

deal with me for preaching it—nay, may even be under obligation to do so. It may not be amiss to state that the circumstances under which the lecture was delivered. I did not go out of my way to seek a passage on which to preach the view set forth. I had been engaged for some Sundays in expounding the Epistle to the Romans. This passage in the 5th chapter should have formed the subject of discourse on the 29th August, but I have found so great difficulty in giving a satisfactory interpretation, that, after spending a good deal of time in reading, &c., I gave up the subject and fell back upon another which was less difficult. On 26th September, after an interval of an absence from home, I preached the discourse now under consideration, having made the best preparations I was able in the time to make. I need not enter into the difficulties which the passage presented to my mind, further than to say that it was not merely the use of the expression “all” and “the many” in parallel clauses that impressed me, but the triumphant tone of the statements concerning the abounding of grace over sin. I was led to put together and to weigh against each other two sets of passages in scripture—the one set appearing to teach the eternity of punishment, and the other appearing to teach that there would come a time when alienation from God and rebellion against Him should cease, when all things should be reconciled, when God should be all in all, and when consequently punishment should come to an end. I did not deny the eternity of punishment, but expressed doubts as to its eternity—doubts based partly on grounds of reason, and partly on Scripture. I did not say that the teaching of the Confession of Faith was unscriptural on this point, but that there were passages of scripture which I found it hard to reconcile with the statements of the Confession, and to which sufficient weight had not, in my judgment, been allowed. I expressed the wish that the doctrine of the final salvation of all might be true—quoting the words of Tennyson—and I indicated that the passage quoted from the writings of St. Paul appeared to favour that doctrine. At the same time I urged just as strongly the force of the expressions in which, apparently, the eternity of punishment is set forth. The general conclusion which I drew, therefore, was that the teaching of scripture was not clear and decisive on this point, and that it was one on which further study and investigation might throw light. I feel disposed to ask members of Presbytery what I should have done under these circumstances. Here was a difficult passage—one of acknowledged difficulty—which met me in the regular course of exposition. What was I to do with it? Pass it over? or give a superficial explanation that left the difficulty exactly where it was? or make the best I could of it after honest and prayerful study? The last course was the one that I adopted, and one which still commends itself to my sense of right. It may be said that it was not right to speak on such an important matter in a way opposed to the general teachings of the Church when my own mind was in a state of uncertainty and perplexity. That view would carry more weight with me if I held that a minister is at liberty to say nothing from the pulpit except that on which no doubt can possibly be entertained. I have been accustomed, however, to hold that I was doing my people's real service in leading them to think for themselves, and it has been my habit to state difficulties frankly, often without even