

The Future Punishment

FIVE DISCOURSES ON FUTURE PUNISHMENT

PREACHED IN GRACE CHURCH, KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI.

**BY THE RECTOR
CAMERON MANN**

**NEW YORK
THOMAS WHITTAKER
2 AND 3 BIBLE HOUSE**

**COPYRIGHT, 1888,
BY THOMAS WHITTAKER.**

**Press of J. J. Little & Company, Astor Place,
New York.**

www.CreationismOnline.com

CONTENTS

DISCOURSE PREFACE

I.THE GENERAL SUBJECT

II.THE THEORY OF FINAL RESTORATION

III.THE THEORY OF ETERNAL PROBATION

IV.THE THEORY OF EVERLASTING MISERY

V.THE THEORY OF FINAL DESTRUCTION

PREFACE

THE publication of a volume, however slight, needs some apology from its author, in these days of innumerable books.

Mine is simple. I preached these sermons last October, and had reason to think that they were useful to many of those who heard them or read the reports of them in the newspapers.

Not a few persons have asked that the sermons should be printed in shape more convenient than the columns of a daily paper. And it seemed to me quite possible that what was found of value to people here might do some good to people elsewhere. Therefore I publish the sermons.

And I publish them exactly as they were preached. This is not a treatise on future punishment. It makes no such pretension. Any man who may chance to read it is simply in the position of one who should stray into my church on a Sunday and listen to the preacher.

The subject is not exhaustively discussed, nor is each assertion fortified by full reference to authorities.

I had thought of adding notes and appendices which should enlarge and buttress up the text. But I found that this would lead me, if done properly, into making something quite different from the original work.

There are plenty of scholarly books on the general subject. I see no need that I should, even were I able, add to their number.

But I am not aware of any simple publication taking the view I have taken and treating the topic as I have treated it. And I do know that the commonest and bitterest objections to the Gospel, among average Americans, are those which cluster around this matter of future punishment. I have tried to answer such objections fairly, and in a way suited to the needs of those (and they are the bulk of our congregations) who do not study works of profound scholarship and elaborate discussion.

I give in a note* a list of what I have read on the special subject of future punishment, for two reasons; first, that when I have consciously or unconsciously reproduced an argument contained in these works I may in this brief way confess my indebtedness; second, that if I have advanced anything to be found in some book which I have not read, it may have the additional weight due to its occurring to different minds.

* "Eternal Hope," Farrar;

"Mercy and Judgment," Farrar;

"What is of Faith as to Everlasting Punishment," Pusey;

"What is the Truth as to Everlasting Punishment," Oxenham;

"Salvator Mundi," Cox;

"Life in Christ," White;

"The Valley of the Shadow," Hall;

"The Divine Government," Smith:

The series of articles on Future Punishment published in the "Contemporary Review" for April, May and June, 1878. Of course I have found much on the subject in works not devoted to it, but it is impossible to mention all such cases. I may, however, specify a sermon by Archer Butler, on "Eternal Punishment," and one by Church on "Sin and judgement.

I may be accused of rashness in dealing at all with this mysterious and awful doctrine. I can only reply that it must be dealt with; that to keep silence is to speak, and, in my case, to speak what I do not believe.

CAMERON MANN.

1. THE GENERAL SUBJECT.

Whatsoever a man sows that shall he also reap.—GALATIANS 6:7.

IN taking "Future Punishment" as the subject of a course of sermons, I am largely influenced by the current misunderstanding and misrepresentation of the Church's teaching on this matter. The strongest passages in our popular infidel literature, in the cheap tracts of unbelief, are those wherein the author deals with what he is pleased to style "the Christian doctrine of hell." And as I follow him through his train of argument and sarcasm and denunciation, I often feel that he is quite right. Such a conception of the future life as he sets up to knock down is one which ought to be knocked down. It is unjust, repulsive, absurd.

But who believes it? Who teaches it? That here and there some poor, darkened soul may credit these grotesque horrors, I am not hasty to deny. Nor would I deny that, in certain ages and amid certain environments, many monstrous notions have overlaid the Gospel doctrine of retribution, so that by a large share of the people it was not clearly discerned. Nor, again, would I deny that some of these corruptions have been crystallized into binding dogmas by sects which, having split off from the historic Church, had lost the authoritative guidance of her creeds, and so were led by the mere prevailing opinion of the day.

But as concerns the Church of which I am a priest, I say, without fear of contradiction, that she never sanctioned any such teaching about hell as Mr. Ingersoll, for instance, assaults; and, as concerns the vast majority of Christians not in our Church, I can say that they do not hear any such teaching from their clergy. In fact, about the only place where it can be listened to is an infidel lecture room. But there it has all the changes rung on it; few, indeed, are the discourses which do not admit of some sneer or invective against "the hell of the Christian Church."

And a Christian thinker is often provoked by these gross caricatures of his belief; he is indignant on finding that the weapons most eagerly hurled against the Gospel are simple lies as to its purport. Yet such tactics on the part of infidelity are encouraging. They show that against Christianity in its true shape and colour modern infidelity can arouse no moral feeling.

And without some hold on moral feeling, argument is weak. This the men striving to turn the masses against the Church know full well. They know that the elaborations of a cultured scepticism which attacks Christianity after courteous prelude and with due observance of all the equities of controversy, will make small way with most men and women. Common-sense folk ask what infidelity proposes to give them in exchange for their old faith. And they are hardly to be won from their trust in a loving Father and a heavenly home by any philosophy which represents this brief earthly life, so burdened with labour and traversed with pain, so darkened by errors and embittered by losses, with its brave hopes unfulfilled and its great designs barely begun, with its thought wrestling against mysteries and its love sobbing over graves, as “the be all and the end all” for a human soul.

Most of us demand a theory of life which shall be of some serious use; which shall uplift and strengthen; which shall put us on our mettle and make us achieve our best; which shall arm us against our low passions and console us in our mighty grief.

But no such theory can be given by those whose outlook is bounded by the confines of “this bank and shoal of time.” We must “lift up our eyes to the hills, from whence cometh our help.” Not on the flat lands of daily experience, but on the peaks of divine revelation rests the light of immortality. The infidel orator when he paints his brightest picture of human possibilities sketches a peaceful household, and cries, “Let us stake our happiness here; let the husband love his wife, and the mother her child, and the friend his friend; let our toil be to supply the needs and delights of these dear ones; let our recreation be the enjoyment of their companionship; let our worship be that of the family circle before the altar of home!”

But to that family circle ere long comes the stern apparitor and leads some one away; it may be he whose gallant manhood upreared that shrine of love; it may be the priestess who kindled its pure flame; it may be the last golden-haired child that threw its little handful of incense on the altar. Where is the gladness of that circle now? Where is the serenity of that worship? What is left for the passion which poured out its precious oil upon those heads now lying in the dust? Have all these affections grown so gigantic, only to be smitten into nothingness by some petty accident, by a falling pebble, or a little puff of noxious vapour? Is this knitting of heart to heart a mere delusion? Infidelity would make it so. According to materialistic philosophy the noblest joys of our life are like the cup of wine given to the criminal before he laid his head upon the block: let him make the most of its brief glow, in a moment the axe must fall.

And such a theory once really dominating us would speedily make an end of love, in any sense higher than that of the horse and the hound.

If death were seen
At first as death, love had not been,
Or been in narrowest working shut,
Mere fellowship of sluggish moods,
Or in his coarsest satyr-shape
Had bruised the herb and crushed the grape,
And basked and battered in the woods.

It is only the hope of immortality which makes love possible. And for the support of this hope, for the vision which gives it definite shape and consistence, it is acknowledged, at least in this age and country, we must turn to Christianity. He who rejects the clear promises of Jesus will not get much comfort out of the fine-spun arguments of Plato, or the pitiful groping of John Stuart Mill. To refuse Christianity, therefore, is to refuse the only teacher speaking certitude of immortality.

And so while the infidel reasoner may gain the suffrages of careless or vicious tempers by cheap wit over the Pentateuch, easy sarcasms on the inconsistencies of communicants, perplexing questions about profound mysteries, all adorned with profuse sentimentalizing over sunshine, and grass, and flowers, and birds, he cannot in this way meet the demands of serious and strenuous minds. He must show something in Christianity at least as repellent to human affections, as withering to human hope, as destructive to human progress, as is the system which he himself advocates. And naturally this blemish on Christianity is sought in its doctrine of future punishment; naturally, because the doom of unrepentant sinners is the one dark theme in the Gospel. When Jesus Christ touches on this subject, all gladness fades and His voice sounds saddest warning. And so I do not wonder that infidelity, seeking a weak spot in the Gospel, makes its attack here. When the Church proclaims a message, amid all whose joyous harmonies sounds one mournful note, it is to be expected that the questioners of her message will lay all possible stress upon this displeasing feature, will give to it disproportionate prominence, will reason as though the offer of heaven were mainly a threat of hell.

But it does seem surprising that, not content with this unfairness, they should go on and distort the doctrine by omissions and additions, and then hold Christ responsible for what foolish Christians, or still more foolish sceptics, have twisted His sayings into.

I appeal to any man, familiar with the popular infidel literature of the day, to say whether its statement of the Christian doctrine of the future retribution can be found on a single page of the Bible or of the Book of Common Prayer. The reply must be that it cannot; from which the inference is that with the doctrine as taught by the Church infidelity dare not grapple, knowing that, however terrible, it is not ferocious; however mournful, it is not ridiculous. Nevertheless, illogical and irrelevant as they are, these sceptical taunts and comments and denials do have a pernicious effect. By many the infidel's picture of hell is accepted as the Catholic doctrine, and then, of course, his easy criticism of that picture is accepted also, and the whole matter is supposed to be settled.

And, further, the prominence given to this subject at the present day has caused many Christians to revise their opinions, to seek anew, and from the very source, what our Lord really taught on the matter; which process has led them to see that some notions they had held were unwarranted, were not essential parts of the doctrine, were human fancies or deductions, for which, at the most, only a probability could be claimed.

All this, of course, is well, but it has not rarely made people think that the primitive belief in hell is being abandoned, that the Church is quietly dropping her ancient convictions. And if this be so, men say, then she cannot be more certain about what she still affirms; a few more years and she may drop that also. And thus have arisen shades and gradations of doubtfulness even among Christians.

Now it will be one of my main duties in this course of sermons to show you that, however individuals may have discarded opinions, the Church has made no change in her faith, and that her preachers must and do still urge "righteousness and temperance," with the old incentive of a "judgment to come." What the Church formally declared as revealed upon this subject, in the first century, and in the sixteenth century, she declares to-day; and we who have sworn to minister the "doctrine of Christ, as this Church hath received the same," feel no hesitancy in repeating her old warnings of the certain punishment of wilful sin. She has said nothing we would like to forget; there is no line of her prayers or articles we would wish to blot. We preach concerning the future of humanity, unfettered by the opinions of any of her children, no matter how eminent, but in unswerving loyalty to her authoritative creeds.

I enter, then, upon this course of sermons with the assurance that I have a solemn truth to set forth—a truth declared by Jesus Christ and intrusted to His Church, of just as much importance now as it was eighteen hundred years ago. But it is a truth suggesting many inquiries and speculations, which do not affect its essence, and which, though inevitable, are commonly fruitless. And so I may as well say at once that I shall not try to build up a complete and minute theory of God's judgments and the mode of their operation. I shall not attempt to draw a map of Gehenna, nor to play the part of Virgil in the under world. There are questions which I shall make no attempt to answer, believing them to be unanswerable, and there are others as to which I can only offer opinions, which may or may not be correct.

I know, indeed, that people are sometimes restive if preachers hesitate; they want to hear from the pulpit only positive affirmations; they dislike being told that certain tracts in theology are unexplored regions. Why handle these subjects at all, it is asked, if you cannot handle them masterfully? Why puzzle us with discoursing largely composed of guesses? Why bring any utterance into the sermon which you cannot preface with a "Thus saith the Lord?" And I reply, first, that these questions will not pause at the door of the church; they will come in. We cannot ignore them. They may never lift up their voice from the pulpit, but they are whispering in the pews. They float in the mind of the layman as he listens, and of the priest as he speaks. And it is far better to face them manfully, to seek the best answer we can get, though it be conjectural or partial, than to have them flitting about us forever humming a vague distrust.

And, second, I think it is wholesome for us to see clearly and confess frankly that we do not know all about the plans of God and the destiny of man, to humbly accept the revelation of what is necessary for our spiritual guidance, without grumbling because to some of our queries there comes no reply.

Now there are three, and but three, authorities which can teach us aught concerning the future life. They are Holy Scripture, the natural world, and the moral sense of man. In each of these God has written his revelation more or less plainly. All sorts of aids in the elucidation of these authorities, of course, come in, and chief of such aids I rank the historic Church. Her creeds and liturgies, based upon divine revelation and adapted to human needs, tested by the revolutions of society and glorified in the lives of saints, are the most venerable interpreters of the Bible, the most reliable exponents of our moral convictions, and surely not the least important testimonies of what men have seen in the universe about them.

But I do not reckon the Church to be a source of doctrine; she is its witness and keeper. The origin of her teachings must be sought in the three places I have specified. These three, Scripture, Nature, Conscience, are the ultimate arbiters. When they agree, we have the most absolute certainty; when they are silent, we are at utter loss; when they seem to disagree, we can only stand in patience before

the secret things of God, confessing with the Greek poet that “it is impossible to know those divine things which God chooses to conceal.” It is, indeed, often hard to do this; these insoluble problems may lay hold on us with eager hands, may call to us with passionate voice. But the enduring faith, the magnanimous temper thus engendered are of priceless value in the shaping of character; it is part of life’s discipline to give them, to teach us face to face with inscrutable mystery and unexplained pain, to place our “hope of answer or redress behind the veil, behind the veil.”

It now remains for me, in this introductory sermon, to state the broad doctrine of future punishment as the Church steadfastly affirms it, and to note those subdivisions of the subject which I shall treat hereafter.

“Whatsoever a man sows that shall he also reap.” In these words of St. Paul is laid down the principle whereon the doctrine of the Church is based. The text is an exact setting forth of the sinner’s doom, and it is correspondent to all the analogy of Nature, and it is confirmed by the moral sense of man.

If there be a future life at all, men must enter upon it substantially the same beings that they were in this life. We know of no magic change of character wrought by death. We have no right to suppose any such change. Indeed, to do so is to deny the future life. If when a man dies there at once appears a totally different sort of man in some other world, that is not the dead man’s reappearance in a new stage of existence. It is a fresh creation.

Even if you suppose that the materials for this new being were derived from him who has just died, that he has been, so to speak, dissolved into elements, and these elements recombined in another structure, it is not the same man. He was a person with a definite character; he had his individuality, which marked him off from all the rest of men. Destroy this and you destroy him. About this, I think, there can be no dispute. John Stuart Mill, considering the subject solely in the light afforded by Nature, says, in words almost identical with those I have just used: “Whatever be the probabilities of a future life, all the probabilities in case of a future life are that such as we have been made or have made ourselves before the change, such we shall enter into the life hereafter.” Whatever kind of man he is, then, who lies upon some deathbed, it is the same man who joins the throng of the departed.

All his days here he was sowing certain passions and desires and convictions in his own heart. As he grew, they grew, blooming and fruiting in his words and deeds, and sowing themselves over and over again, ever thicker and thicker. They became himself. His natural capacities and they interpenetrated each other, clove to each other, became a character and personality, a human soul separate and distinct from all others. It is that soul which has passed through the gate of death, or else nothing has. And what it finds there is what it did and was here. All the selfishness, avarice, lust, gluttony, cruelty, irreverence, envy and pride which marked the man here, these are the company who shall welcome him there. The sinner here is the sinner there. All the familiar circumstances have passed away, but the habitual character remains. It is appalling, but it is most equitable. The one thing in a man’s own power is himself.

Circumstances he cannot control, but his own attitude he can. Whatever a man really strives to become he does become. “Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.” There are no thwarting chances in this.

Do you from your heart yearn to achieve such goodness as beckons to you, to gain the uprightness, the reverence, the purity, the charity of which you have had a vision? Then know, O soul of noble desire, that it is within your reach. Sow early and late, with patience and confidence, such seeds of longing and purpose, and rest assured that the golden harvest shall wave on the eternal plains. But if, on the other hand, you sow meanness and vileness, sins and shames, do not look for any fruitage but these things over again in multiplied pervasiveness and intense activity. No deceit is practiced upon us; the amplest warning has been given. Many a sample of eternity’s harvest comes into our earthly markets. All the anguish, the disgust, the self-contempt, the weariness, which sin must bring forever it does bring now.

This is the Christian teaching about future punishment, that they who defy God’s laws and determine to be a law to themselves shall have their will; that “whatsoever a man sows that shall he also reap.” This is the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures. Is it irrational? All Nature confirms it.

Is it unjust? Whose conscience will aver that to let a man make his choice is not fair? But, it may be said, the re is certainly more taught in Scripture than what has just been stated, the bare fact that as the seed is so shall the harvest be. Does not the Bible speak of a land of mingled flame and darkness, of a place of wailing and despair, of men gnashing their teeth in torment, of a quenchless fire and a worm that never dies? Certainly; but all this is involved in or dependent upon the great law stated in the text.

These figures and symbols express facts which are inevitable if there be a future life for evil men; nauseous shame and poisonous desire, and dull loathing and bitter despondency, “fear and self-hate and vain remorseful stings.” Such things come from sin in this world; the more depraved a soul is the more truly wretched it is; the only sunshine which brightens any life comes from goodness either within or without, from the rays of love sent forth or gathered up. Brief as life is here; and curiously as the careers of men

cross and recross each other, so that no one is guided or affected solely by his inner motives; and impartial as nature is with her rain for the just and the unjust, yet we do perceive in all moral evil at least the germs of woe.

And in such indexes, although small pricks
To their subsequent volumes, there is seen
The baby figure of the giant mass
Of things to come at large.

And not only is it that sin makes a hell within the sinner's breast, it builds up and peoples a hell around him. There is a law of moral gravitation which draws men to their proper society. This law is much interfered with by the various circumstances of earthly living, wicked sons have good parents, and gentle friends hold desperately onto reprobates. But the law never relaxes, and at last it has its way. Little by little the vile nature slips through the barriers of wistful affection and steals or swaggers down to kindred vileness. A thousand homely proverbs such as, "you may know a man by the company he keeps," testify to our knowledge on this matter.

And what is the company which awaits a lost soul? Other souls lost as he is lost, selfish, hateful, foul, false, suspicious as himself. Only because there are kind hearts and pure minds in it is this world not a hell. So far as they have power the wicked make it one, with their lies, their filth and their cruelty. And the terrible warning of Christianity is that when the good and faithful servant shall enter into the joy of his Lord, amid the hosts of the blessed, the faithless shall be left to himself and those like him. This is hell: first a temper, a disposition, a character, and then the place which must be found or made by such.

And to one who considers fairly and thoroughly what is involved in such an existence, a gloomy band of captives with their guilt hanging on them for chains, in a land where no honest man, no chaste woman, no innocent child ever walks, where the turbid air is never parted by an angel's wing nor pierced by a contrite prayer, to one who considers this, no Bible phrase or symbol will seem overdrawn.

But a question which has commonly arisen for men accepting the general doctrine of retribution, as I have sketched it, is this: Must the punishment of the wicked last forever? Will there always be a penal settlement somewhere amid the stars? In answer to this four theories have been advanced:

- First— That there will be a final restoration of the wicked.
- Second— That there will be an endless probation for the wicked.
- Third— That there will be a ceaseless torture of the wicked.
- Fourth— That there will be an annihilation of the wicked.

Each of these I shall consider by itself in the following sermons of this course. I will only say now that the Church has not officially pronounced upon them, that she leaves us free in considering them, that we cannot be branded as heretics, no matter which we may adopt. All that we are bound as members of the Church to believe, all that we swear belief in at our baptism, is that there will be a judgment for sin and that a man shall reap as he has sown.

And the Bible and the Church are more merciful than the stern analogies of nature. The moral and spiritual laws of God are gentler than the material. There is no allowance made in nature for adverse circumstances, for rocky ground or lack of rain. "The education of nature," says Professor Huxley, "is harsh and wasteful in its operation. Ignorance is visited as sharply as wilful disobedience; incapacity meets with the same punishment as crime." But, says the greatest of English theologians, Bishop Butler, "when the soul passes to receive its eternal doom, every merciful allowance shall be made and no more required of any one than what might have been equitably expected of him from the circumstances in which he was placed."

I leave it to you, my hearers, to decide who speaks most nobly of God and most cheerfully for men—the eighteenth century theologian or the nineteenth century scientist; the professor who has turned from all revelation to seek information solely from the natural world, or the bishop who studied both the Bible and nature and noted their analogies. I do not think you will hesitate. For myself Huxley's reasoning only from physical phenomena seems a good example of that terrible fault against which Tennyson has warned us, in lines which are a wholesome motto for all who follow such investigations as we are now engaged in:

Hold thou the good: define it well:
For fear divine philosophy
Should push beyond her mark, and be
Procuress to the Lords of Hell.

2. THE THEORY OF FINAL RESTORATION.

Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which works in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.—PHILIPPIANS 2:12, 13.

IN the sermon last Sunday I stated the broad teaching of the Church upon future punishment, what must be accepted by any man who accepts the Bible and the creeds. This teaching we found to be that sin involves misery, and that the future life of sinners must be wretched, even more so than their life now, since much which interferes here with the working of the spiritual forces will not be permitted to stand in their way forever.

It was also stated that all the circumstances of each life will be mercifully considered in the passing of judgment upon it. I shall have more to say upon that topic hereafter, but I wish to pause for one moment to enter my solemn protest against the absurdity, imputed to the Gospel, of teaching that at death all men are to be at once confronted with some changeless standard of belief or conduct, no allowance being made for differences of capacity, knowledge and opportunity. The Gospel teaches no such monstrous cruelty.

We then faced what is the really momentous question about future punishment—the question whether it will ever end. I call this the momentous question, not forgetting that there are other unsettled points on which theologians are not agreed; such as whether the torments of hell are partly physical or wholly spiritual, whether there are many or few that be saved, and the like. These are questions of secondary importance, and further, they are questions which I think we have no means of answering. We cannot make any conjectures which are even plausible. That the woe of hell will be the just infliction for the sin, and that they who enter into that woe will be only meeting their just deserts, is quite enough for us to know.

But the question whether the punishment of the damned shall be everlasting, whether there shall be, throughout all the aeons, a hell inhabited by tormented human beings, stands on different ground. I believe we have some materials for constructing an answer, and I feel that an answer would be of great value, that the question is one of practical consequence. And so I am to ask you to consider with me the four theories which have arisen on this matter: the theories of final restoration, of eternal probation, of everlasting torment, and of final destruction. This list is exhaustive; in the way taught by some one of these four doctrines condemned souls must be treated; there is no other possibility.

I declared last Sunday what I wish to repeat and amplify and emphasize now, that as between these theories the Church has never enforced the choice of her children, has never passed any formal and authoritative decision approving one and rejecting the rest. I make this declaration as regards the Holy Catholic Church throughout the world; she has never in any creed inserted an article or by any general council set forth a canon anathematizing one of these theories as heresy or indorsing one as the exclusive truth.

I make this declaration as regards the great Anglican branch of the Church Catholic; in no document binding upon the conscience of her members, in no sacramental rite, in no doctrinal utterance, has she indorsed any one of these theories.

I make this declaration as regards our own American Church; in all her legislation she has left this matter untouched, has never narrowed that intellectual freedom which is her children's rightful heritage as baptized into the Church Universal and by a ministry tracing its succession back through the line of Canterbury. As a minister of this Church I am at liberty, as members of this Church you are at liberty, to adopt whichever one of these theories seems to you best warranted by divine revelation. If we pursue our studies reverently and laboriously we may, indeed, come to discordant conclusions, but we cannot, because of these, bandy accusations of heresy or thrust each other from the ranks of fellowship. "From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead," says the creed to which we swore allegiance when we were received into the Church. In that judgment and its necessary consequence, the due punishment of sinners, we must believe. But as to what shape this due punishment of sinners will take, or how long it will last, we are under no constraint of Church dogmatizing.

I do not mean to say that the Church stands perfectly neutral in this matter. I do think that she has to some degree uttered an opinion. There are expressions scattered here and there in the Prayer Book which have a weighty implication. But it still remains true that she has made no theory about hell "de fide" and imperative.

Nor is this attitude of the Church due to ignorance or stolidity or chance; her tolerance is not thoughtless or casual. It was not, as has been falsely asserted, because the question was never raised within her cognizance that she made no decree upon it; and most certainly it was not, as has been claimed, and too often with malignant motive, because the theory of everlasting torment was the universal and settled conviction of the Church that she found it needless to condemn other opinions, since being held by nobody they did not in any practical sense exist. For from the very dawn of Christian history down to the present day, we find men, prominent in the Church's hierarchy and foremost in her assemblies, who did not believe in everlasting torment; such men as Clement, Bishop of Alexandria; Gregory, Bishop of Nazianzus; Gregory, Bishop of Nyssen; men who died for the faith, like Justin; men who wrote

whole libraries of Christian literature like Origen. The subject was discussed in the early days as well as in the modern; there was no such complete, unbroken harmony of opinion as might keep the Church from any declaration.

But we have better evidence than even the long list of those whose various opinions she tolerated, that her course in this matter has been deliberate and intentional. Attempts have been made to get a formulated decision on the subject, and all have failed. One of the most eminent men in the early days was Origen, who believed in and defended the final restoration of the wicked. In his lifetime and after his death this doctrine was vigorously criticised by such as held other views. The argument was carried on widely and earnestly and long. As the years went by the four great Ecumenical Councils (recognized as authoritative by the Greek Church, the Roman Church, and the Anglican Church) assembled and performed their work, that of Nice, A.D. 325; Constantinople, A.D. 381; Ephesus, A.D. 431; Chalcedon, A.D. 451.

Not one of the Councils put out any dogma about the mode or duration of future punishment. But more than this, at a later date the Emperor Justinian, who had conceived a violent prejudice against Origen, undertook to get that father's doctrine of final restoration formally condemned. A council, known as the Home Synod, was held at Constantinople. A letter from the Emperor, attacking various opinions of Origen, was read, and the following canon, drawn up by the Emperor, was submitted to the council, together with others, for adoption.

The canon, translated, runs thus: "If any one says or thinks that the punishment of devils and wicked men is for a time, and that there will be an end to it sometime, or that there will be a restoration and renewal of the devils or wicked men, let him be anathema." Here the issue was clearly made. The acts of this synod are not indeed binding on the Church at large, since it was only a provincial assembly. But as there is some reason to think that these acts were indorsed by another council which, though not universally accepted as oecumenical, ranks very high, it is interesting to know what the Home Synod did.

Well, it did not adopt Justinian's canon; it refused to brand, at the request of the Emperor in days when such a request was a good deal like a command, any man as a heretic for thinking that the woe of the damned might come to an end.

There has been a case somewhat similar in the history of the English Church. In the first draft of the Articles of Religion stood one condemning the doctrine of final restoration. But at the final and formal adoption of the Articles that one was dropped. There can be no explanation of this except that it was intended to leave the matter open, to tolerate the opinion. So it has been understood; and accordingly an English ecclesiastical court, in which the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Archbishop of York both sat, decided that there is no distinct declaration of our Church forbidding "the expression of hope by a clergyman that even the ultimate pardon of the wicked, who are condemned in the day of judgment, may be consistent with the will of Almighty God."

As concerns our own American Church, I need only remind you that in the preface to the Prayer Book she avers that she is "far from intending to depart from the Church of England in any essential point of doctrine, discipline or worship, or further than local circumstances require." Very different has been the course of sects which were the natural representatives of the extreme notions of the ages which gave them birth; for, having little respect for ancient customs, and being in no way restrained by inherited habit, they rushed into profuse and eager dogmatizing. The cautious temper of the historic Church they despised, her tolerance they counted supineness; it seemed to them that now for the first time was Christianity to be preached, and they could not afford to let any point go unsettled. And so the sects which arose in the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries have been voluble in statements and definitions, which passed well enough in their day, being mere embodiments of common opinion then, but which wear a very different appearance now.

When we find the Augsburg Confession asserting a hell of everlasting torment, and crushing with relentless ban any hope of its ultimate extinction; when we read in the Wesleyan Catechism that "Hell is a dark and bottomless pit, full of fire and brimstone," where "the wicked will be punished by having their bodies tormented with fire, and their souls by a sense of the wrath of God," and that "the torments of hell will last for ever and ever;" when we see in the Larger Catechism set forth by the Westminster Assembly the answer to the question, "What are the punishments of sin in the world to come?" given thus:

"Everlasting separation from the comfortable presence of God and most grievous torments in soul and body, without intermission, in hell fire, forever," we know how to appreciate our own immunity from such burdens of human construction and imposition. And we shall not be surprised that while the Churchman of to-day uses his Prayer Book with the same serenity and confidence as did the Churchman of three hundred years ago, many another doctrinal standard has been relegated to some dim corner, and most of those who are formally bound by its decisions would be vastly astonished and not at all delighted by its contents.

I have now, I trust, sufficiently shown that we may consider the four theories without any disloyalty or disrespect to the Church; we use a liberty she has sanctioned: and to one of the four I proceed.

The theory of final restoration is that the punishments in hell will all be corrective and medicinal; will work steadily for the reformation and purifying of the sufferers, so that finally, though after the lapse of how many ages no one can even guess, the sinner will have paid the just penalty of his guilt, will have become thoroughly penitent for his wickedness, will have been cleansed from all his evil desires; will have turned to God with true affection, and therefore will be admitted to the blessed company of the saints, welcomed by exultant rejoicings over a brother who “was dead, and is alive again; was lost, and is found.”

I have already named some of the earlier theologians who espoused this theory, and the list might be considerably extended. In our own Anglican Communion it has been advanced by such men as Ralph Cudworth, William Law, F. D. Maurice and Charles Kingsley. It is, as you all know, the distinctive doctrine of the modern sect of Universalists, and, for brevity, I shall speak of it hereafter as Universalism, though many of its supporters have no connection with that sect.

Now, observe, the Church does not forbid you to believe or to teach Universalism. Men whom she has placed on the bishop’s throne, men about whose heads she has painted the aureole, have done so. If after the best study you can make of the subject you come to the glad conclusion that all men shall finally be saved, you need dread no rebuke from the ecclesiastical authority. But you have no right to say to yourself, “I like this doctrine; it frees me from much anxiety; it seems to me more liberal, it affords me great pleasure, I had rather it were true, therefore I will believe it.”

Not by such careless and lazy and cowardly conduct can you gain the right to proclaim a belief in universal salvation. The doctrine does not come to you with any such sanction of creed or council or general consent as can make it proper for you to simply receive it with humble acquiescence. Some noble Christians have held it, but a far greater number have not. The majority may, indeed, have been mistaken, but you cannot lightly assume that Augustine and Chrysostom, Anselm and Aquinas, Taylor and South, and Pearson, Pusey, and Keble were either dull-witted or cold-hearted; and if not, then there must be some very serious objections to this doctrine of final restoration, else these men would not have opposed it. And it will not do for any of us to flippantly ignore or rashly push by these objections, to come to our beliefs simply at the bidding of our preferences. Such conduct would support any and every kind of scepticism and superstition.

No, before we embrace Universalism we must demand its proofs. If they are sufficient, how joyously will we confess it!

Universalism, you will notice, does not deny that there will be a hell wherein sinners shall be justly punished. It does not, or need not, deny that the suffering in hell will be keen beyond all conception and prolonged through countless centuries; that there will be in many cases most exquisite pains; that all the old guilt will be a fiery atmosphere, all the old sins will sting like undying worms; that imagination cannot depict the gloom and woe into which some souls must pass; all this, by the only reasonable Universalists, is fully allowed. But it is claimed that all this misery will work out its own cure, will develop a loathing for sin and a yearning for holiness, so that finally, from the fires of remorse, and the gloom of self-contempt, and the torture of remembrance, a man shall emerge clean, and humble, and loving. And Oh, that it may be so!

But what say our three authorities upon the matter? In the first place I think that the testimony of Nature is against this doctrine. Both in the material world about us and in human society we see cases of utter failure, organisms and organizations which disappear in total wreck. Now the special tenet of Universalism is that such failure and wreck are incredible; that a wise and omnipotent Creator cannot allow anything to go to irretrievable ruin. The finest utterance of this philosophy is in the familiar words of Tennyson:

Oh yet we trust that somehow good
Will be the final goal of ill,
To pangs of nature, sins of will,
Defects of doubt, and taints of blood;
That nothing walks with aimless feet;
That not one life shall be destroyed
Or cast as rubbish to the void,
When God hath made the pile complete;
That not a worm is cloven in vain;
That not a moth in vain desire
Is shrivelled in a fruitless fire,
Or but subserves another’s gain.

And yet the worms are cloven and the moths are burned, and, so far as we can see, no reparation is made. The whole history of our planet shows a vast, an incalculable destruction, which has, so far as evidence is given us, only subserved “another’s gain.” The great poet from whom I quoted confesses that Nature lends him “evil dreams,” not bringing one seed in fifty to bear, developing

higher forms of life with prodigious havoc to the lower; blotting out not merely individuals, but species and tribes, turning a world of verdant plants into dark seams of coal, a world of animal life into quarries of marble; so that at last he cries that

Nature, red in tooth and claw
With ravine, shrieks against his creed,

his hopeful doctrine of universal triumph and salvation. Of course it is evident that the vast destruction told in geology's pages was not purposeless; it prepared the way for a nobler life; the coal is warming our houses now, and driving our machinery; the marble rises glorious in our palaces and temples. And we may fairly conclude, from the facts open to us, that nothing does walk with "aimless feet;" that the wildest destruction has its constructive office. But it is very clear that this is often only serving "another's gain;" that a dozen, a thousand lives are sacrificed for one life. And provided the building erected is of priceless value, no just complaint can be made, because much material was used as scaffolding and cast away as rubbish when it had served its purpose.

A mountain of marble might well be hewed to chips if it were necessary to do so to bring out the statue which shall tell the wonderful story of Art.

And so, too, it may be that the cost of the movement of the life of this world from lower to higher forms is paralleled by the cost of still higher movement. God may permit the existence of sinners, because without that there could be no saints; because courage, and compassion, and purity and justice, and truthfulness, are characteristics only to be gained amid a world of temptation—a world where there are crimes and oppressions, cruelties, and shames, and lies. There can be no victory without a battle, and no hero without a trial. And so the real purpose and use of wicked men may consist in the fact that they are necessary for the training of brave and pure souls, as

The gem too poor to polish in itself,
If ground to brighten others.

The analogy of Nature at least is terribly suggestive in this direction.

Nor, when we turn to what we know of human history, to what we see in human society, do we find any sharp denial of the possibility of failure. Race after race, civilization after civilization have perished on this earth, leaving perhaps, some warning or guidance for those who should succeed, but never to rise again themselves. "One such failure of man's earliest efforts, it may be, is revealed to us, below layer after layer of the after lives that rose up upon its ashes, in the burnt and wasted citadel of Troy; and another lies hidden, we know, under the dreary darkness of the Dead Sea waters; while yet another had to perish, root and branch, under the unsparing sword of Israel that hewed its hosts to pieces, hip and thigh, at the going down to Bethoron, and by the waters of Merom.

And, as with the races of the past, so with the individuals of the present, we see failure upon failure. We see man after man growing daily more degraded, sinking lower and lower in sensuality, freezing harder and harder in selfishness, losing faster and faster all high principle and noble aspiration. In hospitals, and asylums, and prisons are to be found frightful hulks of humanity, which it is impossible to imagine once more under sail, their spars all gone and every plank in their hulls rotten. It is an old story how habitual sin brings remorse but not repentance, how the satiety of one stage of vice hurries a man into the lower stage, how he who betters not with time

Corrupts the strength of heaven-descended will,
And ever weaker grows thro' acted crime,

until all power for right desire even is gone. Thus, to him that hath is given, and from him who hath not is taken away even that which he hath. So it is in this world; what reason have we to think it will not be so in the next? What forces are to be brought to bear there which have not been applied in vain to some men here? A Christian civilization, a pure Gospel, a pious home, a father's example, a mother's prayer—men have flung all these influences off to plunge into foulest vice. What can be done for those who have sinned against light, who have steadily disobeyed the whispers of conscience, and repelled the grace of God! I do not think that a single motive to righteousness can be imagined to exist in the future life which does not exist now and here, and with no perceptible effect upon many men.

It seems to me, then, that Nature gives no support to the Universalist theory; that all the analogies point the other way.

What does Holy Scripture teach? I shall not deal with the exegesis of isolated texts, partly because texts can be quoted by both sides, but mainly because I have not the time for such a process. I must ask you to credit me with reasonable honesty and diligence, so that when I make a general statement you may rely upon it that I have looked up the particular texts naturally connected with it.

What is the broad utterance of the New Testament?—for the Old Testament need not now be considered; its feebler light can show nothing to men which Christ and the apostles left doubtful or dark. We are told by Universalists that the words translated “hell” and “damn” and “damnation” in our English Bibles do not mean what people commonly understand by these terms. This is, in most cases, true. The words rendered “damn” and “damnation” should be rendered “judge” and “judgment,” and it would then be plain that in many texts they do not refer to the final doom. And “Hades” ought never to be rendered “hell;” that word should be used only for “Gehenna.”

We are told that “aionios,” commonly rendered “eternal,” does not necessarily mean everlasting. That is true. We are told that in the famous passage, “These shall go away into aionian punishment, but the righteous into aionian life,” the everlastingness of the lot of the righteous does not necessarily involve a similar everlastingness in the lot of the wicked, that aionian means age long, and that the aion or age appropriate for holy and blessed life might be very, even infinitely greater, than that appropriate for retributive punishment. This also I think is true. But so far no proof of restoration has come. For that, however, we are referred to those passages so abundant in the New Testament which proclaim God’s love for all men, Christ’s dying for all men, the gospel sent to all men, the grace offered to all men. But I find no passage clearly asserting that these gifts so universally offered will be as universally accepted.

Finally the Universalists appeal to the Scriptural assertions of the ultimate triumph of Christ and the overthrow of the powers of evil. But to this the advocates of other theories will reply that a king is triumphant when his conquered foes have been shut up in dungeons or lie dead on the field of battle.

I must say that I cannot find a single text in the Bible which, considered with due regard to its context, seems to me to plainly teach Universalism.

And on the other hand, what are we to make of the great current of Biblical warning to sinners? Does it not treat their doom as final? Their ruin as absolute? The broad path leading to destruction, the chaff burned in fire unquenchable, the destruction of soul and body in Gehenna, the stone whose fall grinds to powder, the drowning in destruction and perdition, the second death—are not all these expressions of dread significance, suggesting no change or qualification?

Or take our Lord’s parables: Is there any slightest hint of a final restoration of sinners in them? The tares gathered and burned at the harvest; the guest lacking a wedding garment thrust out from the feast; the foolish virgins knocking vainly at the fastened door; the slothful servant deprived of his talent and cast into outer darkness—is there the faintest light of hope falling upon any of these pictures? That God wishes all men to be saved; that Christ became incarnate to make universal salvation possible; that the Church was established to set forward the salvation of all men—these are truths which are abundantly indicated by the Scriptures. But that all men will be saved I do not find distinctly stated anywhere in the Bible.

What says our last authority, the moral sense? Here Universalism claims to find its strongest ally. And, indeed, if the moral sense does demand the final redemption of all men, if our common feeling of justice is left revolted by any other theory, then in a case where there was any possible doubt as to the meaning of Scripture, Universalism would command an assent. Now it is unquestionable that our moral sense does rebel against any presentment of Almighty God as careless about the welfare of the meanest of the creatures.

The old pagans might pay reverence to deities who thought little and felt little and did little for mortals, but a conscience enlightened by the New Testament and the Church will not tolerate any such portraiture of the Divine. It is impossible to believe that the Anointed One Who took His human name of Jesus because He should save His people from their sins, Who told the story of the shepherd seeking the lost sheep until he found it, Who talked with the soiled woman of Samaria and dined with the corrupt publican of Jericho and went forth with the last salutation of wistful affection to receive the kiss of Judas in Gethsemane, it is impossible to believe that He Who knows us all by name and Whom no foulness on our part can repel from attempting to cleanse us, should be content after a few years to let a sinner go unvisited, untaught, unhelped, unloved.

No, we are sure that God is love; we find in Christ the incarnation of that love, and any doctrine which presents God otherwise than as loving in His dealings with any rational creature is indignantly repudiated by the moral sense. But does the denial of Universalism so present Him? I think not. Universalists claim that God must, by the very law of His own nature, do all that is possible to save a sinner. That is true. They further claim that if God thus acts, the sinner must be saved. And this is an error, due to a misconception of what salvation is, and what omnipotence implies. For salvation is not a place, but a condition; not a circumstance, but a temper; it is not being somewhere, but being somewhat; it is the man’s relation to God. Now there are two parties in settling that relation. God is one, but the man is the other, and unless they cooperate no salvation can be wrought. And so in the text I have taken to-night, St. Paul, recognizing this, says:

“Work out your own salvation; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do.” They are to work, relying upon God’s grace to make the toil successful, but without their work the grace would fail. It is the mystery of free will, it is the very central fact of human nature, it is the one thing which makes salvation a reality.

Is it said that I limit God’s omnipotence? I reply that the greatest of metaphysicians and most eminent of theologians have always confessed that “God cannot effect that which involves a contradiction;” and if it does not involve a contradiction to say that God has made man a being with free will so that he may love God by his own volition, and then to go on and say that God must make man love Him, by forcing his will, and that the result is that man, of his own volition, does love God, then there is no such thing as a contradiction. The obedience of a human soul must be voluntary, or there is no distinction between that soul and a clod of clay, so far as serving God is concerned. If God makes men good by irresistible pressure, this action is the same in kind as that whereby the dust ranges itself in a quartz crystal, or the sap rises to nourish a plant.

And then all our words for goodness, for moral action, are mere delusive terms, having no corresponding realities. For free will is of the essence of goodness; a morality which could not be other than it is would be mere mechanism. And it is the fatal flaw in Universalism that it does deny free will; it inherited this denial from the Calvinism out of which it was born. From Calvinism men learned a doctrine of “irresistible grace.” And then the moral sense rose up against the other Calvinistic teaching of “everlasting torment” like a giant. What! God able to save all men, and yet willing only to save some; able to make all men good, but determined to leave many to writhe in wickedness forever! It is false; it is blasphemous!

And in this the moral sense was right. Grant “irresistible grace” and “final restoration” follows as a matter of course. But grace is not irresistible. It was God Who spoke those sorrowful words over the city on which His grace had been showered in vain: “Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which kills the prophets and stones them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together as a hen doth gather her brood under her wing, and ye would not!”

“Ye would not.” It was the glorious and dangerous prerogative of the soul which those men exercised to their own destruction. Omnipotence itself cannot save the unwilling sinner. And, therefore, our moral sense does not support Universalism as the only theory reconcilable with our trust in God’s love for His creatures. Indeed, if omnipotence can make men good in the future, it ought to do so now; there should be no sin, no misery in the present world.

But that sin is here stands beyond all question, and before that solemn fact I think Universalism must go down. It implies a view of God’s working utterly irreconcilable with the known conditions and the present realities of human life.

True and beautiful are those well-known lines where Whittier insists that God will never forsake His creatures:

I know not where His islands lift Their fronded palms in air; I only know I cannot drift Beyond His love and care.

But the same poet goes on to say, as one must who has honestly looked things in the face:

The sweet persuasion of His voice
Respects thy sanctity of will.
He gives day; thou hast thy choice
To walk in darkness still.

It is not without deep significance that, in a passage of the Bible where there is at least some looking out toward judgment and the lasting doom of men we find the words, “He that is righteous, let him be righteous still, and he that is holy, let him be holy still,” preceded by these other words: “He that is unjust, let him be unjust still, and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still.” For it is that unique endowment of humanity, making it possible to disobey God and do evil, which gives it all its capacity for noble desire and glorious achievement, for shaping character and deserving immortality. Because man can disobey, he can obey, and such magnificent obedience as he can render is a greater thing than the ordered harmony of all the systems of the stars.

3. THE THEORY OF ETERNAL PROBATION.

“He went and preached unto the spirits in prison; which sometime were disobedient.”—1 PETER 3:19, 20.

LAST Sunday we considered the theory known as “Final Restoration” or “Universalism,” and I gave the arguments which seem to me fatal to that theory. The great flaw in Universalism, regarded philosophically, we found to be its implicit denial of free will, its tacit assumption that man is purely a creature of circumstances, and that a change in the

circumstances must revolutionize the man. As I pointed out, such reasoning is destructive of all conceptions of duty and morality, makes the spiritual life purely mechanical, and leaves it just as absurd to style a man wicked because of his pernicious deeds, as it would be to call a watch wicked for not keeping correct time.

And as we could find nothing in the present aspect of the world and human society which suggests, and nothing in the New Testament which declares the final restoration of all sinners, the conclusion seemed unavoidable that that theory, ardently as our mere wishes might espouse it, has not sufficient evidence to commend it to our judgment.

The theory which I shall discuss this evening is the one I have called "Eternal Probation." It differs from Universalism in that it does not peremptorily assert that all men will ultimately be cleansed from sin and received into the heavenly home; it only claims that such purification and salvation will be always possible, that grace and opportunity will be present in the deepest pits of hell, that it can never be said of any condemned soul that its case is hopeless. This is the theory advanced, so far as anything positive was advanced, in Dr. Farrar's now famous sermons on the subject of future punishment. He entitled the volume "Eternal Hope," in significant contrast to that inscription, "All hope abandon, ye who enter in," which Dante represents as crowning the infernal gate.

Canon Farrar and those who agree with him argue for vast reformatory processes in the world to come, and while they do not venture to say that in all cases this discipline will succeed, they yet consider that it will effect large results, that great multitudes will be saved by it, that those with whom it fails will be but a small band of most obdurate temper and loathsome character. The lasting misery of these, it seems, may be contemplated without overwhelming grief and horror. This theory of eternal probation is the least defined and elaborate of the four; its advocates have not undertaken to state it with scientific clearness nor to place it before us as an orderly system. Their common method has been to attack "everlasting torment," to ignore or pass slightly by "final destruction," to regretfully confess that they dare not proclaim an absolute "universalism," and then, of course, nothing is left but the vision of a reformatory, over which hangs the menacing possibility that for some of those within its walls it may be an everlasting prison.

Now, because of the very lack of precision and detail in this theory, because it does on the one side touch everlasting torment, and on the other, final restoration, it has many adherents, and is not easily refuted. It leaves the whole matter in the valley of the shadow; it whispers that there are great hopes, but to the stern warnings sounded from Nature and Scripture and conscience it replies that it does not deny that there are also solemn apprehensions. And so evading or lessening many objections and according with the general yearnings of all kind hearts, it is not surprising that in one way or another this theory should find many supporters.

Practically it comes to pretty much the same thing as Universalism. And it is evident that it is open to most of the objections which have been noted as confronting Universalism. They may strike eternal probation with less vigour, but they strike it just as squarely in the face. The analogy of Nature and the broad current of Bible warning and exhortation tell as little of an eternal purgatory as they do of a terminable hell.

But on one very important point our present theory is unclogged by a difficulty, and that the chief difficulty, attaching to Universalism; it does not deny the freedom of the will. While urging that circumstances have an enormous power in shaping character, it does not claim that they are irresistible. Where Universalism demands that God being able to make men good if He chooses, must at last so choose, or else He is not loving, not even just; eternal probation simply argues that as our circumstances have a tremendous influence for spiritual weal or woe, and as those circumstances are in some way, direct or indirect, of divine arrangement, a just God must see to it that each man shall be given every outside help conceivable, every help which any other man has had, for arousing noble desire and brave resolution and righteous performance. And this, I conceive, is perfectly true.

The theory then goes on to remind us that some men do have helps toward holy living which are not on this earth afforded to others. One child is born with the malign promptings of hereditary taint in every drop of his blood; while another enters the world rich in a heritage of noble likes and dislikes stored up by generations of clean and honourable ancestors; one baby has barely learned to name the commonest sights and experiences of household life before it is taught the great verities of religion, and almost its first utterances are the little prayers which it repeats in perfect trust at its mother's knee; while another looks out of eyes as limpid upon the loathsome debaucheries of the slums where the lowest vice of a great city holds tyrannic rule, and baby lips, repeating what baby ears have heard, lisp obscenity and stammer curses.

And, as with the beginning of life, so with its after days; there is no equality in all those surroundings and extraneous forces which go so far to sway our choosing and mould our character.

All this is simply undeniable. The shadings of human condition are countless, but they run down from the whitest white to the blackest black. It were absurd to say that a Hottentot or a Pi-Ute has had any such chance for or inducement to righteous living as comes to the average American, or that the children of thieves and harlots get any such start in the religious life as do the children of this congregation.

Unless, then, we adopt the doctrine that God has determined to save only a select few, has “chosen some men to eternal life and the means thereof,” and has passed by and foreordained the rest to dishonour and wrath,” which doctrine I take to be horrible beyond credence, we must believe that somewhere and somehow these grievous inequalities are to be adjusted. As to this our moral sense is imperious, and no weight of authority can bow it down. If you could show that the Bible taught otherwise, you would simply make men throw away their Bibles in disgust or despair. And it is the tactics adapted by the baser infidelity of our day to represent the Bible as teaching thus, sure that if they can once get that notion into people’s minds they will have dethroned the Scriptures.

I know, indeed, that some good men have been Calvinists; that at a certain period, not a few keen intellects and kind hearts held to a set of doctrines irrational and cruel, and sought to maintain them by texts of Scripture. Into the explanation of such a state of affairs I cannot now go. But I may observe that we have a somewhat similar state of affairs now in certain quarters. There are men of ability and personal excellence at this time teaching a philosophy quite similar to the Calvinistic, quite as horrible, quite as irreconcilable with our moral sense, and yet finding not a few disciples in all grades of society. The fatalism which once tried to prove itself by the texts of Holy Scripture now tries to prove itself by the statements of physical science. Instead of quoting prophet and apostle, these new fatalists quote chemistry and biology.

But it is the same dismal and repulsive dogma: that there is no justice to be shown to men—that they are dragged up or down, into light or darkness, by chains they did not weld and cannot break. And the fact that among the men proclaiming this modern gospel of the devil are some whom we know to be sincere and just and compassionate, should make it easier for us to understand how among the advocates of that former gospel of the devil there were good men also, who wrought righteousness in their day and left illustrious names. But in both cases it has been in spite of the doctrine, not because of it; and in the long run the doctrine brings about its legitimate results. Wherever Calvinism has flourished, it has sown broadcast the seeds of a fierce and contemptuous infidelity. In many a homely verse of Robert Burns we see how one, not insensible to piety nor scornful of devotion, as the “Cotter’s Saturday Night” gives ample proof, despised and trampled on those teachings of election and reprobation, which have made bigots and hypocrites, cowards and infidels, but never brought one soul to the love of Christ, and never entered into an honest, humble heart, except to dim its sunshine and freeze the streams of its joy.

When, then, the advocates of eternal probation say that circumstances exert a mighty power, they are right; when they say that all men, if they are to be tried by the same standard, must have the same advantages of circumstance, they are right; when they say that obviously men do not have any such equality in this present life, they are right. When, therefore, they conclude that there must be some light given, some training exercised for many, indeed the great majority of men, in the future life, they are right.

But on two points, I think, they are wrong. First, in their extension of this enlightening and educating period throughout all eternity. Second, in their considering it as a probation at all, in their denying that the great choice is made and the everlasting destiny fixed for most, if not all, men in this present life.

Let us consider the first point. We have judged it to be certain that there must be some chance for repentance, some opportunity for improvement beyond the grave, and that many who, as viewed by their fellows in the transient and delusive lights of this earth were wretched failures, quite devoid of holy impulse or moral attainment, may in the next stage of existence display new capacities respondent to the new influences, is quite probable, and can be reasonably hoped. Just in so far as a man’s shortcoming has been casual, not deliberate, has been due to defective equipment or contracted stage; to lack of instruction or perplexed wits, just so far we may boldly assume the result will be scanned with leniency, and a new and better opening for the work will be given.

All those seeds of pure passion and glorious emprise lying dormant in a heart exposed only to the winter of this world will assuredly be called forth to stately growth and abundant bloom in some kindlier atmosphere. Of this much we may be confident. But this is not “eternal probation.” It is only the old doctrine of the “intermediate state,” a doctrine resting upon clear warrant of Holy Scripture, and buttressed by the constant teaching of the Catholic Church—a doctrine implied in one of the articles of the Apostles’ Creed. It is because of the denial or neglect of this doctrine by modern Protestantism that many strange and irrational opinions about future punishment have arisen. For the current teaching is that when a man dies his soul is at once received into heaven or thrust down to hell, welcomed to eternal bliss or doomed to never-ending woe. And on this supposition, the question naturally arises, what is the fate of the great middle class of mankind?

What becomes of those who are conspicuous neither for virtue nor for vice, whose careers have not been resplendent with holiness nor rotten with sensuality; who have been fairly honest in their business, and kindly in their families and generous toward their neighbours; whose religion or irreligion was rather a surface matter, the belief not ardent, the doubt not bitter; men who gave occasional alms from real pity, and kept from foul vice in real disgust; in short, the majority of men? And again, what becomes of men cut off in their youth, who stood bewildered before the thronging presences and clamorous voices of the world; whose moral muscles had not been toughened by prolonged exercise, and whose spiritual attitude had not become habitual? And once again what becomes of those billions born into and dying amid the darkness of heathenism, knowing the divine love only as it is reflected from

the shattered sacraments of Nature and the dimmed conscience of humanity, men to whom abominable practices came with venerable sanction and debasing superstitions with authoritative seal? What of all these?

Such men are not saints, are not holy, are not fit to behold the Beatific Vision. When we read the glowing descriptions of the Heavenly Jerusalem, and translate into spiritual verities all that imagery of gates of pearl and streets of gold and walls of precious stones, few indeed are they whom we have met in our daily walk and conversation who seem prepared to pace the strand of the river of life or to kneel before the throne of God and the Lamb. It is hard, indeed, to imagine serene crowns upon those knitted brows, clear robes about those dusty forms, euphonious harps swept by those careless hands, which we behold in every thoroughfare and marketplace.

But can any one with human compassion, dare any one with human justice, assert that all these are to be cast away, lost forever; that they shall never be touched to finer issues or given one glimpse of the nobler life?

The popular notions of modern sects put us in the dilemma of either degrading the standard of heaven or multiplying to an awful degree the population of hell. We must either reckon that "holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord," a very shabby and tainted condition, or we must conclude that most of our fellow creatures are hopelessly damned. And when the choice is thus limited there can be little doubt as to how most men will decide. They will assure themselves that such injustice as this wholesale damnation involves, will never be done, and they will go on unappalled in their mediocre lives, confident that it will come out all right somehow.

But when once the doctrine of the intermediate state is comprehended, the dilemma we have noted vanishes, and with it must vanish all this easy confidence.

For all to whom earth has not allowed ample time and means for the right choice and for action on that choice, there will be abundant amends hereafter? If they really were ignorant, they will be taught; if they really were fettered, they will be freed. But on the other hand, if they did persistently sin against light, of what use would more light be. If they wound chains around themselves, what power could tear these bands away? The doctrine gives us most comfortable hope for all who have been thwarted and hampered, by external influences, in their spiritual life; but it offers no drowsy cordial to him who consciously neglects duty, and lets his spirit grow poorer day by day.

That the doctrine is true, that there is such an intermediate state awaiting men after death, I take to be distinctly revealed in Holy Scripture, and I chose for my text to-night these words of St. Peter, which tell us that no sooner had our Lord finished His atoning work than He went and offered its results to the spirits which were in prison, which had once been disobedient in days when the divine law had less evident sanction and the divine love a slighter disclosure.

Jesus Christ preached, declared the gospel to the spirits which were in prison. Let him who can, believe that the mighty Victor, coming from the cross where He had won His battle, proclaimed what He had done for human salvation to these spirits in vain! I cannot and will not. But it is not my purpose now to detail the proofs, Scriptural or otherwise, of the intermediate state. My point now is that this doctrine meets all the requirements which can be justly urged in favour of eternal probation; and it is a doctrine having the express sanction of the Church, which, in all her teaching, distinguishes clearly between Hades, the place of departed spirits, and Gehenna, the place of final punishment.

And besides the proof texts from Scripture and the endorsement of the Church, this doctrine has, as we have already observed, the approval of our moral sense. When a man reads these words of our Lord: "Woe unto thee, Chorazin, woe unto thee Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes," it is certain that he will wonder why those works were not done in those ancient cities and will murmur that the Tyrians and Sidonians would not be fairly treated unless they should have these inducements to repentance. To their spirits also in the prison house ought to come that Saviour from the cross. God, who wills all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth, owes to those far away Phoenicians that revelation which Christ said would have saved them.

There is no escaping this conclusion, and we ought to accept it frankly, freely and with exceeding joy. Who cares what petty sectarian platform goes to pieces, if, with the approval of Scripture, Conscience and the Catholic Creeds, we can trust that many a soul which knew not Christ in this world shall find Him in the next! It was that most reverent and saintly man, whose scrupulous exactness in thought and expression earned for him the title of "The Judicious Hooker," who said with passionate pathos in one of his sermons, nearly three hundred years ago, "Surely I must confess unto you, if it be an error to think that God may be merciful to save men even when they err, my greatest comfort is my error. Were it not for the love I bear unto this error, I would neither wish to speak nor to live."

But the only sufficient basis for this hope of mercy to error, of allowance for ignorance which conducted into crime, lies in the doctrine of the intermediate state. For to say that God pardons error and the sins arising there from, if we mean that He simply annihilates the past, is absurd. It cannot be done. If we mean that He treats the misled sinner as though he were a saint, this, too, is absurd. It cannot be done. The God of truth cannot lie, cannot ignore realities. Men sinning through ignorance bear the marks of their transgression, and these marks require time for their effacement. There is a great interval between the woman, born and educated in a pure home, who has kept the law of chastity, and the woman born and educated in the slums, who has broken it; between the heathen who obeyed the fragmentary moral code of his cannibal tribe and the Christian who followed the precepts of the Gospel. We may hope that a ll of them will be saved, but it is certain that if they are all to enter upon the same blessed life some of them need purifying preparation. And such a preparation the intermediate state will supply.

But, says some one, this is simply purgatory. To which I reply, first, what if it were? If it is true, the more people who believe it the better, and I for one am not to be driven from a well-founded and most blessed doctrine by what an old English writer styles “that stale and putrid imputation of popery.” But, urges the objector, the Anglican Church has condemned the doctrine of purgatory in one of the Thirty-nine Articles, and you are bound by these articles.

I admit that I am bound by the Articles, but I deny that they condemn purgatory. What they do condemn is “the Romish doctrine concerning purgatory”—a very different matter.

That doctrine, with its accompaniments, masses for the dead, indulgences, and the like I also repudiate; but that souls are instructed and amended and purified in Hades I do certainly believe. And if anybody chooses to call that believing in purgatory, I care not.

So far, then, I accord with the advocates of eternal probation. They assert that there is repentance and amendment beyond the grave. I gladly agree. But when they represent this intermediate state as prolonged through all the ages, I reply that this is not demanded by any necessities of the case, and is directly opposed to the plain teaching of Scripture. If there is any fact about the future which our Lord and the apostles seem to reveal in clear terms, it is that there will be a grand consummation, a final crisis, the last judgment.

At this great assize men are to be divided into two classes; to the one, the sentence is, “Come, ye blessed;” to the other, “Depart, ye cursed.” Now, if there were an eternal probation, it must be for these latter souls, those who have been sent to “the aionian fire prepared for the devil and his angels,” that is, to Gehenna. But we have not the slightest hint in the Bible of any purifying or elevating processes in Gehenna. It was Hades where our Lord preached to the spirits, it was in Hades that the rich man began to feel shame and sorrow for his selfish life; but Gehenna is the place of which it is said that it were better to lose eye and hand, to be blind and lame, rather than to perish there, body and soul. And further, all the condemned in Gehenna are those who not only failed on earth, but failed also in Hades; they are not now the victims of birth and environment, but the sullen, self-devoted slaves of evil; they are such as have sinned against light and love. To them what further help can be given; from them, what change can be expected?

Is it asked, How do we know that there will be any such obstinate and persistent rebels against God? I reply, because of what we behold here, and because of what Scripture declares as to the hereafter. There are men here who do, unless all signs deceive us, show total depravity, who are utterly without shame for their sin or desire for goodness. And the Bible makes it clear that at the last judgment there will be not one class, but two, and after it not only the aionian life but also the aionian punishment.

I grant freely all which is urged as to the endless benevolence, the unwearied compassion of God. If ever from the lowest depths of Gehenna this cry should come,

Sad for past error, and repenting me—
For that my dreams were idle, now I know,
And that I, wasteful, let my brief years go,
Squandering swift life on vainest fantasy;—
To Thee, O God, Who deals tenderly
Unto men’s souls,—making the congealed snow
Melt and wax warm—and harsh weights lighter grow
For all who burn with holy fire for Thee;—
To Thee, O God, I turn me now and pray
That Thou wouldst draw me from this deep abyss,
From which I may not, by myself, win free.
Thou Who didst ransom humankind that day,
Thou Who wast ready once to die for us,
O, dear Lord God, do not abandon me!—

If ever such a voice should sound in hell, it were flat blasphemy to deny that it will be heard in heaven.

No number of ages can lessen God's will to pardon penitence and aid resolve. Never will He reject those who seek Him. Even this is not the full truth. He is ever seeking His creatures. The rays of His love are in all the universe striving to evoke the thankful life which they may render glad. But when those rays fall on withered selfishness, on sullen pride, on brutish sensuality, and when what they would call out is generosity, humility, purity?—the sunshine which lifts the pine like a tower into the clear sky, and swings the harebell from a morsel of earth in the cleft, pours equal benediction upon the surface of the rock, but can win no recognition of its presence in a responsive life.

Is it inconceivable that this should find its analogy in the spiritual world, that the divine love should press upon some stubborn hearts in vain? It is not only not inconceivable, it is demonstrated. What can God do to draw a free soul to a faithful service that He has not done for some of us, and without effect? "If under the present state of things," said Charles Kingsley to his congregation of English villagers, "we cannot be holy, we shall never be holy." And so while I think we must grant nearly every premise offered by the advocates of eternal probation, I do not think we ought to grant their conclusion. The reforming processes in the world to come are not eternal.

And as the final words of this sermon let me say something upon the other point ignored by this theory whose very title of "Probation" seems to me to indicate a mistake. The intermediate state is not one of probation, not one where the choice is to be made. The decision between good and evil is rendered, in most cases at least, in this present life. To every man—the most degraded savage, the most ignorant rustic, the most miserable outcast of a city street—something comes with the light of duty on its brow; moral codes vary widely, but every man has some notions of right and wrong. The gloomiest soul dungeon lets in a little light, the narrowest soul paddock allows of some movement. To every man is offered some moral choice.

And the question put to him on entering the next world is not how much did you accomplish, but, in what spirit did you work. There are many first here who shall be last there. Their positions were given, not earned: they had high characters by inheritance or circumstance, not by resolve and toil. And there are many last here who shall be first there. For their movement was ever upward, though its beginning was at the bottom. We are responsible more for our purpose than for our attainment. If the purpose was noble, God will see that we carry it through; if not in this stage of existence then in the next. But that next stage is not one of probation: the probation is here.

I repeat, it is no comparison of two columns, one of good deeds, the other of bad; nor is it the relative amount of light and darkness in a character which settles the fate of a soul.

White shall not neutralize the black, nor good
Compensate bad in man, absolve him so; Life's business being just the terrible choice.

Where a man has arrived, in his march through life, depends much upon where he was at the start; what conquest he has made depends much upon the arms which were given him at the opening of the battle; but which way he marched, and for which flag he fought, this he chose for himself, and according to that choice he will be judged by that God "unto Whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from Whom no secrets are hid."

4. THE THEORY OF EVERLASTING MISERY.

Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created.—REVELATION 4:11.

IN our discussion of future punishment hitherto we came to the following conclusions: That the penalty for wilful sin is inevitable, being its natural outgrowth and fruitage; that the worst result of persistent wrongdoing is to establish in the wrongdoer not merely a dislike but an incapacity for repentance; that this incapacity may become such as even the divine love cannot remove.

I dismissed, therefore, with profound regret, those theories which promise that after the last judgment there shall still be a salvation for such as have been up to that time obstinate in rejecting the grace of God.

I proceed now to examine the other answers to the question.

If after that great consummation, that harvesting of the results of earth, that justification of God's dealings with men, which the Christian Creed announces in the words, "From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead," if then there shall be a number, large or small, of guilty men and women unfit for the light and companionship of Heaven, saturated with malignity and crystallized in vice, only one of two issues is possible. Either these people will continue to exist in such a state forever, hateful and miserable wretches, or they will at some period absolutely cease to be. The first reply is that of the theory of "everlasting torment;" the second that of the theory of "final destruction," or, as it is often styled, "conditional immortality." And in one of these two I think we must find the awful truth.

We are to discuss this evening the doctrine of everlasting torment. Briefly stated, it is this: That after God's grace has been freely offered to a human being, only to be steadily refused; after abundant chance has been afforded for right choice and right action, only to be shunned or spurned; after all love has been withered, and all purity rotted, and all reverence razed from a soul, then the man will be cast out from any prospect of the land where good and gentle natures dwell, and will be compelled to associate with such as himself, leading the life which sin necessarily involves—a life of discontent and turmoil, of mocking passions and unsatisfied desires, of suspicion and malice, of fretting envy and gnawing pride, with no sweet remembrance of the past, no pleasing service in the present, no glad on-looking toward the future: and that this life will last forever, so that always in God's universe there will be a tract of lurid gloom from whose miserable inhabitants He shall receive only the enforced homage of mutinous slaves.

Of course we all know that there have been statements of the doctrine of everlasting woe far more frightful and shocking than this. There have been pictures of Gehenna which represented Almighty God as torturing the victims there with divers exquisite agonies, spiritual and material, regardless of their shrieks and prayers for pardon and deliverance. The ghastliest aspects of Nature, the bloodiest pages of human history, have been scanned for materials wherewith to construct descriptions of damnation—the craters of volcanic fire, the engulfing slime of miasmatic swamps, the piercing cold of polar snows, the racks of inquisition cells, the orgies of savages, the cruel jaws of the tiger, and the noisome coils of the serpent.

That in certain ages there was much horrible rhetoric of this kind in the preaching about hell, I am far from denying. You do not find it in the Bible, nor, with very rare exceptions, in the early Christian fathers; but, during the middle ages, and later in Calvinistic communities, it was too common. The Anglican divines have, on the whole, been honourably free from it, and, while many of them have preached everlasting misery for the damned, they have not indulged in grotesque horrors and sickening similitude.

For, indeed, all this revolting description is no essential part of the doctrine of endless woe. And we ought to remember that very often those pictures of hell which we find in old art or literature were symbolic rather than statistical. Many of the passages culled from bygone preachers and poets and held up for the ridicule of the present generation do not, as Farrar has remarked, deserve such treatment. We are wrong in taking for precise and matter-of-fact detail the vivid rhetoric wherein a poetic mind expressed its conviction of the dreadful results of sin, the agony of an existence separated from the love of God and the companionship of all holy beings. It is not fair to class the imagery of such men as Dante, or Milton, or Jeremy Taylor, who were pouring out what has been aptly styled "the poetry of indignation," with the coarse materialism of some mendicant friars or revival preachers who really meant that hell is a lake of molten fire with poisonous dragons floating on its waves, and that the devils are commissioned torturers who treat their victims as Indians do their captives at the stake.

In the one case it is a poetic imagination seeking in these material similitude some vent for the awful emotions with which it looks on the prospect of hopeless sin; in the other we listen to a dull materialist for whom nothing seems real which does not clutch hold of the bodily senses. The two men may use very similar phrases with very different meanings. In order, then, to judge the doctrine of everlasting torment fairly, we must dismiss all these details from our minds; they do not necessarily belong to it. Reject them all, and it still remains like some terrific cliff from which the cheap scribbling and caricatures scrawled by idle hands have been washed and worn away.

That there may be physical anguish in Gehenna, it were foolish to deny, for there will be a full humanity there, and the body will share the condition of the soul then as it does now. The whole man sinned and the whole man must suffer; wherever he has susceptibilities his evil passions will strike their poisoned fangs. We know nothing about the resurrection body except that it is a body, the home and instrument of the soul. But it were unreasonable to suppose that, the relation of soul and body continuing essentially the same in the world to come that it is here, each should not sympathize with the other as it does now, that there should be nothing in hell analogous to the aches and quivering and deadly pains which vice brings on this earth. But that there will be an outward application of physical tortures, that the greedy flame will forever lap the sensitive limbs, or the knotted scourge will ceaselessly fall upon the lacerated flesh, or that anything of the kind will take place—this is no part of the theory we are considering, and would, I suppose, be indignantly repudiated by most of its present adherents.

It is, indeed, sometimes asked, "After all, what is the difference whether the torment be material or mental, so long as it is torment; in some way it must come from God, acting either by general laws impressed on human nature, or by special interventions in human conditions; if the man is wretched, his wretchedness arises from the divine will, and you really soften nothing by your negation of

external tortures.” There is some apparent reason in such remarks. It is true that spiritual woe is just as woeful, spiritual gloom just as gloomy, spiritual pain just as painful, as material. And the gross, physical notion of hell is not denied on the ground that its penalties are too severe, but because they are such as would be applied by mere arbitrary vengeance; they do not spring from the nature of things, are not the inevitable consequences of sin, are not at all analogous to the way God deals with us here and now.

They bring in an element of personal vindictiveness, and we reject them because they imply an unworthy conception of God, one contradicted by nature as well as by conscience and Scripture. There is absolutely no instance in Nature of contrivances to produce useless suffering. All pain comes from ignorant handling of things or perversion of their proper uses.

And so what the sinner brings upon himself, the continual irritation of base desires, the haunting memories of an evil past, and “that strange sense of nothingness and wasted days which blights the exhausted life” is quite in accord with all our experience. He reaps what he has sown. But blows applied from the outside, with no object except to inflict pain, are utterly without precedent and are beyond belief. God does not so work.

And the allegation sometimes made that only some such prospect of physical agony will touch the crass illiterate classes, that to talk to them of spiritual woe is to speak in a style beyond their comprehension, that they need to be addressed in terms of the rack and the thumbscrew, the lash and the flame, I meet with uncompromising denial. “Give some tract upon hell-fire,” says Cardinal Newman, “to one of the wild boys in a large town, who has had no education, has no faith; and instead of being startled by it, he will laugh at it, as something frightfully ridiculous.” No, the universal gospel, which from the first was preached to the poor, need not alloy and coarsen its doctrine of retribution in order to make them understand it.

Speak to a man, in whatever rank of this earthly life you find him, of sin and guilt, of shame and failure, of a dreary land where is no honesty, or purity, or kindness, and you need not fear that your words will not be comprehended.

And I think that in all ages it has been this true notion of future punishment which has really roused men’s apprehensions and affected them to good purpose, however they may at times have sought striking pictures of hell in art and poetry, in symbolism and metaphor. And so, when Shakespeare makes one of his characters, not a philosopher like Hamlet, but an ordinary gentleman, utter his fear of what may come after death, although Claudio does mention material torments, yet he goes beyond these and finds his deepest dread in a woe quite other than corporeal, as he exclaims:

To bathe in fiery floods, or to reside
In thrilling regions of thick-ribbed ice;
To be imprisoned in the viewless winds,
And blown with restless violence round about
The pendent world; or to be, worse than worst,
Of those that lawless and uncertain thoughts
Imagine, howling!

In these last words is his real fear, here is the “worse than worst,” in “those monstrous thoughts which ever seem to be about to take on an hideous shape and ever again vanish into formlessness, leaving the tortured spirit howling with rage and terror at it knows not what, save that it is the dim phantasmagoria of the hell it ever bears within itself.” It is from such a doom that Claudio recoils, with the cry:

‘Tis too horrible,
The weariest and most loathed worldly life
That age, ache, penury and imprisonment
Can lay on nature, is a paradise
To what we fear of death.

Not then as cheapening guilt, nor as minimizing retribution, do the ablest advocates of everlasting misery repudiate these portrayals of it which find their noblest symbolic use in Dante’s *Inferno*, their most pernicious misuse in much revival oratory.

The only shape in which the theory of endless woe deserves serious attention is one whose solemn severity is marred by no absurdities, which looks not to incongruous physical torments, but to an existence separated from all goodness and completely enslaved to evil; with satiety, but no cessation; with remorse, but no repentance; with recurrent spasms of disgust quivering through the dismal apathy of despair.

This is indeed a dreadful doctrine, and we have good cause to ask that cogent proof shall be given before we are required to accept it.

I have in the previous sermons of this course reviewed the arguments for final restoration and eternal probation, and pronounced them insufficient. I cannot now go over that reasoning again. I think it was fair and that the conclusion reached was just. So I take that now as a point settled, and proceed to review the positive evidence for everlasting misery—the arguments adduced by those who believe in it. Their first great proposition is that everlasting misery has ever been the accepted theory of the generality of Christians. From primitive days to the present, we are told, the prevalent belief has been that damnation means endless torment. And we are asked whether this would be likely were not the doctrine clearly apostolic; would men have accepted so repellent a dogma upon anything short of most positive evidence?

To some extent I must admit the truth and power of this reasoning. It does seem that the majority of Christians have, so far as we can ascertain their opinions, held this theory. One exception, however, must be made, and a significant exception it is. So far as can be learned from the scanty remains of the very earliest age of Christianity the dogma of everlasting misery was not held at all universally then. That most of the primitive Christians thought the punishment of sin to be endless is clear, but that they thought it would be endless torment is by no means clear. Expressions speaking of an absolute destruction as the final doom are to be met in the writings of the earliest fathers. Later on the belief in the inherent immortality of the soul became dominant among Christian thinkers, and some became Universalists, while the majority, holding the former belief of the eternity of punishment were led into the conviction that it must be endless misery.

And, although all along there were individuals and schools which rejected this dogma, it did undoubtedly become the dominant one. But it should be noted that it was not at first so hard for men to conceive as it is now. Views not utterly repulsive to the Roman accustomed to the cruel sports of the amphitheatre, or the Northman familiar with bloody revenges, or the Asiatic crushed by merciless oppression, look different after eighteen centuries of Christianity have been softening human hearts and illuminating human intellects. And in the very corruptions of the medieval period beliefs and practices were current which made this doctrine less grievous. Men turned to the exaggerated power of the sacraments and the priestly absolution, and extended the remedial work of purgatory far enough to furnish them consoling hopes for themselves and those most dear to them.

And further, there was in the past, as there is in the present, an incapacity in most minds to at all grasp the dreadful significance of everlasting torment; so that much of the repetition of the formulas declaring the doctrine really represents little deliberate conviction. I know this has not always been the case. I know that some men who could say, like Archer Butler, that this doctrine, “were it conceived in its full proportions, would involve the whole face of Nature in gloom, would hang the very heavens in black, and make all their daily and nightly glories but the torchlight of a funeral chamber;” that “were it possible for man’s imagination to conceive the horrors of such a doom as this, all reasoning about it were at an end, it would scorch and wither all the powers of human thought;” I know that some such men have nevertheless mournfully accepted and preached it, saying “it is God’s mercy that we can believe what adequately to conceive were death.” But these men are not the majority, and the long acceptance of this doctrine has been rather in the way of a vague fear than in that of definite belief. And in that branch of the Church Catholic to which we owe especial reverence the doctrine has been more slightly held and preached than in most other quarters. Romanists and Puritans have been its warmest defenders. Anglicans, even when professing it, have commonly laid less stress upon it.

And finally, this argument from continued ascendancy, even were that ascendancy unqualified, is not by itself sufficient. A general acceptance is not a positive guaranty of truth.

“It may very fitly be pointed out,” says Dr. Littledale, in reply to the argument from the long prevalence of the popular theology in the church, “that an equal or greater prescription exists in favour of the tenet of verbal inspiration, which no Biblical scholar of repute now holds. But this tenet, like that of endless punishment, has never been formulated by the Church, and makes no part of any concilia decree or any Christian creed.”

It seems to me, therefore, that this first argument for everlasting misery is not at all conclusive; though I must frankly confess that it is very strong, and, in my opinion, the strongest offered.

The second important one is, that, inasmuch as the soul of man is naturally immortal, and inasmuch as there is no prospect of redemption after the last judgment, the souls of the damned must continue in misery forever. There is no flaw in this reasoning if the premises are true, and the second we have decided so to be, in our previous inquiries. The one question, then, is as to the first premise: Is man naturally an immortal being? Is his personality indestructible? Observe, the question is not whether there is for all men a future life, but whether that life must last forever. It is perfectly conceivable that a human being might enter on another stage of existence after death here, and live through some term of years or centuries in that new stage, and then have his existence absolutely terminated; as the larva dies to reappear an insect, and then dies to live no more. The question now is simply whether

every human germ reaching a certain point of development must continue to exist in one and the same distinct personality forever and ever and ever, as long as Almighty God Himself.

And to that question I reply in the negative. My reasons for such a reply I shall give in the final sermon of this course, and I think you will find them sufficient.

But if man be not naturally immortal, the argument for endless misery based on the assumption of such an immortality at once disappears.

We come, now, to the third proposition in favour of the theory, which is that the Bible plainly teaches it. And here, again, I must respond with a point-blank denial. Whether or no the doctrine be true, it is not plainly and unequivocally laid down in Holy Scripture. I cannot, of course, now give a detailed examination of every text which has been appealed to on this matter. But I shall offer some broad considerations founded upon a careful study of those texts, and I shall treat the most important ones more fully. In the first place, the great majority of passages quoted as supporting endless torment do so only upon the supposition of the inherent immortality of man, which supposition I have already averred, and shall hereafter demonstrate has no Scriptural authority. The mass of texts mentioning the doom of sinners speak of that doom as complete and irrevocable. They oppose any theory of restoration. But they do not at all oppose a theory of destruction, for that would be a doom complete and irrevocable. There is a notable, indeed an absolute, lack of any such expressions in the New Testament as “everlasting torment,” or “endless suffering,” or “perpetual woe.”

There is not one phrase in the original Greek, there are but two or three in the English version, which even seem to convey any such meaning. The passage most relied on by the defenders of this theory is that in St. Matthew’s Gospel, where our Lord declares that the wicked shall go away into “aionian punishment,” and the righteous into “aionian life,” rendered in our translation by “everlasting punishment” and “life eternal.” Now it is as well settled as any fact can be about the meaning of words when great issues appear to depend on it, that “aionian” does not mean “everlasting,” that it is not a word of precise and limited significance as to duration. It is often applied to things which are everlasting, and it is often applied to things which are not. The hills are called “aionian,” but they shall pass away; the law of God is called “aionian,” and that shall not pass away. The most literal rendering of the word would probably be “age-long,” yet this fails to suggest its super-sensuous and spiritual implications. But, without going into minute discussion, it suffices to say that aionian punishment does not necessarily denote a punishment which never ends; though I think it only fair to allow that this would be the more natural interpretation. Still it is noteworthy that there are some half dozen Greek words and phrases which do mean “everlasting,” about whose significance there is not the slightest question, and that not one of these is ever used in the New Testament in connection with the doom of sinners, though several of them are applied to other matters. But, it is urged, the word is employed in the same sentence to describe the lot of the righteous and the lot of the wicked; if the former is to be eternal, so must the latter be. There is force in this plea, and though ingenious reasoning has been applied to set it aside, I do not myself feel that the reasoning is altogether satisfactory. But one point is certain: even if you do take the word as applied to future punishment to mean that this punishment is endless, it does not follow that it is endless torment. It might be annihilation, for that would be an endless doom—one never reversed. And, in view of this, it seems to me that this one text cannot be relied on as a sure basis for the doctrine of never-ceasing woe.

What others are there? Well, one in the Apocalypse about the smoke of the torment of the worshippers of the beast ascending up for “ages of ages,” rendered in our version “forever and ever.” I will not insist upon the peculiar difficulties in this mystic book as rendering its interpretation most difficult and the founding of great dogmas upon single texts in it most hazardous; but will simply observe that the phrase “ages of ages” is ever and again employed in the Bible to designate periods falling far short of absolute eternity. Therefore, this passage is not at all conclusive. But we are reminded that in several places our Lord speaks of sinners as cast into “unquenchable fire.” Now it does seem to me that to insist that this is a figurative expression for everlasting torment, when it can just as well, nay, far more naturally, be taken as a figurative expression for absolute destruction, is most unwarrantable.

Fire does inflict pain, but only for a time. Left unquenched and allowed free course, it burns up and completely dissolves what is cast into it. A little heap of ashes is all that remains where at first, perhaps, was a writhing body.

Such are the main evidences offered in defence of the proposition that the New Testament teaches everlasting misery for the damned. There are other texts which I do not mention for lack of time, but I have specified the leading ones. Are they sufficient to settle the question? Granted, if you please, that were we sure from other sources that this theory is correct, these texts might then be regarded as agreeing with it. Do they by themselves clearly and positively indicate it? I do not see how any man can venture to say more than that they might perhaps be so understood. And I must confess that to me it is morally inconceivable that, if the Bible meant to warn us of everlasting torment, it should do so only in a few words of dubious interpretation, a few metaphors and figures which might mean something else.

And now let us glance at some weighty objections to the theory. The one from Holy Scripture I pass by for the present; it will come out in my next sermon. But there are others.

And first is urged the injustice of such a doom. Men have but a brief life here, and for misuse of it are hurled into undying woe. This is shocking to our moral sense. Of course the answer is offered that they have time enough to make choice between good and evil, to give the soul its direction, the character its outlines; and that, if circumstances do not allow of free and open choice here, there will be better chance and light in Hades; so that no man will be damned except he who wilfully and persistently preferred evil to good. This may be so, however, and the sinner may justly deserve punishment, but he cannot deserve everlasting misery; that would be out of all proportion to his guilt. No matter how thick the transgressions, how dark the stains of a human life, it is wild to maintain that millions of ages of suffering cannot begin to be ample chastisement for the sinner, ample vindication of the divine law.

But the reply is that the sinner continues to sin, and it is the sin itself which is its own scourge. "The punishments of hell are but the perpetual vengeance that accompanies the sins of hell. An eternity of wickedness brings with it an eternity of woe."

But the sharp rejoinder instinctively springs forth that it were, if not technically unjust, at least strangely clumsy and even more strangely unkind, that the untold millions of men should be created at all, when so many are certain, even though it be by their own fault, to incur the horrible penalties of Gehenna.

To this it is answered that "moral freedom and endowment are a prerogative so great that for it the possibility and even the certainty of sin may well be incurred." And we are referred to the analogies of Nature and this earthly life, to all those facts which tell of the gradual growth of a glorious result through appalling waste and ravage. We are pointed to the corruption and carnage of carboniferous swamps, to the battle and slaughter of Mesozoic seas, to the continents of teeming life engulfed in the waves, to the great shroud of the ice ages, wrapped around whole tribes of stately organisms. We are reminded of the illimitable forests choked in the peat beds, of the unnumbered animal tribes crushed into stone, of all that process of strife and pain and decay and destruction whereby the life of this earth rose ever higher and higher. Or again we are referred to human history, to the enormous sacrifice of happiness and peace and life through which humanity has wrought out its great achievements, to the battle-fields heaped with corpses, to the dungeons crowded with captives, to the crippled poverty of the wounded and the dreary taskwork of the slave, to darkened homes and broken hearts, to all the toil and agony which have been spent for the elevation of man.

I grant all these most solemn facts; I grant their meaning, too, which is unmistakable; but I insist it is only destruction, not ceaseless torture, which all these things suggest. The myriad shells of the marble beds feel no pinching pressure now in the mountain ranges; the ferns and mosses of the coal-fields do not toss in torment as the fire glows in the grate; the huge old "dragons of the prime" lie still and painless in their rocky cerements. And the same assurance comes from human history. So far as this life shows—and in such analogies we deal only with what this life does show—the sufferers of the past are at rest. They did undergo toil and anguish, but of all of them who lay stark on the stricken field, who rotted away in prison cells, who wept their lives out by desolate hearths—of them all now it can at least be said: "After life's fitful fever they sleep well." In all these analogies there is no hint of deathless agony, of never-ending grief. We can see that there may be "rubbish in the void," in order that the pile may be complete, but must this rubbish be ever conscious of and writhing in its degradation? Will not the battlements of heaven stand as firm and flash as bright even though there be no sullen prisoners in oubliettes far below? And to this I have never seen any satisfactory reply made by such as teach the doctrine of everlasting woe.

I come now to the last important objection to this theory, which is that this doctrine contradicts the very idea of God. He is Almighty Love. But if there be everlasting misery there must be everlasting sin. That is incredible. Unless we adopt the philosophy which poor John Stuart Mill thought more natural than Christianity, some dualistic or Manichaeic system, which says there are two gods, one good, the other evil, or that matter is coeval with God, and He finds Himself hampered by its dull resistance—unless we adopt some such wild doctrine, we must confess that nothing can be except by God's volition and permission. If sin is eternal, then it must be because He so wills. But what is sin? It is disobedience to God. Has He willed, then, that He shall always be disobeyed? He must have, if He has willed a never-ending hell. But such disobedience would be obedience, such sin would not be sin, such a hell would be simply another species of Heaven where God's will was done in a different way. All of which is utterly absurd and unchristian.

Now the usual reply to this is that it is just as hard to conceive how evil can exist now as it is to conceive how it may continue to exist. But that is not true. We can comprehend how God might permit sin to be for a season with all its vile and tragic workings, because only so could the man of free will be tried and educated and purified. The allowance of an evil world because in it the saints and heroes are trained, is not at all hard to understand. With all eternity to work in, God can surely allow this passing cloud to gather shape. But shall it obscure the sun forever? Remember, this is God's world. "Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created." Is it His pleasure that evil men should blaspheme Him and hate each other and gnaw their own hearts forever? Impossible. Has He created a monster at which He Himself now stands dismayed, unable to subdue it, loathsome as it is in His sight? Impossible again. I deem this argument to be utterly fatal to the doctrine of everlasting torment. Everlasting

torment means everlasting sin, and everlasting sin is a contradiction in terms. I may be wrong, there may be some distortion in my intellectual vision, but I cannot see otherwise.

And so I say with humility, knowing how many better men have said otherwise, but I say it in such confidence as a man must have when to him, his belief stands in the clear brilliance of a necessary truth, "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible," and I cannot believe He has made a creature certain forever to defy His holy law, certain forever to spurn His mighty love.

5. THE THEORY OF FINAL DESTRUCTION.

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.
ROMANS 6:23.

TO those of you who have heard the former sermons of this course, it has, doubtless, become plain which of the four great theories concerning future punishment I deem to be the truth; for having rejected three, there is but one left.

So far as I can judge, the doctrine of the final destruction of impenitent sinners is suggested by the course of Nature, revealed in Holy Scripture, and conformed to our moral sense.

I do not, indeed, profess to hold this doctrine with the same confidence, nor to preach it with the same authority, that I feel regarding the divinity of our Lord, or the atonement, or the resurrection, or any other of those fundamental truths set forth in the Catholic Creeds. For in the case of the latter I have, besides my own conviction, based upon such study as I could make, the clear, positive witness of the Church, that they are essential portions of the gospel committed to her to teach to every creature throughout all time. These are the dogmas of the Church, which her clergy declare with all the warrant of her commission.

But the doctrine I shall explain and defend this evening I do not present as a dogma of the Church; I offer it simply as my own opinion concerning a subject on which she has not ruled; and I fully admit the right of those who have taken the same vows as myself to differ with me on this matter. But if they have rights, so have I. And on this subject I cannot be silent; I must utter what after honest toil, I have concluded to be the most reasonable and best supported answer to a question which forces itself upon our attention. It is my constant office in this place to read the solemn warnings of the coming doom of sinners delivered by prophet and apostle, and by Jesus Christ Himself, and to lead you in your supplications that from His "wrath and everlasting damnation" God may "deliver us." It is my frequent duty to stand by an open grave, and to say, in behalf of myself, and those gathered around me, and of that one whose body lies so still before me, "In the midst of life we are in death; of whom may we seek for succour, but of Thee, O Lord, Who for our sins are justly displeased? Yet, O Lord God, most holy, O Lord most mighty, O holy and most merciful Saviour, deliver us not into the bitter pains of eternal death." Am I never to offer any explanation of what damnation and eternal death probably are? Knowing, as I do, that explanations are current which on the one hand tend to make the doom of sinners so light that men cease to fear it, or on the other hand so repulsively unjust that they cease to believe in it, am I not simply in the line of my duty when I tell you what, so far as I can see, is the real, the awful, the equitable destiny of persistent sinners? True, I have no formulated decree of a council, no binding article of a creed to set forth and explain. I can only give you my opinion, but that opinion is not the mere reflection of surrounding views, nor the obstinate preference of individualism, nor the careless offspring of chance. I am prepared not merely to say "I think so," but to give good reasons for my thinking so.

The theory of the final destruction of the wicked, or, as it is more briefly and correctly named, the theory of "conditional immortality" is this: That men are not created with inherent immortality, with a soul, or body, or both, such as cannot be destroyed, but that immortality is a superadded gift which man's nature is capable of receiving and which God bestows in such cases as He wills, and that He does not so will in the case of impenitent sinners; hence, it of course follows, that at some time all such offenders will cease to exist.

Observe carefully the point of view taken by this doctrine. It does not regard the sinner as a naturally deathless being, whom because of his wickedness God violently annihilates. It regards the sinner as a mortal to whom God gave a certain term of life with the possibility that by loving God and receiving forever from him the vitalizing power of the Divine love he might become immortal, or, to speak more correctly, might always be preserved alive; but failing of this, failing to become partaker of the Divine nature and to escape the corruption of the flesh, the sinful mortal endures only for the allotted term, and then passes back into the impersonal elements from which his nature was first shaped.

The doctrine involves no assertion of an absolute annihilation, which may or may not be philosophically conceivable. But man is a compound structure in body and soul. And what happens to the sinner in the eternal death is that his entire nature is broken up, dissolved, all individual characteristics vanishing, all personality lost. The component parts may still continue in the universe, but the man is no more. When a plant decays in the ground, although each atom of carbon and hydrogen and oxygen which made up its cellular tissue is still somewhere, that particular plant is gone; never again shall the dew lie soft on its leaves and the bee sip from its nectaries. And when a man perishes in Gehenna, when the bitter pains of eternal death have done their full work upon him, whatever particles of matter may mingle with the star dust, whatever scattered force may wander off through space, the man is gone; never again shall that particular personality feel or think, be conscious of the present or remember the past.

This is what conditional immortality teaches about damnation: it results in the utter destruction of the damned.

The theory is unmistakably not the popular one, for the prevailing notion is that men are naturally immortal, and it requires a vigorous mental wrench to get ourselves into position to even consider the possibility that they are not. Yet I think few people are aware upon how slight a basis the prevailing opinion rests; and as a preliminary step in considering the positive evidence for conditional immortality, it is needful to show that there is no substantial proof of unconditional.

Let it, however, be clearly understood at the outset, that conditional immortality does not deny that for all men there will be a future life, that there will be a resurrection of the unjust as well as of the just; on the contrary it asserts this, it views man's allotted term as stretching into the next world, in many cases for education and discipline, in some at least for the vindication of justice. Nature dimly hints at this future life of all, Conscience demands it, and Scripture declares it.

But what reasons have we to suppose it will be eternal?

The first commonly offered is that all men have in all ages, with exceptions so few as not to count, believed in the immortality of the soul; that such a belief is certainly not suggested by the phenomena of death or the obvious aspects of Nature, and must therefore spring from one of two sources—from a divinely-planted instinct or a primeval revelation; and of course if such a witness as either of these certified to our absolute immortality, we must be satisfied. Our own reading of Nature, our own interpretation of the surface facts of death, we might distrust; but an idea which God stamped upon our very hearts, or delivered to our first parents to be handed down through all generations, we cannot hesitate about.

But is human immortality such an idea? I grant it is one not likely to be suggested by our present environment. All about us we behold existences dissolving and fading away. The old elm under which we used to throw ourselves in our boyish rambles was blasted by the lightning, the dog who followed at our heels was shot. They are only pictures in our memory now; we can find covert from the hot sun beneath those broad boughs no more, and all our calling and whistling will not bring that lithe form bounding along the lane. We know that they have ceased to be. We have even sometimes watched the process of the utter dissolution of such creatures; we sat beside the fireplace and saw the blazing logs turn into smoke and ashes; we passed and repassed the swamp edges where some poor brute's carcass was preyed upon by the flies and the crows, was washed away by the showers, and dissipated by the winds. There was no hint of immortality there.

And when we consider our own human life; when we look into the passing crowd only to see vacancy where there should be a familiar face; when we follow a funeral or walk through a graveyard, it is to note the same facts of dissolution. "For that which befalls the sons of men befalls beasts; even one thing befalls them; as the one dies so dies the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no pre-eminence over a beast."

Well, then, it is asked, whence comes the general belief in immortality? Must it not be from a divine voice, which has been heard throughout all human history, and which still speaks in human hearts? I do believe in such a voice, and I do think that it warns and consoles men with the threat or promise of a future life, but I see no evidence that it has given assurance of immortality. That in all ages and by all races some sort of survival after death has been expected, seems fairly certain. Probably there is no savage tribe, however squalid and brutal, in whose folklore are not a few dim pictures of a land beyond the grave.

But these all fall far short of being visions of immortality. That the brief years of earthly joy and sorrow, toil and achievement are not all which shall be granted a man, that beyond them there is another existence, is one thing, but that he shall exist forever is quite another.

And while there is world-wide expectation of a future life, there is not, and never has been, any such expectation of immortality in the sense of a personal identity continuing forever.

Without insisting upon the shadowy character of those phantoms which Homer describes, flitting about the underworld; without dwelling upon the fact that the Norse mythology represents the gods and men as destroyed in the great Ragnarok, and that the

regeneration foretold as following appears to be a new creation; without arguing that the idea of absolute eternity is one which no barbarous people ever really contemplated; it will be sufficient to note that among some of the most highly civilized and educated nations of the ancient world the accepted teaching was that human individuality would in the course of eternity disappear. The ancient Egyptians, from whom came the civilizations of Greece and Rome, held that wicked souls would be annihilated, and that the good would be absorbed into the divine essence from which they had once emanated.

Four hundred million Buddhists believe to-day, as uncounted millions of their ancestors have believed during the last twenty centuries, that the souls of men survive in transmigration after transmigration for a time, and then, one by one, lapse back into Nirvana, losing all distinct personality and consciousness. Indeed, the underlying doctrine of all philosophical paganism, Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Indian, was pantheism. And pantheism, making all forms of mind and matter mere transient bubbles upon the one great ocean of the divine, which glitter for a time, then break and are re-absorbed by the universal waters, utterly negatives all that we mean by the immortality of man.

And in the face of these facts it is idle to appeal to any general belief in human immortality. There is no such belief covering the nations and lasting through the ages. And so the first argument falls.

But, secondly, it is urged our moral sense demands immortality. We feel that there must be some retribution for the unpunished sins of this life—for the cruelty, deceit, and corruption by which so many have placed their feet upon their fellows' necks. There must be some compensation to all those pure and gentle folk who, through pain and shame and misery, worked righteousness and love; to the mighty heroes who gave up ease and profit that they might bear the burdens of a distrustful and thankless world. This reasoning is just, and it goes far to prove a future life, where all these matters shall be set right. It may even suggest an immortality for the good as in some sense deserved by them; so long as they use the boon of existence well, they may be deemed to earn its continuance. But the argument in no way demands immortality for the wicked. When a due penalty has been paid for the temporal transgressions, justice can ask no more. And surely no man, however fiery in his indignation at some villainy, however urgent in his cry for its avenging, would wish the criminal to be kept alive forever that he might forever suffer. The moral argument for a future life is complete, but it does not cover the question of immortality.

And, thirdly, appears the old scholastic proposition, that man's soul, which is his real self, is an un-compounded substance, an indivisible essence; incapable of destruction by the scattering of its components, since there are none; and that as the absolute annihilation of anything is inconceivable, therefore the soul must be immortal.

To which I reply, first, that annihilation is no more inconceivable than creation; and second, that it is pure assumption to say that the soul is un-compounded and indivisible.

Further, if by the soul we mean the real personality, there is much ground for considering it to be a compound of bodily and spiritual elements. The doctrine of the resurrection implies this, and all the discoveries of modern psychology tend to approve it. Not by such reasoning as Plato sets forth in his exquisite *Phaedo*, about the supposed nature of the soul, have men in general been convinced of a future life at all, much less of the everlastingness of that life.

All this arguing for the essential immortality of the soul is not only mere guesswork, it is worse. It is a defiance of established principles. As Archer Butler puts it—and I may remind you that he was biased by no theory in doing so, for his own belief was in eternal misery for the damned: "The notion is itself absurd of any created thing existing for a single instant by any title but the will of its Creator; all existence must be purely permissive but that of God; nothing can be essentially eternal for the future but that which has been eternal from the past."

And so in Tennyson's noble poem, discussing the question of immortality, when the first voice pleads that because the man was not in the past he shall not be in the future, the man does not venture to deny the conclusion except by questioning the premise:

But if I grant, thou might defend
The thesis which thy words intend—
That to begin implies to end;
Yet how should I for certain hold,
Because my memory is so cold,
That I first was in human mould?
It may be that no life is found,
Which only to one engine bound
Falls off, but cycles always round.
As old mythologies relate,

Some draught of Lethe might await
The slipping thro' from state to state.

But to this the other makes harsh yet unavoidable answer:

The still voice laughed. "I talk," said he,
"Not with thy dreams."

Not by such unverifiable fancies and vague suppositions is the immortality of the soul to be proved. That the Creator might have made us with the settled purpose of keeping us in existence forever is possible, but not in the world around us nor the consciousness within do we find assurance that He has done so.

But some may say, at all events the Bible teaches that man is an immortal being. No, the Bible does not. Neither in the Old Testament nor in the New, is there a single statement that men are naturally and inherently immortal. Says Edward White—and all my study of Scripture confirms his statement—"Of the survival of souls in a Sheol or Hades, the Bible seems to speak often; of the actual eternal survival of the saved it also speaks; but it never once places the eternal hope of mankind on the abstract dogma of the immortality of the soul, or declares that man will live forever because he is naturally immortal.

I cannot, of course, discuss all the texts bearing upon this matter. I can glance only at two or three. The Old Testament I must pass hastily by, though it most strongly supports my present position; for who can forget the point of view taken by those Psalms which express the highest devotional thought of the old Jewish Church? "Yet a little while and the wicked shall not be; yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place and it shall not be. The wicked shall perish, and the enemies of the Lord shall be as the fat of lambs; they shall consume; into smoke shall they consume away." "The transgressors shall perish together; the end of the wicked shall be cut off." "When the wicked spring as the grass and all the workers of iniquity do flourish, it is that they may be destroyed forever." "He shall gnash with his teeth and melt away." Are these expressions consistent with a belief in man's natural immortality?

Yet the Psalms are the part of the Old Testament where we find the strongest hopes of a future life for the righteous. But they rest solely on God's grace. And so when the psalmist has exclaimed, "Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and Thy dominion endures throughout all generations," he goes on and declares, "The Lord preserves all that love Him, but all the wicked will he destroy." It may perhaps be urged that the Jewish dispensation was one of temporal rewards and punishments, and that all these promises and threats are to be interpreted of this present life and world. Suppose it to be so, though I do not see how any one can fail to note the openings on eternity which are to be found all along in the writings of psalmist and prophet, yet the old dispensation was at least typical of the new, and in its language about things then we find the prophecy of things thereafter. And the whole burden of the prophecy is life for the righteous and death for the wicked.

Nor does the New Testament make any change in this teaching. It throws a stronger light on the future, but the same great facts stand out. Everywhere in the Gospel Jesus Christ is shown as the sole basis for human immortality. Never is there any intimation that men are naturally deathless. On the contrary, St. Paul distinctly declares that God only hath immortality; and in the two cases where he speaks of men as immortal he says that it is not something inherent, but conferred, this mortal is to "put on immortality," and so death shall be swallowed up in victory. Nowhere does the New Testament say that Christ came to deliver man from an unending torment which would be the inevitable consequence of an unending existence in sin; but eighty times, in the writings of St. John alone, it is declared that the gift of life, or life everlasting, is the object of the Incarnation. Take one text as a sample. How clear the words ring out sounding the Gospel Message, "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

What would any one naturally infer from such words, except that without Christ's aid the doom of all men would be absolute destruction, and that such as rejected His aid must undergo that doom. I am aware that it has been attempted to set aside this tremendous and continuous and harmonious teaching of the New Testament by ascribing secondary meanings to the terms life and death, by dwelling upon their moral significance and their figurative uses. But all this kind of reasoning is attenuated and fallacious. Were there in Scripture any clear, positive affirmations that all men shall as a matter of course live for ever and ever, then its assertions that everlasting life comes only to those who believe in the Son of God, who are saved by Him, might perhaps be interpreted as signifying a glorious and blessed existence, and its assertions that the wicked shall perish might be construed as meaning that they shall exist in moral wreck and degradation.

But in the absence of any such affirmations—and they are totally absent—to put such secondary interpretation on words, and utterly deprive them of their primary and usual import, is most preposterous.

Let me ask you to listen now to a few of the words of Christ and His disciples respecting future punishment. First, in order of time, comes John the Baptist's prophecy of what would be the result of the Messiah's work: "He will thoroughly purge His floor and will

gather His wheat into His garner; but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire.” And here are our Lord’s words in the Sermon on the Mount: “If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee; for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into Gehenna.” That is, it is better a man should deprive himself of some natural rights and enjoyments, which to him are full of danger; that his life here should be maimed and contracted, rather than that by letting these things get the mastery of him he should ultimately be deprived of existence itself. If any one objects that only the body is mentioned, frivolous as the objection is, let him pass on to another of Christ’s sayings: “Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in Gehenna.”

It is indeed true that our Lord did not commonly threaten; His was a gospel of salvation, and we are more often left to infer the punishment of sin from what He says about the reward of goodness, than directly told of it. Thus when Christ says that He is come not to destroy men’s lives but to save them, or when He says that the blessed departed shall not “die any more,” or that those who keep His saying “shall never see death,” or that He is come that men “might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly,” or that to His sheep He gives “eternal life, and they shall never perish,” from all such presentments of His purpose we cannot but infer that to those who are not saved by Him exactly the reverse of all this must happen, that they shall die again, shall see death, shall not have life, shall perish. Men are walking in the broad road that leads to destruction. They can escape from that doom only through Him Who is “the Way, the Truth and the Life.”

St. Paul speaks the same language: “The wages of sin is death;” “if ye live after the flesh ye shall die;” “who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord.” These are some of his expressions. He speaks of men being drowned in “destruction and perdition,” using in the original two of the strongest terms for extinction of being which can be found in the Greek language. St. Jude likens the punishment of the wicked to the fate which came upon Sodom and Gomorrah, those ancient cities whose inhabitants were utterly consumed by the avenging fire. And St. Peter, speaking of the wicked, declares (I quote the Revised Version), “these as creatures without reason, born mere animals to be taken and destroyed, railing in matters whereof they are ignorant, shall in their destroying be surely destroyed,” or, as these last words may fairly be rendered, “shall utterly perish in their extinction.” Upon this tremendous passage the able and learned Edward White comments thus: “Evil men did not resemble beasts in evil speaking but they resemble them in irrationality, and will be like them in their destiny. The beasts are made or born for extinction, and wicked men will suffer also; but if this word signified endless misery it could not be said that the “natural irrational brutes” were “made” for that.

I might adduce many other texts, but there must be some limit, and so I close the list. Now as to all the passages I have quoted, and the other similar ones, the advocates of everlasting torment argue that the terms used in them are figures of speech for such torment.

I have already noted the fatal objection to such reasoning, and I will only now add the utterance of a distinguished scholar: “My mind fails to conceive a grosser misinterpretation of language than when five or six of the strongest words which the Greek tongue possesses, signifying ‘destroy’ or ‘destruction,’ are explained to mean an everlasting but wretched existence. To translate black as white is nothing to this.”

But some one will ask how does it happen that men have so gone astray on this matter; why did not the early Christian fathers teach conditional immortality? To which I reply, that the earliest of them did. Ignatius, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Theophilus are to be ranked as holding this view. The author of the Epistle to Diognetus, Arnobius, and even Athanasius use language which is accordant with it, though the last named uses other language also. Not a few men of note in the Anglican Church have taught the same doctrine, and among them was the great preacher Jeremy Taylor, and the great metaphysician John Locke. Still I admit that the doctrine cannot be proved by common consent. I simply claim that, from the only three sources, which are authoritative, it does receive substantial warrant; that it is suggested by Nature, that it is declared in Scripture, that it is not discordant with our moral sense. And it is due to the intelligence and piety of past generations to observe that they all held to one part of the doctrine—they all believed that the eternal life of the saved came from Jesus Christ. And having their minds intent upon this, some of them at least might be less careful in considering how the very existence of the soul through all the ages comes from Him also, and how apart from Him such existence is impossible.

I have said that our moral sense finds this doctrine of the destruction of the wicked not unreasonable. For the purpose of God in creating man is thus seen to be purely benevolent.

It is, indeed, sometime s bitterly complained that God might have so made us that there should be no wicked, and therefore no destruction; we might have been so framed that we must love the good and do the right. No, WE might not. God could make creatures incapable of disobeying His will, moving on the path marked out for them without a swerve to the one hand or the other. He has made such creatures. They fill the whole vault above us with their brilliant procession every night, as they sweep in constellation after constellation across the sky. He has made such creatures. They cover the whole earth, with their grace and their helpfulness. “Roots cleaving the strength of the rock, or binding the transience of the sand; crests basking in the sunshine of the desert, or hiding by dripping spring and lightless cave; foliage far tossing in entangled fields beneath every wave of ocean, clothing

with variegated, everlasting films, the peaks of the trackless mountains, or ministering at cottage doors to every gentlest passion and simplest joy of humanity.” He has made such creatures. They wander through every forest, they swim in every tide, they fly on every breeze.

And they obey God perfectly. “He hath given them a law which shall not be broken.” And I doubt not God is pleased by this absolute and un-repining service, that the Omniscient sees each wild rose on the bank and hears each song-bird in the tree, observant of every flush of colour and every note of melody. And so the psalmist, after his magnificent description of this lower creation, exclaims: “The glory of the Lord shall endure forever; the Lord shall rejoice in His works.”

But all this hymn of praise falls short of that which men can utter; this uncomprehending obedience is a small thing compared with a free will service.

And so God has made man, able to obey, able to disobey, a conscious, free agent. And to this creature He speaks, not with the compelling thunder of power, but with the soft persuasion of love. Here is a creature who can love God and do His will from that motive; and be glad, with a gladness possible only to such a nature, in so doing. And to this creature God says, “If you will so live as to be fit for life you shall live with Me forever; if not, you shall pass to the unconscious dust from whence you came.” Is there any injustice here? The wildest infidel cannot assert it. And when we go on and see what God has done to save us from that fate which the first transgression had so justly earned, how He suspended the penalty, how “He that might the vantage best have took, found out the remedy,” how He sent warnings and chastisements and incentives and instructions, how at last Christ came, “not to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved,” how everything has been wrought out for us except to deprive us of our magnificent capacity for free service and to turn us into mere puppets—when we consider all this, must we not exclaim that such a course could be possible only to the Absolute Love. Let us not look at these matters from the wrong end. The Gospel is not one of damnation, but of salvation. Christ finds men dying, He comes to save them.

In the first book of the Bible we are told of man’s creation. He was not made immortal, but he was made with a capacity for immortality. And the means for preserving his life to all eternity were provided. “The tree of life ‘stood’ in the midst of the garden.”

I care not now whether you regard this story of Genesis as literal, or allegorical, or mystical. It tells our early history in the best possible way for us; it gives us the significance of the facts. Whether the “tree of life” was rooted in common clay and spread its leaves forth in such sunshine as now falls on earth, or whether we have here a figure for some sacramental mystery, makes no difference. There it was; a something adapted by God as the means of perpetuating the life of man.

After the fall we are told that God said, “Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever; therefore, the Lord God sent him forth from the Garden of Eden.”

However obscure may be part of this verse, and difficult to comprehend, one truth stands out clear, that when man lost his innocence, and when, therefore, perpetual existence would be for him everlasting misery, God would not curse him with immortality, but sent him back to till the ground from whence he was taken, to live as an animal till, like the animals, he should cease to live at all. It was mercy and not wrath which made this decree.

You all know the redeeming work which followed, the promise of a Deliverer, the institution of sacrifice, all the mercy and grace which culminated in the Incarnation. And now turn with me to the last book of the Bible, to those last utterances of Jesus Christ which have been heard by mortal ears: “To him that overcomes, to him will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.”

www.CreationismOnline.com