

THE FUTURE LIFE.—THE OTHER SIDE.

"He's a bad surgeon that for pity spares
That part corrupted, till the gangrene spread,
And all the body perish. He that's merciful
Unto the bad, is cruel to the good."

I have read with some degree of care the series of articles on "The Future Life," signed "Christian," and although he has a plausible and clever way of putting things, I can hardly think that he has made out a good case. It seems to me that he entirely ignores the atonement of Christ, and the influence of the Holy Spirit in the conversion and salvation of men, and substitutes pain and punishment. I think, too, that he is in error when he intimates that pain is always remedial and corrective, and that it is inflicted solely for the moral improvement of the person punished. It is a well known fact that imprisonment rarely improves the character, but on the contrary invariably makes those who are bad still worse. There are those in our penitentiaries who are imprisoned for life, not indeed for their own sake, nor in any hope that they will be improved by it, but as a penalty due to their crimes, in the interests of justice, and for the good of the community outside the walls of their prison. Several years ago in one of the Western States, out of false sympathy for evil doers, they abrogated the law of capital punishment; but time has shown that it was a serious mistake, for since then crime has increased to such a fearful extent, that only a week or two ago they declared that the reputation and safety of the State rendered a return to the old law of capital punishment a necessity. We see the same thing in connection with the divine government. "The angels that kept not their first estate are confined in chains and darkness" until the judgment. According to the Scriptures they have now been suffering nearly six thousand years, and without, as far as we know, having had any offer of mercy. The Holy Scriptures are entirely silent about their future, except that we are informed that they will be, at the end of the present dispensation, "cast into the lake of fire." So we see from these examples that pain and punishment are not always remedial or corrective; neither is punishment inflicted mainly for the personal good or improvement of those who are punished. Let it be observed that the foregoing examples in proof are taken from both worlds—men and angels. Men are often called to endure much suffering in the present life, in addition to innumerable calls of Providence and grace, and yet they remain obstinate and wicked, and die in that condition. Is it, then, at all probable that any lengthened period of suffering in the life to come would produce true penitence, and so purify the soul as to fit it for a pure heaven? If men abuse God's mercy in this world, and obstinately refuse to be saved, how can they reasonably or justly hope to be saved in the next? To me the indulgence of such a hope while living and dying in sin seems selfish, mean and presumptuous. "The divine word," reason and justice, all appear to be directly against such a doctrine. "Christian" on this point reasons well, and in a christian spirit, and I think he says about all that can be said on that side, but I could like to have seen more scripture proof, for it is by that alone that this solemn question must be decided. Unless his position and doctrine can be sustained by the Word of God, plausible reasoning stands for but little, and it is just here that I think he fails.

That sinners dying impenitent are lost, and that for them "there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin," has been a doctrine held by the Church and taught by the most pious and learned of her teachers for centuries, will scarcely be disputed. That of itself is a somewhat strong proof that the doctrine is scriptural and true, for where there is so much piety and learning, there is at least the probability that truth is on their side. To those who are not "spoiled by vain philosophy," the language of the New Testament is sufficiently plain. On a point so solemn, relating to the everlasting destiny of multitudes of the human race, is it at all likely that the all-wise and beneficent Creator would speak so as to leave any possibility of being misunderstood? Take our Lord's most pointed words on this awful subject. "These shall go away into *everlasting punishment*." Take also those other weighty words of His, "He that believeth not the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." Now suppose you put the New Testament in the hands of a plain man, and his eyes fall upon these words for the first time. What opinion, may I ask, would he be likely to form with regard to the duration of the punishment of the wicked after death? Would he get the idea of an "indefinite period" or "final restoration" from these words of our Lord? Would he not as he closed the Book say to himself, Why, this Book teaches that there will be no end to the punishment of the wicked. It is generally agreed, I believe, that the plain, obvious sense of a passage is the true one; according to this rule, any common reader of the New Testament, or of our Lord's words, could come to no other conclusion than that the wicked "shall go away into everlasting punishment." It should be remembered that the Holy Scriptures were written not for the few but the many, not for philosophers, but for the people.

It is also worthy of note that in Matt. xxv., 46, the same terms are employed to describe the duration of the happiness of the righteous, as are used to set forth the duration of the punishment of the wicked; so that if one is terminable so is the other—the duration in both cases is the same. The late learned Dr. Adam Clarke, in his notes, says that he has seen the best things that have been written against the argument as drawn from this passage, but he had never seen anything but what sound learning and criticism would be ashamed to acknowledge. The original word is certainly to be taken in its proper grammatical sense—continual being—never ending. We must assume, says another eminent writer, that the power of sinning remains, otherwise man's responsibility would cease; and if that remain, what probability is there that he would be more willing to give up sin there than here? The Scriptures give us no reason whatever to hope that such will be the case. Sin by an eternal moral necessity carries with it, or brings ultimately, its own punishment, and the punishment will continue as long as the sin continues.

Then it is asked, Do you believe in the eternity of evil? Can it be possible that the All-good and All-mighty Creator will allow evil in any form to exist for ever? Such a thing cannot be. I answer: "We are but of yesterday, and know nothing." But how do those who ask these questions account for the existence of evil at all, or why it should have been allowed to exist in the world

for thousands of years? If evil were needful in the past for so long a period, may it not be so in the future for a still much longer period, even for ever? I say needful, for if not needful it would not be allowed. May it not be that the existence of evil is a necessary condition of things in connection with the moral government of God, and that it may so remain for ever? "His ways are in the whirlwind and in the sea, past finding out."

It is also said that the doctrine of everlasting punishment is opposed to the benevolent character of God. It may appear to be so, but we should not forget that the punishment is self-inflicted. The very benevolence of God may require Him, as the Great Governor of the universe, to leave those who refuse to be saved in their lost estate as an example and warning to others, and possibly for other inscrutable reasons relating to the government of God. His justice requires Him to be just to all, as well as merciful to all, but "His ways are not our ways, and He giveth not account of Himself to man." Those who take "Christian's" view of this subject, admit that the root word from which the term "everlasting" is derived means "a long, indefinite period"—"*ages of ages*." So that if we discard the old orthodox view, but little comfort can be taken from the new, for according to their own showing the punishment of sin in the world to come will be both long and severe. Punishment ever follows on the heels of sin, for God will "by no means clear the guilty," but He has the prerogative and the will to pardon and save all who repent and believe in His Son Jesus Christ.

QUARTUS.

ABRAHAM SANCTA CLARA.

Abraham Sancta Clara was a barefooted Augustine monk, who, in 1669, became imperial court preacher to Leopold I., the Emperor of Germany. He was wonderfully popular as an orator. He is said to have been distinguished by brilliance of imagery, genial wit, an animated delivery, and excoriating powers of satire. He died in 1709. The following passage is a fair specimen of his droll style and the method of preaching that was preferred during the times in which he lived, by all classes in Southern Germany.

THE PRODIGAL SON.

"Of what country the prodigal son was is not precisely known, but I believe he was an Irishman. What his name was, is not generally understood; but I believe it was Malefacius. From what place he took his title (seeing he was a nobleman) has not yet been discovered; but I believe it was Maidsberg or Womenham. What was the device in his coat of arms, no one has described; but I believe it was a sow's stomach in a field *verde*."

"This chap travelled with well-larded purse through various countries and provinces, and returned no better, but rather worse. So it often happens still, that many a noble youth has his travels changed to travails. Not seldom, also, he goes forth a good German, and returns a bad *Herman*. What honour or credit is it to the noble river Danube that it travels through different lands, through Suabia, Bavaria, Austria, Hungary, and at last unites with a sow! The pious Jacob saw, in his journey, a ladder to heaven; but, alas! many of our quality find, in their journeys, a ladder into hell. If, now-a-days, a man travel the stove. But tell me, dear half-Germans, (for whole Germans ye have long ceased to be,) Is it not true? Ye send your sons out that they may learn strange vices at great cost in stranger-lands, when, with far less expense, they might be acquiring virtues at home. They return with no more point to them than they went out, except that they bring home some new fashion of *point-lace*. They return no more gallant. They return more splendidly clad, but good habits were better than to be finely habited. New-fashioned hats, new-fashioned periwigs, new-fashioned collars, new-fashioned breeches, new-fashioned hose, new-fashioned shoes, new-fashioned ribbons, new-fashioned buttons—also new-fashioned consciences creep into our beloved Germany through your travels. Your fool's frocks change too with every moon; and soon the tailors will have to establish a university, and take doctor's degrees, and afterwards bear the title of right reverend doctors of fashion."

"If I had all the new fashions of coats for four-and-twenty years, I would almost make a curtain before the sun with them, so that men should go about with lanterns in the day-time. At least, I would undertake to hide all Turkey with them, so that the Constantinopolitans should think their Mohammed was playing blind-the-cat with them. An old witch, at the request of king Saul, called the prophet Samuel from the dead, that he might know the result of his arms. It will soon come to pass, that people will want to call from the dead, the identical tailor and master who made the beautiful Esther's garment, when she was so well-pleasing in the eyes of Ahasuerus. * * * * * So the prodigal son learned but little good in foreign lands. His doing was wooing; his thinking was drinking; his Latin was *Proficiat*, his Italian *Brindisi*, his Bohemian *Sasdravi*, his German *Gesegnets Gott*. In one word, he was a goodly fellow always mellow, a vagrant, a *bacchant*, an *amant*, a *turbant*, a *distillant*, &c. Now he had wasted his substance in foreign provinces, and torn his conscience to tatters as well as his clothes. He might, with truth, have said to his father what the brothers of Joseph said, without truth, to Jacob when they showed him the bloody coat, '*fera pessima*,' &c., 'an evil beast has devoured him.' An evil beast devoured the prodigal son: an evil beast, the golden eagle; an evil beast, the golden griffin; an evil beast, the golden buck, an evil beast, the golden bear. These tavern-beasts reduced the youngster to that condition that his breeches were as transparent as a fisherman's net, his stomach shrunk together like an empty bladder, and the mirror of his misery was to be seen on the sleeve of his dirty doublet, &c. And now, when the scamp had got sick of the swine-diet, more wholesome thoughts came into his mind, and he would go straight home to his old father, and seek a favourable hearing at his feet; in which he succeeded according to his wish. And his own father fell quite lovingly on the neck of the bad *vocativo*, for which a rope would have been fitter. Yea, he was introduced with special joy and jubilee into the paternal dwelling, sudden preparations were made for a feast, kitchen and cellar were put in requisition, and the best and fattest calf must be killed in a hurry, and cooked and roasted. Away with the rags and tatters! and hurrah for the velvet coat and the pinked-up hat and a gold ring! Bring on your fiddlers! *allegro!*"