

ON THE DUTY OF FORGIVENESS.

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PART II.

"Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven."

What we want to ascertain at present is this:—

Whether a person who has been injured or offended is laid under obligation by God to forgive the injury or offence, provided the person guilty of the injury or the offence does not exhibit any sense of, or sorrow for, the wrong done? Or to put it in this form: Does the neglect or refusal of the wrong-doer to make suitable acknowledgment exempt or preclude the person wronged from forgiving the wrong? Is this sorrow for, sense or acknowledgment of wrong-doing the prescribed and exclusive condition on which the offended or injured party can or ought consistently with due regard to all the interests involved, to grant forgiveness? Would he be in the path of duty were he to do so on any other condition? and is he now in the path of duty in abstaining from doing so, until that condition is fulfilled? Before giving a reply to this question, about which, after a somewhat protracted and careful investigation of the whole subject, we feel no manner of difficulty, it may be well in the outset to state some things respecting which there ought to be, and indeed is, agreement in sentiment.

For example: That one person may be forgiven of another, and yet unforgiven of God; and, of course, the reverse—namely, that one may be unpardoned by a fellow-mortal, and at the same time pardoned by God. The getting or not getting it does not affect vitally the relation in which one stand to God, but, on the other hand, the giving or not giving remission of the offence or injury does so affect the relation in which the other stands to God. It is

of importance to keep this in view, as it is fitted in the one case to excite alarm, and in the other impart comfort: alarm in the bosom of the one not giving—comfort to the heart of the other not getting pardon. The pardon, then, that is thus extended or withheld must just be taken for what it is worth; neither over-estimating nor under-estimating its value and efficacy. One may put it up at too high a mark; another pay too large a price for it.

Again, it is here assumed to be one's duty to forgive an offence or injury, in the event of the offender asking to be forgiven. This is so very obvious, that it would be an insult to your understanding to lead proof. That there are many in the world who refuse, even when asked to do so, to pardon offences, cannot be doubted. The unmerciful servant mentioned in the parable is the type of a class. Such conduct is denounced in the strongest possible terms, and will be most severely punished. It is conduct that God and all good men hold in just abhorrence, as that which not a single word can be urged in defence of; for which, while persisted in, no sort of excuse or extenuation can be offered. In consequence hereof, exclusion from the sympathy, countenance, friendship of God, will be the fate of the erring one, who will also be bereft of all well-grounded hope of admission to his presence at and after death.

Further, we take for granted that it is the bounden duty of the person giving offence or doing injury to ask the pardon of that injury or offence, from him to whom the offence has been given, or on whom the injury has been inflicted.