

WILL  
SIN AND SUFFERING  
BE  
EVERLASTING?

NOTES OF A CALM INQUIRY AS TO THE TRUTH  
OF A COMMONLY TAUGHT DOCTRINE.

BY  
JOSEPH STRATFORD,  
*Cirencester.* *K*

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“SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES.”—JESUS CHRIST.

“PROVE ALL THINGS.”—*Apostle Paul.*

*“Our conscience is bound down by the word of God; we can suffer all things, but we dare not overstep the word of God. The word of God must reign above all things, and remain the judge of all men.”*

LUTHER.

*“Deliver me from the narrowing influence of human lessons, from human systems of theology. Teach me directly out of the fulness and freeness of Thine own word. Hasten the time when, unfettered by sectarian intolerance, and unawed by the authority of men, the Bible shall make its rightful impression upon all; the simple and obedient readers thereof, calling no man Master, but Christ only.”*

T. CHALMERS, D.D.

*“Beware of a nominal acquiescence in certain alleged truths; because you have been taught them in your infancy, or because they are the established opinions of those with whom you are connected.”*

ABERCROMBIE.

*“The great day of account will alone show what frightful loss may then be suffered by christian men who, whether in trade or in the ministry, have stifled their convictions, OR EVADED THE FORMATION OF ANY, by turning away from the consideration of subjects which they OUGHT to have investigated, simply LEST inconvenient conclusions should be forced upon them. Alas! there are yet too many ways in which the birthright may be sold for a mess of pottage.”*

HENRY DUNN.



## PREFATORY STATEMENT.

WHEN, more than three years ago, I voluntarily resigned my position as a denominational minister, I was, in part, influenced by the fact that I "could not feel perfectly unfettered in my inquiries after truth, and in my utterance of what I might believe," so long as I held such a position.

One subject which had for many years more or less exercised my mind was that which is examined in the following pages. Many things prevented my giving it full and fearless attention. I was afraid of unsettling my mind on other questions by an investigation of this; I was unwilling to pursue any inquiry which might place me in opposition to the commonly taught doctrine of the Christian Church: and I was discouraged by the apparent difficulty, if not impossibility, of gaining any fuller and brighter light on the painful subject from the Scriptures.

Independent thought on other points having, however, led to satisfactory and happy results, I was encouraged, especially in my new and unfettered circumstances, to give this doctrine renewed and thorough consideration. I found help; obtained light, and felt comfort. It soon became known to me that among my friends there were many other minds in a similar state to my own. What could be more natural than that we should speak often one to another on a subject of such interest?

At length seven or eight of us met to pursue our inquiries, and then by invitation our number was doubled by christians belonging to various churches. In the course of three or four weekly meetings, held in the house of a friend, we gave the question in its various aspects earnest, dispassionate, and prayerful examination.

Was this a sin? It was apparently so regarded by some. We were freely denounced as "unitarians" and "infidels;" and ridiculed as "fools" and "madmen." The most false and foolish rumours were circulated, even—I hesitate to write it—by our fellow christians!

It was deemed well to offer light to those who might desire to obtain it; and I accordingly arranged for a much larger but select meeting. Nearly one hundred, comprising members of almost every christian community in the town, accepted my invitation, and listened with some appearance of interest to an address, the substance of which is here published.

During these proceedings two classes of facts have specially attracted my observation.

First. I have discovered with astonishment the ignorance of many christians on this subject, and seen with pain the strange tenacity with which they cling to the old dogma. Nor has this been all: it has been lamentable to observe the bitterness of spirit with which some have denounced all inquiry by others, and obstinately refused to hear, read, or think on the question themselves. Such exhibitions of temper cannot but remind us of a certain prophet, who, disappointed in his desires for the destruction of Nineveh, and displeased with the mercy of a pardoning God, refused to heed even Divine reasoning, and passionately attempted to justify his sinful anger. One would think that every benevolent heart would rejoice to hear that God's word admitted of another interpretation, and that it was possible to take a brighter view of this gloomy subject. But it is not so. As Jonah would rather that the "exceeding great city" should be destroyed than that his prediction should not be verified, so, it seems as if some would rather that countless myriads of their fellow human beings should be consigned to endless misery than that one jot or tittle of their theology should appear untrue.

Second. It has been most interesting to see others approaching the subject with candour, and pursuing their inquiries with intelligent earnestness and care. In not a few cases the results have been most pleasing. Higher and happier thoughts of God have been gained. The work and love of Christ have appeared in fresh aspects of greatness and glory. Some light has been thrown upon many dark and distressing enigmas in the Word of God and the history of man ; and perplexed and burdened minds have found relief.

I could record many facts as proof of this ; and tell how in some instances I have received the thanks of those whom I have aided in their inquiries.

I would esteem it an honor and a joy to be thus instrumental in leading souls into clearer light and higher life. Even the reproach which has to be borne should be accounted a glory, though it come from christian professors. Paul, when constrained by the love of Christ, was contemned as beside himself by some members of the church at Corinth ; and to a greater than the Apostle, even to the "Lord of all," the *religious* Jews said, with all the dogmatism and bitterness of their intolerant spirits, "Now we know thou hast a devil, and art mad."

Is it not written, "Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you ;" "It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his Lord ;" "If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him?"

I ask an unprejudiced perusal of what I have written. I do so conscious that it is the result of honest efforts to discover the truth.

The principle which Ruskin lays down concerning Art might be applied in a most emphatic sense to religious teaching. The artist has not to create, but to contemplate and exhibit natural facts ; and in this inquiry it has been my aim, not to fashion a theory of my own, but to discover and interpret and set forth the truth of God.

Freely forgiving the injustice of those who have hastily judged without evidence, "according to appearance," I now offer them the means by which they might "judge righteous judgment." Should

any be still disposed to shut their ears, and yet condemn, I say, "Strike ; but hear." But my hope—my prayer is, that many may be led to examine this deeply important matter in an earnest, unprejudiced spirit, looking to God for guidance, and desiring to be led into all truth.

I shall be neither surprised nor grieved if, even in the minds of earnest inquirers, conviction should come slowly. Established opinions cannot be—and ought not to be—readily renounced. Cautiousness in the adoption of fresh views may be quite compatible with candour in their investigation. Slowly—perhaps much too slowly—have I arrived at my present convictions. Many writers holding similar views make similar acknowledgments. We are, therefore, not disposed to demand a hasty reception of our teaching ; nor shall we be astonished if others should be as hesitating and as tardy as ourselves in embracing opinions so different to those generally held. It will, however, both surprise and grieve us, if any, who give the subject the consideration we ask, do not attain to higher and more satisfactory thoughts of God's future dealings with our fallen race, than those which have so long prevailed in the Christian Church.

J. S.

*Cirencester,*  
*May, 1869.*

# WILL SIN AND SUFFERING BE EVERLASTING?



## I.

### INTRODUCTION.

“HE THAT ANSWERETH A MATTER BEFORE HE HEARETH IT, IT IS FOLLY AND SHAME UNTO HIM.”—*Prov.* xviii. 13.

*“I say not, Compromise the right: I would not have thee countenance the wrong,  
But hear with charitable heart the reasons of an honest judgment.”*

MARTIN TUPPER.

CAN we imagine that the Church of God understands all truth as it is contained in the Holy Scriptures? and holds and teaches the whole of that truth, without admixture or addition?

May there not be some portions of both Old and New Testaments which have never yet been distinctly comprehended? Are there not some things which, although held by the first churches, have long been lost, and are being only slowly and partially recovered? Is it not possible that there may be some grave errors which the Church has long maintained, and which it has yet to unlearn and renounce?

John Robinson, lamenting the obstinacy with which Lutherans and Calvinists refused to go beyond what their theological masters had taught, solemnly charged the “Pilgrim Fathers” to be ready and willing to embrace any further light which God might reveal to them; for he was “very confident the Lord had more light and truth yet to break forth out of His holy word.” Another eminent servant of God, the devout and thoughtful Vinet, has recently said: “Even now, after eighteen centuries of Christianity, we may be

involved in some enormous error, of which the Christianity of the future will make us ashamed."

The truth and force of these remarks would seem, from the prayers of God's people, to be very generally admitted. In private and in public, many are the petitions presented for deliverance from all error, for increased knowledge of the Word, and for guidance into all truth.

There are, too, those who not only pray for fuller and clearer light, but who, not expecting it to be miraculously afforded, seek it in the humble and earnest study of "all Scripture," which, "given by inspiration of God, is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness."

One subject which has occupied the profound attention of some of these searchers after truth is, that of THE FUTURE DEALINGS OF GOD WITH THOSE OF THE HUMAN RACE WHO DO NOT FORM PART OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST.

The investigation of such a subject demands much preparedness of mind and heart. How necessary that it should be approached without prejudice; with a readiness and a resolve to embrace the truth, however contrary it may be to the opinions we have been accustomed to hear and receive; and with a deep conviction that the God of truth will be pleased rather than offended by our humble and honest efforts to become more perfectly acquainted with His will. He encourages us to "search" His own Word, and He charges us to "prove" the prophesyings of our fellow men.

## II.

### THE QUESTION STATED.

BUY THE TRUTH.—*Prov.* xxiii. 23.

*"When we are at pains in searching after truth, that we may come to the knowledge of it, and may distinguish between it and error, then we buy it."*—M. HENRY.

It cannot be questioned that according to the measure of responsibility and guilt there will be retribution. The wrath of God is already revealed "against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men," Rom. i. 18. Man is even now under law, and to every transgression there is attached some penalty. "Whoso breaketh a hedge, a serpent shall bite him." "The way of transgressors is hard." "He that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul." "He that pursueth evil, pursueth it to his own death." "He that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption."

Suffering as surely follows sin as shadow attends substance in the light of the sun. The infliction of penalty may not be immediate,



but it is sure. The wages of sin, if not received now, will have to be received in the future. The end is not yet. We read of "the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God ; who will render to every man according to his deeds ; . . . unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness ; indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile," Rom. ii. 5, 9.

But while the CERTAINTY of future punishment admits of no doubt, its NATURE and DEGREE may be matters of question. It is to the latter that attention is particularly directed.

WHAT WILL BE THE DURATION OF THIS PUNISHMENT? WILL IT BE LIMITED IN ITS CONTINUANCE, OR WILL IT BE ABSOLUTELY AND NECESSARILY ENDLESS?

A deeply interesting and important inquiry, but one which many would have us leave, as not affecting us, and moreover as being either fully settled, or utterly insolvable.

I answer :—It is a subject which largely involves the character of God ; which powerfully affects the thoughtful christian's state of mind ; and which exercises some influence, good or evil, upon all who give it consideration. God speaks of it ; theologians have propounded their theories about it ; and the Church, having formed its creed concerning it, teaches that creed constantly and dogmatically. By thousands of christians it is not acknowledged to be a settled question. It demands and is receiving fuller and more intelligent investigation than it has ever before had.

### III.

## THE COMMON CREED OF THE CHURCH.

"TAKE HEED WHAT YE HEAR."—*Mark* iv. 24.

*"From the very beginning there were many heresies, errors, and false doctrines prevalent among the professed followers of Christ ; and such errors were maintained and propagated among those who formed what was called the Catholic Church."* "It is absurd to talk of the Church of any age as an infallible guide."—DEAN GOODE.

In pursuing this inquiry it will be well to look at THE COMMONLY RECEIVED CREED OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH ON THIS DOCTRINE. It will be found in the following propositions :

1. Man—every human being—civilized or savage, Jew or Gentile, possesses not merely an intelligent, moral, and responsible nature, but also an immortal nature : a soul, endowed by its Creator with a natural, unconditional, indestructible immortality, so that, having begun to exist, it must of necessity continue to exist for ever.

2. There are two future states, in the one or other of which every immortal soul must for ever exist ; the one a state of perfect holiness and bliss ; the other a state of utter wickedness and woe.
3. Man's probation for the future is confined to his present life on earth ; his future condition will depend entirely on his character and standing in this world ; and the life of every human being is followed immediately by a fixed and irreversible doom.
4. The coming of Christ will be the end of time to all our race : the resurrection will take place, and all the dead, both righteous and wicked, will be raised with immortal bodies : the corruptible bodies of the living will also be rendered incorruptible ; and then, according to the decision of the great Judge, each immortal soul, clothed in an immortal body, will enter upon its eternity of happiness or misery.
5. All who pass from this present state in sin, impenitence, unbelief, ignorance ; unforgiven, unrenewed in heart, unreconciled to God, or unacquainted with God, will be doomed to everlasting condemnation.
6. This condemnation will consist in their being left for ever under the power of evil, and subjected for ever to the most dreadful anguish of which their souls and bodies will be capable ; they will be for ever sinning and for ever suffering : there may be different degrees of torments ; but in no case will there be a termination of misery ; it will be hopeless and unending.

It may be necessary to give evidence that I have fairly stated what I have called "the commonly received creed of the Christian Church on this doctrine."

Here are a few proofs :

"This is the Catholic Faith, which, except every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly."

At the coming of Christ, "all men shall rise again with their bodies ; and shall give account for their own works."

"And they that have done good, shall go into life everlasting ; and they that have done evil, into everlasting fire."

*Book of Common Prayer.*

"The wicked shall be cast into hell to be punished with unspeakable torments, both of body and soul, with the devil and his angels for ever."—*The Assembly's Catechism.*

"What, Oh what is it, to conceive of lying in a fire more intense than nature can kindle, for hundreds, thousands, millions, yea millions of millions of years ; which, after all, are only a minute of time compared to eternity."—BISHOP HALL.

"The greatest aggravation of these torments will be their eternity. When a thousand millions of ages are past, they are as fresh to begin as the first day. The damned were never weary of sinning, nor will God be weary of punishing."—RICHARD BAXTER.

“From the moment wherein they are once plunged into the lake of fire, burning with brimstone, their torments are not only without intermission, but likewise without end.”—WESLEY.

“In the state which Scripture has described under the fearful emblems of the undying worm, and the inextinguishable fire, there is reason to apprehend the career will be from one state of malignity and wickedness, and exasperation, to another, the fresh sins thus committed and the fresh guilt thus incurred *there*, involving not endless only, but ever increasing punishment.”—JAMES STRATTEN.

“In hell there is no hope. They have not even the hope of dying—the hope of being annihilated. They are for ever—*for ever*—FOR EVER lost! On every chain in hell there is written, “For Ever.” In the fires there blaze out the words, “For Ever.” Up above their heads they read, “For Ever.” Their eyes are scorched, and their hearts are pained with the thought, that it is “For ever.” Oh! if I could tell you that hell would one day be burned out, and that those who were lost might be saved, there would be a jubilee in hell at the very thought of it. But it cannot be,—it is an eternity of hell without hope of escape.”—C. H. SPURGEON.

“There all the soul, and, after the resurrection, all the immortal body must endure indescribable misery, and no easy part be within, or without. How dreadful is the state of those, who, dying in their sins, are dragged down by devils, in infinite despair! how would they shrink back from the mouth of the infernal dungeon! but they cannot, for the wrath of an incensed God drives them in. Alas! how infernal the society! how doleful the abode! Oh, the dread torments of eternal fire! Oh, the horrid company of hellish fiends! Where can they turn their affrighted eyes? Alas! it is every where the same sad spectacle; blackness, and darkness, and devils, and flame. O, could they die again; but die they cannot. Roll on, ye everlasting ages! but why roll on? ye will never be nearer to an end.”

“*Tempests of angry fire shall roll  
To blast the rebel worm,  
And beat upon his naked soul,  
In one eternal storm.*”

PIKE'S “*Persuasives to Early Piety.*”

It is taught in psalm and hymn, and mingles in the service of song with the praises and rejoicings of worshipping saints—

“*Justice has built a dreadful hell,  
And laid her stores of vengeance there:*  
“*Eternal plagues and heavy chains,  
Tormenting racks and fiery coals,  
And darts to inflict immortal pains,  
Dyed in the blood of damned souls.*”—WATTS.

*" See the short course of vain delight  
Closing in everlasting night ;  
In flames that no abatement know,  
Though briny tears for ever flow."—DODDRIDGE.*

*" There is a death whose pang  
Outlasts the fleeting breath ;  
Oh, what eternal horrors hang  
Around ' the second death ! ' "—MONTGOMERY.*

*" ' For ever and ever ' shall all  
Who neglected or scorned at the light,  
Be under the wrath of their God,  
Tormented by day and by night."*

BRITISH HERALD, Feb., 1869.

These proofs could be multiplied by thousands. In ponderous systems of divinity, in popular sermons, in carefully prepared confessions and creeds ; in sublime epics and in doggerel verse, in books of devotion and in religious tracts, in laboured theses among students and in catechisms for babes, the church has been teaching this doctrine for more than sixteen centuries. It is being taught still. Last Lord's Day it was proclaimed from thousands of pulpits ; and instilled, in families and schools, into thousands of young minds.\*

How shall this teaching be regarded ?

Surely it cannot be treated with indifference. It involves a most stupendous truth, or a most monstrous fiction. If it be true, then no language can be too strong to teach it : no vehemence can be excessive in its proclamation. But if it be false, it cannot be too emphatically denounced, or too soon swept away, as a dishonor to that God whose truth it is said to be.

Some give it honest and vivid belief ; and it thus becomes, not to depraved and hardened natures, but to reflective and tender minds, a subject of agonizing thought. In not a few instances it is the cause of insanity ; and in thousands of others it is a heavy cloud of darkness upon the soul all through life.

I hardly like to refer to a class of christians who apparently regard this terrible teaching with satisfaction. The sufferings of a slave excite their liveliest pity : they would make any effort to save a condemned murderer from the gallows : the vivisection of a poor dog would fill them with horror ; and yet they can complacently contemplate a dogma which declares the eternal torments of myriads of their fellow human beings ! I have heard it taught and advocated by those who have been sipping their wine and enjoying their dessert !

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*\* Even the Evangelical Alliance demands that its members should " hold and maintain what are usually understood to be Evangelical views in regard to the eternal punishment of the wicked."*

By others it is to some limited extent received. They believe that it is contained in the Scriptures, and accepting those Scriptures as the word of God, they feel bound to accept this doctrine. They accept it with some degree of pain, reluctance, and reserve; but they fear to question, and therefore satisfy their minds by some measure of assent.

Not a few professedly believe, yet secretly reject it. Some ministers are included in this class, and it is humiliating to think of the shifts and evasions they sometimes employ to conceal their real sentiments. Its fiercest preachers may be its most utter disbelievers.\*

There are those by whom it is boldly but ignorantly denied, and utterly and indignantly rejected. This is the case among professional men, well educated young men, and especially among artisans and mechanics. They do not inquire much, nor reason deeply; yet, with little or no hesitation, they declare their disbelief in such a dogma.

But there are those who do subject it to investigation; and, bringing it to fair tests, fearlessly examine whether it be the tradition of man or the truth of God.

## IV.

## MORAL ARGUMENTS AGAINST THIS CREED.

“SHALL NOT THE JUDGE OF ALL THE EARTH DO RIGHT?”

Gen. xviii. 25.

*“It is unjust  
Alike to made and Maker to believe  
The Eternal should a creatural soul invest  
With deathlessness to suffer pain alone.”*

P. J. BAILEY.

*“God, in revelation of Himself,  
Singles out love from all His attributes  
As that by which He glories to be known.”*

It is viewed in the light of REASON. Men of reverent spirit and sanctified judgment think they have liberty to do this. They know that while the word of God contains much that *transcends* our

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\* *Have you thought about it? Do you believe it? are questions which it is well to press upon the minds and consciences of its advocates and teachers.*

reason, it contains nothing *contrary* to that reason when rightly exercised.\*

They know, too, that God appeals to our reason, and encourages us to exercise it in reference to Himself, His works, and His ways. They therefore reason in reference to what the church teaches as His truth concerning the everlasting torments of hell,—and reason thus :—

1. They think of eternity, and by varied and repeated efforts of mind, endeavour to get impressive thoughts of endless duration. The years of past ages—the sands of the sea shore, and of the arid desert—the blades of earth's grassy fields—the rain drops and the snow flakes—the leaves of autumn forests—the stars of heaven ; the numbers which the figures of arithmetic express—and many labored calculations and curious imaginations, are employed to stamp upon the soul some vivid views of the countless ages of everlasting existence.
2. They think of eternal evil—of rebellion shut up in hell and held in chains, yet ceaselessly and everlastingly raging against the Majesty of the universe—of souls becoming more and more guilty and abominable for ever and ever—and of their curses continuing to resound through that kingdom of eternal peace and glory in which God is to be “all in all,” the centre and joy of all His holy creation.
3. They think of this unceasing sinning as connected with unceasing suffering. Experience has given some knowledge of bodily pain and mental anguish ; of days or nights of suffering and sorrow. Suppose this to be continued for weeks and months ! Imagine it to be prolonged for years ! Think of its lasting through a long life ! But, what would this be compared with the agonies of an immortal body and an immortal soul age after age in endless succession !
4. They think of the beings whose punishment, it is said, this will be. They do not deny that men have sinned, and utterly failed to please and glorify God : nor do they deny “the exceeding sinfulness of sin,” as the rebellion of the creature against the holy, just, and good laws of a Creator of infinite majesty, worthy of the supreme and everlasting love of every intelligent being He has formed. But neither can they ignore such facts as the following : Human beings are not self originated, nor self endowed : they did not seek their present existence, nor had they any choice of the circumstances in which they became intelligent and responsible creatures. Each one comes into existence with some inherited

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*\* The doctrine of transubstantiation, which many learned men would affirm to be as clearly taught as the doctrine of eternal torments, is contemptuously rejected by many on this very ground. They say, “The New Testament must not be so interpreted as to teach a dogma which is opposed to fact and reason.”*

propensities to "lusts of the flesh," or "lusts of the spirit." A perfectly sound mind in a perfectly sound body cannot be found. The years of life, at the most, are but few ; many are passed in childish ignorance, others are consumed in toil and trouble ; the last are often "labor and sorrow." Millions are born in heathen darkness, in which they live and die. Multitudes, even in Christendom, are trained in sin from the cradle ; many others, of all classes, are surrounded by influences unfavorable to the welfare of their souls ; while not a few who hear the word of God, hear it taught with such imperfection, and adulterated with such human tradition and folly, that they either do not understand it, or cannot believe that it is a message of love from the throne of Heaven.

5. They reverently think of that God by whom, according to the teaching of the church, these human creatures are to be kept in a state of everlasting sin and suffering. They contemplate His works, and trace evidences of His goodness in every department of creation. They ponder His present government, and, while finding "many things which are hard to be understood," they are fully persuaded that

*"Righteous is the Lord in all His ways,  
And kind in all His works."*

PS. CXLV. 17., YOUNG'S TRANS.

They search His Revealed Word ; and many and solemn are the statements they find concerning His holiness and justice ; His hatred of sin, and His determination to punish it. But how abundant are the revelations of His goodness and mercy—His grace and love !

Turning the pages of pentateuch, psalms, and prophets, they read :

"The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth ; keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin."—Ex. xxxiv. 6, 7.

"The Lord is gracious, and full of compassion ; slow to anger, and of great mercy. The Lord is good to all : and His tender mercies are over all His works."—Ps. cxlv. 8, 9.

"His anger endureth but a moment."—Ps. xxx. 5.

"His mercy endureth for ever."—Ps. cxxxvi. 3.

"To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses."—Dan. ix. 4.

"He delighteth in mercy."—Micah vii. 18.

From the Lord Jesus and His inspired servants they hear :

"He is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil."—Luke vi. 35.

"God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."—John iii. 16.

“God commendeth His love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”—Rom. v. 8.

“God is rich in mercy.”—Eph. ii. 4.

“God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.”—1 John i. 5.

“God is love.” “God is love.”—1 John iv. 8, 16.

With these thoughts and these facts they decide against the doctrine of the church. They say in effect, “We cannot receive it. It is contrary to that reason with which God has endowed us; it is repulsive to those moral instincts which He has implanted in us as men; and it is repugnant and distressing to those principles and affections which He has wrought in us as His children. There may be portions of the Scriptures which we cannot clearly explain, but surely they do not teach a doctrine so opposed to the plain declarations of other parts, and contrary to the tenor of the whole Word. These dark passages, doubtless, admit of some other interpretation more in harmony with a revelation of God’s love.”

Now, be it observed these are not the reasonings of proud infidels; nor of ill-instructed, worldly-minded professors, “wise in their own conceits;” nor of young and inexperienced converts, prone to “lean unto their own understandings;” but of thousands of mature believers in Christ, whose hearts are “established with grace,” and who “serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.” Some of these are conscious of the fact that as they have grown in knowledge and in grace, so have they become more and more dissatisfied with the dogma of eternal sin and misery.

## V.

# SCRIPTURAL ARGUMENTS AGAINST THIS CREED.

“TO THE LAW AND TO THE TESTIMONY.”—Isaiah viii. 20.

*“The humble man may search any truth boldly in the Scripture, without any danger of error. And if he be ignorant, he ought the more to read and search holy Scripture, to bring him out of ignorance.”*

FIRST HOMILY.

*“The inventions of man, and not the revelations of God, are the cause of nearly all religious differences.”*

SMITH, OF CAMPBELTON.

But there are some who, not satisfied with these conclusions of reason, pursue a further and more thorough course of examination. They take the creed of the Church, and analyzing it, submit its constituent parts to the test of God’s Word.



The Church teaches that every human being is the possessor of an immortal soul, and on this assumed foundation it builds the awful doctrine of immortal evil and immortal woe.

Now, is this foundation true or false? Is there plain Scriptural proof that every man is the possessor of a never-dying, indestructible, immortal soul?

To this inquiry the following facts may serve as an answer:—

1. The terms “immortal beings,” “never-dying souls,” “deathless spirits,” and similar phrases, although so common in the speech and writings of man, are never found in the Word of God.
2. The doctrine of fallen man’s natural immortality is nowhere taught, either in the Old or the New Testament. It is not plainly declared; nor can it be reasonably inferred from any statement contained in the Scriptures.

The following admissions are made by orthodox writers:

“The immortality of the soul is rather supposed, or taken for granted, than *expressly revealed* in the Bible.”—ARCHB. TILLOTSON.

“Adam forfeited the blessing of immortality.”—THOMAS SCOTT.

“The doctrine of the immortality of the soul, and the name, are alike unknown to the entire Bible.”—Dr. OLSHAUSEN.

“In fact, no such doctrine is revealed to us.”—ARCHB. WHATELY.

“That the soul is naturally immortal is contradicted by Scripture, which makes our immortality a gift dependent on the Giver.”—RICHARD WATSON.

Many recent writers of unquestioned ability and christian character, maintain that the doctrine of all men’s immortality has no foundation in the inspired word; and is a figment derived from pagan philosophy.

The Rev. H. H. Dobney, of Maidstone, in a letter to the late Archbishop of Canterbury, speaking of those who have examined the Scriptures with especial reference to this question, says:

“Coming afresh to the study of the Scriptures, they have been struck with the silence of the Bible on this point of an absolute and unconditional immortality for all men. They find nothing in the book at all akin to the popular language on the subject.”

“Search the Bible from beginning to end,” says another clergyman, the Rev. Thomas Davis, M.A., “and you will no where find sinners addressed as immortal beings.”

Speaking of the origin of this doctrine, the Rev. H. Constable, A.M., prebendary of Cork, refers to its reception by many of the fathers, who with Tertullian, adopted the sentiment of Plato—“Every soul is immortal.”—“A doctrine,” says Mr. Constable, “which neither Old Testament nor New taught directly or indirectly, nay which was contrary to a great part of the teachings of both, these fathers brought in with them into the Church.”

Another well-known writer, Mr. John Nelson Darby, the leader

of one party of 'Brethren,' bears the following emphatic testimony in his work, "THE HOPES OF THE CHURCH:"

"We would express our conviction, that the idea of the immortality of the soul has no source in the Gospel; that it comes, on the contrary, from the Platonist; and that it was just when the coming of Christ was denied in the Church, or, at least, began to be lost sight of, that the doctrine of the immortality of the soul came to replace that of the resurrection. This was about the time of Origen. We assert that this view has taken the place of the doctrine of the resurrection of the Church, as the epoch of its joy and glory."

Mr. Henry Dunn asserts that the dogma "falls to the ground the moment it is confronted with Scripture."

"Neither from reason nor Scripture," says Mr. Maude, "is there any sufficient evidence of the tremendous dogma of man's natural immortality to be discovered."

"The writer of an able little tract, "IMMORTALITY ONLY IN CHRIST," "offers a purse of One Hundred Guineas for the production of a single passage from Scripture proving the natural immortality of the soul."\*

3. Immortality is attributed to God. We read of "the glory of the UNCORRUPTIBLE God," Rom. i. 23. He is adored as "the King eternal, IMMORTAL, invisible," 1 Tim. i. 17; and in chapter vi. 15, 16, of the same epistle, He is declared to be "the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords; WHO ONLY HATH IMMORTALITY."
4. Immortality as possessed by man is represented as a blessing, specially bestowed by God upon those who seek it in His own appointed way. "To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality," God will render "eternal life," Rom. ii. 6, 7.
5. This great gift of immortality comes through Christ. It is

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\* *That it cannot be proved by reason seems as plain as that it is not taught by revelation. The great Wesleyan divine, RICHARD WATSON, asserts that in nature and providence 'there is no indubitable declaration of man's immortality, nor any facts and principles so obvious as to enable us confidently to infer it. All OBSERVATION lies directly against the doctrine of the immortality of man.' He speaks of 'the absurdity of the 'natural immortality' of the human soul,' and says, 'It does not follow that they [souls] are IMMORTAL, because they are IMMATERIAL. The truth is, that God only hath independent immortality, because He only is self-existent, and neither human nor brute souls are of NECESSITY immortal.' These are the words of an acknowledged Methodist minister and theologian.*

DR. DAVID THOMAS, editor of 'The Homilist,' declares, 'I believe that the constitutional immortality of the creature is a contradiction.'

merited for men by His obedience and death ; and it is bestowed for His sake upon all who believe in His name. How plainly is this declared :

“ In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.”—John i. 4.

“ The bread of God is He who cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world.” “ I am the bread of life.” . . . “ I am the living bread which came down from heaven : if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever.”—John vi. 33, 35, 51.

“ I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”—John x. 10.

“ The gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.”—Rom. vi. 23.

“ This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath life.”—I John v. 11, 12.

“ Christ who is our life.”—Col. iii. 4.

“ He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life.”—John iii. 36.

“ I am the resurrection and the life : he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live : and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me, shall never die.”—John xi. 25, 26.

It is therefore said that “ Christ hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel.”—2 Tim. i. 10.

6. The terms “immortality” and “incorruptibility,” when elsewhere used in the New Testament, are applied exclusively to things pertaining either to God Himself or His people.

The Divine principle by which christians are born again is termed “incorruptible seed.”—I Peter i. 23.

The graces of their renewed spirits are said to be “incorruptible.”—I Peter iii. 4.

Their changed, or raised bodies, will put on “incorruption,” and “immortality.”—I Cor. xv. 52, 54.

Their inheritance will be “incorruptible.”—I Peter i. 4.

Their reward is called an “incorruptible crown.”—I Cor. ix. 25.\*

“ It is certain,” says Dr. Whately, “ that the words, ‘ life,’ ‘ eternal life,’ ‘ immortality,’ etc., are always applied to the condition of those, and of those only, who shall at the last day be approved as ‘ good and faithful servants,’ who are to ‘ enter into the joy of their Lord.’ ”

7. Now, not only are these terms never applied to the wicked, or

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\* The same word in Eph. vi. 24, and Titus ii. 7, is translated ‘ sincerity.’ Alford renders it in the former case ‘ incorruption,’ and thinks it refers to the IMMORTALITY of the christian’s love for the Lord Jesus. In the latter case he omits it altogether as not found in our oldest MSS.

to anything connected with their present or future state, but the very contrary is both negatively and positively taught.

*a.* It is most plainly declared that there is no immortality at present possessed by those who are not in Christ. "Thou shalt surely die" was the threatened penalty of disobedience to the Divine law; and as disobedient and condemned under the law, men are said to be "dead;" to be destitute of that conditional immortality which man at first possessed, but forfeited by transgression. This lost life the sinner has in himself no power to regain. It is the gift of God to those in Christ, and therefore, apart from union to the living and life-giving Saviour, the soul is without that "life" which never ends.

"He that believeth not is condemned already."—John iii. 18.

"Dead in trespasses and sins."—Eph. ii. 1.

"If a man abide not in Me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is *withered*."—John xv. 6.

"He that hath not the Son of God hath not life."—1 John v. 12.

*b.* It seems to be as plainly affirmed that for the despisers and rejectors of the Son of God there will be no immortality in a future state. We read that there will be 'stripes,' 'indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish,' 'death,' and 'destruction;' but we do not read of 'endless life in endless woe,' of 'eternally-increasing guilt and eternally-increasing punishment,' nor even of 'millions of years' of sin and suffering. It is written that 'the wages of sin is death,' Rom. vi. 23; but it is not written that 'the wages of sin is an immortality of wickedness and torments.' It is declared that the unbelieving and unrighteous shall 'perish,' John iii. 15, Rom. ii. 12, 2 Thess. ii. 10; but it is nowhere said that 'perishing' means 'living eternally in the pains of hell.'

The great christian philosopher, Locke, says: "By 'death' some men understand endless torments in hell-fire; but it seems a strange way of understanding a law which requires the plainest and directest words, that by death should be meant eternal life in misery! Can any one be supposed to intend, by a law which says *for felony thou shalt surely die*, not that he should lose his life, but be kept alive in exquisite and perpetual torments? And would any one think himself fairly dealt with that was so used?"

Archbishop Whately, in a careful examination of these terms, has given reasons for believing that 'perdition,' 'death,' 'destruction,' which are employed to express the doom of the condemned, mean that they are to be "really and literally 'destroyed,' and cease to exist," not that they are "to exist for ever in a state of wretchedness." He therefore concludes that we are not warranted in making "it a point of christian faith to interpret figuratively and not literally the 'death' and 'destruction' spoken of in Scripture as the doom of the condemned; and to insist on the belief that they are to be kept alive for ever."

## VI.

## OBJECTIONS STATED AND ANSWERED.

"THE ENTRANCE OF THY WORDS GIVETH LIGHT."—Ps. cxix. 130.

*"So strong an association is apt to be established in the mind between certain expressions and the TECHNICAL sense to which they have been confined in some theological system, that when the student meets with them in Scripture, he at once understands them in that sense, in passages where perhaps an unbiassed examination of the context would plainly show that such was not the author's meaning."*  
—ARCHBISHOP WHATELY.

With such evidence, then, may we not ask—Is the church authorized to attach to these terms significations which are apparently so unnatural and arbitrary; and to explain the passages in which they occur as most positively teaching a doctrine of such tremendously dreadful character?

"Yes," it is replied; "for we read of 'hell fire, where their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched,'" Mark ix. 47, 48.

Gehenna, which is here translated "hell," was a valley outside Jerusalem, where executions sometimes took place, and into which the dead carcases of criminals, and the filth of the city, were cast, Matt. v. 22. Amidst such things, processes of corruption would be continually going on, and worms would find constant prey. In addition to this, for the more speedy destruction of some of these loathsome matters, and also for the purification of the air, fires were kept perpetually burning. It was therefore regarded by the Jews as an image of that state where the wicked will be punished, and our Lord, adopting the popular view, and quoting from Isaiah lxvi. 24, so refers to it in these passages. The imagery is that of destruction; not of continued existence; the criminals were destroyed, and their bodies consumed, not kept in life and torment. It was the worms that lived, not the bodies on which they fed; it was the fire that was unquenchable, and not the carcases that were living and indestructible. Worms and fire continued to feed and consume, because they continued to be supplied with fresh material to prey upon. The words contain an awful truth, but that truth is not that the "undying worm" means eternal remorse in the sinners conscience, and the "unquenchable fire" flames that shall torment body and soul for ever. Severe punishment—complete destruction may be taught; but not ceaseless and endless tortures. Do not our Lord's words confirm this, when He says, "Fear Him who is able to *destroy* both body and soul in hell (gehenna) Matt. x. 28? and is not this that "everlasting destruction" of which Paul speaks, 2 Thess. i. 9; a destruction which will be complete, final and irreparable,

according to the words "the workers of iniquity shall be destroyed for ever;" yea, "utterly consumed?" \*

"But," it may be said, "this is not all. It is declared by our Lord that the wicked shall go away into "everlasting punishment," Matt. xxv. 46. Now, the word here translated "everlasting," and applied to the doom of sinners, is the very word which in the same verse is applied to the future life of the righteous, and which elsewhere is applied to the existence of Jehovah; therefore, to limit the signification of the word in connection with the punishment of the wicked, demands that you also limit it in connection with the glory of the saved, and even in connection with the existence of God."

Such is, in substance, the very strongest argument that can be brought in support of the dogma of eternal sin and woe; and it is one built entirely upon the meaning and application of a Greek word!

AION, a Greek noun often occurring in the New Testament and in the Septuagint, is variously rendered 'age,' 'world,' 'for ever,' and 'evermore.' Lexicons define its meanings to be "time; a space of time; a lifetime; the age of man; the ordinary period of man's life; man's estate; a long period of time; a generation; period of a dispensation; and lastly, eternity."

AIONIOS, the adjective derived from AION, is translated in the New Testament by the words 'eternal' and 'everlasting.' Its meanings, according to the lexicon, are "of long duration; eternal-lasting; permanent;" and many eminent scholars render it by the terms 'age-during,' or 'age-lasting.'

EIS TOUS AIONAS TON AIONON, translated 'for ever and ever,' would, if literally rendered, be 'unto the ages of the ages.'

"The words 'eternal,' 'everlasting,' and 'for ever,' are often to be taken for a long time, and are not always to be understood strictly."—CRUDEN.

"The terms everlasting, eternal, for ever, original or translated, are often employed in the Bible, as well as other writings, under great and various limitations of import; and are thus withdrawn from the predicament of NECESSARILY AND ABSOLUTELY meaning a strictly endless duration. The limitation is often, indeed, plainly marked by the nature of the subject."—JOHN FOSTER.

We may now proceed to an argument recently used by an able writer,† and which somewhat simplifying and extending I gladly adopt.

When it is asked, as it is with no small air of triumph,—Do not these expressions denote eternity? we are content to reply,—THAT

\* *Since writing this, I find that Dr. Whately takes a similar view.*

† *Mr. W. Maude, of Birkenhead, in 'a magnificent article' on 'IMMORTALITY,' which appeared in the March number of 'The Rainbow.'*

DEPENDS UPON THE SUBJECT TO WHICH THEY ARE APPLIED. In most cases, at least, the adjective (age-lasting), and the intensive forms (ages of ages), signify a duration coincident with that of the subject spoken of.

On this point we have great pleasure in being able to quote Dr. George Sidney Smith, of Trinity College, Dublin, whose Greek scholarship will hardly be called in question, and whose testimony is all the more valuable as that of an opponent. He says :

“There is no mystery or ambiguity about the word *AIONIOS*. Like many other words in the Lexicon, it has several meanings ; but this creates no difficulty : the context is always sufficient to decide ; the relation and genesis of its different meanings are well ascertained ; and as a general definition, it may be safely held that it commonly means *A CONTINUOUS DURATION AS LONG AS THE SUBJECT IS CAPABLE OF.*”

Hence, when applied to God, as for example when we read of “the everlasting God,” and of “Him that liveth for ever and ever,” we accept these expressions as strictly equivalent to eternity, *BECAUSE WE ARE FULLY ASSURED ON OTHER GROUNDS, THAT THE GLORIOUS BEING TO WHOM THEY ARE APPLIED EVER DID AND EVER MUST EXIST.*

In like manner, when “eternal life,” or “everlasting life,” (life age-lasting), is predicated of the saved, as in Matt. xxv. 46, John iii. 16, &c., we accept this also as denoting an unending existence ; for if the word *AIONIOS* were blotted from the New Testament, the doctrine of the immortal life of the righteous would still be so plainly taught, that it would continue to “shine forth with a lustre all but undimmed.”

But when we read of “everlasting hills,” of the earth that “it abideth for ever,” and of Jewish statutes and ordinances to be observed “for evermore,” we know these words applied to such subjects cannot mean endless duration, because we know these subjects are not capable of endless continuance.

So when the same expressions are used in reference to the future sufferings of the lost, they *DO NOT AND CANNOT* signify an eternal duration, because, so far from having here, as in the case of Jehovah and of His saints, independent evidence of the immortality of unsaved souls, we have on the contrary conclusive proof that they do not possess it ; for we have already seen that Scripture nowhere declares immortality to be every man’s natural inheritance, but God’s supernatural gift “through Christ” to those “in Christ.”

Therefore, these expressions, however emphatic, when applied to the future state of sinners may fairly be taken to mean, not an endless existence in sin and suffering, but a condition of punishment terminating only with the existence of the sinner, however protracted or otherwise that existence may be.

As a further illustration take the following sentence :—

The everlasting God, (Rom. xvi. 26), the maker of the everlasting

hills, (Gen. xlix. 26), who gave everlasting statutes unto Israel, (Lev. xvi. 34), and appointed Aaron and his sons to an everlasting priesthood, (Ex. xl. 15), hath in His everlasting gospel, (Rev. xiv. 6), promised everlasting life to the believer, (John iii. 16), but threatened everlasting destruction to the wicked, (2 Thess. i. 9.)

Who would think of giving to the word 'everlasting' the same meaning in every instance? Yet in every instance it may be the translation of the same original word. Is it not plain that its signification depends upon the subject to which it is applied?

Other passages which are thought to confirm the traditional view have upon examination "been found either entirely to fail in lending it even the appearance of support, or to be but as dust in the balance against the overpowering weight of testimony on the other side." \*

## VII.

### SOME RESULTS.

"I SPEAK AS TO WISE MEN ; JUDGE YE WHAT I SAY."—1 *Cor.* x. 15.

From these facts and reasonings it appears :

1. THAT SIN AND SUFFERING CANNOT BE EVERLASTING UNLESS MAN IS ALREADY NATURALLY IMMORTAL ; OR, UNLESS GOD SHOULD CLOTHE HIM WITH IMMORTALITY FOR THE VERY PURPOSE OF EVERLASTINGLY TORMENTING HIM.
2. BUT, SCRIPTURE TEACHES THAT MAN IS NOT ALREADY IMMORTAL ; AND SCRIPTURE, FAR FROM TEACHING THAT GOD WILL GIVE IMMORTALITY TO SINNERS, DECLARES THAT HE WILL DESTROY THEM.

THEREFORE IT FOLLOWS THAT THE COMMON DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH, WHICH AFFIRMS THE IMMORTAL EXISTENCE OF HUMAN BEINGS IN WICKEDNESS AND WOE, IS CONTRARY TO THE WORD OF GOD ; AND THAT THE WICKED WILL NOT BE KEPT IN ENDLESS SIN AND MISERY, BUT BE PUNISHED WITH ULTIMATE DESTRUCTION.

If any should think this a light and insufficient punishment, let them give the solemn subject a deeper consideration. Is the loss of natural life a small matter? Is it esteemed a light punishment when the life of a criminal is taken by the laws of his country? Does the doomed man account it so? Suppose he is young, and in full possession of all his faculties ; conscious of capacity for high action and enjoyment, yet also conscious that he is self-ruined ; that he has despised instruction ; that he has broken good laws ; that

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\* *Rev. S. Minton, an eminent evangelical clergyman of London, and author of an excellent work—'The Glory of Christ in the Creation and Reconciliation of all things.'*



he has refused offered clemency ; and that he is about to be justly and publicly destroyed from among his fellow men as unfit to live ! Will he regard such a penalty as a trifle ? But how faintly this illustrates the condemnation and destruction of a sinner by the justice of God. The guilty and unholy soul will in the future be much more awake to its true character and state and doom, than it is now at all willing to be. Its high capacities, its varied privileges, its mad rebellion, its utter folly ; its abuse of light and knowledge—its neglect of the great salvation—its rejection and contempt of the glorious and gracious Son of God—will then be seen in a widely different light. Then, too, will be felt that shame which must fill those upon whom a holy God must frown ; and the terribleness of that loss which will be sustained by those who have refused to seek that “honor and glory and immortality” which can be realized only in the eternal light of His countenance.

Here our inquiry might end, and the view at which we have arrived would, as John Foster admits, prove to thousands of thoughtful and benevolent minds ‘a prodigious relief.’\* But may we not go beyond this ?

#### VIII.

### FURTHER FACTS, THOUGHTS, AND INQUIRIES.

“WHO HATH KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD?”—*Rom. xi. 34.*

“*The great effort of theology in all ages has been to fill up in detail that which is told in outline only—to define that which has not been defined—to explain that which has not been explained—to clear up that which has been left obscure.*”—DUKE OF ARGYLL.

Forgetting that revelation speaks to us only “in fragments and unsystematic forms, leaving questions of infinite interest unsolved, and a thousand natural curiosities of the mind unsatisfied,” men have nevertheless labored to produce systems of theology teaching in rigid lines all truth. Impatient of anything like incompleteness in their theories, theologians have undertaken to fill up with their

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\* *Such minds will often revolt against the creed they seem forced to believe, and long for some brighter view. Dean Stanley, in an article in ‘Macmillan’s Magazine,’ for March last, asserts that in John Keble’s poems ‘the voice of nature sometimes makes itself heard above the demands of theology,’ and that the poet ‘vividly realizes the impossibility of decreeing to an everlasting ruin all the dwarfed and stunted spirits of our common humanity.’*

own dogmatic details the sublime outlines which God has sketched in His word.

In nothing is this more apparent than in the creed of the church respecting the future destiny of our race. With unhesitating positiveness, and in fixed and hard terms, all human beings are divided into two classes—the elect church and the reprobate world—the heirs of heaven and the heirs of hell ; each of which will, immediately on leaving earth, enter upon reward or punishment.

Without attempting to “explain that which has not been explained,” or professing to be wise above that which is written, it will be neither irreverent nor unprofitable to direct some further attention to this subject.

While the destruction of some appears to be most plainly revealed, it by no means follows that all the human race who pass out of this present life without a knowledge of Christ will therefore likewise perish. For those who prove incorrigibly disobedient to law and gospel, wilfully sinning after they have “received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins ;” no other or further way or opportunity of obtaining forgiveness and entering into life ; “but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries,” Heb. x. 26, 27.

But will this be the doom of all who leave earth without a saving knowledge of Christ ?

We believe that children, dying in infancy, although having no knowledge whatever of the Saviour, are nevertheless interested in the blessings of His redemption. Are there not millions of others who, as to knowledge of God and moral responsibility, are in much the same position as children ? Not only myriads of heathen, but multitudes in what are called christian lands, may be included in this class. Have we not in the black alleys of our great cities many whose ‘faces, eloquent in wretchedness,’ seem to say, ‘We did not place ourselves here ; were the choice given us freely, we would not be here as we are?’\* Have we not in our rural districts many whose lives are passed in heavy toil, and whose faculties, small at first, remain to a sad extent unexercised and undeveloped ? Are there not families in the middle and higher classes where the minds and hearts of the young are left so uninstructed in the truth of God, and are so surrounded by worldly influences, and so absorbed by worldly interests and pleasures, that they live and die in practical heathenism ? Is it not also true that there are some whose ‘religious instruction’ is of such a character that they cannot be said to have been taught ‘the way of the Lord ;’ or to have had made known to them ‘the glad tidings of the kingdom of God ?’

According to the common doctrine, not only are all these souls immortal, but their immortal destiny is fully, finally, and unalterably

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\* ARCHBISHOP THOMSON in *Essay on the ‘Death of Christ.’*

fixed by their brief, imperfect, and unfavorable probation here on earth.

Now, while denying that they are already naturally immortal, and while acknowledging that they do not in this present life seek and gain immortality, yet it may be asked whether we are quite sure that the common doctrine is right when it so positively teaches that the future and final destiny of all human beings will be fully decided and unchangeably fixed by what they were during their lives in this world, and that their present lives will be immediately followed by this irreversible doom?

In the examination of such a question other inquiries will arise, and some too commonly ignored truths will have to be taken into consideration.

1. What Scriptural proof have we that every soul when "once it leaves the clay," immediately passes into full and final joy or woe? It is true that Dr. Watts sings—

*"Up to the courts where angels dwell,  
It mounts triumphant there;  
Or devils plunge it down to hell,  
In infinite despair."*

So it is commonly believed. But where is the Scriptural evidence? Is there no intermediate state?

"The word translated 'hell,' in Luke xvi. 23, and some other places, is in the original 'Hadës,' and 'Hadës,' in Hebrew Sheol, is the abode of *all disembodied spirits* till the resurrection; not the place of torment, much less *hell*, as understood commonly, in the Authorized Version."—(Dean Alford.) Of one part of Hadës our Lord speaks as 'paradise,' Luke xxiii. 43, that part where the souls of the righteous await, in circumstances of blessedness, the day of resurrection. It was into this part that the soul of Lazarus, the departed beggar, entered. That other part of this intermediate state in which the rich man is represented as "lifting up his eyes" is undoubtedly a state of suffering and sorrow, but "not of eternal condemnation; for the judgment has not yet taken place."

2. But when the judgment shall have taken place, is it positively revealed that *final* condemnation and destruction shall be the doom of every soul that has suffered and sorrowed for a time in Hadës? Is it plainly declared that souls shall suffer and sorrow only to become more guilty, more sinful, more ripe for destruction? Are the fires of this intermediate state to be regarded simply as instruments of vengeance, and never of correction? Will they serve only to torment, and never to purify? Is fire always employed to represent processes of vindictive punishment; and never to illustrate refining chastisement? What is the meaning of 1 Peter iii. 19, 20? Dean Alford, after a full and candid examination of the various interpretations of this passage, says: "I understand these words to

say, that our Lord in His disembodied state, did go to the place of detention of departed spirits, and did there announce His work of redemption, preach salvation in fact, to the disembodied spirits of those who refused to obey the voice of God when the judgment of the flood was hanging over them." He concludes by asking, "Who shall say that the blessed act was confined to them?" May it not be further asked, Who shall say that mercy shall not be extended to others in a similar state? Is it unreasonable—is it unscriptural—to believe that those who can scarcely be said to have had a fair probation on earth, may have a further and more favorable trial in a future state; and that in millions of instances this may result in their obtaining, not the high and peculiar honor and blessedness of the elect church in the kingdom and glory of Christ, but a happy and holy immortality?

Some other truths should also be considered.

It is commonly taught and believed that the present state will be immediately followed by one that will be final; that this is the last dispensation; that God's dealings with our world will terminate at the coming of Christ; that then 'time will be no more,' and changeless eternity will roll its unmarked ages on.

Is this the teaching of the Word? The expressions, 'this age,' and 'the age to come,' were common among the Jews, and signified respectively the time before the coming of the Messiah, and the period which would follow His appearing.

Our Lord and His apostles use these and similar expressions; but use the one in application to the period of the Gospel dispensation which had then commenced, and which now is; and the other in reference to a future age or ages of time belonging to the universal church. Thus Christ, speaking of the sin against the Holy Ghost, says, "It shall not be forgiven, neither in this world (AION, *age*), neither in the world (age), to come,"—Matt. xii. 32. Paul, in 1 Tim. iv. 8, uses a similar phrase, "The life that now is, and that which is to come." So elsewhere we have the words, 'this present world,' (age), Titus ii. 12; 2 Tim. iv. 10: 'this' 'time,' Mark x. 30, &c.; all relating to the present state of things; while in other places we read of 'that world,' (age), Luke xx. 35; and of 'the ages to come,' Eph. ii. 7; all referring, not to the heavenly and eternal state, but to some future dispensation of God's dealings with His church and with the world.

This future period, of which the church now thinks so little, will be inaugurated when the Lord Jesus shall appear, revealing His glory, and manifesting and establishing His kingdom. This is evidently 'that blessed hope' for which believers should be looking, Titus ii. 12, 13. It was that for which the early christians seem to have waited with 'ardent hope and strong desire.'

We need not wonder that they did so. What will be accomplished in that glorious age which will commence when

*“The Lamb for sinners slain,  
Redeemer, King, Creator,  
In bliss returns to reign,”*

is not fully revealed ; but much is told us. The long predicted and long preached kingdom of God will be among men. Jesus will reign over His ransomed saints, and they shall be with Him and like Him in blessedness and glory. But not His church only : the nations of the world will receive blessings in His reign—

*“All the promises do travail  
With a glorious day of grace.”*

That judgments many and fearful will be inflicted cannot be denied ; nor can it for a moment be doubted that wondrous, glorious, and merciful things will then be accomplished among Jews and Gentiles.

Is it not of this future age that the prophets pour forth their most glowing predictions, as in Psalm lxxii., Is. xi., Zech. xiv., &c. &c. ?

Does not our Lord Himself speak of this coming age as ‘the regeneration,’ when He will ‘sit in the throne of His glory ; and His faithful apostles shall also sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel?’ Matt. xix. 28. Is it not of the same kingdom that He speaks in Matt. xxvi. 29? Peter describes it as ‘the times of the restitution (restoration) of all things,’ Acts iii. 21. Paul points to ‘the dispensation of the fulness of times,’ in which there shall be a ‘gathering together in one’ of ‘all things in Christ,’ Eph. i. 10 ; and ‘the reconciliation of all things by Him unto God,’ Col. i. 20.

When he speaks of ‘the glory that is to be revealed ;’ and of the earnest expectation of the creature waiting for the revelation of the sons of God ; and declares that ‘the creation itself shall be set free from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the children of God,’ (Alford), is he not pointing to this future period which will commence when the Lord Jesus shall come again, not to judgment only, but ‘unto salvation?’ Are not the works of the devil to be destroyed? 1 John iii. 8. Is not he that had ‘the power of death, that is, the devil,’ to be destroyed? Heb. ii. 14. Do we not read, Christ must reign till He hath put *all* enemies under His feet ; and that the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death? 1 Cor. xv. 25, 26.

Will it not be as the result of the accomplishment of His mighty and merciful purposes in this promised period that at His name ‘every knee shall bow ; and that every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father?’ Phil. ii. 10, 11.

Now, of this future kingdom, this glory that was to follow His sufferings—this age of exaltation and acknowledged Majesty which would succeed the almost universal indifference or ignorance of the present dispensation—the Saviour must have thought much ; and probably His references to it, in His recorded words, may be more

numerous than we have been accustomed to think. Having our minds filled with the notion that what we call time would be immediately succeeded by eternity, and that heaven or hell would immediately follow removal from earth, we have interpreted our Lord's words accordingly. Many of His expressions which doubtless refer to this future age we have interpreted of eternity; and things relating to His kingdom and reign on earth, we have applied to that future state of glory and joy which will be heavenly and eternal, and in which God, even the Father, shall be 'all in all,' 1 Cor. xv. 24, 28.

We have thus not only been led to imagine that all the saving purposes of God must be accomplished *now*, or not at all; but is it not likely that we have also failed to understand some most interesting and important truths which our Lord may intend to teach?

For instance, are there not cases in which, if we read the word 'age-during,' or 'age-lasting,' instead of 'eternal,' or 'everlasting,' we may understand Him as speaking, not of that which pertains to a future eternity, but of that which pertains to the future age? Suppose, keeping in mind the fact that there is to be a future age in which Christ will be reigning and working, and His people as kings and priests reigning and serving with Him, we were to read—

'Age-lasting life,' *instead* of 'eternal life.'—Matt. xxv. 46, &c.

'Age-lasting punishment,' *instead* of 'everlasting punishment.'—Matt. xxv. 46.

'Age-lasting fire,' *instead* of 'everlasting fire.'—Matt. xxv. 41. \*

'Age-lasting condemnation,' *instead* of 'eternal damnation.'—Mark iii. 29.

'In the age to come age-lasting life,' *instead* of 'in the world to come eternal life.'—Mark x. 30.

'He shall live to the age,' *instead* of 'he shall live for ever.'—John vi. 51.

Should we then imagine that the great Teacher was discoursing of things in reference to their endless existence in eternity, or in reference to their existence in the future but terminable age of His millennial kingdom?

Yet, each one of these expressions may be thus translated.† Why then should we be dogmatically taught that such phrases must be understood as meaning nothing but endless duration? as referring to nothing but a future and absolute eternity?

\* "These be the fires of which I spake on earth, Æonian, not eternal."

BAILEY.

† Robert Young invariably uses the term 'age-during' as the translation of AIONIOS.

## IX.

## CONCLUSION.

"HE RETAINETH NOT HIS ANGER FOR EVER, BECAUSE HE DELIGHTETH IN MERCY."—*Micah* vii. 18.

"*My enjoyment in looking forward to eternity depends in great measure on the assurance that God will be 'ALL IN ALL;' and that sin and misery will come to an end.*"—SAMUEL MINTON.

"*Be true to every inmost thought,  
And as thy thought, thy speech.*"—DEAN ALFORD.

The question, Will sin and suffering be everlasting? has been asked, and the answer of the Church has been given. Arguments against this answer have been adduced, and objections to these arguments have been examined. Some results seem to have been obtained: punishment terminating in destruction, and not immortal life in torments, appears to be the doom of the wicked. But in the term 'wicked' we have not included all who do not form part of the elect Church. Many truths of Revelation—many facts and reasonings—have led us to higher thoughts of God's purposes, and brighter hopes concerning the future destiny of myriads of our race, than those which the Church generally entertains.

Whatever may be the result of this inquiry upon the minds of others, the effect upon my own is that of a deep conviction, a most satisfactory belief, a devoutly glad and thankful assurance, that the commonly taught doctrine of 'eternal torments' is the tradition of man, and not the truth of God. Reason and Revelation alike lead me to reject it. I reject it when I contemplate the works of creation and mark the ways of providence. Evil may exist, but it is largely exceeded by good; suffering may be experienced, but there are many alleviations, and its design is evidently beneficial. Mysteries may abound; but whatever clouds and darkness may be round about Him and His ways, God by a thousand facts and analogies speaks of glorious designs and blessed results.

"*The Night is mother of the Day,  
The Winter of the Spring,  
And ever upon old Decay  
The greenest mosses cling,  
Behind the cloud the starlight lurks,  
Through showers the sunbeams fall;  
For God who loveth all His works,  
Hath left His hope with all!*"—WHITTIER.

I reject it when I observe its effects upon my own soul; it revolts

my reason ; it agonizes my heart ; it confuses my views of God ; it weakens my confidence in His government ; it lessens my love to His character.

I reject it when I ponder the revelation of Himself and His will which He has given us in His word. There He shines forth as the King of glory ; true and righteous : the God of grace ; delighting in mercy : the Father of the Lord Jesus, whom He hath sent to be 'the propitiation for our sins ; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world :' and there He speaks, proclaiming by word and deed,—“GOD IS LIGHT ; GOD IS LOVE.”

“Now unto the King of the ages, the immortal, the invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory to the ages of the ages. Amen.”

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