

to us seems evil, as well as good, is a part of the constitution of the universe. To fathom the mystery of the universe—that is, the mystery of existence—we cannot hope. Of eternity and infinity we can form no notion: we can think of them only as time and space extended without limit,—a conception which involves a metaphysical absurdity, since space and time we must always think of as divisible into parts, while of infinity or eternity there can be no division. The thought of eternal existence, even of a life of eternal happiness, if we dwell upon it, turns the brain giddy: it is a sort of mental torture to dwell upon the idea.

The doctrine of a future life, with rewards for the good and punishment for the wicked, as we all know, pervades the New Testament. That this world is evil, and Christians must look forward to a better world, is the teaching of the founder of Christianity and of all Christian Churches. It could not fail to be fostered by the state of the world, and especially of the subject provinces under the Roman Empire. The Christian martyrdoms are a signal testimony to the same belief. Yet the doctrine can hardly be said to be so distinctly stated in the New Testament as its overwhelming importance might have led us to expect. It is, in fact, rather assumed than stated. The passages concerning it are rather homiletic than dogmatic; they are enforcements of the infinite blessedness of piety and goodness, of the infinite curse attending wickedness, rather than enunciations of an article for a creed. Nor is anything explicitly said as to the manner in which the mortal is to put on immortality, or as to the state and occupations of the blessed in the next world. White robes, harps, palm branches, a city of gold and jewels, are not spiritual; they must be taken as material imagery; taken literally, they provoke the derision of the sceptic.

Difficulties crowd upon us and severely tax the exegetical resources of Dr. Salmond. A sudden and absolute change of nature is contrary to all our experience, which would lead us to believe that gradual progress is the law. The disproportion of eternal rewards and punishments to the merits or sins of man's short life is profoundly repugnant to our moral sense. When we take in the cases of children, of savages, and of the hapless offspring of the slums, of the heathen who have never heard the Word, the difficulty is immensely increased.

In all the churches there is now a revolt against the belief in eternal fire, which, nevertheless, if the Gospel is to be taken literally, it would seem impossible to avoid. Such a belief, in fact, can hardly be thought ever to have gained a practical hold on the mind; if it had, it would