

conceptions overwhelmed in darkness and horror if it be rejected, I therefore conclude that a limited interpretation is authorised. Perhaps there is some pertinence in the suggestion which I recollect to have seen in some old and nearly unknown book in favour of universal restitution; that the great difference of degrees of future punishment, so plainly stated in Scripture, affords an argument against its perpetuity; since, if the demerit be infinite, there can be no place for a scale of degrees, apportioning a minor infliction to some offenders; every one should be punished up to the utmost that his nature can sustain; and the same reason of equity there may be for a limited measure, there may consistently be for a limited duration. The assignment of an unlimited duration would seem an abandonment of the principle of the discriminating rule observed in the adjustment of degrees.

If it be asked, *how could* the doctrine have been more plainly and spiritually asserted than it is in the Scripture language? In answer, I ask, how do we construct our words and sentences to express it in an absolute manner, so as to leave no possibility of understanding the language in a different, equivocal or questionable sense? And may we not think that if so transcendently dreadful a doctrine had been meant to be stamped as in burning characters on our faith, there would have been such forms of proposition, of circumlocution, if necessary, as would have rendered all doubt or question a mere palpable absurdity?

Some intelligent and devout inquirers, unable to admit the terrific doctrine, and yet pressed by the strength of the Scripture language, have had recourse to a literal interpretation of the threatened destruction, the eternal death, as signifying *annihilation of existence*, after a more or less protracted penal infliction. Even this would be a prodigious relief; but it is an admission that the terms in question do mean something final, in an absolute sense. I have not directed much thought on this point; the grand object of interest being a negation of the perpetuity of misery. I have not been anxious for any satisfaction beyond that; though certainly one would wish to indulge the hope, founded on the divine attribute of infinite benevolence, that there will be a period somewhere in the endless futurity, when all God's sinning creatures will be restored by him to rectitude and happiness.

It often surprises me that the fearful doctrine sits, if I may so express it, so easy on the minds of the religious and benevolent believers of it. Surrounded immediately by the multitudes of fellow mortals, and looking abroad on the present, and back on past state of the race, and regarding them as to the immense majority, as subjects of so direful destination, how can they have any calm enjoyment of life, how can they be cordially cheerful, how can they escape the incessant haunting of dismal ideas, darkening the economy in which their lot is cast? I remember suggesting to one of them such an image as this:—suppose the case that so many of the great surrounding population as he could not, even in a judgment of charity, believe to be Christians, that is, to be in a safe state for hereafter—suppose the case to be that he knew so many were all doomed to suffer, by penal infliction, a death by torture, in the most protracted agony, with what feelings would he look on the populous city, the swarming country, or even a crowded, mixed congregation? But what an infinitesimal trifle that would be in comparison with what he does believe in looking on these multitudes. How, then, can they bear the sight of the living world around them?

As to religious teachers; if the tremendous doctrine be true, surely it ought to be almost continually proclaimed as with the blast of a trumpet, inculcated and reiterated, with ardent passion, in every possible form of terrible illustration; no remission of the alarm to thoughtless spirits. What! believe them in such inconceivably dreadful peril, and not multiply and aggravate the terrors to frighten them out of their stupor; deploring that all the horrifying representations in the power of thought and language to make, are immeasurably below the real urgency of the subject; and almost wishing that some appalling phenomenon of sight or sound might break in to make the impression that no words can make. If we saw a fellow mortal stepping heedlessly or daringly on the utmost verge of some dreadful precipice or gulf, a humane spectator would raise and continue a shout, a scream, to prevent him. How then can it comport with the duty of preachers to satisfy themselves with brief, occasional references to this awful topic, when the most prolonged thundering alarm is but as the note of an infant, a bird, or an insect, in proportion to the horrible urgency of the case?

There has been, in some quarters, what appeared to me a miserably fallacious way of talking, which affects to dissuade from

dwelling on such terrifying representations. They have said,—"These terrors tend only to harden the mind; approach the thoughtless beings rather, and almost exclusively, with the milder suavities, the gentle language of love." I cannot, of course, mean to say, that this also is not to be one of the expedients and of frequent application. But I do say, that to make this the main resource is not in consistency with the spirit of the Bible, in which the larger proportion of what is said of sinners and addressed to them, is plainly in a tone of menace and alarm. Strange if it had been otherwise, when a righteous Governor was speaking to a depraved, rebellious race. Also it is matter of fact and experience, that it is very far oftener by impressions on fear that men are actually awakened to flee from the wrath to come. Let any one recall what he has known of such awakenings. Dr. Watts, all mild and amiable as he was, and delighted to dwell on the congenial topics, says deliberately, that of all the persons to whom his ministry had been efficacious, *only one* had received the first effectual impressions from the gentle and attractive aspects of religion; all the rest from the awful and alarming ones—the appeals to fear. And this is all but universally the manner of the divine process of conversion.

A number (not large, but of great piety and intelligence) of ministers within my acquaintance, several now dead, have been disbelievers of the doctrine in question; at the same time not feeling themselves imperatively called upon to make a public disavowal; content with employing in their ministrations strong general terms in denouncing the doom of impenitent sinners. For one thing, a consideration of the unreasonable imputations and unmeasured suspicions apt to be cast on any publicly declared partial defection from rigid orthodoxy, has made them think they should better consult their usefulness by not giving a prominence to this dissentient point; while yet they make no concealment of it in private communications, and in answer to serious inquiries. When, besides, they have considered how strangely defective and feeble is the efficacy, to alarm and deter careless, irreligious minds, of the terrible doctrine itself notionally admitted by them, they have thought themselves the less required to propound one that so greatly qualifies the blackness of the prospect. They could not be unaware of the grievous truth of what is so strongly insisted on as an argument by the defenders of the tenet—that thoughtless and wicked men would be sure to seize on the mitigated doctrine to encourage themselves in their impenitence. But this is only the same perverse and fatal use that they make of the doctrine of grace and mercy through Jesus Christ. If they will so abuse the truth, we cannot help it. But methinks even this fact tells against the doctrine in question. If the very nature of man, as created, every individual, by the sovereign Power, be in such desperate disorder, that there is no possibility of conversion and salvation except in the instances where that power interposes with a special and redeeming efficacy, how can we conceive that the main proportion of the race thus morally impotent (that is really and absolutely impotent), will be eternally punished for the inevitable result of this moral impotence? But this I have said before.

With all good wishes for the success of your studies and ministrations, I am, dear Sir, yours truly,

J. F.

LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE.

BY BROUGHAM.

As men will no longer suffer themselves to be led blindfold in ignorance, so will they no more yield to the vile principle of judging and treating their fellow creatures, not according to the intrinsic merit of their actions, but according to the accidental and involuntary coincidence of their opinions. The great truth has finally gone forth to the ends of the earth, that man shall no more render account to man for his belief, over which he has himself no control. Henceforward, nothing shall prevail upon us to praise or to blame any one for that which he can no more change than he can the hue of his skin or the height of his stature. Henceforward, treating with entire respect those who conscientiously differ from ourselves, the only practical effect of the difference will be, to make us enlighten the ignorance, on one side or the other, from which it springs, by instructing them, if it be theirs; ourselves if it be our own; to the end that the only kind of unanimity may be produced which is desirable among rational beings—the agreement proceeding from full conviction, after the freest discussion.

A strong mind can proudly triumph over the oppression of pain, the vexations of disappointment, and the tyranny of fortune.—John Foster.

DANCING.

BY DR. CHANNING.

Dancing is an amusement, which has been discouraged in our country by many of the best people, and not without reason. Dancing is associated in their minds with balls; and this is one of the worst forms of social pleasure. The time consumed in preparation for a ball, the waste of thought upon it, the extravagance of dress, the late hours, the exhaustion of strength, the exposure of health, and the languor of the succeeding day,—these and other evils, connected with this amusement, are strong reasons for banishing it from the community. But dancing ought not therefore to be proscribed. On the contrary, balls should be discouraged for this among other reasons, that dancing, instead of being a rare pleasure, requiring elaborate preparation, may become an every-day amusement, and may mix with our common intercourse. This exercise is among the most healthful. The body as well as the mind feels its gladdening influence. No amusement seems more to have a foundation in our nature. The animation of youth overflows spontaneously in harmonious movements. The true idea of dancing entitles it to favor. Its end is, to realise perfect grace in motion; and who does not know, that a sense of the graceful is one of the higher faculties of our nature? It is to be desired, that dancing should become too common among us to be made the object of special preparation as in the ball; that members of the same family, when confined by unfavorable weather, should recur to it for exercise and exhilaration; that branches of the same family should cultivate in this way their occasional meetings; that it should fill up an hour in all the assemblages for relaxation, in which the young form a part. It is to be desired, that this accomplishment should be extended to the laboring classes of society, not only as an innocent pleasure, but as a means of improving the manners. Why shall not gracefulness be spread through the whole community? From the French nation, we learn that a degree of grace and refinement of manners may pervade all classes. The philanthropist and Christian must desire to break down the partition-walls between human beings in different conditions; and one means of doing this is, to remove the conscious awkwardness, which confinement to laborious occupations is apt to induce. An accomplishment, giving free and graceful movement, though a far weaker bond than intellectual and moral culture, still does something to bring those who partake it, near each other.

The Bible Christian.

MONTREAL, FEBRUARY, 1847.

MONTREAL UNITARIAN CHURCH.

On the evening of Tuesday the 21 instant, a Soirée was held in the rooms of the basement story of the Unitarian Church of this city, for the benefit of the Sunday School in connection with the congregation. There were nearly two hundred persons present, many of them being Christian friends from other denominations. The school-room was connected with a saloon for refreshments, and the larger room adjoining served, for the time, all the purposes of a drawing room. The latter was tastefully decorated, and the former was provided with tables amply and elegantly furnished by the industry and liberality of the ladies.

After tea, the chair was taken by William Workman, Esq., and the meeting was addressed by the minister of the church and several other gentlemen. At eleven o'clock the assemblage separated highly gratified with the proceedings of the evening.

On Sunday evening, the 7th instant, a discourse was delivered, according to announcement, in the Unitarian Church of this city, on the present distressed condition of the people of Ireland. The church, on this occasion, was completely filled in every part—chairs and benches being placed in the aisles. The large congregation, which must have been composed of persons of various origins and denominations, seemed deeply interested in the subject presented to their notice, and listened throughout the discourse with a marked attention.

THE NEW PLANET.

In our last number we took occasion to introduce a notice of the new Planet recently discovered by M. LeVerrier. In speaking of its distance from the central body of our system, we find a mistake has been made. Having no other means of information on the subject available at the time, we were led to rely on a newspaper paragraph. We saw it stated there, that the newly found orb lay at three times the distance of Uranus from the Sun. This is incorrect. It lies at about double the distance of Uranus from the Sun; as every one will perceive from the credible statements now generally in circulation.

DR. PRIESTLEY.

The following paper relating to the life and character of this eminent man, was read at a late meeting of the Mutual Improvement Class in connection with the Montreal Unitarian Church. It is presented here in the hope that it will interest our readers as much as it did those who listened to its perusal.—The particulars of Dr. Priestley's life, &c. are abridged principally from his Memoirs, commenced by himself, and, after his death, continued and completed by his son.

"The life of Dr. Priestley has always appeared to me to furnish a beautiful and interesting portrait of the true Christian character; and perhaps my predilection for this subject may in some measure be prompted by the fact, that he was a faithful witness for, and bright exemplar of, that form of faith which we regard as primitive and uncorrupted Christianity. In religious inquiry, Dr. Priestley united the most child-like simplicity of character with the most manly intrepidity. He had a firm conviction that by Truth no man was ever injured; and he was always ready, "through good report and evil report," to follow wherever she should lead, without any regard to consequences. His other studies and pursuits, great and important as they were, were regarded as nothing in comparison with religion; and on this subject he delighted most to exercise the energies of his vigorous and inquiring mind. To the study of the Scriptures he brought a reverent and devout spirit, and defended its historic and prophetic authority with an earnestness and power seldom, if ever, equalled. And to this reverence for the Word of God may be attributed his bold and uncompromising opposition to what he believed to be the inventions and corruptions of men.

As a philosopher, Dr. Priestley, eminent as he was, was perfectly free from the slightest approach to vanity; and though distinguished as an inventor and discoverer, he never entertained any petty jealousy about prior discovery. The progress of knowledge was his sole object; and he was quite indifferent whether the discovery of new facts was made known by himself or by another.

As a metaphysician, he advanced doctrines which even to many of his best friends appeared startling, whilst from others he drew down upon himself an opposition often exhibiting itself in coarse vituperation and invective; but these were lost sight of by him, or were regarded as the idle wind, in his eager pursuit of right, and his devoted loyalty to the sacred cause of truth.

Few men have had to struggle for so many years with circumstances more straitened and precarious than Dr. Priestley; few men have ventured to attack so many and such inveterate prejudices respecting the prevalent religion of his country; few have had to encounter more able opponents in his literary career; or have been exposed to such incessant and vindictive obloquy from men of every description, in return for his unremitting exertions in the cause of truth; yet none have more uniformly proceeded with a single eye, regardless of consequences, to act as his convictions impelled him, and his conscience dictated.

Dr. Priestley, it has been said, was a man of perfect simplicity of character. He laid open his whole mind and purpose on all occasions, and always pursued avowed ends by direct means. In integrity and disinterestedness, in the strict performance of every social duty, no one could surpass him. His temper was easy and cheerful, his affections were kind, his dispositions friendly. Such was the sweetness of his manner in social intercourse, that many who entertained the strongest prejudices against him on account of his opinions, were converted into friends on a personal acquaintance.

A deeply-rooted conviction of the benevolence of that Being who overrules all events, and who, he said, "always took more care