

## A Comparison.

ISAIAH I. 18 AND EPHESIANS IV. 25-29.

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THERE is a subtlety of meaning in the passage first referred to which, as a rule, escapes detection. Many take the text to mean that though the sins with which they (for the application is universal as well as special) are stained be as scarlet, yet they shall be washed away, and the heart left white as snow. But what the prophet actually says is,—and we are not wresting the Hebrew words when we thus interpret him,—that the sins *themselves* and not the *heart* shall be white as snow, that though red like crimson *they* shall be as wool. There is a psychological, or, more correctly speaking, a spiritual subtlety in the expression, which it is interesting to examine.

We might thus seek to paraphrase the hidden meaning. Sin is the abuse of powers and gifts and talents lawful enough in their right exercise. Sin is the wrong use of right gifts; it is the discolouring of what by itself is unstained and untainted; it is the turning of the heart's good dispositions and affections into channels that flow away from God, rather than towards God. The washing away of sin, then, is not the destruction of the power, or gift, or talent, or disposition, or affection which was the channel or instrument of the sin; but the cleansing of the sin within these media—so that they lose not any of their vigour or vitality, but become instrumental in an entirely different fashion. The sin was probably manifested by an undue exercise of the gift or disposition. When the sin is washed, the same form of gift, the same *virus* of disposition, remains, but exercises a different influence.

This explanation will be more lucid if we look to the passage in Ephesians. There St. Paul seems to recognise the fact that the taking away of sin is simply the resetting of the disposition which caused sin. In ver. 28 he says: 'Let him that stole give'—*i.e.* let him that laboured to get by stealth for his own profit, labour by good works to obtain for others; a change of effort was required with the same *energy*; the power of work is to be redirected; a clever thief has it in him to become a great benefactor; the cleverness for the one end can be changed by the grace and regenerative

power of God into cleverness for an exactly opposite end. Again, in ver. 29, he who has been accustomed to talk profanely and irreverently, when regenerated will not lose his power of speech, that power is only cleansed and he becomes a speaker to edification. *The sin is made white.* In the case of the thief the temptation to sin lay in a natural cleverness to acquire property; when selfishness got the mastery, that cleverness became sin; when selfishness was expelled, that is, when the sin was washed, that cleverness became a virtue—a virtue of *charity*, because we cannot give until we have received and obtained.

In ver. 29 the temptation lurked in the gift of speech, *without* reverence that became sin, *with* reverence it became a good and useful gift; the sin was washed and became white.

So, further, in the case of temper, in ver. 26: 'Let not the sun go down upon your wrath'—let not wrath, the apostle would say, be in the dark—be in fellowship with darkness; but let the sun shine upon wrath so as to show what darkness is—what one should be wrathful with. 'Be angry and *sin not*,' that is the enlightened wrath, the wrath *whitened* by grace. There is a temper which is sin, because it is acted in darkness; there is a temper which is righteousness, because it is of the light; that enlightened, whitened temper is called enthusiasm, which is just *ἔνθεος*, godliness.

To be born anew, then (Eph. iv. 24), to be born from above, is to have what is wrongly placed within us placed right; temper turned to righteous wrath; the proclivity to steal and cheat turned into the disposition to work for and gain for our neighbour what he lacks.

The grace of God, therefore, is not destruction of individuality and of original endowments of character, it destroys nothing of original character, it only delivers that from a pernicious tendency. John the Apostle was by nature fervid; he was a zealot; his zeal, however, was at first misdirected, it was of the scarlet-and-crimson colour, leading him into the sin of intolerance. Interrupted and overpowered by the grace of God

that misguided fervour became the fervour, the white-wool-like fervour of love, and he became the apostle of love.

Peter was constitutionally (we might say) jealous, if John was constitutionally zealous. Peter showed this in his jealousy for His Master's honour, as well as in being once on a memorable occasion jealous of His Master's company—"let us build here three tabernacles." But ere long he became changed, his jealousy began to take

another form. He became jealous of His Master, not for himself, but for the world; and on that rock, Peter, Christ founded His Church.

The scarlet and crimson taints are taken from dispositions which in each character were capable of advancing God's glory; and so whitened and purified, these same dispositions which were once 'sin' become righteousness. The *sins* which were as scarlet become white as snow, and those like crimson become as wool.

## At the Literary Table.

### THE BOOKS OF THE MONTH.

Two important books, and a new edition of another, have arrived just too late for notice. They are *The Ancient Hebrew Tradition as illustrated by the Monuments*, by Professor Hommel (S.P.C.K., Crown 8vo); *The Ancient Faith in Modern Light*, a series of essays (T. & T. Clark, 8vo); and the third edition of Dr. Salmond's *Christian Doctrine of Immortality*. These books will be dealt with next month. Now we have room just to say that Professor Hommel's new book is directly written as 'a protest against the modern school of Old Testament Criticism'; and that the essayists in *The Ancient Faith* are Dr. Vincent Tymms ('Christian Theism'), Mr. Edward Medley ('The Permanent Significance of the Bible'), Dr. Cave ('The Bible View of Sin'), Dr. S. G. Green ('Deity and Humanity of Christ'), Principal Vaughan Pryce ('The Redemptive Work of the Lord Jesus Christ'), Dr. Samuel Newth ('New Testament Witness concerning Christian Churches'), Dr. Joseph Parker ('The New Citizenship'), Mr. William Brock ('Christianity and the Child'), Dr. Guinness Rogers ('The Pulpit and the Press'), and the late Dr. H. R. Reynolds ('The Witness to the Spirit').

THE CHRISTIAN PICTORIAL. VOL. VIII. (*Alexander & Shephard*. 4to, pp. 324. 4s. 6d.)

Handsomely bound, lavishly illustrated, sympathetically written, and up to date in every respect—that is the new volume of *The Christian Pictorial*.

FADS OF AN OLD PHYSICIAN. BY GEORGE S. KEITH, M.D., LL.D., F.R.C.P.E. (*A. & C. Black*. Crown 8vo, pp. x, 173. 2s. 6d.)

If you or I were to write *Fads of an Old Theologian*, no one would look at our book. But to the great majority of our countrymen, and even of our countrywomen, the body is of more pressing concern than the soul, and even the *Fads* of a physician will run to its tens of thousands. Well, this physician's *Fads* will do no harm. He pleads for a simpler diet, and less of it. He is perilously near the theologian in that, no doubt; perilously near the evangelist, whose *Fad* is *let him deny himself* and take up his cross daily and follow. But he is a physician, and he will be read, and he will do some service to the soul as well as to the body.

THE ETHICS OF JOHN STUART MILL. BY CHARLES DOUGLAS, M.A., D.Sc. (*Blackwood*. Post 8vo, pp. cxxvi, 233. 6s. net.)

Into this volume Dr. Douglas has gathered all that John Stuart Mill ever wrote on Ethics. There is, of course, the *Utilitarianism*; there are also the chapters on the Moral Sciences from the *Logic*; and the whole is illustrated or checked by constant quotation from the other works. For Dr. Douglas has a familiar knowledge of the writings of John Stuart Mill. He can lay his hand on the right quotation at the right moment. The result is as complete an exhibition of John Stuart Mill's thoughts on Ethics as it is possible now to possess.

But Dr. Douglas does more than gather. He