

*James A. May Jr.*

*Chester & Clarke*

TWO SERMONS

ON THE

Tragedy at Harper's Ferry.

THE CURSE OF GOD AGAINST POLITICAL ATHEISM: WITH  
SOME OF THE LESSONS OF THE TRAGEDY  
AT HARPER'S FERRY.

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A

# DISCOURSE

DELIVERED IN THE

CHURCH OF THE PURITANS, NEW YORK,

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BY REV. GEORGE B. CHEEVER, D. D.

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# DISCOURSE.

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If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light; but if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. — MATT. VI: 22, 23.

THE purpose makes the man, and as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he. If for God in his heart, then for God everywhere; if for self and the world in his heart, then for self everywhere.

Principle and Expediency are the watchwords that divide the world as truly and thoroughly as light and darkness, sin and holiness. But expediency assumes the form and reputation of principle, and carries a great part of the world on the side of wrong, under the profession of wisdom and conservatism, teaching the right. The conflict is fundamental. A selfish expediency is the native habit of mankind, and the first battle against it is when a man is converted from the power of Satan unto God. When he comes under the government of righteous principle, and makes the will of God his rule, instead of consulting and obeying what is, or seems to be, expedient in his own view for his own interest, or convenient for his own will and pleasure, he is a converted man — a true Christian.

He cannot be a Christian, and remain on *both sides* the fence, a time-server. "Ye cannot serve God and Mammon." He cannot be a Christian and remain *on the fence*, waiting to jump with the tide of popular applause, or at the suggestion of expediency, and, until that decision, serving neither God nor Mammon. He is always, however he may stand in this world, and seem to be facing both ways in the sight of man, on one side or the other with God, either for him or against him. We shall follow our text in its two great applications, first to our personal, second to our social and civil or political being and life.

I.—True religion consists in choosing and following what is right, and making that in all cases determine what is expedient. I speak now of all cases where the question of right, of duty, is involved; for there are many things, many junctures and affairs of life, where prudential considerations as to what is best form the whole field of consideration, and that which seems to a man's mind on the whole most profitable is best, and therefore ought to be pursued, is therefore right. It is right, because it is best. Wherever the balance of considerations is merely prudential — as, for example, whether you shall take passage for a sea voyage in a sailing vessel or a steamship, whether you shall embark your capital in one direction or another of varied forms of business or investments equally honorable and proper; ten thousand cases might be stated where that which, on the whole, you discover or conclude to be best, most advantageous and convenient for you, is right. It is not best merely because it is right, but right because it is best, there being no other moral principle involved in it, but a choice of benefits, which is no moral principle at all. And a man whose life is confined to such pursuits might possibly never be found acting in reference to any moral principle, or any consideration of it whatever; might live to the age of Methuselah, plodding on in business, or running a career of vast speculations in business, without ever having his soul stirred by anything higher than calculations of prudence. In such a case, the very absence and negation of moral principle would be the debasement and destruction of a man's nature, and the condemnation of his life. A life centering on self, absorbed in self, occupied wholly with self, and what is best for self, is a selfish life — a life of self-idolatry — a life in which self is the supreme principle, and, God being entirely disregarded, an immoral principle and an immoral life. The entire negation of high moral principle constitutes as perfect an immorality of character as the presence and power of a positive reigning vice. And it may be absolutely more difficult to raise a man up from the depths of such negation, from the dungeon of such a tomb, and inspire him with piety, than it is to break in violently upon great and raging sins, in which men have been held captive by Satan at his will.

We belong to God, and are bound to regard His will supremely in all things, and to seek His approbation, and carry into effect His law, both in ourselves and others. The eye single, therefore, is the eye that is turned towards Him, while the evil eye is the eye that is

turned towards self—turned away from God, and filled with self instead of God, as the supreme idol. You know that in the language of the very proverbs of society there is no more fitting description of a mean and worthless creature—a selfish, heartless, unsympathising man, from whom you can expect nothing good, great, or generous—than the phrase that he is always sure to look out for number one. Self always comes first between his sight and everything else under heaven; and until this depravity is broken and conquered, and he is taught and inspired by Divine grace to lose sight of self in God, and to say, Not my will, but thine, be done, God himself, in his view, and heaven and angels, are nothing but a grand contrivance for his own happiness. But when a man begins to love God, and to look away from self to Him, then it is happiness to him that God reigns; and as long as God reigns, he cannot be otherwise than happy in him, safe and happy in His love. He dwells in God and God in him; and as God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all, the whole being of the soul whose sight and affections are fixed on Him, is irradiated with His light; and as God is love, so he that dwelleth in God dwelleth in love, and if there were no interruption to this communion, would be baptised and bathed in the continual blessedness of God, as an experience inseparable from his own existence. Such a man is safe and happy, everywhere and under all circumstances, in God. He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. He may be the inmate of a dungeon, condemned to death by human law, but with God's law and God's love in his heart he will be as happy as an angel.

Thy shining glance can cheer  
 The dungeon where I dwell:  
 'Tis Paradise, if thou art here;  
 If thou depart, 't is hell.

The path of duty will be made plain to such a man, and he will have courage ministered to him from God to walk in it, always making God's word, God's law, the light, the guide, the arbiter of conscience, and always endeavoring, in all things, to maintain a conscience void of offence towards God and man.

For this, two great things are necessary—much prayer, and much earnest and prayerful study of God's word. Both these things are necessary, and if a man neglect either, he is liable to go

astray, and while he thinks he is acting from principle, to be acting from mistake or from mere selfish expediency. "Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee." Prayer hides God's word in the heart, and the Holy Spirit abides there with it, and leads it into all truth and duty; and this being the case, a man having God's truth for his shield and buckler, and God's Spirit for his comforter, has need of nothing else, and need fear nothing. Hence the appeal of God, "Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness—ye people in whose heart is my law; fear ye not the reproaches of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings; for the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool; but my righteousness shall be forever, and my salvation from generation to generation." The righteousness of God is the one permanent, eternal reality and rule, and the law of God is the manifestation of that righteousness for the guidance of human conduct. The law of God is a system of principles. He governs the universe upon principles—the principles of his own righteousness. They are of equal and universal application. They are not one thing in heaven and another thing on earth; one thing among God's friends, and another thing among his enemies; they are the same everywhere, and the standard of right and wrong is the same on earth as it is in heaven. Perfect obedience, supreme devotion to God, is the rule here, as it is there, and God will have his will done on earth as in heaven. The principles of God's law never vary. They are as immutable as himself. They never bend to circumstances, but go straight through the universe. They do not come into the world to be refracted out of their straight line in the gross medium of men's fancies or maxims of convenience or expediency; they cannot alter. Heaven and earth shall pass away before one jot or tittle of the law shall fail. As a standard of feeling and action, as a standard of right and wrong, as a standard of duty under all circumstances, and of judgment in every respect, it is unerring and unchanging. Its principles were given forth, not to be judged, criticised, or evaded by God's creatures, but to be obeyed, and carried into unfaltering execution. Their application is not to be prevented because of its condemning, overturning consequences in a world of sin; they are to be laid alongside the character and employments of men, though, to the anger of all, they make the whole world, with their whole business, guilty before God. The least concealment or alteration of any one principle of God's law would be of more evil

in any community than the overturning of that whole community could be by carrying out that principle to the uttermost. For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men, and especially against those who hold the truth in unrighteousness. And the business of the servant of Jesus Christ is to make constant application of the law of God, and bring its light to blaze and its power to bear upon every form of iniquity.

And although the principles of God's word, taken up resolutely, and carried straight through human society, make tremendous work with the principles of this world, yet that is the very application and overturning that God requires, whose conservatism is just this; the removing of those things that require overturning or may be shaken, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. The principles of God's word cut across and tear up by the roots whole plantations of the most cherished human maxims and laws. They do this with such amazing power, wherever any sinful practice has gained the sanction of time, and been winked at by a worldly Church, that even churches and ministers are afraid of their operation. The consequences of the unbending principles of the Word of God are so tremendous in their conflict with human passions, especially where sin is legalized and oppression carried on by statute, that even the professed friends of God shrink from meeting them. Nevertheless, those principles must be applied; they are our only salvation; the only hope of the world being made better is in them, and our only security from being swallowed up in the world's wickedness is in the great breakwater with them breasting the storm, when the waters roar and are troubled, and the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. The only true expediency is to act from principle, to obey God, to obey a conscience enlightened and guided by the Word of God, to ask in all things what God will have us to do, and having ascertained the path of duty toward God, to go forward and do it, leaving the consequences with him. It is no excuse for wickedness, though all the world should consent to follow it, and though all the statutes of mankind should command us to do the same. But by the Word of God alone can we know what is righteousness in principle and righteousness in law.

And here, in passing, let the importance of the Bible and its teachings in our common schools be noted, to have the common conscience of the nation so trained, to give the nation a common sense and



knowledge of equity and righteousness, so sturdy, so habitual, that tyranny shall quail before it, and legislators not dare the experiment of promulgating unrighteous law. Such a conscience, so trained, is the strongest, most impregnable safeguard of a nation's liberties.

II. — Here we advance to the second great branch of our subject. Adherence to the law of God, as supreme in political as social life, is our only security. It is impossible to describe strongly enough the infinite importance, at this present time, for all men, public and private, for us as a community and people, of keeping this great truth in view, and acting upon it. The most pernicious and alarming doctrines are being circulated among us; doctrines that at one and the same time go to the destruction of all conscience towards God, and all humanity and justice towards our fellow-beings; doctrines that take away our very right to demand and enforce freedom and justice against tyranny and injustice, and deprive us of the very possibility even of appealing to God against the iniquity and oppression of man; doctrines that deny and annihilate the inherent supremacy of conscience, instructed by the Author and Framers of our being, over all our actions, and commit that supremacy to the absolute sheer will of an oligarchy in power over us, or of the multitude who consent to put the will of that oligarchy into the shape of law, and then arrogate for it the sanction of the Almighty, at the same time announcing our duty to obey it, whether the Almighty sanctions it or not; nay, even though it be against the express interdiction of the living God; doctrines that at the same time, and by a fatal coherence and necessity of logic and of consequence, deny any inherent rights but such as are permitted and guaranteed by some written human constitution, and in creatures of a sable hue any rights at all, if any State or community, by law or declaration, deny them, withhold them. Doctrines that, in affirming that so long as anything whatever is put in the form of human law, so long its obligation of obedience is supreme and imperative, (no matter how infamous or oppressive the law may be,) take from God himself his own sovereignty over us, and from ourselves all right of resistance against wickedness in God's name — all possibility of the protection of our conscience and our liberties — all remnant of liberty itself worth possessing — since, by these doctrines, all that any band of usurpers have to do, in order to sanction, confirm, and render immutable and eternal their despotism, is to promulgate its principles and pretences

in a constitution, and pass its requisitions in the shape of law, which, while it stands, is imperative, and of which they can forever prevent the alteration or repeal. The whole scheme is one of complete practical atheism; and hell itself, the empire of Satan, would need no better foundation against the authority of the Lord Almighty.

Yet it has been shamelessly promulgated, in so many words, that the constitution of the people, their political constitution, is their Bible; and this for the purpose of defending the right of the government to pass, and the duty of the people to obey, one of the most inhuman, unchristian, irreligious, savage statutes, that, under the light of God's word, and in defiance and violation of his law, ever was passed on earth. It is not only affirmed that their political constitution is their Bible, but that any law whatever, which the legislature may please to pass, under the pretended sanction of that constitution, however wickedly perverted, and concerning which they can get it affirmed by a bench of judges that, in their opinion, it is constitutional, has an obligation of obedience attached to it above God's law—the Bible of God being supreme only in and for heaven; while the political Bible is supreme on earth, and so supreme that no appeal from it can be taken to God's Bible, so supreme that God's law cannot be quoted as above it—cannot be permitted to have any authority over the conscience under it. A people that will give way to such doctrines, that will applaud the speeches and the teachings in which they are conveyed, that will vote for men and put men in power who proclaim them, and signify their readiness and determination to enforce them, are as fast as possible cutting off all possibility of protecting their own liberties—are forging chains and manacles for their own souls, are offering up themselves on the altar of national atheism as the prey of tyrants, are on the eve of that irremediable betrayal and renouncement of their own inheritance of freedom, their birthright from God, of which there is no place for repentance, and after which there is no hope; of which God himself says, they have chosen their own way, I also will choose their delusions; they have chosen the statutes of Omri, and the statutes of Omri shall be their ruin.

The extreme of baseness and treachery towards God and man, to which these advocates of human tyranny have gone, is almost incredible. There are those who not only assert that any and every human law has the authority of heaven, and that men are bound to obey it so long as it is law, whether it be contrary to God's law or not, but

even that we have no right to go against any wrong, any wickedness, which a human constitution protects, and orders us not to interfere with, or which it is even asserted by the judges to protect, or which is by them pronounced constitutional. Here these men tie up our hands, and we, if we admit such pretensions of ungodliness, tie up our own hands, not only from all right and possibility of self-defence, if our own liberties are by pretended law taken from us, but from the equally sacred and grander and more noble and glorious right and duty of defending others, and protecting others from wrong and ruin. Could anything be more monstrous, more heaven-defying, than the doctrine that because a wrong or impiety is a vested wrong, secured by a constitution and laws in its favor, therefore we are cut off from all right of interfering against it, or claiming the rights of the victims crushed under it, or insisting upon their deliverance from such oppression?

Especially, could anything be more monstrous than such an atheistic claim in behalf of wrong, for immunity from examination and redress under a government professing to acknowledge God and his word and the religion of the Bible as of supreme authority, and professing distinctly to have been framed for the protection of the liberties and rights of every human being under it, to establish justice and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity; a constitution framed under an appeal to God, under a declaration that our very title to the state and dignity of a nation is drawn from the laws of nature and of nature's God, and under the promulgation of these truths as self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights governments are instituted among men, deriving their just power from the consent of the governed; that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter it or to abolish it, and to institute a new government, laying its foundations on such principles and organizing its powers in such form as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness. The less is always included in the greater; and if the people have power and right to change or to abolish their constitution when its action is perverted to the support and protection of wrong, much more have they the right and power to resist such perversion; much more is the resistance of such

perversion their bounden duty and the duty of those who are called to administer the government.

If the government be framed for the establishment of justice and the protection of liberty for all, and of the just rights of all who are set under it by the Creator, then the constitution of such a government — a government meant for such purposes — and just only while it adheres to them, cannot be assumed to sanction any wrong in conflict with them, or to forbid the resistance and removal of any wrong, of which in spite of its object, and against the authority of God, from whom alone its sanction is derived, the constitution is perverted to become the instrument. It is, therefore, monstrous to say that we will go against wrong only so far as the constitution permits us to go against it; for in the first place, the Almighty has commanded us to go against all wrong, and especially so to administer government as that God's rights, and the rights of conscience towards God and justice to every creature may be protected by it; and in the second place, the rights bestowed upon men from their Creator are asserted, by the very declaration under which and in pursuance of which the constitution has been framed, to be inalienable; and, therefore, the constitution itself binds those who administer it, as well as the people who must watch over its operation, to go against any wrong which is against those rights, and not to suffer any law in behalf of such wrong to be executed.

Every sufferance of such execution, every lending of themselves, either on the part of magistrate or people, as instruments of such wrong in the name of law, and under the pretence of law, is just the deliberate commission of two crimes instead of one. First, it is the transaction of the original crime — injustice, inhumanity — which is a sin against both God and man; and second, it is the practice of the crime in the name of law, which is an added sin, especially against God, and is the daring assertion that human law is higher than the Divine. It is not only the practice of the sin, which is an act of disobedience against God and cruelty towards man, but it is the teaching of such disobedience to others, the enforcement of it by law against God's law. And God himself says, that while he who shall be guilty of breaking any one of his commandments shall be punished according to his crime, he that shall not only do but also teach such crime, such violation, shall be utterly cast out from the kingdom of heaven. And our blessed Lord condemned in the strongest terms the Scribes and Pharisees and rulers

of the nation because they had dared, under pretence of God's authority, to do and to teach things contrary to God's law, or which made God's law of none effect, perverting and setting aside its authority. And no wonder; for God has said, in that very book out of which our blessed Lord drew and expounded his own commission as the Messiah and preacher of righteousness, that the throne of iniquity shall not have fellowship with him which frameth mischief by a law.

And the whole Word of God, both Old and New Testament, burns, blazes, with intensest fire of Divine anger, against this complication of atheism towards God and cruelty towards man. In very many ways it is so reprobated, that none can possibly mistake; none following and obeying man rather than God can possibly plead ignorance or innocence.

Wo unto them that decree unrighteous decrees, and that write grievousness which they have prescribed, to turn aside the needy from judgment and to take away the right from the poor among the people. Wo unto them that justify the wicked for reward, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him. Wo unto them that draw iniquity with cords of vanity, bind it with unrighteous law, and bind their sin about as with a cart rope. Oh, my people, they which lead thee cause thee to err and destroy the way of thy paths; and the mean man boweth down, and the great man humbleth himself to such commanded wickedness; therefore forgive them not. Therefore my people are gone into captivity; therefore hell hath enlarged herself and opened her mouth without measure, as must always be the case when the way of sin, which is the way of hell, is established by law, and your very rulers and political guides cry out that you have no right to interfere with it and nothing to do but to obey it, because with a great lie they swear that it is in the constitution. But wo unto them that call evil good and good evil; that put darkness for light and light for darkness.

And how fearfully literal, how appalling in the exactness of their application to our sin, in the various forms of exasperation assumed by it, are the curses, embodied and distributed in the Word of God. It is terrible to note them, and to observe that we ourselves not only justify but claim and compel their utmost application, by our renewal and justification of the very identical crimes against which they were first issued. Cursed be he that removeth his neighbor's landmark: and all the people shall say, amen! With what a sweep of wicked-

ness was the sin subject to this curse transacted by us as a nation, when the grand and sacred landmark of millions, protecting them from the abominations and cruelties of Slavery, securing them from the possibility of that wickedness ever entering among them, was broken down, obliterated, annihilated; and the people, instead of applying God's curse against the treachery of such a removal, consented to it, through their senators and representatives. And now they reap the fruits of such a treacherous consent.

Cursed be he that maketh the blind to wander out of the way: and all the people shall say, amen! Cursed be he that perverteth the judgment of the stranger, fatherless, and widow: and all the people shall say, amen! **THE JUDGMENT OF THE STRANGER!** We have turned it into wormwood. We have taken the stranger, and the whole race of strangers, African strangers, and by the color of the skin have branded them as outcasts, dehumanized, chattelized, food only for the cruelty and avarice of oppressing States and traders in human flesh, denied all the rights of humanity, denied the existence of any rights that white men are bound to respect, law itself having been contrived for them, only as a cage, or a wheel, or an iron rack, to maim, to debase, and injure them. We have treated them with such concentrated, appalling, and complicated cruelty and wickedness, that the very name of *stranger*, God's sacred seal and claim for benevolence, mercy, protecting justice, is but a watchword of inhumanity and crime, at the very pronouncement of which there passes before the soul such a long procession of horrors, such an array of the vastness and detail of national and individual injustice and legalized barbarity, that the mind is almost maddened by the vision. And God hath said, in reference to all this, and to the sentence of moral assassination issued against the race of strangers from our Supreme National Tribunal of Justice, **CURSED BE HE THAT PERVERTETH THE JUDGMENT OF THE STRANGER!**

Then again, Cursed be he that smiteth his neighbor secretly: and all the people shall say, amen! Cursed be he that taketh reward to slay an innocent person: and all the people shall say, amen! Come forward, ye that are guilty of this wickedness, and receive your appointed sentence at the hand of God. Hear this, ye that by legalizing the wickedness, by pleading a commission for it in human Courts, by sanctioning its mischief as being framed by law, intend to gain the reward of such iniquity, and to escape the curse! Hear this, ye marshals of a base, atrocious enactment of human cruelty

against the innocent fugitive from bondage, ye man-hunters, ye human hounds, basest of all villains that ever for reward give themselves up as go-betweens and cat's-paws for Satan's purposes, for the avarice, lust, and tyranny of wicked men! Cursed be he that taketh reward to slay an innocent person! Your hounding and betraying of the Fugitive Slave, for the price of blood, is that slaying of his personality, which is set of God in the category of crime as equal with that of murder, and worthy of death.

And these atrocities could never have existed in our statute books, could never have been endured by the conscience of the people, nor ever could such impious daring and defiance against God and man have risen to such a pitch of atheism among our legislators and rulers, to be claimed as having the sanction of heaven, and setting aside and nullifying the divine law, except under the concealment, silence, and practical denial of that law, in these very respects, even by the church and ministry. Had the church and ministry spoken out at the beginning, and continued their testimony, had they, trusting in God and faithful to him, applied the fire of his word against this sin from the outset, it never could have risen to such a pitch of universal and desperate depravity; it would have been stayed and utterly abolished, long ere the present crisis. But now the word and authority of God are deliberately set aside, and the law of this wickedness is proclaimed as higher than the Highest. "Therefore," saith an avenging God, "as the fire devoureth the stubble, and the flame consumeth the chaff, so their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust, because they have cast away the law of the Lord, and despised the Word of the Holy One of Israel."

Now, what are we to say to these things? Do we imagine, my friends, can we deceive ourselves so far as to dream, that a nation guilty of such practical atheism, under the comparative dimness of the old dispensation, could be cast forth from God's presence and blessing, and laden with such retributive curses, and that we, a Christian nation, under so much clearer light, with their own example before us as a warning, and their punishment as a proof, can escape, can be let off, under our commission of the same guilt? Is the casting away of the law of the Lord, and the setting up of a political idol of iniquity in its place, any less hateful in His sight, any more endurable in us than it was in them? Can we, of all nations of the earth, be such atheists and not be punished for it? Has

that which was sin among the Jews become righteousness among the Gentiles? Can an iniquity become righteous now by State sanction, by political platforms, which was only doubled in its iniquity and immensely exasperated, even then, by the very attempt to claim for it the guardianship of the State, and to set it under sanction of the law? Nay, the Lord will enter into judgment with the rulers and the princes of the people. Thy princes are rebellious and companions of thieves. Every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards. They judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the stranger nor the oppressed come unto them; but they dare to say, our party is the white man's party; and as to the negro, we are not our brother's keeper; but it is a false accusation against us that we wish to have anything to do with the protection of the rights of the blacks; and so have you taught cruelty and wickedness and rebellion against the Lord, and have attempted to set the assassination of the rights of a whole race of your fellow beings in your very constitution, as a compacted bond of such wickedness. Therefore, hear the Word of the Lord, ye scornful men, that rule this people. Because ye have said, we have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement, when the overflowing scourge shall pass through it shall not come unto us, for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves; therefore, thus saith the Lord: Judgment will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet, and the hail shall sweep away your refuges of lies, and the waters shall overflow your hiding place; and your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then ye shall be trodden down by it.

Any compact with wickedness is an agreement with hell, but especially the pretence of such a compact, binding you to the extremest cruelty and injustice, in a covenant setting out with the declaration that it is for the more perfect establishment of justice and of freedom. The pretence of law for such rascality is only a vast exasperation of the villany, and the more law for such wickedness the less justice, the less sacredness, and the greater the obligation to resist such wickedness when it is taught in high places, and pretended to be sanctioned by the authority of law; for when this is the case, and men, in the name of God, do not resist, then everything goes rapidly to ruin; and as the prophet of the Lord declared, in this very case of old, except God raised up some gap men in this breach, except



the Lord of Hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah. Therefore, hear ye the Word of the Lord, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah. To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations. Your Sabbaths and your calling of assemblies I cannot away with. It is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your appointed feasts my soul hateth. And when ye spread forth your hands I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make many prayers I will not hear, for your hands are full of blood. Wash ye, 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 fatherless, plead for the widow; open thy mouth for the dumb, in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction; open thy mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy. But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.

When will our own country and people once lay these things to heart? In what way, by what method of warning, of arrest, can we be made to feel that not even to Israel of old were these truths so appropriate, by reason of their sins, as on account of our sins they are to us? Will nothing move us, nothing awaken us, nothing bring us to repentance? Are we so insensate, so drunken with our prosperity, so mad upon our idols, as to imagine that we can take the very same sins on account of which God swept the Jews from the face of the earth, and not only practice them individually, but teach and command them, by law, enshrine them in our tribunals of justice, maintain them as elements of our religion and manifestations of God's righteousness, and still go on with impunity in such a career, and escape God's wrath? Even amidst the distant thunder of the coming tempest, while the big drops are falling that forerun the storm, under the very discipline of God's preliminary plague, the blood at Harper's Ferry being only the precursor of the blood of the first born, if the American Pharaoh, with Jannes and Jambres, resisting God, refuse to set his people free; even thus and now, we are publicly taught that man is to be obeyed rather than God, that the wicked laws of men must be sustained and followed, no matter what becomes of God's law, for that law is so sacred a thing, and so important to

be preserved in its majesty, that while it is law, though ever so opposed to God's word, it must be fulfilled. But the only majesty of law is the majesty of God's authority, God's righteousness, and if divested of that, if contrary to that, then the only obligation upon us is that of disobeying and denouncing it. God's law indeed must be fulfilled, and man's law, if contrary to God's law, must be disobeyed; and this is the only way to preserve a just respect for the government, or a remnant of human freedom on the earth. Yet these atheists tell us, "Obey even the bad law while it is a law, until it be repealed!" As if any tyrant on earth, or oppressive government, would ever repeal one of their unrighteous enactments, so long as they found the people willing to obey them. As if Nebuchadnezzar's law of image-worship would ever have been repealed if Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, instructed by our modern politicians, had consented to obey it, and had taught the people to obey it while it was a law. Or as if the decree of Darius against prayer to God, in the law of the Medes and Persians, would ever have been repealed, had Daniel, according to the same atheistic teachings, obeyed it so long as it was a law; had he not disobeyed it, in the name of God, and gone into the lion's den in consequence, just as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego into the fiery furnace. They broke up the tyranny by breaking the law, and that was the God-inspired and commanded method of protesting against it.

All the threatenings of God's wrath against the Jews, and the whole record of their fulfillment, are pages for our warning and instruction, to avoid the same sins, or meet the same retribution. All this hath the mouth of the Lord spoken for us, and we are on the verge of the same ruin, except we repent. If the justice of an incensed God was executed upon them, let none imagine that we shall be spared. When the Lord Jesus came unto his own, and re-promulgated God's violated laws, he found the leprosy of the nation hidden even in the Church.

Stiff in the letter, lax in the design,  
 And import of their oracles divine,  
 Their learning legendary, false, absurd,  
 And yet exalted above God's own word,  
 They drew a curse from an intended good,  
 Puffed up with gifts they never understood;  
 He judged them with as terrible a frown,  
 As if not love, but wrath, had brought him down.

Yet he was gentle as soft summer airs,  
 Had grace for others' sins, but none for theirs.  
 The temple and its holy rites profaned  
 By mummeries, He that dwelt in it disdained,  
 Uplifted hands, that at convenient times  
 Could act extortion, and the worst of crimes,  
 Washed with a neatness scrupulously nice,  
 And free from every taint but that of vice.

Shall we despise the warning and the lesson, or lay it to heart?  
 When men, through covetousness, with feigned words, make merchandise of you, and ye permit and sanction, and perpetuate by law, the making merchandise of men, be sure that your judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and your damnation slumbereth not. Let the inspired Christian Poet continue his strain. Judgment, however tardy, mends her pace —

When obstinacy once has conquered grace,  
 But grave dissemblers cannot understand  
 That sin let loose speaks punishment at hand.  
 Oh, Israel! of all nations most undone!  
 Thy diadem displaced, thy sceptre gone;  
 Cry aloud, thou that sittest in the dust,  
 Cry to the proud, the cruel and unjust;  
 Knock at the gates of nations, rouse their fears;  
 Say wrath is coming and the storm appears.

Their glory faded, and their race dispersed,  
 The last of nations now, though once the first,  
 They warn and teach the proudest, would they learn,  
 Keep wisdom, or meet vengeance in your turn.  
 If we escaped not, if Heaven spared not us,  
 Peeled, scattered and exterminated thus,  
 If vice received her retribution due,  
 When we were visited, what hope for you?

What hope, indeed! Let the fulfillment of the curses that have been summoned from the law of God answer, recorded for our warning in the divine history. It is a terrible array; but it is not to be denied that no small portions both of the Old and New Testaments are occupied with these vivid expressions of divine justice, these avenging lightnings of God's violated law.

It is not to be denied that God set forth these maledictions to be a power against sin, and a terror to evil-doers, and they do possess an efficacy when every other method would have failed. God meant

them to be applied. But a man cannot be fitted to deal with the divine curses as they ought to be used, without the same Holy Spirit in his heart by whose influence they were inspired. They are a sharp two-edged sword, and without the spirit of heaven-inspired love, a man may cut himself with it oftener than he does God's enemies, and he will be just as likely to grasp it by the blade as by the handle. Hence the great significance of the catalogue of a Christian's armor, in the sixth chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians, where the detail begins with the truth as a girdle, and righteousness as a breastplate, and the feet shod and quickened with the glad tidings of peace, and the shield of faith and the helmet of salvation; all these personal graces, elements of Christian experience in possession, in wearing and use, before the mention of the sword of the spirit as the weapon of war, and then follows prayer as always to be used inseparable from the whole.

Here is great instruction. If we would wield the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, with a divine, irresistible efficacy, we must have the spirit of that sword in our own hearts. We must know its power in living faith and experience, that we may cut and smite with it in every direction, in the right way. This is our energy unto salvation. This is the secret of success and permanence in every true reform. These are the weapons, and this is the spirit and temper of every true religious reformer. We must trust in God, and smite with his Word, and in him we shall conquer. But if we cast aside his Word, or if, without its spirit in our hearts, without a supreme regard to it, as our supreme rule, and to him who gave it, as our guardian and guide, we go forward in the strength of mere common philanthropy; especially if because a treacherous portion of the visible Church of God have perverted his Word to the sanction of sin, and received iniquity to their protection and embrace, we therefore suffer ourselves to lose our hold on God, our confidence in his truth, and throw away the Christian armor in this conflict,—then are we sure to be defeated; for ~~except~~ the Word of God be applied against this gigantic sin, nothing can cope with it; the edge of every other weapon will be turned. The Word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword against sin, and if the Church and the ministry would use it faithfully, trusting in God, sin would be conquered. Its sharpest edge is to be used, and it is not to be wreathed with flowers nor handled deceitfully,

nor the trowel of Ezekiel's false prophets to be substituted for it, daubing with untempered mortar. Used as God gave it, it has a power, even against the atheism and inhumanity of Slavery, that nothing else can have.

I say, used as God gave it, applied with all its native pungency and power, no hearkening to the cry, prophecy unto us smooth things, no concealment of the message, nor handling of the Word of God deceitfully, but according to his own command. Diminish not a word; my words, every one of them, whether men will hear or forbear; my word, as the fire and the hammer against sin, with a "Thou art the man," and "Thus saith the Lord," to the sinner. I say, used as God gave it. Some good people are fearfully and sanctimoniously set against applying the denunciations of God in the case of great and popular sins, and are very piously horrified, (the editors of some religious newspapers especially,) with the bitterness of such denunciations; prophecy not unto us right things, prophecy smooth things, prophecy deceits. But God gave these denunciations to be applied, not to be disavowed, nor evaded; and they have a force, in the right place, and an authority, that nothing else can have. Suffer me here to present you with an illustration of the efficacy of such plain speaking, when honeyed words, and a soft and flattering tongue, would have been the devil's stratagem. The anecdote was given me by a venerable Christian of the persuasion to whom it refers, and it is pointed and powerful. In the work of the Abolition of Slavery, by the Society of Friends in one of the Southern States, there was at first great difficulty and opposition. In one of their stormy discussions, an influential Quaker, who still held on to his Slave property, when it was insisted that they must all relinquish it, and the most persuasive arguments had been employed in vain, arose and declared that they had no right to make such a demand upon him, that his Slaves were as truly his property as his oxen, and that it was not obligatory on him to give up the one more than the other. Indignant at this assertion, another brother arose to answer him, and said: "Friend, that speech of thine came right out from the very belly of hell, yea, from the very belly of hell thou hast brought this speech." On their assembling the next morning, the man thus pungently rebuked said to his reproving brother: "Friend, thou didst hurt my feelings; thou didst much distress me by thine unkind speaking. I could get no sleep all

night for thy bitterness." "Friend," said his neighbor, "if thou hast been distressed I am glad of it; I am glad thou couldst not sleep, and I hope to God thou never wilt sleep again till thou hast freed thy Slaves." And he could not sleep again, and did not, till he had freed his Slaves; but had it not been for the faithful reproof of his brother he might have kept them to this day.

Read the twenty-seventh chapter of Deuteronomy, and then say for what purpose were these curses given, and to whom were they committed for use and application. To the Church and the ministry, for a great, wise, most merciful and good purpose, against the cruel, remorseless, gigantic sins of men and nations; against oppressors and those who sanction their villanies. It is the business of the Church and ministry to apply these withering denunciations, just as God gave them, to the precise sins which he has catalogued and classified there and elsewhere for their reprobation. They are tremendous weapons, which those only can use aright who are themselves inspired with God's love, and therefore know how to hate what God abhors and has forbidden.

They who do not hate what God hates, and who refuse to resist and oppose what God has commanded them to oppose, are false in their profession of love. They do not know how to love what is good and holy, unless they hate and abhor what is wicked, unjust, and oppressive. Who are they that dare step between God's truth and the sinner, to shield him from its reprobation? Who dare interfere with the maledictions of God's Word, and forbid or deny their application to the very identical crimes and the precise characteristics and personages, pointed out for such fire?

It is for the Church and the ministry to obey God, and in behalf of the oppressed, smite the rebellious and stout-hearted oppressor. God has revealed his most terrible, most awful declarations against such wickedness, on purpose for his people to apply them against those who are guilty of it. But if such who profess to have been the recipients of his grace refuse this mission, then let them refrain from denouncing, in their turn, those who, perhaps without the spirit of love, but to supply their treachery, take up the burden of those curses, and seem to occupy themselves wholly with them. If the Church do not curse at God's command, in sympathy with him, out of love, and in the spirit of righteous indignation in behalf of the oppressed and against the oppressor, then the world will curse, the heart of agonized humanity will

curse, out of nothing but wrath and hatred. If the Church and ministry refuse to apply these denunciations of God against sin, then the world will take them up and scatter them as firebrands, arrows, and death. If the Church do not use them as God intended, men out of the Church, driven into infidelity by the Church sanctioning sin, will brandish them with mere natural revengeful passion and heat. If this fire be not kindled on God's altar, in God's fireplace, the devil will scatter it all about the house. Or if conservative saints jump upon the safety-valve, to confine the steam and prevent the noise, then no wonder if it explodes to men's destruction. It is thus that such a man as John Brown, of Osawatonic, was thrown from his balance and driven to a course of desperation. The Church and the ministry would not give vent to that fire which God has committed to them for application against sin, and the consequence was, that a double portion of it in his soul exploded.

I have recently had the opportunity of learning something of John Brown's integrity and nobleness of character, both native and Christian, from his sister, a woman of Christian dignity and refinement; confident, that amidst all his enemies and trials, even unto death, her brother, under the ban of human law, human tyranny, employs the consolations of the presence of his Saviour. She described the boyhood and youth of her brother, as well as his riper Christian career, as being marked by one characteristic especially, above the train of common men, a keen sensitiveness to the wickedness and cruelty of injustice and wrong, a sensitiveness both of conscience and of feeling for the right against the wrong, above what she ever knew in any other person. And the thoroughness, uprightness, and consistency of his Christian character no man doubted that knew him. He was a man of prayer. And he believed himself to be under the guidance of God in his efforts against Slavery, and in behalf of the enslaved. He may have carried this feeling, this assurance, to the degree of supposing himself commissioned, here and now, for just such a violent and desperate raid against this atheistic and tyrannical wickedness, just where it is defying God and trampling upon man with impunity; commissioned, not only with the general and particular revelations of God's will and of the Christian's duty against such gigantic sin, but to lift up the standard as he has done with such unquestionable courage and heroism, in literal fulfillment of the

injunction to resist unto blood, striving against sin. We may rightly lay the responsibility of his mistakes, and, (if any man dare brand it as fanaticism to have and to exercise such extreme hatred against Slavery,) of his fanaticism in this matter, upon the insensibility and treachery of those who ought long ago to have fought against this wickedness, and conquered and abolished it, with the Word and Spirit of the Living God, but who have not only refused to oppose it, but taken it to their own embrace, and sanctioned it as a Christian institution, not only refusing all sympathy in behalf of the oppressed, but espousing and defending the cause of the oppressor. Such a soul as John Brown's could not endure such appalling wickedness, especially when the iron entered into his own heart, through the bodies of his own murdered children, and the destruction of desolated households.

A silent, conservative, treacherous church and ministry compel such a soul to do more, to feel more, to hate more, than its sensitive organization can bear; and it very naturally may give way under the pressure. If the church and ministry had done their duty, John Brown would have done no more than his; John Brown would have been found with the church, directing the great guns of God's Word against the sin of Slavholding, and not at Harper's Ferry with carnal weapons. Let not those professed Christians who have neglected their duty presume to utter one word against that martial hero for having overdone his. The dumb dogs that never even yelped against Slavery are deep-mouthed in their denunciations of him. The man has committed no treason, but the silent church and ministry have. If the man should be hanged, it is their treason, not his own, for which he suffers. They who have sanctioned the iniquity and cruelty against which he has been fighting are the traitors, and the anguish of such treachery, if such a man brooded long over it, might have driven him almost mad, even if the murder of his own children had not been added to it. The inactivity and treachery of the church, amidst the prevalence of such enormities, drive some men into infidelity, but not a man whose communion is with God, not a true Christian such as John Brown is said to be; the mischief with him seems to have been that the failure and treachery of others, their unfaithfulness to God and the enslaved, filled him with more fire than he could keep within the bounds of wisdom and prudence. It is the declaration of divine inspiration itself that oppression maketh a wise man mad. Let those that are



without sin cast the first stone; and depend upon it God had rather see such men made mad in such a way, than see the cowardice and treachery of the church, sanctioning oppression, and denying his Word.

John Brown has committed no treason, for he owed no allegiance to Virginia. And how could he commit treason when his sole object was to free the Slave? How commit treason in going against a wickedness which God had forbidden, and which faithfulness to God's Word compelled him to oppose? If John Brown, trusting in his Saviour, comes under that category of the wise men made mad by oppression, John Brown is safe in the loving protection of his Father. John Brown is received of God, though outlawed by those whose very government is itself a piracy against God's government, "framing mischief by a law," crushing and destroying the rights, families, and lives of innocent men, and putting to death men who choose to obey God rather than man. Men can only degrade themselves, and stamp their own pretended justice with eternal infamy, in hanging such a man upon the gallows. But they cannot harm *him*; he is safe with God; and we are safe only in obedience to God.

The great lesson of the tragedy is this: If the men of peace will not apply God's law against the sin of Slaveholding, in the shape of argument and earnest truth and the maledictions of God, the men of war will put it in the shape of bullets, and fight it out, and God will let them. Most of the wars in this world have risen from the scarcity and unfaithfulness of Christian warriors; for if they will but fight God's battles with the sword of the spirit, which is the Word of God, God himself promises that even men of violence shall turn their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks, and the nations shall learn war no more. God grant that this consummation may come! But for us it never can come, if we hold on to our sins, if we do not apply the thunder and lightning of God's Word persistently, from the pulpit, on the Sabbath, and in every possible way, against this most stupendous of crimes against God and man, entrenched as it is in the bosom of the visible church, and enthroned on the Tribunal of our Supreme Justice!