

But before the people will acknowledge the justice of our claims and apply our principles in the affairs of life and the government of the world they must be satisfied that they are founded in truth. It is our privilege to furnish the evidence and it becomes our appropriate duty to show that our faith is in harmony with reason and nature—that it corresponds to the essential philosophy of all things, and is sanctioned by Revelation. Trusting in God for His blessing, and in your kind indulgence, we will undertake to discharge this duty.

We regret that the acknowledged faith and opinions have done no more to elevate the affections, and improve the condition of man.—They have utterly failed to correct the heart or the life. They have disturbed his present peace and darkened his prospects for the future.—Thousands of the young and innocent have been induced to relinquish whatever is most beautiful in life—to give up all that renders religion attractive and divine, for a miserable superstitious, which like the Opas, fills the very atmosphere with death. I am reminded that this dark theology, like a great idol, has been rolling its ponderous car over the world for ages—I follow its desolating track, by the wreck of noble minds—by the fearful wail of the lost spirit, and the crushed hopes and affections of those who love! Oh! when I look at this picture, drawn with the pencil of reality, in all its deep shadows and startling colors, the brain is oppressed and the heart is sick; and while we would stifle the inquiry, it finds an utterance;—In the name of reason, of humanity and heaven, is there no hope for man?

It is with no unkind feelings that we expose the errors of the world; whether they have their existence in opinion or practice, in the theories of men, or in actual life, we must be allowed to speak with all boldness, and without fear or favor. We love to tell plain truths in a plain way; they are better understood. We cannot charm the ear with the essence of all language; give us leave to speak an honest mind—listen while we speak, and we ask no more. "Come now, and let us reason together." It has been said that he who will not reason is a bigot, that he who cannot is a fool, and that he who dares not is a slave. We trust that those whom we address are not wanting in the disposition, the ability, or the courage. Let us approach this subject with the consciousness that the mind was made to be free; that it is our high prerogative to think for ourselves, and our duty to speak and act for humanity. May we not hope that you will feel a deep interest in the subject of our investigations? Is it not well to inquire whether the millions of trembling spirits inhabiting this earth, may not all rejoice in hope of the glory of God? We cannot be indifferent to the subject, if we heed the cries or regard the claims of humanity. To live like rational and immortal beings, we must be all attention and action. We should labor with a loving and willing spirit, to correct the errors of men and to remove the evils of the world. To live truly we must live in generous feelings—in holy thoughts and illustrious actions. The poet has given our idea of life.

"We live deeds, not years; in thoughts, not breaths; in feelings, not in figures on a dial.

He most lives,

Who thinks most—feels the noblest—acts the best."

Hoping that our present labors may aid in some small degree to promote this higher life, we invite you to go with us through the course of illustration and argument. Our invitation is to all—  
"COME NOW AND LET US REASON TOGETHER."

### AN EXAMINATION OF THE DOCTRINE OF ENDLESS PUNISHMENT.

#### NO. I.

##### SPIRIT OF THE DOCTRINE.

"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world." 1 John, iv. 1.

It is scarcely necessary to observe that there are in the world, many different and even contradictory doctrines, claiming the name of Christianity. The text would seem to indicate, very plainly, that it is the duty of the Christian to examine all doctrines, for the purpose of determining whether they are, or are not of God. It is the object of the present, and it will be the design of some subsequent articles, to discharge

his duty so far as the doctrine of endless misery is concerned. I may perhaps be allowed to say in the outset without incurring the charge of egotism, that I was formerly a believer in that doctrine. The creed that contained it was rocked in my cradle with me, and it was most sedulously taught me "from my youth up." Against all my early impressions, and the strong prejudices of education, I have rejected it for reasons, that appear to me good and substantial; and it is my purpose to lay some of those reasons before you. I cannot hope, that all who read this will view them in precisely the same light with myself; and though I fail to convince, yet I trust I shall, in the end, have the satisfaction of knowing that my duty has been plainly, candidly, and affectionately done. Without further preliminary remarks, I proceed directly to the work proposed.

1. My first objection to the doctrine is, that it is plainly and most clearly, anti-Christian in its spirit. You will bear in mind, that we are directed in our text, to "try the spirits, whether they be of God," and will therefore, I trust, have no hesitation about the propriety of the work in which we are engaged.

There is one great principle of truth applicable alike to the physical and moral world, in view of which we should conduct this examination. It is laid down by the Savior thus: "The tree is known by its fruit, and the fountain by the waters that it sends forth. "Grapes do not grow on thorns, nor figs on thistles; neither doth the same fountain send forth waters both bitter and sweet."

Now, all systems of doctrine have some great leading features, which mark them as distinct from all others: and one of those features, is the spirit which pervades them. Thus, for instance, the Mahometan religion is essentially contentious and warlike, in its spirit. Its author was a "man of war," and his religion was established by the sword and the javelin. He taught his followers to fight for the faith, and promised the highest seat in heaven to those who bled and died in the battle for his defence. Its spirit, therefore, is the spirit of war.

Should you tell the Mahometan that he ought to submit even to insult and injury, with patience and "resist not evil," he would tell you that your teachings were anti-Mahometan in spirit. The prophet himself fought, and your doctrine is opposed to the spirit of his whole life, and all his teachings; and by this he would decide, with as much certainty, as by the clearest testimony of the Koran.

So the Christian religion is essentially a system of "peace and good will." Its spirit is the spirit of love and kindness. Its author breathed this spirit in all his works and sayings. Love is the very essence, the life and soul of the gospel; and I am prepared to reject any, and every doctrine and practice, as anti-Christian, that is opposed to this all pervading spirit of love. I care not who preaches it, or by what ingenuity men may endeavor to extort it from the sacred writings; if it breathe the spirit of revenge or hatred, it is no more certain that Mahometanism and Christianity are not identical, than it is that such a doctrine or precept is no part of the gospel; for, "the same fountain doth not send forth waters both bitter and sweet." Thus, then, without resort to "doubtful interpretations, or disputations about words," but by a test as infallible as the trial of gold by fire, you may distinguish between the metal and the alloy, and separate the gold from the dross. Let us, then, try the spirit of the doctrine of endless misery, by the spirit of the gospel as exhibited

1. In the teachings of the blessed Savior. Take the parable of the "Prodigal Son," as an illustration. This is its substance. "A certain man had two sons; and the younger said unto his father: give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. So he divided to him his living.—And soon he departed, and took his journey into a far country. Away from the counsels of a father, and free from the restraints of parental authority, he indulged his lusts, and spent his substance in riotous living. There arose a mighty famine in the land, and he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and as if to compensate his degradation was sent into the field to feed swine. So sore was his want, that he would have filled himself with the husks which the swine did eat, and no man gave unto him. Then he came to himself. He thought of his father and

his home, and remembered that there, even the hired servants had enough and to spare. He said therefore, "I will arise and go to my father, and I will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. Make me, therefore, as one of thy hired servants."

We turn now to the father. He had wept for the loss of his son. He had remembered him and cared for him, even when he cared not for himself. He had mused of him, and prayed for him, in the silence of the night and in the waking hours of the day, and had waited with anxious solicitude for his return. And, behold! now he comes! Far in the distance appears the form of a weary traveller. The eye that was dim with age could see him "while yet he was a great way off;" and detect the well remembered image of a long-lost son. His limbs were just now tottering and trembling upon his staff; but he forgets he is old. The aged frame assumes the vigor of youth. He needs no staff to support his steps; but he runs to meet him. He forgot the rage, and filth, and folly of his son. He forgot his guilt and iniquity; aye, he forgot every thing, but that it was his son, and in a transport of joy he clasped the poor wanderer in his arms, and kissed him? The first word uttered was, "Bring forth the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring upon his finger and shoes upon his feet, and let the fatted calf be slain, and let us rejoice; for my son has returned, and I have received him safe and sound."

Here is a true delineation of the spirit of the gospel; for this parable is but an illustration of the ways of God to man. As this father felt towards his son, so did God feel towards his children. Ask you to try the spirit of the doctrine of endless misery by this standard. Do you see anything in this doctrine that resembles the spirit of this father? When earth's wandering prodigals shall be gathered before him, will he treat them as this father treated his son? Or, will he cast them out to wander hopeless and forlorn, world without end? I pray you try the spirit whether it be of God. To me it looks not like the gospel spirit.

But there is another character introduced in the parable. The older brother was in the field, and when he drew near the house, and heard the sound of music and dancing he called one of the servants and asked what it meant.—The answer was, "Thy brother has come, and thy father hath killed for him the fatted calf." "And he was angry, and would not go in. Therefore went his father out and entreated him, saying, It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad, for this, my son, was lost, and is found; he was dead, and is alive again. But he said, "Lo! these many years do I serve thee, and yet thou never gavest me so much as a kid to make merry with my friends. But no sooner does this thy son, who has devoured thy living with harlots, return, than thou hast killed for him the fatted calf." "He was angry, and would not go in." Here you see a spirit very different from that of the father. It is a spirit that would crush the sinner and drive him from his home.—It is the spirit of revenge, of wrath and unforgiving cruelty. And now I pray you, try the spirit of the doctrine of endless woe, and tell me, is it more like that of the father? or of the elder brother? If it be like that of the elder brother, then judge ye, whether I am not justified in saying, that the doctrine is anti-Christian in spirit.

Take another illustration, found in the parable of the "Lost Sheep." "A certain man had an hundred sheep, and one of them went astray.—He left the ninety and nine in the wilderness and went after the one that was lost, until he found it; and when he had found it, he laid it upon his shoulder and bore it home; and said to his neighbors, rejoice with me for I have found my sheep that was lost." I hold that the conduct of the shepherd here, is an illustration of the spirit that marks the conduct of the good and gracious master; and I hold it no perversion to say, he intended to teach here, that if in the fold above he had the ninety and nine of the human race, and one only was lost, his spirit would go out in its power, and in the arms of his love bear home the wanderer, and hold him up as the last trophy of his grace, and a subject of joy for all the inhabitants of heaven above.

It is remarkable that the shepherd did not give over the search until he had found the sheep; and when he had found it, he did not merely call and

offer to show the way home; nor did he trust the sufferer to his own strength, and leave it to the mercy of the wolves. But the power of his strong arm was made bare for the rescue, and upon his broad shoulder the poor wanderer was laid, and he bore it home, and kindred spirits rejoiced that the lost was found. Here is the spirit that pervades the gospel. It is a spirit of devotion to the interests of man, that pauses at no difficulties or dangers, that draws upon its own resources and goes out in the might of its power to seize upon a sinking world, and bear the lost, lost child of error home to heaven and to God.

I ask: Do you see such a spirit in the doctrine of endless misery? Does that doctrine teach you, that God will treat sinners in the same spirit as the good shepherd the sheep? If not, then judge ye again, whether it is not anti-Christian in spirit.

But there are plainer teachings than these.—"What man among you that is a father, if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent, or if he ask an egg will he give him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the holy spirit to them that ask him!" Again: "Ye have heard that it hath been said, by them of old time, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy'; but I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you: that ye may be the children of your Father, who maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain upon the just and the unjust." Still once more, and I leave this view of the subject. "Behold the fowls of the air, for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Behold, the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin, and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, will he not take care of you, O ye of little faith?"

Here is the spirit of God as set forth in the gospel. It is a spirit of unceasing care and kindness; a spirit that loves its enemies and transcends even the warm love of a parent for his children; a spirit, which feeds the fowls of the air, decks the lilies of the field; and over all the earth extends its watchful and sleepless vigilance, to deliver, to bless, and to save.

I ask you to examine the doctrine of endless misery, which crushes the sinner in hopeless woe with the remorseless cruelty of the demon; and see if you can find in it a spirit akin to that which loves even its enemies, which shines in the sun and falls in the gentle showers, feeds even the fowls of the air, and decks the "lilies of the field." If not, then again we must be driven to the conclusion that the doctrine is anti-Christian in its spirit. Thus much for the teachings of Christ—  
Let us examine

2. His examples. And here we shall find a still more clear, and tangible exhibition of the spirit of love and kindness. Upon him, at his baptism, we are told, "the spirit of God descended as a dove and rested upon him." It was a harmless and peaceful emblem, indicative of the nature of the spirit by which he was guided.

The story of his life is told in the simple sentence, that "he went about doing good" and his kind sympathies flowed out freely to all that were in want or distress. Behold him as he draws near to the city of Nain. There comes out a poor widow following the corpse of her son. He had been cut down in the bloom and strength of his life. He was the pride of her eyes, and the joy of her heart, for he was her only son, and she was a widow. Lonely and desolate was that mourner now, and comfortless was her bleeding heart, for she was going to deposit in the cold grave the last tie that bound her to the earth. Jesus met her in the way; and he was touched with compassion, and he spake the word, and the young man arose from the dead, and gave him again to his mother.

Look again, and see him at the grave of Lazarus. The two sisters had wept for a brother, to whom they had looked for protection and support, and who was dear to their hearts. Four days had he been in the ground. The place he had occupied was vacant, and the sisters were disconsolate. But Jesus appeared in that scene of woe, and soon their sorrow was turned to joy