

Conditional Immortality

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A Help To Sceptics

A Series Of Letters Addressed By Professor Sir George. G. Stokes, Bart. To

James Marchant

Sometime Evidential Lecturer To The Barking Rural Deaneries And The Christian Evidence Society

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PREFATORY

IN the following letters, addressed to the undersigned by Prof. Sir G. G. Stokes, Bart., he endeavours to help the sceptic who cannot, as he says, "become a Christian, because he thinks that the dogma of endless torments is an article of the faith once delivered to the saints." I feel that these valuable letters should (having the author's permission) be published (although the genial author says they were written for you). In doing so I may be allowed to say that I have only suppressed a few passages of a purely personal character. Several repetitions might have been omitted with advantage to the argument, but to do this would have destroyed their letter form, which was very undesirable.

My part in the correspondence was mainly confined to the fortunate and interesting duty of suggesting difficulties and asking for explanations. Only when my words cannot be fully read in the replies have I ventured to state them here, enclosing them in square brackets. I need scarcely say that I do not commit my self to any statement in these letters.

The learned author is alone responsible for the views he expresses with great earnestness and simplicity. JAMES MARCHANT.

NOTE

The Author desires to acknowledge the courtesy of Messrs. T. & T. Clark of Edinburgh who have permitted him to quote certain passages from the translations of the writings of the Fathers contained in their "Ante Nicene Christian Library"

Chapter 1

CAMBRIDGE, 1st May 1892.

Is the doctrine, Mr. Marchant, of endless torments a stumbling block to atheists?

A very big stumbling-block. Remove this dogma from Christian teaching and many unbelievers say they would love their Elder Brother, Jesus Christ.

I thought it likely enough that the dogma of endless torments might be a stumbling-block in the minds of those who are sceptically inclined, and therefore I may say at once that, whatever the opinion of this or that Christian may be and on this point Christians differ it is, as I believe, no part of the faith once delivered to the saints. It rests upon the combination of the dogma of the immortality of the soul, with what to me seems to be the clear teaching of Scripture, that the perdition of the lost is final and irreparable.

By the dogma of the immortality of the soul I mean what one hundred years ago was pretty well universally taught among us, that man is by nature, by the very condition of his creation, an immortal being; that mortality affects his body only, but that his soul cannot but live for ever. This dogma, adopted in the supposed interest of the Christian faith, is, as I believe, and for more than twenty years have believed, nowhere taught in Holy Scripture, but is rather opposed to the teaching of Scripture, and is a root-error from which springs a whole crop of theological difficulties, obscuring the fair proportions and glorious prospects of the Gospel of Christ.

It is a simple matter of fact that there are a large number of Christians at the present day who do not hold it, and there are unmistakably clear statements in the writings of a few of the ancient Fathers showing that they did not hold it, although doubtless there were others of the Fathers who did.

The dogma of the immortality of the soul must not be confounded with the doctrine of a future state. It is as clear as clear can be that the latter is taught in Scripture; but the former is merely of the nature of a philosophical speculation to account for the latter, and the basis of the future life held out in Scripture is, as I believe, altogether different.

I believe that the account of man's creation given in Genesis accords with the teaching of Christ and the Apostles as to the future state. I believe that man was created with a view to immortality, but that his actual attainment of immortality was contingent on his obedience. When he fell from obedience his whole being became forfeited to sin, and not only so, but the corruption of his moral nature descended by heredity to his posterity, who, as far as anything left of what they came in for by creation is concerned, are not immortal beings, but mortal.

"In Adam all die." It was not intended that man should be an immortal sinner, and he was driven from the garden, "lest he should put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever." What ever the figure may be, this seems plainly to indicate that his actual possession of immortality was not innate in him, but dependent upon the use of means, from which he was shut out when he fell from righteousness.

If his fall from original innocence entailed the forfeiture of his immortality, it stands to reason that immortality would only be restored on condition of means being found for his restitution to a condition of innocence of uniformly doing right. But how can such a restitution be effected? The law of conscience cannot suffice, in that it is "weak through the flesh." Once broken through, it can no more keep a man uniformly straight afterwards than an egg dashed on the pavement can be made a whole egg again. In his natural condition the thing is impossible. But God, in His great love to man, has provided means for his recovery means astoundingly supernatural in their character, means the operation of which we do not in this life understand, or at least can only get some glimmering notion of, but of which the full effect will be found by the redeemed in a life to come. This plan involved the union of the Divine and human natures in Jesus Christ.

His suffering, sinless though He was in Himself, of death, the penalty of sin; His resurrection to a supernatural life a second life, to which all will by Him be raised; "for as in Adam all die, even so in Christ will all be made alive." Christ has broken the bonds of death for the whole human race, and in this way is "the Saviour of all men."

All men are, through Him, brought within the possibility of immortality. But as the actual possession of the immortality which was within primitive man's reach was contingent upon his obedience, so the retention of the second life is contingent upon whether the means provided for man's restitution to a condition of holiness take

actual effect; and that, as I think we are told, depends upon what takes place during his present state, his state of probation. All that are in the graves, we are told, shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; but the issue of that resurrection will not be the same for all.

They that have done good will come forth unto a resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto a resurrection of judgment. A veil is in great measure drawn over the fate of the latter, but the general teaching, and especially the imagery of Scripture, seem to point to a miserable destruction: they will be consumed like tares burnt up in the fire; thrown away like bad fish; consigned to a second death, from which there is no resurrection. Thus by the final

purification of the righteous, and by the destruction of the wicked, moral evil will be rooted out, and those passages of Scripture which represent the perdition of the lost as final and irremediable, and those other passages which picture to us a state in which all will once more be very good, are reconciled with one another without the slightest strain in either case. There are about forty passages in the New Testament in which the expression "eternal life" occurs. In two, I think, it is the appellation applied to our Lord Himself; in every one of the remaining thirty-eight or so the context shows that what is called "eternal life" is not the common lot of all men, but is peculiar to the redeemed.

The expression "eternal punishment," in the last verse of Matthew 25, seems to me to shut out all hope of final restitution for the lost; but the meaning may perfectly well be similar to that of the "eternal fire" in Jude 1:7, a fire eternal in its effects. The fire which fell on the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah was not one which was always burning, but one which destroyed them for ever.

They were not, like Jericho, afterwards rebuilt, but destroyed for good. If any objector presses the dogma of eternal torments against the Christian religion, it seems to me that the simple answer to him would be to say that is not one of the fundamental articles of faith, but merely a matter of opinion, and that there are many Christians who do not believe that the wicked will live for ever. Some also think that in the long-run they will be reformed, in some way that we are not told; though, for my own part, I think that Scripture is dead against this view.

It is, I think, a great mistake to draw unauthorised and highly-seasoned pictures of the lost, and then try and frighten men away thereby from such a fate. The Gospel is a message of good news, of eternal life in holiness and happiness to those who lie in darkness and in the shadow of death. At the same time, of course, the serious consequences of turning away from the light are by no means to be hidden.

Chapter 2

WITH reference to my last, I would just remark, though you probably will have perceived the same thing yourself, that it is not a matter to be needlessly brought into discussion. The arguments for or against it involve a reference to the teaching of Scripture, and infidels would not admit the authority of Scripture. But if infidel opponents declaim about endless torments, I think the straightforward answer to them is that there is a large number of Christians who do not hold that view, and do not think that it is taught in Scripture. It is clearly illogical to bring forward difficulties connected with endless torments as an objection to Christianity, unless that view be an integral part of the Christian faith; and that it is not that is proved by the fact that there is a large number of earnest Christians who do not hold it.

There is not a syllable in the Liturgy or Articles of the Church of England affirming it, For not far short of a quarter of a century now I have lived in the belief that the view which has been designated that of "Life in Christ" is the real teaching of Scripture. That view is expressed in the words, taken not metaphorically but in a straightforward manner, "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ." It is wonderful what harmony it introduces, both between one part of Scripture and another, and between the teaching of Scripture and what commends itself to our moral sense. As a friend of mine in Cambridge, before whom I brought that view, said to me, "Reading the Bible with that idea in the head is like turning a key in an oiled lock."

Chapter 3

I GOT your very careful and thoughtful letter yesterday evening, on my return from a visit in the north-west of Ireland. I am much obliged to you for the letter. It assists one much in getting an insight into the way in which sceptics, especially those of the artisan class, view the subject.

I am out of the way of this myself; you, on the contrary, have had a rare opportunity of knowing.

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I will commence a letter now which I propose to add to from time to time when I am not otherwise engaged. I think most Christians would consider the Scriptures, directly or indirectly, as the ultimate appeal on points of doctrine, at least as regards matters which lie outside man's natural reason, and which he could only have learned through revelation. I say "or in directly," because Roman Catholics would attach very great importance to tradition, to the decision of even provincial councils, etc.; but these follow what rightly or wrongly they suppose to be taught by Scripture. But Scripture is, at least on minor, though it maybe still important points, differently interpreted by different Christians or bodies of Christians. This shows that it is not always easy, even with careful study, to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion as to what the real teaching of Scripture is.

Now I supposed, rightly or wrongly, that persons of a sceptical turn, especially those the condition of whose lives did not permit them to obtain a liberal education, would not be disposed to engage in a study of Scripture, the authority of which they would not recognise, in order to make out what its teaching was on this or that doctrine. I supposed that they would take their ideas of what was involved in the Christian religion from the current popular theology, in so far as they came incidentally across it. If they are not willing to examine for themselves the teaching of Scripture, nor to listen to others expounding at length (it demands a fair amount of time) the teaching of Scripture, I do not see what there is for it but to state whether or no there is a general consent among Christians as to the subject.

Doubtless if you take the whole Christian world you may find a few scattered Christians who advocate this or that extravagant doctrine: the point is, Is there or is there not such a general consent among Christians as to the truth of the doctrine of endless torments as would make it reasonable for a man who is unable or unwilling to discuss the scriptural evidence to regard it as an essential part of the Christian faith?

Now there is clear evidence that some of the very early and very eminent Fathers did not hold it. No words can well be clearer than those of Irenaeus (a disciple, by the way, of Polycarp, who himself was a disciple of St. John), or again of Theophilus, Bishop of Antioch about A.D. 150, showing that they held that eternal living existence was for the saved only. You mention Arnobius, who how ever lived later, about A.D. 300, and Justin Martyr, whose testimony you rightly, I think, regard as conflicting.

Doubtless you may find others, the fierce and (as he was deemed) heretical Tertullian among them, who were strong for endless torments. But in face of the clear testimony of such men as Irenaeus and Theophilus, it assuredly cannot be said that there was a general agreement of the early Fathers in favour of the doctrine of endless torments. And it is to be noted that Theophilus uses the expression, "but we say so and so," indicating that he was not expressing his individual opinion, but the general opinion of the Christians around him.

The case of Justin is instructive, as showing how the doctrine of endless torments crept in. It appears from his autobiography, so far as it is contained in his "Dialogue with Trypho," that trying different systems of Greek philosophy, he at last settled down to the Platonic, and I dare say that, even after his conversion to Christianity, he felt that he owed a spiritual advancement to Platonism. The aged Christian whom he met one day as he was walking by the sea seems clearly to have held the same doctrine as Irenaeus and Theophilus.

But in speaking to Justin his words fell on a soil deeply imbued with Platonism. The old man's words raised a ferment in his mind, which ended by his embracing Christianity. But he appears to have worked out the thing very much in his own study, setting himself, as he says, to the study of the Hebrew Prophets. But they lived before "life and immortality were brought to light by the Gospel."

It is not wonderful then that, in spite of the old man's words, a portion of his Platonism stuck to him still; and though of course he could not longer hold that souls were un created, he may yet have imagined that they were by their very nature immortal.

Platonism was doubtless a great advance on the secularism of the Epicurean and thus appeared to make for Christianity. One can readily understand how, in the conflict with worldliness, Platonism may have been patted on the back, and received with undue favour by early Christians, especially in Greek-speaking countries. And if we have the Platonic dogma of the natural immortality of the soul coupled with the clear (as they appear to me, at least) declarations of Scripture as to the finality of the perdition of the lost, there we have the doctrine of endless torments. The influence of Greek philosophy was aided by the natural tendency of the human heart for man to find in himself the satisfaction of his wants. Thus a strong current set in towards the adoption of the notion of the natural immortality of the soul. In the Middle Ages it was held, I suppose, almost universally. Nevertheless, it finds no place in the ancient creeds which are accepted generally by the Church, nor does that corollary from it, the doctrine of endless torments. The creeds to which I refer are the Apostles', the Nicene, and the so-called Athanasian. Even the last (the authority of which I do not think is equal to that of the others), in referring to the fate of the wicked, does but re-echo the words of our Lord in the last verse of Matthew 25, without laying down anything as to their interpretation.

Within the last half- century there has been a very general abandonment of, or, at least, refusal to assert the doctrine of endless torments. I have spoken quite freely to, and heard quite freely from a considerable number of persons, on the subject of the future life, persons who were mostly clergy men, and I found hardly any who adhered to the doctrine of endless misery.

I am bound to say that, according to my experience, the greater number substituted for the old view the idea that in some un-

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revealed way all would be saved in the end. This I look on as a consequence of sticking to the (erroneous, as I believe) doctrine of the natural immortality of the soul. Nevertheless, there is at the present day a very large number of thoughtful Christians who hold the doctrine of "Life in Christ," that is, that immortality is not by nature but by grace not the common lot of all men, but of those who shall be deemed worthy of that world (or age), and of the resurrection (not "of," but) from out of the dead.

In face of the various facts I have mentioned as to enlightened Christian opinion as to the future life, no sceptic has a right to say that the doctrine of endless torments is involved in the Christian faith. I believe it makes a great difference in our feelings towards God whether we adopt the doctrine of endless torments (at least when amplified, as it often is, but there is no occasion it should be) or the doctrine of "Life in Christ." I recollect when I was a little child being so horrified at the idea of endless torments that I wished there was no God and no future state, lest I should fall into them. No doubt all children are naughty more or less, but I don't think I was what would be called a naughty child as children go, perhaps rather the reverse. Perhaps, my mind being naturally of a mathematical turn, I took in the idea of infinite duration more readily than most children would have done. If we affirm eternal living duration only as it is affirmed in Scripture, namely, as belonging to the saved, this horror in our ideas of God does not occur, while yet there is the wholesome fear left of incurring a miserable destruction.

There is nothing in Article XVII. defining "damnation" to mean eternal life in a state of misery, though likely enough such was the idea the framers of the Articles attached to the word.

I think with you that the question of the ultimate fate of the wicked is not one to be brought forward needlessly. The Gospel, as the very word means, is a message of good, not a revelation of endless torments. What we have to do is to show that in Christ we may have life, even eternal life, and that a life of happiness. We need not too curiously inquire into the fate of those who reject the offer, and "deem themselves unworthy of everlasting life."

But if the sceptic throws it in our teeth that Christianity teaches the doctrine of endless torments, we have a perfect right to show that that is a mistake. Nobody can question that it was the prevalent belief for many centuries together, but that does not suffice to prove it true. We are not bound to prove it false; what we have to do is to proclaim the countervailing truth, the positive teaching that in Christ we may have life.

[What do you think, Sir George, of the following argument, stated by Dr. W. W. Moberly ("Agnosticism," p. 59)? His writings are at least clear and acute.

["I may take it then, Professor Huxley being witness, that I have a will. . . . Now there is no law in science more fundamental, no law which has been supported by a greater variety of experiences or tested by more searching experiments, than the law of the conservation of energy. The sum of all the energies in the universe is a constant quantity: in other words, forces are never destroyed. If we may extend this law to the physical sphere and there is nothing to show that we may not the soul, with its power of volition, cannot be annihilated. Were the soul to go out of existence on the dissolution of the body, a force would have been lost, the sum of the energies in the universe would be a changing quantity, the law of the conservation of energy would be false." . . . "There is no reason why death should put an end to the soul, . . . on the contrary, there is the strongest reason namely, the uniformity of nature why it should not."]

You ask me about the argument for the immortality of the soul derived from the physical law of the conservation of energy. I am bound to say that I do not think there is anything at all in it. The term "conservation of energy" has a very definite meaning in the mind of the physicist; but it is now in very general use, and lots of people employ the term who have only a hazy notion of what it means, and who employ it very loosely. The energy which impels a railway train is derived from the consumption of the coals. The heat which arises from the combustion of the coals is not all accounted for by the heat which radiates from the furnace or boiler, or which is communicated by conduction to the air, or which passes into the air in the condensation of the waste steam (i.e. steam which has done its work) which comes out of the chimney.

More heat goes into the boiler than comes out again, and the energy corresponding to the excess is what drives the train. The train will go on or be brought to a stand-still at the will of the engine-driver, but the will of the driver is not the energy which drives the train. There is no evidence whatsoever that will and mechanical energy are mutually convertible. When a man does work by the voluntary exertion of his muscles, the belief of physicists is that the mechanical energy by which the work is done is derived from chemical changes in the body ultimately from chemical changes in the food. The will merely gives the word of command, like the engine-driver in the train. There is no evidence whatsoever that will belongs to the category of things to which the law of the conservation of energy applies.

If it be said, True, but may we not at least infer from analogy that something of the same kind applies to the will? I reply the two things are too dissimilar to allow us to infer from the one to the other. May not the true analogy, in so far as there can be any analogy at all, be of this nature: the exertion of will entails consequences to the man who exerts it and to society; may not these be in some sense the equivalent of the will exerted, in a way bearing a more or less remote analogy to the way in which the work done on a train is the equivalent of the heat apparently lost in the boiler?

To go back to immortality, I would note the passage, “who hath abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel.” It might, I think, be somewhat more exactly rendered by “ who hath made death inefficacious, and hath illuminated life and immortality through the gospel.”

The natural effect of death is abolition of living existence. But this effect of natural death to man has been taken away by Christ, whose voice all that are in the graves shall hear, and shall come forth, though not to all will it be a resurrection to eternal life. But as objects may be in a dark room with us and yet we do not know that they are there, but when a lamp is brought in we see them, so in the purpose of God it was designed that the death which we witness should not be to man what to all appearance it is, the final abolition of being, as we have every reason for supposing it is for the animals which the butcher kills; but we were in the dark as to this purpose of God until it pleased Him to reveal it to us, which was done when the good news of redemption was made known to man.

It is, in my belief, in vain that we attempt to substitute metaphysical or physical arguments in favour of the survival of the soul for the revelation which, in the fullness of time, it pleased God to make to mankind, through His Son, of what lay before them. I have written a good deal to-day, and finished sooner than I expected.

Chapter 4

I think, who watches the behaviour of an intelligent dog, or even of an animal far lower in the scale of intelligence, can doubt that the creature exercises a will. If, then, will proves immortality, we must attribute immortality to dogs: if to dogs, why not to cats? In the Spectator, some time ago, there was an article, whether by the editor or someone else I do not know, the writer of which, evidently for the sake of maintaining the natural immortality of man, wrote favourably of the supposition that lower animals also were immortal.

I confess I don't think there is anything in Dr. Momerie's argument which you quote.

Chapter 5

The more I think of it, the more vain appear to me to be all attempts to establish man's immortality on a physical or metaphysical basis. Man has a double nature: he is an animal, like one of the lower animals, but he is at the same time a spiritual being, which we have no right to suppose that any of the lower animals are. Were he animal alone, he would be subject, like the lower animals, to death; and we have no reason to think that death does not make an end of them. If he is to be immortal, his immortality must be looked for in connection with his spiritual nature, not in connection with what he has in common with the lower animals. Man is possessed of will, but so, as we have every reason to believe, is a dog or a rat. It is not in this that immortality is to be sought.

But we have no reason to suppose that the lower animals have an idea of a God, or that they have a conscience leading them to feel themselves accountable to Him. It is in our relations to Him that we are to look for immortality.

And is not this precisely in accordance with what we are taught in Scripture? Take what is said of the Tree of Life in the account of the Creation. Whether it were an actual tree, or whether the language is figurative, this broad feature appears on the surface, that man's immortality depends not on something in him, but on something outside him; that it is not absolute, but conditional; that it depends on man's relationship to God; that when by his disobedience he became alienated from God the immortality which he might have had was forfeited, and he was driven from the Tree of Life, lest he should put forth his hand and take of it, and eat, and live forever. Surely the plain indication is that it was not the purpose of God that man should be immortal as a sinner. Why, then, was he not destroyed at once? Because God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son, that all that believe in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Because through the death of the Son of God means have been provided, means the operation of which I do not think we shall understand until in a future life the effect is experienced by the redeemed, whereby man may be reconciled to God, and notwithstanding his past sin be restored to a condition of uniform obedience.

To those, but to those alone, in whom the intended means of reconciliation will take effect the forfeited immortality will be restored. In the description of their state in the last chapter of Revelation, the Tree of Life appears once more upon the scene. For those who fail to attain that state there is nothing left but destruction, by a second death from which there is no resurrection; nothing left but destruction of body and soul of being in Gehenna. So when scoffers asked of old, “Where is the promise of His coming, for since the fathers fell Asleep all things continue as they were from the foundation of the world?” the reply is, “It is not that the Lord is slack concerning His promise, but is longsuffering to us ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”

But the day of decision will come at last, when the finally impenitent will be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, consumed like tares burnt up in the fire to get rid of them. Is there anything in this to hinder us from joining in the exclamation, "Just and righteous are Thy ways, Thou King of saints"

Chapter 6

I do not think it desirable needlessly to obtrude on an audience discussions as to the final fate of the unsaved, but I do think it desirable for the Christian apologist to study the question for himself, so as to be prepared with an answer in the event of Christianity being reproached by an opponent with demanding acceptance of the dogma of endless torments.

A clergyman lately wrote a paper in the Clerical Magazine, which much struck me when I first read it in MS. It is entitled "Scriptural Evolution."

Its object was to remove objections to Scripture doctrine as to the nature of man, derived from the analogy of his body to that of lower mammalian animals. This it did by drawing an analogy with the scriptural account of the Incarnation.

We may gather from the account in the Gospels that the principle of independent life was in a supernatural manner communicated to a germ in the womb of the Virgin, so that that Holy Thing that should be born of her should be at the same time Son of God and Son of Man: the Divine and human natures being thus united in one Person, while the human development intra-uterine life, birth, infancy, childhood, boyhood, manhood were left to take place in the ordinary manner of man.

Now just as we, as Christians, hold that the Divine and human natures are united in Christ, may we not in an analogous manner suppose that the animal and the spiritual natures are united in man? As God and man are one Christ, may we not say by analogy that the biological and the spiritual natures constitute one man? Mortality belongs to the lower animals, and to man so far as he is only an animal. If man is to be immortal, it must be in connection with his spiritual, not his animal nature: the evidence for it and the conditions of it must be sought in his relations to God. It is vain to look for immortality in anything he has in common with the lower animals, will included: when he fell, he forfeited the immortality which might have been his, and "the creature became subject to vanity." But still there was, through redemption, a hope left him of regaining the forfeited immortality. This subjection to "vanity" was not in accordance with what man would wish, not even what the children of God would wish. But the subjection left a hope of delivery from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

"The whole creation (the whole human race) groans and travails in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit the redemption of our body." This is not yet seen, but is hoped for, and meanwhile "we are being saved by hope, waiting with patience for that which as yet we see not." Vain is the attempt to found immortality on the nature of man, or even upon the loftiness of his mental powers. Eternal life is the gift of God, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

When men persuade themselves that they have got immortality already, the glorious hope of immortality which Scripture holds out is converted into a possible curse so dire, that it drives men away from Christ, or if not that, Its possible result rests as a sore burden upon their minds, and terribly clouds over their ideas of the goodness of God. And if they attempt to dispel these clouds by twisting the solemn declarations of Scripture into something compatible with the notion that all men will be saved in the length (as the old Article expressed it), the stern side of Scripture teaching is painted over, and such plain declarations as "If ye live after the flesh ye shall die" are reduced to milk and water.

Chapter 7

There are several topics in your letter written four or five days ago, but for the present I will confine myself to one, the first. Accustomed to views connected with what for many centuries was the commonest belief of Christians regarding the future state, when one first takes in the idea of conditional immortality the objection you name is pretty sure to present itself. The resurrection of a man is a miracle: why should God perform this miracle on a wicked man if he is raised merely to be judged and punished?

In the first place, resurrection is in one sense a miracle and in one sense not. A miracle is in some respect or other supernatural, be it only a super natural prediction of what is going to take place; but it is also exceptional it may for instance be performed on some special occasion in attestation of the truth of some message. If that message be one which it is important that man should know and believe in, and if it involves in part the supernatural, above the platform, that is, of what being accessible to our senses and our reason on the information our senses convey we call the natural, it is perfectly rational to suppose that some exhibition of the supernatural should have been granted to render credible information relating to the

platform of the supernatural.

Now, to say that resurrection is a miracle is partly true and partly false. It agrees with the nature of a miracle in belonging to the platform of the super natural, of the above-natural; it differs from a miracle in being not exceptional, but general. It is a general law of the supernatural platform to which the plan of redemption belongs. Surely it is not for those who are strongest in demanding that we shall accept nothing but general laws to object to resurrection because it is general, and to demand as a condition of believing in it that it shall partake of the exceptional character of a miracle in being miraculously (miraculously because not merely supernatural but exceptional) conferred upon some and not on others.

I think Scripture leads us to regard it as a potential benefit conferred on the whole human race. We read that Christ tasted death for every man; that He is the Saviour of all men, specially of them that believe. But not every potential benefit becomes actual. Two children, we will suppose (boys, say), are born with thoroughly healthy constitutions; one, when he grows up, leads a moral, temperate life, and preserves excellent health. The other, when he grows up, gives himself over to drunkenness or debauchery, and dies of delirium tremens, or of some foul, loathsome disease, suffering misery through his adult life, or perhaps finds life so miserable that he puts an end to himself. The first has had a happy life; that of the second was so miserable that (looking only to what belongs to the visible natural platform) we may truly say, "Good were it for that man if he had never been born." What we are called on to believe as regards the future life is nothing more than the analogue of what we witness in the present.

We do not look on the misery of the drunkard or debauchee as vindictiveness on the part of God, but as the natural consequence of the course that the man has chosen for himself. What is to hinder us in looking in the same way at the suffering, whatever it may be, which the lost will undergo after resurrection?

What the nature of the judgment of the last day may be we do not know; yet I have often thought that judgment too may be of the nature of a potential benefit. Not even the best Christian in this life is wholly free from sin: "in many things we offend all." Yet the Church of the redeemed is represented as not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, as clothed in white raiment, as presented "faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy." Some great change must come over even the best. I think this change is represented as arising, in some way which I don't think we shall understand until it is experienced, from the death of Christ, and (as I incline to think) from the revelation which will then be made of what is involved in that death.

If the redeemed are represented as clothed in white raiment, it is because they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. What does Saint John say of conformity to Christ? "We know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him, FOR we shall see Him as He is." I have long thought that this revelation would be the means of causing the character of each man to take its final set for good or for evil.

Just as in this life the preaching of the Gospel of Christ may be a savour of life unto life or a savour of death unto death, so the revelation of the last day may produce these opposite sets in the character, and the direction that the set will take may be determined by the character that has been formed during the state of probation. On those in whom the set will be for good the gift of eternal life in its final inalienable possession will be bestowed. As to those in whom it will be for evil, the general teaching of Scripture is, I think, that they will be destroyed like tares burnt up in the fire. I may notice here that the words in the Authorised Version of Mark 9:43, 45, "into the fire that never shall be quenched," are not a correct translation. The Greek is simply "the unquenchable fire," in other words, "into the fire that cannot be put out."

I take for granted this is corrected in the Revised Version, but I have not it at hand. The words in the A. V. imply that the fire will burn for ever, though it is true that they do not actually affirm it. The words in the Greek do not imply anything of the kind, but merely a fire which cannot be put out, so as to rescue any portion of what it has seized upon. I will stop here for the present, as I have other writing to get on with. I look on those books on hell that you sent me as practically blasphemous. I do not say that they were intended to be they may have been written with a good intention; but I can hardly imagine but that the writers must have felt that they were indulging in a pious fraud. I suppose they thought that the end they sought justified the means. I will send this off without waiting to write more.

Chapter 8

I forgot in my letter this morning to say (though it matters little, as the thing is obvious) that if we are confronted by such books as the two tracts on hell which you sent, we must boldly say that Christianity is not responsible for all that some individual Christian, nay, nor even what some particular denomination of Christians may represent as belonging to it.

I have read attentively the whole of your letter; but while the first difficulty you raise is one which I think would occur to most people, there is a great deal in what follows that I fail clearly to understand. I have not the advantage you have in being familiar with the ideas of freethinkers. I am afraid that my remarks must therefore be of rather a desultory character. Perhaps some day before long we may meet and talk over the matter.

For fear of misunderstanding, I will mention that, when I speak of the immortality of the soul, I always mean the proposition that it must from its nature live forever. Some people, however, by the expression "immortality of the soul" merely mean the proposition that it does not die with the body, which is a different thing altogether.

I am half inclined to suppose that you must understand the expression in the second sense, for you write as if there were no alternative but either to adopt materialism or to suppose that man has an immortal soul. If we use the term in the first sense we are not held down to any such dilemma. On the contrary, Christ Himself, as I believe, affirms the opposite.

He tells us not to fear them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do, but rather to fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in Gehenna (Matthew 10:28).

I was thinking of continuing my letter, taking the subjects you mention in order. But there is so much in which I fail to catch your ideas that I fear it would only be a waste of time. The interchange of ideas would take place far better in conversation, which I hope we may have some day before very long. As far as I can gather from your letter the ideas of freethinkers, I am forcibly impressed with the immense amount of mischief that is done by such teaching as that contained in the tracts on hell. The Gospel, the message of good, the glad tidings of great joy, is converted into a revelation of endless torments so horrible, that instead of God being love, He is thought of as the inflicter of misery so horrible that the thought of it drives all other considerations out of the mind. Instead of being what Scripture represents, the object of redemption is supposed to be the negative one of delivering men from such a horrible fate.

If there be an eternal future life for all, a man must be somewhere, and as there are but two places where he can be, there is no help for it but to desire to be in heaven. But heaven has no attractiveness: eternal life is thought of as a continuation forever of a life much like the present; and as the man's earthly life is, it may be, a hard one, there is little attractiveness in that perhaps the man might prefer not to be.

But Scripture represents the load of labour not as belonging to man in his original state, but as laid upon him when he fell. "In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread all the days of thy life, until thou return unto the ground." And along with the deliverance from sin, Scripture represents the redeemed as obtaining deliverance from the unhappiness of this world. "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away."

The Gospel is a message of good. What is Christ's own preaching? (see Luke 4:18-22), and what is the effect of such preaching? "All bare Him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth." God is love, and if we would draw men to God it must be by setting forth His love. Christ says, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me." It is consonant to the ways of fallen man to try and dragoon men into obedience. But obedience merely by stern compulsion, through fear of punishment, does not imply any renovation of character.

You ask in one place whether it is not possible to live a Christian life while yet believing in the natural immortality of the soul. Of course it is: for centuries together that was the commonest belief among Christians. But if it be not true, it can hardly be but that in teaching Christianity according to that system we shall encounter difficulties which might have been avoided. I think it would be most unwise to commence with points about which Christians are so much divided; but if an objector says that Christianity teaches endless torments, and therefore he will not have it, it is fair and even right to say that there are numbers of Christians, men competent to examine the question, who are strongly of opinion that it is not taught in Scripture, so that at any rate it cannot be assumed.

You give a quotation from Irenaeus which is supposed to show that he held endless torments; but in reality he does nothing more than re-echo the words of our Lord in Matthew 25:46. Do these teach it? As showing the use of words, look at Jude 1:7. Sodom and Gomorrah are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. These cities were destroyed by a fiery destruction, I suppose a tremendous volcanic explosion more severe than that which some years ago destroyed half the island of Krakatoa and altered all the soundings in the Strait of Sunda. Unlike the destruction of Jericho, a city which some generations later was rebuilt, that of Sodom and Gomorrah was final, their very site (or supposed site, at least) being now covered by the water of the Dead Sea. The fire which destroyed them destroyed them for good, and therefore it is called an eternal fire. Hence the eternal punishment of Matthew 25:46, though perfectly compatible with eternal misery, is also perfectly compatible with a punishment of extermination.

Hence if any one says he won't believe in Christianity because it teaches endless torments, it is perfectly fair to say, "Are you sure it does teach it? Numbers of Christians, learned and unlearned, don't think so." As to confessions, neither the Apostles' nor the Nicene Creed affirms it, no, nor even the so-called Athanasian, for the expression "perish everlastingly" and "eternal fire" are quite compatible with destruction. I believe it is contained in the Westminster Confession; but the Westminster divines had no authority to speak for Christendom.

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Certainly there is not a word affirming it in the formularies of the Church of England. You are quite right, I think, in saying, that in trying to influence a sceptic you are not to assume the authority or inspiration of Scripture. That is a question for Christians to consider. The first question in reference to the Bible, especially the New Testament, is, Are the writers honest men? From that we may go on to the character of Christ as set forth in the Gospels especially. Perhaps it might be well not to begin with His Deity, but consider His character as man. Such would seem to have been the training of the Apostles themselves, for it was not till they had been a good while with Him that He asked them, "Whom say ye that I, the Son of Man, am?" and obtained from Peter the confession, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." What He is called in the New Testament generally, in relation to His Divine nature, is the Son of God. It was this confession which He so much commended in Peter. It was this to the confession of which we may from one point of view regard Him as a martyr; for when the chief priests and elders and all the council failed in the attempt to convict Him through false witnesses, the high-priest at last said, "I adjure Thee by the living God, that Thou tell us whether Thou be the Christ, the Son of God." Jesus answered, "Thou hast said;" and it was on account of this so-called blasphemy that they condemned Him to death.

Could any good man utter such a blasphemy, as it would be if it were not true? And then He was declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead. His character, His miracles (which the historians, whom I now assume to be honest, narrate in the most plain, matter-of-fact way), His resurrection, strengthen one another's evidence that He was the Son of God. In His character, which as human is intelligible to us, we read the character of the invisible God, whom no man hath seen nor can see, as Christ Himself says, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father."

But I must now stop.

Chapter 9

In finishing my letter this afternoon there was one thing which I forgot to mention. You speak about men not caring for immortality unless it were absolute, not conditional upon anything. The term "Conditional Immortality" had reference to man in his condition of innocence. The question was, "Was man created an immortal being, though not necessarily immortal as to the body, or was his attainment of immortality contingent on his obedience?"

The latter view has (for one of its names) been designated that of "Conditional Immortality." If, however, we take the condition of the redeemed in a future state, it seems to me to make practically no difference whether we regard their immortality as absolute or conditional. Few men fear that their life will be terminated by suicide: anyhow a healthy man leading a happy life does not. If, then, the redeemed in a future state have a life, not absolutely immortal, but terminable only by what I may call spiritual suicide, what does it matter? It is practically the same thing as if they were unconditionally immortal.

The attractiveness of the prospect of immortality does not depend upon its merely being deathlessness, but upon the sort of life of which the continuance is promised. Of it is said, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive what God hath prepared for them that love Him." But it is said, "We love Him because He first loved us;" and to be able to love Him we must be persuaded of His love to us; and certainly such books as the two tracts on hell don't help us to that.

P. S.
The doctrine of "Conditional Immortality," though it relieves us from the dogma of the endless misery of the lost, which it is hard to find a motive for, or to reconcile with the declaration God is love, has at the same time its stern side. It says, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." It tells us it is a question of now or never: "Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation."

Chapter 10

I WRITE a few lines to point out how self-consistent the Bible is as regards man's condition as he was, as he is, and as he may become. His original condition is represented whether it be literal or figurative matters little for my argument as that of being placed in a garden furnished with every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, with free permission to eat of any tree he liked with one exception. The Tree of Life, the pledge or means of immortality, was open to him. But when through disobedience he fell, all was changed.

He was driven from the garden; the ground was cursed for his sake; he was condemned to lifelong labour. "In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread all the days of thy life." The Bible connects the labour and sorrow to which man is subject with sin. At the same time it holds out to us the prospect, through the redemption that Christ has wrought for us, of complete (in a future life) delivery from sin, and along with that from the ills that sin brought with it. I referred yesterday to Revelation 21:4. Note how, in the account of the post-resurrection condition of the redeemed, the Tree of Life, from which man was so long banished, appears again upon the scene. Is there nothing in this deliverance from labour and sorrow to attract the workingman? What makes him desirous of an Eight-hours Bill but that he feels the grind of labour? But perhaps the man may say, "Oh, what you tell me is all very well, if it be true, for good people; but things like that are not for such as me." Why not?

The redeemed are represented as clothed in white raiment, not because their raiment was never dirty, but because they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. He says, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Again, "Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that My house may be filled." He did not repel the touch of the nameless woman, who, on account of the sinful life she had led, was a social outcast, but bore witness to her love as proving that she had been forgiven, and bestowed on her the formal absolution, "Thy sins are forgiven." Fanciful and horrible pictures of the supposed torments of the lost are not calculated to draw men to God, but very decidedly to repel them. Scripture does not represent it as the object of Christ's death to save men from endless torments. Had this been the object, we might say then Christ died "in vain" (Galatians 2:21). The word there translated "in vain" means gratuitously, i.e. superfluously, needlessly.

Had the object been merely to save men from endless torments, then the agony and bitter death, the cross and Passion of our Redeemer would have been a needless superfluity: the thing might have been far more cheaply done.

God would have only had to destroy what He had created, and consign men to the nothingness from which they came. What saith the Scripture as to the object of the death of Christ? "Who gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Again, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." Again, "God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Let not the man say, "It is high, I cannot attain unto it;" for what saith the Scripture? "Who soever will, let him take of the water of life freely." Freely, that is as a gift, without money and without price.

He is not to wait till he thinks himself fit for it, but to engage at once in the Christian warfare in faith; in other words in trust. He is to work out his own salvation, not saying that it is no use, as he is too weak for it, for he has the arm of omnipotence to lean upon: it is God that works in him both to will and to do. Not saying that there is no need for him to work, for God will do it all instead of him, for he is called upon to work himself; to be, as I may say, a fellow-worker with God. The struggle will have to be a lifelong one, but the victory will come at last if he endures unto the end.

Meanwhile, to bear him up under the ills of life, he will have the blessed hope of everlasting life, won for him at so great a sacrifice. He need not trouble himself with attempting to give a rationale of the atonement: if he believes that Christ died for us, and that through His blood we have redemption, even the forgive ness of sins, that is enough for him.

For my own part, I think that mischief has been done by premature attempts to give a complete rationale of the mystery of the atonement. We can see some conditions which it satisfies, like sunbeams pointing to the place of the sun, which itself is hidden by a cloud. But we shall not, I think, be able to understand the point of concurrence of these beams till the cloud is removed, till the day comes when we shall know even as also we are known.

Meanwhile, the love of the Father in giving up for us His beloved Son, in whom He is well pleased; the love of the Son in voluntarily submitting for us to His bitter death, is that which draws men to God. The cross of Christ is the magnet: as He says, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me."

Chapter 11

I WAS looking over some of your letters last night, and I see there is one important point which I have not fully answered.

I said if the objection arising out of the doctrine of endless torments were brought forward, that an answer to it would be that there were numbers of Christians who do not hold it that it is at any rate no essential part of the faith. You said very truly, Might we not say the same of several other doctrines, such as the Trinity, the atonement, etc.? These are not your words, but it is the substance of the thing.

I said that you greatly under estimated the great body of opinion, and in many cases of men who are learned as well as sincere Christians, who do not hold it. I feel that this is an imperfect answer. What are we to look on as fundamental points of the Christian faith? There is a well-known test expressed in Latin, "Quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus" "What always, what every where, what by all." To find this we must go back to very early times, well before the great disruption of Christendom into the Eastern and Western Churches. Neither the Westminster Confession, nor the Thirty-nine Articles, nor any similar confession of some individual Church in the present divided state of Christendom has the authority we demand to speak for the whole Church. The earliest extant confession appears to be the Apostles' Creed, in a slightly shorter form than we have at present.

Now what do we find there? The confessor expresses belief in God, the Father Almighty; in Jesus Christ, His only Son our Lord; in His Incarnation, death, resurrection, Ascension, future coming to judgment; in the Holy Ghost, in the forgiveness of sins, in the Resurrection, in the life everlasting.

There is not a word here about the final state of the lost. It teaches the positive truths which concern a man to hold if he would

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have his share in the benefit of the “glad tidings of great joy.” Questions as to the ultimate fate of the lost may be considered by Christians: they are not suited for discussion with sceptics, further than to state boldly, in case a sceptic urges the doctrine of endless torments as an objection to Christianity, that it is not an article of the Christian faith. The resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth is a very corner-stone ‘of the Christian faith. There must be no mincing of matters here. While that is in abeyance, to enter into discussions about the nature of the perdition of the lost is only to draw a red-herring across the path. Of the earliest teaching of the Apostles, shortly after the day of Pentecost we read, “With great power gave they witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.” Saint Paul says, “If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain, ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.”

I may remark by the way (but this is for you, not for the sceptics) how frankly Saint Paul admits that the denial of the resurrection of Christ involves the adoption of the creed of the Secularist, and the admission that (in those days of persecution) the Christian’s lot was a hard one. He says later on, “If the dead rise not, let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.” How completely he ignores the Platonic doctrine of the natural immortality of the soul. His argument would fall to the ground all together if he were a Platonist. But though the resurrection of Christ be such a central doctrine of the Christian faith, the evidence for it, strong as the independent evidence is, is not to be separated from a consideration of the character of Christ. The two form parts of a complete whole, which is to be treated as a complete whole, just as a jury would treat the combined testimony of all the witnesses in a trial.

And in order that the evidence may be considered as a whole, I think it best to adopt the plan you have found the best in actual experience, and ask the hearer to accept, just provisionally, as a working hypothesis, that the historical Jesus of Nazareth had in Him the two natures, the Divine and the human, united in one. We are not to begin with assuming the authority of Scripture, but merely take the records we have in the New Testament of the life of Jesus and the teaching of His followers, as honestly-written narratives, not exempt from such errors in small details as an ordinary historian, however honest and painstaking, might fall into. Whether more is to be claimed for them is a question for after-consideration, in case the man comes to believe in the fundamental articles of the Christian faith. And now I must conclude, merely wishing you God-speed in your work.

Chapter 12

I MAY mention that in one of his Advent sermons (the third, I think), Bishop Jeremy Taylor mentions, with out the slightest hesitation, Irenaeus and Justin Martyr as examples of two of the early Fathers who held the destruction of the wicked. Taylor himself held the so-called orthodox view; but he speaks of the above view as less objectionable than that of universal restoration.

I do not go so far as the bishop about Justin. Doubtless Taylor relies on that passage in the dialogue with Trypho. But Justin, I think, just relates the conversation as it took place, without making any comment on the old man’s words. It seems to me pretty plain that the old man believed that immortality was for the saved alone; but what Justin thought, is rather to be gathered from the apologies, and there the testimony seems conflicting. My own conjecture would be that the question between endless misery and final destruction is one which never came prominently before Justin’s mind, and that his mind oscillated between remaining affection for Platonism, to which he felt he owed much, and conformity to the language of the Christians about him.

As I said, Theophilus of Antioch is equally clear with Irenaeus, and his words imply that what he said was the general belief of the Christians about him. However, the discussion of this question is a matter for Christians, not for sceptics, further than may be necessary to show them that, as the doctrine of endless torments is no part of the faith, but only a matter of opinion, they cannot with justice reproach Christianity with it.

Chapter 13

CONCLUSION

FOR my own part, the strongest thing against it, seems to be Revelation 20:10, taken in connection with the words (Matthew 25:41), “prepared for the devil and his angels.” True, the words in Revelation 20:10 do not apply to man at all, but to the devil, the beast, and the false prophet, whatever the two last may mean. But the words in Matthew 25:41 seem to make it improbable that the effect of the fire should be different on the devil and on wicked men; endless torments in the one case, destruction in the other. But the Apocalypse is so dark and figurative that it is not safe to found a doctrine on a single passage in that book, especially when the testimony of the rest of the New Testament seems to point the other way. And strong as the words in Revelation 20:10 are, they are not stronger than those of Isaiah 34:10 with reference to Idumaea, and we know that those cannot be taken lite rally. Still, in the face of these words, we are not, I think, to press the doctrine of the destruction (in contradistinction to endless misery) of the lost as if it were an article of faith. The important point is that in the gospel, eternal life is offered to man and guaranteed for the saved, and only for the saved. As for those who wilfully reject the offer because they love dark ness rather than light, we can only say that the general teaching of the New Testament points very decidedly to their everlasting destruction, though in face of one or two passages we cannot absolutely guarantee to them (and why should we?) that they may not even suffer endless misery. It is the demand to receive this last as an article of faith, not the refusal to make its

denial an article of faith, that has such an injurious effect, and makes so many men sceptics.

IRENÆUS AGAINST HERESIES BOOK 2, CHAPTER 34, SECTION 3

For as the heaven which is above us, the firmament, the sun, the moon, the rest of the stars, and all their grandeur, although they had no previous existence, were called into being, and continue throughout a long course of time according to the will of God, so also anyone who thinks thus respecting souls and spirits, and, in fact, respecting all created things, will not by any means go far astray, inasmuch as all things that have been made had a beginning when they were formed, but endure as long as God wills that they should have an existence and continuance. The prophetic spirit bears testimony to these opinions, when He declares:

“For He spake, and they were made; He commanded, and they were created: He hath established them forever, yea, for ever and ever.” And again, he thus speaks respecting the salvation of man: “He asked life of Thee, and Thou gave him length of days for ever and ever;” indicating that it is the Father of all who imparts continuance for ever and ever on those who are saved. For life does not arise from us, nor from our own nature; but it is bestowed according to the grace of God. And therefore he who shall preserve the life bestowed upon him, and give thanks to Him who imparted it, shall receive also length of days for ever and ever. But he who shall reject it, and prove himself ungrateful to his Maker, inasmuch as he has been created, and has not recognised Him who bestowed, deprives himself of continuance for ever and ever. And for this reason the Lord declared to those who showed themselves ungrateful towards Him: “If ye have not been faithful in that which is a little, who will give you that which is great?” indicating that those who, in this brief temporal life, have shown themselves ungrateful to Him who bestowed it, shall justly not receive from Him length of days for ever and ever.

THEOPHILUS TO AUTOLYCUS CHAPTER 27

But some one will say to us, Was man made by nature mortal? Certainly not. Was he, then, immortal? Neither do we affirm this. But one will say, Was he, then, nothing. Not even this hits the mark. He was by nature neither mortal nor immortal. For if He had made him immortal from the beginning, He would have made him God. Again, if He had made him mortal, God would seem to be the cause of his death. Neither, then, immortal nor yet mortal did He make him, but, as we have said above, capable of both; so that if he should incline to the things of immortality, keeping the commandment of God, he should receive as reward from Him immortality, and should become God; but if, on the other hand, he should turn to the things of death, disobeying God, he should himself be the cause of death to himself.

For God made man free, and with power over himself. That, then, which man brought upon himself through carelessness and disobedience, this God now vouchsafes to him as a gift through His own philanthropy and pity, when men obey him. For as man, disobeying, drew death upon himself; so, obeying the will of God, he who desires is able to procure for himself life everlasting. For God has given us a law, and holy commandments; and everyone who keeps these can be saved, and, obtaining the resurrection, can inherit in-corrption.

JUSTIN MARTYR: DIALOGUE WITH TRYPHO CHAPTER V

(J. Justin. P., the aged Christian, his so-called preceptor)

P. Those philosophers know nothing, then, about these things; for they cannot tell what a soul is. J. It does not appear so.

P. Nor thought it to be called immortal; for if it is immortal, it is plainly un-begotten. J. It is both unbegotten and immortal, according to some who are styled Platonists.

P. Do you say that the world is also unbegotten?

J. Some say so; I do not, however, agree with them.

P. You are right; for what reason has one for supposing that a body so solid, possessing resistance, composite, changeable, decaying, and renewed every day, has not arisen from some cause? But if the world is begotten, souls are also necessarily begotten, and perhaps at one time they were not in existence, for they were made on account of men and other living creatures, if you will say that they have been begotten wholly apart, and not along with their respective bodies.

J. This seems to be correct.

P. They are not then immortal?

J. No; since the world has appeared to us to be begotten.

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P. But I do not say indeed that all souls die; for that were truly a piece of good fortune to the evil. What then? The souls of the pious remain in a better place, while those of the unjust and wicked are in a worse, waiting for the time of judgment. Thus some which have appeared worthy of God never die; but others are punished so long as God wills them to exist, and to be punished. Extract from Chap. VI.

P. Now the soul partakes of life, since God wills it to live.

Thus, then, it will not even partake of life when God does not will it to live. For to live is not its attribute, as it is God's; but as a man does not live always, and the soul is not for ever conjoined with the body, since, whenever this harmony must be broken up, the soul leaves the body, and the man exists no longer; even so, whenever the soul must cease to exist, the spirit of life is removed from it, and there is no more soul, but it goes back to the place from whence it was taken.

THE END

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