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THE LAW OF GOD.

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Moral System—desirableness of—Excellency of law—seen in its nature—tendency—approved by conscience—exemplified by Christ—Propriety of punishment—Yet some not punished—why—Atonement—Bearing of on impenitent—Punishment inevitable.

THE fact that sin, over and above all other views of it, is to be especially regarded as the violation of law, rendering the transgressor obnoxious to the displeasure of the moral Governor, brings us to another branch of our subject, and constrains us to consider the nature of the system under which man is placed, and in which he stands toward his Creator in the relation of the governed to the governor.

It is most abundantly evident—from all the circumstances of the case, to which we need not now refer—that God has adopted a plan of government for his intelligent creatures, that is admirably suited to their natures. He governs them not by mere force, as inanimate matter is blindly obedient to the physical impulses to which it is subjected; nor by instinctive impulses as the brute creation is governed; but by an intelligent appeal to them; making known his will, express-

ing what he would have them to do, promising rewards to obedience, punishment to transgression. This is how God hath chosen to govern intelligent creatures; it is what is meant by the common phrase, "the moral government of God," which is a government of intelligent creatures, by an appeal to their sense of right, and by an address to their hopes and fears—in other words by the presentation of suitable motives; i. e., by rewards and punishments.

On this subject we must dwell a little, as it greatly assists toward a right conclusion concerning future punishment, and indeed concerning other important doctrines. In fact it would be impossible for us to form correct ideas on our present subject without referring, though briefly, to the nature of a system of moral government. We may however treat the matter historically, as fact, rather than abstractedly as doctrine; for our religion is eminently one of facts. That God made man upright, we are assured by the highest authority. Man as a creature was perfect. Not, however, that we are to understand by this anything incompatible with the fact that he was of course devoid of all experience, and was placed only at the very starting point of his course. But there was no suitable endowment withheld; God looked upon him and pronounced him good. Let us also look at him before sin entered, and while yet the groves of Eden echoed to his joyous tones. He had perceptive faculties by which he could discern the nature and bearing of things about him; he had appetites the gratification of which would be one source of pleasure, while it would al-

so sustain his being; he had a moral sense, a sense of right and wrong which would dictate to him as to the proper exercise of both his intellectual and his lower faculties; and he was free to act as he might choose. Thus he had all the faculties we can deem at all desirable; and all his powers as he came from the Creator's hand were nicely balanced, or adjusted.

Now let us suppose the improvement, the elevation of this being, to be the benevolent object which his Maker proposes. How shall this be accomplished? In other words how shall his character be improved, matured? What system shall be adopted with a view to the progressiveness of his character, and thus the increase of his happiness? We have admired him as constituted by his Maker, endowed as we have seen with certain faculties. But must not these faculties be exercised? Can there be growth in character without these faculties being called into exercise? Assuredly not. And if it be wise and good to endow man with moral and intellectual faculties, and with appetites, and with the power of volition, or will, implying choice, it must be wise and good to call into exercise the faculties bestowed; the only way, too, in which we can conceive of real growth in character and happiness. But how much this involves! In fact it involves the whole question; for what have we asserted but that it is wise and good to place man in such circumstances as that there shall be objects to exercise his perceptive faculties, to solicit his appetites, to invite his volitions, and thus to call out the decision of conscience, or the moral sense, in

harmony with which ought to be all his volitions and conduct.

But this implies, of necessity, the possibility of going wrong. Choice necessarily involves this. In other words, placing an intelligent creature like man in circumstances the most fitted, by the exercise of all his faculties, to mature his character, and thus elevate him in the scale of being, involves the possibility of failure, of deterioration, of sin and misery. For infallibility belongs to God alone. It is an incommunicable prerogative. It would be a contradiction in terms to speak of an infallible creature. We might as well talk of a created God. And to suggest that God should so interpose, with a creature thus situated, as to secure right volitions at every moment, is to suggest that which would be incompatible with the system which we had previously concluded to be the best for an intelligent creature thus constituted to be placed in. For the proper point of time for us to judge of the desirableness of a moral system, is when the creature thus endowed, with all his attributes exquisitely balanced, enters on his course; which we perceive indeed to involve the possibility, not necessity, of failure; but which at the same time exhibits the best method, if only vigilantly attended to by the probationer, of continued and unlimited improvement.

An eminent writer has well said—"We will not say that we envy our first parents; for we feel that there may be a higher happiness than theirs; a happiness won through struggle with inward and outward foes,—the happiness of power and victory,—the happiness of disinterested

sacrifices and wide spread love,—the happiness of boundless hope, and of thoughts which wander through eternity."*

Now the circumstances in which man was placed, by calling into exercise his various faculties, were admirably adapted for his improvement. He was forbidden to eat of the fruit of a certain tree. His powers of perception would enable him to perceive the desirableness of the food; and his appetite would be stimulated. He might also perceive the undesirableness of indulging his appetite, because the fruit was prohibited; and in aid of this would come the moral sense, the feeling that it would be wrong to eat—right to abstain. The higher susceptibilities ought, we will say, to triumph over the lower. And if they had, how decidedly would the character have been raised by the conflict with the temptation, and by the victory gained. There would have been an increased tone of vigor; while the consciousness of doing right, and the exercise of the higher faculties which had been thus stimulated, would have raised the tone of happiness. Moreover, a habit of subordinating the lower to the higher susceptibilities would have begun to be formed; and every repetition of such conquest would have strengthened the habit of virtue, till eventually such an elevation would have been attained, as that the certainty of always acting rightly might have been confidently predicted.

But on the other hand, and as it happened, the lower susceptibilities were allowed to operate un-

* Dr. Channing, in his Review of the Character and Writings of Milton.

duly; the tempting fruit was gazed on; its alleged properties increasingly stimulated the desire to partake; the exquisite balance of the faculties trembled, and was eventually destroyed by the allowed increase of appetite; present gratification was coveted; and in an evil hour man reached forth his hand, and contrary to the moral sense, broke the law of his Maker.

But to conclude a branch of the subject which by universal consent transcends the ability of the human mind in its present incipient state to fathom, and on which it would be the height of presumption to imagine that one could cast more than the feeblest possible glimmering of light, even if so much as this may be conceded; we may, I think, very satisfactorily perceive this, viz., that if it be wise and good to endow man with faculties, it must be every way desirable that they should be exercised. Thus only can the intelligent creature advance to higher and yet higher grades. But if a moral system be the wisest and best for such a creature, as a whole, then the contingent evils which necessarily may arise (not must) do not in any degree impeach the wisdom and goodness of the benevolent Creator.

To return then from the precincts, which we had nearly touched, of a subject at present shrouded in perhaps impenetrable mystery, and confessedly surrounded like the throne of the Eternal with clouds and darkness; emerging again from the gray twilight of reason into the clearer light of revelation, we shall tread upon our path with a less hesitating step, for our way is now much plainer. We better understand the character

which God sustains, and the system under which man is placed. As to the former—whatever other titles we may call him by—"the Lord is our King, the Lord is our Lawgiver, the Lord is our Judge." And as to the latter, we are governed by motives presented to us, by an appeal to our hopes and fears; every way the most desirable method of governing intelligent creatures. God's will, then, comes to us in the form, not of mere counsel or advice, but of law. And as law it is of course enforced by proper sanctions; fenced on the one hand by the most glowing promises, on the other by awful threatenings. We come then to the consideration of this, which in substance and essence is given to all moral agents, and which will never be repealed, nor even qualified. We might take as a motto the apostolic assertion, "The law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just and good," Rom. vii. 12. And so our subject at present is

§ THE EXCELLENCY OF THE DIVINE LAW.

By the first clause of the text just quoted the apostle means that the law as a whole is agreeable to the character of God, and calculated to promote holiness. When he goes on to speak of "the commandment," he seems to refer to the law taken in its various parts separately; each specific requirement is "holy, just and good," with perhaps a special reference to that one which he had been particularly alluding to, "Thou shalt not covet," and which might serve as a key to the whole, by showing that they extend to the heart "The commandment," then "is holy"—

pure, free from all defect; "just"—agreeable to justice, right in the very nature of things; "good"—in the object and end it is designed and calculated to accomplish, benevolent, adapted to secure happiness.

We might indeed well conclude, even prior to examination, that a law given by God would necessarily be characterized by highest excellence. If we did not know what the law itself was, if the bare fact alone were announced to us, that God had authoritatively published a law which was to regulate the conduct and feelings of his creatures, both towards himself and in all their intercourse with each other, we nevertheless might, antecedently to all knowledge of its nature, positively conclude that the stamp of perfection must be indelibly impressed upon it. For how could it be supposed credible, coming from an infallibly wise and good Being, that there should be either deficiency or excess? that there should be an arbitrary exaction of more, or a weak toleration of less, than was exactly proper? To suppose God capable of issuing a law requiring either more or less than was exactly right, is to suppose him acting without wisdom and without goodness; in fact, it is to deny altogether the existence of those attributes which distinguish Deity,—perfect wisdom, perfect justice, perfect benevolence.

We have then, in the essential character of God, a guarantee that the law which issues from him shall be neither deficient nor superfluous; "his work is perfect." And then if he gives a perfect law, it must be right to enforce it; and there must be as much wisdom, and even good-

ness in his guarding it when given, as there is of those qualities in his giving it at first; and consequently it is as right to punish the violation of law, as it was right originally to enact law at all.

But we will not rest the case on the presumed excellence of the law; we will examine it for ourselves; it invites the investigation of the thoughtful and it deserves their admiration, for it is beautiful as the laws which God hath stamped on nature, and by which he secures the order and harmony of the universe.

But what do we mean by "the law?" We will endeavor to answer the question, and in so doing shall perceive that—

§ 1. The excellency of the law is seen in its very nature. Generally, we mean by the law that which is commonly called "the moral law," presented to us in the shape of distinct commandments, ten in number, prescribing to each one of us concerning God in the first place, and then concerning our deportment to all our fellow creatures. These are illustrated, and their extensive bearing shown, by many other precepts which are scattered through the Scriptures. But there is not a single injunction or prohibition (of a moral kind we mean, of course, not referring now to the ceremonial law given to the Israelites, which has another explanation) which is not referable to one or other of these commandments, and included in it.

If, however, without any amplification, we wish to have the whole law in a closely condensed form, so that we may bring it under the eye in one view in all its entirety, we can do so. It lies in a

small compass as summed up for us by its divine interpreter, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength, and thy neighbor as thyself." Thus it consists of two parts. Let us examine it in both its branches, and see if it be not holy, and just, and good.

As to the *first* part, is it not well to call on the creature to love, and reverence, and worship, and obey his all-wise and kind Creator, Preserver, and Benefactor, to whom he owes life and breath and all things, and on whom he entirely depends? Must it not be right to love perfect excellence and goodness—to submit to perfect wisdom—to manifest gratitude for kindness? Must it not be right to worship God? and if so, right to worship him in the way which he may see fit to prescribe? And if all this be right, is it not of course right to require it? And if so, would it not therefore be wrong to dispense with it? Then this first part of the law cannot be excepted against.

The *second* branch is drawn out for us into six particulars; the admirable propriety of which will be the more readily recognized, if we consider ourselves the objects on whose behalf the law is made, rather than the subjects to whom it is given. In the first of which God very wisely and kindly confirms parental authority, and dictates to children as to their behaviour towards those who gave them birth. They are to love and respect and obey them, kindly cherishing them in old age, if need require, tending them and soothing them to life's latest hour. All parents must approve this requirement; and if in any case the young were

disposed to murmur at it, feeling it an irksome yoke, we should appeal from their present to their future selves, when they also shall sustain the parental character, and will be quite prepared to approve it.

The second cannot require any comment: Thou shalt not kill. Who does not feel that his life ought to be inviolate, and the life of those he loves? Who does not decide that if any man should invade his dwelling, and murder his wife, his parent, or his child, severe punishment ought to follow? See then with grateful admiration, how, by an express prohibition to all men, God has guarded your life and the precious lives of all who are dear to you.

Similar is the third: Thou shalt not commit adultery, including in the prohibition every kind and degree of impurity. But to whom shall we appeal? Assuredly not to the violators of this commandment in any form; not to those who would, at any cost, throw the reins upon the neck of their passions, and with base selfishness seek only their own gratification, no matter at what expense to others. From such we turn away, as utterly incapacitated to judge; or we appeal to them in the other characters they may sustain, and as to the relationships of life which they rejoice to own. Who does not wish, above his wish for life, that the sanctity of his own dwelling may ever be most sacredly preserved? Does not every one who answers to the name of brother, husband, father, with a knit brow and a flushed cheek, and in a tone of deepest emotion, assert that his own beloved relatives ought, by every means possible

to devise, to be most sacredly guarded from even the slightest harm? Would he not have them protected by the strongest sanctions law can give, shielded as by triple brass, from the faintest breath of the spoiler? How benevolent, then, the law which forbids, under penalty of God's displeasure, every one from blighting the fair blossoms you so sensitively cherish. God himself puts a fence around your dwelling; and in a tone of command that will not be slighted with impunity, warns off every profane intruder, and forbids even the faintest wish to wrong you. Thus is he by this law the kind guardian of your domestic peace.

Similar is the fourth: Thou shalt not steal. Again consider yourself the object in whose favor the law is made, and you will recognize that hereby God sets a hedge about all you have; your possessions are to be your own entirely, and no one is to deprive you of the least portion, or to defraud you in any transaction. So with the fifth. All persons are forbidden to meddle with your fair fame; your character is to be as sacred as your life: God will not hold that individual guiltless who misrepresents you in any way. And knowing that all outward improprieties and positive wrongs begin in the heart;—in the sixth he prohibits all persons from wishing to wrong you in the least degree, or to gratify themselves at your expense.

Thus God decides how all persons shall behave to you, thus kindly does he guard you on every hand. While in other parts of scripture, these requirements are explained to be positive in their real meaning, as well as negative: so that persons

are not to be content with simply abstaining from doing you harm; they are to do you good as occasion may require; they are to embrace all opportunities of increasing your comfort and happiness, and are to love you as they love themselves. Thus extensively has God cared for your welfare; thus strict is the charge he has given to all men concerning you.

Is not the law, then, holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good? And then is it not quite as excellent when you are the subject, as when you are the object of it? when it is law to you concerning all your conduct towards others, as when it is law to others concerning you?

§ 2. But observe its excellency in its tendency to make the observer of it happy.

And it has this tendency in many ways. There would be in one who should perfectly keep the law a perfect satisfaction with himself, Conscience would never speak in an accusing tone, but always the language of approval. There would be a sense of God's approbation, which would fill the heart with joy.

It will be admitted by every reflecting person, that happiness does not depend so much on external circumstances, as upon the state of our own minds. We are dependent on ourselves rather than upon others. Take an ambitious, restless, dissatisfied man, and load him with riches, honors, authority; will he be happy? You unhesitatingly answer, No. But why not? Because, you reply, his own disposition will prevent. Take another,—a suspicious, jealous, irritable and revengeful man; place him among the peaceful and

amiable; will he be happy? No, his wretched temper will be a perpetual preventive of enjoyment, and if he does not find sources of disquietude, he will make them. On the contrary, let a man of a cheerful, contented, grateful, and benevolent disposition, be brought into painful circumstances, and his situation, though trying, will not deprive him of peace and happiness. Or let a meek and gentle spirit, though sensitive, be exposed to unkindness; still though grieved, the mind is not robbed of its peace. We have a beautiful illustration in the Psalmist,—“Princes did sit and speak against me, but thy servant did meditate on thy statutes.”

We can easily conceive that were an angel to become incarnate, and to dwell among us for a time, exposed to hardship, neglect, and insult, none of these things would destroy his peace. His well-regulated mind would prevent external things, mere accidents, from affecting his inner self. And so our happiness is not placed at the mercy of outward circumstances, over which we have no control: it is made to depend much more intimately upon ourselves, and the state of our own minds. “A good man is satisfied from himself.” “Great peace have all they that love thy law, and nothing shall offend them.”

The law of God is such as, if observed in its spirit as well as its letter, would make us happy in our conformity. It prohibits nothing that is not injurious, it requires nothing that is not advantageous. We know how pleasant to one’s self are the feelings of kindness and benevolence. I can confidently appeal to the reader, whether he

has not felt an exquisite glow of delight, when, on some happy occasion, his breast has been full of good will to all around him. O yes, if we know what it is to look abroad on creation with a kindly eye,—to be glad in the joy that was felt by others, and to wish happiness to the universe, embracing in our benevolence all ranks of creatures, we can bear witness to the fact that such feelings of expansive benevolence to others, when self was for a time lost sight of, have produced a gush of rapturous enjoyment which language is too poor to describe.

Happiness, then, depends on the state of our own minds, and the feelings which are prevalent there. Now the law of God prescribes exactly that class of affections, and that only, which invariably and necessarily produces enjoyment in the existence and exercise of them—Love. “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength; and thy neighbor as thyself.” And so “love is the fulfilling of the law.”

Allow the imagination to bring such a state of mind before you as your own; just try the experiment of imagining how you would feel, if every selfish, unlovely emotion had become utterly extinct, leaving no trace behind, and pure love to all beings animated your breast; the heart filled with holy love and reverence for God, so that you exulted in your relation to him, and delighted in all his will; love to God supremely, and to all his creatures subordinately,—why, your cup would be full to overflowing, and you would be ready to shout aloud for joy. Thus admirably is God’s

law adapted to secure the perfect happiness of every one that observes it. Thanks be to God for such a law!

§ 3. Its excellency is further seen in its power to secure the happiness of the entire universe.

Poetry is poor, and the imagination altogether inadequate, to exhibit the scene which would, everywhere and always, meet our eye, were the law of God perfectly obeyed by all. Every individual being possessed of those feelings which we have just alluded to, all would possess in themselves a source of unbounded happiness. Moreover, the mind of the individual would not have to depend merely upon itself, but every other being would regard him with perfect love, and would seek his welfare. And thus, all loving and all loved, every heart would be attuned to harmony, and every voice in concert would sweetly swell the universal chorus; for God would be exalted to his proper throne, and would reign supreme over willing and delighted subjects, who were ever yielding the homage of love to a God of love; while the feeling of every heart towards the Great Supreme first, and then towards all fellow creatures, being precisely that the exercise of which causes exuberant gladness, and this being in such a supposed state uninterrupted, our happiness would meet with no rude check, and being perfect, so would our bliss be perfect also.

What a delightful vision is thus presented to our view. The God whose name is love, sitting on the throne of universal empire, and swaying the sceptre of love over all the intelligent creation; the teeming myriads of the universe burn-

ing with seraphic love to him, acquiescing, delighting in his will, and dwelling rejoicingly in his presence; their hearts being under the soft control of love, they regard their fellow creatures with a beaming eye, and the melody of love is heard in every whisper, and in every note. Nor is all this a pleasant fiction. Such is heaven. Law perfectly observed there—the law of love—secures the happiness of all. And it is nothing but the universal neglect of God's law which has transformed this beautiful earth into the wilderness that it is. Oh, how wretched has the infraction of law made man everywhere! How earth sighs, from her deepest recesses, over the ills which have resulted therefrom, and wherewith humanity is weighed down and crushed. Whenever man causes a sigh to rise from any heart, that sigh is wrung from the bosom by his violation of God's law. Trace up then all the misery which has filled the world to this, its proper source, and say whether the beauty of the law is not apparent in the happiness it can cause, and in the wretchedness which its violation occasions.

§ 4. Its excellency is seen in the fact that the moral sense, the conscience, of every man approves it.

Among even those who, alas for them! impiously set themselves against God and his revelation, there is not one that can take any exception against this law. All have broken it, and all by nature dislike it as a law for themselves, and refuse to obey it; but all have a perception of its excellence. And that part of it especially which refers to our behaviour to each other, has been

adopted by all classes, and has received even from the ungodly the designation, "the golden rule." And every man wishes all others to regulate their conduct towards himself by this law, whether he is governed by it or not. And this universal demand, even from those who have violated it, is a universal testimony to its excellence.

Yes, all men love to see it exhibited and observed by others. For who is there so base as not to approve the self-denying philanthropy of a Howard, the untiring humanity of a Clarkson, and of many others whom it would be easy to mention? Yet all that was so admirable in them was conformity, in some good degree, to this law. How often men admire, without giving themselves the trouble to think what it is that imparts loveliness to the objects of their applause. You may perhaps see one who is fitted to adorn the choicest circles, leaving the elegant occupations and refined society of her graceful home, entering the abode of poverty and affliction, to administer with her own hands to the wants of the suffering, or by her soft and sweet-toned consolations soothing the mind of the miserable. You may observe her encountering all that delicacy shrinks from, a ministering angel to the wretched. You speak in glowing terms of her goodness, but do you recognize that such an one is only complying, and that but partially, with one branch of this beautiful law?

What we instantly hate, too, is a violation of this law. We see a sordid wretch, who, having gold in his coffer, loves to keep it there: a son of misery, aye, a daughter of sorrow humbly sues for a trifle from his abundance; but the vile lover of

his yellow earth turns a deaf ear to the pleadings of distress; anguish may rise, and swell, and overwhelm the soul; he beholds it all unmoved, his heart is like the nether millstone. We vent our indignation—honest, praiseworthy indignation. But the conduct so justly stigmatized is precisely the opposite to that enjoined by God's law, and is expressly denounced by it. See how, when unbiassed by personal considerations, we take part with the law, and approve it as holy, just and good. Thus in the meed of admiration which we bestow on virtue, and in the frown of indignation with which we greet the contrary, does the moral sense of all men testify to the excellence of the law. Partial conformity to it presents us with partial excellence and partial happiness; while perfect conformity thereto, is perfect excellence and perfect happiness.

§ 5. The excellency of the law is further shown in the fact that the Saviour, when intending to exhibit a perfect model of loveliness of character, made it his rule.

It has been already remarked, that the loveliest character we ever met with derived all that was really excellent from conformity to the law of God. There is no imaginable excellence that it does not comprehend. Take then the finished portrait of perfection which we have in the whole demeanor of Jesus of Nazareth. Whatever forbearance, magnanimity, benevolence, self-renunciation, he manifested, he never went a hair's breadth beyond the requirements of this law. Did he forget his own fatigue at Jacob's well? Did he wipe away the tears from the widowed cheek

of her of Nain? Did he weep in sympathy with the sorrow-stricken sisters of Lazarus? Did he go about doing good, laboring to reclaim the wanderer, to instruct the ignorant, to bless the wretched, and to raise all about him to virtue and happiness? Did he bury in oblivion his cruel wrongs, and pray for his very murderers? Did he forget his own anguish on the cross, when his weeping mother caught his eye, and when the accents of the dying thief fell upon his ear? In no one instance did he ever step beyond the circle law had drawn. In all he did, when in childhood and youth he was subject to his parents, when in after life he lived only for the good of all around him and for the glory of his Father, he only, as it was predicted of him, magnified the law and made it honorable, by complying with its demands. Study then the character of Jesus, gaze on the exquisite loveliness that was embodied in his demeanor, and as you admire, recognize therein neither more nor less than law perfectly observed:

“For in his life the law appears,
Drawn out in living characters.”

Here then we pause. We have recognized the fact that a law emanating from God cannot be other than precisely what it ought to be; for the character of the Divine Being is a guarantee for this. We have considered the law in itself, and perceived its claims to be admired. We have also regarded it in its legitimate effects, its adaptation to make the observer of it perfectly happy, and so the entire universe. We have seen how instinctively men admire its requirements to be

observed by others towards themselves: and have traced the perfect loveliness of character which distinguished Jesus of Nazareth, to the fact that it was entirely formed on the model of the law, of which it was an attractive embodiment.

And now are we not entitled to affirm that the law which God has revealed for the conduct of his subjects, is as beautiful as those laws of nature to which we have previously adverted? Is there not as much adaptation in this to produce harmony and happiness in the world of mind, as in those to secure the order of the material universe? With how much higher delight, then, may we admire and extol this law of God, than we praise those other laws which he hath stamped on matter, though they are perfect.

But barren admiration is not the point at which we may stop; there are obvious conclusions which we may not lose sight of. It must be admitted, for example, 1. That it was every way wise and benevolent and right for God to give such a law as this; perfectly right to call on all his creatures to love him supremely, and to love one another perfectly and uninterruptedly; necessarily right, for we cannot conceive that the opposite course would be at all right; viz., that he should not call on them to love him, and to love one another. To dispense with this, would be to dispense with what was essential to the happiness of all; and which therefore would not have been benevolent, but the very reverse, even unkind and cruel.

Then, 2. It must be as proper to guard a law, so necessary to the general welfare. By how much it was wise and good to give such a law, by just

so much it must be wise and even benevolent, to insist on its being obeyed. For as well not enact law, as leave every one at full liberty to observe it or not, just as he chooses; in which case it would not be law at all. But the proper guard of law is penalty threatened to the transgressor, which cannot therefore be dispensed with; the universal welfare requires to be thus protected. It is wise and good, therefore, to threaten punishment to the man who shall set the law at nought, for the violation of law is the only thing that can introduce disorder and anarchy, which has accordingly to be prevented by all proper means.

But if it be right to threaten, it must be, 3. right to fulfill the threatening. For it cannot be right for the Supreme Governor to speak, and not to keep his word. He must ever be the God of truth. And it would soon be known that though he threatened awfully, it was nothing but an idle word which might be disregarded with impunity; and then it is all one, as though there were no such law at all, and so the entire universe is given up of God, wholly abandoned to utter lawlessness! But by how much we shrink from this, by so much do we acknowledge that God must execute his threatenings. That due regard to the whole, which it were awful beyond conception to think of as not paid, demands that the law, which is essential to the peace, and harmony, and happiness of the universe, shall be guarded by the punishment of the transgressor.

Thus, then, punishment is imperative. It is not that God burns with resentment at the affront put upon him; not that he lays aside for a mo-

ment any of the goodness of his nature; not, as some choose wickedly to pervert things and say that, according to scripture, he brought some of his creatures into existence in order to make them miserable; but his very regard to the universal happiness compels him to maintain his holy law inviolate. Nor can any reasonable person regret that the law of God, when violated, should bring suffering to the transgressor, any more than he can regret that fire should burn and water drown those who choose to brave them.

It is not wrath, it is not fury, it is not passion, which lifts the arm of justice against the violator of law, but wisdom and goodness; which is not that blind, indiscriminating, easy goodness which some choose to ascribe to God, and which would be a weakness exposing to contempt, rather than a virtue commanding our respect;—but an enlarged and all-comprehensive regard to the interests of the whole, with which the well-being of the incorrigible transgressor (if it were possible, indeed, which in the nature of things, it is not, for a determined despiser of such a law to be happy), could not be allowed to come into competition or bring into jeopardy. So that the very benevolence of God, his considerate regard to the welfare of the many, will nerve his arm to inflict the necessary punishment on the rebellious. Thus we have calmly reached this point—the indispensableness of punishment when law is broken.—*Future Punishment*, pp. 37-52.

LEARNED MEN ON THE LAW.

DR. ADAM CLARKE.—“Man cannot have a true notion of sin but by means of the Law of God.” *Com. on Rom. vii.*

DR. BARNES.—“All the Law of God is binding on Christians. True piety has respect to all the commands of God and keeps them.” *Note on Matt. v, 19.*

DR. CUMMING.—“The Law of Ten Commandments is in itself unchangeable and permanent. It was ordained by the Supreme Law-giver as the infallible rule of life, to all men, in every age of the world; in all places, under all circumstances, in every nation and generation of men on the earth.”—*Signs of the Times, pp. 23, 39.*

MR. SPURGEON.—“The Law of God is a divine law, holy, heavenly, and perfect. There is not a command too many; there is not one too few. Its perfection is a proof of its divinity.” *Sermons, p. 280.*

DR. SCOTT.—“This Law, which is so extensive that we cannot measure it, so spiritual that we cannot evade it, and so reasonable that we cannot find fault with it, will be the rule of the future judgment of God, as it is of the present conduct of man.”—*See Com.*

JOHN WESLEY.—“Every branch of the Law is holy, just, and good. It springs from, and partakes of, the holy nature of God; it is every way just and right in itself.” *Notes on Rom. vii.*

PRES. HUMPHREY.—“The Law has no limitations, and therefore can never expire. It has never been repealed; and as the sacred canon is full and complete, we are certain it never will be. It is, therefore, binding on every one of us at this moment; and will be upon all future generations.” *Essay on the Sabbath, p. 24.*

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