

those who are working with such admirable energy, courage, and fidelity, outside the visible Christian sphere, that spirit in man which searches and cannot but search 'the deep things of God,' creates for itself a new instrument of thought which will give to it the mastery of a wider, richer, and nobler world.

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THE FUTURE LIFE.

No. III.

I have dwelt on the argument against the orthodox doctrine of eternal punishment as it is drawn, first: from the character of God; and second: from the words of Christ and the Epistles. I have granted that there are passages bearing on this question which cannot be explained away. But if the object Christ had in teaching be taken into consideration—also the parabolic form into which he so often threw his words, and I may say, the exaggerated form in which he sometimes spoke in order to force home some truth—if these things are allowed to have weight and then the general teaching of Scripture be taken, the sublime declarations of the final triumphs of truth, the conclusion will be arrived at that the Scriptures do not teach the doctrine of eternal punishment as it is held by the Churches. Let us examine it further.

A great deal is said in Scripture, and testified to by our own consciousness, about the sinner's banishment from God. That was the immediate result of the fall; that is the great lesson taught by that magnificent allegory—the story of the first transgression in paradise. It is a type of all and every sin. Mark the effect: the machinery of man's life is thrown out of gear in a moment: the beautiful harmony of his being is broken up: a gulf of separation divides between him and God. They were one, but they are wrenched apart now. It is said the man was driven forth out of paradise: that is an attempt to convey the truth in a dramatic form. So Christ said He would gather the sheep on his right hand, and the goats on his left, calling the sheep to eternal blessedness, and banishing the goats to everlasting fire. It is an appeal to the imagination; it is the dramatising of an idea to convey the notion of separation from God. So the prodigal son is depicted as leaving his home, and wandering far away from the influence of home and the presence of his father. It is only natural perhaps, that from such passages, Christians should have got the notion that heaven and hell are two distinct places, as much as, say, France and Siberia are distinct places. The one was understood to be a place of unclouded joy—unceasing song, and a steadfast gaze upon the face of Jesus Christ; the other a place of darkness, yet a fiery pit: each man a torture to himself, and to all others. It had great effect in saving men, let it be confessed. I remember being driven from the cricket field with fear tingling at every nerve, by being told by a grave Wesleyan that those who played cricket on earth would be compelled to toss balls of fire to each other in hell. I didn't dare pluck a flower on Sunday—for they told me that those who plucked flowers on Sunday would have to pluck burning thorns and briars in hell. And I can assert that though the effects of such teaching soon wore off, while they lasted they were most powerful to keep me from such things as cricket, and plucking flowers, and other things not quite so harmless, perhaps. Most of us have got rid of that exceeding grossness, I imagine. But it is hard work to get rid of the idea that hell is an actual place. We have done with the literal fire, and the literal worm: we say, these were figures of speech—so were the words "sheep" and "goats"—but with strange inconsistency we will not allow that figure of speech might have gone further. Hell a *place*; a *place* where God is not—a life apart from His life? that cannot be. God must be omnipresent in all space. There can be no mote that peoples the sunbeam, no shadow in a corner, no drop of water in a cave, no spot on an insect's wing, no little cell of life which only the microscope can discover in the seed sporule of a moss, but God is there. God is in the mote—in the drop of water—in the tiniest cell of vegetable life. Take a telescope and penetrate into the vast halls of creation—to the furthest nebulous spot seen in Orion's belt—and God is there. He is in all space and in all time. Take the wings of the morning and fly to the uttermost fringe of creation, and He is there—infinite in power, in wisdom, and in love. In Him all life must live, and move, and have its being, for ever and for ever. In every place He is, and apart from Him is nothing. But there is such a *condition* as that of separation from God. There is a hell; it is not a place but a *state*. It is in the here—it is in the hereafter. Wherever there is sin there hell is. The vast majority of mankind are in hell to-day—I speak of the living. They are separated from God. God is in all His handiwork. He looks out on men from all creation, but they see Him not, nor know that He is near. He speaks by the fire, the earthquake, the tempest and the silence, but men are deaf—they hear not the pleading of love and the warning of wisdom. Others consciously keep themselves separate from God. They know right, but will not do it; they know truth, but will not speak it; they know justice, but will not practise it. The whole life, as to conduct, is wrenched away from Him who gave that life. To do God's will, to keep His commandments, to love Him and serve Him, to know Him in mind and heart and conduct, that is to be in heaven. Not to do His will, to break his commandments, to seek the things of time and sense, that is to be in hell—for that must separate the soul from the Author of life and light and peace.

Now, punishment of sin is of two kinds, I take it. The one is *negative*, as simple loss; the other is *positive*, as actual suffering. In the first it is from the non-cultivation of powers; in the second, from the wrong use of powers. For example as to the negative, or loss. I believe every man is endowed with some faculty for perceiving and admiring the beautiful. The charm of a lovely landscape—of the wild flowers in a valley—of the rushing of waters—of the waving of forest trees—of the shining of stars at night, ought to call out the admiration of those who have eyes to see and hearts to feel anything. But hosts of men and women see no beauty in these things; they do not feel the spirit which breathes in all the works of God; they do not see the invisible behind the visible, and the immaterial behind the material. They are heavy and gross: in the midst of nature, yet most unnatural. And those who are lovers of all that is beautiful; those who look on a flower as a thing of joy, almost a sentient thing, that speaking, fills the heart with gladness; those to whom the song of birds, and

the murmur of running brooks, and the laughter of the waves of ocean, are a source of exquisite delight; those say of those others, "poor things, what a pity they are so dull, what a loss they sustain." And they are right. Those dull people are suffering a great loss every day and every hour. They are ignorant of it; they have no sense of loss, but all they save they lose.

Take education again as to literature. Not many would deny that in the culture of the mind there is great and permanent gain. By reading books we enjoy intercourse with the superior minds of every age. In books the greatest of men talk to us, give us their most precious thoughts, and pour their soul into ours. With the power to read books, we command the distant and the dead to speak to us again, we become heirs of the spiritual life of past ages. At my bidding Milton sings to me of Paradise, and Shakespeare opens to me the worlds of imagination and the fierce workings of the human heart. I can warm myself at the fire of genius, rejoice as it flames high and flings a light abroad. I can put myself in the line of all the great and the good, the saints and the heroes who made the mighty past, because I can read. Now, he who in boyhood was neglected, and who after boyhood was done neglected himself, loses all that joy. He knows nothing of the world of intellect, or the working of intellect in all its manifold forms of action; and nothing of that keen delight which all must feel in converse with the living dead. It is loss, great and terrible loss. He feels no pain, no conscious want of intercourse with other minds through books, but every cultured man knows that the neglect of letters is being powerfully revenged.

The same may be said of friendship and love. We are all made for it. By nature we are all gregarious. We find expansion of being, a development of what is true and noble in us, by intercourse with our fellow-men, by loving and being loved. And those who know the joy of friendship, and the dear delights of home, do from their hearts pity the poor cynic who cultivates hatred to men, living unloved and unloving. They know, though he does not, the value of those precious pearls he is despising.

Now, apply this argument to matters of religious life. It is true that he who has most of religion has most of joy. To find God is to find the supreme good of life. It is to find the ideal of all perfection, beauty to the imagination, truth to the reason, justice to the conscience. To find God is to find the peace which passeth understanding, is to enter into the possession of things past, and things present, and things to come. To develop religion in the heart and mind is the condition of the highest happiness which is possible to man. But how many know this, how many do actually realize it in daily and hourly life? Only a few. The people for the most part, are without God in the world, without the consciousness of His gracious presence. But the few know how much the many lose by that. It tortures them to think of the blindness and folly which will cast away the real good of life. So they beseech men to turn to Christ now. Every hour is precious, for every hour the soul of man is kept without faith, without light, and without the heavenly love, is a loss so great that no calculation known to man can give the sum of it. Is not that the reason of our missions, home and foreign? Not even Calvinism, that stern and cruel thing, will consign the heathen to everlasting punishment. It has invented a place, half a heaven and half a hell for them, because they have not heard the sound of the Gospel, and we know that multitudes in our great cities might as well have been born and bred among the savages of Africa for all the good they have got from Christianity. Men and women may be found in the agricultural districts of England, and in the St. Giles' part of London, in the streets of New York and Boston—in Montreal—who are as far removed from Christianity in thought, in feeling, and in conduct, as the wild Indian who hunts for food in the backwoods of America. And to consign them to hell for ever is more than even a fierce Calvinism has ever dared to do. They will be punished, it says, but in modified form. All of us believe that to condemn them for an ignorance which is no fault of their own would be to impugn the universal justice of the universal Father. But, that belief notwithstanding, we spend our tens of thousands every year, that we may employ men of intellect and heart, men of broad sympathy and deep piety, in declaring to the heathen the glorious Gospel of the blessed God. And why? because we in some sort feel the terrible loss they suffer, the irreparable, the eternal loss. To any man and to all men, the past is over for ever. Was it good? then the gain is eternal. Was it bad? then the loss is eternal. An hour once wasted can never be redeemed. An opportunity once neglected can never be recalled. A man cannot live twice in the same time, any more than he can bathe twice in the same wave. The past with each one has glided into the dimward, to be seen by him no more; but by God it has been recorded, for or against him, and is an eternal, and indestructible reality. Thoughts of sin have ripened into wishes, and wishes have broken out into violent acts, and acts have hardened into evil habits—those habits may be broken—the conduct corrected and made chaste, by his own personal endeavour and God's grace within him, but the acts remain, things done. He will find favour with God; will take hold of his helping mercy; will receive conquering strength, but he cannot undo the past; he cannot travel back that winding way of sin. It is irrevocable, even to Omnipotence. He has sown, and he must reap. He has contracted a debt to Nature, and he must pay to the uttermost farthing, for Nature is a pitilessly accurate accountant. God will help man. He will give him sustaining and conquering grace: He will inspire him with courage; but man must pay the debt. The penalty of wrong-doing is eternal. How can it be otherwise? The prodigal goods he had spent were gone for ever; the wasted years could never be recalled. A boy for the sake of play wastes his time and neglects the work of education; and that loss can never be regained. He may set to work in after years and become a great scholar, but he has to spend the time of manhood in doing what as boy he should have done. A man loses his money, then goes to work and makes some more. He is rich again, but he is still the poorer by more than the amount he first did lose. And so sins, be they what they may, entail eternal punishment. Man was driven from Paradise, and a flaming sword stood guard at the gates for ever after. The five foolish virgins lost the joy of that feast, and lost it for ever. The man's unused talent was taken from him, and that could never be given back again. Some other time, when