

No 419

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Reason and Religion.

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Isaiah T. 18.

Come now and let us reason together saith
the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they
shall be as white as snow; though they be red
like crimson, they shall be as wool.

Religion is a reasonable thing. It urges no claim, without a ground in the eternal principles of justice and equity. "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right,"—and, whatever God demands is enforced by the same great consideration: it is only and wholly right; not to do it is only & wholly wrong!

Man's noblest and distinguishing gift is Reason. What a magnificent endowment is that faculty of the mind, by which we separate between what is true and what is false; by which the line is drawn dividing between good and evil; and by which we deduce inferences from facts or conclusions from propositions!

Is there not something grand and godlike, in the power to recognize intellectual and moral worth. There, in the silent chambers of the soul, into which no eye but God's ever looked, and where no sound of footstep was ever heard, there is a throne, and upon that throne, the monarch of this little empire sits, invisible. Through those noiseless halls, move innumerable throngs, in rapid procession - every subject which can claim the thought or attention, the aim or affection, of man. And, upon the merits of each, that monarch, Reason, instinctively, pronounces judgment. Is there not something, in the possession of such a faculty, which makes every man feel as though he, himself, were a God.

There is no doubt that where the exercise of Reason is perfect, where sin has never come in, as a disturbing cause, to obscure the perception of the soul, - in a word, where the whole intellectual and moral nature is in a normal, healthy, perfect condition, Reason makes religion. It teaches the right, with a certainty, that leaves no room for doubt. It leads to the Creator of all. It draws the soul toward the Supreme Reason, as its natural center of revolution. Without doubt, God's holy angels need no law. They are a law unto themselves! They know God's will, from the dictates of their own souls. In all perfect beings, religion is so reasonable that they never probably think of doing wrong.

It would be so in this world, but for the fact and presence of Sin. Here is a great disturbing force. It comes into this universe of souls, as though some stray planet should come within the confines of our solar system, and throw everything out of balance! It attracts souls out of the orbit of obedience, revolving about God, and leads little satellites to attempt to set themselves up for suns - self dependent: independent of the great sun of Righteousness. You can see this result reached in what is known in modern times, as Rationalism - the very name of which implies that it sets up human Reason in the place of Revelation, and even of God, himself - as the ultimate authority &c

Yet even in man's fallen estate, there is so much left, in Reason, of its original clearness of view, and so much capacity to receive truth, that, while it does not and cannot discover, it can respond to what is right. When God commands us, there is something within us, which answers; "that is all reasonable." Left to ourselves, we might "feel after God" without "finding him", "though he be not far from every one of us." But he does not leave us to ourselves; He draws near and compensates for the dimness of our powers of seeing, by the clearness of his revealed will. He helps our Reason. He condescends to argue with us, to present the grounds of his claim and convince us &c

Thus must we understand and interpret this text. The prophet Isaiah tells us the sad story of the wicked wanderings of Israel. God had "nourished and brought up children and they rebelled against him." They had become "a sinful nation" - a people laden with iniquity, "corrupt themselves, they were corrupters of others. In the graphic & poetic language of the prophet: "from the sole of the foot even unto the head, there is no soundness in them, wounds and bruises and putrifying sores." In this polluted and diseased moral condition, they substituted a multitude of sacrifices for the offering of a pure heart, till their oblations were vain and their incense an abomination, to

to the Lord. Under these circumstances He utters
the touching and beautiful appeal of the text. And
when in all the old economy does Jehovah appear
in a lovelier light, than here, bowing from his high
and holy place, and gently calling his wayward
people to a conference with himself. "Come now, let
us argue, or discuss, the case together." The form of
the verb denotes a reciprocal action. He does not
approach them, as they deserved, an incensed God
simply and severely announcing his law and
its penalty; but, like a grieved Parent, ready to
show the reasonableness and rightness of all his
demands, and patiently hear and answer all
their arguments and objections.

The great ground upon which God here urges his claim to the love and service of his people is an appeal to Reason. As though he had said: "submit my demands and requirements to the tribunal of your own intelligent faculties, and see if their decision do not approve my claims as reasonable and right."

In the opening of this prophecy, God had stated his complaint: "Hear O heavens, and give ear O earth; for the Lord hath spoken: I have nourished and brought up children and they have rebelled against me"! I believe it has been always conceded, even by the most degraded of barbarians, that the maker of a thing ^{is} makes the

owner, and, until he transferred or vitiated his title, had a right to its services, ^{even} if it were no more than a blind machine. We recognize this principle in the so called patent-right, which, by a writing, properly authorized and duly authenticated, granting a privilege to some person or persons; - secures to such, for a term of years, the exclusive right to an invention.

The same general law applies to the ownership of cattle. He who buys or raises the ox or the ass is considered entitled to the use of those animals, - to their services. And even these dumb brutes, that have not reason, moved by instinct, alone, come to recognize their master, and sub-

mit willingly and patiently to the yoke. Let us
then hear the complaint of God: "The ox knoweth
his owner and the ass his master's crib; but Is-
rael doth not know: my people doth not consid-
er." The beast of burden yields to his master such
a measure of affection as a brute can give and
obeys his word or goad; yet my people endowed
with rational powers, intelligenced and affection,
know not their owner, recognize not their master,
consider not his claims to their gratitude and
service!

But God's complaint covers more ground e-
ven than this. I have nourished and brought up
children and they have rebelled against me.

The common sense of mankind has always admitted and insisted that, far closer than the relation between an inventor and the product of his genius, or the master and the animals he owned, ^{is} was the tie between parent and child. I do not know that there ever was a nation or people, among whom parental authority and filial obedience were ignored or accounted unreasonable. Indeed the half-civilized tribes have sometimes been distinguished, above some so-called christian nations, for the fidelity of children to their parents. The laws of almost all countries constitute the father, owner and master of his child, entitled to his services without pay, be-

yond his support, until he becomes of a certain age; while a law, unwritten in any human code, but engraven on the fleshly tablets of every heart, tells us that the parent has a claim to a child's respect, gratitude, love!

This claim rests upon two great considerations. First a tie of Nature and again of Nurture. The fact that you are a child of another is of itself enough. By birth and origin, a bond is established between parent and offspring, and a relation created, which can be compared with almost nothing on earth. Then let us remember how the nurture of parental love and care daily strengthens the bond and confirms the

relation which come by nature, so that if one be adopted, as a child, and so receives this nurture, the absence of the natural bond cannot destroy the claim to filial love and obedience.

See, now, how God's complaint against his people rises in dignity; deepens in pathos; how comprehensive! how condemning! "I have nourished and brought up children and they have rebelled against me." They are mine by nature for they are my children; I created them; - maker of their bodies; father of their spirits, am I the Lord. They were mine by nurture: for I have nourished and brought them up, their preserver benefactor redeemer as well as creator!

Is there no reason in Gods demand? "My son
give me thine heart!" thy life! Shall we refuse
to God what we concede to man. Man really owns
and possesses nothing - even our children are
given of God. Can you, who are an inventor, rea-
sonably claim the right to make such a use
of a machine, as may most serve your profit?
Can you who own cattle reasonably defend
your title to their service, in yoke or harness?
Can you who, by nature and nurture, are a
father, reasonably require of your son his love
and labor, and yet withhold from God your
own affection and activity? Do you act accord-
ing to the dictates of reason, in so doing!

Behold, my hearer, God's patent right stamped,
in immortal characters, upon your brow! He
has impressed you with his own image and super-
scription. Upon the same reasonable grounds, that
you "render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's," ought you to "render unto God the things which
are God's." You are purely his invention, for he, alone,
planned your physical and spiritual system - what
a machine is that, whose maker and builder is
God! how fearfully and wonderfully made! Has not
God, by a law higher than all the authority of let-
ters-patent, a right to your service, to own & use
you as he sees fit? I tell you he has put his seal
upon you - in every faculty of mind and body.

you may read: "thou art mine - my creature and
the Lord am thy Creator." His is the original and
exclusive right, not as the buyer or possessor, but
something infinitely more. His claim is not one
which another can seize or seize: it is natural-
ly inalienable; you cannot transfer it - even He
cannot, for he cannot cease to be your Creator.
You are his child, by nature: although he crea-
ted you, it was not as he created matter even in
its most refined forms, or even as he made the an-
imals: he breathed into your nostrils the breath
of life, and you became a living soul. &c

You are his child, by nurture. He "brought
you up." By his preserving goodness & grace you

Still live. Had he not created you, his daily consideration and provision for your wants - above all his love for you, while in rebellion, inducing him even to give his best beloved to the cruel cross for your sake, would establish a high claim upon your gratitude and service!

If you would see the reasonableness of God's claims, reflect a moment. You regard a man as a robber, who voluntarily infringes your patent, who intelligently takes anything belonging to you, and uses it for his own pleasure & profit. Above all, you regard a son as a monster, who repays all your love and care, from his birth, only with rebellion against your authority and

utter disregard of your wish or will. Let me ask you is it reasonable to "rob God." Yet you are robbing him every day, and while you cheat Him of his dues you pay them over to the devil and throw in your own soul, gratis. Is there any show of reason in ignoring the claim of your heavenly Father, and virtually denying that you are his son by giving your life and love to everything else but his service? Every principle, on which man acts with man, and which is esteemed honorable and reasonable, transferred to God, demands a life of piety. There is not a fair argument that can be advanced, which would in any measure prove sin to be reasonable!

If then any man is not a servant of God, it is
not because God asks anything unreasonable.
On this very chapter, he gives the substance of his
requirements: "Wash you, make you clean: put
away the evil of your doings, from before mine
eyes. Cease to do evil: learn to do well: seek
judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the father-
less, plead for the widow." Are not all these de-
mands such as may safely submitted to reason?
Yes, if men do not serve God, it is not because they
doubt whether they ought. For whatever a man
may pretend to believe, down in the secret heart
there is an instinct which tells him that every
requirement of God's law is Reasonable.

Thus far we have spoken only of the general
invitation of the text: "Come now and let us rea-
son together." We have supposed there was nothing
to make such mutual approach ^{im=} possible, be-
tween man and God. But the same common con-
viction of mankind which affirms that his re-
quirements are reasonable, also impresses us with
a sense of necessary separation between a pure God
and sinful man. There is a universal feeling of
guilt, which tells us, that, in coming to God, our
very first necessity is pardon. However right his
law, we have not kept it; its penalty overhangs
us. However we might obey it, in the future there
is first positive guilt to be washed away!

When God comes down and reasons with Man;
all His invitations to a life of holiness are met
by the cry of the race - whence shall we get forgive
ness! and God takes out of our mouths this ar
gument, by anticipation. As though he had said:
your past sins need be no obstacle to holiness or
happiness. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they
shall be as white as snow: though they be red
like crimson they shall be as wool," i.e. clean
white wool. The words translated crimson and
scarlet are commonly combined to denote one col
or and are here separated only as poetical equiv
alents: and so snow, which is the purest white
known, and wool correspond, in significance.

Guilt, being regarded as a stain, its removal denotes restoration to purity and the implied conclusion of the reasoning is, that God's willingness to pardon throws the blame of their destruction upon themselves.

Two thoughts are latent here, in the very terms used. The grace of God is seen in contrast with man's Guilt which is

Very great. The words which are translated scarlet and crimson both refer to the celebrated dye, obtained from a certain insect known as the Coccus Ilieis, which adheres with its eggs to the twigs of a species of oak, and is related to the Coccus cacti or cochineal. see Vol 785. P. 135 & 136

Both species of insect are very small: it takes 70,000 of the cochineals to make one pound of the dye. The very word is suggestive of the multitude of our sins. It is not one iniquity that has left its stain on the soul - who shall count our innumerable of pines - neglect of duty, contempt of law - how vast the number of sins that have combined to dye the soul.

2 And then the color, itself, is suggestive of the deepest guilt, the most aggravating wrong. It is the color of blood; our hands, our hearts, our garments are red, like the murderers, we have not lifted up the sword against our fellow - yet let us remember that no man sins for himself alone.

That mysterious bond of influence which couples human hearts makes every man, an engine, drawing, after him, a train of human destinies. If he goes to ruin, down he drags others - if his life has an ascending grade, toward higher hopes, and nobler aims, and purer service, on, after him, follow those, who yield to his influence & example. Every man is his brother's keeper - and many a man, whose influence has been to destroy souls, perhaps, by no more direct power, than a worldly morality, a selfish ambition, will find, in the hereafter, that the "voice of his brother's blood cries to him" from the abyss, and ^{he} shall wander forever "a fugitive and a vagabond," accursed of God.

Yet, though your sins be as scarlet, though your hands, like those of Cain, were red with a brother's blood, there is no guilt so deep, there are no sins, so many, but may be washed away, in the blood of Jesus. Though you were the chief of sinners, this fountain can make you white as the snow.

2. Again the terms used in the text represent guilt that seems to be impossible of cleansing. The word rendered scarlet is thought, by some, to mean twice-dyed. It is well known, as a fact, that red is the most indelible stain. For example, in paper manufacture, where rags are so extensively used, the most trouble-

Some of all colors is the Turkey red. You may dip the fabric, dyed with it, into the bleaching solution: it comes out only a little paler: the color is there, in its strength, and if it be steeped long enough to efface the color, entirely, the fibre is, itself, destroyed: it will be useless in the manufacture. Hence these scarlet rags are put by themselves and made into red blotting paper. Hence your writing pad is red, - scarlet.

Here then is the color which modern Science pronounces indelible, chosen by God, to represent the most confirmed guilt - the most discouraging, indelible stain of sin. The prophet does not say though your sins be as

blue or as green or as black, but as Scarlet.
Like lady Macbeth you may vainly & often
have tried to wash away your guilt, and felt
the dye of your sin indelible, yet Jesus' blood is
able. That is as deep scarlet as your guilt; yet
it leaves no stain. Sprinkled with it, the unclean
ceases to be unclean: iniquity is purged away.
Here is the most reasonable part of God's invita-
tion. He offers to remove the grand obstacle to ho-
liness, happiness, heaven. You are left without
excuse: "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us
from all sin." Hear the gentle invitation. Let God
appeal to your Reason, and since all his re-
quirements are reasonable, yield Him your heart

Above all, remember that the secret of all suffering, sorrow, the basis of misery, here, and Hell, hereafter, is Sin. Unless you can get rid of sin, guilt is your everlasting possession, and wrath the inevitable treasure, you are laying up for an eternal future!

Helpless and foul as the trampled snow,
Sinner despair not! Christ stoopeth low
To rescue the soul that is lost in its sin
And raise it to life and enjoyment again.
Groaning, bleeding, dying for thee,
The crucified hung on the accursed tree!
O God in the stream that for sinners did flow
Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.

Walerford Sabb. A.M. May 20. 1866. Presbyt. Church

Detroit Michigan Fort St. Ch. Sabb. P.M. Apl. 11. 1869

" " " " " am. July 18. 1865. R

Exeter " " " " " Sabb. P.M. May 4. 1879. R