CHAPTER V.

Retribution not Revenge.

BUT our opponents may now exclaim, that, by proving that God's motive in his punishments is not merely remedial but retributive, we only succeed in making him out a vindictive person, and therefore abhorrent, instead of an object of reverence to right minds. They say that vindicatory punishments are mere revenge, and revenge is sinful and odious. They assert that the concept of retributive sufferings, inflicted merely to satisfy moral resentment, is barbaric. Savage and barbarous rulers thought this right, and under the name of justice remorselessly indulged their spite and malice against their enemies. And our opponents claim that, as the light of Christian civilization spreads, this cruel notion is corrected. We must therefore ascertain and settle the truth as to this sentiment of vindicatory justice, as it is ascribed to good men, and especially to the Divine Ruler. Is the desire for simple retribution upon guilt malicious revenge, or is it grounded in a reasonable and necessary moral judgment? Is this intrinsic desert of suffering in the sinful agent the counterpart to that intrinsic title to welfare as due to virtuous agents, upon which our opponents insist

most strenously? And is this the simple and primary aim of the wise and righteous Ruler in punishing to requite the ill-desert of the guilty man? We assert the latter set of propositions. We do not disclaim for the Divine Ruler all remedial policy, nor all benevolent motive in the sufferings which he visits upon sin. Doubtless, among the manifold purposes of his wisdom, he does aim to recall transgressors from their sins, and, even in his sterner acts of retributive justice, he has an eye to deterring other men from sin by the spectacle of its woeful consequences. But behind and underneath all these legitimate and benevolent policies is God's fundamental judgment, that sin is to be punished *because it deserves to be*, because impartial justice requires due penalty, just as it demands reward for virtue.

The position is proved by conclusive facts in the consciousness of all men. Their moral intuition recognizes ill desert as an essential element in evil action. Desert of what? Moral ill-desert is but desert of natural ill. It is an immediate judgment of the reason that voluntary sin deserves penal suffering, Ask any unsophisticated mind why a given penalty is proper, and it will reply, simply because the sinner deserves it. Every person, whether sympathetic and benevolent or harsh and revengeful, when shocked by a crime, feels an instinctive desire that it may receive due

retribution. These all think that this is not revenge, but a sentiment of justice. If the criminal escapes judgment, they say that the "gallows has been cheated." So opposite are the two sentiments of retributive justice and revenge, the most compassionate, pure, sympathetic women and ingenuous youths feel this sentiment of justice most keenly, while they would shrink with the greatest reluctance from being obliged to witness the pangs of the wicked. The most righteous and amiable magistrate is at once the most certain to pronounce the righteous judgment against crime, and the most tender and sad in doing it. Such judges are not seldom seen to assert the inexorable claims of the law with tears coming down their faces.

The same position is proved by those principles which direct our penal administration. Not only do legislators and lawyers, but all the people, see these principles to be self-evident. For instance, let us suppose that counsel for a murderer, after a just verdict of death rendered, and after admitting that there were no adequate mitigating circumstances, should move the judge to set aside the verdict simply because the fear and anguish of the condemned man were pitiable. Any righteous judge, learned in the law, would reply that such a motion was entirely improper; that it was tantamount to requiring him to perpetrate injustice and to become a traitor to the state and to his own

official oath; and if the counsel grew pertinacious in his claim, he would risk being punished for contempt. Or if the repentance of the condemned man were urged as the ground for setting aside a just verdict, the judge would explain that while this was, of course, the proper feeling for the criminal, it constituted no satisfaction whatever for the penal debt, no just recompense for guilt. The due punishment alone must pay that debt of justice. Or let this plea be urged that this murderer had slain but one man, and had always been a harmless person before, and would certainly become so in future. The judge would say this was nothing to the purpose; that because this peaceful life only satisfied the just demands of the law, it could not be offered as payment for guilt of the murder; for this the only compensation was the due and just punishment. We here see that human law does not believe the medicinal or remedial effect of penalty to be its main end; because it proceeds to exact the punishment just the same whether there is or is not any evidence that the criminal is cured of his moral disease by his own penitence and reformation.

We introduce a still more conclusive argument. Sin is the antithesis of virtue. That moral principle in the reason which makes us desire the reward of righteousness is one and the same with that which makes us crave the due punishment of

wickedness; moral approval of virtue and moral indignation against evil are not effluences of two principles in the reason, but of one only. They are differentiated solely by the opposition of the two contrasted objects. The sincere approbation of the good necessitates moral indignation against the evil, because the objects of the two sentiments are opposites. Everybody thinks thus. Nobody would believe that man to be capable of sincere moral admiration for good actions who should declare himself incapable of moral resentment towards vile conduct. Now, then, if we would have a God without moral indignation against sin, we must have one without any moral pleasure in righteousness. If we must have a God capable of disregarding and violating the essential tie between sin and its penalty, we must have him equally capable of disregarding the righteous tie between meritorious obedience and reward. How would our opponents like that result? They are the very men who hold that the good man's title to heaven is grounded on this inviolable bond which, in the judgment of the good God, unites righteousness and reward. If we were to say that God is capable of capriciously rending that bond, they would fill the very heavens with their outcry against the injustice and even blasphemy of such a doctrine. Yet these are the men who insist that God may capriciously rend the exactly parallel bond between

guilt and deserved penalty. The magnetic needle presents an illustration exactly. When the little bar of steel is charged with this electric energy its upper end invariably seeks the north pole, and as invariably is repelled from the south pole of the earth. They are not two opposite energies in the north pole of this needle, but one only; it is the same magnetism which causes the north pole to attract and the south pole to repel its upper end, because the magnetic conditions of the earth's two poles are opposite. What should we think of the mariner who should tell us that he had so marvellous a needle that its upper end was always and certainly attracted to the north pole, yet not repelled from the south pole? We would know that he was either ignorant or a liar.

Now, we must believe that God's righteousness is the same in its essential principles with that which he requires of us, and this by two reasons, as even the pagan poet knew, "We are God's offspring." He formed our spirits in his own image and likeness. Again, God is the moral governor of mankind. If the righteousness which he requires of us were not the same in principle with his own, ruler and ruled could not understand each other. But Scripture expressly confirms our position here. As Proverbs xvii. 15, "He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the Lord." Romans ii. 9-11, "God

will render indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul that doeth evil. . . . But glory, honor and peace to every man that seeketh good. . . . *For there is no respect of persons with God.*" 2 Thessalonians i. 6, 7, "Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled rest with us." In each of these scriptures, and in many others of similar import, the retribution of guilt is declared to be the exhibition of the same righteousness (not revenge), with the reward of merit.

Again, the Scriptures ascribe retributive justice to God as his essential attribute, not an optional exercise of his physical power. He is declared to be perfectly righteous, and righteousness in a ruler is defined as the principle which gives to every one his due with unvarying impartiality. "Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne." "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil." "He hateth all workers of iniquity." In Ezekiel xviii., he triumphantly asks the sinful Jews: "Are not my ways equal, saith the Lord? (impartial); are not your ways unequal?" He then proceeds to explain this impartiality with the utmost precision, as the expression of that impartiality both in punishing the backsliders and pardoning the penitent. If distributive righteousness is an essential attribute in God, then his immutability necessitates its impartial and uni-

versal application to both classes of sinners. The declarative holiness of God necessitates the same regularity. The proper expression of that holiness is the divine action, rather than the divine words. If God rewarded guilt with immunity and welfare, in as many cases as he thus rewards merit, rational creatures could see no evidence at all of his holiness. Were he to vacillate only to the extent of rewarding guilt with welfare in the minority of cases, to that extent he would impair this manifestation of his holiness. The attribute of truth is surely perfect and essential in God. But this also insures the invariable exercise of his punitive justice, for he has not only said, but sworn, that "the wicked shall not go unpunished."

But the Scriptures come still nearer to the issue in debate. They declare expressly in many places that in God's administration sin is unpardonable until satisfaction is made for its guilt. In Numbers xxxii. 23, God says by Moses, "Be sure your sin will find you out." In Romans i. 18, he declares by Paul that "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven *against all* ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." In two most solemn and emphatic places (Exodus xxxiv. 7; Nahum i. 3), Jehovah declares that he will by no means clear the guilty. The crowning evidence is in the words of the Redeemer himself, in that very sermon on the Mount, which our opponents are so fond of claiming, Mat-

thew v. 17, 18, "Think not I am come to destroy the law and the prophets; I am not come to destroy but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, until heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle of the law shall not fail until *all be fulfilled.*"

The rite of bloody sacrifice, unquestionably ordained for man, the sinner, by God, proves the same truth. Until the Lamb of God came and took away the guilt of the world, God's requirement of bloody sacrifice was invariable. From Abel down to Zachariah, the father of John, in order that believers might pray, the smoke of the burning victim must ascend from the central altar. The Apostle Paul has summed up the invariable history in the words (Heb. ix. 22), "And without shedding of blood *is no remission.*" But this awful rite, the death and burning of an innocent and living creature, could typify but one truth, substitution. Compared with the milder ritual of the new dispensation, bloody sacrifice was more expensive and inconvenient, yet God regularly required it. It is manifest that his object was to keep this great truth, penal substitution, prominent before the minds of sinful men, because, like our opponents, they are so prone to forget it.

But our opponents here advance two cavils which they think are very decisive. They cry: the best civil magistrates sometimes pardon crime without satisfaction, and their moral credit is

thereby enhanced with their subjects instead of being lowered. Why may it not be all the more so with the God of love? The reply is very simple. Because those cases of pardon, in which alone human rulers can properly set aside a verdict without penal satisfaction for guilt, are cases which can never possibly occur under God's jurisdiction. They must fall under one of these heads: where either the evidence of guilt has been afterwards found inconclusive, or it is uncertain whether the condemned man acted with criminal intention, or where unforseen circumstances are about to change the operation of the sentence of the law into something more severe or destructive than was justly intended. But these cases arise because all human rulers are fallible; in the administration of an omniscient, infallible God, they never can occur. But every wise man knows that these are the only cases in which it is safe and right for human magistrates to exercise the pardoning power. Again, it is objected that this God enjoins on us the forgiveness of injuries without retribution as at once the loveliest, the most Godlike Christian grace. Therefore this dogma must be false, which represents God as always unforgiving until his vengeance is satisfied. They brandish before us the Lord's prayer. They proclaim the words of Paul, requiring us to forgive our enemies "even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven us."

Out of their own mouths we easily refute them. For Paul teaches, in this their *textus palmarius*, that God does not forgive his enemies after the fashion they claim, but for *Christ's sake*. Which is to say that God's forgiveness of his enemies is grounded in Christ's satisfaction for their guilt, and it implies that those enemies of God who reject Christ's satisfaction are not forgiven by God. The forgiveness required of us is to be after the pattern of God's forgiveness (as he, etc.). Now, how does God forgive his enemies? *Upon condition of repentance and faith;* not otherwise. And Christ, in teaching Peter, shows that our forgiveness is not required to go beyond God's. If thy brother "trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him." (Luke xvii. 4.) But what if the offender says, "I do not repent." Christ answers (in another place), don't seek revenge, but let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican. But the weakness and folly of this cavil is best revealed by this question: In what relation do we stand to our trespassers in this forgiveness of injuries? In the relation of fellows, equals, sinners toward God like them, and fallible creatures. In what relation does God stand to his trespassers? In that of sovereign owner, and also in that of infallible chief-justice and magistrate. That makes all the difference. "Vengeance

is mine, saith the Lord." The visiting of due retribution upon guilt is the exclusive prerogative of God; because his sovereignty, his power, his purity, his infallible wisdom and justice qualify him for that task. And therefore we who are disqualified are not to meddle with it. Is it not fatuous to infer that because God says we are unfit, and therefore must not meddle with his prerogative, therefore he must not exercise it himself? Even the poorest human magistrate sees this difference perfectly. Let us suppose that a thief duly convicted should reason with him to set aside a just verdict in this way: "Squire, you are a charitable Christian; last year when I and my family were in distress your charity gave me relief. This verdict puts us in distress again; the same charity should again release us." We presume the plainest squire would know how to say: "Thou fool, then I was acting toward thee as a private person and neighbor. I took what was mine own to succor thy distress; now I sit in the judgment seat; I represent the delegated rights of the law, of eternal justice and of God; these are not my own to give away in charity. I am sacredly sworn to uphold them. Would it be charity in me to commit theft and perjury to extend succor to you in this present distress, where you deserve none?"

Our opponents are fond of charging that this our doctrine of God's distributive justice is harsh, barbaric, bloody; that ours is "the theology of the

shambles." Our just retort is, theirs is the theology of dishonesty. None could declare more loudly than they that for a ruler to rob an obedient subject of the reward pledged to his merit would be false, dishonest, unprincipled. We have proved along with the Scripture that the bond which connects just retribution with guilt is morally the same. Do they insist upon inventing a dishonest divine ruler? The Psalmist says, that they who invent an imaginary god "are like unto him." So are they which "worship him." Were we as severe, we might justly say to our readers, You had better not entrust your social rights, even to people who worship a god not governed by principle.

We now reach a point where we place our opponents in a fatal dilemma. They say there cannot be any substitutionary punishment of guilt, that it would be an immoral legal fiction. Very well; then they and all their adherents are self-condemned to an inevitable and everlasting hell! For they certainly are sinners, and God's doctrine is that in his final judgment all sin is unpardonable Sinners may be pardoned: but the guilt never. For this, satisfaction must be made, if not through a substitute, then by the sinner himself. If, then, substitution is absurd and unrighteous, then we testify solemnly to these gentlemen that the sole result of their boasted philosophy will be, as surely as God is God, to seal them all, self-condemned, to perdition.