

THOUGHTS ON IMMORTALITY

J. C. RYLE



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Introductory Note

THE following pages contain the substance of a Sermon which I preached, by invitation, in the Nave of Peterborough Cathedral, on the Fourth Sunday in Advent, 1877,—the substance and not the precise words. The plain truth is, that the Sermon was not intended for publication. It was preached from notes, and was one of those popular addresses which will not bear close reporting. A style of language which satisfies the ear when listened to, will seldom satisfy the mind when read. On receiving a manuscript report from the publisher, I found that it would require far more labour to condense, correct, paragraph, punctuate, and prepare the Sermon for the press, than to write it out roughly from my own notes and recollection. From want of time I had no alternative but to adopt this course, or to decline publication altogether. The result is that the reader has before him the matter, order, heads, arrangement, and principal thoughts and sentences of my Sermon, but not, I repeat, the precise words. With this I hope he will be content.

The postscript which follows the Sermon is a brief attempt to throw light on a subject which is troubling the minds of some Christians in the present day. That subject is "the future state," or "state after death." Of course in a little book like this the reader must not expect to find this deep subject handled exhaustively. But I venture to think I have supplied some plain reasons why the "old paths" about the future state ought not to be lightly forsaken. I have also given the names of books in which fuller information can be obtained.

Novelties in theology are always attractive. New views, such as those now-a-days propounded about the future state, are, at first sight,

specious, plausible, and very taking. But with all respect for the advocates of newer, broader, and more liberal teachings (so-called), I see nothing in them which stands the test of calm investigation in the light of the Bible. "The old is better."

J. C. LIVERPOOL.

Palace, Liverpool,

19th April, 1883.

THOUGHTS ON IMMORTALITY

"The things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."—2 COR. 4:18.

A SUBJECT stands out on the face of this text, which is one of the most solemn and heart-searching in the Bible. That subject is eternity, or immortality.

The subject is one of which the wisest man can only take in a little. We have no eyes to see it fully, no line to fathom it, no mind to grasp it; and yet we must not refuse to consider it. There are star-depths in the heavens above us which the most powerful telescope cannot pierce; yet it is well to look into them and learn something, if we cannot learn everything. There are heights and depths about the subject of eternity which mortal man can never comprehend; but

God has spoken of it, and we have no right to turn away from it altogether.

The subject is one which we must never approach without the Bible in our hands. The moment we depart from "God's Word written," in considering eternity and the future state of man, we are likely to fall into error. In examining points like these we have nothing to do with preconceived notions as to what is God's character, and what we think God ought to be, or ought to do with man after death.* We have only to find out what is written. "What saith the Scripture? What saith the Lord?" It is wild work to tell us that we ought to have "noble thoughts about God," independent of, and over and above, Scripture. Natural religion soon comes to a standstill here. The noblest thoughts about God which we have a right to hold are the thoughts which He has been pleased to reveal to us in His "written Word."

I ask the attention of all into whose hands this sermon may fall, while I offer a few suggestive thoughts about eternity. As a mortal man I feel deeply my own insufficiency to handle this subject. But I pray that God the Holy Ghost, whose strength is made perfect in weakness, may bless the words I have written, and make them seeds of eternal life in many minds.

I

**We live in a world where all things are
temporal and passing away**

That man must be blind indeed who cannot realize this. Everything around us is decaying, dying, and coming to an end. There is a sense, no doubt, in which "matter" is eternal. Once created, it will never entirely perish. But in a popular practical sense, there is nothing undying about us except our souls. No wonder the poet says:—

"Change and decay in all around I see:

O Thou that changest not, abide with me!"

We are all "going, going, going," whether high or low, gentle or simple, rich or poor, old or young. We are all going, and shall soon be "gone."

Beauty is only temporal. Sarah was once the fairest of women, and the admiration of the Court of Egypt; yet a day came when even Abraham, her husband, said, "Let me bury my dead out of sight" (Gen. 23:4.)—Strength of body is only temporal. David was once a mighty man of valour, the slayer of the lion and the bear, and the champion of Israel against Goliath; yet a day came when even David had to be nursed and ministered to in his old age like a child.—Wisdom and power of brain are only temporal. Solomon was once a prodigy of knowledge, and all the kings of the earth came to hear his wisdom; yet even Solomon in his latter days played the fool exceedingly, and allowed his wives to turn away his heart.

Humbling and painful as these truths may sound, it is good for us to realize them and lay them to heart. The houses we live in, the homes we love, the riches we accumulate, the professions we follow, the plans we form, the relations we enter into, they are only for a time. "The things seen are temporal." "The fashion of this world passeth away." (1 Cor. 7:31.)

The thought is one which ought to rouse every one who is living only for this world. If his conscience is not utterly seared, it should stir in him great searchings of heart. Oh, take care what you are doing! Awake to see things in their true light before it be too late. The things you live for now are all temporal and passing away. The pleasures, the amusements, the recreations, the merry-makings, the profits, the earthly callings, which now absorb all your heart and drink up all your mind, will soon be over. They are poor ephemeral things which cannot last. Oh, love them not too well; grasp them not too tightly; make them not your idols! You cannot keep them, and you must leave them. Seek first the kingdom of God, and then everything else shall be added to you. "Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth." Oh, you that love the world, be wise in time! Never, never forget that it is written, "The world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." (Col. 3:2; 1 John 2:17.)

The same thought ought to cheer and comfort every true Christian. Your trials, crosses, and conflicts are all temporal. They will soon have an end; and even now they are working for you "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." (2 Cor. 4:17.) Take them patiently; bear them quietly; look upward, forward, onward, and far beyond them. Fight your daily fight under an abiding conviction that it is only for a little time, and that rest is not far off. Carry your daily cross with an abiding recollection that it is one of the "things seen" which are temporal. The cross shall soon be exchanged for a crown, and you shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God.

II

We are all going towards a world where everything is eternal

That great unseen state of existence which lies behind the grave, is for ever. Whether it be happy or miserable, whether it be a condition of joy or sorrow, in one respect it is utterly unlike this world,—it is for ever. There, at any rate, will be no change and decay, no end, no good-bye, no mornings and evenings, no alteration, no annihilation. Whatever there is beyond the tomb, when the last trumpet has sounded, and the dead are raised, will be endless, everlasting, and eternal. "The things unseen are eternal."

We cannot fully realize this condition. The contrast between now and then, between this world and the next, is so enormously great that our feeble minds will not take it in. The consequences it entails are so tremendous, that they almost take away our breath, and we shrink from looking at them. But when the Bible speaks plainly we have no right to turn away from a subject, and with the Bible in our hands we shall do well to look at the "things which are eternal."

(a) Let us settle it, then, in our minds, for one thing, that the future happiness of those who are saved is eternal. However little we may understand it, it is something which will have no end: it will never cease, never grow old, never decay, never die. At God's "right hand are pleasures for evermore." (Ps. 16:11.) Once landed in paradise, the saints of God shall go out no more. Their inheritance is "incorruptible, undefiled, and fadeth not away." They shall "receive a

crown of glory that fadeth not away." (1 Pet. 1:4; 5:4.) Their warfare is accomplished; their fight is over; their work is done. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more. They are travelling on towards an "eternal weight of glory," towards a home which shall never be broken up, a meeting without a parting, a family gathering without a separation, a day without night. Faith shall be swallowed up in sight, and hope in certainty. They shall see as they have been seen, and know as they have been known, and "be for ever with the Lord." I do not wonder that the Apostle Paul adds, "Comfort one another with these words." (1 Thess. 4:17, 18.)

(b) Let us settle it, for another thing, in our minds, that the future misery of those who are finally lost is eternal. This is an awful truth, I am aware, and flesh and blood naturally shrink from the contemplation of it. But I am one of those who believe it to be plainly revealed in Scripture, and I dare not keep it back in the pulpit. To my eyes eternal future happiness and eternal future misery appear to stand side by side. I fail to see how you can distinguish the duration of one from the duration of the other. If the joy of the believer is for ever, the sorrow of the unbeliever is also for ever. If heaven is eternal, so likewise is hell. It may be my ignorance, but I know not how the conclusion can be avoided.

I cannot reconcile the non-eternity of punishment with the language of the Bible. Its advocates talk loudly about love and charity, and say that it does not harmonize with the merciful and compassionate character of God. But what saith the Scripture? Who ever spoke such loving and merciful words as our Lord Jesus Christ? Yet His are the lips which three times over describe the consequence of impenitence and sin, as "the worm that never dies and the fire that is not quenched." He is the Person who speaks in one sentence of the wicked going away into "everlasting punishment" and the righteous

into "life eternal." (Mark 9:43-48; Matt. 25:46.)*—Who does not remember the Apostle Paul's words about charity? Yet he is the very Apostle who says, the wicked "shall be punished with everlasting destruction." (2 Thess. 1:9.)—Who does not know the spirit of love which runs through all St. John's Gospel and Epistles? Yet the beloved Apostle is the very writer in the New Testament who dwells most strongly, in the book of Revelation, on the reality and eternity of future woe. What shall we say to these things? Shall we be wise above that which is written? Shall we admit the dangerous principle that words in Scripture do not mean what they appear to mean? Is it not far better to lay our hands on our mouths and say, "Whatever God has written must be true." "Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Thy judgments." (Rev. 16:7.)

I cannot reconcile the non-eternity of punishment with the language of our Prayer-book. The very first petition in our matchless Litany contains this sentence, "From everlasting damnation, good Lord, deliver us."—The Catechism teaches every child who learns it, that whenever we repeat the Lord's Prayer we desire our Heavenly Father to "keep us from our ghostly enemy and from everlasting death."—Even in our Burial Service we pray at the grave side, "Deliver us not into the bitter pains of eternal death."—Once more I ask, "What shall we say to these things?" Shall we teach our congregations that even when people live and die in sin we may hope for their happiness in a remote future? Surely the common sense of many of our worshippers would reply, that if this is the case Prayer-book words mean nothing at all.

I lay no claim to any peculiar knowledge of Scripture. I feel daily that I am no more infallible than the Bishop of Rome. But I must speak according to the light which God has given to me; and I do not think I should do my duty if I did not raise a warning voice on this subject,

and try to put Christians on their guard. Six thousand years ago sin entered into the world by the devil's daring falsehood,—“Ye shall not surely die.” (Gen. 3:4.) At the end of six thousand years the great enemy of mankind is still using his old weapon, and trying to persuade men that they may live and die in sin, and yet at some distant period may be finally saved. Let us not be ignorant of his devices. Let us walk steadily in the old paths. Let us hold fast the old truth, and believe that as the happiness of the saved is eternal, so also is the misery of the lost*

(a) Let us hold it fast in the interest of the whole system of revealed religion. What was the use of God's Son becoming incarnate, agonizing in Gethsemane, and dying on the cross to make atonement, if men can be finally saved without believing on Him? Where is the slightest proof that saving faith in Christ's blood can ever begin after death? Where is the need of the Holy Ghost, if sinners are at last to enter heaven without conversion and renewal of heart? Where can we find the smallest evidence that any one can be born again, and have a new heart, if he dies in an unregenerate state? If a man may escape eternal punishment at last, without faith in the blood of Christ or sanctification of the Spirit, sin is no longer an infinite evil, and there was no need for Christ making an atonement.

(b) Let us hold it fast for the sake of holiness and morality. I can imagine nothing so pleasant to flesh and blood as the specious theory that we may live in sin, and yet escape eternal perdition; and that although we “serve divers lusts and pleasures” while we are here, we shall somehow or other all get to heaven hereafter! Only tell the young man who is “wasting his substance in riotous living,” that there is heaven at last, or, at any rate, no eternal punishment, even for those who live and die in sin, and he is never likely to turn from

evil. Why should he repent and take up the cross, if he can get to heaven at last, or escape punishment, without trouble?*

(c) Finally, let us hold it fast, for the sake of the common hopes of all God's saints. Let us distinctly understand that every blow struck at the eternity of punishment is an equally heavy blow at the eternity of reward. It is impossible to separate the two things. No ingenious theological definition can divide them. They stand or fall together. The same language is used, the same figures of speech are employed, when the Bible speaks about either condition. Every attack on the duration of hell is also an attack on the duration of heaven.* It is a deep and true saying, "With the sinner's fear our hope departs."

I turn from this part of my subject with a deep sense of its painfulness. I feel strongly with Robert M'Cheyne, that "it is a hard subject to handle lovingly." But I turn from it with an equally deep conviction that if we believe the Bible we must never give up anything which it contains. From hard, austere, and unmerciful theology, good Lord, deliver us! If men are not saved it is because they "will not come to Christ." (John 5:40.) But we must not be wise above that which is written. No morbid love of liberality, so called, must induce us to reject anything which God has revealed about eternity. Men sometimes talk exclusively about God's mercy and love and compassion, as if He had no other attributes, and leave out of sight entirely His holiness and His purity, His justice and His unchangeableness, and His hatred of sin. Let us beware of falling into this delusion. It is a growing evil in these latter days. Low and inadequate views of the unutterable vileness and filthiness of sin, and of the unutterable purity of the eternal God, are fertile sources of error about man's future state. Let us think of the mighty Being with whom we have to do, as He Himself declared His character to Moses, saying, "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious,

longsuffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin." But let us not forget the solemn clause which concludes the sentence: "And that will by no means clear the guilty." (Exod. 34:6, 7.) Unrepented sin is an eternal evil, and can never cease to be sin; and He with whom we have to do is an eternal God.

The words of Psalm 145 are strikingly beautiful: "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.—The Lord upholdeth all that fall, and raiseth up all those that be bowed down.—The Lord is righteous in all His ways, and holy in all His works. The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon Him, to all that call upon Him in truth.—The Lord preserveth all them that love Him." Nothing can exceed the mercifulness of this language! But what a striking fact it is that the passage goes on to add the following solemn conclusion, "All the wicked will He destroy" (Psalm 145:8–20.)

III

Our State in the unseen World of Eternity depends entirely on what we are in time

THE life that we live upon earth is short at the very best, and soon gone. "We spend our days as a tale that is told."—"What is our life? It

is a vapour: so soon passeth it away, and we are gone." (Psalm 90:9; James 4:14.) The life that is before us when we leave this world is an endless eternity, a sea without a bottom, and an ocean without a shore. "One day in Thy sight," eternal God, "is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." (2 Pet. 3:8.) In that world time shall be no more.—But short as our life is here, and endless as it will be hereafter, It is a tremendous thought that eternity hinges upon time. Our lot after death depends, humanly speaking, on what we are while we are alive. It is written, God "will render to every man according to his deeds: to them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: but to them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation, and wrath." (Rom. 2:6, 7.)

We ought never to forget that we are all, while we live, in a state of probation. We are constantly sowing seeds which will spring up and bear fruit, every day and hour in our lives. There are eternal consequences resulting from all our thoughts and words and actions, of which we take far too little account. "For every idle word that men speak they shall give account in the day of judgment." (Matt. 12:36.) Our thoughts are all numbered, our actions are weighed. No wonder that St. Paul says, "He that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." (Gal. 6:8.) In a word, what we sow in life we shall reap after death, and reap to all eternity.

There is no greater delusion than the common idea that it is possible to live wickedly, and yet rise again gloriously; to be without religion in this world, and yet to be a saint in the next. When the famous Whitefield revived the doctrine of conversion last century, it is reported that one of his hearers came to him after a sermon and said,—"It is all quite true, sir. I hope I shall be converted and born again

one day, but not till after I am dead." I fear there are many like him. I fear the false doctrine of the Romish purgatory has many secret friends even within the pale of the Church of England! However carelessly men may go on while they live, they secretly cling to the hope that they shall be found among the saints when they die. They seem to hug the idea that there is some cleansing, purifying effect produced by death, and that, whatever they may be in this life, they shall be found "meet for the inheritance of the saints" in the life to come. But it is all a delusion.*

"Life is the time to serve the Lord,

The time to insure the great reward."

The Bible teaches plainly, that as we die, whether converted or unconverted, whether believers or unbelievers, whether godly or ungodly, so shall we rise again when the last trumpet sounds. There is no repentance in the grave: there is no conversion after the last breath is drawn. Now is the time to believe on Christ, and to lay hold on eternal life. Now is the time to turn from darkness unto light, and to make our calling and election sure. The night cometh when no man can work. As the tree falls, there it will lie. If we leave this world impenitent and unbelieving, we shall rise the same in the resurrection morning, and find it had been "good for us if we had never been born." (Mark 14:21.)*

I charge every reader of this paper to remember this, and to make a good use of time. Regard it as the stuff of which life is made, and never waste it or throw it away. Your hours and days and weeks and months and years have all something to say to an eternal condition beyond the grave. What you sow in life that now is you are sure to reap in a life to come. As holy Baxter says, it is "now or never." Whatever we do in religion must be done now.

Remember this in your use of all the means of grace, from the least to the greatest. Never be careless about them. They are given to be your helps toward an eternal world, and not one of them ought to be thoughtlessly treated or lightly and irreverently handled. Your daily prayers and Bible-reading, your weekly behaviour on the Lord's day, your manner of going through public worship,—all, all these things are important. Use them all as one who remembers eternity.

Remember it, not least, whenever you are tempted to do evil. When sinners entice you, and say, "It is only a little one,"—when Satan whispers in your heart, "Never mind: where is the mighty harm? Everybody does so,"—then look beyond time to a world unseen, and place in the face of the temptation the thought of eternity. There is a grand saying recorded of the martyred Reformer, Bishop Hooper, when one urged him to recant before he was burned, saying, "Life is sweet and death is bitter." "True," said the good bishop, "quite true! But eternal life is more sweet, and eternal death is more bitter."

IV

**The Lord Jesus Christ is the great friend
to whom we must look for help, both for
time and eternity**

The purpose for which the eternal Son of God came into the world can never be declared too fully, or proclaimed too loudly. He came to give us hope and peace while we live among the "things seen, which are temporal," and glory and blessedness when we go into the "things unseen, which are eternal." He came to "bring life and immortality to light," and to "deliver those who, through fear of death, were all their life-time subject to bondage." (2 Tim. 1:10; Heb. 2:15.) He saw our lost and bankrupt condition, and had compassion on us. And now, blessed be His name, a mortal man may pass through things temporal with comfort, and look forward to things eternal without fear.

These mighty privileges our Lord Jesus Christ has purchased for us at the cost of His own precious blood. He became our Substitute, and bore our sins in His own body on the cross, and then rose again for our justification. He suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us unto God. He was made sin for us who knew no sin, that we poor sinful creatures might have pardon and justification while we live, and glory and blessedness when we die. (1 Pet 2:24; 3:18; 2 Cor. 5:21.)

And all that our Lord Jesus Christ has purchased for us He offers freely to every one who will turn from his sins, come to Him, and believe. "I am the light of the world," He says: "he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."—"Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"—"If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink."—"Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out"—And the terms are as simple as the offer is free: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." "Whosoever believeth on Him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 8:12; Matt. 11:28; John 7:37; 6:37; Acts 16:31; John 3:16.)

He that has Christ, has life. He can look round him on the "things temporal," and see change and decay on every side without dismay. He has got treasure in heaven, which neither rust nor moth can corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal.—He can look forward to the "things eternal," and feel calm and composed. His Saviour has risen, and gone to prepare a place for him. When he leaves this world he shall have a crown of glory, and be for ever with his Lord.—He can look down even into the grave, as the wisest Greeks and Romans could never do, and say, "Oh, death, where is thy sting? oh, grave, where is thy victory? oh, eternity, where are thy terrors?" (1 Cor. 15:55.)

Let us all settle it firmly in our minds that the only way to pass through "things seen" with comfort, and look forward to "things unseen" without fear, is to have Christ for our Saviour and Friend, to lay hold on Christ by faith, to become one with Christ and Christ in us, and while we live in the flesh to live the life of faith in the Son of God. (Gal. 2:20.) How vast is the difference between the state of him who has faith in Christ, and the state of him who has none! Blessed indeed is that man or woman who can say, with truth, "I trust in Jesus: I believe." When Cardinal Beaufort lay upon his deathbed, our mighty poet, Shakspear, describes King Henry as saying, "He dies, but gives no sign." When John Knox, the Scotch Reformer, was drawing to his end, and unable to speak, a faithful servant asked him to give some proof that the Gospel he had preached in life gave him comfort in death, by raising his hand. He heard; and raised his hand toward heaven three times, and then departed. Blessed, I say again, is he that believes! He alone is rich, independent, and beyond the reach of harm. If you and I have no comfort amidst things temporal, and no hope for the things eternal, the fault is all our own. It is because we "will not come to Christ, that we may have life." (John 5:40.)

I leave the subject of eternity here, and pray that God may bless it to many souls. You and I have looked each other in the face perhaps for the first time, and probably for the last time, in our lives. But when and where shall we meet again? Before we part, and perhaps for ever, I offer a word of friendly exhortation. I offer to every one within these old Cathedral walls to-night some food for thought, and matter for self-examination.

(1) First of all, how are you using your time? Life is short and very uncertain. You never know what a day may bring forth. Business and pleasure, money-getting and money-spending, eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage,—all, all will soon be over and done with for ever. And you, what are you doing for your immortal soul? Are you wasting time, or turning it to good account? Are you preparing to meet God?

(2) Secondly, where shall you be in eternity? It is coming, coming, coming very fast upon us. You are going, going, going very fast into it. But where will you be? On the right hand or on the left in the day of judgment? Among the lost or among the saved? Oh, rest not, rest not till your soul is insured! Make sure work: leave nothing uncertain. It is a fearful thing to die unprepared, and fall into the hands of the living God.

(3) Thirdly, would you be safe for time and eternity? Then seek Christ, and believe in Him, Come to Him just as you are. Seek Him while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. There is still a throne of grace. It is not too late. Christ waits to be gracious: He invites you to come to Him. Before the door is shut and the judgment begins, repent, believe, and be saved.

(4) Lastly, would you be happy? Cling to Christ, and live the life of faith in Him. Abide in Him, and live near to Him. Follow Him with

heart and soul and mind and strength, and seek to know Him better every day. So doing you shall have great peace while you pass through "things temporal," and in the midst of a dying world shall "never die." (John 11:26.) So doing, you shall be able to look forward to "things eternal" with unfailing confidence, and to feel and "know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle be dissolved we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." (2 Cor. 5:1.)

V

Eternal Hope

SINCE preaching the above Sermon I have read Canon Farrar's volume, "Eternal Hope." With much that this book contains I cannot at all agree. Anything that comes from the pen of such a well-known writer of course deserves respectful consideration. But I must honestly confess, after reading "Eternal Hope," that I see no reason to withdraw anything I have said in my Sermon on "Eternity," and that I laid down the volume with regret and dissatisfaction, unconvinced and unshaken in my opinions.

I can find nothing new in Canon Farrar's statements. He says hardly anything that has not been said before, and refuted before. To all who wish to examine fully the subject of the reality and eternity of future punishment I venture to recommend four works which are far less known than they ought to be, and which appear to me far sounder, and more Scriptural, than "Eternal Hope." One is

"Horbery's Enquiry into the Scripture Doctrine of the Duration of Future Punishment." The second is "Girdlestone's Dies Iræ." The third is "Childe's Unsafe Anchor." The fourth is a volume of American Essays by various writers on the "Future Life." No one of these books has ever been answered, and I venture to think they never will be. "Bishop Pearson on the Creed," under the head "Resurrection," and "Everlasting Life," will also repay a careful perusal."

The plain truth is, that there are vast difficulties bound up with the subject of the future state of the wicked, which Canon Farrar seems to me to leave entirely untouched. The amazing mercifulness of God, and the awfulness of supposing that many around us will be lost eternally, he has handled fully and with characteristic rhetoric. No doubt the compassions of God are unspeakable. He is not willing that any should perish. He would have all men to be saved. His love in sending Christ into the world to die for sinners is an inexhaustible subject. But this is only one side of God's character, as we have it revealed in Scripture. His character and attributes need to be looked at all round. The infinite holiness and justice of an eternal God,—His hatred of evil, manifested in Noah's flood and at Sodom, and in the destruction of the seven nations of Canaan,—the unspeakable vileness and guilt of sin in God's sight,—the wide gulf between natural man and his perfect Maker,—the enormous spiritual change which every child of Adam must go through, if he is to dwell for ever in God's presence,—and the utter absence of any intimation in the Bible that this change can take place after death,—all, all these are points which seem to me comparatively put on one side or left alone in Canon Farrar's volume. My mind demands satisfaction on these points before I can accept the views advocated in "Eternal Hope," and that satisfaction I fail to find in the book.

The position that Canon Farrar has taken up was first formally advocated by Origen, a Father who lived in the third century after Christ. He boldly broached the opinion that future punishment would be only temporary; but his opinion was rejected by almost all his contemporaries. Bishop Wordsworth says,— "The Fathers of the Church in Origen's time and in the following centuries, among whom were many to whom the original language of the New Testament was their mother tongue, and who could not be misled by translations, examined minutely the opinion and statements of Origen, and agreed for the most part in rejecting and condemning them. Irenæus, Cyril of Jerusalem, Chrysostom, Basil, Cyril of Alexandria, and others of the Eastern Church, and Tertullian, Cyprian, Lactantius, Augustine, Gregory the Great, Bede, and many more of the Western Church, were unanimous in teaching that the joys of the righteous and the punishments of the wicked will not be temporary, but everlasting."

"Nor was this all. The Fifth General Council, held at Constantinople under the Emperor Justinian, in 553, examined the tenets of Origen, and passed a synodical decree condemnatory of them. And for a thousand years after that time there was an unanimous consent in Christendom in this sense." (Bishop Wordsworth's "Sermons on future rewards," etc., p. 34.)

Let me add to this statement the fact that the eternity of future punishment has been held by almost all theologians from the time of the Reformation down to the present day. It is a point on which Lutherans, Calvinists, and Arminians, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and Independents have always, with a few exceptions, been of one mind. Search the writings of the most eminent and learned Reformers, search the works of the Puritans, search the few literary remains of the men who revived English Christianity in the

eighteenth century, and, as a rule, you will always get one harmonious answer. Within the last few years, no doubt, the "non-eternity" of future punishment has found several zealous advocates. But up to a comparatively modern date, I unhesitatingly assert, the supporters of Canon Farrar's views have always been an extremely small minority among orthodox Christians. This fact is, at any rate, worth remembering.

As to the difficulties besetting the old, or common, view of future punishment, I admit their existence, and I do not pretend to explain them. But I always expect to find many mysteries in revealed religion, and I am not stumbled by them. I see other difficulties in the world which I cannot solve, and I am content to wait for their solution. What a mighty divine has called, "The mystery of God, the great mystery of His suffering vice and confusion to prevail,"—the origin of evil,—the permission of cruelty, oppression, poverty, and disease,—the allowed sickness and death of infants before they know good from evil,—the future prospects of the heathen who never heard the Gospel,—the state of China, Hindostan, and Central Africa, for the last 1800 years,—all these things are to my mind great knots which I am unable to untie, and depths which I have no line to fathom. But I wait for light, and I have no doubt all will be made plain. I rest in the thought that God is a Being of infinite wisdom, and is doing all things well. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. 18:25.) It is a wise sentence of Bishop Butler: "All shadow of injustice, and indeed all harsh appearances in the various economy of God, would be lost, if we would keep in mind that every merciful allowance shall be made, and no more shall be required of any one, than what might have been equitably expected of him from the circumstances in which he was placed, and not what might have been expected from him had he been placed in other circumstances." ("Analogy," part ii. ch. vi. p. 425. Wilson's edition.) It is a grand

saying of Elihu, in Job: "Touching the Almighty, we cannot find Him out: He is excellent in power, and in judgment, and in plenty of justice: He will not afflict." (Job 37:23.)

It may be perfectly true that many Romish divines, and even some Protestants, have made extravagant and offensive statements about the bodily sufferings of the lost in another world. It may be true that those who believe in eternal punishment have occasionally misunderstood or mistranslated texts, and have pressed figurative language too far. But it is hardly fair to make Christianity responsible for the mistakes of its advocates. It is an old saying that "Christian errors are infidel arguments." Thomas Aquinas, and Dante, and Milton, and Boston, and Jonathan Edwards were not inspired and infallible, and I decline to be answerable for all they may have written about the state of the lost. But after every allowance, admission, and deduction, there remains, in my humble opinion, a mass of Scripture evidence in support of the doctrine of eternal punishment, which can never be explained away, and which no revision or new translation of the English Bible will ever overthrow.*

That there are degrees of misery as well as degrees of glory in the future state, that the condition of some who are lost will be far worse than that of others, all this is undeniable. But that the punishment of the wicked will ever have an end, or that length of time alone can ever change a heart, or that the Holy Spirit ever works on the dead, or that there is any purging, purifying process beyond the grave, by which the wicked will be finally fitted for heaven, these are positions which I maintain it is utterly impossible to prove by texts of Scripture. Nay, rather there are texts of Scripture which teach an utterly different doctrine. "It is surprising," says Horbery, "if hell be such a state of purification, that it should always be represented in Scripture as a place of punishment." (Vol. ii. p. 223.) "Nothing," says

Girdlestone, "but clear statements of Scripture could justify us in holding, or preaching to ungodly men, the doctrine of repentance after death; and not one clear statement on this subject is to be found." ("Dies Iræ," p. 269.) If we once begin to invent doctrines which we cannot prove by texts, or to refuse the evidence of texts in Scripture because they land us in conclusions we do not like, we may as well throw aside the Bible altogether, and discard it as the judge of controversy!

The argument of some, that no religious doctrine can be true which is rejected by the "common opinion" and popular feeling of mankind,—that any texts which contradict this common popular feeling must be wrongly interpreted,—and that therefore eternal punishment cannot be true, because the inward feeling of the multitude revolts against it,—this argument appears to me alike dangerous and unsound. It is dangerous, because it strikes a direct blow at the authority of Scripture as the only rule of faith. Where is the use of the Bible, if the "common opinion" of mortal man is to be regarded as of more weight than the declarations of God's Word?—It is unsound, because it ignores the great fundamental principle of Christianity,—that man is a fallen creature, with a corrupt heart and understanding, and that in spiritual things his judgment is worthless. There is a vail over our hearts. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him." (1 Cor. 2:14.) To say, in the face of such a text, that any doctrine which the majority of men dislike, such as eternal punishment, must therefore be untrue, is simply absurd! The "common opinion" is more likely to be wrong than right. No doubt Bishop Butler has said, "If in revelation there be found any passage the seeming meaning of which is contrary to natural religion, we may most certainly conclude such seeming meaning not to be the real one." But those who triumphantly quote these words would do well to observe the

sentence which immediately follows: "But it is not any degree of a presumption against an interpretation of Scripture, that such an interpretation contains a doctrine which the light of nature cannot discover." ("Analogy," part i. chap. ii. p. 358. Wilson's edition.)

After all, what the "common feeling" or opinion of the majority of mankind is about the duration of future punishment, is a question which admits of much doubt. Of course we have no means of ascertaining: and it signifies little either way. In such a matter the only point is, What saith the Scripture? But I have a strong suspicion, if the world could be polled, that we should find the greater part of mankind believed in eternal punishment! About the opinion of the Greeks and Romans at any rate there can be little dispute. If anything is clearly taught in the stories of their mythology it is the endless nature of the sufferings of the wicked. Bishop Butler says, "Gentile writers, both moralist and poetic, speak of the future punishment of the wicked, both as to duration and degree, in a like manner of expression and description as the Scripture does." ("Analogy," part i. ch. ii. p. 218.) The strange and weird legends of Tantalus, Sisyphus, Ixion, Prometheus, and the Danaides, have all one common feature about them. In each case the punishment is eternal! This is a fact worth noticing. It is worth what it is worth. But it shows, at all events, that the opponents of eternal punishment should not talk too confidently about the "common opinion of mankind."

The doctrine of the Annihilation of the Wicked as soon as they die, to which many adhere, appears to me so utterly irreconcilable with our Lord Jesus Christ's words about "the resurrection of damnation," and St. Paul's words, "There shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust" (John 5:29; Acts 24:14), that until those words

can be proved to form no part of inspired Scripture it seems to me mere waste of time to argue about it.

The favourite argument of the advocates of this doctrine, that "death, dying, perishing, destruction," and the like, are phrases which can only mean "cessation of existence," is scarcely worth noticing. Every Bible reader knows that God said to Adam, concerning the forbidden fruit, "In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." (Gen. 2:17.) But every well-taught Sunday Scholar knows that Adam did not "cease to exist," when he broke the commandment. He died spiritually, but he did not cease to be!—So also St. Peter says of the flood: "The world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished." (2 Peter 3:6.) Yet it certainly did not cease to be; and when the water was dried up Noah lived on it again.

The argument that the words "eternal and everlasting" in Scripture do not always mean "endless," and that consequently "everlasting punishment" does not mean "endless punishment," is one which will not bear calm investigation. No doubt such expressions as "everlasting," when applied to physical subjects, such as the hills, denote nothing more than the comparative stability and antiquity of mountains on the face of the globe. But it is equally certain that when God and His dealings with man's soul are the subject eternity always denotes a really endless eternity. The New Testament, at all events, supplies unanswerable evidence on the point. In our authorized version the same Greek word is forty-two times translated "eternal," and twenty-four times "everlasting." In forty-three places it is applied to the "endless" life of glory which is promised to believers. In six places it is applied to the future state of the impenitent and unbelieving. But in these six places there is not the slightest symptom of a proof that the word means anything else than what it means in every other passage in the New Testament where it occurs.

In short, from the beginning of Matthew down to the end of Revelation, the word can only bear one meaning. Whether applied to "God," or to the "Spirit," or to redemption, or consolation, or glory, or punishment, or fire, it can only bear one interpretation. It always signifies that which has no end.

VI

Conditional Immortality

THERE is another doctrine, however, about the future state, which has lately found great favour in some quarters, and requires more attention because more specious and plausible than the doctrine of ultimate universal annihilation. The doctrine I have in view, if I understand it rightly, amounts to this. "Immortality, in its fullest sense, is the peculiar privilege of the believer. His happiness after death is really and literally eternal. But the misery of those who die in sin will not be eternal. It will cease after a certain period, though that period may be fearfully long, and then will come a state of non-existence, or unconsciousness, like the future state of the Buddhist." The advocates of this modern theory contend that the endless existence of beings in suffering is irreconcilable with the character of a loving and merciful God.

Now, it would be easy to reply that mortal man is a very poor judge of what is suitable to the character of God, or what is inconsistent with it. Man's ideas of the enormous sinfulness of sin in the sight of God, and of the unutterable holiness and purity of God, are sure to be thoroughly inadequate and defective. No duration of countless

ages will ever make sin anything but an unspeakable evil before the Being with whom we have to do. Millions of years of misery could never satisfy that breach of God's law for which the blood of Jesus Christ, the Eternal Son of God, was needed to provide atonement. It is the blood, and not length of time that alone exhausts the sinfulness of sin. But I do not wish to dwell on this point. I prefer resting on God's Word.

I say, then, unhesitatingly that the alleged distinction between the duration of the future blessedness of the godly, and the future misery of the ungodly, is a distinction which cannot be proved from the Bible. You cannot teach the distinction without striking a deadly blow at the prospects of the believer beyond the grave. The language of Scripture about the duration of the future state of both classes is one and the same. You cannot limit or shorten one state without equally limiting or shortening the other.

What says the prophet Daniel: "Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." (Dan. 12:2.)

What says our Lord Jesus Christ? "These shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal." (Matt. 25:46.)

These two texts alone seem to me conclusive and unanswerable. In each case the Hebrew and Greek words describing the two states are precisely the same. The future happiness of the saved, and the future misery of the lost are declared to be alike in point of duration. If one is to come to an end so also is the other; if the "life" is endless so also is the shame and the punishment. To my eyes both appear equally interminable, everlasting, and eternal.

Where is the Christian who would not be shocked at the idea of a life of blessedness after death which was one day to cease and come to an end? What Bible-reading believer does not cling to the idea, that after this world of change and decay there will be a world without change? What holy man or woman, in the midst of partings, crosses, separations, sicknesses, and deaths, does not rejoice in the thought of a kingdom incorruptible, a crown that fadeth not away, a meeting without a parting, a gathering without a separation, a life without death? And why? Simply because these are things which are promised a hundred times in God's written Word.

All this wealth of hope must be given up and thrown overboard if we once admit the modern theories of some about the world to come. The future crown is to fade away! The future meeting is to be broken up! The future glory is to set! The future life is to be exchanged for extinction or unconsciousness! Most wretched and miserable prospect! But there is no alternative if words have any meaning at all, on the principle of some modern teachers. Once grant that everlasting punishment is to have an end, and by parity of reasoning you must grant that there is an end of everlasting life. Once overthrow the truth of an everlasting hell, and you cannot maintain the truth of an everlasting heaven. They stand or fall together.

It is a deep saying of Gregory the Great, quoted by Bishop Pearson, "If that which God has THREATENED is not true, then that which He has PROMISED is also not true." In short, to use the Bishop's own words, "The condition of the lost is unalterable, their condemnation is irreversible, their torments inevitable, their miseries eternal. As they shall not be taken from their punishment by annihilation of themselves, so the punishment shall not be taken off them by any compassion."

"Their persons shall continue for ever in this remediless condition, under an everlasting pain of loss, because there is no hope of heaven, —and under an everlasting pain of sense, because there is no means to appease the wrath of God which abideth on them." (Pearson on the Creed, vol. i. p. 467.)

The common reasoning of some advocates of this view, that it is shocking to suppose God calls so many beings into existence, who shall finally come to everlasting misery, was long ago so wisely answered by Bishop Butler, that I shall content myself by quoting his words.

In the fifth chapter of the first part of his analogy, the Bishop observes,—

"That the present world does not actually become a state of moral discipline to many, even to the generality,—i.e., that they do not improve or grow better in it—cannot be urged as a proof that it was not intended for moral discipline by any who at all observe the analogy of nature. For of the numerous seeds of vegetables, and bodies of animals, which are adapted, and put in the way to improve to such a point or state of natural maturity and perfection, we do not see perhaps that one in a million actually does. For the greatest part of them decay before they are improved to it, and appear to be absolutely destroyed. Yet no one, who does not deny all final causes, will deny that those seeds and bodies which do attain to that point of maturity and perfection, answer the end for which they were really designed by nature; and, therefore, that nature designed them for such perfection.

"And I cannot forbear adding, though it is not to the present purpose, that the appearance of such an amazing waste in nature, with respect to these seeds and bodies, by foreign causes, is to us as

unaccountable as—what is much more terrible—the present and future ruin of so many moral agents, by themselves,—i.e., by vice."

I will now conclude this lengthened postscript with a passage from a work I sent forth twenty-five years ago, which many readers of this paper have probably not seen. A quarter of a century has passed away since I wrote the passage, and many "times have passed over me." I hope I am wiser in many ways. I have stood by many graves, shed many tears, carried many crosses, spoken with many Christians, and read many books. But I see no reason to alter any of the opinions which the following paragraphs contain, or to withdraw from the position I took up.

... "Let others hold their peace about hell if they will;—I dare not do so. I see it plainly in Scripture, and I must speak of it. I fear that thousands are on the broad way that leads to it, and I would fain arouse them to a sense of the peril before them. What would you say of the man who saw his neighbour's house in danger of being burned down, and never raised the cry of 'Fire'? What ought to be said of us as ministers, if we call ourselves watchmen for souls, and yet see the fires of hell raging in the distance, and never give the alarm? Call it bad taste, if you like, to speak of hell. Call it charity to make things pleasant, and speak smoothly, and soothe men with a constant lullaby of peace. From such notions of taste and charity may I ever be delivered! My notion of charity is to warn men plainly of danger. My notion of taste in the ministerial office is to declare all the counsel of God. If I never spoke of hell, I should think I had kept back something that was profitable, and should look on myself as an accomplice of the devil."

"Reader, I beseech you, in all tender affection, beware of false views of the subject on which I have been dwelling. Beware of new and

strange doctrines about hell and the eternity of punishment. Beware of manufacturing a God of your own,—a God who is all mercy, but not just,—a God who is all love, but not holy,—a God who has a heaven for everybody, but a hell for none,—a God who can allow good and bad to be side by side in time, but will make no distinction between good and bad in eternity. Such a God is an idol of your own, as really as Jupiter or the monstrous image of Juggernaut,—as true an idol as any snake or crocodile in an Egyptian temple,—as true an idol as was ever moulded out of brass or clay. The hands of your own fancy and sentimentality have made him. He is not the God of the Bible, and beside the God of the Bible there is no God at all. Your heaven would be no heaven at all. A heaven containing all sorts of characters mixed together indiscriminately would be miserable discord indeed. Alas for the eternity of such a heaven! There would be little difference between it and hell. Ah, reader, there is a hell! There is a fire for the chaff as well as a garner for the wheat! Take heed lest you find it out to your cost too late."

"Beware of being wise about that which is written. Beware of forming fanciful theories of your own, and then trying to make the Bible square in with them. Beware of making selections from your Bible to suit your taste,—refusing, like a spoilt child, whatever you think bitter,—seizing, like a spoilt child, whatever you think sweet. What is all this but taking Jehoiakim's penknife and cutting God's Word to pieces? What does it amount to but telling God that you, a poor short-lived worm, know what is good for you better than He? It will not do: it will not do. You must take the Bible as it is. You must read it all, and believe it all. You must come to the reading of it in the spirit of a little child. Dare not to say, 'I believe this verse, for I like it. I reject that, for I do not like it. I receive this, for I can understand it. I refuse that, for I cannot reconcile it with my views.' Nay, but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?' By what right do you

talk in this way? Surely it were better to say over every chapter in the Word, 'Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth.'—Ah, reader, if men would do this, they would never try to throw overboard the doctrine of the eternal punishment of the wicked." ("Wheat or Chaff?" Wm. Hunt and Co.)

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