then surely we should make conscience of it, confess it contritely before God, and seek from Him grace to mortify it. That which was spoken by Christ on the Mount is addressed unto us today: O that we may be given ears to hear and hearts to improve the same!

"For after all these things do the Gentiles seek: for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things" (v. 32). In these words our Lord advances two additional reasons why His people should not be unduly solicitous about temporal supplies. First, because such anxieties are *heathenish*. This will appear more evident to the ordinary reader when we point out that the Greek word which is here rendered "Gentiles" is translated "heathen" in Acts 4:25, Galatians 1:16, etc. At the time Christ made this statement, the "Gentiles" were without any written revelation from God and were in complete spiritual darkness. In consequence, they had the most erroneous ideas of the Divine character and government. Many of them believed that all things were fixed by a blind and inexorable fate, while others went to an opposite extreme, supposing that nothing was predetermined, but that everything was left to capricious chance. Such are the philosophisings of man's much-vaunted reason when unilluminated by the Spirit of Truth.

The concepts which the "Gentiles" formed of their "gods" were such that they could have no trust in them. So far from regarding their "gods" as beings of benevolence who regarded their devotees with compassion, they were looked upon as objects of dread, whose favour could only be purchased by the most costly of offerings (appropriated by the priests) and whose ire had to be placated by human sacrifices. Of a future life beyond this vale of tears the heathen had but the vaguest and gloomiest ideas. Consequently this world meant everything to them, and therefore their whole thought was directed and their energy devoted to the obtaining of its necessities and comforts, making such their chief good. Their ambition rose no higher than to eat and drink, to

have sufficient material things and make merry therewith. And those of them who possessed little of this world—and only a very small number had much—were weighed down with worry as to how soon their slender resources might completely fail them.

“For after all these things do the Gentiles seek” (Matt. 6:32). It should be pointed out that the word in the original whereby Christ described the behaviour of the heathen is more emphatic than our translation intimates, denoting that they “set themselves to seek” or “seek with all their might.” This is a detail of some importance, for the mere or simple seeking of things necessary for our welfare is a *duty*, but when we give ourselves wholly to the quest thereof it is a sin, for it proceeds from distrust of God. And this was precisely the case of the Gentiles at that time: they were without the knowledge of the true God, had not His Word and were ignorant of His providences. How vastly and how radically different is the case of the Christian! God is revealed to him in Christ, a written revelation from Him is in his hands assuring him of the supply of all his need. How shameful then, how wicked, for a child of God to come down to the level of the heathen, as he does when worry possesses his heart.

The force of our Lord’s argument (that it is an argument or dissuasive is clear from its opening “for”) will probably be more apparent if we paraphrase it thus: because on all these things do *worldlings* set their hearts—in the parallel passage it reads, “For all these things do the nations of the world seek after” (Luke 12:30). How utterly unworthy for a Christian to be regulated by a mode of thinking and acting such as governs the godless, to descend to the level of the unregenerate. Yet alas, how many of those now bearing the name of Christ do this very thing. How grossly materialistic is this twentieth century. How close is the resemblance between what men call “Christian civilization” and the conditions which obtained in the degenerate empires of ancient Greece and Rome. Human nature is the same in every age, the same the world over, and will inevitably remain so except where the Holy Spirit is pleased to work in His transforming power.

“Solicitude for the future is nothing more than *worldly mindedness*. The heathen tendency in us all leads to an over-estimate of material good, and it is a question of circumstances whether that shall show itself in heaping up earthly treasures, or in anxious care. They are the same plant, only the one is growing in the tropics of sunny prosperity, and the other in the Arctic zone of chill destitution. The one is the sin of the worldly-minded rich man, and the other is the sin of the worldly-minded poor man. The character is the same turned inside out! And therefore, the words ‘ye cannot serve God and Mammon,’ stand in this chapter in the centre between our Lord’s warning against laying up treasures on earth, and His warnings against being full of cares for earth. He would show us thereby that these two apparently opposite states of mind in reality spring from one root, and are equally, though differently, ‘serving Mammon.’ We do not sufficiently reflect upon that” (A. Maclaren).

There are some who seek to excuse their anxiety and worrying by saying it is the result of temperament or circumstances. Even so, that does not lessen their sin. Divine grace teaches its possessor to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts (Titus 2:12) and lifts him above circumstances (Phil. 4:11). The fact is that those who do not trust in God’s goodness and count not upon His faithfulness to supply all their needs are pagans, no matter what may be their profession. Pagans believe not in Divine providence, and so rely upon the means, trusting wholly in their own efforts and endeavours, and so make themselves their own god. The real reason why empty profes-

sors are so anxious about the things of this life and so troubled over future supplies is that their hearts are earthbound and their desires heathenish. A worldling is one whose anxieties and joys are both confined within the narrow sphere of the material and the visible—take *that* from him, and he has nothing left.

Observe now the ground on which this argument of dissuasive rests. Real Christians have the true God for their God which the heathens have not, and therefore they must differ from them in their behaviour. God clothed the grass of the field (Matt. 6:30)—yea, with a verdure and beauty exceeding that of Solomon's royal robes—"therefore take no anxious thought, saying (unbelievingly and petulantly) What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? Or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed" (v. 31). "For after all these things do the *Gentiles* seek," and you must not be like they are. In all things the children of God should differ from the heathen. "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" said Christ (John 17:14), and as He evidenced His separation from and unlikeness to it, so must we. "Be not conformed to this world. but be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds" (Rom. 12:2). Sons of the King of Heaven are not to conduct themselves like beggars.

"For your heavenly Father *knoweth* that ye have need of all these things" (Matt. 6:32). Here is still another reason, the most powerful of all, for delivering believers from distressing fears and God-dishonouring anxieties about future supplies. "Your heavenly Father" is set over against the inanimate and impotent "gods" of the heathen: His knowledge or tender solicitude, against their ignorance and lack of concern. The poor pagans might well say, If we are not wholly taken up with seeking after the necessities and comforts of this life, then pray who will provide them? But it is far otherwise with the Christian. The One who made Heaven and earth sustains to him the relation of a heavenly Father: "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear Him" (Psa. 103:13). He knows what I have need, and will not deny it to me. "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in Heaven give good things to them that ask Him" (Matt. 7:11). The believer need trouble himself no further than to soberly use all lawful means, calmly and confidently counting on God to bless the same: God *will provide* what is needful for him and therefore he need not vex his mind about it.

Let it be duly noted that Christ here repeats the note which He had struck in Matthew 6:26—"your *heavenly Father* feedeth them." If He provides for such inferior creatures as the fowls of the air, will He suffer the members of His own family to want? He is their *Creator* and so bountifully supplies their need; but He is the Christian's *Father* and will not forget His own child. Here is double armour against the arrows of anxiety: the intimate relation which the great God sustains to His people, and the assurance that His knowledge to them is equal to His love for them. The children of this world are indeed tormented with anxiety as to how tomorrow's supplies will be obtained. Nor is it at all strange that they should be bowed down with such cares, for they have no heavenly Father to whose infinite love and faithfulness they may commit themselves. Consequently in this argument Christ is putting His disciples to the proof, as to whether or not the relation which God sustains to them is actual and counts for anything, or whether it is mere theory and lip profession.

All distrustful anxiety about the supplies of things needful proceeds on the assumption that God either does not know our wants or that He cares not for us, which is precisely the attitude of

the worldling. But with the Christian it is very different. He has the realization that "He who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32). He is assured from Holy Writ of God's special providence over him, taking notice of his case, whatever it may be, and making all things work together for his good. From this assurance he must learn to practice *contentment*: depending upon God by simple faith and trustfully leaving himself and all his interests in His gracious hands. This contentment or acquiescence in the Divine will is to be practiced in sickness as well as in health, under trials as well as blessings, in adversity as in prosperity, realizing that whatever may be our circumstances they are according to the good pleasure of our heavenly Father, who is infinite in power and wisdom.

"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33). In these words Christ makes known the great counter argument and remedy for covetousness. As in the previous verses He had been striking at the root from which that sin proceeds, namely, distrust of God and excessive care for the things of this life—so here He reveals the effectual specific, that is, making the things of God our paramount concern. "It is of no use only to tell men that they ought to trust, that the birds of the air might teach them to trust, that the flowers of the field might preach resignation and confidence to them. It is no use to attempt to scold them into trust, by telling them that distrust is heathenish. You must fill the heart with a supreme and transcendent desire after the one supreme Object; and then there will be no room and leisure left for the anxious care after the lesser. Have inwrought into your being, Christian man, the opposite of that heathen over-regard for earthly things" (A. Maclaren).

The renowned Thomas Chalmers was the author of that impressive expression, "The expulsive power of a new affection." God and the world, Christ and Belial, cannot possess the soul of the same person. When the love of God is shed abroad in the heart the love of the world is cast out: "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away, behold all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17). Man is constituted that he cannot be devoted to two different and diverse objects at one and the same time: it is utterly impossible for him to serve two masters—God and Mammon. Let his affections be set upon things above and they will be detached from things below. The more real and blessed (by the exercise of faith) become the former, the less attractive will appear and the less hold upon will the latter have. The best way to get a child to drop a filthy or dangerous object is to offer it another one more satisfying. If the horse cannot be induced to trot, turn his face homewards and it will quickly improve its speed.

Having by one argument after another dissuaded His disciples from distrustful care, Christ now shows them what that care is which *ought* always to possess their hearts: to wit, care of the kingdom of God and His righteousness. Three questions at once suggest themselves to us. First, what is denoted by those particular terms? Second, what is imported and included in our "seeking" after "the kingdom of God and His righteousness." Third, what is meant and included by the word, "first"? Most of the commentators regard "the kingdom of God and His righteousness" as a comprehensive expression for Divine things in general. Thus Matthew Henry says, "It is the sum and substance of our whole duty." Thomas Scott gives, "The blessings of the Messiah's kingdom, the righteousness in which His objects are justified, the grace by which they are sanctified and the good works in which they are to walk." To us it appears that such definitions are too

brief and too vague to convey any distinct concepts to the mind, and therefore we shall endeavour to canvass them more closely.

Among dispensationalists the grossest conceptions have obtained concerning “the Kingdom”: they have literalized what is figurative and carnalized what is spiritual. Strictly speaking, the Greek word “*basileia*” has reference to *sovereignty* rather than to territory; to *dominion*, rather than a geographical sphere. The “kingdom of God” signifies *the rule of God* and therefore, in its widest latitude, takes in the entire universe, for the Ruler of Heaven and earth governs all creatures and things: angels and demons, men, elect and reprobate, animals and fishes, planets and the elements. “Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the Heaven and in the earth is Thine; Thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and Thou art exalted as Head above all” (1 Chron. 29:11). And again—“The LORD hath prepared His throne in the heavens, and His kingdom ruleth over all” (Psa. 103:19). Rightly did one of the Puritans affirm, “There is no such monarch as God is, for largeness of empire, for absoluteness of power, and sublimity of His throne.” By some, this aspect of it has been designated “the Kingdom of Providence.”

In its more contracted sense, “the kingdom of God” has reference to a certain order and estate of men, namely, those who profess to be in subjection unto the rule of God, who avow their allegiance to Him. As the “kingdom” of Satan (Matt. 12:26) is found wherever we meet with those in whom the Prince of the power of the air “now worketh” (Eph. 2:2), so the kingdom of God exists wherever there are those in whose hearts He reigns. This aspect of it is denominated “the kingdom of Grace.” As such it is to be considered two ways: as externally administered, and as internally received. Its external administration consists of the ordinances and means of grace and the outward profession men make thereunto—hence in the parables of the kingdom, Christ pictures tares as well as wheat, bad fish as well as good—being included therein. When He said to the Jews, “The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof” (Matt. 21:43), Christ had reference to the external privileges of the means of grace. As internally received, the kingdom of God consists in Divine grace ruling in the hearts of His elect so that they are brought to submit themselves unto the obedience of Christ. It is this aspect of the kingdom which is in view in Matthew 6:33.—A.W.P.

THE LIFE OF ELIJAH.

21. *Welcome Rain.*

Not a little is said in the Scriptures about *rain*, yet is such teaching quite unknown today even to the vast majority of people in Christendom. In this atheistic and materialistic age God is not only not accorded His proper place in the hearts and lives of the people, but He is banished from their thoughts and virtually excluded from the world which He has made. His ordering of the seasons, His control of the elements, His regulating of the weather, is now believed by none save an insignificant remnant who are regarded as fools and fanatics. There is need, then, for the servants of Jehovah to set forth the relation which the living God sustains to His creation and His superintendence of and government over all the affairs of earth—to point out first that the Most High foreordained in eternity past all which comes to pass here below, and then to declare that He is now executing His predetermination and working “all things after the counsel of His own will.”

That God’s foreordination reaches to material things as well as spiritual—that it embraces the elements of earth as well as the souls of men, is clearly revealed in Holy Writ. “He made a decree (the same Hebrew word as in Psa. 2:7) for the rain” (Job 28:26)—predestinating when, where, and how little or how much it should rain: just as, “He gave to the sea His decree, that the waters should not pass His commandment” (Prov. 8:29), and as He has “placed the sand for the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree that it cannot pass it; and though the waters thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail” (Jer. 5:22). The precise number, duration and quantity of the showers have been eternally and unalterably fixed by the Divine will, and the exact bounds of each ocean and river expressly determined by the fiat of the Ruler of Heaven and earth.

In accordance with His foreordination we read that God “prepareth rain for the earth” (Psa. 147:8), and unless He did so, there would be none, for puny man can no more create rain than he can make the sun to shine. “I will cause it to rain” (Gen. 7:4) says the King of the firmament, nor can any of His creatures say Him nay. “I will give you rain in due season” (Lev. 26:4), is His gracious promise, yet how little is its fulfillment recognized or appreciated. On the other hand He declares, “I have *withholden* the rain from you . . . I caused it to rain upon one city and caused it not to rain upon another city: one piece was rained upon and the piece whereon it rained not withered” (Amos 4:7 and cf. Deut. 11:17); and again, “I also will command the clouds that they rain no rain” (Isa. 5:6), and all the scientists in the world are powerless to reverse it. And therefore does He require of us “*Ask ye of the LORD rain*” (Zech. 10:1) that our dependence upon Him may be acknowledged.

What has been pointed out above receives striking and convincing demonstration in the part of Israel’s history which we have been considering. For the space of three and a half years there had been no rain or dew upon the land of Samaria, and that was the result neither of chance nor blind fate, but a Divine judgment upon a people who had forsaken Jehovah for false gods. In surveying the drought-stricken country from the heights of Carmel it would have been difficult to recognize that garden of the Lord which had been depicted as “a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills: a land of wheat and barley, and vines and fig trees: a land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack anything in it” (Deut. 8:7-9). But it had also been announced, “And thy Heaven that is over the head shall be brass, and the earth that is under thee shall be iron: the LORD shall make the rain of thy land

powder and dust" (Deut. 28:23, 24). That terrible curse had been literally inflicted, and therein we may behold the horrible consequences of sin. God endures with much longsuffering the waywardness of a nation as He does of an individual, but when both leaders and people apostatize and set up idols in the place which belongs to Himself alone, sooner or later He makes it unmistakably evident that He will not be mocked with impunity, and "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish" become their portion.

Alas that those nations which are favoured with the light of God's Word are so slow to learn this salutary lesson: it seems that the hard school of experience is the only teacher. The Lord had fulfilled His awful threat by Moses and had made good His word through Elijah (1 Kings 17:1). Nor could that fearful judgment be removed till the people at least avowedly owned Jehovah as the true God. As we pointed out earlier, till the people were brought back unto their allegiance to God, no favour could be expected from Him; and neither Ahab nor his subjects were yet in any fit state of soul to be made the recipients of His blessings and mercies. God had been dealing with them in judgment for their awful sins, and thus far His rod had not been acknowledged, nor had the occasion of His displeasure been removed.

But the wonderful miracle wrought on Carmel had entirely changed the face of things. When the fire fell from Heaven in answer to Elijah's prayer, all the people "fell on their faces, and they said, The LORD He is the God; the LORD, He is the God" (1 Kings 18:39). And when Elijah ordered them to arrest the false prophets of Baal and to let not one of them escape, they promptly complied with his orders, nor did they or the king offer any resistance when the Tishbite brought them down to the brook Kishon and slew them there (v. 40). Thus was the evil put away from them and the way opened for God's outward blessing. He graciously accepted this as their reformation and accordingly removed His scourge from them. This is ever the order: judgment prepares the way for blessing; the awful fire is followed by the welcome rain. Once a people takes their place on their faces and render to God the homage which is His due, it will not be long ere refreshing showers are sent down from Heaven.

As Elijah acted the part of executioner to the prophets of Baal who had been the principal agents in the national revolt against God, Ahab must have stood by a most unwilling spectator of that fearful deed of vengeance, not daring to resist the popular outburst of indignation or attempt to protect the men whom he had introduced and supported. And now their bodies lay in ghastly death before his eyes on the banks of the Kishon. When the last of Baal's prophets had bitten the dust, the intrepid Tishbite turned to the king and said, "Get thee up, eat and drink; for there is a sound of abundance of rain" (1 Kings 18:41). What a load would his words lift from the heart of the guilty king! He must have been greatly alarmed as he stood helplessly by watching the slaughter of his prophets, tremblingly expecting some terrible sentence to be pronounced upon him by the One whom he had so openly despised and blatantly insulted. Instead, he is allowed to depart unharmed from the place of execution; nay, bidden to go and refresh himself!

How well Elijah knew the man he was dealing with! He did not bid him humble himself beneath the mighty hand of God and publicly confess his wickedness, still less did he invite the king to join him in returning thanks for the wondrous and gracious miracle which he had witnessed. Eating and drinking was all this Satan-blinded sot cared about. As another has pointed out, it was as though the servant of the Lord had said, "Get thee up to where thy tents are pitched on yon broad upland sweep. The feast is spread in thy gilded pavilion, thy lackeys await thee; go,

feast on thy dainties. But 'be quick' for now that the land is rid of those traitor priests and God is once more enthroned in His rightful place, the showers of rain cannot be longer delayed. Be quick then! or the rain may interrupt thy carouse." The appointed hour for sealing the king's doom had not yet arrived: meanwhile he is suffered, as a beast, to fatten himself for the slaughter. It is useless to expostulate with apostates: compare John 13:27.

"For there is a sound of abundance of rain." It should scarcely need pointing out that Elijah was not here referring to a natural phenomenon. At the time when he spoke a cloudless sky appeared as far as the eye could reach, for when the Prophet's servant looked out toward the sea for any portent of approaching rain, he declared "there is nothing" (1 Kings 18:43), and later when he looked a seventh time all that could be seen was "a little cloud." When we are told that Moses "endured as seeing Him who is invisible" (Heb. 11:27) it was not because he beheld God with the natural eye. And when Elijah announced, "there is a sound of abundance of rain" that sound was not audible to the outward ear. It was by "the hearing of faith" (Gal. 3:2) that the Tishbite knew the welcome rain was nigh at hand. "The Lord God will do nothing, but He revealeth His secrets unto His servants the Prophets" (Amos 3:7) and the Divine revelation now made known to him was received by faith.

While Elijah yet abode with the widow at Zarephath the Lord had said to him, "Go show thyself to Ahab, and I will send rain upon the earth" (1 Kings 18:1) and the Prophet believed that God would do as He had said, and in the verse we are considering he speaks accordingly as if it were now being done, so certain was he that his Master would not fail to make good His word. It is thus that a spiritual and supernatural faith ever works: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen (Heb. 11:1). It is the nature of this God-given grace to bring distant things close to us: faith looks upon things promised as though they were actually fulfilled. Faith gives a present subsistence to things that are yet future: that is, it realizes them to the mind, giving a reality and substantiality to them. Of the Patriarchs it is written, "these all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off" (Heb. 11:13): though the Divine promises were not fulfilled in their lifetime, yet the eagle eyes of faith saw them, and it is added they "were persuaded of them and embraced them"—one cannot "embrace" distant objects, true, but faith being so sure of their verity makes them near.

"There is a sound of abundance of rain" (1 Kings 18:41). Does not the reader now perceive the spiritual purport of this language? That "sound" was certainly not heard by Ahab, nor even by any other person in the vast concourse on Mount Carmel. The clouds were not then gathered, yet Elijah hears that which shall be. Ah, if we were more separated from the din of this world, if we were in closer communion with God, our ears would be attuned to His softest whispers: if the Divine Word dwelt in us more richly and faith were exercised more upon it, we should hear that which is inaudible to the dull comprehension of the carnal mind. Elijah was so sure that the promised rain would come—as if he now heard its first drops splashing on the rocks or as if he saw it descending in torrents. O that writer and reader may be fully assured of God's promises and embrace them: living on them, walking by faith in them, rejoicing over them, for He is faithful who has promised: Heaven and earth shall pass away before one word of His shall fail!

"So Ahab went up to eat and to drink" (v. 42). The views expressed by the commentators on this statement strike us as being either carnal or forced. Some regard the king's action as being both logical and prudent: having had neither food nor drink since early morning and the day be-

ing now far advanced, he naturally and wisely made for home, that he might break his long fast. But there is a *time* for everything, and immediately following a most remarkable manifestation of God's power was surely not the season for indulging the flesh. Elijah, too, had had nothing to eat that day, yet *he* was very far from looking after his bodily needs at this moment. Others see in this notice the evidence of a subdued spirit in Ahab: that he was now meekly obeying the Prophet's orders. Strange indeed is such a concept: the last thing which characterized the apostate king was submission to God or His servant. The reason why he acquiesced so readily on this occasion was because compliance suited his fleshly appetites and enabled him to gratify his lusts.

"So Ahab went up to eat and to drink." Has not the Holy Spirit recorded this detail so as to show us the hardness and insensibility of the king's heart? For three and a half years drought had blighted his dominion and a fearful famine had ensued. Now that he knew rain was about to fall, surely he would turn unto God and return thanks for His mercy. Alas! he had seen the utter vanity of his idols, he had witnessed the exposure of Baal, he had beheld the awful judgment upon his prophets, but no impression was made upon him: he remained obdurate in his sin. God was not in his thoughts: his one idea was, the rain is coming, so I can enjoy myself without hindrance; therefore, he goes to make merry. While his subjects were suffering the extremities of the Divine scourge he cared only to find grass enough to save his stud (18:5), and now that his devoted priests have been slain by the hundreds, he thought only of the banquet which awaited him in his pavilion. Gross and sensual to the last degree, though clad with the royal robes of Israel.

Let it not be supposed that Ahab was exceptional in his sottishness, but rather regard his conduct on this occasion as an illustration and exemplification of the spiritual deadness that is common to all the unregenerate—devoid of any serious thoughts of God, unaffected by the most solemn of His providences or the most wondrous of His works—caring only for the things of time and sense. We have read of Belshazzar and his nobles feasting at the very hour that the deadly Persians were entering the gates of Babylon. We have heard of Nero fiddling while Rome was burning, and even of the royal apartment at Whitehall being filled with a giddy crowd that gave itself up to frivolity while William of Orange was landing at Tor Bay. And we have lived to behold the pleasure-intoxicated masses dancing and carousing while enemy planes are raining death and destruction upon them. Such is fallen human nature in every age: if only they can eat and drink, people are indifferent of the judgments of God and their eternal destiny. Is it otherwise with you, my reader? Though preserved outwardly, is there any difference *within*?

"And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; and he cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees" (1 Kings 18:42). Does not this unmistakably confirm what has been said above? How striking the contrast here presented—so far from the Prophet desiring the convivial company of the world, he longed to get alone with God. So far from thinking of the needs of his body, he gave himself up to spiritual exercises. The contrast between Elijah and Ahab was not merely one of personal temperament and taste, but was the difference there is between life and death, light and darkness. But that radical antithesis is not always apparent to the eye of man: the regenerate may walk carnally, and the unregenerate can be very respectable and religious. It is the crises of life which reveal the secrets of our hearts and make it manifest whether we are really new creatures in Christ or merely whitewashed worldlings. It is our reaction to the

interpositions and judgments of God which brings out what is within us. The children of this world will spend their days in feasting and their nights in revelry though the world be hastening to destruction; but the children of God will betake themselves to the secret place of the Most High and abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

“And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel: and he cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees.” There are some important lessons here for ministers of the Gospel to take to heart. Elijah did not hang around that he might receive the congratulations of the people upon the successful outcome of his contest with the false Prophets, but retired from man to get alone with God. Ahab hastens to his carnal feast, but the Tishbite, like his Lord, has “meat to eat” which others knew not of (John 4:32). Again—Elijah did not conclude that he might relax and take his ease following his public ministrations, but desired to thank his Master for His sovereign grace in the miracle He had wrought. The preacher must not think his work is done when the congregation is dismissed: he needs to seek further communion with God, to ask His blessing upon his labours, to praise Him for what He has wrought, and to supplicate Him for further manifestations of His love and mercy.—A.W.P.

THE DOCTRINE OF MAN'S IMPOTENCY.

8. *Its Elucidation.*

God's sovereignty and man's responsibility are never confounded in the Scriptures, but from the two trees in the midst of Eden's garden (the "tree of life" and "the tree of knowledge of good and evil" (Gen. 2:9) onwards, are placed in juxtaposition. Human responsibility is the necessary corollary of Divine sovereignty. Since God is the Creator, since He is sovereign Ruler over all, and since man is but a creature and a subject, there is no escape from his accountability unto his Maker. If we were asked to define more definitely, responsible for *what*? We would answer, Man is obligated to answer to the relationship which exists between him and his Creator: he occupies the place of creaturehood, subordination, complete dependency, and therefore must he acknowledge God's dominion, submit to His authority, and love Him with all his heart and strength. The discharge of human responsibility is simply the recognition of God's rights and acting accordingly, a rendering to Him of His unquestionable due.

Responsibility is entirely a matter of relationship and the discharge of those obligations which that relationship entails. When a man takes unto himself a wife he enters into a new relationship and incurs new obligations, and his marital responsibility lies in the fulfillment of those obligations. If a child be given to him, a further relationship is involved with added obligations (to both his wife and child), and his parental responsibility consists of the faithful meeting of those obligations. Once it is known who God is and what is man's relationship to Him, the question of his responsibility is settled once and for all. God is our Owner and Governor, possessed of absolute authority over us, and this must be acknowledged by us in deed as well as word. Thus, we are responsible to be in complete subjection to the will of our Maker and Lord, to employ in His service the faculties He has given us, to use the means He has appointed, and to improve the opportunities and advantages He has vouchsafed us. Our whole duty is to glorify God.

From the above definition it should be crystal clear that the Fall did not and could not to the slightest degree cancel or impair human responsibility. The Fall has not altered the fundamental relationship subsisting between Creator and creature. God is the Owner of sinful man as truly and as fully as He was of sinless man. God is still our sovereign and we are still His subjects. God's absolute dominion over us pertains as strictly now as it did in Eden. *Though man has lost his power to obey, God has not lost His right to demand.* To argue that inability cancels responsibility is the height of absurdity: because an intoxicated employee is incapable of performing his duties, is his master deprived of the right to demand the same? Man cannot blame God for the wretched condition in which he now finds himself: the entire onus rests on the creature, for his moral impotency is the immediate effect and result of his own wrong-doing.

God's right to command and man's obligation to render perfect and perpetual obedience remain unshaken. God gave to man his "substance" (Luke 15), but he spent it in riotous living: nevertheless God may justly challenge His own. If an earthly master gives a servant money and sends him forth to purchase goods, may he not lawfully demand those goods even though that servant spent the money in debauchery and gambling? God supplied Adam with a suitable stock, but he trifled it away. Surely, then, God is not to suffer because of the creature's folly, be deprived of His right because of man's crime. The fact that man is a spiritual embezzler cannot destroy God's authority to require what the creature cannot be excused from. A debtor who cannot pay the debts which he has incurred remains under the obligation of paying. God not only pos-

sesses the right to demand from man the debt of obedience, but from Genesis 3 to the last chapter of the New Testament He exercises and enforces that right and will yet make it publicly manifest before an assembled universe.

Though it is true that man himself is entirely to blame for the wretched spiritual condition in which he now finds himself, and that the guilt of his depravity and powerlessness lies at his own door, yet we must not lose sight of the fact that his very impotency is a *penal* infliction, a Divine *judgment* upon his original rebellion. Moral inability is the necessary effect of disobedience, for sin is essentially destructive, being opposed to all that is holy. God has so ordered it that the effects which it has produced in man furnish a powerful witness to and an unmistakable demonstration of the exceeding sinfulness of sin and the dreadfulness of the malady which it produces. Sin not only defiles, but enervates: it not only renders man obnoxious in the pure eyes of his Maker, but it saps man of his original strength to use his faculties aright and the more he now indulges in sin the more he increases his inability to walk uprightly.

Further light is cast upon the problem of fallen man's responsibility by obtaining a right view of the precise *nature of his impotency*. Let us begin by pointing out what it *does not* consist of. First, the moral inability of fallen man lies not in the absence of any of those faculties which are necessary to constitute him a moral agent. By his transgression man lost both his spiritual purity and power, but he lost none of his original faculties. Fallen man possesses every faculty with which unfallen man was endowed. He is still a rational creature. He has an understanding to think with, affections capable of being exercised, a conscience to discern between right and wrong, a will to make choices with. Because he is in possession of such endowment, man has faculties suited to the substance of the Divine commands. Because he is a moral agent, man is under moral government, and must yet render an account unto the supreme Governor.

At this point notice must be taken of an error which obtains in the mind of some, tending to obscure and undermine the truth of fallen man's unimpaired responsibility. God declared that in the day Adam ate of the forbidden fruit he should "surely die," which has been wrongly understood to mean that his spirit would be extinguished, and that consequently while the natural man possesses a soul he has no spirit and cannot have until he is born again. This is quite wrong: in Scripture "death" signifies separation and never annihilation. At physical death the soul is not exterminated but separated from the body, and the spiritual death of Adam was not the extinction of any part of his being, but the severance of his fellowship with a holy God. In consequence thereof Adam's descendants are born into this world "dead in trespasses and sins," which is defined as "being *alienated* from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart" (Eph. 4:18).

When the Father said of the wayward one, "this My son was dead, and is alive again" (Luke 15:24), He most certainly did not mean he had ceased to exist, but simply that the prodigal had been "in the far country" and had now returned. The Lake of fire into which the wicked are cast is termed "the second Death" (Rev. 20:14) because they are "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power" (2 Thess. 1:9). That the natural man *is* possessed of a spirit is clear from "the Lord which . . . formeth the spirit of man within him" (Zech. 12:1); from "what man knoweth the things of a man save the spirit of man which is in him?" (1 Cor. 2:11), and from "the spirit shall return unto God who gave it" (Eccl. 12:7). It is then a serious mistake to say when Adam died in Eden that any portion of his tripar-

tite nature ceased to exist. Fallen man, we repeat, possesses all the facilities which unfallen man had.

When the Scriptures affirm “they that are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom. 8:8) it is not because they lack the necessary faculties. That “cannot” must be understood in a way which comports fully with fallen man’s responsibility, otherwise we should be guilty of making one verse contradict another. The “cannot” of Romans 8:8 (and similar passages) is in nowise analogous to the “cannot walk” of a man who has lost his legs, or the “cannot see” of one who is deprived of his eyes—in such a case he “cannot” because he has not the requisite facilities or organs. A person who was devoid of such members at his birth could not possibly be held accountable for the non-exercise of them. But the moral impotency of the sinner is far otherwise. He *does* possess moral faculties, and the reason he fails to use them for the glory of God is solely because of his hatred of Him, because of the corruption of his nature, the enmity of his mind, the perversity of his will. And for that he is responsible.

For a man to be so besotted by strong drink that he cannot help getting inebriated, excusing him only adds to his condemnation. For a man to give way to speaking what is untrue, forming the habit of telling falsehoods until he becomes such a confirmed liar that he is incapable of uttering the truth, only evidences the awful depths of his depravity. But ponder carefully the nature of his incapability—it is not because he has lost any faculty, for he still possesses the organs of speech—but because he has sunk so low he can no longer use those organs to good purpose. Thus it is with the natural man and his incapability of pleasing his Maker. Man is endowed with moral faculties but he perverts them, puts them to a wrong use. He has the same heart for loving God as to hate Him, the same members to serve Him with as he now employs in his disobedience.

“It is strange if God should invite the trees or beasts to repent, because they have no foundation in their nature to entertain commandments and invitations to obedience and repentance; for trees have no sense and beasts have no reason to discern the difference between good and evil. But God addresses Himself to men that have senses open to objects, understandings to know, wills to move, affections to embrace objects. These understandings are open to anything but that which God doth command, their wills can will anything but that which God doth propose. The commandment is proportioned to their rational faculty and the faculty is proportioned to the excellence of the command.

“We have affections, as love and desire. In the commands of loving God and loving our neighbour there is only a change of the object of our affections required; the faculties are not weak but by viciousness of nature, which is of our own introduction. It is strange, therefore, that we should excuse ourselves and pretend we are not to be blamed because God’s command is impossible to be observed when the defect lies not in the want of a rational foundation, but in our own giving ourselves up to the flesh and the love of it, and in willful refusal of applying our faculties to their proper objects, when we can employ those faculties with all vehemence about those things which have no commerce with the Gospel” (Stephen Charnock, 1660).

This is a suitable place for us to mention and correct a mistake which occurs in some of our earlier writings. Lacking the light which God has now granted us, we then taught (1) that fallen man still possessed a natural ability to render unto God the obedience which He requires, though he lacked the necessary moral ability; and that (2) it is because man is possessed of such natural

ability he is a responsible creature. The first mistake was really more a matter of terms than anything else, for all that we meant to signify by “natural ability” was the possession of faculties which capacitated man to act as a moral agent. Nevertheless, as wrong terms conduce to wrong ideas, we must correct them. The second was an error in doctrine, due to our crass ignorance. In the last two months we have shown that the basis of human responsibility consists not of anything in man, but rather in his relationship to God, and that the faculties which constitute him a moral agent merely *fit* him to discharge his responsibility.

Many able writers in their efforts to solve the problem presented by the moral impotency and yet moral responsibility of fallen man, had recourse to the distinction between natural and moral ability and inability. They did not see how a man could be held accountable for his actions unless he was in some sense capable of performing his duty. That capability they ascribe as his being in possession of all the faculties requisite for the performance of obedience to the Divine Law. But it is now clear to us that these men employed the wrong term when they designated this possession of faculties a “natural ability,” for the simple but sufficient reason that fallen man has lost the power or strength to *use* those faculties aright, and it is surely a misuse of terms to predicate “ability” of one who is *without strength*. To affirm that the natural man possesses ability of any sort is really a denial of his total depravity.

In the second place, it should be pointed out that the moral inability or impotency of the natural man is not brought about by any *external compulsion*. It is an utterly erroneous idea to suppose that the natural man possesses or may possess a genuine desire and determination to do that which is pleasing unto God and to abstain from what is displeasing to Him, but that a power ab extra, something outside himself, thwarts him and obliges him to act contrary to his inclinations. Were such the case man would be neither a moral agent nor responsible creature. If some physical law operated upon man (like that which regulates the planets), if some external violence (like the wind) carried men forward where they desired not to go, they would be exempted from guilt. Those who are compelled to do what they are decidedly averse to could not be justly held accountable for such actions.

One of the essential elements of moral agency is that the agent acts without external compulsion, in accord with his own desires. The mind must be capable of considering the motives to action which are placed before it and choosing its own course—by “motives” we mean those reasons or inducement which influence choice and action. Thus, that which would be a powerful motive to the view of one mind would be no motive at all in the view of another. The offer of a bribe would be sufficient inducement to move one judge to decide a case contrary to evidence and law; while to another such an offer, so far from being a motive for wrong doing, would be highly repellent. The temptation presented by Potiphar’s wife, which was firmly resisted by Joseph, would have been an inducement sufficiently powerful to have ruined many a youth of less purity of heart.

It should be quite evident, then, that no external motive (inducement or consideration) can have any influence over our choices and actions except so far as they make an appeal to inclinations already existing within us. The affections of the heart act freely and spontaneously: in the very nature of the case we cannot be *compelled* either to love or hate any object. Neither an infant nor an idiot is capable of weighing motives or of discerning moral values, and therefore they are not accountable creatures, amenable to law. But because man, though fallen and under the

dominion of sin, is still a rational being, possessed of the power to ponder the motives set before his mind and to decide between good and evil, he is fully accountable, for he freely chooses that which, on the whole, he most prefers. Moral agency can only be destroyed by a force from without obliging man to act contrary to his nature and inclinations.

There is nothing outside of man which imposes upon him any necessity of sinning or which prevents him turning from sin to holiness. There is no force brought to bear immediately upon man's power of volition, or even upon the connection between his volitions and his actions, which *obliges* him to follow the course he does. No, what man does ordinarily he does voluntarily or spontaneously in the uncontrolled exercise of his own faculties. No compulsion whatever is imposed upon him. He does evil, nothing but evil, simply because he chooses to do so: the only immediate and direct cause of his doing evil is that he so wills it. Therefore since man is a responsible creature, who, without any external power forcing him to act contrary to his desires freely rejects the good and chooses the evil, he must be held accountable for his criminal conduct.

We submit that what has been pointed out above considerably relieves the difficulty presented by the impotency of fallen man to meet the just requirements of God, and that if the reader will carefully ponder the same it should be apparent to him that the problem of human inability and accountability is by no means so formidable as at first sight appears. The case of the fallen creature is seen to be vastly altered once it is clearly defined what his impotency does not consist of. It makes a tremendous difference that his inability to obey his Maker lies not in the absence of those faculties by which obedience is performed. So, too, the complexion of the case is radically changed when we perceive that man is not the victim of a hostile power outside of himself which forces him to act contrary to his own desires and inclinations.

It will thus be evident that so far from fallen man being an object of pity because of his moral impotency, he is justly to be blamed for the course which he pursues. We do not condemn a man without legs because he is unable to walk, but rightly commiserate him. We do not censure a sightless man for not admiring the beauties of Nature, rather does our compassion go out unto him. But how different is the case of the *natural man* in connection with his bounden obligations to serve and glorify his rightful Lord! He is in possession of all the requisite faculties, but he voluntarily misuses them, deliberately following a course of madness and wickedness, and for that he is most certainly culpable. His guiltiness will appear yet more plainly as we behold what his moral impotency *does consist of*, when we consider the several elements which comprise it.—A.W.P.

THE DIVINE AGENCY IN WAR.

(Jeremiah 51:20)

George Lawson

War is one of the most frightful calamities which can overtake a nation: how dreadful then the misery and suffering entailed when *many* nations are involved therein. At such a time the belief of many in an over-ruling Providence is rudely shaken, for to them it appears that Satan, rather than the Lord God, is master of the situation and the author of their troubles. Even God's own people, unless they are firmly established in the Faith, find it difficult to stay their minds on the Ruler of the Universe, trusting implicitly in His wisdom and goodness. Questions will be raised that are not easily answered, doubts stirred up which cannot readily be stilled. It is therefore timely to ask, What is the relation of God to war? Is He but a far-distant Spectator, having no immediate connection? or is His agency directly involved? if so, to what extent? To speculate upon such a solemn matter would not only be useless, but impious—to the Word of Truth we must turn if we are to have right thoughts thereon, thoughts which honour and not dishonour the Most High.

We have been granted the loan of a small book published in 1810 which contains three sermons by George Lawson, minister of the Gospel, Selkirk, Scotland, in which he has most helpfully dealt with "The Divine Agency in War and Revolution." They examine this subject in the light of Holy Writ and are the best treatment of the same which we have ever come across. We therefore propose to give our friends the benefit of these sermons. We shall not publish them at length, but summarize their contents, sticking close to their substance, and even language, yet here and there adding some comments of our own. Though preached nearly one hundred and fifty years ago they are most pertinent to our own times, for they were delivered in the midst of the Napoleon wars, when the greater part of Europe was then convulsed and plunged into wretchedness and woe, in fact, conditions which obtained then supply not a few analogies with those existing now.

Those who read the histories of nations find many proofs that men are often more cruel to their fellows than lions and tigers. These ferocious animals kill their prey only to satisfy their own hunger, but men destroy their fellows to fulfil the lusts of ambition and avarice which can never be satiated. Lions and tigers may have killed thousands of human beings in the course of the centuries, but millions have been destroyed in the span of a few years by the restless wickedness of men who cared not what their fellow men suffered if they obtained the gratification of their unreasonable desires, which, when they were satisfied, were found to add nothing to their happiness, but rather to increase their misery.

Who can sufficiently deplore that depravity of human nature which has made men beasts of prey, or rather devils to one another, seeking whom they may devour? He who has read the history of any nation must be sensible, if he uses his understanding, that the accounts given us in the Holy Scriptures of the corruption of mankind are well confirmed by experience. But let us not think, my readers, that the same corrupt nature is not in ourselves which shows itself in the ravagers and destroyers of mankind; or that it does not operate in us because it is not manifested in the same outrageous manner against our fellow men. There is none among men that is righteous, none that seeks after God. Self-love has taken the throne of the heart of man, and when it is not

under Divine restraint nor refused opportunities of discovering its horrible malignity, it spreads misery and ruin around it on every side.

But while we contemplate with grief and shame the works of men of the same corrupt natures with ourselves, we ought by no means to overlook the agency of Divine providence in all these occasions wherein they are actors. God is the supreme agent. All inferior agents are under His government and held by Him under such effectual control that they can do nothing without Him. In the most tremendous calamities which they inflict, they are the ministers of God's righteous providence. When kingdoms are destroyed, by whatsoever means, the agency of *God* is to be acknowledged in this work of judgment. This is plainly taught in, "Thou art *My battle-axe*, and weapons of war: for with thee will I break in pieces the nations, and with thee will I destroy kingdoms" (Jer. 51:20). This was the text for each of Mr. Lawson's sermons, but before considering it more closely let us call attention to one or two other Scriptures, equally definite and striking.

In Jeremiah 25:9 we find Jehovah referring to Nebuchadnezzar as "My servant," just as He spoke of "My servant Moses" (Num. 12:7) and "David My servant" (Psa. 89:3). The king of Babylon was just as truly an instrument of the Divine will as were the Patriarchs—the one in punishing and destroying, the other in delivering and building up. "Lo, I will bring a nation upon you from far, O house of Israel, saith the LORD . . . and they shall eat up thine harvest, and thy bread, which thy sons and thy daughters should eat: they shall eat up thy flocks and thine herds: they shall eat up thy vines and thy fig trees: they shall impoverish thy fenced cities, wherein thou trustedst, with the sword" (Jer. 5:15, 17). God brings judgment upon a nation as surely as He gives blessing, uproots as truly as He plants. "Lo, *I raise up* the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, which shall march through the breadth of the land, to possess the dwelling-places that are not theirs: they are terrible and dreadful" (Hab. 1:6, 7): how clearly do those words reveal that even heathen nations are under God's control and used by Him when it serves His purpose. None who are conversant with the contents of Holy Writ and who bow to its authority can doubt for a moment that God uses one nation as His instrument for chastening another, even though afterwards He destroys the instrument itself.

"Thou art *My battle-axe* and weapons of war: for with thee will I break in pieces the nations, and with thee will I destroy kingdoms" (Jer. 51:20). The reference here is to Cyrus, but what is said of *that* mighty conqueror is equally true of all conquerors that ever lived or shall live on the earth. Shall there be evil in any city or kingdom, and the Lord hath not done it? (Amos 3:6). Conquerors reckon themselves almost gods upon the earth, but the axes and saws with which men cut and cleave wood might, with far better reason, exalt themselves to the rank of human creatures. None of them can do anything but what God's counsel determined before to be done by their hand—and therefore it is our bounden duty to give God the glory for all the good that is done by them, and to adore His awful providence in all the miseries which they inflict upon guilty kingdoms.

When God is pleased to bring about changes and revolutions in kingdoms, He ordinarily makes use of *men* for His instruments. Cyrus and his army were His battle-axe and His weapons of war for the destruction of Babylon. Alexander the great was His battle-axe for the destruction of that empire of Persia which Cyrus had raised upon the ruins of Babylon. The Romans were God's battle-axe and weapons of war for the subversion of those kingdoms into which the em-

pire of Alexander was divided—as, we may add, they were His battle-axe in destroying Jerusalem: note well how in Matthew 22:7 it is expressly declared of the Romans, “He sent forth His armies and destroyed those murderers (of the Prophets and of His own Son) and burned their city.” Later, the Goths and Vandals were God’s battle-axe for the subversion of the western part of the Roman empire, as He employed the Saracens and Turks to destroy the eastern part of it.

1. Let us now consider on what account conquerors of nations are called “God’s battle-axes.” We read in Scripture of hail and snow laid up in His magazines which He has prepared for the day of war (Job 38:22, 23). By a like figure of speech these mighty men whom He employs in shaking nations and overturning kingdoms are compared to these terrible weapons which in ancient times were used for the destruction of mankind. God had *chosen* the instruments employed by Him for subverting kingdoms. Before the foundation of the world He decreed whatever has come to pass or *will* come to pass, and selected from the rest of His creatures the inferior agents by which all His counsels were to be accomplished. As Paul was separated from his mother’s womb to bear the name of Christ before the Gentiles and to raise up many churches, so Cyrus was chosen to be the utter destroyer of Babylon and the repairer of the desolations of Sion. God said of him long before he came into the world, “he is *My shepherd*, and shall perform all My pleasure” (Isa. 44:28).

2. All *the talents* possessed by conquerors are the gifts of God. When we read the exploits of the champions of Israel in the days of David, we see how abundantly God bestowed on His favoured people those accomplishments by which many of them acquired immortal honour. It was He who taught David’s hands to war (Psa. 18:33, 34), made his feet like hinds’ feet and set him upon His high places. It was He who girded David’s illustrious heroes with strength, so the bows of steel were broken by their arms; lion-like men were destroyed with as much ease as if they had been little children, and whole troops were put to flight by the steady valour of single champions.

But are those accomplishments *from God* which are used for the service of the devil? Certainly, for the devil cannot put wisdom into the inward parts: he cannot inspire the hearts of men with unshaken fortitude to battle; good gifts may be applied to very bad purposes. The accomplishments of the destroyers of mankind are the gifts of God to them, not for their own benefit, but for the chastisement of guilty nations. If the plowman cannot manage his business successfully unless God instruct him (Isa. 28: 26, 27), it is impossible for the warrior to lay his plans and execute them with determined bravery amidst a thousand dangers and obstructions without receiving from on High a large portion of those intellectual endowments which are the glory of men when they are directed by benevolence, and their disgrace when they are made subservient to a selfish ambition. When Cyrus is called “the anointed of the Lord” (Isa. 45:1), we are taught not only that he was chosen to accomplish great works for God, but that he was qualified by the Spirit of God for doing them. Not only that wisdom by which some are furnished for usefulness in the Church, but all those qualities of mind by which any of the sons of men render themselves illustrious, come from the Spirit who is the Author of rational life as truly as of spiritual (see Exo. 28:3; 31:2, 3; Job 32:8).

3. By the Divine providence conquerors are *placed in those circumstance* which give them opportunities for performing those great works for which they have been renowned. Multitudes are compelled by necessity all their days to live in obscurity, whatever talents they may possess.

If Cyrus had been the son of a peasant, all his great endowments might have been concealed from the world, or at least no mention made of them in history. Though the son of a petty king, he was the grandson and the nephew of mighty monarchs of the Medes, and matters were so arranged by Divine providence that, having received the excellent education which the Persians in that age bestowed upon their children he obtained that place in the armies and councils of his uncle Darius which furnished him with opportunities to exalt his country above the other nations, to destroy his enemies, and in destroying them to subvert that mighty empire of Babylon, by which the people of the Lord had been so cruelly oppressed.

But although men should be born in a low station, if God has great works to be performed by them, He knows how to raise them from obscurity and to extend their sphere of usefulness or of mischief. For many generations past the affairs of Europe have been managed with such a steady policy that there seemed to be no reason for dreading any very remarkable reverse in the fate of nations. But of late such changes have taken place that new and striking lessons have been given to all mankind of the instability of all things under the sun and of the inefficacy of human wisdom to secure the thrones of those who derive their pedigree from a long list of royal ancestors, or to prevent the children of the lowest of their subjects from rising up to seize their envied power. "The Lord casts down the mighty and raises the poor out of the dust that he may inherit the throne of glory."

The means by which men raise themselves to stations of grandeur are often very bad. Justice and mercy are trampled under foot by men who aspire to stations to which they were not born. But without God these measures which are so greatly detested by Him would not be successful. It is the devil who prompts men to make use of them: but he is a liar when he says that he gives the kingdoms of the world to whomsoever he will. God never committed the disposal of kingdoms to His great adversary. But He sometimes shines upon the counsels of the wicked, to place them in a position to perform services to Himself, which they are better qualified to perform than His own faithful people. Agrippian, the mother of that monster Nero, procured the imperial crown for him by poisoning her husband Claudius, and Nero secured it to himself by the murder of his adopted brother, the son of Claudius. Yet concerning that prince, and those magistrates who held their place under him, it could be said with truth, "there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God" (Rom. 13:1).

4. God directs all *the enterprises* of the conquerors of the world. He presides in their councils; He regulates their decisions; He determines against what nations they shall lead forth their armies to war. It is, indeed, too high for us to understand *how* God regulates the councils of wicked men and how He bends their minds to a compliance with His decrees in those actions wherein the depravity of their hearts operates with a force that carries them beyond all bounds; but if it be wondrous in our eyes, should it be wondrous in the eyes of God also? Let us remember that our consolation and joy of faith depends on this truth, that no man can say and it comes to pass, when the Lord commands it not. If any man or devil were left to do one thing independently of the Divine providence, the foundation of our confidence in God would be subverted, and what could the righteous do? But Jehovah is the everlasting King—He fashions men's hearts—and while they are executing their own wills they are effectually executing the will of God.

Could any counsels be more unjust and impious than those of him which boasted, "Shall I not as I have done to Samaria and her idols, so do to Jerusalem and her idols?" (Isa. 10:11). Yet he spoke the truth, although he meant to lie, when he said, "The Lord said to me, Go up against this land and destroy it" (2 Kings 18:25). Hear what God Himself says concerning him, "O Assyrian, the rod of Mine anger, and the staff in their hand is Mine indignation. I will *send him* against a hypocritical nation and against the people of My wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets. *Howbeit he meaneth not so*, neither doth his heart think so" (Isa. 10:5-7).

When Nebuchadnezzar was ravaging the world, he held the nations in perpetual alarms. When he made an end of one conquest, it was the subject of anxious inquiry what nations should next be attacked by him. It was at one time a question whether he should lead his terrible armies against the children of Ammon or against Jerusalem. The oppressor of the nations was for some time himself undetermined and used divinations to decide the business. He made his arrows bright: he consulted with images: he looked in the liver. At his right hand were the divinations for Jerusalem, to appoint captains to open the mouths in the slaughter. But the matter had long before been determined in the counsels of *God*, who revealed His purpose through the Prophet: see Ezekiel 21:18-24.

5. All *the success* of conquerors is from God. We are often astonished at the rapidity of their progress. Some of them have achieved conquests in the space of a few weeks that which other famous leaders would have deemed it glorious to have achieved in a lifetime. Cyrus was justly accounted one of the most renowned leaders in the ancient world yet his victories are expressly attributed in Scripture to the providence of God. "He will do his pleasure on Babylon and his arm shall be on the Chaldeans. I, even I, have spoken, yea, I have called him: I have brought him, and he shall make his way prosperous" (Isa. 48:14, 15). When Nebuchadnezzar like a destroying lion laid the countries of the east desolate, the Lord put courage into the hearts of his soldiers, directed their operations and removed every obstacle out of their way—that He might accomplish His Word: see Ezekiel 30:22-26.

We have sometimes been astonished at the madness which seemed to possess the hearts of kings and their counselors when their dearest interests urgently demanded the exertion of all the wisdom that could be found within their kingdoms. But let it be solemnly remembered that it is often God's way to blind those whom He intends to destroy. "Shall I not in that day (of her calamity) even destroy the wise men out of Edom?" (Oba. 8)! So, too, we have been amazed at armies famous in battle who could maintain their ground and sometimes win notable victories, against more than double their number, yet a few years after turn back in battle when there are no such odds against them. God, to accomplish His purpose, weakened their courage and withered their strength: "Now have I brought it to pass that thou shouldest be to lay waste defenced cities into ruinous heaps. *Therefore* their inhabitants were of small power, they were *dismayed* and confounded" (Isa. 37:26, 27).

6. All *the events* brought about by conquerors are consequently works of Divine providence. Mighty changes are accomplished by those who subvert kingdoms and destroy nations. But no change can be produced, great or small, by any power on earth which is not to be ascribed to the Most High who rules in the cabinets of kings, the tumults of the people, the fury of battle, as truly as in the raging of the sea. The Lord speaks of four sore judgments by which He punishes

guilty nations: the sword, famine, pestilence, and beasts of the earth (Ezek. 14). He executes these judgments by different means but they are all equally the work of His hands. His agency ought to be acknowledged no less in what is done by wicked men than by what is accomplished by withholding rain. The wars by which the kings of Canaan were rooted out were as truly from God as the fire and brimstone which destroyed Sodom. The sword of Joshua was the sword of Jehovah (Josh. 10:42).—A.W.P.

THE DESTRUCTION OF TYRE.

In the destruction of the cities and nations denounced by prophecy we are not merely to view the fulfillment of prediction, but we are to consider that the thing predicted is to be effected by the Lord, so that the destruction is *the Lord's* work. "He stretched out His hand over the sea, He shook the kingdoms: the Lord hath given a commandment against the merchant city to destroy the strongholds thereof" (Isa. 23:11). God does the thing: man does it. In doing the work of the Lord man acts *freely*, and is justly accountable for doing what is directly appointed for him to do. Philosophy cannot plumb this ocean by its line; philosophy, therefore, denies what it cannot comprehend. But does she show wisdom in this? No—she manifests her folly. The amount of her unbelief is this: "There is nothing in the ways of the Almighty but what I am able to comprehend." Can there be a purer specimen of atheism and madness?

In the accomplishment of the threatenings against the nations, we are also to consider that God usually works in the way of providence. He works effectually but in such a manner that His hand is not generally seen. The wisdom of this world sees nothing but the agency of man. Here is the great wisdom of God: He manifests Himself in His works of providence; yet, as in the works of creation, He is not seen.—Alexander Carson, 1854.



