

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

Christ, as in a late-risen Sun of Righteousness. We know how the perfect law, magnified as well as vindicated in the Cross, has brought to the Christian world, along with perfect righteousness, pardon, and acquittal, a better daylight to the soul, a spring-tide of devout affection, a quickened love for duty, and a new fruitfulness in the service of humanity. If healthier moral impulses course in the veins of Christian men, if nobler desires fire their blood, if inward disorder has given place to harmony; if, in a word, moral winter be over and gone, and the time of the singing of birds be come—then indeed is God's glory to be seen, not alone, nor best, in the circling year or the heavens that rain sunshine on the soil. The old Nature-revelation has no glory now in comparison with this glory that excelleth. Far above the laws and forces of his own handiwork in material creation must be that God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who to our own moral nature has revealed Himself in the Scriptures as the righteous Father, and who quickeneth the heart of his earthly child into a moral beauty like his own.

J. OSWALD DYKES.

THE BIGOTRY OF ILLUMINATION.

ISAIAH lxvi. 5.

WE have but to place the parable of the "two men who went up to the temple to pray" side by side with this picturesque Verse, to see that it is one and the selfsame Spirit which speaks to us by the pen of Isaiah and the lips of our Lord. The words of Isaiah are simply an antique version of the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican.

In his day, as in our Lord's, there were those who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others; Pharisees before the Pharisees, who were mainly occupied with the niceties and technicalities of ritual, who condemned their very brethren as unclean, and cried, "Stand off! we are holier than you!" And even in Isaiah's day there were Publicans as well as Pharisees—men of a humble and contrite spirit, who could not so much as look up to Heaven, but smote upon their breasts, saying, "We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteous deeds as filthy rags. Be not very angry, O Lord, neither remember our iniquity for ever." And just as the Lord Jesus, humbling the proud and exalting the humble, pronounced "this man justified rather than the other," so the Lord Jehovah affirms that He will appear to give joy to the contrite souls who trembled at his word, and to put to shame the painted hypocrites who hated them, and cast them out of the synagogue.

But we must try to form a more exact and complete conception of the two classes whom Isaiah depicts than even this parallel affords.

At the time of which the Prophet speaks, the Jews were captives in Babylon. Their captivity was drawing to a close. They were looking forward to times of peace, when, restored to their native land, they should not only build houses, but inhabit them, not only plant vineyards, but enjoy them; when their cities should rise from their ruins, and the whole land become a fold for flocks.¹ The great body of the nation, then as always, took the days as they came, and seldom troubled themselves to reflect whether on the higher, or the

¹ Isaiah lxxv. 8-10, 17-25.

future, aspects of their life. But there were two classes in the nation who were not content to drudge on day by day, who were compelled to look before and after. And, while they both devoted themselves above all to the religious aspects of human life, and sought to keep themselves in correspondence with Heaven, their reflections landed them in quite opposite conclusions.

By far the larger and more influential of these two classes gave themselves mainly to the speculative and the ceremonial elements of religion. They thought much and freely on the truths which lie at the basis of all religion; but they also thought much of ritual, or the mere outward and formal expression of religion. The Prophet tells us that, in the prospect of being restored to the land of their fathers, they were much exercised as to the kind of temple they should build for Jehovah, the sacrifices they were to offer Him, as to how and in what forms they should revive the splendid ritual of his house. And, remembering the stress laid on temple and sacrifice by Moses and the prophets, our first impression of these men is that they must have been the very salt of Israel, that the thoughts and intents of their hearts must have been singularly well-pleasing to God. Naturally, therefore, we are no little surprised to hear¹ God refusing any house they could build for Him, with anger and contempt, and denouncing their sacrifices, the very sacrifices ordained by Moses, as mere insults and crimes. "He that slayeth an ox killeth a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb strangleth a dog; he that offereth an oblation offereth swine's blood; he that burneth incense blesseth an idol." In any connection these words

¹ Isaiah lxvi. 1-3.

would be startling enough; but to find them in a Hebrew Scripture, addressed to Jews bent on honouring Jehovah by reviving the worship of his house, is enough to take away one's breath. What had these men done, into what fatal error had they fallen, that they should be thus roughly rebuked by Him of whom they said, "Let Jehovah be glorified"?

Their contact with the restless, inquisitive, and cultivated intellect of the Babylonians had led them to inquire and think more freely than their fathers had been wont to do. All that we include under the term "education" had become a passion with them during their captivity. They were wild for that "knowledge" which they saw to be "power." But this could be no offence to the God of all wisdom. Nor, I think, can *the bitterness* of his wrath against them be explained either by their adoption of certain Babylonian methods of inquiry into the secrets of the spiritual world, or even by their having partially yielded to the vast and constant pressure of the idolatrous influences by which they were surrounded. It *was* an offence against God, it did "provoke" Him, that they should "sacrifice in the gardens" of the Babylonian temples, and "burn incense on the tiles," or bricks, for the fabrication of which the Babylonians are celebrated to this day, and of which they built their altars. It did seem to Him that they "walked in a way which was not good" when they "sat among the graves" to hold intercourse with the dead, and "spent the night in crypts," where they were initiated in the secret mysteries of heathen philosophy; when they did not scruple to eat that which his law denounced as unclean at idolatrous feasts. It could not but move Him to resentment,

when, forsaking Him and forgetting his holy mountain, they "prepared a table for Fortune, and filled a libation to Destiny." In so far as they fell into these sins, they could not but incur the anger of God.¹

But we must remember that, according to the whole testimony of ancient history, the Jews did not as a people yield to the idolatry of their captors; that, in their captivity, they grew so sick of the dark and cruel worship of idols, as that they have never since lapsed into that sin, prone to it as they had been before. We must also remember that those of them who were initiated into the mysteries of the Babylonian schools and temples may have been, and probably were, sincere seekers after knowledge. Struck and impressed by the superior civilization of their captors, they gave themselves to search out its secret sources, with a view of appropriating whatever they found good in it, and of reproducing it in Hebrew forms. There was no sin in that. Moses had learned much of his wisdom in Egypt. Even the law that came by Moses bears abundant traces of having come to him through an Egyptian mould; while the temple and its services, the priesthood and its vestments, were confessedly framed on Egyptian models. And if Moses might learn from Egypt, why might not these subsequent leaders of Hebrew thought learn from Babylon? That which was a virtue in him could hardly be a sin in them. Yet, despite the goodness of their intention, and in part, apparently, *because* of their intention to modify and enlarge the Mosaic ritual by the Babylonian wisdom, God rejects their temple and worship with the utmost abhorrence: nay, He denounces them with a

¹ Isaiah lxxv. 3, 4, 11.

bitter contempt, for which, as yet, we cannot fully account.

If we would account for it, we must not only take note of their deference to the Babylonian wisdom, we must also observe that these men had fallen into the very sin most offensive to Heaven—hating men to prove their love for God. Puffed up by a sense of their superior wisdom, they affected a singular and unapproachable holiness. *They* had been initiated into sacred and secret mysteries; *they* had held converse with the spirits of the dead; they had been admitted to the most interior and solemn acts of the Babylonian worship; they were purposing to modify and reform the Mosaic law and ritual: and on all these grounds they claimed a sanctity special and peculiar to themselves. *They* were not of the common strain. They were not as other men were, but high above them. They posed themselves as on a pedestal, and, gathering their immaculate robes about them, they cried to their brethren, “Stand off! we are holier than you!” Chosen and set apart, as they conceived, by special revelations and superior sanctity, they even “hated” their brethren, and “thrust them out,” *i.e.*, excommunicated them from their fellowship. Nay, worse still, and the crowning sin of all, they made God Himself a partaker in their sins—hating their brethren *for his Name's sake*, and thrusting them out *that He might be glorified!*

Now, there is no sin against the Divine Love so offensive as this, none which so deeply moves the Divine resentment. In the Old Testament Scriptures we see a God who is merciful and gracious, easy to be entreated for any sin committed simply against Him-

self, but who flames into fierce anger so soon as man sins against man. In the Scriptures of the New Testament we see that the God manifest in the flesh is even ready to make excuse for his disciples when they are simply lacking in the sympathy or the loyalty due to Him, but that He turns upon them with his severest rebukes the moment they attempt to keep the little ones, the humble and despised, from Him, or to "forbid" those who do not "follow with them." And when men not only sin against men, but *hate* them, and not only hate them, but hate them *for God's sake*; not only cut them off from their sympathy and fellowship, but cut them off *for the glory of God*: when they not only commit the sin most offensive to Him, but commit it under cover of zeal for his service, we can well understand—and we of the Church need especially to lay this fact to heart—that his anger against them should be fierce, and bitter, and well-nigh implacable. They cannot love the Father whom they have not seen, unless they love the brothers whom they have seen; and therefore they reach the very climax of iniquity and hypocrisy when they hate their brethren out of love to God.

There is a bigotry of Ignorance; but there is also a more deadly bigotry of Illumination: and it is these illuminated bigots, boasting themselves of their larger wisdom and superior sanctity, who constitute one of the classes—what we may call the *Pharisee* class—placed before us by the Prophet. The other class—which we may designate the *Publican* class—are characterized by a single phrase: they "*tremble at the word*" of God. But this phrase is expanded in the second verse of the Chapter: "On this man will I

look—*on him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembleth at my word.*”

The second, the excommunicated class, then, consists of “the faithful remnant” of Israel. Hated by their brethren, they are loved by God; cut off from the Church, they nevertheless compose the true Church. And they are described as men who above all seek to acquaint themselves with the Divine Will. Perceiving that they have opposed that Will, that the word of God condemns their personal and national sins, they are filled with a humble contrition for their sins, a holy fear of the Word that condemns them. Unlike their illuminated brethren, they have no conceit of a superior holiness; they do not account themselves as in any sense holy, but as sinful and unclean. The prayer recorded in Chapters lxiii. and lxiv. is *their* prayer, and in this prayer we may hear the breathings of their humble and contrite spirit. They know how their brethren regard them, that they have been thrust out of the Jewish fellowship. They admit, “Abraham is ignorant of us, and Israel will not acknowledge us.” But, instead of being inflamed with resentment, and retorting scorn with scorn, they are moved to supplication and confession. “God,” they say, “in Himself so good and kind, is angry with us. Then we must have sinned. Had we continued in his ways, we had been saved.” And then they fall to the most pathetic and exhaustive confession of sin. “We, all of us, became as an unclean thing, and all our righteousness as filthy rags. There was none that called on thy Name, that stirred himself up to cleave to Thee. Therefore hast Thou hid thy face from us, and made us to melt away in the hand of our iniquities.” Confession rises into the

most plaintive and piercing entreaty. "Yet now, O Lord, Thou art our Father. We are the clay, and Thou our Maker. We are all of us the work of thy hands. Be not very angry, O Lord, neither remember our iniquity for ever. Behold, consider, we beseech Thee; we are all of us thy people!"¹ Where shall we find words more pathetic and imploring than these, or words which more fitly express the humble and contrite spirit that trembles at God's word? As we listen to them we feel that they flow up through the rifts of a broken heart. The men who utter this confession and prayer stand at the very farthest remove from the proud affectation of superior sanctity which breathes in the words of their brethren who hated them: "Stand off! we are holier than you; you, who are not holy at all!" In the one class, we have the haughtiest assumption of holiness; in the other, the profoundest consciousness of sin.

There is another point of contrast between them. The men who claimed a superior illumination and sanctity "*hated*" their brethren and cast them off. But these humble spirits will not repay hate with hate. They love and pray for the very men who hate and ban them. Abraham may be ignorant of them; Israel may not acknowledge them; but they will not separate themselves from any who bear those honoured names. In their prayer, rich in the deepest pathos, there is perhaps no more pathetic touch than this,—that no less than four times within its narrow compass we find the words *all of us*. "*We, all of us*, became as an unclean thing; *We, all of us*, faded like the leaves; *We are, all of us*, the work of thy hand; *We are,*

¹ Isaiah lxiii. 16; lxiv. 5-9.

all of us, thy people." With a love that absorbs and transcends all hate, they *will* pray for, they *will* associate themselves with, those who have banned them and cast them from them. They cannot confess their own sins without also confessing the sins of their judges and censors; they cannot ask the Divine mercy for themselves without asking it also for the very men who have shewn no mercy to them.

So that the contrast between these two classes is radical and complete. The one is characterized by a towering spiritual pride and an utter lack of charity; the other, by humility and love. The latter class, the men of a humble and contrite spirit, may not be so wise as their brethren who hate them; they may not be so zealous for modes of worship as those who thrust them out; "the glory of God" may not be so often on their lips. They may be outcasts from the commonwealth and lie under the ban of the Church — as our English fathers did for many a day. But, because they love their very enemies; because they bless those that curse them, and pray for those who despitefully use them, the ultimate victory lies with them. When God appears, it is they who will rejoice and be glad: it is their self-righteous self-complacent brethren who will be put to shame.

This is the Divine judgment on the judges and the judged. It is given briefly and dramatically in the passage before us: Hear ye the word of Jehovah, ye that tremble at his word. Your brethren that hate you and thrust you out for my Name's sake have said, Let Jehovah be glorified! But He shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed. This is the verdict of God, and it is difficult to say which of the two classes would

be the more astonished by it. Doubtless the Pharisaic *illuminati*, the men who trusted in themselves and despised others, who looked down on their brethren from their lofty pedestal with the fine scorn of a more liberal creed and a more æsthetic ritual, would be amazed and confounded to hear that they were less acceptable to God than the very men whom they hated and banned; nay, that they were rejected by Him. But even they, I think, could hardly be so astonished as the poor and contrite spirits who had meekly submitted to their scorn. *These*, surely, could hardly have believed for joy and wonder as the Word, at which they had been wont to tremble, declared them to be the true servants of Jehovah, and warned their haughty self-complacent judges: "Behold, my servants shall eat, but ye shall famish! Behold, my servants shall drink, but ye shall thirst! Behold, my servants shall rejoice, but ye shall be ashamed! Behold, my servants shall shout for gladness of heart, but ye shall cry out for sorrow of heart; ye shall wail for anguish of spirit: and ye—ye who have cursed so many—shall leave your name for a curse to my chosen ones! *You* build me a temple! Heaven is my throne, and the earth my footstool. What house can *ye* build for me, and how can ye make ready a place in which I will rest? *You* offer me a sacrifice! He of you that slayeth an ox killeth a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb strangleth a dog. Your very worship is offensive and abominable to me as an unclean offering or a public crime." ¹

Such a verdict as this must have been a terrible blow to men who had put on the airs of favourites of Heaven, and had despised their simple and unlettered

¹ Isaiah lxx. 13-15; lxxvi. 1-3.

brethren. And it may very well be that, in the fact that the prophets were constantly bringing them such verdicts as these, we have the explanation of a point which has much perplexed historians and commentators. The difficulty has been to account for the historical fact that only a few of the children of Israel cared to return from Babylon to Judæa, and that, of the few thousands who came back from the Captivity, hardly any appear to have been men of learning and wealth and influence. But if the Jews who had acquainted themselves with the wisdom of Babylon, and acquired opulence or influence in the land of their captivity, found themselves constantly passed over by God, and the preference given to men of a humble and contrite spirit; if the Voice of Inspiration met their claims with contempt, and denounced their very wisdom and sanctity and zeal as new offences against Jehovah, we can easily understand that they would not be eager to adventure their all in his service. Why should they care to make great sacrifices and brave great dangers in order to serve a God who threatened them with his anger, to build up a social and religious state in which their special gifts would be of no value, in which they could win no honour, for which they were condemned beforehand as unfit? If Jehovah cared only for the humble and contrite souls who trembled at his word, and with whom they had refused to associate, let Him have them: but why should *they* abandon their studies, their high position, their reputation and emoluments, to serve Him? If they came to the conclusion that it was not worth their while to link their fate to that of the poor and scanty bands led back to Jerusalem by Zerubbabel and Ezra, but resolved to

stay in the great busy world in which they had acquired place and consequence, we need not, I think, be very much surprised.

The great lesson of this passage is a lesson very pertinent to the present time. There is a bigotry of Illumination as well as a bigotry of Ignorance, a bigotry of Breadth as well as a bigotry of Narrowness. Against the latter most of us who write and read this Magazine are, perhaps, on our guard. Sectarianism is not attractive to us. The man who can see nothing good beyond the limits of his own fellowship, of his own branch of the universal Church, has been sufficiently stigmatized to make us resent any comparison of ourselves with him. The man who prays thus with himself, "God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are, nor even as this Episcopalian, this Presbyterian, this Baptist," is not likely, we admit, to go down to his house justified; and we may therefore strive, with more or less success—not often with complete success, I fear—against the spirit of his prayer. But are we sufficiently on our guard against another, and a still more fatal, temper? Our very breadth and liberality of thought may bring us under the Prophet's censure by another road. The Jews condemned by Isaiah were those who had most freely acquainted themselves with all the wisdom of Babylon, and were most willing to modify both their creed and their worship, so as to adapt it to their larger outlook. It was in the full pride of their superior wisdom and more reasonable service that they separated themselves from their brethren, and thrust them out from all community of thought and fellowship of spirit. And, in like manner, we may have yielded to the spirit of our age :

we may have suffered our thoughts to widen with the years; our creed may be broader; we may breathe a more large and kindly air than of old. And we may be so conscious of the advance we have made, as to have lost, in some measure, the humble and contrite spirit to which God manifests Himself in love. We may look, with the fine scorn of superior intelligence, or more cultivated taste, or what we mistake for "a larger charity," on men who still stand where we ourselves once stood, and hold the views we once held. Some touches of this superfine scorn may be seen, I think, in our schools of science, of literature, and of art. And we can hardly hope that no trace of it is to be found in the Church—in ourselves. For some of us, at least, it must be very hard to maintain terms of sincere brotherly communion with those who, as we deem, are less advanced than ourselves; we may even hate a bigot with perfect bigotry; to our Publicans—*Philistines* we sometimes call them—we may be tempted to exclaim, "Stand off! I am of a more refined intelligence and a broader heart than you." We may even suffer this evil spirit to taint our worship, and our prayer may run, "God, we thank Thee that we are not as other men are—Romanists, Ritualists, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, nor even as this Methodist. We have done with sectarianism, and keep no terms with it." Forgetting that, if we have any higher wisdom than others, it is that we may teach them what God has taught us; forgetting that, if we have any greater strength, it is that we may bear the infirmities of the weak; forgetting that, if our charity be of a purer and broader strain, it is that we may love more men and love them more

purely ; we also, in God's name and all with a view to his glory, may separate ourselves from brethren who, though they are ignorant and narrow and suspicious, may nevertheless tremble at the word of God, and heartily long to know and do his will. *O hear the word of the Lord, ye that sin against the spirit of the Lord, by despising any of your fellows, however ignorant and weak they may be. If ye hate your brethren, and thrust them out for his Name's sake, saying, Let Jehovah be glorified! He shall appear to their joy, and ye shall be ashamed.*

EDITOR.

THE SECOND ADVENT.

ST. MATTHEW XXV. 5.

IF it be true that belief in the ministry of angels has to a great extent faded out of our modern Christianity, and if (as I have tried to shew in a former paper) an account can be given of that change which is quite consistent with a very deep and earnest faith, I believe that we may turn to another and even more important article of historical Christianity with something of the like feeling and of the like hope. And, surely, it is not necessary again to argue that it is well for us to face every change of this kind with the utmost honesty. To fling away any article of one's creed, or to hold it as an open question, just because doubts arise concerning it in the minds of others or in one's own, is a rashness and a folly. But when there has been a slow but very general fading away of beliefs, of feelings, or of expectations, which once were part and parcel of ordinary Christian faith, it is our obvious duty to look the matter in the face, and get, if possible, to the bottom of it.