

CHAPTER VI.

The Witness of Human Consciousness and Experience.

THESE all confirm the proposition that, under a right moral government, punishment, either personal or vicarious, must follow guilt invariably. This is what is meant by that fear of death which is present, both instinctive and rational, in every human consciousness. Some men die calmly under the delusions of agnosticism, universalism, or utter-weariness of life. Some, like the skeptic, David Hume, effect before company a cheerful indifference which they are far from feeling. But the average, the natural, and the reasonable state of the human spirit which is not sustained by a conscious justification through Christ's vicarious righteousness is to dread death, because it expects penal evil in another life. Why this dread and expectation? "The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law!" And this is the final judgment of the guilty conscience against itself in that most honest hour, when the approach of "death, that most potent, wise, and eloquent teacher," has dissipated the deceitful illusions of life and compelled the soul to face the truth.

Reference has been made to the sacrifices re-

quired in the Old Testament. Reason and Scripture both declare that these were types, and that this is the principle which they teach by emblem: expiation must be made for guilt in order that pardon may take place. But as the meaning of pardon is that it releases the culprit himself from punishment, this needed expiation is to be made by a substitute. The lamb, the kid, the bullock are themselves "clean beasts," innocent of guilt, but they die in place of the guilty worshipper, in order that he may pray and be pardoned; thus teaching the substitution of one innocent for the guilty, more clearly than any words. It is noticeable, moreover, that all pagan religions employ bloody sacrifice, either animal or human, and in the same sense. When idolaters pray, they feel that their gods must be propitiated. Why this? Because deep down in their consciousness they have the judgment, it may be surd and distorted, that, for the guilty, satisfaction must be made to their gods in order that they may be propitiated. The essential fact is, that this obstinate conviction inheres in the minds of all pagans and polytheists of all races and ages. Whence does it come? Will our opponents answer that this is nothing but the persistence of a traditionary superstition derived from the ignorant and senseless usage of the first parents of the race? This provokes two questions in reply. Whence did these first parents get the usage; and was it in fact the dictate of a senseless

superstition, or of a command from God? Reason and Scripture say the latter. The second question is harder: How comes it that such a tradition should persist through hundreds of ages, where similar traditions asserting the truths of God's unity, spirituality, and infinite perfections have been lost, although so much more obvious to right reason than the religious value of animal sacrifice? The tradition would have been lost long ago from pagan minds were it not sustained by the echo of their own moral intuitions.

We do not advance considerations drawn from the policy of God's rectoral relations to man as our foremost or most weighty arguments; but they have their inferior place. When a superior being assumes the office of judge and ruler over men, he enters into moral relations with them; and, if he is perfect in wisdom and justice, he will infallibly administer his judicial functions on that plan which is most promotive of the proper ends of his government. Now, our opponents say that those ends are remedial and deterrent. But experience proves that the execution of penalties should be regular and invariable in order to secure these results. The least uncertainty in the sequence of punishment upon transgression will raise in the mind of the man under temptation a doubt and a hope whether he, in this instance, may not sin and yet escape. This doubt weighs with the tempted mind much more than it is worth. The sinner's

hope magnifies his chances of escape. Thus the ends of justice, and even of benevolent policy, require of this Divine Ruler invariable regularity in punishing. This, in the end, must prove the most humane as well as the most impartial. If he allows some guilty persons to escape when others are punished, he loses that moral respect from his subjects which is so necessary to good government. Tolerated transgressions are as mischievous as they are illegal; they are contagious; they strongly threaten the welfare of the law-abiding. The ruler who is uncertain in attaching just penalties to the guilty raises this question, so damaging to his authority, in the minds of his subjects: What right has he thus to jeopardize our welfare, duly earned by obedience and guaranteed to us by the covenant of his own law, in order to favor the very law-breakers who deserve no favor? Is this either just, wise, or benevolent?

So powerful is this inferior argument, drawn from the interests of the subjects of his moral government; but we can never grant that these are its highest end. God's own glory presents an end unspeakably more worthy; and it needs no exposition to show that for that highest end absolute regularity, equity, and impartiality are necessary. If penalty follows the transgressions of some, it must follow the transgressions of all. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"