

formula of "Where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched!"

III. But you perhaps will ask me, *is there no possibility of escape? shall the punishment of the wicked be eternal? shall they not rather be blotted out?*

Let me say here that I have no sympathy with that sort of Christianity which is ever ready to defend the awfulness and the eternity of Hell for others, but which the zealot would not for one moment tolerate for himself. Let us not forget that the measure we would mete out to others will be meted to us again.

In regard to the first interrogatory, I am willing to say that *so long as sin shall last, so long there must and will be penalty; and penalty means suffering—suffering in the ratio of guilt. Sin eternal, so will be retribution. Now suppose we read the text, as some would render it, the smoke of their torment ascendeth up "for ages and ages" instead of "for ever and ever," would you be any the more reconciled to its endurance? "Perhaps a little," you reply, "but only just a little." "Age—long suffering!" Is that the extent of your ambition? Anything, so it be not eternal! Oh what quibbling! BEWARE, and deal frankly with your souls. You don't want even "ages" of agony; and yet these are denounced against the impenitent transgressor. Oh! flee to the stronghold while yet there is time. See! The avenger of blood is behind you; escape for your life—hasten and tarry not!*

Furthermore, as to the 2nd and 3rd enquiry: but no! before proceeding farther, I too must ask a question, and it is this: *Why do you wish to know whether the retributions of the future shall or shall not be eternal? Because of a prurient curiosity—an idle prying into the great secrets of the future? or because you are weighing in your own mind whether it will pay or not to defy Omnipotence, and spurn the gracious offer of mercy and forgiveness?*

Assuredly if you have determined, as is your manifest duty, to renounce your sins and to walk henceforth in newness of life, through Divine grace, it can be a matter of small personal concern to you whether the punishment of sin shall or shall not be eternal. You have laid hold upon the horns of the altar. You have accepted the salvation of the Gospel. You have enlisted as a Christian soldier; fled to the stronghold as a prisoner of hope. For you, then, there is now no condemnation. Why need you, therefore, be anxious to secure the eternal condemnation of your brother? Can you not leave that to his Master, before whom he standeth or falleth? You can surely believe that the Judge of all the earth will do only what is right, that his

punishments will be *such as men deserve* and His Word declares. If it be God's will that any soul of man shall "perish," perish he will, whatever that may mean; that "his root shall be as rottenness and his blossom shall be as dust," (Is. v. 24)—that also shall happen to him. This we know: that the persistently wicked, "who know not God and obey not the Gospel," shall "be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power," (2 Thess. i. 9.)

Go home, then, my brother, and think and pray over this. Lay the matter before God in your secret heart; then search His Word, and pray to be guided aright and led to choose the good part; and then, if still unsatisfied, unable to decide between Christ and Belial, Heaven and Hell, come back to me and we will talk it over; but you must first pledge me to make and say you have made *an honest and determined effort to escape the condemnation of Hell and to find, the way to the glory everlasting.*

And finally, brethren, one and all, let me entreat you to beware how you do aught which shall disqualify you for the realms of glory, for if you do, the choice you make must, in the nature of things, be that awarded you. I have endeavored to set before you, in these sermons, Life and Death, Heaven and Hell: may God enable you to choose the better part which shall never be taken from you.

And to choose without delay. The sands of time are ebbing fast away.

"And every beating pulse we tell
Makes but the number less."

Not long will salvation be in our option. That door is open yet. The Saviour stands there inviting all to enter in. The Spirit and the Bride say come. The pitcher is not yet broken at the fountain nor the wheel broken at the cistern. The marriage feast is prepared, and all things are ready for the invited guests. Let there, then, be no dallying with iniquity; no trifling pondering of "the chances." Heaven is within your reach; Hell may be shunned and avoided. What, then, hinders you from making the better choice? Make it, in the strength of God, and you are safe.

And to you, brethren beloved, who are walking by faith and not by sight, let me say, be encouraged and press on. You have girded on the Christian armor: Keep your weapons burnished, and stand with loins girded and lamps burning; and yours shall be the glad welcome, "Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

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