

THE LIKENESS AND THE DIFFERENCE.

[The following is an extract from an editorial in Zion's Herald (Boston) the leading organ of the M.E. church of New England.]

That faculty of our moral nature by which we judge of the quality of our own acts and the acts of others, and which we call conscience, was given to us of God. Its judgment is immediate and decisive when occasion occurs. We cannot avoid it. The character, the law, and the acts of our Creator are passed upon before this personal tribunal in our heart. We cannot avoid doing this. God knows we must form these judgments, for he has given to us this moral nature. We cannot call that right, because it is a divine act, which really shocks our conscience. The fact of its being found in the Bible, if it is abhorrent to our moral sense, cannot give it any different ethical coloring to us. It is wrong there and everywhere – to us. God has given us this faculty, in order that we should make these judgments. We cannot help them. We are not responsible for them. They flash out their decisions involuntarily to us.

In accordance with this common law of our natures, men freely express their judgments in reference to the divine government over us, and especially in regard to the sanctions revealed in the Bible as following a persistent breach of the law of God. They judge of the divine conduct towards themselves, as they would of their own towards their children. They would not justify themselves in an exacting, persistent, absolutely strict demand of entire obedience at the hand of the latter, but would be lenient, forgiving, patient, forbearing, hopeful and helpful until the last. This is what their moral nature exacts of them towards their children. Have they not a right to demand the same at the hand of the Great Heavenly Father? No human mind could endure the thought of the absolute and eternal

ruin – the protracted, conscious, exquisite, and hopeless suffering of thousands upon thousands of intelligent immortals; the moral sense of no saved person could enjoy, it is affirmed, the bliss of heaven, to know that related and heretofore greatly beloved friends were enduring the unmitigated woes of an unlimited wretchedness. Our ethical natures must be of the same character as that of our Creator, for God has given us ours. He would not bestow upon us a moral sense which would apprehend that to be right which is in itself wrong, and conversely. He knows that all His acts and threatenings must pass in review before our own inward apprehensions of justice and righteousness. Can He expect that we will believe in reference to Himself that, that which shocks beyond expression our moral apprehension, is right simply because He has ordained it?

We present the question quite boldly and without qualification in order that any suggestion that is made may cover, if possible, the strongest aspect of the case. We hear, in these days, in our religious discussions, expressions that would have been thought blasphemous a few years since. The divine Lawgiver and Creator is unceremoniously summoned before the tribunal of our lower human courts, and His character and acts are submitted to a summary judgment. If He treats His creatures as many believers in the Bible think He does, He is affirmed to be worse than a devil. If He permits them to enter upon such a life as ours, the character and circumstances of their birth largely deciding their moral conditions in spite of themselves, and then condemns them, after a life of frightful temptation, with small or no fair opportunities for moral recovery, to a fearful and hopeless retribution in a life to come, He is, as these modern religious philosophers say, simply a monster. Our own moral natures rise up involuntarily within us, it is urged, and repel such an idea of the infinite Creator and Father of the universe.

Now, while a reverent and Christian believer would hesitate to use such language as this, every one may safely affirm that some time and somewhere every act of God, to every intelligent soul, will be made to appear, as it relates to the individual or universe, absolutely righteous. We may not be able to adjust all the questions involved, here and now, but some time God will justify himself before the moral sense He has Himself created within us. It is just as safe and proper, also, to say that at some point in the history of every soul, God's economy over him and all other souls will be made to appear as the reign of infinite and unqualified love. God expects this judgment at the hand of every person, for He has given to all this wonderful faculty of sitting upon His own acts, and He has revealed Himself both as holy and as a God of love; not simply merciful and forgiving, but essential love itself.

We cannot look back upon the history of the race, or even read the Bible, or gather up the results of our own observation, and feel that, judged by our standard, the government of the world has seemed exactly just to individuals and nations. We cannot reconcile divine impartiality, with the special favor shown to some peoples and some individuals....

Amid all these conflicting moral elements, we readily hold our faith in both the divine wisdom and love. The Judge of all flesh will do right. And God is love. It becomes us, therefore, to be both modest and reverent in our expressions of opinion in reference to divine acts to occur on the other side of the vail. We only see now in part. God will be true to Himself and to our purified moral sense. Let us not dare summarily to express, in our ignorance and moral infirmity, a judgment upon His possible government hereafter, beyond the sure word of prophecy.

REMARKS BY THE EDITOR:

The above is evidently the expression of a noble, honest heart, yearning and longing for the bright light of truth to prove to him what the scriptures claim, that "God is love," and "His mercy endureth forever." We are glad to think that this brother is one of many who are beginning to awake to the fact that there must be something in God's plan which they have not yet seen, which will harmonize His word and show its claim, that God is just and merciful and loving, to be borne out and proved by his dealings with his creatures. This Brother, while not alone in his unrest and disquiet, is comparatively alone in his utterances. Others think, but seldom speak, and the above utterances seem to indicate either a bolder or a larger heart than the majority of his colleagues possess.

When we read such heart throbs how we wish we could give some of **[R130 : page 6]** the consolations of the "sure word of prophecy." How we wish for opportunity to sing to them "The Song of Moses and the Lamb," and to show to them that only the few – that have "come to the knowledge of truth" and have "been made partakers of the Holy Ghost" (the church), only these have yet had their trial, or judgment, and that it is a blessed truth, and eventually will be "glad tidings of great joy to all people, that God hath appointed a day (age) in the which He will judge (Put on trial by giving them the clear knowledge of the truth) the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath afore ordained – Jesus Christ," the new man – the "anointed Saviour" – head and body. ("Know ye not that the saints shall judge the world?" If they could but see what is meant by Peter in Acts 3:21. ("The heavens must retain (Jesus) until the times of restitution of all things.") and that the very object of His coming is to glorify His Bride and "the Virgins, her companions that follow her," and then through them to "bless all the families of earth" and "restore all things" – restore poor fallen humanity to its original human perfectness which God declared "very good," freeing them from all the evils of Adam's

transgression and placing them again where it is possible for them to keep a perfect law. Oh, would that they could see that this "time [these years] of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all the holy Prophets since the world began," is the magic key which unlocks God's goodness, love, mercy, and justice and discloses to our enraptured vision not only "the exceeding riches of His grace and loving kindness toward us in Christ Jesus," but that it also gives us a glimpse of "the depth of the riches, both of the knowledge and wisdom of God," that we might "comprehend with all saints the height and depth, length and breadth, and know the LOVE of God which passeth knowledge."

But why is it that souls expressing such longings for truth as the above, are unwilling [generally] to hear or investigate our sweet story? Alas, they are bound! Creeds made by fallible men in the Fifteenth to Seventeenth centuries, who, though honest, had much of the error, tradition and darkness of old Papacy clinging to them. These are the shackles and chains which bind men's consciences and prevent the reception of truth, or so dilute and mix it with error as to destroy much of its power and almost all of its beauty. Oh, that christians could realize the liberty whereunto they are called, and that they would not be held in bondage to any man nor to any written creed, nor to any preconceived opinions of their own (an unwritten creed.) Let us put down no stakes, saying, thus far will I believe and no farther, but realize that the Lord is our shepherd and that he will lead His sheep day by day and arrange ways by which things both new and old shall be brought [R130 : page 7] out of the great treasure-house of His word as meat in due season for the household of faith. Let us remember that it is as much our work to follow as it is the Spirit's work to lead us into all truth. "Then shall we know if we follow on to know the Lord," [Hos. 6:3]. "Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made you free, and be not again entangled with the YOKE OF BONDAGE."