

THE GOSPEL MESSENGER,

OR UNIVERSALIST ADVOCATE.

["AND THE ANGEL SAID UNTO THEM, FEAR NOT, FOR BEHOLD! I BRING YOU GOOD THINGS OF GREAT JOY WHICH SHALL BE UNTO ALL PEOPLE."—Luko 2: 10.]

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EXAMINATION OF THE DOCTRINE OF ENDLESS PUNISHMENT.

HELL FOR THE WICKED.

The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God." Psalms ix. 17.

The most startling word in the vocabulary of the modern church is HELL. Used long habit and common consent as the name of a place of endless and intolerable anguish, in the future world, it falls upon the popular ear like the cry of the watchman proclaiming a city in flames. Poetry exhausted its imagery, and eloquence uttered its deepest thunders, in portraying the lively horrors of that awful place, to which this startling word is applied.—The fervid imagination of Milton, the glowing numbers of Watts, the spirit-stirring eloquence of a Saurin and an Edwards, and a host of others, illustrious in the church, have all been called in requisition to depict the torments of hell. And the flights of the imagination, the sallies of fancy have been mistaken for oracles of eternal truth, until that word has become the talisman of despair; and through the land, from lisping infancy to decrepit age, there is power in that word to thrill through every artery, and vibrate upon every nerve of the soul. Of all the ingredients mingled in the cup of human misery, those furnished by this word are the most bitter. Of all the sources of sorrow, this is the deepest and darkest; and I do not exaggerate when I say, that it causes more fear, more anxiety, more despair, and wets the green earth with more tears, than any other cause under the high canopy of heaven. I would, if I could, hush those anxious fears, and teach a doubting-sembling world to look up with trustful confidence and hope to its Father God, and feel that in his care and under his wise and gracious government all created humanity is safe; safe now, safe henceforth, and safe forever more.

This is the work in which I am engaged in the present discourse, and I cannot avoid the conviction that it is important.—But I know full well it is a work of no small magnitude. Educated, as I was, in the common view of this matter, and taught with most sedulous care from lisping infancy, I know full well the influence of early prejudices, and the difficulty of turning aside from associations and modes of thought fixed upon us by education and habit.

"The education forms the common mind; Just as the twig is bent the tree's inclined."

The twig may indeed be bent with ease; but when the tree is grown it requires the strength of a son of Anak to make the crooked straight. I cannot help remembering that it is not the twig I have to bend. But my business is to grapple with the mountain oak, and bend the stately trunk of the sturdy monarch of the forest, which has stood there through a thousand storms, wrestled with the furious winds, and dared even the thunder's bolt.

I pray you, my readers, divest yourselves, as much as possible, of the influence of prejudice and fixed habits of

thought. For one brief hour let the crowd be forgotten; let all the phantoms that are so intimately associated with this fearful word *hell*, be banished from your thoughts, and come to this investigation with minds as free and unfettered as if it were the first time you had ever heard of that word.

Some friend has put into your hands the book of Psalms, and there you read for the first time the words of the text: "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God." You would at once inquire, What is this hell, into which the wicked are to be turned? And this is precisely the question to which I wish to direct your attention. The English word *hell* is derived from the Saxon "*helle*," which means "to conceal or cover over," and the noun is applied to any thing dark, hidden or concealed; so that in the etymology of this word there is no shadow of countenance for the meaning usually attached to it. If we look at the original Scriptures we shall find that there are four words which are translated by this one English word "*hell*." These are, "*sheol*," "*hades*," "*tartarus*," and "*gehenna*." The word used in the text is "*sheol*" in the Hebrew, and "*hades*" in the Greek version. As this is the word rendered *hell* in the text, of course it is the only one whose meaning I need discuss in the present discourse. Its literal meaning is, "the grave, or state of the dead." It occurs in the Old Testament sixty-four times; and is translated thirty-two times *hell*, twenty-nine times *grave*, and *pit*. Had it been uniformly rendered by either of these words, its true meaning would have been apparent, and the only obscurity there is about it is with the English reader. A few passages where it occurs will give you a clear view of its use in the Scriptures. Jacob said, concerning Joseph, "I will go down to the *grave* to my son mourning." Judah, making his speech for the liberty of Benjamin, says, "Thy servants shall bring down the gray hairs of thy servant our father with sorrow to the *grave*." Job exclaimed, "Oh! that thou wouldst hide me in the *grave*." David says, "My life draweth nigh unto the *grave*." "Our bones are scattered at the *grave's* mouth." "Like sheep they are laid in the *grave*." Now in all these instances the same word is used that occurs in the text; but it is translated *grave*, and had it been so translated in this instance, it would hardly have been quoted in proof of endless misery. That it has no reference to a place of future torments is evident from a moment's reflection. Jacob did not intend to say that he would go down to a place of endless torment to his son mourning. Nor did Job pray that God would hide him in such a place. Neither did David intend to say, that the bones of the people were laid at the mouth of that place. But they all expected to go to *sheol*, the very *hell* named in our text, be that what it may.

I may remark, however, that this word

is used figuratively to denote seasons of darkness and distress. Thus David says, "The pains of *hell* gat hold upon me." And again, "Great is thy mercy towards me, O Lord, because thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest *hell*." Now it is evident that David had not been in the *grave*, nor yet in a place of future torment; yet he had been delivered from *sheol*, and this is an instance in which we must understand the word figuratively to denote temporal sufferings, or seasons of calamity.

It is not necessary, however, to consume time in an elaborate discussion of this word. The matter is plain and simple thus far. I aver that the literal meaning of the term *sheol* is, "the grave, or state of the dead." And I say further, that this is a well settled truth, that no well informed man ever thinks of disputing. Though the popular clergy, from the force of habit, or some other cause, continue to quote the text in proof of endless torment, yet they know as well as I do, that this word means "the grave, or the state of the dead," no more or less; and there is not a man of them that dare risk his reputation in an attempt to deny or controvert that fact. So it is written in the books of all denominations, and no commentator of any note has denied it. Dr. Campbell says, "*Sheol* signifies the state of the dead in general, without regard to the goodness or badness of the persons, their happiness or misery." Dr. Allen says, "The term (*sheol*) itself does not seem to mean anything more than the state of the dead, in their deep abode." Dr. Whitby says, "*Sheol*, throughout the Old Testament, signifies, not a place of punishment, for the souls of bad men only, but, the grave, or place of death." Chapman, as quoted by Balfour, says, "*Sheol* in itself considered, has no connexion with future punishment." Now these are sound, orthodox authorities, thorough going believers in the doctrine of endless misery, every one. But they were honest enough to speak the truth, which no man can or will deny.

And this is the word that is translated "*hell*" in our text. What does it mean there? I answer, it means just what it does in other places, "the grave, or state of the dead." The Psalmist was treating of the truth that evil deeds generally involve those who perform them, in their evil consequences. He says, "The heathen are sunk down in the pit that they made. In the net that they hid is their own feet taken. The Lord is known by the judgments that he executeth; the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands. The wicked shall be turned into *hell*, and all the nations that forget God." The whole train of thought shows, most clearly, that the text was simply intended to teach that the wicked, caught in the very snares set by their own hands, would be turned into *sheol*, the grave, or state of the dead.

The word rendered "*turned*" generally means, to "*turn back*," usually, to turn or be driven suddenly back, without having

accomplished the purpose intended. Now let us look and see if it is not true that the wicked, and all the nations that forget God are snared in their own works, and driven or turned suddenly, prematurely into the grave, or state of the dead?

1. Let us view it as it regards nations.

The Jews were once a prosperous and powerful people. To them were committed the oracles of the living God, the covenants and the giving of the law. Their proud temple stood at Jerusalem, at once the glory of the nation and the wonder of the world; and while they trusted in God, his arm was made bare in their defence, and he gave them the victory. But they forgot God, and where are they now?—Alas! they are gone. "The sceptre has departed for Judah, and the lawgiver from between his feet. They are scattered among the nations of the earth. Their temple is mouldering in dust, and its gold is carried away. Where now is Greece? Once she was the emporium of science and the light of the world. The arts flourished under her care, and her heroes and statesmen, her poets and orators raised the admiration and excited the emulation of the world. Once the eloquence of a Demosthenes poured forth in the Legislative halls of Greece, could exert an influence that would shake the habitable earth. But her laurels have faded, and her head is low. The dark raven broods in her desolated halls, and the sculptured marble that bore the impress of her art is commingling with its native dust. Tell me, ye sages that record the changes of the past, why is this? What power was that which caused the glory and beauty of Greece to fade as the evanescent beam that flits across the horizon when a transient meteor falls? The answer is, she forgot God; and as you pore over her history there comes up a voice from the sepulchres of her heroes and sages, saying that her ruin was owing to no other cause than the wickedness of her people.

You have heard of Rome, proud imperial Rome, who once ruled the world. She had by the force of her arms subdued the nations around her, and humbled the pride of kings until her treasury was filled with the gold that they paid as the price of her friendship. She, too had her heroes and statesmen, and poets, and orators, whose names are written on the highest niche in the temple of fame. Time was when all the kings of the earth trembled at the neighing of the war steed of one of her Cæsars. Time was when a Cicero could thunder in a Roman senate, to the decision of the fate of nations, and to the sealing of the destinies of the four quarters of the globe. But Rome forgot God, and robber as she was, she fell. Where now the might of her Cæsars? Where the long steel-girt hosts, who followed her eagles to conquest and glory? Alas! the crown has fallen from her head and left it naked and bare. The arm that held the sceptre is paralyzed and cold; and the sceptre itself is changed to the small dust