

philosophy is unable to answer. In fact, holiness is best defined negatively, as the "negation of all that man from his own experience knows to be unholy." These words of the Danish philosopher Rauwenhoff are made still clearer by the following observations: "The strength in the idea of holiness lies exactly in its negative character. There is no comparison of higher or lesser degree possible between man's imperfections and God's perfect goodness. Instead, there is an absolute contrast between mankind which, even in its noblest types, must wrestle with the power of evil, and God, in whom nothing can be imagined which would even suggest the possibility of any moral shortcoming or imperfection."<sup>1</sup> As the prophet says, "Thou art too pure of eyes to look complacently upon evil,"<sup>2</sup> and according to the Psalmist, "Who shall ascend into the mountain of the Lord, and who shall stand in His holy place? He that hath clean hands and a pure heart."<sup>3</sup>

9. The idea of holiness became the preëminent feature of Judaism, so that the favorite name for God in Rabbinical literature was "the Holy One, blessed be He," and the acme of all ceremonial and moral laws alike was found in "the Hallowing of His name."<sup>4</sup> If the rabbis as followers of the Priestly Code were compelled to lay great stress upon ritual holiness, they yet beheld in it the means of moral purification. They never lost sight of the prophetic principle that moral purity is the object of all human life, for "the holy God is sanctified through righteousness."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Rauwenhoff, l. c., 504.

<sup>2</sup> Hab. I, 13.

<sup>3</sup> Psalm XXIV, 4-5.

<sup>4</sup> L. Lazarus: *Z. Charakteristik d. juedisch. Ethik*, 40-45; M. Lazarus: *Ethics of Judaism*, p. 184.

<sup>5</sup> Isa. V, 16.

## CHAPTER XVII

### GOD'S WRATH AND PUNISHMENT

1. Scripture speaks frequently of the anger and zeal of God and of His avenging sword and judgment, so as to give the impression that "the Old Testament God is a God of wrath and vengeance." As a matter of fact, these attributes are merely emanations of His holiness, the guide and incentive to moral action in man. The burning fire of the divine holiness aims to awaken the dormant seeds of morality in the human soul and to ripen them into full growth. Whenever we to-day would speak of pangs of conscience, of bitter remorse, Scripture uses figurative language and describes how God's wrath is kindled against the wrongdoing of the people, and how fire blazes forth from His nostrils to consume them in His anger. The nearer man stands to nature, the more tempestuous are the outbursts of his passion, and the more violent is the reaction of his repentance. Yet this very reaction impresses him as though wrought from outside or above by the offended Deity. Thus the divine wrath becomes a means of moral education, exactly as the parents' indignation at the child's offenses is part of his training in morality.

2. Thus the first manifestation of God's holiness is His indignation at falsehood and violence, His hatred of evil and wrongdoing. The longer men persist in sin, the more does He manifest Himself as "the angry God," as a "consuming fire" which destroys evil with holy zeal.<sup>1</sup> The husbandman cannot

<sup>1</sup> Comp. Dillmann, l. c., 258 f.; J. E., art. "Anger."

expect the good harvest until he has weeded out the tares from the field; so God, in educating man, begins by purging the soul from all its evil inclinations, and this zeal is all the more unsparring as the good is finally to triumph in His eternal plan of universal salvation. We must bear in mind that Judaism does not personify evil as a power hostile to God, hence the whole problem is only one of purifying the human soul. Before the sun of God's grace and mercy is to shine, bearing life and healing for all humanity, His wrath and punitive justice must ever burst forth to cleanse the world of its sin. For as long as evil continues unchecked, so long cannot the divine holiness pour forth its all-forbearing goodness and love.

3. On this account the first revelation of God on Sinai was as "a jealous God, who visiteth the sins of the fathers upon the children and the children's children until the third and fourth generation." So the prophets, from Moses to Malachi, speak ever of God's anger, which comes with the fury of nature's unchained forces, to terrify and overwhelm all living beings.<sup>1</sup> Thus Scripture considers all the great catastrophes of the hoary past, — flood, earthquakes, and the rain of fire and brimstone that destroys cities — as judgments of the divine anger on sinful generations. Wickedness in general causes His displeasure, but His wrath is provoked especially by violations of the social order, by desecrations of His sanctuary, or attacks on His covenant, and His anger is kindled for the poor and helpless, when they are oppressed and deprived of their rights.<sup>2</sup>

4. Thus the divine holiness was felt more and more as a moral force, and that which appeared in pre-prophetic times to be an elemental power of the celestial ire became a refining

<sup>1</sup> Ex. XX, 5; Isa. XXX, 27 f.; Nahum I, 5 f.

<sup>2</sup> Ex. XXII, 23; Num. XVII, 10 f.; XXV, 3; Deut. XXIX, 19; XXXII, 21; Isa. IX, 16.

flame, purging men of dross as in a crucible. "I will not execute the fierceness of Mine anger," says the prophet, "for I am God and not man, the Holy One in the midst of thee, and I will not come in fury."<sup>1</sup> So sings the Psalmist, "His anger is but for a moment; His favor for a life-time."<sup>2</sup> In the same spirit the rabbis interpreted the verse of the Decalogue, "The sin of the fathers is visited upon the children and children's children *only* if they continue to act as their fathers did, and are themselves haters of God."<sup>3</sup>

The fact is that Israel in Canaan had become addicted to all the vices of idolatry, and if they were to be trained to moral purity and to loyalty to the God of the Covenant, they must be taught fear and awe before the flame of the divine wrath. Only after that could the prophet address himself to the conscience of the individual, saying:

"Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire?  
Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?  
He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly;  
He that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes,  
That stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from looking upon evil;  
He shall dwell on high; his place of defense shall be the munitions of rocks;  
His bread shall be given, his water shall be sure.  
Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty; they shall behold a land stretching afar."<sup>4</sup>

Here we behold the fiery element of the divine holiness partly depicted as a reality and partly spiritualized. The last of the prophets compares the divine wrath to a melting furnace, which on the Day of Judgment is to consume evil-doers as stubble, while to those who fear the Lord He

<sup>1</sup> Hosea XI, 9.

<sup>2</sup> Targum to Ex. XX, 3; Sanh. 27 b.

<sup>3</sup> Psalm XXX.

<sup>4</sup> Isa. XXXIII, 14-17.

shall appear as the sun of righteousness with healing on its wings.<sup>1</sup>

5. The idea as expressed by the prophets, then, was that God's anger will visit the wicked, and particularly the ungodly nations of heathendom, and that He shall judge all creatures in fire.<sup>2</sup> This was significantly altered under Persian influence, when the Jew began to regard the world to come as promising to the righteous greater bliss than the present one. Then the day of divine wrath meant doom eternal for evil-doers, who were to fall into the fiery depths of Gehenna, "their worm is never to die and their fire never to be quenched."<sup>3</sup> This became the prevailing view of the rabbis, of the Apocalypics and also of the New Testament and the Church literature.<sup>4</sup> The Jewish propaganda in the Hellenistic literature, however, combined the fire of Gehenna with the Stoic, or pagan, view of a general world-conflagration, and announced a general doomsday for the heathen world, unless they be converted to the belief in Israel's one and holy God, and ceased violating the fundamental (Noachian) laws of humanity.<sup>5</sup>

6. A higher view of the punitive anger of God is taken by Beruriah, the noble wife of R. Meir,<sup>6</sup> — if, indeed, the wife of the saintly Abba Helkiah did not precede her<sup>7</sup> — in suggesting a different reading of the Biblical text, as to make it offer the lesson: "not the sinners shall perish from the earth, but the sins." From a more philosophical viewpoint both Juda ha Levi and Maimonides hold that the anger which we ascribe to

<sup>1</sup> Mal. III, 2, 19 f.

<sup>2</sup> Deut. XXXII, 35; comp. Sifre, 325; Geiger: *Urschrift*, 247, regarding Samaritan text. Zeph. I, 15; Isa. LXVI, 15-16.

<sup>3</sup> Isa. XLVI, 24.

<sup>4</sup> See J. E., art. "Gehenna"; Mid. Teh. to Ps. LXXVI, 11, and LXXIX; Ned. 32 a; Taan. 9 b; Yer. Taan. II, 65 b; Ab. Zar. 4 a and b; 18 b; Ber. 7 a; Shab. 118 a; Sanh. 110 b; Gen. R. VI, 9; XXVI, 11, *et al.*; comp. Romans II, 5; Eph. V, 6; I Thess. I, 10.

<sup>5</sup> Sibyll. II, 170, 285; III, 541, 556 f., 672-697, 760, 810; Enoch XCI, 7-9.

<sup>6</sup> Ber. 10 a; Midr. Teh. to Ps. CIV, 35.

<sup>7</sup> Tan. 23 b.

God is only the transference of the anger which we actually feel at the sight of evil-doing. Similarly, when we speak of the consuming fire of hell, we depict the effect which the fear of God must have on our inner life, until the time shall come when we shun evil as ungodly and love the good because it is both good and God-like.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Cuzari* IV, 5; *Moreh* I, 36, and Commentary to Sanh. X, 1.