

early migrations, or mark their settlement. An effect so almost if not altogether universal, so continuous, so unvaried, so early manifest, and so deeply wrought into the customs of the generations of the world, must have had a corresponding and adequate cause. And it is in vain we look into the constitution of human nature, or abroad upon the mechanism and laws of the external universe, into the heights above or the depths beneath, for any principle or fact which might give birth to such an economy. It is evidently the offspring of the pure, sovereign, revealed will of Jehovah. The ordinance, in the early pages of Genesis, meets and satisfies, and this alone can, all the conditions of the problem. And to reject this, which constitutes a sufficient and the only sufficient solution of the question at issue, is to discard all the established and rational principles of historical evidence and deduction.

[To be continued.]

---

### ARTICLE III.

#### THE IMPRECATORY PSALMS.

By John J. Owen, D. D., Professor in the Free Academy, New York.

By this designation, we refer to those Psalms in which the writer devotes his enemies to destruction. The terms in which this is done, although of varied form and fulness, and relating to contexts of every shade of devotional sentiment, from humble penitential longings after holiness, to triumphal exclamations of confidence in God, evince the most intense and permanent hatred of the persons doomed, with not a single expression of sympathy or regret for their miserable end. There are no tears, such as were wept over Jerusalem, no yearnings, as were felt for Ephraim, no prayer like that of the Redeemer, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," but *antheas*, which for depth and

intensity of expresion, almost horrify the reader, and stagger his belief in their divine inspiration.

The enemies of God's word have seized upon this, as a strong argument against the divinity of the Scriptures. Assuming that these are the denunciations of a malignant heart, and the outbursts of private hatred, they triumphantly ask, how such a spirit is to be reconciled with that, which directs us to love our enemies, and to pray for them which despitefully use us, and persecute us. "How," say they, "can the same spirit which gave this command, and insisted so strongly on its being kept, as an essential element of christian character, have inspired the Psalmist to utter such maledictions upon his enemies?" Chronological difficulties and discrepancies may be removed, harmonized, or attributed to careless copyists. There may be some semblance of apology for the inaccurate and conflicting statements of the sacred writers, their incorrect citations, and the other blunders which they have made. But that one should curse and anathematize his enemies, and yet be impulsively moved thereto by the Being who has commanded us to love our fellowmen as we would ourselves, is too absurd to obtain one grain of belief. If there is any inspiration in cursing one's enemies, it must be derived from the bottomless pit, and not from the Being who claims to be the God of love.

Good men, too, have been troubled about these Imprecatory Psalms, and have resorted to various expedients to free the subject from the difficulties which invest it. Some consider these anathemas in the light of predictions; and for this they have some license in the use and form of the Hebrew future, which, serving the two-fold use of the future, and of the imperative for the first and third persons to express a command, wish, prohibition, renders some passages necessarily obscure, especially when the context does not clearly define the meaning. But the context, in most if not all the imprecatory Psalms, forbids these prayers for God's judgment upon the wicked to be interpreted as predictions. In Psalm 109: 6 seq. the imprecatory verses commence with a regular imperative: "Set thou a wicked man over him, and

let Satan stand at his right hand. When he shall be judged, let him be condemned, and let his prayer become sin; let his days be few, and let another take his office. Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow. Let his children be continually vagabonds and beg; let them seek their bread also out of their desolate places; let there be none to extend mercy to him, neither let there be any to favor his fatherless children," etc. Thus we see that all these imprecations commence with a regular imperative, and must, therefore, in accordance with the general laws of grammar, conform to the same construction.

The reference made to one of these verses by Peter (Acts 1: 20) shows that he regarded them as imprecations, and not predictions. The words in the Psalm, "let his days be few, and let another take his office," Peter, probably from the Septuagint version, cites: "Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein; and his bishopric let another take." In Psalm lix., we have an intermingling of the imperative of the second person, and the future, with an imperative sense, of the third person. "Let their eyes be darkened, that they see not; and make their loins continually to shake (quoted by Paul in Romans 11: 9, 10). Pour out thine indignation upon them, and let thy wrathful anger take hold of them. Add iniquity unto their iniquities; and let them not come into thy righteousness." So also in Psalm lix., "Consume them in wrath, consume them that they may not be; and let them know that God ruleth in Jacob unto the ends of the earth." And again in Psalm lviii., "Break their teeth, O God, in their mouth; break out the great teeth of the young lions, O Lord. Let them melt away as waters which run continually; when he bendeth his bow to shoot his arrows, let them be as cut in pieces." And once more in Psalm xxxv., "Plead my cause, O Lord, with them that strive against me; fight against them that fight against me. Take hold of shield and buckler, and stand up for my help. Draw out also the spear, and stop the way against them that persecute me. Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation. Let them be confounded and put

to shame, that seek after my soul; let them be turned back and brought to confusion that devise my hurt. Let them be as chaff before the wind; and let the angel of the Lord chase them. Let their way be dark and slippery; and let the angel of the Lord persecute them."

Thus we see that there is no way of evading the difficulty, by turning these imprecations into predictions; and it is strange that any commentator, who has an eye to the grammatical construction of these sentences, and to the laws of Hebrew poetry, by which a correspondence is preserved in the members of each parallelism, should ever have dreamed that the Psalmist, in these passages, was simply foretelling the fate of his enemies.

Others meet the allegation that the Psalmist must have possessed a revengeful, malignant spirit, to so devote his enemies, by adopting such a theory of inspiration as to leave a wide margin for the frailties and imperfections of the sacred writers. Thus Stephen, in his defence before the Sanhedrim, made historical mistakes, besides manifesting a very unamiable temper. Paul, Peter, and John, through ignorance of the laws of hermeneutics, often misconceived the true meaning of the Old Testament scriptures; or were so biased by their Jewish prejudices and superstitions, that they gave a false coloring to great truths, which we, with our superior learning and unprejudiced minds, may be supposed to see and explain in more strict conformity to the truth.

The Psalmist, according to this theory, was not perfect. In his prayers he was left to imprecate the most fearful judgments upon his enemies, not as a thing to be imitated, but avoided by those who should come after him. His was the example of a good man, who, in brooding over his wrongs, and recalling the ingratitude with which his acts of kindness had been answered, was betrayed into the use of intemperate language, and was so carried away with his mental excitement, as to even devote his enemies to destruction. But we are not of those who can believe that holy men, who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, could pass so

abruptly from a state of mind, in which what they wrote or said, received the approval of the Spirit, to the very contrary mental state, in which they gave utterance to such sentiments, as, if viewed in the light of being spoken under the influence of a sense of private wrong, were the most malignant of which the human mind can conceive. Take the fifth Psalm for example: "But as for me, I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy; and in thy fear, will I worship toward thy holy temple. Lead me, O Lord, in thy righteousness because of mine enemies; make thy way straight before my face. For there is no faithfulness in their mouths; their inward part is very wickedness; their throat is an open sepulchre; they flatter with their tongue. Destroy thou them, O God; let them fall by their own counsels; cast them out in the multitude of their transgressions, for they have rebelled against thee."

It certainly must be considered one of the strangest anomalies of the human mind, for David, in this Psalm, to have passed so suddenly from the enjoyment of the Spirit's influence, and from so humble and devotional a frame, to a state in which he was left to curse his enemies with all the rancor and bitterness of personal hatred. To argue against the plenary inspiration of the Bible, or to seek to remove any real or imagined difficulties, by adopting such low views of the character and qualifications of the sacred writers, is almost too absurd to merit a serious confutation of the error.

There is no theory which falls below that of plenary inspiration, intelligently defined, and applied with discrimination to the various portions of the sacred volume, which will at all meet the objections advanced against the imprecatory Psalms. In our judgment, if there are any portions of God's word which have superior claims to being regarded as *θεόπνευστοι*, and which, if not *θεόπνευστοι*, must be considered as *δαιμονιώδεις*, *demon-like*, *devilish*, such portions are these imprecatory Psalms. There is a conscious power and freedom, which the writer could only have possessed, on so awful a subject, from the assurance that he was giving utterance to the mind of the Spirit of inspiration.

If this be so, these anathemas must be consistent with the highest degree of benevolence on the part of the sacred writer. In other words, there must have been such enlightened and enlarged views of God's justice in the punishment of the wicked, the stability thereby given to his moral government, and the amount of happiness thus rendered sure to the righteous, that the Psalmist, wrought up to the highest sympathy with this fundamental attribute of Jehovah, anticipated the doom of the ungodly, and devoted them at once to destruction. This, as a divinely-inspired writer, he could with propriety do. God, through him, could doom, in direct terms, the guilty, or he could inspire him to pray for speedy judgments to fall upon them. There can be no doubt in respect to this, unless we doubt the justice of God in the punishment of the finally impenitent.

But was it right for David, as a man, to entertain such feelings? We see that it was right for him to speak as he was moved by the Holy Ghost. But was such a state of mind, considered in relation to a frail, erring man, himself exposed to the same wrath he was invoking upon his enemies, consonant with the spirit of charity, as defined in the fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians?

To this very proper inquiry we reply, that both reason and revelation teach that the righteous will have such clear and sympathetic views of God's justice and its administration, as not only to look with approbation upon the sufferings of the lost, but even to be furnished thereby with new incentives to praise. If God's attribute of justice be necessary to the well being of the righteous—if it be but another manifestation of his love; then, most unquestionably, all the good must rejoice in its demands and sanctions. Take an extreme case, and one which to us, in our present relations, would be most trying. Suppose that a beloved child, who, in this world, was the object of the tenderest parental affection, in the future world should be found to be an enemy of God and of righteousness, and to pardon whom, or suffer to roam about unpunished, would be such a departure from justice as to weaken the Divine administration; nay, as could be fully

shown, to absolutely overthrow the moral government of God: would that parent, transplanted in due time into the upper sanctuary, where all earthly relations are merged and lost in those higher and abiding affinities which bind the good together in everlasting union, feel other than the most perfect blessedness in the sufferings of his rebellious, Heaven-daring son? Would he not praise God in new and more exalted strains, as the bearings of Divine justice upon the happiness and order of God's universe, were receiving new developments from the sufferings of the lost?

This is the view which revelation as well as reason gives of this subject. John heard the voice of a great multitude, as the voice of many waters and of mighty thunders, saying: "Alleluia; for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth." But God reigneth, not simply as God of love, but as the God of justice, having power to crush his enemies, omnipotent over every foe. It was this power, this omnipotence in avenging the blood of his saints, and in reigning victorious over every enemy, that awakened those thunders of praise. And this is but the varied notes of another song, which, with the great voice of much people in heaven, was sung in the hearing of John: "Alleluia; salvation and glory and honor and power unto the Lord our God: for true and righteous are his judgments; for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand. And again they said, Alleluia. And her smoke rose up for ever and ever." Here the execution of God's judgments, or what is the same thing, the maintenance of his justice in the punishment of the enemies of his people, is declared to be the cause of his being praised. In Rev. 14: 10, it is said that those who receive the mark of the beast "shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb; and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up forever and ever, and they have no rest day nor night."

These tremendous sufferings are undergone in full view of the angels, and of the Lamb, and, of course, of the redeemed; for the Lamb is represented as standing, surrounded by the hundred and forty-four thousand having his Father's name in their foreheads, and which were redeemed from the earth. Now is it for a moment to be supposed, that these sufferings of the lost, the bare thought of which almost congeals our blood, mars in the least the blessedness of the celestial throng? The song of Moses and the Lamb, which was sung upon the sea of glass, contains a reason why the works of the Lord God Almighty were great and marvellous, drawn from his justice: "Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy; for all nations shall come and worship before thee; *for thy judgments are manifest.*"

Compare with this that most remarkable passage in the song which Moses spake in the ears of all the congregation of Israel, on the borders of the promised land (Deut. 32: 43): "Rejoice, O ye nations, with his people; for he will avenge the blood of his servants, and will render vengeance to his adversaries, and will be merciful unto his land and to his people." This direction to rejoice in view of the Divine vengeance, which is to overtake the enemies of truth and the persecutors of the righteous, follows some of the most fearful threatenings against the wicked with which the word of God abounds. God's arrows were to be made drunk with their blood; his glittering sword, which had been whetted for slaughter, was to devour their flesh; his hand was to take hold of judgment, and kindle a fire in his anger which should burn unto the lowest hell, setting on fire the very foundations of the mountains. Yet all this is adduced as a reason why the righteous should rejoice, and utter their notes of praise in the hearing of all the nations.

The same sentiment is found in many of the Psalms. In Ps. xcvi., it is thus expressed: "The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of isles be glad thereof. Clouds and darkness are round about him; righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne." So also in Ps. xcvi., when all nature is called upon to rejoice, the sea

to roar, the floods to clap their hands, the trumpets and cornets to sound a joyful noise before the Lord, "for he cometh to judge the earth."

In these and divers other passages, which might be selected from God's word, we see that the righteousness and judgments of God are to be regarded as a source of joy to his people. Now the sympathy which the righteous in heaven manifest in the demands and awards of Divine justice, may be and often is felt, although in a less degree, by the good on earth. But if it be proper to share at all in the emotions with which the heavenly company regard the punishment of the lost, who can fix the limits of joyous sympathy with which the judgments of God upon the wicked may be hailed, up to which it may be proper for us, in our present probationary state, to go, but beyond which we may not pass without incurring God's displeasure, or exposing ourselves to the charge of rejoicing in the damnation of our fellow-men? Are there any such prescribed limits, and are we forbidden, either by God's word or the social relations of life, to aim at such a state of conformity to the Divine will, as to rejoice in whatever he may do, either here or in the world to come? We know, from his word, that he will punish the finally impenitent. We know that this will redound to his glory and the good of the universe. Is there anything wrong in praying that he will glorify himself and confirm the righteous in their blessedness, by casting from his presence everything which worketh abomination and maketh a lie? Certainly not. Such a petition to the throne of grace might be misapprehended by the wicked, and perverted to mean something far different from that high and holy aspiration for the full manifestation of all of God's attributes which gave it birth. But against the prayer that God will vindicate his saints, by punishing impious and ungodly men who enter the eternal world with their characters unchanged, there can be urged no objection, either from God's word or on the ground of common humanity.

This being so, who can charge upon the Psalmist a vindictive spirit in his imprecations of the wicked? He did not pray that some particular person or persons should be damned.

He only devoted to destruction the enemies of truth; and this is just what God has declared, in the plainest and most forcible language, that he himself will do. We are not, therefore, cast solely upon the inspiration of these anathemas, to prove their consistency with a humane, benevolent heart; but we have the twofold basis upon which to place our defence of their spirit; viz. the sympathy which they evince in the joyous acclamations with which the punishment of the wicked is hailed in the eternal world, and the other great fact, that in their utterance the Psalmist was filled with the Spirit of inspiration.

Let us now, for a moment, turn our attention more particularly to the Psalms of which we are speaking. Some of these Psalms are Messianic. It will not be denied that the Messiah, speaking by the mouth of his servant, could righteously doom his enemies. As God-man, he shutteth and no man openeth, and openeth and no man shutteth, having the keys of death and hell. That such a Being should anathematize his enemies, anticipating in a manner that dread sentence, the most awful which will ever issue from the tribunal of judgment, "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels," is what no man should gainsay or call into question. It should be borne in mind that it is not so much Christ in his days of humiliation and suffering who speaks in the Psalms, as Christ exalted to be King in Zion, who was to break his enemies with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.

But there are other Psalms of this sort, which are not referable to the Messiah. Some of them were composed by David, one of the most tender-hearted, forgiving, and humane men the world has ever seen. Twice, with almost unparalleled magnanimity, he spared the life of Saul, his bitter and unrelenting persecutor. In what mournful strains did he lament over that same Saul and his sons who had fallen in battle! He was a man after God's own heart. His, surely, was not the spirit which could be so animated with private hatred and revenge, as to invoke the Divine vengeance up-

on his enemies. No : we must refer these anathemas to his holy indignation against sin, his sympathy with the claims of God's violated law, his high view of eternal justice, as the foundation of order, harmony, and happiness, throughout the moral universe. He saw, with inspired vision, the hatred and malignity of God's enemies (for his enemies were God's enemies). He saw that the dearest interests of truth and righteousness would be sacrificed by their exemption from punishment. He saw such glorious results following the vindication of the divine law, that he invokes the execution of its penalties, at once, upon God's incorrigible enemies.

This he was inspired to do. Had he done it, self-prompted, we could not have proved him guilty of speaking unadvisedly, or contrary to the dictates of humanity. For we have shown that it is right to pray for what God has expressed his determination to do, and what the interests of the universe require that he should do. But then we might have said of him, as our Saviour said of James and John, who wished him to call down fire from heaven upon the Samaritans, that "he knew not what spirit he was of." But he spake as he was inspired to speak. God seems to have intended by these passages to show us the intense hatred of sin inspired in the soul by close and devotional communion with him, and to warn sinners of their dreadful doom in thus being cut off from the sympathy of all the good. David was chosen to pen this great and awful truth, because his acknowledged, well-known piety and tender-heartedness would give great emphasis to his denunciations.

We have heard it objected to all this, that the forms of expression in these imprecatory Psalms are of such cold-blooded and malignant cruelty, as to preclude entertaining the idea for a moment that they were inspired of God. But it must be remembered that the Psalmist used language suited to the times in which he lived, and the oriental modes of thought and expression. The doom which he invoked upon the wicked was dreadful, and he employed the most forcible terms in setting it forth. This is true of all the

sacred writers when speaking of the retributions of eternity. The most dire and dread imagery which can be drawn from the whole visible creation, is employed to shadow forth God's anger against the wicked, and the dreadful sufferings which await them. But how will the reality of these sufferings, in the ages of eternity, transcend all that language can depict, or the human mind conceive! The Psalmist could no more have employed frigid, passionless language in relation to so dreadful a theme, than our Saviour, when he spake of the furnace of fire where shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, the outer darkness, and the worm that never dieth. The subject demanded strong and pointed language. Tame and inoffensive expressions, words of softened smoothness, forms of speech chosen to please the ear, would have been as unsuitable to depict the terrors of God's wrath, as would be a warning, addressed in low and suppressed tones, to a traveller in the distance who was approaching some point of imminent and deadly peril.

It has been further objected that the Psalmist includes in his anathemas the families of the wicked. This was both natural and proper. Treason, in that age and country, involved every member of his family in the doom of the traitor. Treason against God, in like manner, involves whole families of the wicked. God has said that he will visit the iniquities of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations; and it was in accordance with this sovereign arrangement that he inspired his servant to anathematize whole families of the wicked: "Let there be none to favor his fatherless children. Let his posterity be cut off; and in the generation following let their name be blotted out. Let the iniquity of his fathers be remembered with the Lord, and let not the sin of his mother be blotted out." A dreadful imprecation, indeed, but one which receives fearful confirmation in the history of the families of wicked men in every age and country. The children of bad men usually inherit their parents' vices, and are involved in the same condemnation, unless brought to repentance by the merciful interposition of the grace of God. It was therefore neither

opposed to God's word nor the manifold and intimate relations which he has instituted between parents and children, that the Psalmist included the families of the wicked in his imprecations.

We believe that we have now referred to the principal objections brought against these portions of God's word. However we may have relieved the minds of others, by the mode in which we have disposed of these objections, we certainly feel ourselves confirmed in the great truth of the plenary inspiration of the Bible, and more and more opposed to all attempts to remove difficulties, by adopting low theories of inspiration, or frittering down God's word in order to make its truths less offensive to the unregenerate heart. When rightly interpreted, the facts of revelation are harmonious, consistent, rational, defensible. The closer we adhere to them, and the more childlike the spirit with which we receive them, the more luminous and heavenly do they appear. But if, from habits of vain speculation, and an affectation of superior shrewdness and discernment in finding difficulties, we come to regard the sacred page with distrust as to its Divine origin, and a distaste for its great fundamental truths, we may rest assured that we shall involve ourselves in doubts and perplexities, whence nothing but the grace of God, in subduing our pride and in imparting to us a teachable spirit, can extricate us.