

Pastor and People.

The Imprecatory Psalms.

In the Sunday Magazine for March, pp. 381-393, is a short but comprehensive argument on the subject expressed in the heading of this article, by W. Lindsay-Alexander. Nothing that the writer ever met with before so satisfied him as this has done. Dr. Hodge, in his very able article on "Inspiration," in the Princeton Review for 1857, at pp. 685-686, has given what may be deemed in general a sufficient answer to certain objections, in these words, "With regard to the denunciatory Psalms, David was the organ of God in denouncing the divine judgments against the wicked. If he did this with the feelings with which a benevolent judge pronounced sentence on a criminal, no much the better for him. But if he did it in the spirit of malice and revenge, so much the worse for him. In either case, the Spirit spoke by the mouth of David. How David's heart was affected by these denunciations, is a question entirely apart from his inspiration," etc.

Mr. Lindsay-Alexander however, has briefly given us an analysis of the whole argument, pro and con. And he has rendered a good service by so doing. Many a pious soul has been sorely troubled by sundry expressions in the Psalms, and in some other places, which he could not reconcile with his intuitive judgments. The writer can never forget what a most excellent lady, a member of the Society of the Friends, once said to him. She loved the Sacred Word. She fed upon the precious Psalms. But there were passages in them that she could not see how a good man could write. She was troubled and perplexed. She only wished that David had never written them. Were she now living, a careful reading of the following would, no doubt, relieve her mind. But her gentle spirit has gone to the blessed World of Light, and she understands it all now.

Says Mr. Lindsay-Alexander, "An exception to the general spirit of piety and goodness that pervades the Psalms, seems to be presented in those passages in which the writer utters, often in vehement language, a desire for vengeance on those whom he considered his enemies, or expresses joy because of calamities that had overtaken, or may overtake them. So repugnant have such utterances appeared to pious feeling, that they have been a stumbling-block to many readers of the Psalms, and have been eagerly laid hold of by those who are opposed to the claims of the Bible as supplying a reason for denying its divine authority. To obviate this, some have proposed to deprive the passages in question of the optative form, and render them as simply asserting what will be the fate of those who are the enemies and oppressors of the good. That such a rendering is in some of the passages grammatically possible, cannot be denied; and in some of them, indeed, it is what the best scholars are agreed should be preferred. Thus, for instance, on Psalm vi. 11, [10] which, in the authorized version, is rendered, 'Let all mine enemies be ashamed and sore vexed; let them return and be ashamed suddenly.' Hupfield says that the verbs are 'to be taken as futures, not optatively,' and he accordingly renders, 'Ashamed and affrighted shall be all my enemies, turned back, put to shame shall they be suddenly; and with this Maurer, De Wette, and Ewald agree. So also Psalm x. 16 is rendered by 'Thou wilt break the arm of the wicked,' etc. But this cannot be carried through all the passages; e.g. Psalms lxxix. 23-28, cannot be got over by this expedient; and even if those which contain imprecations could be thus disposed of, there would still remain those in which exultation and delight are expressed over the destruction and misery of those whom the poet regards as his enemies, or the enemies of his country. The fact therefore, must be admitted that there are in the Psalms utterances of a vindictive character, so strongly expressed, sometimes, as almost to shock the feelings of readers trained in the spirit which breathes through the New Testament. The question is, Can these be reconciled with moral rectitude, or with genuine piety on the part of those by whom they are uttered? As tending to a satisfactory answer to this question, the following observations are submitted:

1. There is a broad distinction between sufferings inflicted from mere vindictiveness, or for the gratification of personal revenge, and sufferings that come upon the transgressor under the law of the divine government, which assigns retribution to the workers of iniquity. To desire the former, is wrong; it may be quite right to desire the latter.

2. There is a distinction between wrongs done to individuals, and wrongs done to the community. A truly pious man will be ready, in his own case, to forgive the former; but he may lawfully wish the latter to be punished.

3. Those living under the ancient dispensation, lived under a law which forbade private retaliation, and the indulgence of vindictive feelings on the part of the individuals who had been injured towards those who had injured them. On this point the law of Moses is explicit:—"Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart; thou shalt surely rebuke thy neighbor, that thou bear not sin because of him. Thou shalt not take vengeance nor bear grudge against the children of thy people; but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself; I am the Lord." (Lev. xix. 17, 18; compare also Exod. xxiii. 4, 5.) Good men living under this law knew that private revenge was forbidden as sinful, and they denounced it as such; compare Prov. xx. 23; xxi. 17, 18, 29; xiv. 21, 22; also Job. xxxi. 29. Men like David had learned this lesson, and could say, as he said to his bitterest enemy, "The Lord judge between me and thee, and the Lord avenge me of thee; but mine hand shall not be upon thee. . . . The Lord be judge, and judge between me and thee, and see and plead my cause, and deliver me out of thy hand." (1 Sam. xxi. 12, 13.) David knew how to forgive an enemy, and to refuse to avenge himself on one that had injured him: (2 Sam. i. 17 & 18; xiv. 24); he knew that God abhorred the bloody and deceitful man;

(Psalm v. 5.) and he could declare that, so far from injuring another, he had rescued those that were, without cause, his enemies, (Psalm vii. 4). It must be allowed to be prima facie improbable that he, or those who, like him, revered God's law, and had learned the lesson of mercifulness which it inculcates, should be found indulging a spirit of cruel vindictiveness, and seeking the destruction of enemies merely for the sake of retaliation.

4. When we look to the motives assigned by the psalmists for the prayers they offer for the destruction of the wicked, we shall find that, for the most part, they are of a wholly impersonal kind. It is the offence given to religion, and the encouragement given to wickedness, by the prosperity of the wicked, that makes them desire the overthrow of the workers of iniquity, (Psalm x. 18; xiv. 7 & 8); it is for the vindication of the divine honor, insulted by the heathen, that they desire the blood of God's servants shed by the heathen to be avenged, (Psalm lxxix. 10); it is for the manifestation of the divine majesty and rectitude, so as to encourage and gladden the pious, and to deter the wicked, that they desire that the oppressors of God's people should be put to shame and destroyed, (Psalm xxv. 26, 27; xl. 16; lviii. 11; lxxiv. 9, 10, etc. In such utterances it is another spirit than that of vindictiveness that breathes.

5. Under the ancient dispensation God had revealed himself as not only long-suffering and merciful, but also as hating iniquity, as requiring transgression, as dealing with every one according to his works, and as rendering vengeance to his adversaries. Specially he had by his prophets made known what he would do to the enemies and oppressors of his people. Is it strange, is it inconsistent with true piety, that a servant of God should express his approval of God's purpose of retribution, should ask the fulfillment of that, or should express satisfaction in the prospect of its fulfillment, in words often borrowed from God's own declaration by his prophets? (compare e.g. Isa. cxxvii. 8, 9, with Isa. xlii. 16, 18; Jer. l. 15, 20.) This, so far from being strange, is only what we might expect. True piety leads a man to approve of God's purposes, and to desire their fulfillment. The blessed in heaven, we are told, say when the judgments of God are made manifest, "Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are the judgments," (Rev. xv. 4; xvi. 7); the saints under the altar cry 'with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth,' (Rev. vi. 10); and when judgment comes on Babylon, the command is given, 'Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets, for God hath avenged you on her,' (Rev. xviii. 20.) When such utterances are found in the New Testament, need we wonder that those who lived under the former dispensation, should express, in language not more strong, their desires for the fulfillment of God's threatenings against the enemies of his kingdom, and the oppressors of his people, or should exult over the prospect of such fulfillment? And has been well remarked by Bishop Wordsworth, such utterances are but words of the people of God accepting, and re-echoing the judicial decrees revealed in his word.

The conclusion to which these considerations lead is, that where the psalmists utter imprecations against their personal enemies and oppressors, they mean nothing more than to invoke Him to whom 'belongeth vengeance and recompense,' to vindicate as he sees meet, the cause of his servants, even as our Lord himself did, (1 Peter ii. 23,) leaving it with Him to render to them according to their deeds, even as Paul did, (2 Tim. iv. 14;) and when they call for vengeance on the enemies of God and his Church, or exult in the judgments inflicted upon them, they merely respond to what they knew to be the purpose of Him, who will not suffer the wicked always to triumph, and who, as 'the Lord God of recompenses, will surely requite.'" (Jer. li. 50.)

With the exegesis involved in the above, Dr. Alexander, in his work on the Psalms, accords.

Whatever tends to vindicate the Holy Word against unfriendly criticism, and especially to relieve honest difficulties in the minds of its true friends, should be gladly accepted; and it cannot be doubted that many devout and earnest Christians will thank Mr. Lindsay-Alexander for the help he has afforded them, just where they had long felt the real need of it.—W. P. V. in Philadelphia Presbyterian.

Safe in God's service.

One day, as Luther was journeying with some companions through a forest, a band of masked and armed horsemen came suddenly upon them, seized and bound the great reformer, and carried him away. His companions mourned and lamented for him; but as soon as he was out of their sight, his captors removed their masks, and he found he was with friends, who were taking him to a safe hiding-place where he would be secure from the malice of his foes. So death may come upon us, as if we were our enemy, and bear us away in his irresistible grasp; but even in the darkness he will whisper to us: "Fear not; I also am a servant of the great King; I am carrying thee to the rest which He hath prepared for His people," and as the light from the New Jerusalem begins from afar to fall upon us, we shall see that we are in the strong arms of an angel of God.—Bertram.

Doubts.

I once told my congregation that I had passed through a season of doubt and fear. One of my elders said to me, "I am sorry you told the people that. Just suppose you had been swearing or stealing, you would not have told them of it?" "No," I answered, "that would be a terrible thing." "Well," replied he, "I don't think it is much worse than disbelieving God, and if you go and tell them that, you set them a bad example." And he was right. It is not for the leader in any sense to doubt the success of the enterprise.—Sawyer.

The Aged Pastor.

He stands at the desk, that grave old man, With an eye still bright, though his cheek is wan, And his long white locks are backward rolled From a noble brow of classic mould, And his form, though bent by the weight of years, Somewhat of its primal beauty wears.

He opens the page of the Sacred Word— Not a whisper, low nor loud, is heard, Even fully assumes a serious look As he reads the words of the Holy Book, And the thoughtless and gay grow rovt'out there, As he opens his lips in fervent prayer.

He stands as the grave old prophet stood, Proclaiming the truths of the living God, Fearing no proof in the case of men, Whose hearts are at ease in their folly and sin, With a challenge of guilt, still unforgiven, To the soul untried, unmet for heaven.

Oh, who can but honor that good old man, As no nearer his threescore years and ten, Who hath made it the work of his life to bless Our world in its we and wretchedness, Still guiding the feet, which were wont to stray In the paths of sin, to the narrow way?

With a kindly heart, through the lapsing years, He hath shared your joys, he hath wiped your tears, He hath bound the wreath on the brow of the bride,

He hath stood by the couch when loved ones died, Pointing the soul to a glorious heaven As the ties which bound it to earth were riven.

Methinks you'll weep another day, When the good old man shall have passed away, When the last of his ebbing sands are run, When his labors are o'er, and his work is done; Who'll care for the flock and keep the fold When his pulse is still and his heart is cold?

You'll miss him then; every look and tone, So familiar now, when forever gone, Will thrill the heart with an inward pain, And ye long and listen for them in vain, When a stranger form and stranger face Shall stand in your honored pastor's place.

—Presbyterian Weekly.

Luther and Calvin.

Both Luther and Calvin brought the individual into immediate relation with God; but Calvin, under a more stern and militant form of doctrine, lifted the individual above Pope and prelate, and priest and presbyter; above Catholic Church and National Church, and General Synod; above indulgences, remissions, and absolutions from fellow-mortals, and brought him into the immediate dependence on God, whose eternal, irreversible choice is made by Himself alone, not arbitrarily, but according to His own highest wisdom and justice. Luther spared the altar, and hesitated to deny totally the real presence; Calvin, with superior dialectics, accepted as a commemoration and a seal the rite, which the Catholics revered as a sacrifice. Luther favoured magnificence in public worship, as an aid to devotion; Calvin, the guide of republics, avoided in their churches all appeals to the senses, as a peril to pure religion. Luther condemned the Roman Church for its immorality; Calvin for its idolatry. Luther exposed the folly of superstition, ridiculed the hair shirt and the scourge, the purchased indulgence, and decried worthless masses for the dead; Calvin shrunk from their criminality with impatient horror. Luther permitted the cross and the taper, pictures and images as things of indifference; Calvin demanded a spiritual worship in its utmost purity. Luther left the organization of the Church to princes and governments; Calvin reformed doctrine, ritual, and practice, and by establishing ruling elders in each Church, and an elective synod, he secured to his policy a representative character, which combined authority with popular rights. Both Luther and Calvin insisted that, for each one, there is and can be no other priest than himself; and, as a consequence, both agreed in the clergy. Both were of one mind that should pious laymen choose one of their number to be their minister, the man so chosen would be as truly a priest as if all the bishops in the world had consecrated him.—Bancroft's U. S.

The Preciousness of Trial.

"To know fully what Christ is, we must know something of adversity. We must be tried, tempted and oppressed—we must taste the bitterness of sorrow, feel the presence of want, tread the path of solitude, and often be brought to the end of our own strength and of human sympathy and counsel. Jesus shines the brightest to faith's eyes when all things are dark and dreary. And when others have retired from our presence, their patience wearied, their sympathy exhausted, their counsels baffled, perchance their affections chilled and their friendship changed, then Christ approaches and takes the vacant place, sits at our side, speaks peace to our troubled heart, soothes our sorrows, guides our judgment, and bids us 'Fear not.' Beloved reader, when has Christ appeared the nearest an' most precious to your soul? Has not been in seasons when you have been the most in need of His quickening counsel and of His soothing love? You once thought you knew Him, and you did in some degree; but now, in the depth of your hallowed sorrows, a sorrow into which the Man of sorrows and the brother born for adversity has enshrined His whole self, you exclaim, 'I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee!'"—Winstlow.

Prayer Consistent with Law.

Does the efficacy of prayer, if admitted, conflict with the reign of law? Does it not rather establish, confirm, complement it? For if we suppose prayer—the highest frame, the loftiest enterprise, of the human soul—to have no consequence in the spiritual universe, we have, then, a cause without a result, an aim without an end. All other states and acts of the mind are under the dominion of law. Thought, reflection, analysis, the flight of fancy, the aspirations of all the higher powers of the intellect, have their commensurate revenues. Is prayer alone abnormal? Or is there any thing inconsistent with a law-loving philosophy in those seasons of the Christian's faith, "Ask, and ye shall receive;" "Draw nigh unto God, and He will draw nigh unto you?"—A. P. Postledge.

The Bible in India.

At the late anniversary of the British and Foreign Bible Society, held in London, a letter was read from Sir Bartolo Frere, in which he speaks as follows of the influence of the Bible among the teeming millions of India:

"At different places, during His Royal Highness's tour, the Prince received from various bodies copies of translations of the Holy Scriptures into, I believe, no less than eleven languages, and in, I think, no less than nine cases the translations comprised the whole Bible, and some of the most important portions of both Testaments were presented, which had been translated into nine other languages in which no complete translation of the whole Bible has yet been finished. This may afford some idea of the number of readers in India to whom the Holy Scriptures are now accessible in their own Indian dialect; and when I mention that of all these versions four only were, I believe, complete when I first went to India, forty-two years ago, we may have some idea of the great present activity of the society's agents, in a great number of missions, scattered through such a number of nations speaking so many different dialects.

"Then, as to the effect produced, apart from direct and entire conversions from other religions to Christianity, I may mention the fact, which struck me greatly, that I was assured from many quarters that many thousands of Hindoos, who do not make any profession of Christianity, habitually use books of the Old and New Testaments as their models in prayer and their standards of morality. I need not trouble you with comments on the fact, but I am sure that all friends of the Bible Society will rejoice to think that the devotional portions of the Bible, and the moral teachings of our Lord and His apostles, are largely read and deeply thought on by great bodies of their fellow-subjects who are still in search of a rule of life."

Am I Doing My Duty as a Christian?

In our present condition of partial sanctification and imperfect knowledge, there are times when we may have great difficulty in determining what duty is, and again as to the best mode of accomplishing it.

We need continually to keep before us the teachings of God's word, to understand what we ought to do—what should be our highest aim, in every-day life, and in view of the relations that we sustain to God and to our fellow-creatures, and we need also to look up continually to God, to give us wisdom, that, in aiming to do what is right, we may adopt the best way of doing it, and thus avoid doing harm. Especially is this important in our efforts to bring our fellow-men under the influence of the truth. But to understand what duty is and how to perform it, is not all that is necessary. Thus far, everything may be perfectly plain, and very often is, and yet the duty is not performed, nor is there any effort made to perform it. And why? Because the inclination is wanting.

Men and women professing to be Christians, and who have solemnly promised submission to Christ as King, habitually refuse to obey Him; for, to refuse to perform duty is so far to refuse to obey Christ. How often, when the matter of family worship is pressed upon the consideration of parents professing to be Christians, or the matter of home Christian instruction, is the answer made, "Well, I know that is duty, but—" Then follows the excuses, such as have been employed by negligent professors of religion to quiet conscience, from generation to generation.

Talk to the church member who never occupied a place in the prayer-meeting—who hears the bell that calls the people together for prayer, ring from week to week, and from year to year, but never heeds it—who refuses to regard it as the call of God to him or to her—talk to that church member, and most likely the reply will be, "Yes, I know it is my duty." Then excuses are made. Excuses for the neglect of what is admitted to be a duty—and if a duty, then, that which implies moral obligation to perform. Strange that professing Christians should be so slow to learn that duty admits of no excuses. To neglect it is to sin. To neglect what is acknowledged to be duty, is, for him who does so, to stand self-condemned before God and his people. Should God say, "According to thy statement, so shall thy judgment be," how wretched would be the condition of the person described!

The great need is the inclination to do duty. For this every one should pray. May God graciously teach us what we ought to do, enlightening the understanding; and may He also graciously incline us to walk in the way of His commandments, and to delight in His testimonies. Thus may we be prepared for the better country, and for the services of the upper sanctuary.—Transylvania Presbyterian.

Take Them to Jesus.

Burdens are numerous and heavy. What shall we do with them? Many are carrying them. Is that the best we can do? They cling to us with strange tenacity. They load us down by day, and worry us by night. It is thought to be a good sign for one to become sleepless under responsibilities. A shrewd financier was asked by a bank director how they could insure the success of the bank. His reply was wise from a mere worldly standpoint, "Get a president who will take the bank to bed with him." On the same principle we should seek pastors who will take their churches to bed with them. But there is a better way; take banks and churches to Christ, cast all burdens on Him, for He careth for us, and we shall have rest, and yet not lose zeal. In no other way can we escape the burdens without loss of interest and energy, but in this way we escape worry and increase of energy. Sleep sweetly, and work refreshingly; feel the full weight of the burden, and find Almighty strength, carrying it. We learn to live well when we spontaneously hasten to Christ with all our cares; lay them all on Him, and then He is our wisdom and strength at all times, in all labors and trials.—Baptist Union.

The Union of the Presbyterian Churches in England.

"The united Church will be a real power on behalf of Evangelical Protestantism and Nonconformist liberty, and the happy auspices under which it commences its new career warrant bright hopes in relation to its future. Its liberal supporters, who have attested their gratitude to God for the union by general acts of consecration, evidently desire that it should be a Missionary Church, and in such a work it will have the sympathy and prayers of all the Free Churches, if it is observant of those rules of fellowship by which our relations to each other should always be regulated. An unwise competition on its part in districts where success can only be secured by crippling the resources of Churches which are agreed with it in every point except that of Church government, can profit no one; but there are numbers of fields open to its workers where no such difficulty can arise. Free Churches ought to have a better understanding with each other on this point, and for lack of it they too often thwart each other's efforts when they ought rather to be a source of mutual strength. It should never be forgotten that there is a tendency in weakness to become yet weaker, and if members of the different sections of Evangelical Nonconformity cannot agree to work together where it is impossible that all can be represented without inducing everywhere a condition of feebleness which is fatal to progress, Free Churches will not obtain their true position in the country. The men who counsel this kind of rivalry are the common enemies of all. We, as Congregationalists, are not likely to seek amalgamation with other Churches, and, in fact, our system would prevent it; but might we not draw closer the ties of union with some of the Methodist bodies in particular? The Primitive Methodist and the Methodist Free Churches are in very intimate sympathy with us, and though formal union would neither be desirable nor possible, might there not be an alliance between us which would be eminently useful to all?"—The Congregationalist.

Random Readings.

Our homes should be as holy as our churches, to say the least.

Every branch of the true vine produces the same kind of fruit, let that be much or little.

What are Raphael's Madonnas but the shadow of a mother's love, fixed in permanent outline forever?

We do not believe immortality because we have proved it, but we forever try to prove it because we believe it.

The most heart-rending of all the troubles and agonies of life is to know that some trusted friend has deceived us.

What assurance can I have that Jesus died for me if I am not living truly unto Him?—Dr. Cuyler.

I will listen to any one's convictions, but pray keep your doubts to yourself; I have plenty of my own.

He that follows the Lord fully, will find that goodness and mercy follow him continually. For daily wants he will find daily grace.

He that said, in the Gospel, "I fast twice a week," was a Pharisee; he that can tell how often he hath thought on, or prayed to God to-day, hath not meditated nor prayed enough.—Donne.

A missionary society is said to have adopted a device found on an ancient medal, which represents a bullock standing between a plow and an altar, with the inscription "Ready for either—ready for toll, or for sacrifice."

A child, speaking of his home to a friend, was asked, "Where is your home?" Looking with loving eyes at his mother, he replied, "Where mother is!" Was ever a question more truthfully or touchingly answered?

It is not faith, nor repentance, nor baptism, that actually saves, but the power of Christ. He does the saving, we do the receiving. The Word does not teach, "believing and being baptized saves;" but "he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved," by the Lord who makes the promise.

Poets know, and statesmen ought to know, it is by sentiment when well directed—as by sorrow when well used—great nations live. When sentiment dies out, and mere prosaic calculation of loss and profit takes its place, then comes a Byzantine epoch, a Chinese epoch, decrepitude, and slow decay.—Kingsley.

SINCE it is more important how we live than how we die, and since death is merely the arrival at the end of a journey—the beginning, progress and history of a journey determining what the arrival is to be—we shall do well to dismiss our borrowed trouble with regard to the manner of our departure out of the world, and be sollicitous only with regard to the right discharge of present duty.

LET not mistakes nor wrong directions, of which every man, in his studies and elsewhere, falls into many, discourage you. There is precise instruction to be got by finding that we are wrong. Let a man try faithfully and manfully to be right. It is at the bottom of the condition on which all men have to cultivate themselves. Our very walking is an incessant falling—a falling and catching of ourselves before we come actually to the pavement! It is emblematic of all things man does.—Carlyle.

THE future of a primitive Christian was bright with one object and one event, the Lord and His advent. They knew that He was to come the second time, but they did not know when. So they not only longed and waited, but they watched. His words concerning watching were always in their ears, "Watch, for ye know not when the Son of Man cometh." This is the posture in which it becomes us to be, "looking for and hastening unto the coming of the day of God." Whatever would interfere with this, must be avil. Anything that would lead us to say "My Lord delayeth His coming," must be wrong.