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WAR AND JUDGMENT

A Sermon

PREACHED IN THE CHURCH OF CRATHIE, IN
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BY NORMAN MACLEOD, D.D.

ONE OF HER MAJESTY'S CHAPLAINS FOR SCOTLAND, &c. &c.

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O God, who art the author of peace and lover of concord, in knowledge of whom standeth our eternal life, whose service is perfect freedom ; Defend us thy humble servants in all assaults of our enemies ; that we, surely trusting in thy defence, may not fear the power of any adversaries ; through the might of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



"To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven. . . . A time of war."
—Eccles. iii. 1, 8.

"Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O Lord, have we waited for thee; the desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee. With my soul have I desired Thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early: for when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness."—Isaiah xxvi. 8, 9.



YOU will not be surprised, in this crisis of European history, that I have selected "War" and "Judgment" as the subjects of my exposition. The events which occupy the thoughts of the civilised world during every week-day, may surely occupy ours for a short time upon this day also, when we meet not only to worship God, but to learn His "ways" and the meaning of His "acts" towards men and nations. In the earlier and more stirring periods of our national history, "preaching for

the times," as it was called, was the rule, and not the exception, as it is in these days. Great questions were then at issue, national rather than individual; or, if individual, relating chiefly to the duties of the Christian as a citizen and member of the Church, and to the part he should take in the battles then being fought to secure religious and civil liberty. At such times it could hardly be otherwise than that the clergy, from their relatively superior knowledge and influence, from the sense they entertained of the momentous consequences at stake, and from the scanty means of diffusing knowledge among the people, should have taken a prominent place as teachers and leaders in politics. But it is very different now. The increase of education, the vastly improved means of spreading information, above all the blessing of a representative government with freedom of debate—advantages secured by past struggles, revolutions, and sacrifices—have necessarily transferred much of the teaching of the pulpit to the press and to Parliament. We clergy are thus enabled thankfully to withdraw into other spheres of teaching and labour more congenial to our minds, and more suited to the specialities of our experience and

calling. And yet, surely there are still public events occurring of vast importance, which the Christian minister, of all men, should earnestly endeavour to bring into the light of God's revelation of Himself. Such an event is war, and it cannot be either vain or presumptuous to inquire into God's will regarding it. Our Lord desired His disciples, as being no longer "slaves," but "friends," to possess an intelligent understanding of what He taught and did:—"I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known to you."

I purpose, then, *in the first place*, to consider in the light of Scripture that terrible visitation—"a time of war." In doing so, I shall confine myself chiefly to the question of the lawfulness of war. For if it is unlawful—if it is condemned by God—then no Christian, without incurring guilt, can enter the army or navy; nor can a Christian nation annually vote millions for the support of both, as we do. Nay, more, such a conclusion must affect our moral estimate of the whole past history of the human race, shroud in

darkness every soldier's grave, and cause us to alter all our schemes for the preservation and progress of civilisation. On the other hand, if war is lawful, we surely owe it to our brave men by land and sea, to defend them from so terrible an interpretation of their professional life. They have exposed themselves to every peril, sacrificed the fellowship of those dearer to them than life, and given up the peace and comforts of home for the rough usages of the stormy sea and of the camp; and "counting not their lives dear to them," have "endured hardness," and "waxed valiant in fight," to secure the liberties and peace of their country. And if we enjoy, in our nights and days of peace, and in our sense of safety and freedom from all alarm, the fruits, to a large extent, of their watchfulness and bravery, let us take heed lest we thoughtlessly add to their many troubles and anxieties the dread suspicion that their work is sinful: let us endeavour rather to strengthen and encourage them by the assurance that the Lord of hosts is ever ready to help them to do their duty, to bless them in the doing of it, to hear their prayer, and to "gird them with strength to battle."

In dealing with this question, it is quite unnecessary to dwell on the horrors of war, especially at the present time, when we cannot forget them if we would, and when every day presents to our hearts such fearful pictures of human suffering. The spectacle of one dead or dying soldier on the battle-field, or of one bereaved and weeping family at home, would be sufficient to solemnise the mind, to say nothing of the awful picture visible within the whole scene of war, which the imagination in vain endeavours to realise—vast fields of torture and carnage; tens, ay, hundreds of thousands of widows and orphans and loving friends, who, in the soldier's grave, have buried their hopes and joys; provinces devastated; towns burnt; families ruined and exiled; the industry and comfort of millions everywhere blasted; and, worse than all, alienation caused between nations and races who should be united, not only by interests common to humanity, but by the ties of holy brotherhood. So far from exaggerating these horrors, I rather think that we are not sufficiently alive to their dreadful reality, and that it will not be out of place to warn you against the temptation to partake of these daily tales of war and suffer-

ing as stimulating food to nourish a love of excitement, rather than as a sacrificial banquet of death, of which we should partake as members of a bereaved and sorrowing family. The teaching and warning on this point by a great poet, written more than seventy years ago, when our own country was threatened with invasion, are needed now as much as then :—

“Boys and girls

And women that would groan to see a child
 Pull off an insect's leg, all read of war,
 The best amusement for our morning meal !
 The poor wretch who has learned his only prayers
 From curses, who knows scarcely words enough
 To ask a blessing from his heavenly Father,
 Becomes a fluent phraseman, absolute
 And technical in victories and defeats,
 And all our dainty terms for fratricide ;
 Terms which we trundle smoothly on our tongues
 Like mere abstractions, empty sounds to which
 We give no feeling and attach no form !
 As if the soldier died without a wound ;
 As if the fibres of this God-like frame
 Were gored without a pang ; as if the wretch
 Who fell in battle, doing bloody deeds,
 Passed off to heaven, translated and not killed
 As though he had no wife to pine for him,
 No God to judge him !
 And what if all-avenging Providence,
 Strong and retributive, would make us know
 The meaning of our words !

Spare us yet a while,
 Father and God ! O spare us yet a while ! ”

All honour indeed be to those who keep alive in us a sense of the horrors of war, that so the passion which from vain and selfish motives would welcome the conflict, may be condemned as unworthy of a Christian nation.

But the more we realise the horrors of war, the more wonderful it seems that war should have occupied so prominent a place in human history, and should have been waged by all nations,—the most cultivated and civilised as well as the most rude and savage. The history, indeed, of every nation is, to a large extent, a history of its wars. War is the theme of the earliest songs and grandest poems; the subject of the oldest paintings on temple and palace walls, and of the noblest sculptures of antiquity. Great warriors have ever been among the most honoured of men; and the profession of arms has always ranked among the most honourable. Bad as man is, there must surely be something in war higher and better than the mere gratification of base passions or the perpetration of murder and butchery; a *something*, whatever it be, without which such a spectacle could not possibly, I think, be presented to the world, as

the war now raging between two of the most cultivated nations in Christendom.

Nor is the question affected by another fact—alas too true!—that there have been unjust and wicked wars, caused by pride, selfishness, ambition, love of conquest, and the worst human passions.

Those who condemn war as absolutely sinful, do so upon the ground, that it is contrary both to the commands and to the spirit of Christianity. The following commands of Christ are quoted as clearly forbidding it:—"Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: but I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee; and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away" (Matt. v. 38—42).

Now, we may at once conclude that, as it is impossible to regulate our conduct by these commands interpreted according to their letter, it cannot have been Christ's intention that we

should do so, but that we should regulate our conduct by them when interpreted according to their "spirit and life," and consequently as clearly forbidding personal hatred, retaliation, and revenge. It is further very obvious that obedience to the command, "resist not evil"—the only one here which can be applied to war—unless explained by that common sense and spiritual judgment which our great Teacher ever assumed to be possessed by those whom He taught, would destroy God's order in society, make government impossible, and law a non-entity; overturn the authority of judges, magistrates, and parents; deliver the righteous into the hands of the wicked; allow the most savage and barbarous nations to rule the world; and thus turn Christianity into a curse, by subverting God's great gift of civilisation.

It is further alleged, as I have said, that war is against the whole spirit of Christianity—whatever interpretation may be given of its specific commands—on the ground that it necessarily implies the indulgence of those passions of hate and revenge which, in all circumstances, are confessedly inconsistent with religion. But is this assumption, on which the argument is

founded, justified by fact or by the nature of the case ?

War is, no doubt, carried on by persons, yet it is not on that account necessarily personal. Hate or revenge may no more exist in the breast of a soldier, even when taking the life of an "enemy" at the risk of his own, than in that of a juror bringing in a verdict of guilty against a criminal; or in that of a judge sentencing him to be executed; or in that of the official carrying out the sentence. In none of these cases is punishment the end in view; but rather the upholding of law and righteousness, by depriving the wrong-doer of his power, and thus deterring others like-minded from following his example.

The feeling of society, moreover, which associates courage and fearless daring in war with the truly chivalrous and "gentle-man," affords unconscious testimony to a general belief in this absence of all personal hate and love of blood. The facts of war, too, corroborate the justness of this feeling, for on the eve of the sternest combat, when foe is about to meet foe in deadly strife, let but the news of peace be proclaimed, and the echo be heard from afar of "the soft peace march, which beats 'Home, brothers, home,'"

then will all signs of enmity at once give place to mutual congratulations. Nay, the noblest combatants will honour their opponents in proportion to the bravery they have displayed. Alas ! it is quite possible that more of the personal enmity condemned by Christ may be found within the bosom of the Church—in the war of ecclesiastical parties, when differing about the things which belong to the kingdom of peace ; and “ words sharper than swords ” may be spoken or written, against those who differ from them in opinion, by the most enthusiastic enemies of all war.

Again, I cannot but think that what inspires us with admiration and respect for those engaged in war, is the idea that it embodies and expresses on a great scale the sublime principle of self-sacrifice ; that the battle-field on which thousands of our best and bravest, in obedience to command, and in the name of the nation, willingly suffer and die, because it is *right*, and because their country “ expects every man to do his duty,” becomes a consecrated altar. The ideal warrior would thus be the most Christian man, because he alone is able truly to offer himself unto God as a willing sacrifice ; and the ideal

Christian nation would be one whose soldiers and sailors were not mere paid and ignorant mercenaries, recruited from the dregs of society, but men of a very different mould, more fit to fight and die in the defence of righteousness; God-fearing men, of education and intelligence, capable of engaging in war with a holy, devout, humble, and reverent spirit;—such warriors as might be led to battle with military music like that to which the soldiers of Jehoshaphat marched, when “he appointed singers unto the Lord that should praise the beauty of holiness *as they went out before the army*, and to say, Praise the Lord, for his mercy endureth for ever !”

Let me remark, finally, on this point, that in harmony with this view of war, I am not surprised that its great sacrifices have been closely connected in history with great gains; and that the world has reached each successive stage in its onward and upward progress through conflict, revolution, and suffering. By the terrible trial and decision of war, the stronger, more manly, or more civilized races have gradually and necessarily dominated over the weaker, more luxurious, or more barbarous ones, and thus made government and progress possible, by allying

them with power and skill. It is thus that Peace with her beautiful repose, Freedom with her stately mien, and Civilisation with her many crowns, have oftentimes been the fair and immortal children of War, their grim and bloody parent. When disposed, therefore, to look on war only as a terrible cross laid on humanity, or to linger on the scene of dread suffering which it displays, we may shudder at the agonizing spectacle, or beat our breasts in sadness and despair; but how often after a while are we cheered by a resurrection morning and the dawn of a brighter day, when unexpected and rich blessings come to us from this cross and out of this grave, as the result of all the previous sacrifice and suffering!

We shall now, *in the second place*, consider what is revealed in Scripture regarding God's dealings with nations in the way of "*judgment*,"

Let me say, generally, that the Old Testament is the chief record of God's dealings with *nations*. He who made the world is ever revealed as its universal King. The very record of the dispersion of mankind in Genesis testifies to the fact of those scattered children being recognised by

Him as still belonging to His family. If He specially educated one nation, He tells us why—that it was not on the principle of favouritism, which finds no place in Him, but in order to do most good to all by preparing the world through it for the coming of Christ, in whom the reign of God should be finally established in the hearts of living men. And if little, comparatively speaking, is recorded in the Old Testament regarding some monarchies that have played a great part in history, yet enough is told us to show that He never let go His hold, so to speak, of any of them; that He was the God, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles, and “ruled over the kingdoms of the heathen.” And because He was *their* Lord, He sent His prophets ever and anon to reveal His will to them, and to lay “burdens” of warning and rebuke upon kingdoms and cities, such as Egypt, Babylon, Nineveh, Tyre, and the more immediately surrounding nations. It is thus, as I have said, that the Old Testament is the chief source of our information regarding the divine government of *nations*, in every place and in every age; and is a revelation through facts of what I may

venture to term the politics of Heaven towards them. Accordingly, the Old Testament may be said to contain the only real history in existence, inasmuch as it alone professes to record facts in their relationship to a divine plan and purpose. And if principles are here revealed by which the world is governed and moves onward from generation to generation towards the brighter day, we ought not ignorantly to gaze on the dial-plate of Time, and watch the movements of the hands as if they were self-directed; but should seek rather with an enlightened faith to discern an unseen and higher power behind, guiding and governing all, yet without trenching upon human liberty and responsibility.

After what has been said I need hardly add, that in the Old Testament, the idea of the nation as a corporate unity is everywhere recognised, whatever be the form of government—a unity, too, implying a national conscience, and the power, therefore, of committing national sins or performing national virtues, and so bringing down corresponding punishments or rewards, and demanding national repentance or thanksgiving. The rulers and ruled were thus taught for all time ~~that~~ they were not solitary units, but

living parts of a great whole, members of a living body; that none of them could live or die to themselves, or be separated in well or ill doing from their fellow-men—that all were bound up in the brotherhood of a common national life, for the character of which they were each in a measure responsible. Hence the deep meaning of the confessions and thanksgivings poured forth by the prophets in the name of the nation—"our kings, our princes, our fathers, and all Israel"—including, as they often did, the sins and mercies of long past generations.

We are now better able to enter into the teaching of the Bible regarding God's "*judgments*" on nations; by which term I understand not only His righteous decisions as to their character or conduct, but also the punishments and forms of discipline by which these were followed up.

Now, there are a few characteristic features of such "*judgments*," or rather of the principles on which they were administered, which I shall briefly notice.

(1) The first is, that they were determined solely *by moral causes*. The one thing demanded

by God was righteousness ; the one thing which would not be tolerated by Him was wickedness. However patient, and merciful, and long-suffering He might be,—and we are told He “ is not slack as some men count slackness, but is long-suffering, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance,”—yet to repentance they must be brought, or perish. “ At what instant I shall speak concerning a *nation*, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it ; if that nation, against whom I have pronounced, *turn from their evil*, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it ; *if it do evil* in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good wherewith I said I would benefit them.” (Jer. xviii. 7—10.)

Now, the sins condemned by God, as bringing down punishment, are not those of idolatry only,—an evil, however, which cuts at the root of all religion and morality, by blinding the spiritual eye and hindering it from seeing God, who is invisible,—but many others, which some people would possibly term common and of

every-day occurrence. Here are specimens of the Lord's indictments :—

Falsehood.—"We have made *lies our refuge*, and *under falsehood* have we hid ourselves. . . . Judgment will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet, and the hail shall sweep away *the refuge of lies.*" "This is a rebellious people, *lying children*, children that will not hear the law of the Lord : which say to the seers, See not : and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things ; *speaking unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits.*" (Isa. xxviii. 15, 17 ; xxx. 9, 10.)

Dishonesty and Greed.—"Hear this, O ye that swallow up the needy, even to make the poor of the land to fail . . . making the ephah small, and the shekel great, and *falsifying the balances by deceit* ; that ye may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes ; yea, and sell the refuse of the wheat. The Lord hath sworn, Surely I will never forget any of their works." (Amos viii. 4—7.)

"Thou hast greedily gained of thy neighbours *by extortion*, and hast forgotten me, saith the Lord God. Behold, therefore I have smitten mine hand at thy *dishonest gain* which thou hast made." (Ezek. xxii, 12, 13.)

Slavery.—"Therefore thus saith the Lord, *Ye have not hearkened unto me, in proclaiming liberty,* every one to his brother, and every man to his neighbour: behold, I proclaim a liberty for you, saith the Lord, to the sword, to the pestilence, and to the famine; and I will make you to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth." (Jer. xxxiv. 17.)

Idleness, Pride, Selfishness, and Sensuality.—"Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, *pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness* was in her and in her daughters, *neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy.* And they were haughty, and committed abomination before me: therefore I took them away as I saw good." (Ezek. xvi. 49, 50.)

Drunkenness.—"But they also have *erred through wine,* and through strong drink are out of the way; the priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine, they are out of the way through strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble in judgment." (Isa. xxviii. 7.)

As a summing up of their sins, the Lord saith:—"And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the

sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the Lord of hosts.” (Mal. iii. 5.)

From God’s judgments upon all such sin, which snapped the holy bonds of the family and the state, and resulted in practical Atheism, there was no escape except by repentance. No amount of *religiousness* could be accepted in place of the religion of obedience to God; no sacrifices to the church or to the priesthood, no vain attempts to honour God by the exercise even of prescribed holy ceremonies, could avail:—“Bring no more vain oblations: incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with: it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean; *put*

away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment; relieve the oppressed; judge the fatherless; plead for the widow." (Isa. i. 13—17.)

(2) In the "judgments" of God *no favouritism* to nations was ever shown. If there be a trace of any leniency to one more than to another, it is not to the people of Israel, but to the heathen: as when, in the case of Nineveh, God says, "Should not I spare that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?" (Jon. iv. 11.) While in regard to Israel, on the other hand, he says, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: *therefore* I will punish you for all your iniquities." (Amos iii. 2.) Hence there were no incursions by powerful enemies more frequent or more disastrous than those upon Judea; no sieges more dreadful than those of Jerusalem and Samaria; no captivities more unsparing than when the land of Israel was swept bare of people, its cities left in ruins, and its once fruitful fields and vineyards given up to wild beasts. Moreover, there is no indication given that those

chosen to execute His judgments were necessarily any better than those whom they afflicted. "O Assyrian," says the Lord, "the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. I will send him against an 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;* but it is in his heart to destroy and cut off nations not a few. . . . Shall I not, as I have done unto Samaria and her idols, so do to Jerusalem and her idols? Wherefore it shall come to pass, that when the Lord hath performed his whole work upon mount Zion and on Jerusalem, *I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks.* For he saith, *By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom:* for I am prudent; and I have removed the bounds of the people, and have robbed their treasures, and I have put down the inhabitants like a valiant man. And my hand hath found, as a nest, the riches of the people: and as one gathereth eggs that are left, have I gathered all the earth; and there was none that moved the wing, or opened

the mouth, or peeped. Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith? or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it? as if the rod should shake itself against them that lift it up, or as if the staff should lift up itself, as if it were no wood." (Isa. x. 5—7, 11—15.)

Nor again was there any favoritism or partiality shown to their own people by the seers who pointed out the sins which called for judgment, and prophesied of their coming punishment. The iniquities of kings and of nobles, of priests and of false prophets, and, hardest task of all, those of the people, were exposed and denounced with equal justice; and all were summoned to repentance. Those holy men indeed saw God! And so they rose high above all mere local and personal interests, and witnessed to the righteousness of His will. "The *priests*," they cried, in God's name, to the so-called religious people of the time, "said not, Where is the Lord? and *they that handle the law* knew me not: the *pastors* also transgressed against me, and the prophets prophesied by Baal, and walked after things that do not profit." "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, *my*

people doth not consider. *Ah sinful nation*, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters! They have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward." (Jer. ii. 8; Isa. i. 3, 4.)

(3) Another feature of God's judgments is, that *they were sent directly by Himself*. The history of His dealings with cities and nations, and especially with the Jews, records many of these forms of judgment—such as the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah; the plagues of Egypt; the drowning of Pharaoh and his armies in the Red Sea; the visitations of plagues and pestilences; of famines caused by long droughts, or by locusts; the frequent invasions by the neighbouring nations; slaughter and suffering from the enemy in battles and sieges; and successive captivities.

Now, such judgments are not represented as coming always in the way of natural sequence, —although, no doubt, in very many more cases than those recorded, they did so come. It is evidently the intention of Scripture to teach us that, while the instruments of punishment or reformation were furnished by forces existing in the

world of material nature or of human passion, yet they were specially directed by the living God, to effect His purposes. They were sometimes indeed supernatural, and designed to prove, by very many instances, *not* that "the good Lord was always on the side of the strongest battalions," but, what was of infinitely greater importance for the world to know and believe, that there *was* a good Lord, and one, too, who was on the side of righteousness and mercy, even when allied to weakness, and who could in His own way overcome and confound wickedness, even when leagued with material strength. "Lord," cried King Asa, when going to fight the great Ethiopian army, "it is nothing with Thee to help with many or with those who have no power: help us, O Lord our God, for we rest on Thee, and in Thy Name we go against this multitude."

It is perhaps true that to connect the sufferings of individuals or of nations with their sins, may be a very difficult task nowadays, and one in which the vision of the wisest "seer" may be perverted by the darkness of ignorance and the bias of his own prejudices or passions. It may also be alleged that, so far as we can discover,

God now leaves men to the sole operation of His natural laws, to be punished by the consequences of disobedience to them. But certainly the histories recorded in the Bible were not intended to teach us that, whatever else we need, we need not God Himself; but to impress us rather with the conviction that, over and above law, we have to do with the unseen Lawgiver Himself; and that God did not come into the sphere of human activities long ago, and then depart for ever into the mysterious and distant heavens, but is "the everlasting King," And if we have received this conviction, we have received a very precious gift, calculated to inspire us with reverence and godly fear; to quicken our sense of responsibility to God; to induce us to watch the "signs of the times," and so to read them as to be enabled to make a far nearer approach to their true meaning than would otherwise be possible for us: one too calculated to give us faith in the stability of human society in spite of the ignorance and wickedness of men; and to keep alive glad hopes as to the progress and ultimate triumph of the glorious kingdom of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And what though God be ruling over us and revealing His will to us by general laws; what though we can no more discern the supernatural,—if His government be supernatural, and not eminently natural!—are we not taught by Scripture that God can in His own way and time, now as ever, and by fitting instrumentalities, visit the earth with judgments, and thereby carry out His holy purposes? Verily though “the natural man” may see the natural only, yet the “spiritual man” can see a living God also, if not *in*, yet *from* His working; a God who, in perfect harmony with all fixed law, can, in the world of matter and of mind, touch far-off springs of power, by which forces may be either produced or held in check, so as to do His will. He surely can give to or withhold from man wisdom, skill, genius, power; and in many ways which no human eye can foresee, may reward well-doing or punish wrong-doing. He can punish the wicked by even letting him “eat of the fruit of his own ways, and be filled with his own devices.” And He can humble the pride of wealth, punish its selfish expenditure, and destroy the godless boasting of commercial prosperity, by the action of laws which can affect

the treasures of gold and silver, through other treasures known to Himself alone, such as "the treasures of the snow, and of the hail, which He hath reserved to Himself against the day of trouble;" and by rain poured down or withheld from His secret laboratory, He can make the Exchanges of the world to tremble or rejoice.

(4) Another feature of God's judgments is what I dare to term *their awful earnestness*. There is no revelation in Scripture of that kind of God which is created by the imagination of a selfish and effeminate sentimentalism—a good-natured idol who reigns merely for the sake of helping to make sinners happy in any way they choose, and to save them from painful consequences of evil here and hereafter. The only living and true God is, indeed, perfect love, and the One who alone perfectly loves the sinner. But His love is a love of righteousness as the only source of real peace, and necessarily implies a corresponding hatred to all iniquity as the only source of real misery. The wrath of God against evil is consequently measured only by His love of good. Hence it is that He will never spare punishment, however severe, in order to foster the good or save it from

destruction. And it is in this element of righteous love that His character as revealed in the Old Testament and in Jesus Christ is one. If in the judgments recorded in the Old Testament, God is revealed chiefly in His hatred to sin; while in the facts recorded in the New, He is chiefly seen in His love to sinners, yet His character as revealed in both is the same. If the prophecies of the old dispensation are full of awful pictures of woe to the impenitent, are not those equally so in the one prophetic book of the New? Amidst its mystic symbols, its clouds and darkness, what pictures of suffering and agony are visible! One ever hears trumpets of woe sounding, and sees the vials of wrath pouring out, and beholds mighty battles raging, and cities and nations destroyed amidst signs of dread terror. A Person, too, is seen guiding and governing all—a Mighty One, who at one time appears as a meek and suffering “Lamb in the midst of the throne,” the symbol of self-sacrifice as the source of power; and again as one who, although all love, yet “rules the nations with a rod of iron,” whose “judgments are true and righteous,” and who “in righteousness doth judge

and make war!" If there is mingled with all these revelations of God in Christ a tenderness and gentleness of love which attracts the heart alarmed by His solemn threatenings, even so it is with the same God as revealed through the prophets in the Old Testament:—in the touching pathos of His laments for evil; in His Fatherly longings and yearnings for the good of man; and in His almost passionate and personal cries and pleadings to every prodigal, that he may return to the good and blessedness of a Father's home. He surely thus mingles mercy with judgment, who, amidst the awful desolations of Jerusalem, and when no message of comfort could be sent to wicked princes, priests, or people, yet remembered the negro slave, Ebed-melech, saying to Jeremiah:—"Go and speak to Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will bring my words upon this city for evil, and not for good; and they shall be accomplished in that day before thee. *But I will deliver thee* in that day, saith the Lord: and thou shalt not be given into the hand of the men of whom thou art afraid. For I will surely deliver thee, and thou shalt not fall by the sword, but thy life shall be for a prey unto thee:

because thou hast put thy trust in me, saith the Lord." Or again, when the children of Israel had conquered their brethren of Judah, and slain very many, and taken a vast number of captives to Samaria, God, who had inflicted the "judgment," remembered mercy, and sent the prophet Oded to proclaim, "Behold, because the Lord God of your fathers was wroth with Judah, he hath delivered them into your hand, and ye have slain them in a rage that reacheth up unto heaven. And now ye purpose to keep under the children of Judah and Jerusalem for bondmen and bondwomen unto you: but are there not with you, even with you, sins against the Lord your God?" So they were commanded to set the captives free. And what followed?—"And the men which were expressed by name rose up, and took the captives, and with the spoil clothed all that were naked among them, and arrayed them, and shod them, and gave them to eat and to drink, and anointed them, and carried all the feeble of them upon asses, and brought them to Jericho, the city of palm trees, to their brethren: then they returned to Samaria" (2 Chron. xxviii. 15).

(5) It may be instructive to inquire, lastly, *what response was given* to God's purpose, when revealed, of judging the nations in righteousness and with "the rod of His anger?" There were, alas! then as now, those who had lost all faith in God; fools who were "corrupt and did abominable works," and who said, "There is no God;" and the "wicked who blessed the covetous, whom the Lord abhorreth, who, through the pride of their countenance, would not seek after God, who was not in all their thoughts, and *whose judgments were far above out of their sight;*" who said, "God hath forgotten, He hideth His face, He will never see it." For persons so proud, earthly-minded, and godless,—without eyes to see, ears to hear, or hearts to feel,—what could be done? Nothing! "When Thy hand is lifted up, they will not see!" "Why should they be stricken any more? They will revolt more and more!"

But there were others who were willing to be taught of God, and who would "hear His voice in the rod." The truthful, who loved the truth, who had faith in God and reverence for His teaching, bowed before Him with joy because He was coming in judgment to put down wicked-

ness and to establish righteousness:—"The Lord reigneth, let the earth be glad!" "O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness: fear before him, all the earth. Say among the heathen, that the Lord reigneth: the world also shall be established, that it shall not be moved: *he shall judge the world righteously.* Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof. Let the field be joyful, and all that is therein: then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice before the Lord: *for he cometh, for he cometh to judge the earth: he shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth*" (Ps. xcvi. 9—13). In the same spirit Isaiah says:—"Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O Lord, have we waited for thee; the desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee. With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early: *for when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness*" (xxvi. 8, 9). What a grand response did those who knew God thus give, in their prayers and confessions, to the righteousness of His judgments, however severe—as expressed, for example, in the Psalms,

the Lamentations of Jeremiah, and the confessions of Daniel! The one cry is: "Lord, Thou art right, and we are wrong! Thou art seeking our good, and we bless Thee for Thy mercy in afflicting us, in order that we may receive it!" Nor was there any selfish, pharisaical wish that they themselves should escape from God's eye or God's rod, or separate themselves in sympathy or in suffering from their brethren. They desired that He should search and judge themselves, as well as others, and see if there was any wicked way in them, and prayed that He would only lead them in a path of righteousness. But they also experienced, from coming into contact with the evil around them, that deep but noble sorrow which ever accompanies holy joy—for the brightest light of such joy, when it falls on the body of sin, will occasion the deepest shadow. From their knowledge of God, their love to His people, and their sympathy with Him who judged righteously, they carried upon their hearts as none others did the awful burdens of the sin and suffering laid on their brethren, willingly sharing all their privations, and, worse than all, suffering from the personal enmity of those whom they taught and

loved, if only they might bring them back to God. In those children of God we thus behold reflected the image of the Perfect Son, hear in their words echoes from the Rock of Ages, and see in their sufferings the shadow of the cross.

God's judgments on His people were not wholly in vain, any more than were the teachings and sufferings of the prophets; for a righteous response was at last given by the nation to God, and lessons were learned which had been obstinately neglected for generations. The captives on the banks of the Euphrates learned to renounce idolatry for ever; so that while the great idolatrous nations of antiquity have passed away, and their history is read only in their tombs or in their ruined palaces, under heaps of rubbish, Israel yet lives. In all lands into which the "tribe of the wandering foot and weary breast" has been driven, the Jew witnesses for the being of the one living and true God; and his chastisement of nineteen centuries in exile has not alienated his heart from the land or from the God of his fathers!

What sublime illustrations, also, of the spirit in which God's righteous judgments on iniquity

were received are presented to us in the lives of those holy "seers," through whom God conveyed to the nations His dread messages of war, and threats of coming judgment! They habitually kept the eye open ready to receive light, come when and whence it might; and light accordingly was sent to them, in which to read God's mind and will, and the real state of their country, as well as God's purposes regarding it. They spoke not their own word, but the word of the Lord Himself. With tender consciences that trembled at it, with tender affections which clung in love to their fellow-men, with loyal and passionate attachment to their people whose grand calling and destinies they realised, they received and hid the word in the depth of their being, although they thereby died to self in order to live to Him. Their flesh shrank from drinking the cup given them, for they were but men, and made of dust like ourselves; and they would have fled in weakness from the awful presence of the righteous God about to judge the earth; but they could not, for they were bound to Him by cords of love and truth. His word burned within them like fire in their bones; and they went forth to

desert wildernesses to be alone with God, and to gird themselves by prayer for their great battle against evil; thence returning to the busy world, "seeing Him who is invisible," they presented themselves to kings and princes, to priests and people. Pointing to heaven with their skeleton arms, they announced His "judgments," and piercing with glittering eye the hearts and consciences of kings and people, they exposed their vain, false, and godless lives, until they trembled, and felt that God was indeed speaking to them—a God to whom they must yield, or abide the consequences of rebellion! What could silence such men as these? No opposition, no flattery, no bribes, no sufferings, no persecutions! For God they lived; and they dwelt in His light like angels standing in the sun. They *knew* He had sent them; and when men would not hear them, in the agony of loving despair they turned to inanimate nature, and cried, "O earth, earth! hear the word of the Lord!" These verily were not the men who could lie for God!

Where are our "seers" now? Where are those who with spiritual eyes search after God, seeking as for life itself to know His will?

Where are those whose powers of vision have been so cultivated by humility, faith, and love of truth, that they can discern His presence, and see the glory of His wisdom and righteousness in His dealings, now as of old, towards the children of men! Where now are the prophets among either clergy or laity—for “would that all God’s people were prophets!”—who, rising far above the narrow circles of political party, church, sect, race, or nationality, can tell us what they themselves know of the God of the whole earth and of His righteous judgments, and help us to sing our *Te Deums* and our holy songs of thanksgiving for the real triumph of right over wrong, of truth over falsehood, by whatever sufferings attained, and by whatever people, kindred, or tongue achieved, whether by friend or foe, if God only be thereby glorified! “Send forth, O Lord, Thy light and Thy truth!” “Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O arm of the Lord, as in the ancient days, as in the generations of old!”

Shall we attempt to apply the principles we have been considering to the events now taking place in Europe? It might be easy to connect

the sufferings of which we daily read with immediate moral causes, as well as with others more remote, which would sufficiently account for much that has occurred during these eventful months. But I have no wish to do this, nor to seek to interpret current events; preferring to leave each one to do so as seems to him best, in accordance with those principles of truth and righteousness which are revealed in the Bible and confirmed by history. But if God indeed still governs nations, surely European history is being now affected, and its future moulded, on principles deeper than those involved in the mere surface politics of the time. In His dealings with nations, now as of old, He makes favourites of none; and in mercy, as well as in justice, He will visit iniquities with stripes, wherever found; thus seeking, through the infliction of suffering, to induce men to feel after Him, to search and try their ways, to acknowledge their wickedness, to repent and forsake it, and so possess that righteousness which alone exalts any nation, and is the only guarantee for its real strength, peace, progress, and happiness. It is our firm belief, accordingly, that the future historian who recognises God in history will be able to trace, in some form or other, to this

war many great and permanent blessings, in proportion at once to the sufferings endured by both combatants, and also to the spirit in which these may be received from God. This, at least, is our hope, and ought to be our fervent prayer. In the meantime, we are thankful that the war, in spite of all the alienations and sufferings which it has produced, has already been the occasion of calling forth so many generous gifts, and so many works and tokens of love both at home and abroad in aid of the sick and wounded.

And what of our own beloved country? Most wonderful have been her peace and prosperity during a long period of history. While in this century the storm of war has swept over the world, and the capital of every other kingdom, east and west, has been occupied by hostile armies, no invader has stepped on our shores; nor has the din of battle disturbed our repose. And when, in the discharge of the duties we owed to ourselves and others, we took our share in the sacrifices of war elsewhere, it cannot be denied that these brought decided gains to liberty and civilisation both in the East and West. It has been truly and beautifully said that—

“Ocean, midst her uproar wild,
Speaks safety to her island child.”

But while we must devoutly acknowledge the merciful protection of Him who “holds the waters in the hollow of His hand,” and who “stilleth the noise of the seas and the tumults of the people;” yet this alone does not account for our national mercies. Are we entitled, then, without sinful and ignorant boasting, to look upon such mercies as a recognition of national well-doing? It may be so, we think it is so, and that it is as wrong to blind our eyes to the existence of national virtue possessed by the grace of God, as to blind them to the existence of national sin. It humbly appears to me that, as a nation, working through its legislature, magistrates, and courts of justice, we have endeavoured, amidst many shortcomings and delays, to act justly, to do right to the slave and the poor, and to make the whole nation share the blessings of our common wealth—material, intellectual, and spiritual. And were it otherwise, our guilt, because of our light and our manifold advantages, would be tremendous, and such as might well call down the severest judgments of the Almighty. The battles fought, and the blood

shed, and the sufferings endured by the heroic men of old to secure the civil and religious liberty which we enjoy, would condemn us. The glorious Reformation, which secured for us an open Bible and freedom of faith and worship, and a Gospel now preached by tens of thousands of faithful ministers, and diffused by innumerable channels to all the families of the land,—this great weight of blessing would but crush us if our nation, as a nation, were not righteous, or were in such a state as could hinder us from believing that we were “blessed because our God is the Lord!” We should, however, beware of relying on any strength apart from that which comes from loyal obedience to our righteous and unseen King, lest “our heart be lifted up, and the mind hardened by pride.” Of what avail would fleets and armies be to deliver us from the judgments of God! “Can thine heart endure, or can thine hands be strong, in the days that I shall deal with thee?” Remember His words to Edom, once so great and secure, now empty and desolate:—“*The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee; thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high; that saith in his heart, Who shall*

bring me down to the ground? Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down, saith the Lord.” (Obad. 3, 4.)

But while, as a nation, we have to thank God, without pharisaical pride, for what we are, yet, alas! when we come to the sins of individuals and of society, there is much to humble us. In spite of an amount of genuine Christianity, both as a faith and as a life, to be found in our country, greater I firmly believe than in any other on earth, yet let it be confessed that there are also too many evidences of wickedness among all classes. There are too many signs of it in the selfish and inordinate striving after wealth, and that love of money which makes it a root of all evil, and causes many to “fall into temptation and a snare, and into foolish and hurtful lusts which drown men in destruction;”—in a base sensuality which hardly conceals itself, in spite of a wholesome public opinion, and which threatens to destroy “the old domestic morals of the land;”—in the intemperance and debauchery of others;—in the culpable neglect of the thousands growing up in brutal ignorance of their duties to God and

man;—in not only the appalling want of sympathy among professing Christians with the progress of the Gospel among the millions of heathen committed to our charge in India, but also in the evil done, alas! by too many of our countrymen there, of whom it may be said:—"When they entered unto the heathen, whither they went, they profaned my Holy Name, when they said to them, These are the people of the Lord, and are gone forth out of His land!"

I must also add to these our sins—but not with any reference to the honest doubter, or to the truth-seeking scholar and critic,—an irreverent, proud, and daring attitude openly assumed by not a few against the Christian religion, as taught by Jesus and His Apostles, as if its falsehood were for ever settled, and the faith of the living Church of God for nineteen centuries was a baseless superstition; as if there were no God to know and love; no Holy Spirit to teach and sanctify; no Saviour to believe in and obey; no consequences of sin to fear; and no blessed immortality to hope for! Nor can I here forget the sins of the Church also, and the want of that true union among us which should make our various Churches practically one in all that is

dear to God, one in spirit, in life, in moral power :—a body of priests, offering first themselves as living sacrifices unto God; a body of prophets, witnessing for the one Lord of Life beloved by all; and a body of kings, ruling by the irresistible might of the eternal truth they preach, and the truth they live! Let us be assured that as national judgments are sent to punish and cure national sins, so will the righteous God come near in judgment, “beginning with the house of God,” and search out and visit with stripes all iniquity wherever it exists, until men confess and repent of their sins. Better, infinitely better, any judgments upon us, any sorrow or suffering, than the reign of ungodliness and immorality; or of that selfishness and spiritual pride, by whatever good name it may be called or whatever specious form of religion it may assume, which hinders fellowship between men as brethren, or between man and God as the Father of all, in Jesus Christ our elder Brother and Divine Saviour!

May God have mercy on all ranks and classes, on rulers and ruled, on the nation and on the Church, that individually and collectively we may

feel our responsibility to Him, and serve Him with true and obedient hearts, and so make us a name and a praise among all the peoples of the earth! May we as good soldiers of Christ endure hardness. Amidst wars and rumours of wars may God be our refuge and strength; and may we, by wisdom, intelligence, and forethought, and by the discharge of our duty as Christian citizens, hasten on the time when universal righteousness shall reign, and with righteousness universal peace:—"For as the earth bringeth forth her buds, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all nations." Amen.

