

That God "takes vengeance" and that He is not "unjust" in so doing, this is now and ever has been the firm faith of the Christian Church; not a conclusion which she has ex-cogitated for herself from philosophical considerations on the nature of God, of Divine justice, and human sin, but a belief accepted with shrinking awe from the mouth of her great Teacher and His Apostles. In the present day there are many, as perhaps always there have been some,* to gainsay our confession on this awful subject of Eternal Punishment, and therefore I cannot but feel that I am called to a wholesome work in fortifying your faith against those rash and over-confident speculations which seek its overthrow.

I trust, too, that neither preacher nor hearers need to be reminded with what spirit they should approach this most dread subject,—with what tenderness, humility, and fear,—with what prevailing awe and reverence, saying with the Psalmist, "My flesh trembleth for fear of Thee; and I am afraid of Thy judgments." No looseness of words, therefore, much less any exaggeration of rhetoric, is admissible in our discourse; but that sobriety, gravity, and restraint which befit poor purblind creatures who look dimly though longingly into the great deep of God's judgments, and are themselves tremblingly interested in their unknown event.

1. This truth of our religion, like almost every other truth, has been assailed from very opposite quarters. As the heresies touching the Incarnation were mutually destructive, so that St. Hilary (De Trinitate, lib. I.) could say, "Lis eorum, nostra fides est." "Omnesque se invicem vincendo vincuntur;" "Their contention is but the confirmation of the Church's faith; and their mutually destructive arguments are our victory over them:" so it is also in the present instance. One class of assailants hold that the wicked, men and devils, are not punished for ever, but are all brought back at last to God. Another class of assailants denounce this as a horrible heresy, and maintain that those

* . . . "nonnulli, immo *quam plurimi* æternam damnatorum pœnam et cruciatus sine intermissione perpetuos humano miserantur adfectu, atque ita, futurum esse non credunt."—*S. Aug. Enchiridion*, c. cxii.