

# THE GOSPEL MESSENGER,

OR UNIVERSALIST ADVOCATE.

["AND THE ANGEL SAID UNTO THEM, FEAR NOT, FOR BEHOLD [I BRING YOU GOOD TIDINGS OF GREAT JOY WHICH SHALL BE UNTO ALL PEOPLE."—LUKE II, 10.]

OL. I.

LONDON, CANADA WEST; MARCH, 1849.

NO. 3.

## EXAMINATION OF THE DOCTRINE OF ENDLESS PUNISHMENT.

### THE DOCTRINE OPPOSED TO GOD.

"God is love." 1 John iv 8.

The character of God is the foundation of all that is true in theory, and correct in practice. He is the governor of the universe and the author of all truth. Hence his government will shew forth his character, and his truth will harmonize with his nature, from which it flows, as a stream from the fountain. Hence again, his nature is a perfect standard of truth, and nothing can be true that stands opposed to his character. In two previous lectures I have examined the doctrine of endless misery, and attempted to show that it is anti-Christian in spirit, and opposed to reason, nature and experience, and these were offered as reasons why that doctrine ought to be rejected. I offer at this time as an additional reason for its rejection.

3. It is opposed to the nature and character of God.

The nature of God is set forth in the brief language of the text. "God is love;" He is not merely lovely, but he is *love* itself. Love is the very essence of his nature, and my position is, that the doctrine in question is diametrically and forever, hopelessly, and utterly irreconcilable with the spirit of love, which is the nature of God. It is granted, that the most tender love may acquiesce in the infliction of pain and suffering. Thus, the love of a father may induce him to chastise his child; but it will be for the good of that child, and the same love that prompts the chastisement of the child at first, will sternly forbid the infliction of one stripe more than is necessary to secure the good of the child. So the love of God seeks the good of its objects, and is perfectly consistent with any, and all punishments which are intended for the good of those on whom they are inflicted. But beyond that it cannot go one line. Now the fact that punishment is held to be endless in *duration*, saying nothing of its *degree*, absolutely precludes the possibility of its being designed for, or eventuating in, any good to its subjects.—Such punishment therefore, is utterly opposed to the spirit of love. It is not only improbable, but in the very nature of the case, absolutely impossible, that God should inflict an endless duration of punishment upon any being whom he loves. Love cannot work ill to any of its objects, and as the whole workings of the doctrine of endless misery are "evil, and only evil, and that continually," so it is utterly opposed to all love for its subjects. The question may therefore be properly agitated whether God does in reality love all the human family?

That he *hates* none of them, is evident, for hatred cannot dwell in a being whose nature is love. In such a case, God would be divided against himself, and a house divided against itself cannot stand. We may then safely assume it as an unquestionable

truth, that God does not hate any being that he has made. But more than this, it is evident from his nature that he loves all. He is omnipresent, filling the immensity of space, in every part of the earth, its mountains and valleys, its plains and hills, its oceans and rivers, and its lonely wilds and caves, God is present; and where God is there is love, "for God is love." It is therefore as impossible that God should cease to be love, to any being, as that he should cease to be present with that being. Can man fly from the presence of his Maker? Nay, saith the Psalmist, "If I ascend into heaven thou art there. If I make my bed in hell thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning and fly to the uttermost parts of the earth, even there shall thy hand hold me and thy right hand lead me." So then, God is present everywhere, and as "God is love," therefore, *love* is present every where, and with all beings. From love no real evil can flow; and as endless misery is an infinite evil, therefore it is opposed to love, opposed to God, and cannot be true.

Thus much of the nature of God; and I now come to speak of his character and attributes. Strictly speaking the attributes of God are but different manifestations of his nature. We might as well say, Love is powerful, wise, good, merciful, just and true, as to say that these attributes belong to God; for "God is love," and these are his attributes. But, as custom, and usual modes of speech have sanctioned the use of the terms "Attributes of God," I will employ that phrase. Although the fact that the doctrine of endless misery is opposed to love, the very nature of God, is clear proof that it is opposed to all his attributes, yet, perhaps the argument will be more clearly appreciated, if we carry it out in detail, by an examination of the acknowledged attributes of Deity.

I take then what may be called the cardinal attributes, and attempt to show, that the doctrine in question is opposed to them one and all. These are, Power, Wisdom, and Goodness.

Goodness would seek the best good of all; Wisdom would devise a plan by which that Goodness would carry out its wishes; and Power would execute that plan. The result of the combined action of these attributes is evidently the highest possible good of all. Endless misery would be the greatest possible evil to a large part, and is therefore opposed to these attributes of God.

If there are any who suffer endless misery, I take it that it will be for one of two reasons, "either because God could not, or would not prevent it. Besides these I can think of no reason for such suffering.—Now, if we say that he would not prevent it, we limit his love and impeach his goodness, by making him voluntarily prefer evil to good, suffering to happiness, for his creatures. On the other hand, if we say that he could not prevent the evil, then we impeach his wisdom or power. his wisdom

by supposing him incapable of devising the means of securing the desired object; his power, in supposing him unable to carry out the plan when formed. So that, in either case, the doctrine is most clearly and unquestionably opposed to the attributes of God.

I am aware that there are several ways by which men attempt to evade the force of this reasoning; and some of these I may perhaps with propriety bring before you. One method is, by denying that the best possible good of the universe requires the eternal salvation of the whole human race. It is said that there are innumerable worlds and systems of worlds where God reigns, and that the greatest good of the whole system requires that an example should be made of some, in which the terrible consequences of rebellion against God should be so clearly seen as to deter others from violating his holy laws. God therefore chooses the greatest possible good of the universe, and saves all that can be saved in the nature of things. Now if these premises were true, it would indeed relieve the Divine Goodness of any imputation, in the last act of the drama; for even infinite goodness cannot be expected to perform impossibilities.

But I would be glad to know by whom, and for what purpose this almighty "*nature of things*" was made, which so effectually circumscribes the operations of Divine Goodness. If God gave things their nature, on purpose that they should so circumscribe the operations of his benevolence, then the difficulty remains where it was, and his goodness is still impeached, in the fact that he intended or foresaw the evil, and did not prevent it. But if it be said, that "in the nature of things" God could not prevent it, although his goodness would have prompted him so to do, still we ask, whence came this nature of things? Did it exist fortuitously and independent of God? And did he find in it a power which was an overmatch for his own wisdom, and the strength of his arm? If so, you indeed remove the objection from his goodness; but you lay it down at the door of his wisdom or power. Surely infinite wisdom and an almighty arm, seeking the good of all, ought not to be defeated in its plans or works by a theological or philosophical shadow, called "the nature of things." I go back to the time when there were no things, with or without a nature, but God. And I take it that when God made all things he gave them a nature to please himself, and if afterwards he found this nature opposed to the operations of his benevolence, the fault is with his wisdom, for he should have known better than to give things such a nature.

Another mode of avoiding the difficulty is, by contending that God is infinitely good, even to those who suffer endless misery. Rev. Asa Shinn, in a recent and popular work, enlarges upon the subject after the following manner. I quote from

memory, and give the substance, not the precise words of the argument.

"Infinite goodness does not necessarily involve the idea that all must be alike happy; but only that each individual shall be as happy as he can be made, in view of his nature and condition. Now happiness is connected with holiness, and misery with sin. The holy being cannot be miserable, on the one hand, and on the other, the sinful being cannot be happy. Now here is a large company of incorrigible sinners; God cannot make them happy as such.—To place them in heaven would be of no use, for they would be miserable there. He therefore sends them to hell, and even there makes them no more miserable than they are sinful. He therefore does all that can be done for them, and this is all that even infinite goodness is required to do."

Such is the substance of the argument, and I perceive that is becoming somewhat popular. Specious as it may appear, it is more plausible than solid. I am surprised that so acute a reasoner as this author shows himself to be, in many parts of his work, should have overlooked the important fact, that while he so earnestly labored to relieve the infinite goodness of God from the slightest imputation, he was aiming a shaft directly at his wisdom and power.

Granted if you please, for it is true, that the sinner cannot be happy as a sinner, and that the holy in heart cannot be miserable; and then we will examine the argument. Here is a vast company of sinners, and our author affirms that God cannot make them happy as such. Granted, but did it never occur to him to ask, whether God might not change the character of these sinners, and make them righteous? It strikes me that the reformation of these sinners would be no new thing under the sun. I think I have heard of a power that could cleanse from all iniquity, and if I mistake not, heaven itself is peopled with those who were once sinners even as these. And yet, here was the company of sinners, and as such they could not be happy. The question was, what should infinite goodness do with them? The idea that they might possibly be reformed never seemed to enter his mind. He appears rather to admit, that the efforts of God, in all his wisdom and power, for their reformation, had been baffled. The poor creatures had proved too much for him, and as he could not convert them he must needs make a virtue of necessity, let them go to hell, and there make them as comfortable as he could, all things considered. Now I grant that this makes God good, perfectly so, if you please; but it is a sorry compliment to his wisdom and power. If God could not convert them, very well; it was kind in him to do the next best thing. But if he would not convert them, having the power to do so, then the difficulty lies precisely where it did before, with his goodness.

But here comes another mode of evading