

CHAPTER XLV

DIVINE RETRIBUTION: REWARD AND PUNISHMENT.

1. The feeling of equity is deeply rooted in human nature, demanding reparation for every wanton wrong and yielding recognition to every benevolent act. In fact, upon this universal principle is based all justice and to a certain extent all morality. Judaism of every age compresses this demand of the religious and moral nature of man into the doctrine: God rewards the good and punishes the evil. This doctrine, which is the eleventh of Maimonides' articles of faith, constitutes the underlying presumption of all the Biblical narratives as well as of the prophetic threats and warnings and those of the Mosaic law, in so far as earthly success and prosperity were regarded as the rewards of God and earthly misfortune and misery as His punishments. In the same degree, however, as experience contradicted this doctrine, and as examples multiplied of wicked persons revelling in prosperity and innocent ones laboring under adversity and woe, it became necessary to defer the divine retribution more and more to the future — at first to a future on earth and later to one in the world to come, until finally it developed into a pure spiritual conception in full accord with a higher ethical view of life.

2. As long as in the primitive process of law the family or the clan was held responsible for the crime of the individual, ancient Israel also adhered to the idea that "God visits the sins of the fathers upon the third and fourth generation," as Jeremiah still did¹ in full accord with the second command-

¹ Jer. XXXII, 18.

ment. It was in a far later stage that the rabbis interpreted the words "of those who hate Me" in the sense of individual responsibility.¹ Only in accordance with the Deuteronomic law which says: "The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers; every man shall be put to death for his own sin,"² did the religious consciousness rebel against the thought that a later generation should suffer for the sins of its ancestors, and hence the popular adage arose, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the teeth of the children are set on edge."³ It is the prophet Ezekiel who refutes once and for all the idea of a guilt transmitted to children and consequently of hereditary sin and punishment, insisting on the doctrine that personal responsibility alone determines divine retribution.⁴ But here a new element affects divine retribution. God's long-suffering and mercy do not desire the immediate punishment, the death of the sinner. He should be given time to return to a better mode of life.⁵

But the great enigma of human destiny, which vexes the author of the seventy-third Psalm and that of the book of Job, still presses for a better solution. It is true that the popular belief and popular legends which are preserved in post-Biblical writings as well, insisted on a justice which requites "measure for measure."⁶ Still insight into actual life does not confirm the teaching of the popular philosophy that the "righteous will be requited in the earth" and that "evil pursueth sinners."⁷ The unshakeable belief in the justice of God had to find another solution for life's antinomies, and was forced to reach out for another world in which the divine righteousness would find its complete realization.

¹ Targ. to Ex. XX, 5; Sanh. 27 b.

² Deut. XXIV, 16.

³ Ezek. XVIII, 2.

⁴ Ezek. XVIII, 20.

⁵ XVIII, 23, 32.

⁶ Ex. XVIII, 11; XXI, 23-25; Sota I, 7-9; Tos. Sota III-IV; Sanh. 90 a; B. Wisdom XVI-XIX; Jubilees IV, 31; II Macc. V, 10; XV, 32.

⁷ Prov. XI, 31; XIII, 21.

3. Biblical Judaism with few exceptions recognized only the present world and the subterranean world of shadows, a view preserved in its essentials by Ben Sira and the Sadducees, who were subsequently declared heretics. In contrast to them Pharisaic or Rabbinic Judaism teaches a resurrection after death for a life of eternal bliss or eternal torment, according as the divine judgment finds one righteous and another wicked. We may leave aside the consideration that the first impulse toward a Jewish belief in resurrection came from the non-fulfillment of the national hope, wherefore it was always bound up with the soil of the Holy Land, as will be seen in Chapter LIV. The fact remains that the divine judgment to follow upon resurrection was consistently regarded as a great world-judgment, which was to decide the future lot of all men and spirits. It must be noted also that the apocalyptic and midrashic literature often identifies the pious with the God-fearing Israelites as those who shall arise to eternal life, while the wicked are identified with the idolatrous heathen, who are condemned to eternal death, or, as it is frequently expressed, to a second death.¹

4. Exactly as the old Persian Mazdaism expected the resurrection of all, both good and bad, the believers in Ahura Mazda as well as the rest of humanity, so the apocalyptic writers prior to the Talmudic period describe resurrection as universal: "In those days the earth will give back those who have been entrusted to her, and the nether-world will release that which it has received," according to Enoch LI, 1. Similarly fourth Esdras remarks: "And after seven days of silence for all creatures, the new order of the world shall be raised up, and mortality itself shall perish; and the earth shall restore

¹ See especially Sanh. 90 b-92 b, ref. to Ex. VI, 4; Deut. XI, 9; IV, 5; XXXI, 16; Isa. XXVI, 19; Dan. XII, 13; Ps. LXXII, 16; also Ex. XV, 1; Josh. VIII, 30; and Song of Songs, VII, 10. On the Second Death see *Targ.* to Deut. XXXIII, 6; Isa. XIV, 19; LXV, 6; Jer. LI, 39; and Revelation XX, 6, 14; XXI, 8.

those that are asleep in her; and so shall the dust give back those that dwell in silence; and the chambers shall deliver those souls that were committed unto them. The Most High shall appear on the throne of judgment, and shall say: Judgment only shall remain, truth shall stand, and faith shall wax strong. The good deeds shall be of force, and wicked deeds shall no longer sleep. The lake of torment shall be revealed, and opposite to it the place of joy; the furnace of Gehinnom will be visible, and opposite to it the bliss of Paradise. Then the Most High will speak to the heathen nations, who have awakened: behold now Him whom ye have denied, whom ye have not served, whose command ye have abhorred. Gaze now here and there, — here bliss and rest, there fire and torment."¹

The rabbinic form of the doctrine of resurrection is quite unambiguous: "Those born into the world are destined to die; the dead, to live again; and those who enter the world to come, to be judged."² And wherever the rabbinic or apocalyptic literature mentions the share of the pious, or of Israel, in eternal life, this implies that, while these enter the world to come, the evil-doers or idolaters shall enter hell for eternal death; the understanding being that there is a universal resurrection for the world-judgment.

5. The whole system of eschatology in connection with resurrection arose undoubtedly from the Persian doctrine, according to which death together with all that is evil and unclean is created by Ahriman, the evil principle, and will suffer annihilation with him, as soon as the good principle, Ahura Mazda, has achieved the final victory. Then Soshiosh "the Savior," the descendant of Zoroaster, will begin his kingdom of eternal life for the righteous, coincident with the

¹ IV Ezra VII, 31 f.; comp. Baruch Apoc. 42 ff.; Adam et Eva, 42; II Sibyll., 220-236; IV Sibyll., 180 f.

² Aboth IV, 22.

awakening of the dead.¹ Pharisaic Judaism, however, gave the hope of resurrection a deeper moral and religious meaning. The proofs, or rather analogies from nature, of the seeds springing from the earth in a new form, of men awakening from sleep in the morning, or of the original creation, are shared by the rabbis and the New Testament writers with the Persians. On the other hand, proofs based on the prophetic hope for the future are purely national. So also are those proofs based on the Biblical passage that the God of the fathers had sworn to the Patriarchs to give them the Promised Land.² Likewise the reference to the wondrous resurrections related in the history of Elijah and Elisha offers no proof of a universal resurrection. A striking point and one which deepens the idea of retribution is the simile of the Lame and the Blind³ employed by Jehuda ha Nasi in a dialogue with the Emperor Antoninus. The latter had said that at the last judgment both soul and body might deny all guilt. The body may say: "The soul alone has sinned, for since it has parted from me, I have lain motionless as a stone." And the soul, on its part, may reply: "It must be the body that sinned, for since I have parted from it I soar about in the air free as a bird." To this Jehuda ha Nasi answered: "A king once possessed a garden with splendid fig-trees, and appointed as watchmen in it a blind man and a lame man. Then the lame man spoke to the blind man, 'I see fine figs up there; take me upon your shoulders, and I shall pick them, and we can enjoy them together.' They did so, and when the king

¹ See Stave, *Ueb. d. Einfluss d. Parsismus a. d. Judenth.*, 145 ff.; Boecklen: *D. Verwandtschaft d. jued. christl. u. d. pars. Eschatologie*; Schorr: *He Haluz*, VII-VIII.

² Sanh. 91 a, b; Matt. XXII, 31 f.

³ The parable is found in an Apocryphon ascribed to the prophet Ezekiel, see Epiphanius *Haeres*, LXIV, ed. Dindorf, II, 683 f. and ascribed to R. Ishmael, Lev. R. IV, 5; in Sanh. 91 a, b it is given in a dialogue with Antoninus; in Tanh. Wayithro, ed. Buber, § 12, it is anonymous.

entered the garden, the figs were gone. But when they were held to account for it, the lame man said, 'How could I have taken them, since I cannot walk?' And the blind man said, 'And I cannot see.' Then the king had the lame man placed upon the shoulders of the blind man and judged them both together. In like manner will God treat the body and the soul, as it is said:¹ 'He calleth to the heavens above — that is, the heavenly element, the soul — and to the earth beneath — the earthly body — and places them together before His throne of judgment.'"

6. It cannot be denied that the idea that the soul and body, having committed good or evil deeds together in this life, should receive in common their reward or punishment in the world to come, satisfied the Jewish sense of justice better than the conception developed by Hellenistic Judaism (after the Platonic and, in the last resort, the Egyptian view) that the soul alone should partake of eternal bliss or torment. Nevertheless the philosophically trained Jewish thinkers of Alexandria could not bring themselves to accept a bodily resurrection, and therefore emphasized so much more strongly the great day of judgment and the reward and punishment of the soul in the world to come. Still we find much inconsistency among various authors, sometimes even in the same work, in the conception of future bliss for the good and torture for the wicked. These varied according to the more sensuous or more spiritual view taken of the soul and the celestial world, and according to the literal or figurative interpretation of the Biblical allusions to "fire," "worms," and the like in the punishment of evil-doers, and of the delights awaiting the righteous in the future.²

On this point free play was allowed to the imagination of the people and the fancy of the Haggadists. Still, throughout, the

¹ Ps. L, 4.

² Isa. LXVI, 24; see Yalkut; Bousset, 308-321; J. E., art. Eschatology.

solemn thought found its echo that mortal man must give account to the inexorable Judge of the living and the dead for the life just completed, in order to be ushered, according to his deserts, into the portals of the celestial Paradise or of hell.¹ This led to the view that this whole mundane life is but like a wayfarers' inn for the life to come, or the vestibule of the palace (more precisely the "banquet-hall") of the future.²

7. A further development of the principle of justice in application to future retribution led not merely to such a depiction of the tortures of hell and the delights of heaven that the maxim: "measure for measure," so often deviated from in this life, could find complete realization in the world to come. An intermediate stage also was devised for those whose merit or guilt would enroll them neither among the righteous for eternal bliss, nor among the wicked for eternal punishment. While the stern teachers of the school of Shammai insisted that these mediocre ones must undergo a twelve-month process of purification in the fires of Gehenna, the milder school of Hillel maintained that the divine mercy would grant them admission into Paradise even without the fires of purgatory,³ either through the merit of the patriarchs⁴ or owing to the deserts of a son who has been trained to reverence for God, as is indicated by the legend concerning the Kaddish prayer.⁵ In any case, the teaching of Hillel concerning the all-sufficing mercy of God swept aside the old hopeless conception that eternal suffering in hell awaits the average man, which was adhered to by the Christian church in connection with its dogma of the atoning blood of Christ. Likewise, in the dispute of schools as to whether or not the bliss of eternal life would be accorded also to the righteous among the heathen,

¹ Aboth III, 1, 19, 20; Ber. 28 b.

² Aboth IV, 21.

³ Tos. Sanh. XIII, 3; R. H. 16 b; see J. E., art. Purgatory.

⁴ See Testament of Abraham XIV; comp. Kohler in J. Q. R. VII, 587.

⁵ T. d. b. El. Zuta XVII, ed. Friedman, p. 23. See note, Kalla R. II., J. E., art. Kaddish, but comp. IV Ezra VII, 102-115.

the more humane view of Joshua ben Hananiah prevailed over the gloomier one of the Shammaite Eliezer ben Hyrcanos, and therefore the doctrine became generally accepted, "The righteous of all nations shall have a share in the world to come."¹

8. The apocalyptic writers, who largely influenced the New Testament, and also the Haggadists refer with fond interest to the banquet of the pious in the world to come, where they would be served with heavenly manna as bread, with wine preserved from the days of the creation, and with the flesh of the Leviathan or the fruit of the Tree of Life.² On the other hand they elaborated the tortures of the evil-doers in hell which are to afford a pleasing sight to the pious in heaven, just as the torments of the sinners are aggravated by the sight of the righteous enjoying all delights.³ But at the same time we meet with a more refined and spiritual conception of future reward and punishment among the disciples of R. Jehuda ha Nasi, in the Babylonian Rab, and the Palestinian R. Johanan

¹ Tos. Sanh. XIII, 2; Sanh. 105 a; Midr. Teh. Ps. IX, 18: "The wicked shall return to Sheol, all the nations that forget God," R. Joshua taking the last sense as restrictive and R. Eliezer as a generalization.

² For the banquet of the pious see Aboth. III, 16; Shab. 153 a; Pes. R. XLI; comp. Luke XIII, 28; XXII, 30, and parallels. The idea rests on Isa. LXV, 13, which is taken literally, and Ps. XXIII, 5; see Midr. Teh., ad loc. For the Leviathan and Behemoth see Job XL, 15-30; B. B. 74 b-75 a; Enoch LX, 7 f.; IV Ezra VI, 52; Baruch Apoc. XXIX, 4; Targ. Ps. CIV, 26; Lev. R. XIII, 3. For the giant bird Ziz see Ps. L, 40-41; Targ. and Midr. Teh., ad loc.; Tanh. Beshallah, ed. Buber, 24; Jellinek, B. H. III, 76, 80. For the heavenly manna Ps. LXXVIII, 24; Joma 75 b; Hag. 12 b; Tanh. Beshallah, ed. Buber, 21; Sibyll. Præmium 87; II, 318; III, 746; IV Ezra IX, 19. For the wine see Ex. R. XXV, 10; Ber. 34 b; Sanh. 99 a; Matt. XXVI, 29; comp. also Num. R. XIII, 3 for other fruits of Paradise. For the Persian origin of these ideas see *Bundahish*, XIX, 13; XXX, 25. The Behemoth corresponds with the primeval ox Hadhayos, whose flesh produces the sap of immortality; the giant fish and bird with *Bundahish*, XVIII, 5-8; XIX, 16-19; the wine corresponds with the Parsee Hom: *Bundahish*, XXX, 25. See Windishman: *Zoroastr. Stud.*, 92 f., 252 f., and Boeklen, l. c., p. 68.

³ Shab. 153 a, with ref. to Isa. LXV, 13-14; LXVI, 24; IV Ezra VII, 83, 93.

and his pupil Simeon ben Lakish. "In the future world," says Rab, "there are no sensual enjoyments nor passions, but the righteous sit at the table of God with wreaths upon their heads (like the Greek sages at a symposium!), feeding on the radiance of the divine majesty, as did the chosen ones of Israel on the heights of Sinai."¹ R. Johanan teaches, "All the promises held forth in Scripture in definite form as reward for the future, refer to the Messianic era, whereas in regard to the bliss awaiting the pious in the world to come, the words of Isaiah hold good: 'No eye hath seen it, O God, beside Thee.'"² Simeon ben Lakish even went so far as to say, "There is neither hell nor paradise. Instead, God sends out the sun in its full strength from its encasement, and the wicked are consumed by its heat, while the pious find delight and healing in its beams."³

However, the popular imagination demanded more perceptible pictures of heaven and hell, if fear of punishment was to deter men from sin, and hope of reward to lead them to virtue. The description of the modes of reward and punishment for the future in the Koran is the outcome of mingled Persian and Jewish popular conceptions, and its crass sensuousness exerted in turn a decisive influence upon the entire Gaonic period,⁴ leaving its mark upon even so clear a thinker as Saadia. Not only does he admit into his philosophic work all the crude and conflicting descriptions of the future world, but he also argues for the eternity of the punishments of hell and of the delights of heaven as logical necessities, because only such could sufficiently deter or allure mankind, and a righteous God must certainly carry out His threats and promises.⁵

¹ Ber. 17 a.

² Ber. 34 b; with ref. to Isa., LXIV, 3.

³ Ab. Zar. 36 with ref. to Mal. III, 19-22.

⁴ See Jellinek, B. H. I, II and III, the Treatise on *Gehinnom* and *Gan Eden*.

⁵ *Emunoth VII, IX, and comp. J. Guttman; Religionsphil. des Saadia, 208 f., 249 f.*

9. The entire Jewish philosophy or theology of the Middle Ages remained under the influence of the traditional belief in resurrection. Even Maimonides, whose purely spiritual conception of the soul and of salvation is utterly irreconcilable with the belief in bodily resurrection, and who accordingly dwells instead, in both his *Moreh* and his *Code*, on the future world of spirits, with explicit emphasis on their incorporeality, did not have the courage to break altogether with the traditional belief in resurrection. In his apologetic treatise on resurrection he even attempts to present it as a miraculous act of God beyond the grasp of the intellect. He omits, however, to specify what purpose this miracle may serve, since in the Maimonidean system reward and punishment would be administered in the world of spirits in a much purer and more satisfactory manner.¹ The same standpoint is taken also by Jehuda ha Levi as well as by Crescas and Albo.² If then resurrection be a miracle, it falls outside the scope of philosophic speculation and becomes a matter of faith; accordingly the mystics from Nahmanides down to Manasseh ben Israel associated with it the grossest conceptions.³

10. The actual view of Maimonides concerning future retribution is expressed clearly and unambiguously in both his early product, the commentary on the Mishna, and in the ripest fruit of his life work, the *Mishneh Torah*, where he says "Not immortality, but the power to win eternal life through the knowledge and the love of God is implanted in the human soul. If it has the ability to free itself from the bondage of the senses and by means of the knowledge of God to lift itself to the highest morality and the purest thinking, then it has attained divine bliss, true immortality, and it enters the realm

¹ See Joel, *Religionsphil. d. Mose b. Maimon.*, p. 40.

² *Cuzari*, I, 15; V, 14; *Or Adonai* III, 4, 2. See Joel: *Crescas*, p. 74 f.; Albo: *Ikkarim*, IV, 29-41.

³ Nahmanides, l. c., last chapter; Manasse b. Israel in *Nishmat Chayim*.

of the eternal Spirit together with the angels. If it sinks into the sensuousness of earthly existence, then it is cut off from eternal life; it suffers annihilation like the beast. In reality this life eternal is not the future, but is already potentially present and invariably at hand in the spirit of man himself, with its constant striving toward the highest. When the rabbis speak of paradise and hell, describing vividly the delights of the one and the torments of the other, these are only metaphors for the agony of sin and the happiness of virtue. True piety serves God neither from fear of punishment nor from desire for reward, as servants obey their master, but from pure love of God and truth. Thus the saying of Ben Azai is verified, 'The reward of a good deed is the good deed itself.'¹ Only children need bribes and threats to be trained to morality. Thus religion trains mankind. The people who cannot penetrate into the kernel need the shell, the external means of threats and promises."² These splendid words of the great thinker require supplementing or modification in only one direction, and that has been afforded by the keenest critic among Jewish philosophers, Hasdai Crescas. Too deeply enmeshed in the Aristotelian system, Maimonides found the happiness and immortality of man solely in the acquired intellectual power which becomes part of the divine intellect, and the mere knowledge of God is to him tantamount to the blissful enjoyment of the pious in the radiance of God's majesty. Consequently those who strive and soar heavenward through their moral conduct and noble aspirations, without at the same time being thinkers, receive no reward. Against this Aristotelian one-sidedness Crescas emphasizes God's love and goodness for which the righteous yearn, and in whose pursuit man finds perfection and happiness. Not for the sake of attaining bliss shall we love God and practice virtue and truth, but to love God and practice virtue is itself

¹ Aboth. IV, 2.

² Com. to Sanh. XI and *H. Teshubah*, VIII.

true bliss. This is the nearness of God referred to by the Psalmist and declared to be man's highest good.¹ There is no need of any other reward than this, and there is no greater punishment than to be deprived of this boon forever.²

11. In the face of these two great thinkers, to whom Spinoza owes the fundamental ideas of his ethics,³ the question considered by Albo, whether the eternal duration of the tortures of hell is reconcilable with the divine mercy,⁴ a question which still plays an important rôle in Christian theology, and which was probably suggested to Albo through his disputations with representatives of the Church, — is for us superfluous and superseded. Our modern conceptions of time and space admit neither a place or a world-period for the reward and punishment of souls, nor the intolerable conception of eternal joy without useful action and eternal agony without any moral purpose. Modern man knows that he bears heaven and hell within his own bosom. Indeed, so much more difficult is the life of duty which knows of no other reward than happiness through harmony with God, the Father of the immortal soul, and of no other punishment than the soul's distress at its inner discord with the primal Source and the divine Ideal of all morality. All the more powerfully is modern man controlled by the thought that the universe permits no stagnation, no barren enjoyment or barren suffering, but that every death marks the transition to a higher goal for greater accomplishment. This yearning of the soul finds expression in the Talmudic maxim, "The righteous find rest neither in this world, nor in the world to come, as it is said, 'They go from strength to strength, until they appear before God on Zion.'"⁵

¹ Ps. LXXIII, 28.

² *Or Adonai*, II, 55; VI, 1; comp. Joel, I. c., 56-62; comp. Bahya: *Hoboth, Halebaboth, Shaar Bitahon*.

³ See Joel: *Z. Gen. d. Lehre Spinoza*, p. 64.

⁴ *Ikkarim*, IV, 35-38.

⁵ Ber. 64 a, with ref. to Ps. LXXXIV, 8; see also Midr. Teh. ad loc.