

MORAL INDIGNATION IN BIBLE STORY.

An outburst of moral indignation on occasion of flagrant wrongdoing is evidence of a healthy moral condition. Its absence on such an occasion indicates an indifference to moral destinations found only in lives morally unsound. If a people removed to vigorous, legitimate, resentment on the discovery of wrong doing, it may be inferred that they are morally healthy. If they show no resentment on such a discovery the contrary may be inferred: As the information was flashed over the continent a few weeks ago that the citizens of New York had succeeded in overthrowing a most unrighteous civic government a "thank God" burst from many a thankful heart. For the great upheaval was evidence that the mass of the people were ready, when the occasion arose, to exert themselves with a mighty energy to overthrow unrighteousness, which readiness went to show that the heart of the city was on the whole morally sound. When it was made known, recently, in the capitals of Europe that Turkish Soldiers had massacred, in cold blood, bands of inoffensive Armenian Christians there was such an expression of indignation, that the executive at Constantinople, thought it wise to take immediate steps to amend, as far as possible the wrong done. This vigorous expression of feeling indicated a healthy moral tone. Should the day ever come when such information is received in calm indifference, when men can look upon cruelty and oppression unmoved, they may well exert themselves who have the good of them at heart, for they may know that moral decay is fast eating away the heart of the nations. Therefore while it is to be deplored that occasion arises so frequently for the expression of moral indignation, it is a matter for gratitude that as often as it does arise, there is not wanting a strong and indignant disapproval. This speaks a moral condition full of hope for the future.

The records of early times have preserved impressive and instructive instances of such moral upheavals. Of those found in Bible story, perhaps the most impressive and instructive instance is that recorded in the last three chapters of the Book of Judges. There are some features of the story told in these chapters that are extremely dark and saddening. The awful crime of the guilty rabble, the unrighteous folly of the tribe espousing the cause of these inhuman monsters, the great loss of life going to desolate so many hearts and homes, are of this character. The conduct of the eleven tribes, however, is, on the whole so worthy, and made so prominent in the narrative, that the darker features of the story largely pass from view. In the mighty outburst of indignation that moved the tribes from north to south, from east to west there is brought to light such a love for righteousness and abhorrence of iniquity, and such a determination to establish righteousness and overthrow iniquity that the forbidding features of the story are largely forgotten in admiration of a people endowed with such moral vigor and capable of such an outburst of moral indignation.

The story itself is briefly told. In the town of Gibeah within the limits of Benjamin the worthless rabble committed a horrible crime. Representatives from the eleven tribes demanded the punishment of the guilty: Gibeah and the entire tribe of Benjamin espoused the cause of the accused, and refused to deliver them up to justice. The representatives of the eleven tribes supported by a large army enlisted from all parts of the land between Dan and Beersheba, between Gilead and the west proceeded to enforce their demands. The result was that the guilty and those associated with them were severely punished, but at a fearful cost. Thousands of lives were sacrificed and thousands of homes made desolate. The cost however was not too great. Iniquity for the time being was overthrown. The good name of the nation was kept untarnished and the future of the nation was more clearly seen to be secure. For one thing is certain that a people capable of self sacrificing efforts in behalf of righteousness, such as the eleven tribes put forth at this time, will write their name with a pen of iron in the annals of the nations and will prove themselves one of the mighty forces that go to evolve the history of the world.

To give the eleven tribes all the credit due on the occasion it is necessary to give special prominence to some features of the story. Of these the following may be noted: (a) the parties against whom the crime was committed and the parties punished for the crime. The parties injured by the crime were in a low social condition, perhaps the lowest in the land. A concubine was more a servant than a wife. In demanding the punishment of the wrong doers in the case it was made to appear that Israel was determined to secure justice even for the most lowly. In so doing the people were acting upon a principle which is the basis of the highest modern civiliza-

tion, viz., that all are equal before the law. Nor is it to be overlooked that the party most seriously wronged was no more lowly than unworthy. This fact makes it appear that Israel was bent upon securing justice even for the unworthy. A determination before which even our modern sense of justice may lose much of its self complacency. As to the parties punished they were a tribe in Israel. The eleven tribes regard them as brothers. They speak of them as their brothers. This shows that their indignation was free from hatred and the spirit of revenge, but was akin to the stern impartial righteousness of the justice who passes sentence upon his dearest friend.

(b) The nature of the crime that aroused the righteous displeasure of the people is not to be overlooked. It has been well and frequently said that the moral condition of a people can be inferred, if it be known upon what sins they visit their hottest displeasure. It is a well-known fact that many peoples low in the moral scale who sin against chastity receive but slight disapproval, while many of those of high moral development it offends the moral sense almost more than any other sin. Since it was a flagrant sin of this sort that made such an upheaval in Israel at this time, we are justified in saying that the moral condition of that primitive people compares very favorably with that of many communities in civilized lands of modern times.

(c) The manner in which the eleven tribes restrained and guided their feelings in the matter goes to evidence still further their moral worth. The most important fact in this connection, is their ready submission to divine guidance. They asked for and received instruction from heaven in regard to their duty in the matter. To the guidance of this instruction they submitted the impulses that surged within. Too frequently it is the case that feelings akin to those that moved Israel, through the absence of a wise guiding hand spend themselves in fruitless, even in destructive effort. This is the case, usually, when an indignant people take the law into their own hands. Israel was saved from such unreasoned effort by submitting themselves to the divine will revealed to them. Their example in this regard may well be emulated by all people in the hour of righteous indignation. Nor is it to be forgotten that the eleven tribes made a full inquiry into the charges lodged against the accused, giving them ample opportunity to make what defence they could. It is also only just to add that there was no desire on their part to punish the innocent with the guilty. It was only when the tribe of Benjamin identified themselves with the criminals by espousing their cause that the other tribes proceeded to deal with them in a hostile manner.

Thus it is seen that the conduct of Israel on this occasion was thoroughly worthy, that the more it is brought into the light of day the more worthy it appears to be. It revealed a moral condition on the whole so healthy and vigorous as to make it certain that the nation would be heard from in the future history of the world. It moreover shows that God's treatment of Israel had developed a moral worth even in these early times that in some respects cannot be excelled by modern Christian civilization.

What the Bible Can Do.

"To see how great the contrast is between what the Bible and what other literature can do in shaping human character, it is only necessary to turn from the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam to the book of Psalms, and then compare the social and political spirit of Persia with the social and political spirit of America. The inextinguishable sadness of life woke in Omar nothing more than that defiant despair, that bitter lamentation, that reckless sensuality which express themselves in the exquisite numbers of his undying work. His verses sound over and over again the death knell of human life and hope, and cut the sinews of human effort. In them alternate the delirium of frantic passion and the apathy of satiety or despair. The Psalter on the other hand, that manual of saints and martyrs, strikes in a hundred keys the note of resignation, confidence in God and heroic optimism. This hand-book of saints is also the hand-book of heroes. It contains such songs as rouse nations to a consciousness of life's nobleness and greatness; songs which bring God near to the hearth and to the forum."

I can readily conceive why the Bible was one of the four books which always lay on Byron's table, and it would be easy to fill a lecture with the testimonies, written or unwritten, which painters, sculptors, orators, and poets have rendered to the most thought-suggesting book in the world.—J. Hamilton.