

I do not know how people can joke about this subject, and yet it is the subject of more puns, more caricatures, more jokes in your stores and offices and shops than any other subject. Why do they not joke about the broken bridge at Ash-tabula? or the Atlantic steamer going down off Mars Head with five hundred passengers for about the Indian Famine? or about the earthquake that crushed Lisbon? There is more fun in all those subjects than in this. Let us come to this subject not as critics, not as cavillers not in a polemic spirit. Let us come to it as a question of *personal safety*. Let us empty ourselves of all previous impressions, and without any disposition to twist things, or explain them away, find out what is the announcement of the only authority on this subject that is worth so much as a pin.

1. In the first place, I group together all those passages which represent the *suffering of the lost by fire*. In Matthew xiii. 41-2, it is said, "The Son of man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." Can you explain it away? O, yes. I could make these angels fairies; I could represent this fire as only something looking like fire; I could represent this furnace as a casket with a crimson lining; but what is the use of explaining away a furnace of fire when God says there is one? What is the use of an imprisoned criminal trying to explain away the existence of such a place as a prison?

But you say, "Isn't there some mistake about it?" If there is, then the Almighty Christ made the mistake, for the passage I quoted is part of His sermon. I appeal to Paul on this subject. He was no coward. Instead of his trembling before governments, governments trembled before him. A small invalid, but the most magnificent man of the ages. What does he say? He says to the Thessalonians, "The Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be revealed from heaven with mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on those who knew not God." I appeal to St. John the inspired. In one place he says of the lost,—"They shall be tormented with fire and brimstone." In another place he says,—"The adulterers, the sorcerers, and all liars shall have their place in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone." And in another place

he says,—"They shall both be cast alive into the lake of fire."

The last book of the Bible closes with a dark scroll on the sky. What is it? Smoke. Where there is no fire there is no smoke. "The smoke of their torment ascendeth for ever and ever." "But," you say, "Were not they men who wrote this?" Yes, but they were inspired men. If you do not want to take even inspired men, then I go back to Christ again, and as my first quotation on this subject was from Christ, so my last quotation under this head shall be from Christ as He says—"Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire."

"But," you say, "isn't this *figurative*?" I am not opposed to saying it may be figurative; but I know very well that if it is not fire it is something as severe as fire. Christ and His apostles were not lacking in illustrative power, and when they say a thing is morning, I know it is as bright as it can be; and when they say anything is a fire, I know it is torment unmitigated. I often hear people explain these fiery representations of Scripture as metaphor, and as soon as they make metaphor out of them, they seem to think they have soothed the whole subject.

No; if there be a mental state as sharp and severe as fire, it might as well be fire. Christ and His apostles use the figure of fire, and I know from that there is nothing more painful or more agonizing. But if you want some other figure, take it. Say it is penitentiary, iron-bolted, iron-barred, iron-locked, the doors opening in and not out. If you will, say it is a maelstrom which dashes and breaks to pieces and swallows down all those that come within the sweep of its foaming circles. I will not dispute with you. If you prefer those human similes, take them. I prefer God's comparison, because I know God is right, and human comparisons may be wrong. God says it is fire, and a furnace of fire.

Besides that, my brother, I do not know that it is figurative. *It may be literal*. The Bible sixteen times says it is fire. You say, "I don't believe it, and I won't believe it." Then be consistent, and pitch your Bible into the stove, or throw it into the East River. Thomas Paine was consistent in denying the doctrine of eternal punishment, for he rejected the whole Bible, although in his last moments he howled with so much terror that his nurse fled from the room. He was consistent nevertheless. Voltaire was consistent in rejecting the doctrine of future punishment, because he rejected the