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LOVE
- IN -
WRATH
- OR - THE -

- PERFECTION - OF -
- GOD'S - JUDGMENTS -

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BY
- ARTHUR T - PIERSON -

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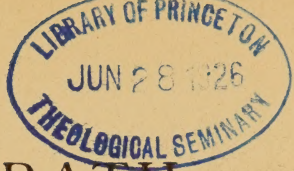
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LOVE IN WRATH

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THE PERFECTION OF GOD'S JUDGMENTS

AN ADDRESS

BEFORE MILDMA Y CONFERENCE, LONDON, ENGLAND,
JUNE 21, 1892

BY

ARTHUR T. PIERSON

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LOVE IN WRATH

OR

THE PERFECTION OF GOD'S JUDGMENTS

This theme is one which calls for most careful, prayerful treatment. Preaching or teaching the Word of God is getting to be to me more and more solemn and awful, and I never confront the question of speaking about God's judgments without finding myself facing the horns of a dilemma, on either horn of which I should fear to be impaled. First of all, there is in these days a great lack of the presentation of this great subject. It is unpopular and unfashionable, and too many professed teachers of the Word of God yield to the clamor of the people for another class of themes; and so there is danger of downright unfaithfulness, for no man can understand God who does not understand his judgments, and no man can appreciate God's grace who does not apprehend His wrath. But, in the second place, it is more dangerous to preach about the judgments of God with an unanointed tongue than it is to let the subject alone altogether.

If we are silent we shall be unfaithful : if we speak we may be ungracious. And I feel that nothing can enable me to speak as becomes the theme but the Holy Spirit of God. I would rather that my tongue would cleave to the roof of my mouth at the beginning, than to discourse on this subject in an unsanctified, unanointed way.

During my seminary life, a member of my class preached about the wrath of God. The tone of the sermon belied God's perfections. The preacher seemed to delight in excoriating people, as a savage might in cutting out a living man's heart and holding it up in exultation. A little boy of seven summers who was present went home and told his mother that he "heard a man preach about a wicked God." As light takes false hues from media through which it passes, the glorious judgments of God may take a lurid glare from the unhallowed temper of a preacher.

There is no escaping the necessity of treating this subject topically, and somewhat after the fashion of a discourse, for there is no subject upon which there are more crude, not to say rude, impressions, and in which we more need to begin, and, in fact, to proceed at every step, with careful definition and discrimination. I shall deal with the whole topic in outline, and first call your attention to the Judge, second to the court, third to the judgment, fourth to the executive, and fifth to the judged.

I. THE JUDGE.

The one great term or phrase in the Word of God for this subject is "Righteous Judge." What is a judge? A judge is one who performs two offices, an office of discerning and an office of deciding: discernment and decision. He is magisterial, but only as he is judicial. There are three departments of government—legislative, judicial, executive—and they may be absolutely independent, the one of the other, in the ordinary processes of government.

Jehovah is at once the God of creation, of providence, and of redemption, and He combines in Himself the legislative, judicial, and executive functions. There is one passage of Scripture which shows this, and only one, and I would take it as a keynote. Isaiah xxxiii. 22: "The Lord is our judge; the Lord is our lawgiver; the Lord is our king." Judicial, legislative, executive; in God all functions combined in one. That is the single passage of Scripture which gives us a glimpse of this threefold character of God.

As Lawgiver, He needs and possesses three great requisites: First, authority, or the right to command; second, wisdom, or the power to give and make proper law; third, holiness, which assures us of the moral and spiritual element, as wisdom does of what may be called the intellectual element.

As a king, God has omnipotence—all power;

omnipresence—He is everywhere at the same time ; eternity—He exists through all the ages ; and, therefore, He is fitted to execute His own laws, for He has absolute power to punish human guilt ; He is everywhere to overtake evil doers ; and He has eternity in which to work out His awful executive decrees.

But as Judge, He has also three great requisites which are absolutely necessary. First of all, omniscience, that He may be able to discern even the motives of the evil doer ; second, integrity, or exact justice, that He may hold evenly the scales of judgment ; and third, judicial vengeance, which secures perfect retribution. Comp. Hebrews x : 30, 31.

I stop here to draw the first great discrimination. Vengeance is not revenge. We must make a discrimination between the two nouns—the noun “vengeance” and the noun “revenge,” and the two verbs—the verb “avenge” and the verb “revenge.” In each case the former of those words refers to the judicial character and action of a magistrate ; and the latter refers to malignant, malicious retaliation, inflicting injury for the sake of inflicting injury, and in return for injury received. We must be careful never to attribute, in that sense, revenge or revenging to God. He knows no *vindictive* wrath, but He does exhibit *vindicative* wrath ; *i. e.*, He vindicates Himself, and His judgments, and His laws, and His character ; but He is incapable of a vindictive act. That would

be diabolical. Let us understand, then, that wrath in God is not to be thought a defect, but a perfection—just as much a perfection as love; and, therefore, we are not to turn away from the vision of God's wrath as though we were called upon to look upon some blemish or blotch or blot in the divine character or government. There is no shadow of imperfection in Him; and not only so, but there is no perfection that is less a perfection than another, for this would be an anomaly and a contradiction.

Polarity, as it is called, exhibits both attraction and repulsion, and at the same pole attraction and repulsion, and by the same law, at the same pole, attraction and repulsion. At the same pole the magnet attracts and repels. And divine benevolence has polarity. At the same pole it attracts and repels. By the same law it attracts and repels. By the same eternal, divine necessity it attracts and repels. With the same divine force it attracts and repels. Its attraction is love, its repulsion is wrath; but wrath is love turned round, and both *wrath* and *love* are the opposing poles of that one attribute—*Benevolence*. Hence it is the more to be regretted, and the more to be lamented, that so many ministers of Christ, not to say members of the church of God, have wrong conceptions of the wrath of God. Watts was wrong when he made the psalm to say of God :

Whose anger is so slow to rise,
So ready to abate.

The fact is, God's anger never rises, and it never abates. It is always at flood tide, at the flood mark ; and that is the mark of infinite perfection. It does not go up and down, like the impulsive, impetuous, and capricious passions of men. It is an everlasting principle, not a passion at all—an everlasting principle—eternal love of righteousness, eternal detestation of unrighteousness. Mark the word "detestation," which I use discriminatingly. It is not simply hate. Detestation is that hate which compels a testimony, *de-testation*. God detests all evil doing, and, therefore, He must witness against it. There is, then, the fact of judgment ; you cannot deny that. At the back of judgment is the wrath of God ; you cannot deny that. But at the back of the wrath is the love of God. Would that we might with equal confidence never deny that !

II. THE COURT.

God has more than one court in which He presides as Judge. First of all, there is the court of *nature*. We are accustomed to speak of "natural laws." I question the correctness of the terminology, for there is no such thing as natural law unless we understand by it simply the process of the divine working. And to attempt to erect a system of natural law without a lawgiver, as the atheist and the materialist do, is absurd. I would like to know how any law could make itself or

could execute itself. The very term "natural law" commits the atheist to an absurdity, for he denies the lawgiver while he talks of law. "Natural law," as the term is used by me now, means, then, the process of divine working. We observe, for instance, in the physical department, that there are certain consequences that inevitably follow upon certain causes. For example, gluttony and intemperance have a debauching effect upon the animal system ; they tend to ruin the capacity for enjoyment, the excessive indulgence of which they represent. And lust, that most terrible of all forms of sensuality, brings rottenness into both the physical and the moral nature. We notice again in the moral department that the effect of greed is to electroplate the greedy man—to change him into a coin; there comes to be a metallic ring about the whole character of a miser, so that he drops into his coffin with a kind of chink. Here, in Great Britain, there was a man who for twenty-five years went to his office early in the morning and stayed till noon, and returned in the afternoon and stayed till night, and all the time was spent in counting over, and gloating his eyes with the sight of, the golden sovereigns that he had accumulated. Not only did that man worship the golden calf, but he was himself a golden calf. Proverbs v. 22, tells us: "His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins." Think of that, brethren of the ministry ; preach on that

text to your congregations : " His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins." The wicked man is braiding the cords and weaving the net by which he makes himself the helpless victim and slave of evil habit. What is that but a natural, moral law ? What is that but the automatic operation of a process of the divine working in the moral nature of the man ?

2. And then there is, secondly, the court of *history*, which is the collective experience of mankind. See in Genesis ix. 6 : " Whoso sheddeth man's blood by man shall his blood be shed." I question very much whether that is to be read as a command or an injunction. I think it may be nothing more than a prediction, for the actual fact of human history, as events have shown, is, that when one sheds man's blood his blood is ordinarily shed by man. A bloodthirsty nature begets a bloodthirsty retribution.

National wrongs and penalties are noticeable all through history. I challenge you to find in all the records of the human race a single instance of a nation that has not been sooner or later overtaken at some period of its career with precisely the wrongs that it has inflicted on other people, or with penalties corresponding thereto. While the lack of time forbids that I should expand on this subject, I am only throwing out lines of thought for you yourselves to pursue hereafter.

3. Now look, in the third place, at the court of *conscience*. There is something awful about it. There is an august assize, with judge and jury, and witnesses and sheriff, within the solemn temple of the human soul. Take Genesis xlii. 21: "And they said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us." That is, in some respects, the most remarkable text in the Bible. God does not speak. No man accuses these brethren. They are accused before the assize of their own conscience. And, if you ever doubt that there is a final retribution, consider that all the elements of hell are possibly suggested in that sentence. *Memory*: "We saw the anguish of his soul," twenty years before, "when he besought us and we would not hear." *Conscience*: "We are verily guilty concerning our brother." *Reason*: "Therefore is this distress come upon us." Put the human soul in the next life with a memory unpurged of the remembrance of evil, and a conscience to accuse, and a reason to justify, and you have all the essential elements of hell. While men fight the Bible doctrine of hell, they surely do not read the tablet written by nature itself within. John viii. 9: "And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing

in the midst." Matthew xxvii. 3-5: "Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that He was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed and went and hanged himself." Here is another victim of the court of conscience, urged on to self-destruction by its sentence.

I have already said solemnly that the whole court is in us. There is the judge, reason, sitting on the throne. There is the memory, summoning the witnesses to the box to testify to the past. There is the impaneled jury, ready to listen to the testimony, and give a decision or judgment. And there is the sheriff, remorse. A great statesman in America was observed on his dying bed to be tossing to and fro in agony. Someone drew near and said, "What is the matter? Can we do anything for you?" He reached out his hand, and took a pencil and a blank card from the table, and wrote on the card one word—"Remorse." In those that went out one by one, convicted by their conscience, and in Judas, in whose hand the silver pieces burned so that he could hold them no longer, you have examples of conscience giving her decision and executing her judgment.

There is no contradiction in saying that every

man consists of "I" and "myself." Woe be to the man where I and myself are in opposition. He knows not what retribution he is preparing for himself within the court of his own being. Read I John iii. 20, 21 : "For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God." Here the argument is, that the condemnation reached in one's own heart is a prophecy of a higher court of judgment.

There is an awful story of a Southern slave-owner and auctioneer, who, after inflicting numberless tortures on men and women, and dividing families, and being guilty of all manner of atrocities, one night sat before his fire in the winter season, and took out the letter of a dead mother from a box where he had kept it for many years, refusing to read it because he expected to find in it a tender remonstrance. He now took up the letter and determined to read it, and as he opened it a lock of her flaxen hair fell out and twined itself round his finger. He looked at it, and it was like a serpent, which he sought to shake off into the fire, but it clung and stung ; and he looked at it, and he talked to it, as if it were a serpent, and he besought it to unwind itself from his finger ; nay, he said that it had wound itself around his heart. He begged that it would depart from him, and he died in an apoplectic fit, the victim of his own conscience. Re-

morse awakened the thunders of God, and they were heard even in the voice or "sound of gentle stillness" from that lock of hair.

I have in my study at home a fearful picture drawn by Retzsch, the delineator, in illustration of Faust. It represents the demons trying to drag down the soul of Faust into perdition, and the angels looking down from the heavenly heights intensely interested in the issue of the contest. They are seeking to drive the demons off from the soul of Faust, and so, having no other weapons at hand, they seize the roses, which they pluck from the bowers of Paradise, and hurl them down; and when those roses pass into the sulphurous atmosphere of the pit, every rose turns to a burning coal that blisters and blasts where it touches. There are many roses that God plucks from the bowers of Paradise, and that He rains down on earth for the sake of driving the demons away from our souls; but when they strike through the atmosphere of an unthankful and impenitent heart, the very roses of Paradise are turned to burning coals. So memory and conscience will transform even blessings into curses, if they are bestowed on a rebellious soul.

4. In the fourth place, there is the court of *public opinion*. I may say that this is a kind of resultant of the individual decisions of the human soul. We speak of common sense. What do we mean? We mean that sentiment or judgment to which men come in common when they are calm and candid.

And I want to say that I believe that in nine-tenths of cases when you can get the common, candid, honest judgment of men it is correct. Let them be calm and cool and dispassionate ; let them be candid, and not dishonest ; let them be withdrawn from circumstances that warp judgment and influence decision wrongly, and you get, in nine-tenths of cases, a safe, correct judgment. I want to throw out one thought which I trust may be possibly helpful to us. If you are ever in doubt with regard to a matter of Christian duty upon which the word of God gives you no clear revelation, either in precept or in principle, and as to which, perhaps, the customs of some other people in the church of Christ betray you by the example of their doing—if you continue doubtful about it, and want to decide it, I know of nothing that will enable you to decide it ordinarily better than what may be called the *communis consensus Christianorum* ; that is to say, What is the common judgment of the most deeply godly and spiritual people who live most in intimate fellowship with God ? And that, in my judgment, is the everlasting condemnation of what are known as worldly amusements, that, although in the word of God there may be no precept that directly touches them—no principle which to everybody obviously covers them, and settles the question of their propriety—this *communis consensus Christianorum* is always against them, and has always been against them. There are some things upon which the devil

has put his mark, and I say, "Let them alone." I prefer the things upon which that distinctive mark does not rest, even though they cannot be shown to be inherently, essentially wrong.

5. The fifth and last of these courts is the *bar of God*. That is the ultimate court from which there is no appeal. Read I Corinthians iv. 3, 4: "But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self, for I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but He that judgeth me is the Lord." Our friend, Dr. Stalker of Glasgow, has finely called attention to the fact that in this passage are found what may be called the four courts of judgment. If this passage is not exhaustive, it is very suggestive. May I call your attention to these four courts? "It is a very small thing that I should be judged of *you*"—my friends—"or of *man's judgment*"—humanity at large. "Yea, I judge not *mine own self*"—personal self-judgment. "But He that judgeth me is the *Lord*." The judgment of a man's friends, the judgment of a man's enemies, the judgment of a man's self—what are they all in comparison with the final, infallible, irrevocable judgment of Almighty God? Deuteronomy i. 17: "Ye shall not respect persons in judgment, but ye shall hear the small as well as the great. Ye shall not be ashamed of the face of man, for the judgment is God's." The final, irreversible judgment is His.

There is a passage which I desire to refer to, but time is passing so rapidly that I dare not at length ; but I pray you to examine it. It is probably the fullest passage in the entire Word of God on this subject of judgment. It is in Deuteronomy xxxii. 35-43. I know of no passage in the Old Testament or in the New that covers as much ground as that covers, and nothing but the lapse of time prevents my treating it in full.

I venture a somewhat more literal rendering:

To Me—the Vengeance and Recompense,
At the time when their foot shall slide ;
For the day of their calamity is at hand,
And the things that shall come upon them hasten.

For Jehovah will judge His people,
And will repent Himself as to His servants,
When He seeth that their Power is gone,
And there is none shut up or left.
And He will say, Where are their Gods,
The Rock wherein they put trust,
Which devoured the fat of their oblations,
And drank the wine of their libations ?
Let them rise up and help you
And become your Protection !
See, now, that I—I am He,
And no God with me.
I kill, and I make alive ;
I wound and I heal
And none can deliver out of my hand.
For to heaven lift I up my hand,
And say—I live forever !
If I whet my shining sword,

And if my hand lay hold on judgment,
 I will render vengeance to my foes,
 And recompense those that hate me.
 I will make mine arrows drunk with blood,
 And my sword shall devour flesh,
 From the blood of the slain and the captives,
 From the head of the chiefs of the foe.
 Rejoice, O ye nations, with His people !
 For the blood of His servants He will avenge,
 And to His adversaries requite vengeance,
 And for His land and His people make atonement.

This passage I have quoted in full, for there is scarce one aspect of God's judgment not here suggested. It teaches us that

His is the vengeance that requites,
 And which is sure to come in His time.
 God mercifully judges His people,
 And retributively judges His foes.
 He leaves men in crises to their own devices,
 He reserves to Himself all final issues,
 And from His judgment there is no escape.
 When He rises up with the Sword of Justice,
 Final and perfect Retribution falls.

And yet all this is the occasion of devout "rejoicing" to those who clearly apprehend the divine character. See verse 43.

Psalm ix. 7, 8, and 16 : "But the Lord shall endure for ever : He hath prepared His throne for judgment. And He shall judge the world in righteousness, He shall minister judgment to the people in uprightness. . . The Lord is known by the

judgment which He executeth : the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands." That last verse has regard to what we call "poetic retribution." This is one of those things which make so unmistakable the fact that God is the judge. "The Lord God of recompenses shall surely requite," says Jeremiah in the 51st chapter and 56th verse. "The wicked is snared in the work of his own hands," as Haman was hung on the gallows which he had prepared for Mordecai, and as the thumbs and great toes of Adoni-bezek were cut off, just as he had before done with the three score and ten kings.

III. THE JUDGMENT.

I pass on now to speak in the third place of the judicial sentence—the magisterial act. This word "judgment" is a very prominent word. I think that one of the Hebrew words so translated occurs over three hundred times in the Old Testament. In God's case the judgment is never tentative. It is a final fiat. As He said of Light, "let it be," and "it was," so in judgment He says, "let it be so," and it is so.

Now, there are two sorts of judgment—the *temporal* and the *eternal*; and we should make a careful discrimination between the temporal and the eternal judgments. For instance, in Isaiah xxvi. 9, we read : "When Thy judgments are in the earth the inhabitants of the world will learn righteous-

ness." This cannot refer to eternal judgment, because the object of these is that the inhabitants of the world shall learn righteousness ; and the judgments are judgments that are "in the earth," distinctively in this present sphere.

And, by the way, what magnificent imagery the Word of God contains on this subject, especially as to the Person of the Judge Himself. Heaven is His throne ; the earth is His footstool. He is seated in heaven, with His feet reaching to the earth ; His pavilion is the heavens ; sunrise and sunset, the lifting of the curtains and the gleamings through of the glory ; light, His robe ; clouds and darkness, His canopy and covering ; His chariots, the clouds ; the wings of the wind, the pinions on which He flies ; His voice, thunder ; the flash of His eye, lightning. His glance makes the earth to quake, and His touch makes the hills to smoke. He takes up the isles in His palm as a very little thing, and the mountains are the small dust of the balance which He holds, and all the nations of the earth are insignificant nothings. What a wonderful representation !

Now the temporal plagues or temporal judgments of God are not so much retributive as disciplinary and educative. They are punitive, but they are more corrective than punitive, if men will only receive them as corrective. God does not so much by them design retribution as He does such punitive measures as will also be corrective,

making the inhabitants of the earth learn righteousness.

Let us recognize, therefore, as God's scourges, the devastations which are abroad in the earth. Diseases are his weapons. Exodus xv. 26. Asiatic cholera, typhus fever, small pox, etc., what are they but God's judgments on the "sin of dirt"! And so the slums of great cities breed pestilence. God has His judgments on moral dirt, impurity, licentiousness, strong drink, blasphemy. One godless infidel village in the great West of America, which was founded upon an oath to exclude all Christian churches and institutions, and where the Lord's supper was blasphemously caricatured, was *thrice* swept with the besom of destruction. It was said when an awful flood nearly destroyed another of our cities, that the greatest destruction lay *right in the track* of the worst drink saloons and brothels! Lincoln said in course of the American War that God might choose to exact one freeman's life for every life sacrificed in slavery. And so it seemed, for that war cost 500,000 lives, 300,000 maimed, 300,000 widows, and 3,000,000,000 dollars of treasure.

1. As to these temporal and corrective judgments, they may be avoided, therefore, so far as sanitary laws—drainage, ventilation, cleanliness—are observed; so far as moral laws are kept, for nothing is settled till settled rightly; and so far as social laws are obeyed, and the mutual dependence

of all classes on each other is recognized and regarded, by promoting measures which elevate the condition of the lowest and poorest. It is said that Robert Peel's daughter died from the infection conveyed in her riding habit from the attic where the poor sempstress who embroidered it had laid it over her sick husband as he shivered in the agonies of a fatal fever. How many ways God has of showing us that society is bound in indissoluble ties; and that it avenges the neglect of the weakest and most degraded of its members!

Now let us carefully note again the absolute perfection of the judgment of God. Never a blemish about it. In the first place it is true and righteous and holy. See Isaiah xxviii. 17: "Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet; and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place." Think how beautiful that figure is of laying judgment to the line, and righteousness to the plummet. When you lay a corner stone, can it be laid too absolutely level and plumb? All the symmetry of the building depends upon the angles of the corner stone. And when God lays the corner stone of judgment, it is true to the line and the plummet. It is perfect in equity. His rewards and His retributions are absolutely without a blot. God is perfect, and therefore His standard is perfect, and therefore His restitution and retribution and recompense must be perfect. Some people

tremble before the thought of the Judgment Day, and we all ought to do so, but we should never lose sight of the fact that the judgment of God is an occasion also of unspeakable joy. It is the *righting of the wrongs of the ages*. There is a manifest want of balance in this life. The scales of God do not hang evenly. Evil does not get its full recompense, and righteousness does not get its full reward; and if we could not lift the curtain, or if it were not lifted in the Word of God so that we get a glimpse of the future, we should be in despair, like the author of the seventy-third psalm. But, blessed be God, the wrongs of the ages are going to be righted; and what the saints do not get here of recompense they shall get there; and what the wicked do not get of retribution here, they shall get there, for God is a perfect God in Judgment.

2. I notice in the second place under this head that there is mercy in justice. We talk of both "the goodness and the severity of God"; but we forget that there is goodness in severity, and there is severity in goodness. You remember about the wars conducted by Prince Eugene and the Duke of Marlborough. Have you ever noticed that at one time they had a contest as to the punishment of men that were guilty of outrages in the way of marauding? and Prince Eugene said, "I always hang every such offender." On one particular occasion there was brought up a soldier who had been guilty of marauding, and whose execution

was demanded by Prince Eugene, but for whom the Duke interceded, saying, "if you hang men for such offenses, you will hang half the army!" The Prince said, "Now, Duke, safety requires such lawlessness to be punished. You have not been accustomed to execute these men, and I have been. Now search the records, and if it is not found that you have executed far more men than I have, I will let this man go free." It was found, on looking at the records, that at least five times as many men had been executed by the more lenient general as by the more severe one. Marlborough's mistaken mercy had set a premium on crime and so multiplied offenders. Chief Justice Hale said, "Whenever as a judge I feel myself swayed to mercy toward a prisoner, let me remember that there also is a mercy due to my country." And I want to say solemnly, not knowing that I shall ever speak in England again, that I believe there is nothing doing more mischief in the world and in the Church of Christ to-day than *unregenerate notions of benevolence*. Such notions picture God as all love and all mercy, with no wrath and no judgment; and lead people in their own families to say, as a woman said to me, "I love my children too well to punish them." No wonder if such children grow up mischief-makers!

3. I want to repeat what I have already intimated, that there is a magnificent and awful grandeur in holy jealousy and fury. Have you ever traveled in

the Alps? You will come sometimes upon a quiet and beautiful valley nestling down among the hills, and full of purling brooks, and birds that sing, and plants that bloom ; and a few steps farther on, it may be, you turn abruptly round a curve, and a great mountain seems to overhang you with its awful shadow, and threatens absolutely to hurl its mass over upon you. Now you cannot have an elevation without a corresponding depression. You cannot have a sunny valley without a frowning mountain. And there are changes in the scenery when you are studying the divine nature. There is the lowly valley, where the flowers of redemption spring and the waters of salvation roll in curling eddies ; but there is the awful great White Throne, glorious indeed, but the more terrible in its shadow, because of its intense light. Look at an engine on the track. How shall the locomotive guide the train of cars to their destination unless it moves within the limits of its steel rails with inflexible and inviolable uniformity? But suppose a man comes and throws himself across the track. The same mechanical law which enables that engine to be a means of transportation, travel, locomotion, and general beneficence to the community, makes it sure to be an engine of destructive wrath to the man that dares to prostrate himself across its path. God moves on a track ; it is the track of perfect holiness. He moves on a track, not for the sake of avenging wrong, but for the benefit and blessing

of His universe ; and if the sinner puts himself across the track, the same law precisely which compels God, for the sake of His universe, to move on those lines of justice and love will make Him the avenger of unrepented sin. For God to leave that track would be for Him to transgress the law of right, and the universe would come to an end before He would do that. If you ever think that there is an inconsistency between wrath and love, I would have you remember that strange expression in the Book of the Apocalypse, "The wrath of the Lamb." What is the lamb? Gentlest of all four-footed beasts, the very type of gentleness, and love, and amiability, and unresisting submission ; and yet it is the wrath of the Lamb which is most fearful of all, and because it is the wrath of *the Lamb*.

4. And then notice again the reason for delay in execution. "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness, but long-suffering." And yet, "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (II Peter iii. 9; Eccles. viii. 11). Thus we are taught that the very mercy which counsels long-suffering only hardens men in evil-doing.

5. Notice, however, the ultimate certainty of divine judgment. Now what are sanctions? Let us stop again to define. Suppose you build an arch. You must have two opposing pillars, or sup-

ports, to sustain that arch. Take away either pillar, and down comes your arch, and all that depends upon it. God's government is a splendid arch which spans eternity, and underneath the arch are these two great pillars—the reward of righteousness on the one hand, and the retribution of evil on the other. To take away that retribution of evil is as surely to demolish the arch, and all that rests upon it, as to take away the award of righteousness. The ultimate certainty is as absolute as that God is, that His government shall be sustained, for the universe hangs on it, and therefore the sanctions that sustain His government shall be maintained, for everything else depends on those sanctions. So we come to the unavoidableness of the judgment.

How shall we escape the just judgment of God? (Romans ii. 3.) Thank God, no transgressor can escape, for He would cease to be the perfect God He is if one such should escape.

IV. THE EXECUTIVE.

And now I come to say a few words about the fourth head of this topical treatment. This embraces the instruments and the agents. And here I make another discrimination. We should not use the word "instrument" and the word "agent" indiscriminately. Agent is derived from *ago—agere*, and implies a personal element, which an instrument does not imply. An instrument may be a blind force, but a blind force can never be an

agent. An agent must be a person. I think that we ought to establish and keep close to that discrimination.

It is a wonderful thing that this great Judge of ours uses as His executive even the blind forces of nature. This is most remarkable. For instance, in the representations of the Word of God, all nature is grandly set forth as yielding absolute obedience to Almighty God. Even these inanimate forces do so. The winds are His messengers, and the flames of fire His ministers. Look at the ten plagues of Egypt. In Exodus vii-xii, there is an early illustration as well as a declaration of the fact that, behind all human calamity, is the hand of God, and that there is a providential control even over the inanimate powers of the natural universe. Light and darkness, hail and lightnings and floods, are used as the instruments of those plagues. All animate nature—fish and frogs, and flies and lice, and locusts and cattle—are all subordinate to the will and word of God. The subtle, mysterious influences of nature, of which we do not know so much, God also used to produce murrain and boils, and blains and disease and death in various forms. Now note—and do not let us shrink from it—the express declaration in Isaiah liv. 16, "*I have created the waster to destroy.*" I pray you notice that.

We had a tremendous exhibition of this truth in the history of the grasshopper scourge in Minnesota.

In 1866, the grasshopper was still destroying these great wheatfields of the West, some of which consisted of thousands of acres without even a single fence. They are the granaries of the whole world. The Christian governor of Minnesota called a day of prayer to Almighty God against the grasshopper scourge; and you ought to have seen the attacks made upon that Christian governor, not only by infidel newspapers and the daily organs of the press, but even by some Christian newspapers so-called! The day of prayer came, and a multitude came out and filled the places of supplication, and besought God to remove the scourge. The spring came on, and the wheat began to appear in the fields, and the grasshoppers appeared alongside of it; and then there went out a shout of derision from those infidels and blasphemers. But mark! At the same time there developed a parasite, previously unknown, that stung the grasshopper, and, in the first place, prevented that grasshopper from doing any harm to the crop of wheat, and, in the second place, from laying of eggs for reproduction, and there have never been grasshoppers in Minnesota since! I am persuaded we are having some miracles wrought in these days, as well as in the days of Egypt; and men would observe them, if they were not so blind as not to see the wonderful works of Almighty God. Hear what God says: "I will send hornets before thee, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite, from be-

fore thee" (Exodus xxiii. 28). Then in Numbers xxi. 6, we read, "The Lord sent fiery serpents among the people." Then, in Jonah i. 17, "The Lord prepared a great fish." Again in chapter iv. 6, "God prepared a gourd"; verse 7, "God prepared a worm"; verse 8, "God prepared a vehement east wind." All departments of nature are covered. The gourd represents the vegetable; the worm and the fish, the animal; and the east wind the blind, inanimate forces. See, in Psalm cv. 16, "He called for a famine," as though the famine came like a servant summoned by his master and said, "Here am I." Read Joel i. 3, 4: "Tell ye your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children another generation. That which the palmerworm hath left hath the locust eaten; and that which the locust hath left hath the cankerworm eaten; and that which the cankerworm hath left hath the caterpillar eaten." And then chapter ii. 25: "And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, My great army which I sent among you." I think that is one of the most startling statements on the subject in the whole Word of God. Just think of it! Think of God calling these *His great army*, in four detachments—the locust, the cankerworm, the caterpillar, and the palmerworm. What an army, and what detachments! Go to the East to-day, and see a cloud of locusts rising from the horizon, and

spreading itself over the entire sky till not a fragment of the blue heavens is visible, and settling down over leagues of territory, inches and inches deep, and leaving behind not one green thing when they have departed! I tell you that all history is embraced in the plan of God. Unquestionably there is a dark side to history, and the attempted solution that accounts for it by chance, or by dual powers like the Persian Ahriman and Ormuz, the powers of good and evil warring against each other, will not avail for an explanation. We must have the Scriptural solution, for that is the only satisfactory one—that there is a providence even over things evil. Devastation is the weapon of God. Diseases are sent by Him. The influenza bacillus is the smallest microbe ever known, and yet look at the damage and disaster which have followed it. It is God's army executing His judgment. About three times a century there comes over even civilized and Christian nations some form of evil that has not been known to science, and in the presence of which even medical men are utterly at a loss. It is God's sign that He has not yet surrendered the providential control of the world.

While speaking of God's use of the blind forces, let me especially refer to the whirlwind. What is a whirlwind? It is the combination of the hurricane and the cyclone. There are thirty cases in which the whirlwind is specially referred to in the Old Testament. I will call attention to some of them,

though I have not time to treat them individually : Isaiah lxvi. 15 ; Jeremiah iv. 13 ; Jeremiah, xxiii. 19 ; Jeremiah xxv. 32 ; Nahum i. 3. I especially want you to notice that the idea of the whirlwind is the idea of resistless violence and fury ; and yet, what is the whirlwind but another form of the breath or wind that is the symbol of the Spirit ? And the conception of wheels comes in here, because of the rapid, cyclonic revolutions of the whirlwind ; and that gives us the sublime and awful figure of the whirlwind as God's Chariot moving with terrific fury ; and the very cyclones are the wheels of God's progress. The cloud, which is another symbol of His judgment, represents mystery and power, and terror, too, because the cloud is the abode of the lightning ; and the fire suggests glory, and the consuming, devouring, and refining influence of flame that God uses.

2. I have already referred to the fact that, in the second place, God's executive includes living animals from the lowliest insect up to the largest of the animal creation.

3. Then in the third place, God's executive is man—man individually, and man collectively. Notice that phrase about Babylon, the hammer of the whole earth, Jerem. l. 23. It does not imply that God approves of a nation because He uses that nation for a scourge. He will take Babylon as a hammer, and break other nations into pieces ; and, because Babylon is proud and rebellious and

arrogant, He will break the hammer itself on His anvil of judgment, when He has done breaking nations with it.

4. Then, in the fourth place, God uses His angels as His executive ; and I want to add, though perhaps some of you will not agree with me, that I believe that they are the active agents of God to-day. Notice how frequently that phrase, "The angel of the Lord," is used in the Word of God—I believe eighty-five times. It is a terrible revelation of how the obedient angelic host may execute the will of God. If one angel in one night could slay 185,000 Assyrians, what do you think twelve legions of angels could have done if Christ had chosen to summon them to His side, when in the garden He confronted His approaching agonies of crucifixion ?

V. THE JUDGED.

I come to say a word in conclusion about the JUDGED.

First, fallen angels and sinners. My hearers, are any of you unsaved ? I want you to notice one awful fact, which God's Word has solemnly brought to your attention—that, while the angels instantly fell, and fell without a Redeemer and without an offer of salvation, into the nethermost world, you have had put before you the promise of salvation in Christ upon the simple condition of faith ; but if you refuse Christ, you sink into the same condem-

nation with demons and devils (Matt. xxv. 41).
Most awful!

There is such a thing as the judgment of disciples. I stop to call attention to one suggestion, which I have never heard referred to except by myself, but it seems to me that there is a thought worthy of utterance. In I Corinthians xi. 31, 32 we read, "For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged we are chastened of the Lord that we should not be condemned with the world." There is a hint here of great value to me—that it is a possible thing for you and me, as disciples, to escape certain chastenings or judgments of God if we sit in judgment on ourselves, and take the occasions of those judgments away. This is just as it is in the family. How gladly would we forego a chastisement that corrects a child's faults, if the conscience of the child would itself correct the faults. May there not be many, many sufferings that it is necessary that God should send upon us because of the rebellious self-will which remains in us, and of our hesitancy in laying ourselves and all we have at the feet of our dear Master? In many cases, if we judged ourselves, it would not be necessary for God to judge us. Judgment, in this passage, as applied to disciples, obviously means Fatherly chastening, and is, therefore, expressly distinguished from condemnation (see verse 32).

But mark this distinction. The Judgment of the great day is a judgment into which—I as truly believe as I believe in Jesus Christ—the believer will never enter. Many may disagree with me, but I hold it as one of the fundamental articles of my creed, that if one has faith in Jesus Christ unto salvation he shall never enter into the judgment of the great day. There is a difference between the *thronos* and the *bema*. There is a difference between the great White Throne and the judgment seat of Christ. Before the judgment seat of Christ we come to have our places assigned us in the kingdom, and to receive the awards and rewards for labor done for Christ. Now mark, eternal life is never once represented as *our reward*. It is the *gift* of God, and a gift is not a reward. A gift is not wages. Wages implies work done. But, having been saved by the gift of God, which is eternal life, we gather fruit unto life eternal if we enter into the work-field of God, and there earn wages by toiling for our Master (comp. John iv. 10, 36); and when we come before the judgment seat of Christ it is to determine what we have done with talents, what we have done with our possessions, our faculties, our opportunities; how we have discharged our obligations; how far our characters and lives have magnified Christ; whether wood, hay, and stubble have been built into the structure, or gold and silver and precious stones. Hence observe

that the ground of security of a disciple lies here—that judgment has been pronounced on his sin and executed in Jesus Christ. If one died in behalf of all, then all died (II Cor. v. 14). Note the sin-offering seems meant in the former part, and the burnt-offering is referred to in the latter part of that passage: “We thus judge that if one died for all then all died: and that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them and rose again.” In the first part of the passage nothing is hinted about life and resurrection, because the words “died,” “dead,” apply to the trespass and sin-offering. The word “burn,” used as to them in Leviticus, means to turn to ashes. But the word applied in Leviticus to the other offering, the burnt-offering, refers to ascending in flame, because life and resurrection are there symbolized. Judgment was pronounced and executed on Christ on our behalf, and it would not be fair to judge us when we have already been judged. God is too exact in His justice for that, and so he that believes in Christ and who by believing in Christ becomes identified with Christ, has been judged, and his judgment has been executed; and there can be no such thing as his coming before the great White Throne for judgment. Hence the absolute safety of a disciple. Comp. John iii. 36; v. 24.

The whirlwind, the symbol of God's fury, has a

center where you are perfectly safe. If you could reach that center, there would be no more motion than there is in the axis round which a wheel revolves. The whirlwind may move with tremendous fury about you, but there is "the sound of gentle stillness" (I Kings xix. 12 Revised Version), in that center. Elijah was carried up in the center of a whirlwind. He went up in a chariot of fire, the wheels of which were a whirlwind. I believe that God loves that soft murmur of grace. It is not God's will to be compelled to judge us; He would be glad to have had all the judgments due to us executed finally in Jesus Christ. And as we began by saying "The Lord is our Judge; the Lord is our Lawgiver; the Lord is our King," I pray you to notice that in that verse, which is the only verse that presents Him in the threefold aspect of the legislative, the judicial, and the executive, there is at the end the marvelous expression, "*He will save us.*" What hope has the sinner when this infinite King combines in Himself all these functions—when omnipotence, and omnipresence, and omniscience, and eternity, and exact justice, and judicial vengeance, and perfect holiness, and infinite spirituality, and the wrath of love are arrayed against him? He hides himself in Christ; he takes refuge in the Rock of Ages; he gets into the center of the cyclone; and then the Lawgiver does not demand of him a perfect obedience, but He takes the per-

fect obedience of His Son in its place ; and the Judge no longer condemns him, for He says, "Your judgment has been pronounced and executed" ; and so Judge, Lawgiver, and King unite to assure the salvation of a believer ! This very God himself *comes and saves us.*





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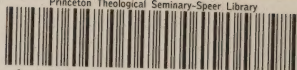
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