

The Doom of the Unjust;

OR,

THE DOCTRINE OF ETERNAL PUNISHMENT

CONSIDERED

IN ITS RELATION TO THE PERSON AND WORK
OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.

WITH

An Appendix, containing a Notice of Disputed Texts.

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THE DOOM OF THE UNJUST.

IN the Epistle to the Hebrews we find the doctrine of "eternal judgment" specified by the apostle as one of the rudimental bases of true Christian faith;¹ and that there is "a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust," was not only a prominent article of all sound Jewish profession,² but has been since confirmed, in the most emphatic terms, by the personal testimony of the Lord.³ Of old it was believed, by all who trusted in the words of God, that "the wicked is driven away in his wickedness, but the righteous hath hope in his death."⁴ None among mortals had known the power of Jehovah's anger,⁵ but that God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or bad,⁶ was a part of that treasure of Divine knowledge which made the generation of His children⁷ to be His *prophets* also, as they ran their race of faith and patience in the hope of a redemption yet to come.

That in an age which glories in its boast of an enlightened liberty of thought and speech, and asserts so loudly and in so confident a tone the claims of natural intellect and conscience, (forgetting meanwhile, or disbelieving, that darkness and defilement hold the mastery of these,)⁸ as to accept that only in the written word of God which is rational and seemly in their eyes, men should very generally stumble at a doctrine which refuses to regard fallen man in any nobler light than that of a

¹ Heb. vi. 2.

² Acts xxiv. 15.

³ John v. 29.

⁴ Prov. xiv. 32

⁵ Ps. xc. 11.

⁶ Eccles. xii. 14.

⁷ Ps. lxxiii. 15.

⁸ 1 Cor. ii. 14; Titus i. 15.

degraded culprit, until justified and reconciled to God by faith in Jesus Christ, is not at all surprising. Nor would it be necessary to contend, at this late hour in the day of grace, for a point of faith which carries its own evidence so plainly on the face of Scripture, if its denial had not recently assumed such seductive plausibilities of form as to draw for a season from the way of truth not a few even of those who are really, it may still be hoped, elect of God.

The pretended textual and critical objections to the doctrine of eternal punishment have been so often and so fully examined and exposed by others as to justify the very slight regard bestowed in the following pages upon these. The distinct object of the present essay is not to insist, by fresh verbal evidence, on the certainty of that dreadful sentence which awaits the unrepentant sinner in the day of wrath, but to show rather, to the hesitating or unwary Christian, the incompatibility of any other supposition with a just and worthy view either of the Person or the work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But while advancing toward my proper subject, I would earnestly remind those for whose sake I write, that it is *here*, and not *hereafter*, that God's truth is to be learnt. The full meaning and power of what is now revealed will be manifested only when we know as we are known; but the *certainty*, and also the distinctive *nature*, of the "things of Christ" are freely communicated to God's children in this present life. To plead therefore ignorance of any part of "the doctrine of Christ," as if it were something in its nature abstruse and difficult of access to an ordinary Christian mind, and which might for that reason be allowably deferred or overlooked, would be, in other words, to degrade Divine revelation to the level of a disputable question,—to forget that *light*, and not darkness, is the normal state of those who are in Christ,⁹—to tamper with "the common faith" once delivered to the saints, and virtually to renounce our claim to be the Lord's disciples, since the Comforter was

⁹ Eph. v. 8; 1 John v. 20.

sent to such to teach and lead them into *all the truth*.”¹ Now we know Divine truth, if believers, not as we may naturally, on sufficient study, comprehend the facts and principles of human science, but solely by the teaching of the Spirit through our *faith*, which quits the sphere of natural investigation in order to become a listener to God; for all who know God truly, or His things, are *taught* of God. Natural speculation therefore upon any spiritual topic of which He has not spoken plainly in the Scripture is both foolish and irreverent. Thus, the not uncommon habit of reasoning theoretically on the ultimate destiny of all that countless number of mankind who lived and sinned and died, in ignorance of gospel truth, is both hurtful and unwise, if only because it is *gratuitous*. We may, and should, discharge ourselves absolutely from all such purely speculative anxieties, and hopefully leave those who never knew, as we have known, a day of gracious visitation, to the just and merciful award of Him who is not the hater but the lover of His creatures, and who will assuredly do right as the Judge of all the world. But it is altogether different with ourselves. We who have heard God’s testimony to His Son shall learn no new doctrine at the day of Christ. The *action* of that day will be in strict accordance with that which was written for our warning, and comfort, and instruction here below, and rehearsed in our ears continually, in the long day of the Lord’s patience, by the witnessing Spirit of His grace and truth.

If we turn now to the Scriptures for a summary of the doctrines of both sin and grace, we shall find that the original sinner is the devil, that they who commit sin are characteristically “of the devil,” and that the Son of God was manifested to destroy the devil’s works.² God, of His own free grace, has wrought redemption for His people, and His people are they only who confess Him in His Son. In Christ eternal life is given to believers, of whom it is also testified that they are *saved*. But if so, it must be asked, From what? The salvation

¹ John xvi. 13.

² 1 John iii. 8; John viii. 34, 35, 44.

which ungodly sinners now neglect is declared to be a *great* salvation; but in what sense is it so described? First and chiefly because of the personal greatness of the Saviour, and the untold wealth of that inheritance which is in Christ the portion of the saved; but, secondly, it has this name in contrast to that great and hopeless ruin which involves all those who will not come to *Jesus* to be saved, but, following the counsels of a heart deceived, take lies for truth, and hope for peace and safety by some other means than their Redeemer's grace;³ for the end of impenitent sinners will be according to the right of their imputed parentage. Doing the deeds of their father, they partake his lot. They who, in the audience of Christ's gospel, serve Satan as the god and ruler of this present age, must share his portion also in the day of wrath.⁴

The reasonings of those who reject the doctrine of eternal punishment betray very commonly an equally erroneous conception of both sin and grace. The idea of personal *guilt* is nearly, if not entirely, excluded from the view of men who regard sin rather as a mental aberration or disease, than as the work of a rebellious will; while the grace of divine redemption is, by thinkers of the same class, misrepresented as a sort of ulterior right and heritage of man as the creature of his Maker's hands. But if, in things merely human, it is justly thought preposterous that a criminal should claim, in the presence of his judge, to define his own offence, and to assess its penalty at his discretion, how far beyond all measure must their folly be who both dispute their Creator's estimate of their condition, when His word declares the whole world guilty in His sight, and would make their own view of what is reasonable the measure of His treatment of themselves! Absurd as such a notion is, when soberly considered, it will be found to lie, under many differences of expression, at the root of all those oppositions of false knowledge which array themselves so thickly and so confidently against the plain letter of God's word.

³ Isa. xliv. 20; Acts iv. 12; xv. 11. ⁴ 2 Cor. iv. 4; Matt. xxv. 31.

But it ought not to be necessary to affirm, to any who believe the Scriptures, that *God only* can know perfectly the nature and true character of that which He condemns. For one of the chief and permanent effects of the entrance of sin into the world has been a general darkening and perverting of the human understanding. God is both light and truth; and because "sin" is but another name for that strange but general aversion of the natural heart and will from God of which the Scripture testifies, it is plain that *right* thoughts of sin, or of any other branch indeed of spiritual knowledge, can belong to those only who are divinely-begotten by the word of truth, according to the sovereign pleasure of His goodness, and who come, therefore, to the Saviour because "taught of God."⁶

A just apprehension of the nature and deep guiltiness of sin, as well as of the exceeding malignity of its effects, is conveyed to the believer partly through personal conviction and an experimental knowledge of its working in himself, but far more abundantly by a contemplation of that ever-blessed Remedy by which alone sin is, for all who will receive it, effectually counteracted and destroyed.

Conscience lights clearly for every child of Adam the path of natural duty. Men know also, without any special revelation from on high, that there is a judgment which regards the right, and that doers of evil things are worthy of death.⁶ But God only can tell us truly what is due to God. It is the *quickened* conscience, therefore, which has felt the power of His words, that judges soundly of the soul's condition in His sight. Now both the claims of God upon His creature, and His own deep purposes of judgment and of mercy, have been gradually told out by His Spirit from the first. Moses and the prophets have been followed by the Son, of whom they spake; and of Him it is written, that "He whom God sent speaketh the words of God."⁷ Truth addresses us distinctly and *finally* by

⁶ 1 James i. 18; John vi. 45.

⁶ Rom. i. 32.

⁷ John iii. 34.

the lips of Jesus, and in the words of His inspired scribes.⁸ Himself the living Truth, the Word made flesh, He is not only the object of all divine testimony, but the sole authoritative voice of God; declaring to us now more fully by the promised Comforter what He personally said in part while on the earth.⁹ All, therefore, that may be positively known with reference to either good or evil, spiritual life or spiritual death, the present state or future disposal of men's souls or bodies, is now placed openly before us in the Scriptures, which all are inspired of God, and profitable *for doctrine* to the man of God.¹ The times of permitted ignorance are past.² Light is in this dark world since Jesus came, shining only the more brightly since it broke forth from its brief imprisonment within His grave.³ God has uttered His last message, and now watches, silently but searchingly, the effect of His Spirit's testimony among men.

It should be remembered always that eternal punishment is declared, as a positive doctrine, in the New Testament only, though implied, as we have seen, not indistinctly in the Jewish scriptures. For it is distinctively the recompence of those who meet by a willing disbelief God's gracious overtures of saving mercy in the gospel, despising thus the riches of His goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering; and slighting, when not openly rejecting, the testimony of the Spirit to the Person and work of God's incarnate Son.⁴

To place this matter in a fuller light, it is necessary to notice here briefly the aspects under which "the natural man" is contemplated in the written word. They are various and distinctive, but bear, under all diversities of form, the common and universal character of alienation of both heart and mind from God.

Man, then, is mirrored to himself in Scripture, by his Maker and his only final Judge, as a bankrupt debtor, an imprisoned

⁸ Matt. xxiii. 34.

⁹ Heb. i. 1, 2; John xvi. 12, 13.

¹ 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17.

² Acts xvii. 30.

³ John xiv. 12.

⁴ Rom. ii. 4, 5.

captive who yet loves his chains; as a hater and an active enemy of God; a sinner and the slave of sin, and, by righteous consequence, a child of wrath by *nature*. He is addressed, in varied tones of warning and commiseration, as a guilty outcast, a ruined spendthrift, a fraudulent steward, an unprofitable slave. He is depicted as a maniac, a leper, lame and blind. He is called unthankful and unholy, and is proved to be both treacherous and blood-thirsty, vindictive and deceitful, proud and foolish, hateful and unclean. If religious, he is called a hypocrite; if profane, his open condemnation is his life. His heart is declared, by Him who searches it, to be a source of all iniquity, and his understanding to be utterly perverse. Incapable of *wisdom*, he is a ready inventor of all evil things; while with reprobate mind and hardened heart he puts continually darkness for light, and light for darkness in his ways. That which he most esteems God calls "abomination," and because his condition of mortality is in agreement with its end, he is said, while yet living, to be "*dead* in sins." That "there is none righteous," and that "all have sinned," are the negative and positive counts of the Spirit's great indictment, when he testifies against God's fallen image in his natural and mortal state.

I cite no texts in proof of the fidelity of this description. All this, and much more than this is, as the Christian reader knows, "contained in Scripture," as God's picture of the natural man. Good word for him, while walking in his own ways, there is none. Left to himself he wanders on in darkness, seeking a false wisdom in the ways of sin.⁵ Taken into covenant, he breaks his word, and turns what should have been his glory to his shame.⁶ If God withdrew His notice for a season from a generally thankless race, to bestow it, with unbounded favour, on a single family, it was only to discover that they differed for the worse from those whom He had left.⁷ The story of the world is an unbroken chronicle of *guilt*. Corrup-

⁵ Rom. i.⁶ Jer. xxxi. 32.

tion and violence provoked the flood, and Zion's princes were rebellious and companions of thieves. God's very ordinances became hateful in His eyes, because of the iniquity of those who thronged His courts with unclean hands and lying lips.⁸ If He indites a roll of judgment on the works and ways of those who called outwardly upon His name, it is filled with lamentations, and mourning, and woe.⁹ Nor is there any hope of natural change, since the voice even of remotest prophecy concurs with that of history in condemnation of the way of unregenerate man.¹ In every variety of attitude and situation God's fallen and rebellious offspring are presented to themselves, save that of acceptable worship and self-justified nearness to their Maker and their Judge. All who pretend to either wisdom or goodness are found liars in His sight. All self-assertion is but robbery of God. And to fix this truth indelibly upon the human conscience, when the God of all grace made HIM to be sin for us, who knew no sin, and for the fulfilling of the Scriptures, the just One was numbered with transgressors, the Son of God was crucified between *two thieves*.

Such, though the world regard it not, is yet truth's faithful portrait of the world. The penitent believer sadly but earnestly acknowledges its accuracy; and while contemplating in this vast historic gallery of sin what seems but a multiplied reflexion of himself, forgets his own dishonour in an adoring recollection of his Saviour's grace, since by the self-same Spirit's testimony each and all of these distinctive conditions of humanity are met equally and completely by the ever blessed life, and death, and resurrection of "the Word made flesh."

It is only therefore by considering the personal grace and glory of HIM who "gave Himself for our sins," that we at any time attain either a just apprehension of the gravity of sin, or a right sense of the propriety of that denunciatory language in which the Spirit of truth declares so long before hand the doom of the despisers or corrupters of the grace of God.

⁷ Amos iii. 2; Isaiah v. 4. ⁸ Isaiah i. ⁹ Ezek. ii. 10. ¹ Rev. xx. 9.

Let us turn then from the dreary contemplation of mortality, and what produced it, to think awhile of Him whom God sent in our outward likeness,² and of whom it is witnessed that He gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.³ The Spirit, when addressing those who already are in Christ by faith, presents to them the great doctrine of atonement in a rich variety of form. I shall confine myself however, for the present, to the apostle's declaration to the Galatians, that the Saviour "gave HIMSELF for *our sins*,"⁴ &c. How brightly the divine excellency of His great name,⁵ who saves His people by redeeming them, is manifested in this and similar testimonies of the Spirit, is known to all who behold, by grace, the Father's glory in the face of Jesus Christ. Our concern is now with the nature, rather, of the marvellous transaction here affirmed. He *gave, to receive*; *Himself* sacrificially to God, that our sins might be acknowledged as *His own*. It was a positive compact; and He who brought thus His voluntary price for His desire was no less a being than God manifest in flesh. Now what God does, under any guise and for whatever end, He does both wisely and justly, whether judgment or mercy be the reason of His act. But a Divine Person is here said to have given *Himself*, not for His people (true as this also is, and how infinitely precious in its truth!) but specifically "for, or on account of, *our sins*." Most clearly then "our sins" were, in the sight of God the Father and of His eternal Son, of such a weight and consequence, that nothing less than the sacrificial self-devotion of the latter could remove them from the presence and the recollection of the former. And if to an unreflecting mind it should seem possible that we, whose life here is but a hand-breadth, might have been ransomed by a satisfaction less than infinite, it must be remembered first, that God's breath⁶ is not a perishable thing, but that when expired from a dying body the human soul remains to fulfil other destinies than those

² Rom. viii. 3.³ 1 Tim. ii. 6.⁴ Gal. i. 4.⁵ Matt. i. 21, 23.⁶ Gen ii. 7; Eccles. iii. 21, and xii. 7.

of time and change; and secondly (and this last is the more important consideration), that sin has to be measured with reference, not to its agent only, but much more also to its *Object*. The rebellion of His creature against God inflicted a wrong on the Creator's majesty which nothing could redress but an exact and absolute obedience to His will by one who stood, as Jesus did, in like relation, being strictly, in the truth of His own person, "the Son of man;" while the guilt of an imperishable soul can find no suited expiation save by the mortal sufferings of Him who is, in name and nature, "the eternal life."

Now, God be thanked, both these conditions have been fully satisfied, to the praise of Him who is both glorious in holiness and rich in grace. The Father has been glorified upon the earth, and God has provided and accepted His own fore-ordained Lamb. But how feeble at the best is our apprehension of these things! Ever ready to view even the deepest mysteries of truth with a first reference to themselves rather than to God, men commonly under-estimate both the strict necessity of such an infinite redemption, and, as a natural consequence, the corresponding sternness of avenging truth in its denunciation of the gainsayers or despisers of the gospel. But the exigencies of eternal holiness, and the consequent necessity of the pains of our redemption, were known at least to Him who underwent them for His people's sake. And with how awful a distinctness is the impossibility of any lesser expiation impressed on the believer's heart as he meditates the anticipative agony of Jesus! "If it be possible," &c., but it was *not*. Now if the forgiveness of God's chosen⁷ could be compassed by no other means, what is to be thought of the state and prospect of those who turn away their eyes and hearts from Him who bought them when He died for the unjust?⁸

Proceeding now with our examination of the text before us, we find it declared further that this giving of Himself for our sins, on the part of our gracious Deliverer, had for its object,

⁷ Eph. i. 7.

⁸ 2 Peter ii. 1.

not (in this place and connexion at least) the ulterior result of glory, honour and immortality, on behalf of His elect, but "that He might deliver us from this *present evil world*," &c. Now these words, if they mean anything, assure us (1) that the state of this present "world" or "age" is such that God can acknowledge nothing that belongs to it; (2) that deliverance out of it is therefore an essential condition of His accepting any as His people; and (3) that by no other means than the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ could this deliverance be wrought.

But if this be so, God, who is the maker and ruler of the ages, and the judge of all the earth, will surely treat judicially, at His own appointed time, that evil of which He forms so grave an estimate; and we are sure also that, as the apostle says, His judgment is according to truth.⁹ And it is further evident, that inasmuch as the gospel is addressed, as an overture of reconciliation, to mankind at large, and bears to each responsible creature under heaven the same message of conditional peace, announcing forgiveness of sins to all who believe on the name of the Son of God, and declaring *condemnation* to be the fixed state of the impenitent and unbelieving, the *effect* of that condemnation, or, in other words, the eventual punishment of the ungodly, must be proportioned to the magnitude and measure, not of the sinner's natural pravity only, but also of the grace despised. Now we have seen that no other price suffices, in the Father's sight, for the redemption of His people, than the blood of His own Son, and that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. Unbelief therefore, or disobedience, rejects God in rejecting Christ; and according to the eternity of His nature who is thus despised or neglected as a Refuge must—reason itself being judge—be the awarded penalty of those who requite His goodness with contempt. *They remain in their sins*, the latest and most ruinous of which is the unbelief which led them to forsake their own mercy in favour of the lying vanities of the deceiver.¹ They are thus doubly and hopelessly con-

⁹ Rom. ii. 2.

¹ Jonah ii. 8; 2 Cor. iv. 4.

demned: by nature and life obnoxious to that wrath of God which burns against all active sin, they augment the measure of their final penalty by all the value of His worthiness who would have been their shield and their deliverer, but whom their folly has changed to be their everlasting foe; for we must remember that the glory of the Son of God is to be the doer *always* of the Father's will. When God meant mercy, Jesus came to die; and because the fury of His anger is ordained for a perpetual vengeance against those who do not turn at His reproof, nor listen to His words of love, *the Lamb* will be no less certainly His wrathful minister of judgment, than He was the obedient sufferer of His good pleasure unto death.

God does not forget, and cannot be forgotten *always* of His own hands' workmanship. But the natural lives of not a few are passed in utter and contented ignorance of God. And all who thus die must continue in their sins, because their dying does not change *themselves*. While alive, and neglecting God's salvation, they were under wrath, although Divine long-suffering withheld the stroke.² Passed now for ever out of hearing of the word of reconciliation, they continue as they were, and are therefore sinners still. And thus must they *remain*; not any longer on God's earth, which they defiled and burdened by their sins, and under the open heaven of His mercy, who kept still entreating them while natural life remained, but in the place which eternal justice has prepared, as well for the latest sinner as the first.³

Reason, if unsophisticated, will admit this conclusion from the apostle's words. But in matters of such awful interest, we are not left merely to our own conclusions. *God* has *spoken*, not less distinctly of the futurity of sinners than He has of the inheritance which is laid up for the just. There is a general resurrection of the dead. Doers of good and doers of evil will alike come forth, at their appointed season, from the grave. To the resurrection of life or the resurrection of judgment they

² John iii. 36. ³ 1 John iii. 8; Matt. xxv. 41; Rev. xx. 10, 15.

must all be brought, by the power of His voice who is Lord both of the living and the dead.⁴ There is an appointed judgment *after* death.⁵ By natural dissolution there is made a separation of this body from the spirit which inhabits it—the latter being thereupon consigned to prison or to Paradise, according to its state. The resurrection will restore this interrupted companionship of soul and body; but with a difference, *presumably* in either case, though our sure knowledge is limited at present to the bodies of the saints. Of them, and of their happy and triumphant change, the Spirit has borne rich and ample witness. They whom their Lord is not ashamed to call His brethren will be like Him in that day. But of the resuscitated unbeliever we have no comparative description. Our knowledge therefore on this truly solemn topic extends no further than to a Divine assurance of the reappearance, in their bodily identity, of “the ungodly and the sinner,” to receive their final doom. Of these an inspired apostle asks, with reference to the coming day, not *how* they shall appear, but *where*? And if this question, and the one immediately before it,⁶ gets no solution from the pen of him who puts them, his silence is not the necessity of ignorance, but the intentional reserve of one whose commission was rather to strengthen his brethren in the true grace of God, than to depict minutely the lasting terrors of His wrath.⁷

For, in truth, the Scriptures are not scanty in their declarations on this solemn point; while to their positive denunciations there will be superadded, by every reflecting mind, the fearfully cumulative weight of all those passages which tell forth so abundantly the blessings of the saved. For the children of the curse must have the opposite to these. If, for example, to be like the Lord be the climax of His people’s hope, the contrary to this will be the lot of the condemned. They are unlike Him in person, in character, in name, in condition and in place. If “salvation” be the chief song of the redeemed, “perdition”

⁴ John v. 28, 29; Rom. xiv. 9.

⁵ Heb. ix. 27.

⁶ 1 Peter iv. 17, 18.

⁷ Luke xxii. 32; 1 Peter v. 12.

must be the realized conviction of those who have denied the Lord that bought them. If the drying up of tears, and a cessation of all pain and sorrow, be among the blessings of the life to come, a continuance of pain and sorrow, and the flow of unavailing tears, belong to the place where God's light never shines. Men are dwelling now in thoughtless or heedless ease who then will know no rest. Lips which might have borne on earth, but would not, the acceptable fruit of praise, must utter, from the place beneath the earth, the *name* and confess, as the victims of avenging justice, the righteous *power* of Him whose title as a Saviour they despised.

The picture which the Judge Himself has drawn of the final condition of the reprobate is full of the terrific force of truth. With "weeping" there is also "gnashing of teeth." Now this last, as has been justly noticed by another, is, as an expression of untamed resistance, a continual provocation of still further penalty, if that were possible. In other words, the idea of *compensation* or *satisfaction* can in no way be rightly associated with the involuntary sufferings of the lost. Christ's blessed death is satisfactory, because He fulfilled and glorified the Father's will by submitting, in the body prepared for Him, to the sacrifice before ordained. But the enduring punishment of the impenitent is, that they have to learn experimentally what they once refused to credit on the testimony of the Holy Ghost. They are to remain as they always were in nature and in character, but in an altered plight. Their merits will be no longer declared in warning, but fulfilled in fact. Expiation, atonement, purgation, or, in any sense, *satisfaction*, is totally excluded, as belonging to another sphere. For theirs is not the endurance of a measured penalty against a limited offence. Their abiding condition is one of active sin. Their tears are tears of unrepentant sorrow, and their gnashings are the instincts of an impotent but ceaseless rage. Enemies of God they lived on earth, and in that same character they must prove the power of His anger. They had thought of Him, in

their willing ignorance, as of themselves;⁸ they learn in that dreadful day how real and lasting a difference exists between Omnipotent holiness and rebellious sin.

They who will come forth to the resurrection of judgment are human beings in their complete identity of body, soul, and spirit. Their ultimate sentence is declared to be "the second death." But this death, of which more will be said shortly, bears no more resemblance to a natural decease than a state of penal suffering does to a state of guilty impunity.⁹ For what men call "the debt of nature" is but the appointed cessation of a life spent well or ill—a limitation judicial, truly, in its character, since mortality and death are both of them effects of sin¹—but *preparatory* only to that day, when the conduct of mortals in their time of opportunity will be finally determined and adjudged by Jesus Christ.² But the *second* death is the definitive execution of the sentence, long before recorded and declared, of lasting exclusion from the presence of the Lord, in which the deceived and the deceiver have a common part.³

Of this judgment and its victims the Scriptures speak with an impressive distinctness and a large variety of description, the negative and positive declarations of the Spirit on this awful topic being almost equally emphatic for a mind that duly weighs God's word. The wicked have no place in the assembly of the just;⁴ not *now*, when they may feast without fear among them that believe, sporting with their own deceivings, uttering boldly their own words and doing their own ways, as they riot in the sunshine of divine long-suffering⁵—but *then*. They *have* a place, but it is outside the city where the righteous dwell.⁶ Because they loved not truth in its sweetness, they must prove it in its bitterness. Because they would give no heed to the word of reconciliation, they must learn by experience that God was no deceiver when He warned them of the wrath to come.

⁸ Psalm x. 11; 1. 21.

⁹ Psalm lxxiii. 4.

¹ Rom. v. 12.

² Acts xvii. 31; Rom. ii. 16.

³ Rev. xxi. 8.

⁴ Psalm i. 5.

⁵ Isa. lviii. 13; 2 Peter ii.; and Jude, *passim*.

⁶ Rev. xxii. 15.

Having chosen what He hated, and hated what He loves, despising Himself in the person of His ever-blessed messenger of grace, they will be too late convinced, that if the pleasures of sin are for a season, its pains and penalties are everlasting.

Whether in figure, by prophetic symbol, or in plain and direct statement, the Spirit of truth insists continually on the *perpetuity* of that condition to which God's righteous judgment finally commits His foes. To some of these instances, in addition to the numerous passages already cited, I will here refer. We read of a class of sinners who, on the sure and solemn word of Christ, "have never forgiveness, but are obnoxious to eternal judgment;"⁷ and it is hardly requisite to say that the whole force of this denunciation lies in the implied continuance of those who are its objects. For an extinct or unconscious person is equally beyond the reach of misery or bliss. There are others who, by the same lips, are consigned prophetically to a punishment as endless as the life which He awards to them that honour Him.⁸ Of others we are told, that "the smoke of their torment ascends up for ever and ever."⁹ A merciless death is an appalling exit from this present life; but the renegade despiser of the cross is warned of a fiery indignation, which awards to such a punishment *incalculably worse*.¹ For it is proportioned to the majesty and worthiness of Him who has been shamed; and since these are infinite, their guilt must also bring an unending penalty upon His foes.

I might enlarge further on the fearful nature of this aspect of judicial truth; but my present aim is rather to put God's true sayings on this solemn subject in direct opposition to the sophistry of those modern adulterators of His word² who, on various pleas, reject as untrue the doctrine of eternal punishment. The theories of men who, with or without a consciousness of what they do, are seeking to make their own thoughts the measure of God's counsel, and to supplant His testimonies

⁷ Mark iii. 29.

⁸ Matt. xxv. 46.

⁹ Rev. xiv. 11.

¹ Heb. x. 28.

² 2 Cor. ii. 17.

by their reasonings, are numerous, and, as is ever found when error combats truth, often dissimilar in form, though with a general agreement of departure from "the common faith." Annihilation, either gradual or immediate, or else a limited term of penal suffering, with an eventual salvation, are the two main alternatives suggested by those who stumble at the plain meaning of the Scriptures. But of both these it ought to be enough to say: (1) that such views are nowhere presented to us in the word of God; and (2) that on either supposition what we *do* there read must, in its natural meaning, be deceptive and untrue. In other words, the reader of the Bible has to choose between faith and reason in this, as in every other case of positive revelation from on high.

God speaks of future punishment, but sets no limit to it. His principle is *recompence*. The righteous and the wicked each have their "reward." What men seek they ultimately find. To them that seek *Him*, God is Himself, in Christ, their shield and their exceeding great reward. If, on the other hand, men seek *themselves*, they will eventually find themselves, and learn definitively what their value is in the estimate of Him whose gift unspeakable they cared not to possess. As a *Judge*, God's ways are equal, though His grace be sovereign. Under the sun there is one event to all.³ Results lie beyond the grave. While here we obey truth or obey unrighteousness; and throughout that "day of God," which never ends, our wages must be as our present work.⁴ The believer is "of God," and works the work of God.⁵ The denier of the truth is "of the wicked one," and does his deeds;⁶ and according to the origin and work of each will be their corresponding destiny for ever.

It is at all times hazardous to tamper with the Spirit's words, and it is unnecessary to point out to Christians the fatal folly of attempting to weaken the force of the denunciatory language of the Bible by the artifices of a self-flattering un-

³ Eccles. ix. 1-3.

⁴ Rom. ii. 5-10.

⁵ John i. 13; vi. 29.

⁶ John viii. 41, 44.

belief. For we cannot conquer truth by incredulity. If it fall *here* in the street, it will presently ride forth in its resistless majesty to victory.⁷ Yet men who claim for themselves chief places in the Church, as faithful expounders of the mysteries of God, are continually doing this, and oftentimes with ruinous success. But, with reference to their teachings, it may well be asked, Does, then, the God of truth resort, as a method of persuasion, to empty and unmeaning threats? To think thus is to degrade our Maker and our Judge beneath ourselves; yet if the arguments of some who reason on this subject are to stand, this monstrous conclusion is inevitable. The limit of men's power is to kill. When Jesus, therefore, warns His disciples of Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast both soul and body into hell, are our gratuitous and arbitrary notions of divine goodness to persuade us that this power, though possessed, will not be used?⁸ Are an unquenched fire and a never-dying worm, which belong, as the same voice tells us, to the final portion of His adversaries, things literal or figurative? One thing at least is clear,—that unending suffering of *some* kind is intended.⁹ And again, if what the Holy Ghost calls "everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power,"¹ means no more, as some would have us think, than an instant and final extinction of Christ's adversaries by a flame from heaven—a repetition merely, on a grander scale, of what has happened more than once already in the history of men—how poor and trifling a conclusion, one may venture reverently to affirm, is such a catastrophe to the awfully solemn language of the Scriptures! Would it really be so fearful a thing "to fall into the hands of the living God," if the vengeance which belongs to Him began and ended in one single annihilating stroke?²

⁷ Isaiah lix. 14; Matt. xii. 20; Psalm xlv. 4.

⁸ Luke xii. 5; Matt. xviii. 34, 35.

⁹ "Where *their* worm dieth not," &c. (Mark ix. 44, *sq.*) But if it *lives*, it is, as another has remarked, because its awful food can never cease.

¹ 2 Thess. i. 9.

² Heb. x. 30, 31.

One of the arguments alleged most confidently by modern deniers of sound doctrine is founded on the fact, that the Greek words signifying "to destroy" and "destruction," have for their ordinary meaning in that language "to make an end of" and "extinction." But such reasoning is utterly illusory. The determining force of the numerous passages in which these expressions are employed with reference to the ungodly, resides not in the words "destroy," "destruction," or even "vengeance," but in their context. It is *from the presence of the Lord* that His adversaries must be driven, though He sees them still. The "outer darkness" hideth not from Him; but because it is the judicial appointment of His wrath, it for ever shuts His presence from themselves. Now to a sinner who never loved that presence, and would not seek it when invited by His embassy of peace, such a final escape from it would be a boon and not a dread, if the time had not then arrived for proving *in fact*, to those who shut their ears to warning words, that out of that presence, and the joy which dwells there, neither rest nor hope are found. If in Jehovah's dealings with His own elect "He retaineth not His anger for ever, because He delighteth in mercy,"³ His vengeance against those who slight His mercy is eternal, because it is an aspect of His very nature in its holy antipathy to sin. They therefore who provoke it by impenitency will not at last forget it, as some fondly dream, in a state of "absolute abolition," but will know not less really the power of His anger, than His redeemed will know the boundless treasure of His love towards themselves by Jesus Christ.

If inspired truth were capable of an extraneous corroboration, I might make nature also an opposing witness in this controversy; for the voice of conscience, whenever audible at all, confesses an indefinite futurity of joy or woe. If Gentile mythology contrasts Elysium with Tartarus, it proves at least a general prevalence among the nations of the earth of this double

³ Micah vii. 18.

conviction : first, that natural death is not the last end of mankind ; and, secondly, that *retribution* is a word which carries with it an eternal force. Apart moreover from the sphere of either conscience or imagination, the ordinary methods of sublunary justice have a weak but faithful analogy to this higher and enduring truth. How often does a single crime against society receive, as its just punishment, a life-long and laborious imprisonment ! And is it a *rational* supposition that the boldest affront and deepest injury which men can offer to the majesty and grace of the eternal God will bear a less than corresponding sentence ? The cases indeed differ. In the former, the culprit's punishment expires with his mortal life ; in the latter, mortality must cease before his punishment begins, because his guilt is the whole action of his natural life. As to the duration of his penalty, it is already recorded as "eternal."

These comparisons are introduced by no means as *supports* of what is written, but as illustrations only. God's words will verify themselves. I will now notice briefly, in connexion with this part of our subject, that false view of universal redemption which is among the most plausible and generally attractive of the many forms which Satan's lie assumes in his unceasing efforts to destroy the truth. On the pretext of magnifying by this means the grace of God, and more worthily extolling the Redeemer's praise, an attempt is made to demonstrate an ultimate necessity of universal pardon, as a deduction from the great fact of a Divine atonement on the cross. Abandoning their minds to the fascinating and seductive illusion of a love both resistless and all-yielding, which is the picture of Divine perfection which their fancy paints, such theorists disdain all obstacles of text, however plain and clear, in favour of this new will-offering of their devotion, with which they would crown *God's* Christ as a Saviour and Redeemer after their own thoughts.⁴ Hence the most vital and emphatic distinctions of the Spirit—the being Christ's, or being none of His ; of God, or of the

⁴ *Conf.* John vi. 15.

devil ; the Church, or the world out of which it has been called ; election, regeneration, salvation and perdition ; in short, all positive Christian doctrine is held to be of temporary meaning only, and destined to resolve itself eventually in the triumphant and indiscriminate affection of Almighty love. While Scripture tells us of a mist of darkness which is to enwrap for ever the impenitent, a fallacious and self-loving humanitarianism raises from the words of God a dreamy haze of general benevolence, in which "vessels of mercy" cease to be distinguishable from "vessels of wrath," and the lover and hater of God's truth meet finally on equal terms. The Saviour—so argue these fervent will-worshippers—shall not, must not, *cannot* have less than all to bless Him, of those for whose sakes and in whose degraded likeness He endured to die. Humanity, by that great act, is brought back from destruction to the righteousness and life of God. The petulant and sin-loving rejector of the gospel in this age may possibly be subjected to some heavier penalty than the present burden of condemnatory words, but will not deprive the Almighty *always* of His own confessed delight.

There is enough of sentimental generosity in this bold and extravagant burlesque of truth to make it acceptable to that numerous class of careless hearers of the word whose habit is to judge their Maker by themselves. Its fatal defect, and necessary condemnation, is, that it reaches its conclusions only by trampling on the plainest and most solemn testimonies of the Holy Ghost. There may be *honesty* in such convictions, but it is the honesty of the drunkard in his cups, or of a madman in his dream ; for they who speak thus use the language, not of the chastened sobriety of a faith which lives only on God's words, but of that proud and self-licensed imagination which when the Lord arises He will utterly abase.

Passing by as unworthy of serious notice some other varieties of contradiction, I pass finally to one which, in its loudly expressed boast of implicit submission to the words of God, differs widely from the last, while it as decidedly rejects the

doctrine of eternal punishment. I refer to the school of Minton, White, and others, whose erroneous teaching is the more dangerous to unwary Christians from the large amount of truth with which it is combined. Holding, with all believers, that death is by sin, and life by Christ alone, they deny perpetuity of being to any who are not in Christ; and attaching to the second death the same eventual notion of extinction which belongs to the closing of our mortal life, make hell a place of gradual but sure annihilation to its victims. Having chosen this assumption as the basis of their theory, with a logical consistency they include in its remote effects, not only the rebellious of mankind, but the devil and his angels also.

The scarcely concealed object of teachers of this class is to bring divine revelation into an exacter harmony with our natural mind and feelings; a desire as unattainable as it is wrong, and which is the fruitful source of almost all forms of erroneous doctrine. Rejecting with a contemptuous and dangerous haste "the popular idea of natural immortality;"—for, as we have already seen, God's breath is not extinguishable, and natural conscience concurs with Scripture and with the soundest teachings of philosophy in asserting the unlimited endurance of the human soul—and insisting truly that life eternal is God's gift alone in Christ, they argue that because the wicked dead are raised only to be consigned by a final judgment to a second *death*, their future existence is not only limitable in its nature, but finds its *end* positively in that second death.

In support of this assumption much verbal criticism, of a specious but entirely inconclusive character, is expended, on the very fallacious principle that words which express faithfully and intelligibly the conceptions of a Greek philosopher, can have no larger meaning when employed by the Spirit of God to enunciate truths which lie far beyond the ken of natural thought. Hence, upon their view, "everlasting destruction" means "utter abolition" in Paul's writings, because it is found in that sense in Plato. "Eternal punishment" in the mouth of our

Lord is made, upon the foregone conclusion that the perishing of the wicked is their ceasing to exist, to signify a comparatively long endurance only of a penal suffering, which ends in the sufferer's extinction, soul and body, &c. Two or three passages are also cited from certain of "the fathers" in proof of the antiquity as well as respectability of these opinions, and the whole scheme is finally offered to the attention of the Church as an efficient antidote to the multiform errors of the day; giving, as it claims to do, a rounded finish to the Christian faith, as a system of doctrine, by retaining all its distinctive declarations, only in a sense which does no violence to sound human sympathies and judgment. Its immediate benefit, it is boldly added, to the true disciple of Christ, will be a relief and final deliverance from that "involuntary unbelief" which is assumed to underlie the confession of all, or nearly all, of those who hold the doctrine of eternal punishment in its plain and natural sense.

I shall presently expose some of the plausible sophisms of this school, but begin by decrying, in the name of all who fear and reverence, as well as love, the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, the gratuitous slander here insinuated against sincere believers in this solemn truth. Such writers, there is room to fear, know little of what passes in the minds of these "elect," in whose number they appear in nowise anxious to be found, and of whom they habitually speak but slightly. Their own study of the Bible should at least have taught them that they whom God calls are brought, sooner or later, into an absolute submission to *His word*; the constant effort of the Spirit being "to bring into captivity *every thought* to the obedience of Christ."⁵ They might have learnt also that it is characteristic of the generation of God's children both to fear and to be confident; that if their heart rejoices at the wonders of His grace, their belly trembles also at the declaration of His judgments; that it is not, moreover, to the wise and prudent,

nor to such as make rational probability in any wise the measure and condition of their faith, that God's secret is revealed, but "unto babes." They might remember that even inspired men confess that here below they only know "in part," and that if anyone think he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know; and that, consequently, to commend any theory of interpretation on the ground of its superior credibility and self-consistency, is merely to excite a just suspicion in all humble minds, that a system which defers in this pointed manner to the human understanding, cannot be wholly and heartily "of God."

The three patristic authorities⁶ quoted in one of the latest publications of this party⁷ are all of them (and especially the last) acknowledged generally to be, whatever other merits they may possess, but indifferent expositors of *doctrine*. But in truth appeals to any other than *Divine* authority are, in a case of this kind, altogether vain. Our inquiry is not what uninspired men—whose extant writings always interest indeed a Christian reader, but by no means always edify him—may have thought on such a topic, but what are "the true sayings of God."

Now, with reference to the entire question of futurity in its bearing on the interests of men, the language of Scripture is as clear as it is solemn. There are the "saved" and the "lost." There are two opposite states of final retribution, between which a great and impassable gulf is fixed. "Eternal life" is the promised crown of those who love the Lord; "the second death" is the fixed destiny of all who are not found written in the Lamb's book of life. Of the casting of death and hades into the lake of fire I will speak presently; I must first notice the very specious argument which writers of this school have raised on the expression "second death." "There cannot," it is said, "be a *second* of anything, unless it be at least of the

⁶ Justin Martyr, Irenæus, and Arnobius.

⁷ "Life in Christ only." By E. White. 1870.

same kind or genus as the first. There could be no likeness whatever between death as threatened to Adam, or death as men suffer it here, and the everlasting torment of a living body and soul united in immortality." Then, with a rashness of assertion well fitted to bring trembling on a sober mind, it is added by the same authority: "Such a doom would not have been called, *by either God or man*, a second death."⁸ For what if, as I now proceed to show, God *has* called, and does still call, a state of endless torment by this name?

I begin by correcting the false use here made of the word "immortality." The impenitent are not *immortal*; they are doomed to a second and unending *death*. Immortality, together with the glory and honour which adorn it, is the sure hope of those only who seek it in the way of truth.⁹ Possessed originally by the living God alone, it is bestowed, in Christ, on those who by Him do believe in God.¹ In all His sayings God will justify Himself; contradiction and uncertainty belong to our thoughts, but not to His.

Looking now to the main argument of those who hold this view, it is evident that the error into which they all have fallen has its root in a forgetfulness, or at least an inadequate consideration, of the *penal* character of death. Familiar, as mortals here, with the visible phenomenon of natural decease, we often overlook the all-important truth, that extinction or continuance are neither of them of the *essence* of the term in question. When God declared prospectively the penalty attaching to a breach of His original commandment, He called it "death;"² and immediately after the transgression He defined its *then* power and effect. Adam was dust, and unto dust he must return.³ In like manner, now that God, having sent His only

⁸ "Life in Christ," &c., page 37.

⁹ Rom. ii. 7.

¹ 1 Tim. vi. 16; 1 Peter i. 21.

² "Dying, thou shalt die." (Gen. ii. 17.) It is only in the light of the gospel that we are able to estimate the full meaning and extent of this original sentence.

³ Gen. iii. 19.

begotten Son into the world to give effect to His great thoughts of love to man, declares to us a second time His will,⁴ He warns us also of the penalty of disobedience; bestowing on this a like *name* to the former, but ascribing to it a character exactly opposite. With the first death there is a ceasing of the pain and burden of mortality; with the second the punishment which God awards to the impenitent *begins*. The first death is a parting of the soul and body; their reunion is an essential preliminary to the enduring of God's final indignation by those against whom it is ordained.

As if to enforce more pointedly this solemn doctrine, we are expressly told of some of the victims of the last judgment, that they are to be cast *alive* into the lake of fire. Now *naturally* to live in death is an impossibility; but it has pleased God to give, as we have seen, a second as well as first meaning to this penal term, and this latter sense is an entire contrast to the first. It is admitted by these teachers that the final extinction for which they are contending may be exceedingly remote; that, for example, the beast and false prophet are not only in a state of penal existence at the end as well as at the beginning of the millennium, but that the language of Rev. xx. 10, if taken absolutely, would imply a perpetuity of torment. This natural interpretation, however, they refuse, insisting that these words should be taken in a *relative* and not an absolute sense. In support of this conclusion they appeal to numerous passages of Scripture in which similar language is applied to things which are nevertheless said afterwards to pass away and have an end. The land, they say, was given to Israel "for ever and ever;" yet the earth that now is is to be burnt, &c. This reasoning is plausible, but its entire futility in relation to the present question is apparent the moment it is remembered that, when the *final* judgment has its place, all transitory things are at an end. The probational ages and dispensations will have run their course. Times, therefore, and objects of comparison are gone. Both

⁴ Acts xvii. 30, 31; Rom. xvi. 26; 1 John iii. 14, 20.

earth and heaven *are fled*. All mutabilities are come to their last change. God's throne is set for a conclusive settlement of right and wrong, which are thenceforward to be no more blended nor confounded. Right is to be right *always*, and wrong always wrong, with a living and abiding expression of their opposite results. The just are for ever before God; the wicked bear for ever what belongs to unrepentant wickedness in the place where the comfort of His presence is unknown.

It has been already shown⁵ that the punishment of everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord means, not a painful, yet sure, though gradual extinction, but a perpetual banishment, in an exactly opposite condition of existence to that of the inheritors of life eternal, from the sight which fills to its full measure the joy of the redeemed.⁶ It is therefore scarcely needful to refute at length the special pleading which, while admitting that in Matt. xxv. 46, the word "eternal" is of equal force in its contrasted application, would change the meaning of "eternal *punishment*" to "the eternal *effect* of an act of punishment." For we have just been reminded that the devil and his angels are to be *tormented* for ever and ever in the lake of fire; and the sentence of condemnation consigns the "cursed" to the eternal fire "prepared for the devil and his angels." These therefore go away into everlasting punishment, or in other words they are to share the ceaseless torment of him whom they preferred, with his delusions, to the grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ.⁷

The casting of death and hell (or hades) into the lake of fire does but rivet, in the most impressive manner, the awful certainty that the state of those whose penal portion is the second death, is a final and *unalterable* state. For while anything destructible remained, death, in its first meaning, warred successfully against it; and hades is the receiver of death's spoils. But now death's occupation has an end, because *mor-*

⁵ *Ante* page 23.

⁶ Rev. xxii. 4; Matt. v. 8.

⁷ Rev. xiv. 10, 11; xx. 10.

*tal*ity is altogether gone. What died once has been brought back from death; but not to return into its former state. The first sentence has been superseded by the last in its effects. And as if to cut off all hope or imagination of an ultimate escape from pain, death and the grave, which once were wished for and relied on as an end of griefs, are here represented as augmenting by their helpless, yet abiding presence, the unending woes of the condemned.

If *time*, as now meted out to mortals, be, as it is, "a dying life," *eternity*, to the unchanged enemies of God, will be, in all the dreadful meaning of that phrase, *a living death*. The mercy which in Eden once withheld from Adam's lips the tree of life,⁸ will be succeeded by the judgment, which must fill the unrepentant sinner with the fruit of his own way.⁹

Enough, it is hoped, has now been said, both in refutation of opposing theories and in proof of the reality of this solemn doctrine as an essential part of the faith once delivered to the saints. My remaining desire is to impress earnestly upon the hesitating or embarrassed Christian who may have fallen for a while under the ensnaring influence of false teaching on this subject, its utter incongruity with that "truth of God" which is, to the obedient believer, "the gospel" also "of his own salvation;"¹ and to urge on all who would have praise of their Master in the coming day, the duty of refusing the right hand of spiritual fellowship to any who, on due deliberation, teach or hold speculative views respecting the future state of the impenitent, at variance with the plain teaching of God's word. For—

1. They who thus speak contradict the Lord; whose clear intention is to represent the opposite states of the "blessed" and the "cursed" as of an equal duration, by applying precisely the same adjective of time to both.

2. They preach another gospel; by so misrepresenting the nature and effect of "the wrath to come," as to place in a new

⁸ Gen. iii. 22.

⁹ Prov. i. 31.

¹ Eph. i. 13.

and utterly false light the whole doctrine of both sin and satisfaction. An infinite sacrifice is made necessary to redress an evil which they affirm to be only of limited effect, in derogation alike of the wisdom and prudence of Almighty God, and the grace of our divine Redeemer, while the sincerity of the Spirit's testimony is brought also into doubt. As a necessary consequence there is an indefinite diminishing, both of the grateful obligations of the saved, and of the apprehensions of the finally impenitent.

3. There are described in Scripture true worshippers and false. The former worship God in the Spirit, and by grace continue in the truth. The latter choose the false guidance of their own reason, and assert their native liberty of will,—following their own imaginations while they outwardly confess themselves their own no longer because purchased by the Lord.² Now the apostle asks, “What part has a believer with an unbeliever?”³ And of this general question the case before us is but a particular example; for every true believer takes God's sayings in their simple force, without admitting reason or natural probability as a moderator of his faith, and therefore no more doubts the certainty of that which is denounced in His word against His adversaries than he suspects the sincerity of His exceeding great and precious promises in Christ to His elect. How then can a genuine believer, whose walk is in the truth,⁴ have fellowship in worship with a sceptic of this class, or of any other class? For the inevitable consequence of doubt or disbelief of the doctrine of eternal punishment is an alteration of the tone and character of professedly Christian worship, from one end to the other. Using, peradventure, the same words, the *spirit*, whether of praise, or thanksgiving, or prayer, must differ essentially in the holders and rejectors of this doctrine; for their thoughts of *God*, whether Father, Son, or Holy Ghost, are not alike. Moreover, sin, redemption, vengeance, mercy; the relation of the Lord's grace to the Lamb's wrath; counsel,

² Jude 4.³ 2 Cor. vi. 15.⁴ 3 John 4.

purpose, threat, and promise; *all*, in short, that is positive in Christianity, is viewed by these opposing parties in discordant lights. Our loving and adoring admiration of Immanuel must be proportioned to our estimate of what His grace has done and suffered for our sakes; for gratitude, if true, must be in harmony with obligation. And if the Lord has paid His people's debt, was that debt one of limited amount or payable in any time on our parts? We confess, if believers, that with His stripes we are healed; but did we merit few of these or many on our own account? "Many offences"⁵ call for many blows. Nor is this all. *Sin* is not to be put in the same category as that which men call "crime." The latter is exceptional, and regarded as an aberration from the path of natural right. But sin is the governing principle of our fallen Adamic nature. *Offences* are but as the ripples of a naturally turbid stream which flows on to the shoreless ocean of unrest.⁶

It is by the infiniteness of the gracious expiation wrought out for them that the judgment which Christ's people have escaped from must be estimated. If the Son of God delivered us from coming wrath, it was because none other could. But from a measurable danger a finite being might have saved. It is, whether consciously or not, against the grace and glory of the *cross of Christ* that all these false reasonings are aimed. And can God's true children contemplate calmly a participation in such things? Professing to worship under the guidance of the same Eternal Spirit which led Jesus to the altar for our sakes, will they mingle with their sacrifice of praise to God for His unspeakable gift a mental reservation as to its real value? But this is what is done by all who take God's gospel in any other than its plain but entirely supernatural sense. The "joy unspeakable and full of glory" of one whose heart is drawn by faith to his unseen Redeemer,⁷ and who bows before the holy majesty of love in silent wonder at the grace which made *him* to differ from his unbelieving neighbour, and brought him forth

⁵ Rom. v. 16.⁶ Isa. lvii. 20, 21.⁷ 1 Peter i. 8, 9.

from natural darkness into the marvellous light of God, is a sentiment at utter variance with the talkative complacency of another, who, handling the same great words of God, allows them only such significance as tallies with his own foregone conceptions, making thus his natural and darkened intellect both the key and measure of his Maker's thoughts.

There is a sentiment of piety natural to man, and religious craving often occupies itself extensively with Scripture; as likewise does a merely speculative vanity of mind. But a new-born babe's desire for the sincere milk of the word is another and a totally different thing. To know God, we must be born of God, and love Him because nurtured in His love.⁸ His saints are not only in His hand,—they sit down also at His feet, and they receive His words.⁹ At that word they both tremble and rejoice. Seeking to serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear, they hold fast, in an unshaken trust, the grace wherein they stand.¹ They are without fear in the day of judgment; not because of their ability to conquer temporary dread by a remoter hope—which the hater of God might do who trusted these false guides, and looked to the safe exit of annihilation from the wrath which must afflict him for a while—but because they know Him as their present Saviour and their life, who is to judge the ungodly in that day.

To sum up the Divine logic of this question, the plain teaching of Scripture leads to the following results:—

1. All men, since Adam's fall, are naturally "under sin."
2. Of sin, and what is due to it, God only is the Judge.
3. Distinctively all sinners are, both in act and by their evil nature, *enemies* of God. But,
4. God is love, and would reconcile the world unto Himself; sending for this end His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live by Him.
5. The obedience of Christ, in life and unto death, alone

⁸ John iv. 10, 16.

⁹ Deut. xxxiii. 3; John xviii. 8, 14, 17.

¹ Heb. xii. 28.

suffices to fulfil all righteousness, and to glorify the Father on the earth.

6. Christ gave *Himself* for our sins. No other ransom could redeem the guilty from the final penalty of sin.

7. While, therefore, faith in Christ completely justifies the penitent believer, unbelief, or neglect of God's great salvation, superadds to the gravamen of natural pravity and personal iniquity the special and irremediable guilt of slighted or rejected grace.

Lastly, sound reason might itself convince us, that sin for which an Eternal Person only could make expiation, must, when unremoved by saving faith in Jesus, have penal effects of an unlimited continuance. But a voice above that of reason has explicitly pronounced the doom of endless torment on the despisers and deniers of the Lord.

No truly spiritual mind will need to be assured that the Lord, who both preaches peace and threatens the impenitent, does not call back His words. What He has uttered of His counsel is *for ever*, even when heaven and earth are gone. But we have seen that it is from His own lips that the sentence of eternal punishment is already passed against the "cursed;" and *all* are cursed who turn away from Him by whom alone the blessing comes.²

We do well to remember, in this busy and progressive day of ours, that the Saviour tells us of *two* gates and of *two* ways; the one narrow and the other broad. The first gate is Himself, who is the way also and the end to His elect. It is the way of *faith*. None find it but they to whom it is revealed. The wise and prudent miss it, but it is entered by the babes of God. The other is the ever open and commodious passage of religious plausibility. Its broad gate is *error*, which seems, however, to be truth to all eyes which have not been opened by the Saviour's hand. No light but that of nature is needed to discover it, and the many reach it under the equally delusive

² Gal. iii. 14.

guidance of time-honoured human tradition and self-commending theories of modern form. This way is paved throughout with perverted and dishonoured truths, which seem to offer a sure footing to the multitude who follow it.³ All who have knowledge without faith, or a vain and dead faith without the love of God, are found there, in company with the perverse disputer and the merely thoughtless and profane. Both self-reliant loftiness of spirit, and self-indulgent indolence and fatness of heart, take what appears to each the way of safety and of peace, but which has, alas! another end. Nor is there any form of error more readily and generally embraced in our day than that which professes to explode, on rational grounds, the unwelcome "dogma" of the lake of fire. Preached openly in many nominally Christian pulpits, it has silent possession, there is too much cause to fear, of a fast growing majority of the rising generation, since under many forms it is a common ingredient of the popular literature of the day.

Nor is this marvellous in the eyes of those who treasure God's true sayings in their hearts, and who note carefully the spirit of the present age, which combines so remarkably the opposite extremes of venerative sentiment and mental independence. Men would serve God in this day, but, like Cain of old, with their own offerings, and after their own thoughts. The godly are fast ceasing, and the faithful failing, from among the children of men; while the *form* of godliness, without its power, is apparent everywhere.⁴ Evil must run its course, and God is trying now the faith and constancy of those who name the name of Christ. The snares of Babylon are spread on every side; but the soul that feeds upon God's living bread will find in *Himself* their refuge from the hour of temptation. He is gathering fast, it may be hoped, what remains to be made ready for His coming, and there is a rich reward in store for such as keep His faith, and continue in His testimonies to the end.

³ Prov. xiv. 12.

⁴ Psalm xii.; 2 Tim. iii. 1-5.

TEXTS are frequently quoted by deniers of the doctrine of eternal punishment which, when superficially regarded, look like evidences on their side. I shall notice here the chief of these.

1. It is by some asserted confidently that the apostle's words in 1 Cor. xv. 22 contain a promise of eventual life and happiness to all mankind. His words are: "As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." But unless it can be shown from Scripture that to be "in Adam" is to be also of necessity "in Christ," this passage yields them no support. "All *in Adam* die." This covers flesh and blood universally. "All *in Christ* shall be made alive." This covers the true seed of God; the number, known to Him only, who are born of God—"they that are Christ's," as the apostle speaks in the verse immediately following. It is astonishing that any attentive reader of this chapter could fall into so obvious an error, especially if due regard be had to such passages as John xvii. 2, 9; Rom. viii. 8, 9; and many others of like force.

2. The Lord's parable in Luke xvi. 20-31 has been strangely claimed as a presumptive intimation that the "lost" here are to be hereafter "saved." Now it is a solemn certainty that a woe belongs to them that are at ease in Zion, and that poor and neglected faith in God will change places in the world to come with self-righteous pride and hardness of heart. There are those who, professing to know God, will have their portion with the unbelievers. But how does this awful truth affect the present question? The lake of fire is the reward, not of the afflicted seeker of mercy, but of the impenitent despiser of God's freely offered grace.

The true force of this parable is to be discovered, not by a minute examination of its terms, but by a consideration of its structure and evident moral intention. The rich man is in *hades*, but *hades* is itself to be hereafter cast into the lake of fire. What the Lord plainly shows us here is, that after death there remains a *permanent*, and often a *contrasted*, destiny for those who die. Faith finds in the bosom of the Father of the faithful its true figurative resting-place;¹ while between that and the

¹ Rom. iv. 16, 17.

allotted portion of carnal security and unbelief there is a great gulf fixed. As to those speculations on the ulterior possibilities of mercy, in favour of which we are asked to qualify the plain sense of what is written, it is enough to remind Christians that whatever is not of *faith* is *sin*. But the limit of true faith is *revelation*. God's testimonies satisfy the mind that rests in Him. Instead, therefore, of enquiring what unrevealed purposes God yet may have, we do wisely to give diligence to make our own calling and election sure.²

3. An attempt has been also made to turn the apostle's reasoning in 2 Cor. iii. 7-11 to the same account. "The ministry of condemnation," it is affirmed, "is to be done away," &c. It will certainly appear to any sober student of the word, that if this be really an honest misconception it is at least a very gross one. The apostle, as most Christians know, is speaking not prospectively, but as an actual "*minister* of the New Testament;" and his argument is, that the legal and death-working ministry of Moses is now supplanted by the gracious and life-giving ministry of Christ. It is not as victims of "the ministry of condemnation" that the finally impenitent will suffer, but as the self-ruined refusers of "the ministry of righteousness;" whose ministers are a saviour, not only of life unto life, but of death also unto death.³

4. The prophecy of Ezekiel, which contemplates the restoration of Sodom and Samaria in the day of Jerusalem's mercy, is accepted by the same class of writers as a pledge of the ultimate recovery of all; and the words of Jude⁴ are triumphantly alleged, in their assumed subordination to that prophecy, in proof of the limited force that the epithet "eternal" should receive, when found in conjunction with words of blame or condemnation.

Now there are, in the first place, conflicting readings of Jude 7, which make it difficult to determine the exact sense of that passage; while a reference to the parallel place in 2 Pet. ii. 6 must convince a candid mind that the intention of both witnesses is the same: to hold up, namely, the earlier judgments of God as a warning to those who are threatened, if impenitent, with His last and irremediable one.⁵ But with reference to Ezekiel xvi., it is clear that, if taken literally, the restoration of Sodom and her daughters takes place in the millennial ago, to which the final judgment is postponed.⁶

5. The last text I shall notice is Rev. xi. 15.: "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ; and He

² 2 Peter i. 10; 2 Tim. iii. 14, 15.

³ 2 Cor. ii. 16.

⁴ Jude 7.

⁵ Bengel, after Cassiodorus, puts *δειγμα* in apposition with *δολον*. "The punishment," he says, "which they endure is *an example* of eternal fire: for the punishment of these cities is not eternal."

⁶ Rev. xx. 7-15.

shall reign *for ever and ever*.”⁷ This verse has been compared with 1 Cor. xv. 24, which affirms the surrender of Christ’s kingdom to the Father, and the inference drawn that what is described in the former passage as an endless roign, is definitely limited in the latter. But surely this is, to say the least, a very careless way of treating Scripture. An attentive reader cannot fail to see that in Rev. xi. 15, Jehovah and His Christ are distinguished, as in Ps. ii. 2. The passage speaks of the assumption, in power, of universal dominion by “our Lord *and* His Christ.” That which had been before in Satan’s hands, as the prince of this world, is now passed into those of Him who is “the King eternal, immortal, invisible;” and whose counsel has appointed to His Christ a throne and dominion of which Ps. ii. and many other Scriptures speak, and to which 1 Cor. xv. 24 distinctively refers. But the fulfilment of the special promise does not break the continuity of the inclusive and eternal truth, which testifies that He (Jehovah) shall reign for ever and ever. The plain drift of the passage is that the once permitted dominance of evil is come to a perpetual end, and that the ages of ages which succeed the crisis there described will witness the unbroken reign of *God*. The just Ruler will receive His kingdom, and restore it, when its term is reached, to Him in whose fear it was administered.⁸ The Son, who always glorified Him, will again be subject to the Father, and God shall be all in all.

I have omitted, I believe, nothing worthy of serious notice in the opposite argument. As to those writers who add to their denial of eternal punishment a refusal also of the doctrine of atonement; and, grounding their reasonings on an appeal to natural consciousness and sympathies, speak blasphemously of things evidently far above their reach,⁹ they must be left to fulfil, if God arrest them not, their self-destructive course.

⁷ εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων.

⁸ 2 Sam. xxiii. 3.

⁹ Jude 10; Ps. x. 5.