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TALES OF THE TOWN.

LAST WEEK, I had occasion to discuss matters pertaining to religion, and in the course of my remarks I ventured the suggestion that there are probably few men who find no time in the turmoil of life to give at least an occasional thought to the possibilities of a future existence.

There undoubtedly exists a widespread and growing popular revolt against the traditional doctrines of retribution, finding expression in newspaper editorials, magazine articles and the popular novel. It is indicated by the restlessness of many of the most thoughtful and devout of the clergy, and by the silent but none the less emphatic dissent of a growing portion of faithful evangelical Christians. The popular revolt is directed not only against Calvinistic doctrines of election and infant damnation, but also and almost equally against the traditional Armenian conception of retribution. I will, with sufficient exactness for my present purpose, define the traditional doctrine in the following paragraph:

"Whoever in Christian lands and after arriving at years of discretion dies without having surrendered to the will and believed in the sacrifice of the historic Christ, shall have his lot and part in hell. And he shall there suffer torments which, whether they be material or spiritual, are of such a nature and intensity as to be aptly represented by the torment of unquenchable fire. And from this torment he shall never have surcease nor respite, but shall be maintained in a conscious existence of unceasing anguish forever and ever."

It should be said at the start that the doctrine itself, when clearly grasped and especially when specifically applied, is an appalling doctrine. To be sure, this is no conclusive argument against its truth, for life and death are appalling facts and full of sombre tra-

gedy on any theory of eschatology. But the popular mind is not severely logical, and there is an obstinate optimism, which in the long run overrides all mere formal logic and flouts any theory which blasphemes its irrational hopefulness. The doctrine in question, while it may be calmly held as a part of a great speculative system, becomes a mental horror and nightmare the moment it is specifically applied. It is a document difficult indeed in the meditations of the study, but almost impossible in the presence of the tears of the mourner and above the face of the silent dead. Since the last issue of THE HOME JOURNAL I have had time to make inquiries on this subject, and the following opinions of clergymen and others, as to a future state, might be read with interest:

A gentleman connected with the Baptist Church had this to say: "The Bible plainly teaches the doctrine of reward and retribution in the future world. The popular revolt against retribution is nothing more or less than a form of unbelief. It is a trick of Satan to lead men to pity themselves and think that a God of love cannot condemn men to eternal punishment. The Great Teacher has declared that if we persist in rebellion till we die we shall 'go away into everlasting punishment.' And there is no hell of despair so hot as the hell of a conscious separation from God, where we are shut out from his presence and mercy. The idea of a future probation may be logical and appeal to our sympathies, but it lacks the imperative element of being scriptural, and no 'popular revolt' can change the fact."

A Roman Catholic clergyman said: "We may not dare to penetrate the secret of God's Providence, but we may thankfully gaze with hope as well as awe at the great sacrament of fire, and trust that it will avail for the final purification of countless millions who have partially misused or neglected, or been inculpably deprived of the sacraments

of this earth. The operations of grace cannot be limited by measurements of earthly time, and in that last hour of his extremest need the prodigal may heed the call so long neglected, return to his father's arms and die forgiven. On which ever side it is looked at, the doctrine of purgatory is a most helpful, most consoling, most practical, most fruitful, most suggestive, most indispensable truth."

Here is the opinion of a Methodist clergyman: "The New Testament is not responsible for what men read into it between the lines, unless it is consistent with the lines themselves. I question the correctness of saying that there is a popular revolt from these views of the future destiny of the impenitent. As well might we say that there is a popular revolt against the Ptolemaic system of astronomy, or against lighting our homes with tallow candles as our fathers did, as if there were a movement to compel us to do so. The masses are not always right. The voice of the people is not always the voice of God. The people crucified Christ and poisoned Socrates. The impulse to progress has seldom or never originated with the crowd. All our advancement has been achieved through the leadership of one, or a few who have gone forward and cleared the way for the people to follow."

A gentleman of the Universalist persuasion said, speaking of Hades, that, "Unfortunately the largest proportion of criminals comes from the churches that teach this doctrine of retribution. Some one asked, the other day, 'Why it was that Unitarian and Universalist clergymen are never called upon to administer consolation to a condemned criminal about to be executed?' The answer is: Because they never find the members of their parishes on the gallows. If this doctrine is true, the ministers who have been recently interviewed ought to preach it much more persistently and robustly than they do. If it is true, they ought to preach it to