Is Eternal Punishment Endless?

IS "ETERNAL" PUNISHMENT ENDLESS?

ANSWERED BY

A RESTATEMENT OF THE ORIGINAL SCRIPTURAL DOCTRINE,

BY AN

ORTHODOX MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL.

Whitman James Morris

The secret things belong unto the LORD our God; but those things which are revealed belong unto us, and to our children, forever, that we may do all the words of this law. — DEUTERONOMY xxix. 29.

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Τὰ κρυπτὰ κυρίῳ τῷ θεῷ ἡμῶν, τὰ δὲ φανερὰ ἡμῖν καὶ τοῖς τέκνοις ἡμῶν εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, ποιεῖν πάντα τὰ ῥήματα τοῦ νόμου τούτου.—**Deut. xxix. 29, LXX.**

PREFACE

TO THE SECOND EDITION.

DURING the year that has elapsed since the publication of the first edition (written and offered to the publishers at a time when I was expecting to continue in the pastoral office), an unexpectedly large number of clergymen, in various orthodox denominations, have, by letter and in conversation, assured me of their substantial accord with, or strong inclination to, the view presented in this Essay. It has, indeed, thus far, as I suppose, been read chiefly by clergymen, and among these, as I have been told by one of them, "it has done its work." While the laity, comparatively seldom called upon to explain or defend the traditional doctrine, have had but a dormant interest hitherto in investigating its grounds, the clergy, on the other hand, have at all times a special interest in such investigations, because constantly required by objectors to vindicate that doctrine as an article of revelation, and to reconcile it with our faith in a mercy that "endureth forever." From many of these defenders of this faith comes to me the response, "If your conclusion is no more than a negative one, it is still to be hailed with joy. The precious gospel at least is relieved from responsibility for the tremendous propositions which Calvin," etc. [See Appendix E.]

Among the few criticisms that have been made there are none that require further reply, than to request a more attentive reading of the argument through the first two chapters. No reply, that I am aware of, has been attempted to the main argument from the history which the fundamental words, *æon* and *æonian*, have in the language of the Bible.

A persistent effort, however, is made to turn the edge of the exegetical argument by the mere inference, that if heaven is endless, hell must be, because the two states are presented in parallel language in Matt. xxv. 46. (See pp. 46–50.) The inconsistency of such reasoners a very few words will demonstrate.

On the one hand they say to the annihilationist, who urges his literal interpretation of the terms *life* and *death*, that life is not mere being, but well-being; death not mere loss of being, but ill-being. Here, evidently, they claim that life and death, as terms applied to the future state, denote a kind, not an amount, of existence; that is, are to be taken as qualitative, not quantitative terms.

But, on the other hand, they say to one who doubts whether the duration, as distinct from the character, of future punishment has been revealed, that the promise of endless life to the righteous requires us to infer from the antithesis that the punishment of the wicked will be endless also. They insist on the endlessness of this punishment as a vital point, and some enthusiastic advocates go so far as to place it on a level of importance in the evangelical system with Christ's Atonement for sin. Here they cross over to the position of the annihilationist, just combated, that life and death in Christ's teachings are quantitative terms, rather than qualitative; they assert, what they had just before contradicted, that an amount, rather than a kind, of existence is the primary thought of the Master.

The inconsistency of such reasoning sufficiently discredits the inference which attempts to turn the point that exegesis establishes.

It is quite one thing to admit (as this Essay most distinctly admits in Chapter III.) the tendency toward permanence that character, whether sinful or righteous, always exhibits; and another thing to assert, dogmatically, that a perfect parallel exists between the processes of spiritual *life* and the processes of spiritual *death;* or, that the unnatural development of sin *must* be endless, because the development of righteousness *will* be endless. *If it be antecedently as probable,* that God will evermore uphold in being a soul irrecoverably involved in the processes of "æonian destruction" (2 Thess. i. 9), as it is that He will perpetuate, according to a specific promise (John xiv. 19), the immortality of a soul healthfully developing the "æonian life" received through Christ; then, and not otherwise, the inference of an endless misery from an endless happiness may have some rational foundation.

There are indications that the free and scholarly discussion of this whole subject, which it was the original mission of this Essay to call out (p. 101), is no longer to be delayed. The demand of theologians who have done up their thinking, that questions which they have settled shall not be reopened, is apparently not respected. It is always a privileged question, whether or no the church has been unintentionally "lying for God," by representing that God has revealed a thing which He has not revealed. This only is the question to which this Essay responds by a simple investigation of the facts, — all rhetoric and speculation put aside.

But should it appear, from the facts, that the endlessness of future punishment has been revealed with considerable clearness, there would then remain this further question: whether

such an article of faith stands in that vital relation to Christ's system of revealed truth, in which, for instance, the doctrine of justification through faith stands; whether any doubt or dissent as to the *duration* of hell so touches the heart of the evangelical system of truth, that it should disqualify for the ministry of the Word the same as doubt or dissent as to the fact of Christ's Vicarious Sacrifice. If, as seems probable, a strong argument could then be made against exclusion, how much stronger, if the position reached by this Essay should appear tenable.

A desirable freedom of thought may be somewhat aided by remembering that these two questions are distinct, and to be separately treated, although the second must constantly appear in the background of the previous question, now pressing with unusual urgency and interest on thoughtful minds: *What does the Bible really say of the duration of future punishment?*

Upon this main issue, — with which alone this Essay is concerned, — one can hardly have observed the uncertainty, the vacillation, the dissatisfaction and dissent, widely spread and still spreading among the clergy of the orthodox denominations, in regard to this subject, without having some such thought as this come into his mind: That if the progress of discussion should finally give to all an assurance that the *endlessness* of hell was not actually taught by Christ, there would not only be a general feeling of relief from a heavy burden, but a general consent to regard the superseded belief as an odious nightmare of medieval ignorance and superstition.

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INTRODUCTION.

THE Bible was once supposed to give authoritative instruction on some subjects on which it is now generally conceded to be silent. It was once supposed that the Bible taught a theory of the universe at variance with the Copernican astronomy. The true pattern of civil government has also been regarded as exhibited in the laws of Moses. But the progress of enlightened views respecting the application of the Bible to the subjects of human study has uniformly been in the direction of contraction. It has gradually been learned that the Bible was not given to teach all truth whatsoever, but merely all truth needful for our salvation from sin.

The general question respecting the relations of the Bible to Science seems destined to receive fresh illustration in the discussion of "Eternal Punishment." It is a fit question for any reverent student of the Bible to propose, whether the Bible was intended to teach us about Eternity any more than about the Universe; whether an infinite duration is not as much beyond the Bible's actual scope as an infinite space; whether the Bible really designs more than to conduct us to the verge of a mysterious infinitude, leaving all the possibilities of the apparently boundless sea, upon which it bids us look and ponder, to be solved by our experience.

While this Essay deals largely with the inquiry, whether

the original language of the Bible respecting the future state has been correctly interpreted, yet taking our English Version, so excellent in the main, precisely as it stands, a question of the highest moment demands answer. A thoughtful reader, ignorant of every language but his mother English, and declining to enter into vexed questions of the interpretation of Greek and Hebrew terms, can yet hardly avoid some such inquiry as this: If the Bible speaks of future punishment as "everlasting," does it speak with *scientific precision* any more than when it speaks of the sky as a "firmament," that is, a solid vault like a great dish-cover, and of this "firmament" as "dividing" the waters above it from the waters beneath it (Gen. i. 6, 7)? Unless, then, we are prepared to let the devil have, with "all the good tunes," all the scientific inquiry into the exact meaning of the Bible, then that inquiry must be both undertaken and befriended by devout believers in the divine authority of the Bible. And such inquiry, in order to reach the truth and command respect, must be performed in a spirit as free as skepticism itself from all the bias of human tradition and dogmatic authority.

The conclusion reached by this Essay is, in general, that of Nescience, viz: That the Bible, while teaching Future Punishment in terms sufficiently explicit and severe for the purposes of moral government, does not positively declare the duration of that punishment. An unbiased criticism by the best light that modern scholarship affords does not accept the sense which tradition has attached to some of the words of Scripture upon this subject. The Bible, however, reveals no restoration of "the lost." It casts no ray of hope upon the future of him who has wasted the present life. But, on the other hand, it does not assert the absolute endlessness of his punishment. Endless it may be, so far as any divine word to

the contrary has reached us. But, after the fullest searching of the Bible teachings, a cloud of impenetrable mystery hides the ultimate lot of the wicked, — a mystery so plainly full of woe that it is likely to prove quite as salutary for moral purposes as any precise and clear disclosure.

Controversy has been far from the writer's aim, which has been simply to develop and restate the original doctrine of the Bible. Written at first solely for the eye of a dear relative, who desired to know the utmost that God, as distinct from some of His expositors, required her to believe respecting the future state of lost souls, these pages are now, at her suggestion, offered to that large class of inquiring minds in the evangelical churches, who, with the most unswerving loyalty to the Written Word, are yet in doubt whether the sound of that Word, as it has thus far reached them upon this subject, is free from commingling voices of human error.

But if any reader be inclined to complain, after reading this Essay, that it has added nothing to things previously known, the writer would remind him, that it is often as serviceable to the cause of truth to *define* the limits of our knowledge, as to *extend* them. To be assured what one is *not* required to believe is often helpful to a doubt-encompassed soul, and vital to its victory in the conflict between faith and unbelief. Ignorant must he be of the phases of religious experience, who does not know that in this way many a struggling swimmer may be lightened of a weight that threatens to engulf him in the depths of infidelity.

To the foregoing it needs only to be added, that the object of this Essay is a mere inquiry into *facts*. No entrance is designed into the metaphysical and ethical arguments which the subject invites, and by which it is often perplexed, but simply

an inquiry into the answer which the Scripture returns to the question, *Is "Eternal" Punishment absolutely endless?* Sincerely and devoutly confessing the supreme authority of the Written Word in regard to the question of human destiny, we are now to seek for its simple testimony unencumbered with the "extra-belief" which results from the ignorance or the arrogance of dogmatizing interpreters.

Since the very nature of the inquiry before us is such that some dry discussion must be encountered at the outset, the suggestion is here made, that those who find the first chapter too hard to begin with may perhaps acquire the requisite edge of interest by first perusing the fourth and the sixth.

If any reader, having thought but little on the subject, is disposed at first sight to criticise the title of this Essay as proposing to solve a sort of identical equation, as if "eternal" necessarily means the same as "endless," he will gain direct insight into the matter by referring to page 55.

IS
ETERNAL PUNISHMENT ENDLESS?

CHAPTER I.

DOES THE NEW TESTAMENT TEACH THE ENDLESSNESS OF FUTURE PUNISHMENT IN EXPLICIT TERMS?

OBVIOUSLY, there are many passages in our English Testaments which read like clear and positive declarations of the endlessness of future sufferings. At the head of the list stands Matthew xxv. 46, "These shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal." The question that immediately starts up is, *whether our translators have here correctly represented the original words of the Lord.* Here we are necessarily obliged to enter into what may seem to some a dry discussion, viz, an examination of the proper signification of a word belonging to a dead language. It is, however, so necessary to any clear and correct decision of the point in question, that few who are at all interested in the main subject will lack interest in examining the hinge on which the controversy may be supposed to turn. The matter is, moreover, capable of being presented, as will be the endeavor of these pages,

in a way that is easily followed by the unlearned reader.

The words "everlasting" and "eternal" stand in our version as the equivalents of the single Greek adjective αἰώνιον (*aiōnion*). This we can anglicize at once by a word which Tennyson has recommended to English ears, — "*æonian.*" "Æonian punishment" and "æonian life" are set forth as the opposite destinies of the righteous and the wicked. What, then, is the exact meaning of this important adjective?

The adjective *æonian* is derived from the noun *æon* (αἰών), which has often been taken to mean *eternity.* What it exactly means we shall see by and by. Thus much may be said at present, — granting that the noun *æon* may mean *eternity,* then the adjective *æonian* would mean *belonging to eternity,* and *æonian punishment* might mean *the punishment that takes place in eternity* (without any intimation as to its duration), as well as *the punishment that lasts through eternity.* Of this, more at another stage of our inquiry. It is to be admitted here (a point to be again referred to), that the adjective *æonian* had some reference to duration. The question now to be put is this: Did it regularly and strictly refer to *endless* duration? In answering this question we have to examine the New Testament in the light of the Old.

The Old Testament was translated during the third and second centuries before Christ from Hebrew into Greek. The version so made, called the *Septuagint* (from the number of scholars alleged to have been em-

ployed upon it; *septuaginta* = seventy), was the Bible of the Apostles. About six sevenths of the quotations from the Old Testament in the New seem to have been made directly from the Septuagint — designated by the numeral LXX. The language of the LXX. moulded the language of the Apostles. The use of a word in the LXX. is a help to understand its use in the Gospels and the Epistles. If the word *æonian* has not a strict and uniform reference to *endless* duration in the LXX., then we shall need a decisive reason for assigning it such a meaning in the New Testament.

We are well aware that this statement starts in the minds of some readers an objection which, for them, dooms it in advance; of that objection, however, account will be made, as soon as the point now raised has been fairly presented.

Now, in the LXX. we find that *æonian*, as far as it may be taken to refer to duration, has a more or less extensive sense *according to the word joined with it.* We find it as an epithet of God in Genesis xxi. 33, where we read that Abraham "called on the name of the Lord, the everlasting (*æonian*) God." The exact force of the epithet here will appear by and by. So far as the idea of duration is found in it, the word is obviously required by its connection here to be taken in the most extensive sense. But we find the same word applied to a variety of things that are not strictly everlasting. In Genesis xvii. 8, the land of Canaan is given to Abraham and his descendants "for an everlasting (*æonian*) possession." In Num-

bers xxv. 13, Phinehas and his posterity are granted "the covenant of an everlasting (*æonian*) priesthood." The book of Proverbs (xxii. 28) forbids the removing of "the ancient (*æonian*) landmark which thy fathers have set." Habakkuk (iii. 6) sings, "the perpetual (*æonian*) hills did bow." Thus, with varying shades of meaning, the epithet *æonian* may denote the eternity of God, or the continuance of an inheritance, an office, a boundary, or a hill. In each case the epithet derives its variable extensiveness *from the word joined with it.* The æonian hills are deemed more everlasting than the æonian landmark, and God only everlasting in the strict sense of the term. Our own word *everlasting* itself has this variable meaning according to the connection in which it stands. We say of a person who dwells during the prevalence of an epidemic in a state of constant apprehension, that he is "tormented by everlasting anxiety;" and again we speak of some who are carried off at the same time as "gone to their everlasting reward," and no one is misled by the varied use of the word, because the connection in each case defines it.

Such, then, being the variable use of the word *æonian* in the LXX., the popular Bible of the Apostles' time, how can we be certified that with reference to future punishment it denotes, in the Apostles' writings, an *endless* duration? We ought to have some decisive ground for concluding that they use the word any differently than their Bible had taught them to use it. Will it be said, that the New Testament does not apply the word to the things of

this life, like the Old, but almost wholly to the things of the life to come? It might even then be begging the question to assume that everything in the future state is endless. But, on the contrary, the New Testament sometimes applies the term *æonian* to the ages *past*, as in 2 Timothy i. 9, "before the world began" (literally "before æonian times," an expression like the LXX., Psalms lxxvii. 5, "æonian years," Eng. Ver., "years of ancient times"). In such connections, certainly, if the word denotes duration at all, it is duration *ended* rather than *endless*.[1] We do not see how any conclusion can show greater reason than this, that as in the Old Testament so also in the New, the extent of the epithet *æonian* must be settled, if at all, by *the connection* in which it stands.

In regard, then, to this most important text, whether we understand that "æonian punishment" means simply *the punishment taking place in eternity*, — a translation that the highest scholarship approves, — or whether we think that the word has *some* reference also to duration, we are far from obtaining from this word *æonian* any testimony to

[1] Compare here Titus i. 2, which literally reads: "in hope of æonian life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before æonian times." While *æonian*, as joined with *life*, refers to the present as extending *indefinitely* into *futurity*, in connection with *times* it denotes certain *definite* periods of the *past*. So in Romans xvi. 25, "which was kept secret since the world began" (literally, in æonian times), we have the word again in reference to measurable periods of the past which have come to an end. The idea that *æon* (*αἰών*) is distinctively timeless and immeasurable, is inconsistent with this use of *æonian* as an epithet of *time*."

the *endlessness* of future punishment. Where the English version seems clear and decisive, the original is ambiguous and indefinite. We must look elsewhere for the decision of the point here left in doubt.

But an objection is made of which notice should be taken here.

The Rev. H. M. Dexter, D. D., in his "Verdict of Reason" (pp. 125, 126), quotes as "very pertinent and conclusive" the following remarks of Prof. S. C. Bartlett, D. D., in his work on "Modern Universalism" (p. 82).

"Universalists make much parade of a few instances in which the Hebrew term for 'everlasting' denotes something less than absolute eternity, as 'the everlasting hills.' But the phrase, when applied to future time, always denotes *the longest duration of which its subject is capable.* 'Everlasting hills' are those which will continue to the end of the world. 'He shall serve forever,' *i. e.*, during the longest period of which he is capable, his whole life. Hannah devoted Samuel to the Lord 'forever' (1 Sam. i. 22); *i. e.*, he was never to return to private life. 'An ordinance forever,' is one which lasts through the longest possible time, *i. e.*, the whole dispensation of which it is a part. Such cases, few in number, do not contravene in spirit the scores of instances in which it signifies absolute eternity, *the original and proper sense of the term.*"

The Professor's language is slightly inaccurate. "*Absolute* eternity" is without beginning, as well as without end, but he uses the phrase as synonymous with mere

endlessness. Let that pass, however. It is remarkable that he does not see that he takes for granted the very thing to be proved. If we should accept his assumption that "æonian punishment" is punishment that lasts as long as it is capable of lasting, the very point on which we need information is, *How long is that?* How long, with reference both to the desert of punishment, and the nature of the punishment, and the capacity of the sufferer to endure punishment, and the character of Him who appoints the punishment? What right have we to assume with Dr. Hodge,[1] that the soul "is in its own nature imperishable?"—an assertion which, did it not come from so high a source, might be deemed irreconcilable with the Apostolic declaration, that God "only hath immortality."[2] Or, with regard to the punishment merely, what right have we to assume that that punishment is capable of lasting forever? If Professor Bartlett thinks we ought to know that from the mere word *æonian*, he ought to know, that not only "Universalists," but some very considerable scholars of the orthodox faith, do not agree with his assertion, that "absolute eternity" is "the original and proper sense of the term."

It is well to make here a note of the fact, which seem to have been strangely ignored, that the Greek, like the English, has its appropriate words to express with precision the idea of endlessness. When the endlessness of future punishments was first declared to be

[1] *Syst. Theol.* iii. 876.

[2] 1 Timothy vi. 16.

an article of the orthodox faith in the middle of the sixth century (see Chapter IV.), the word *ateleutētos* (ἀτελεύτητος — endless) was employed for that purpose,[1] a word not found in the New Testament, though quite classical. The word *endless* is found in our version in 1 Timothy i. 4, — "endless genealogies," where the original is *aperantos* (ἀπέραντος — interminable), and also in Hebrews vii. 16 — "endless life," where the original is *akatalŭtos* (ἀκατάλυτος — indissoluble). It is a very natural supposition, that such words could have been used, guarded with suitable qualifications, as in English, to express the idea of absolute endlessness, if it had been desired to make it appear that future punishments were indeed without end. And can it be regarded as accidental and insignificant, that the sacred writers never employed such terms in describing the future state, but confined themselves to what appears thus far as an elastic and ambiguous word — *æonian?*

The fact that the New Testament writers have rigidly declined to avail themselves at all of the ample resources of their own language to express the idea of an endless punishment with the definiteness that modern theologians so easily give to it, has not been thought worthy of much

[1] "The Holy Church of Christ teaches an endless æonian life for the righteous, and an endless punishment for the wicked." — *Letter of the Emperor Justinian to the Patriarch Mennas.* If *æonian* by itself means "endless," why was it defined by prefixing *ateleutetos*, which also means "endless?" (See the Rev. E. Beecher, D. D., in the *Christian Union*, September 17, 1873, p. 236.)

notice by advocates of the traditional view. But it is, beyond all question, a fact that demands to be accounted for before proceeding to fabricate out of a single ambiguous word, of so varied application as this *æonian*, a test either of doctrinal orthodoxy or of church-communion.

We shall get, however, a more clear and exact understanding of this cardinal word by examining the noun *æon* (αἰών) from which it is derived. *Æonian* strictly denotes that which relates or belongs to *æon*, or *an æon*. What then is this?

It is needless to follow controversialists into an examination of the heathen Greek writers to find out the meaning of this word *æon* in the Scriptures. From the most ancient times downward, it frequently signified the life or age of man. Taking the Greek writers throughout, it certainly has no one invariable signification, being used now by a philosopher to express the idea of unlimited duration, and now by a poet to denote the spinal marrow. The Biblical sense of the word, though not without example in the classical, is distinct from it on the whole, and quite peculiar, as it is used by the LXX. as the equivalent of the Hebrew *'olam* (עולם)[1] *'Olam* in the Hebrew Testament very frequently meant a *world-period* or *cycle*.

Ecclesiastes i. 4 — The earth abideth forever, literally, for the *'olam*, or cycle; LXX. for the *æon*.

Psalm cxlv. 13 — Thy kingdom is an everlasting king

[1] See Appendix.

dom; literally, a kingdom of all *'olams*, or cycles; LXX. of all the *æons*.

Exodus xl. 15 — Their anointing shall surely be for an everlasting priesthood; literally, for a priesthood of *'olam*, or a cycle; LXX. a priestly anointing for the *æon*.

In this last instance, the *'olam*, cycle, or *æon*, closed, as we see by comparing Hebrews vii. 11, 12, at the end of the Mosaic dispensation.

Again,

Psalm cxliii. 3 — Those that have been long dead; literally, the dead of *'olam*, or, as we should say, "the dead of ages;" LXX. the dead of *æon*."

The word *æon* accordingly retains in the New Testament this peculiar Hebraistic color which the LXX. had given to it. The reader not familiar with Greek can take in by a glance at the foot-note[1] the various significations of the word in the New Testament.

[1] Compare Matt. xxviii. 20 — With you always even unto the end of the world (end of the *æon*).

Mark iv. 19 — The cares of this world (cares of the *æon*).

Luke i. 33 — Shall reign over the house of Jacob forever (for the *æons*).

John iv. 14 — Shall never thirst (shall not thirst for the *æon*).

John ix. 32 — Since the world *began* (since the *æon*).

Acts iii. 21 — Since the world *began* (from or of *æon* [as we say "of *yore*"]).

Romans xii. 2 — Be not conformed to this world (to this *æon*).

An examination of all the passages of the New Testament in which the word occurs will yield the following results: —

1. That it denotes a period of duration.

2. That it is used very frequently, much more often than by the classic Greek, in the *plural*. This fact is in the way of the assertion that *æon* has inherently the idea of *infinite* duration, for only finite things can have the

1 Cor. ii. 7 — Which God ordained before the world (before the *æons*).

1 Cor. x. 11 — Upon whom the ends of the world (of the *æons*) are come.

2 Cor. xi. 31 — God . . . . blessed for evermore (for the *æons*).

Eph. ii. 2 — Walked according to the course (the *æon*) of this world.

Eph. ii. 7 — In the ages (*æons*) to come.

Eph. iii. 21 — Throughout all ages world without end (*to all the generations of the æon of the æons*).

1 Tim. i. 17 — The King Eternal (King of the *æons* [a reminiscence of Ps. cxlv. 13, "Thy kingdom is a kingdom of all the *æons*," or "*'olams*"]).

Heb. i. 2 — He made the worlds (the *æons*).

Heb. ix. 26 — In the end of the world (the consummation of the *æons*).

Heb. xi. 3 — The worlds were framed (the *æons* were prepared).

2 Pet. iii. 18 — To Him be glory both now and forever (now and to a day of *æon*).

Rev. iv. 9 — Who liveth forever and ever (*to the æons of the æons*).

There is hardly need to call attention here to the difference between the use of "*æons*" in the Scriptures to denote periods of duration, and the later use of the term, in the nonsense of the Gnostics, to denote "the ideas of the eternal spirit-world" — such as wisdom, power, etc. — conceived as emanations from the Deity.

plural. We can not speak of the coming *eternities*. But Paul speaks (Eph. ii. 7) of "the ages (*æons*) to come."[1]

3. That the present world-period or course of things, is spoken of as *this æon*, or *the æon*, or *an æon*.

4. That the period or course of things which is immediately to succeed the present is likewise called *that æon*, or *the æon*, or *the coming æon*.

5. That past duration, the course or courses of things that have preceded the present, is called *the æon*, or *the æons*, or simply *æons*.

[1] "The time sense [of 'olamim], *worlds after worlds*, ... was a conception peculiarly Shemitic, barely found, if at all, among other ancient peoples, and giving rise to those *pluralities* of *'olam*, and afterwards of *æon*, which can be accounted for in no other way, since the conception of absolute endlessness as etymological in *'olam*, or *æon*, would clearly have prevented it. It is this idea which so refutes the assertion of STUART (*Comment. Eccles.* xii. 1) that 'time divided is not strictly predicable of a future state.' He means that all duration, before or after the present *world*, as we call it, must be regarded as one continuous blank, or unvaried extension of being. There are not only no days and years, such as measure our 'olam, but no æons, or world-times, in that greater chronology. This certainly is not the Scripture mode of conception, or such language as we find would never have arisen, or such pluralities as 'olamim, æons, or their reduplications, ages of ages, worlds of worlds, exactly like the space pluralities, heaven of heavens. Such is the Scripture conception. . . . . And reason sanctions it. What a narrow idea that the great antepast, and the great future after this brief world, or 'olam, has passed away, are to be regarded as having no chronology of a higher kind, no other worlds, and worlds of worlds, succeeding each other in number aud variety inconceivable." (Dr. Tayler Lewis, *Excursus on Ecclesiastes* i. 3. Lange's *Com.* p. 47.)

6. That future duration, in its whole compass, is described as a succession of æons. (See Appendix B.)

7. That the regular phrases for unlimited duration, — *for the æons*, or *for the æons of the æons*, strictly denote an indefinite succession of these finite periods or æons.

8. *That there is no single word that regularly carries the meaning of our word eternity.*

At this point it becomes necessary to criticise the assumption that the phrase *eis ton aiōna* (εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα — for the æon), translated in our version "forever," as in John vi. 58, "uniformly denotes endless duration." If this be so, then the adjective *æonian*, if we could also assume that it is "uniformly" the equivalent of that phrase (an assumption not likely to pass unquestioned), would undoubtedly signify endlessness. We shall not need, however, to test the correctness of this last hypothesis, until we have tested that which it depends upon, and which is advanced, not only by Professor Bartlett, but by an authority no less than Dr. Robinson's "New Testament Lexicon."

It requires some confidence to dissent from a scholar of such fame as Dr. Robinson, but his assertion, that the phrase, "for the æon," is to be regarded as "always implying duration without end" (Lex. p. 21), can be quickly tested. Dr. R. cites, as instances of this meaning, all those passages in the Epistle to the Hebrews which speak of Christ as "a priest forever" (for the æon), as Heb. v. 6. But the priesthood of Christ being, according to the Westminster Catechism, one of the three offices which

Christ as our Redeemer executes, continues only as long as His redeeming work continues. It ends when the redemption is accomplished. So Professor Stuart, a high authority, remarks upon Hebrews v. 6: "'*For the æon*' is to be taken in a qualified sense here, as often elsewhere, *e. g.*, compare Luke i. 33 with 1 Cor. xv. 24–28. The priesthood of Christ will doubtless continue no longer than His mediatorial reign; for, when His reign as mediator ceases, His whole work both as mediator and as priest will have been accomplished." (Comment. Heb. p. 340.)

Let us try another citation which Dr. Robinson offers in proof of his assertion, that the words "for the æon" always imply duration without end. Christ promises to His disciples: "I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever (for the æon), even the Spirit of Truth" (John xiv. 16). The whole representation of the Mission of the Comforter limits His special office to the period (æon), during which — Christ being gone to prepare a place for them — the disciples would need the Comforter in His stead. The Comforter abides with them during the absence of the departed Lord "for the æon," *until* He come again, and receive them to Himself. As *God*, the Holy Ghost will of course be with the Christian "world without end" (to all the generations of the æon of the æons);[1] but as *Comforter*, He is promised, specifically, only "for the æon" in which the disciples would otherwise be left "comfortless."[2]

[1] Eph. iii. 21. [2] John xiv. 18.

Dr. Robinson cites again, 1 Peter i. 25: "The word of the Lord endureth forever" (for the æon). It is true that God's word stands even for the æons of æons, but in view of the passages just examined, it may be doubted whether we are required thus to intensify the statement of the Apostle. His thought, as the context shows, is simply this: that (so far from being of transitory force) God's word to the world stands to the world's end. This is certified by a comparison of Deuteronomy xxix. 29, the things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever" (Hebrew *for 'olam*: LXX. *for the æon*). The extent of "the æon" is defined by the immediately following words: "that we may do all the words of this law"— as the period during which the Mosaic revelation was to be obeyed, *i. e.*, the period of the Mosaic dispensation, which ended eighteen centuries ago.

For a passage in which our translators have stamped upon their version this limited signification of *eis ton aiōna*, see 1 Cor. viii. 13 — "I will eat no meat while the world standeth" (for the æon). The fact is, that the New Testament use of the phrase exactly corresponds to the Old Testament use of it in the LXX., where, as Dr. Tayler Lewis observes, "immense extremes" occur "in the use of the word." He cites for comparison Exodus xxi. 6, the servant who does not wish to be freed "shall serve his master forever" (for the æon); and Deut. xxxii. 40, where God says, "I live forever" (for the æon). Here temporal servitude and Divine existence are comprehended within the elastic limits of the same phrase.

Compare John viii. 35, and xii. 34. In English also, we often use the word "forever" with exclusive reference to the present world, — precisely as the Scripture often employs *eis ton aiōna*, — as in legal phraseology, "to his heirs and assigns forever." The result of a critical analysis of all the passages where the phrase occurs is this: It uniformly denotes, not "duration without end," but *permanent* duration, permanent *according to the nature of the subject*, covering in one case merely the period during which a blasted fig-tree stands,[1] and in another, the eternity of our Lord.[2] To affirm that it *always* implies duration without end, is as contrary to fact as to affirm that it *never* does.

As to any inference respecting the duration of punishment that might be drawn from the point just made — that *eis ton aiōna* denotes *permanence according to the nature of the subject*, compare the criticism already made upon Professor Bartlett's inference from the similar sense of the

[1] Matt. xxi. 19.

[2] 2 Peter iii. 18. The reader who has been assured by certain orthodox dogmatists, that nobody questions their traditional interpretation of the original language of the New Testament on this subject, except a few heretics, or sentimentalists, who cannot endure the plain positiveness of Holy Writ, will appreciate the coolness of that assumption after reading Dr. Tayler Lewis's *Excursus on the 'Olamic or Æonian words in Scripture* in Lange's *Commentary on Ecclesiastes*, pp. 44–51, a contribution to the discussion of the subject, which, coming, as it does, from a scholar whose great learning is combined with an unquestioned orthodoxy, has been surprisingly ignored by writers on the orthodox side for the last five years.

derivative *æonian*. (See pp. 6, 7.) It is not a thing to be assumed, in advance of clear proof from Scripture, that the nature of the subject is such, that a word or phrase of varying import must, whenever applied to future punishment, always be interpreted in its widest possible extent. If it be assumed (1) that the "æonian punishment" means punishment forever; and (2) that this "forever" means as long as the person who is punished exists; it remains to be shown, (3) that his existence itself is endless, before his punishment can be positively declared to be an absolutely endless one. And the passage of Scripture that affirms this (3) yet remains to be discovered.

It seems, then, that the adjective *æonian*, neither by itself nor by what it derives from its noun *æon*, gives any testimony to the endlessness of future punishment. Futurity being represented in the New Testament as a succession of æons, "æonian punishment," so far as the phrase itself can carry its own interpretation, is altogether of indefinite duration, all that the definition "æonian" gives with any certainty being this, that the punishment *belongs to*, or *occurs in*, the æon, or the æons, to come.

It has always been taken for granted, however, that the epithet *æonian*, instead of denoting a *kind* of punishment, denotes an *amount* of punishment, punishment not so much *occurring in*, as *lasting through*, a future period or state. Which of these two, the *qualitative* or the *quantitative*, is the fundamental signification of the epithet, is a question of great moment in this discussion. We shall presently make a strong objection to the tradi-

tional preference of the quantitative idea. But at present we will see what further evidence there may be in its favor. So far as we have looked into it, the quantitative idea, namely, that *æonian* punishment must mean punishment of a certain length or amount, is an assumption which needs to be verified, if it can be, by other testimony from the Scriptures.

In proceeding now to this, it barely needs remark, that none of the words denoting or describing future punishment, which we find coupled with the epithet *æonian*, such as "æonian *fire*" (Matt. xviii. 8); or "æonian *damnation*" (Mark iii. 29, where a more approved reading is "æonian *sin*"), or "æonian *judgment*" (Hebrews vi. 2), adds any further definiteness to the indefinite adjective; indeed, the phrase, "æonian *destruction*" (2 Thessalonians i. 9), needs the constant vigilance of the traditional school to rescue it from the abuse of the annihilationists.

The evidence which we must now look farther for, as to the extent of the epithet thus far indefinitely applied to future punishment, may be sought for partly in explicit statements, and partly in the implication of statements that are not so explicit. In what remains of the present chapter we will examine the first-mentioned class, reserving the other class for the next.

As to explicit statements, there are some which in our version are as decisive as the noted text already examined, but in the original language become as indeterminate as that. For instance, we read in Mark (ix. 43) of

"the fire that never shall be quenched." The word "never" is a contribution of our translators to the original *asbestos* (ἄσβεστος). This may be translated "unquenched" as correctly as "unquenchable." And even if we call it "unquenchable," this word is equally open to a limited or an unlimited interpretation. We often say that a conflagration "raged with unquenchable fury," meaning that it could not be quenched till its material was consumed. The epithet *asbestos*, "unquenchable," is applicable to a fire that lasts very long, or a fire that is for a time beyond all control, as fairly as to a fire that is literally endless. How do we know that the latter is the real meaning of our Lord's word?[1] The original of

[1] Dr. Hodge, in his *System of Theology* (iii. 877), well exemplifies the ease with which an assumed meaning can be *read into* Scripture. He says: "It is to be remembered that, admitting the word 'everlasting' to be ever so ambiguous, the Bible says that the worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched. We have therefore the direct assertion of the word of God that the sufferings of the lost are unending." A more unfounded statement could hardly be made. To illustrate this, let us suppose the correctness of the doubtful statements that in the valley of Hinnom (Hebrew, *Gehenna*) the worm-breeding offal and filth of Jerusalem were consumed by ever-burning fires. It is certain that to such a place (whether a real or an imaginary place makes no difference) the words, "where their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched" (Mark ix. 48), could be applied with literal correctness. But no one would find the idea of absolute endlessness in such an expression. How, then, could Dr. Hodge find in the expression *as figuratively used* a "direct assertion" of endlessness which is not in the expression *as literally used*, unless he should import it furtively from his imagination, or some more reliable extra-

the imagery employed in the Gospel is found in Isaiah lxvi. 24, where the prediction, "neither shall their fire be quenched," has reference to the destruction of "the carcasses" of rebels, until which is accomplished it is unquenchable. In order to make the epithet "unquenchable" denote anything more in the Gospel, it has to be *assumed* that the destructive processes of *future* punishment will *never* be accomplished. But we are limiting our inquiry to that which is *revealed.*

A similar addition to the limited force of the original has been made by the translators in Mark iii. 29, "hath never forgiveness," etc. The original, in the most approved text, reads, "hath not forgiveness for the æon, but is involved in an æonian sin." The idea is stated more explicitly in the parallel text in Matthew xii. 32, where the original, fairly rendered in our version, reads, "it shall not be forgiven him, either in this æon, or in the one to be." It is remarkable that St. Augustine himself derived from this text the idea, that in the coming æon some would obtain forgiveness who were unforgiven in the present, an idea from which the majority of modern Protestants dissent, though following him in most other matters of faith.[1] However, we have observed that

neous source? Such text-stuffing is as much of a fraud in its way, however unconscious, as ballot-stuffing.

[1] "For it would not be truly said of some, that they are forgiven neither in this age (*seculo*) nor in the future, were there not some who, though not in this, are forgiven in the future." See the passage discussed in Lange's *Comment.* Matt. pp. 227–229.

the Scriptures speak of futurity as running its course through "æons of æons." What then of him who finds no forgiveness "in the æon that is to be" after the present? Are we to *assume* that he will find it never in any succeeding æon? We must abstain from unauthorized assumptions. We must leave him where the Scripture leaves him, without one ray of hope. *No more is said* of him, whether he loses his very existence, through the destructiveness of his sin, or lives on to no end of conscious misery, or, in some succeeding æon, finds forgiveness. *Where nothing is revealed, nothing is to be assumed.* The condition of such a soul is sufficiently wretched and desperate to become a most impressive warning to sinners, without any need of our adding to the indefinite statement an inferential woe, or attempting to fix the exact depth of the abyss. We must not omit to notice, however, that the doctrine of endless misery is not the only one which squares with the language of these two texts. They are equally consistent with the theory of the annihilationists, on whatever other grounds that theory may be combated. So far from the absolute endlessness of future punishment being taught by these two texts, that is the very point which they abstain from pronouncing upon.

Perhaps no text has been more strained beyond its legitimate import, for proof of the endlessness of future punishment, than John iii. 36, — "He that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." "Shall *not* see life" is assumed to mean "shall

never see life." "The wrath of God abideth on him," is assumed to be the same as "abideth evermore." The text is declared to teach the unbeliever's irrecoverable abandonment to the powers of punishment. Thus have orthodox men taught their opponents to "wrest" the Scriptures. But compare 1 John iii. 14. "He that loveth not his brother abideth in death." How long? So long as he "loveth not his brother." No one presses the extreme inference that every unloving soul in this world "abideth" irrecoverably "in death." What warrant have we for treating the other "abideth" any differently? What reason to assume that it refers to a state after death, any more than a state before death? What reason for assuming that it denotes in any case an irrecoverable state under "wrath?" It is an abuse of the text to make it declare anything more than the truth that shines on the face of it, namely, that "he who believeth not the Son shall not see life," *while he remains in unbelief*, "but the wrath of God abideth on him," *so long as he continues an unbeliever.* Any other interpretation would condemn to final ruin every person in the world who is at present not a believer in Christ. And this is the sort of evidence on which many good people are content, through the force of unreflecting habit, to rest the tremendous burden of the doctrine of an absolutely endless punishment.

There are, however, three texts in the New Testament, in which the form of words elsewhere denoting unlimited duration is used in what seem to be descriptions of future punishment.

A. "The smoke of their torment ascendeth up forever and ever (for æons of æons)," Rev. xiv. 11.

B. "And her [Babylon's] smoke rose up (literally, rises up) forever and ever (for the æons of the æons)," Rev. xix. 3.

C. "And the devil [with the beast and the false prophet] shall be tormented day and night forever and ever (for the æons of the æons)," Rev. xx. 10.

"Here," exclaims an advocate of the endlessness of future punishment, "is an end of all controversy. What language could be plainer, and what more conclusive?"

If, however, one undertakes to deal with the subject as an investigator, rather than as an advocate, he will find this apparently plain and conclusive testimony involved in some very reasonable doubts, which are by no means to be superciliously treated, in the style of some modern dogmatists, as the cavils of an unbelieving spirit.

It is noticeable, whether significant or not, that the only apparently positive declarations of the absolute endlessness of future punishment occur in that one book of the New Testament which all concede to be the most figurative and enigmatical of all. But let us examine them.

The first two, (A) and (B), may be considered as one. The original of the imagery is found in Isaiah xxxiv. 10, where it is predicted, as one particular of the judgment to come upon the land of Idumea, "the smoke thereof shall go up forever" (Heb. "for *'olam*;" LXX. "time for the *æon*"). The New Testament prophet sim-

ply intensifies the ancient figure to "æons of æons." But, of course, neither Isaiah nor John meant literal smoke. The "smoke" of torment means a *sign* of torment, just as smoke is a sign of fire. A sign of torment, or punishment, then, is to "rise up" forever and ever. Here, now, if we no more desire to exaggerate the declarations of Scripture than to evaporate them, we have to ask the question, — Does this mean any more than that the punishment is to be so *signal*, so memorable, that its sign, or memorial, rising up in remembrance, will be before intelligent minds forever? We find probable warrant for this view in Jude 7, where we read that, "Sodom and Gomorrah . . . . are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal (*æonian*) fire." The fires that destroyed those cities soon ceased to burn. But so signal was the catastrophe, so proverbial in after ages became the names of Sodom and Gomorrah, as perpetual monuments of wrath, though buried out of sight, that the transient fire-storm which overwhelmed them became, in the living uses of history and of moral instruction, a fire truly *æonian*, the same in moral effect as a fire literally everlasting.[1]

The remaining text (C) is unique. The devil, the beast, and the false prophet (who- or whatever may be

[1] A commentator no less orthodox and judicious than Barnes remarks in his *Notes* on this passage: "The destruction was as entire and perpetual *as if* the fires had been always burning." Does not the quasi sense belong to the æonian phrase as fairly in one text as in the other?

denoted by the last two of this infernal trinity), are to be "tormented day and night forever and ever." The *expression* is so far different from the preceding that, instead of the sign of torment, the torment itself is described as perpetual. Whether the *thought* is materially changed by so slight a change in the expression we cannot be so certain without further examination. But taking the words at their face value, as we are bound to take all the words of Holy Writ, it appears that those three great enemies of God (who, by the way, do not seem to be human beings) are to be tormented endlessly. *Are we now to take this as a literal statement of fact?* The question is forced upon us by the context, where we read that "death and hell (*Hades*, elsewhere meaning the place of departed souls) were cast into the lake of fire" (verse 14). Is not either one of these neighboring expressions probably just as literal, or just as figurative, as the other? Or must we believe that John mixed things here, so that the plainest prose and the most high wrought poetry stand in contiguity, with no sign of transition to guide the interpreter? Certainly, if it be true, as a statesman has said, that "votes should be weighed as well as counted," equally should proof-texts. And it is a question of which every scholar, at least, will feel the force: How many such proof-texts from the poetical imagery of a book of promise, written for the consolation of a martyr-church, would be sufficient to counterbalance the omission, from Gospel or Epistle, of the single plain didactic statement that we are searching for?

It is to be remembered, in a critical estimate of the real value of doctrinal proof-texts from John's Revelation, that there is no other book of the New Testament in which commentators elsewhere concordant disagree so much. When interpreters can better agree respecting the explication of its symbolic language *by the facts of past history*, they may with more confidence resort to its metaphors for proof of a doctrine which lacks other proof in the New Testament. We cannot, therefore, accept this single text, whose highly figurative context, as well as the unknown character of two of the personages it speaks of, involves its interpretation in such uncertainty, as furnishing sufficient ground by itself, in the absence of decisive testimony from the plainer parts of Scripture, for recognizing the endlessness of the "æonian punishment" as an article of the Christian faith. The ruling out of such evidence does not disprove the endlessness of that punishment, but simply obliges it to seek more satisfactory proof before admission to unquestioned belief.

There is, however, a text in the Epistle of Jude (verse 6), which some quote as possessing special weight. "The angels which kept not their first estate . . . . he hath reserved in everlasting chains . . . . unto the judgment of the great day." The value of this text is thought to lie in its supplying a decisive synonyme of the uncertain term *æonian*. For "everlasting" does not stand here as the equivalent of *æonian*, but for a word *aïdios* (ἀΐδιος), which we may anglicize as *aïdian*. Here, it is said, we have a synonyme for *æonian*, whose meaning is clear;

aïdian is a word applied to the eternity of God (see Romans i. 20), "even His eternal (*aïdian*) power and Godhead."

It is to be noticed that these two texts, the latter of which is taken to interpret the former, are the only ones in the New Testament that contain the word *aïdian*. If now it be assumed that *aïdian* regularly denotes that which is strictly everlasting, then we are met by a question that ought to be answered: "Why, with this word at hand, to give precise expression to the idea of endless duration, have the sacred books never employed it with reference to the future of the human race, but always the indeterminate word *æonian*? For instance, in the very next verse (7), Jude, in speaking of the punishment of Sodom and Gomorrah, drops the word *aïdian*, just used with reference to the angels, and takes the word *æonian*, a change scarcely noticed in our version by the change of "everlasting" to "eternal." *Æonian* and *aïdian* may be used interchangeably in the writings of Plato, but they are not in the writings of the Apostles; in these the futurity of mankind is only *æonian*.

Professor Bartlett pronounces the occurrence of *aïdian* here (in evidence, as he assumes, that *æonian* is the same as *endless*) to be "singular and startling." His wonder suggests to us a further wonder. If *aïdian* has the meaning of endlessness any more clearly and strictly than *æonian*, then the entire avoidance of this clearer and stricter term throughout the New Testament as descriptive of human destiny in the future state is certainly very "singular," even if not actually "startling."

It might, however, be regarded as even "startling," if, after all the reliance that has been placed upon this passage, it should turn out that a limited interpretation is here attached to *aïdian* by its context. What if Jude only meant to affirm that the imprisonment of the fallen angels is "everlasting" until the Judgment! — thus leaving the after ages unspoken of. This is Barnes's view, who remarks in his "Notes," "This passage does not in itself prove that the punishment of the rebel angels will be eternal, but merely that they are kept in a dark prison . . . . which is to exist forever with reference to the final trial." What is to be after that, is stated, Barnes adds, in Matthew xxv. 41.

The result of our inquiry thus far is, that the texts which in our English Bibles appear to teach in the plainest manner the endlessness of future punishment, do not seem to teach it in an exact and unprejudiced interpretation of the original. The utmost that can be said is, that they leave the duration of future punishment indeterminate; they abstain from saying that it is absolutely and literally endless. It may be endless, notwithstanding; there may be other evidence; we have still to examine a large class of passages which are thought to teach it by implication. And we are, if possible, to study them without any desire to make them prop a previously adopted belief. Such a desire is a prejudgment which cannot fail to warp the ultimate conclusion.

If, fully persuaded by tradition, or in any other way, of the endlessness of future punishment, we come to the

New Testament to look up proof-texts for it, we find precisely what we are looking for, and in great abundance. There are a great many passages in the New Testament, into which a mind already imbued with that doctrine can easily put the same, because the language is elastic, and indecisive. The fact that skeptics have declared that the Bible teaches endless punishment, is sometimes pointed out as proof that the Bible does teach it; an unfair conclusion, however. It makes no difference whether one be a Christian or a skeptic; if he goes to the Bible to look for a doctrine which he already thinks to be there, he will be quite likely to read his preconceptions into the sacred book, instead of reading God's communications out of it. Nor does the fact that a man is a skeptic, — if by that word unfriendliness to the idea of a supernatural revelation is denoted — make him any more acute a discerner of the exact meaning of Scripture texts. But if we can keep ourselves sufficiently clear of preconceptions to study the Bible in a tolerably scientific spirit, regarding only *what is written*, stripped of all the dogmatizing that theologians have overlaid it with; if we endeavor to recognize *the simple objective truth of the Divine word as unmodified by our own or others' subjectivity;* if we study the Bible with a candid willingness that it deliver a testimony at variance with our traditions; it is possible that we, — like those before us, who have had their astronomical and political and ecclesiastical and theological misconceptions of Biblical teaching modified by study, — shall find some of our preconceptions less strongly sus-

tained by scriptural authority than we had supposed. When the texts, which, in the common version of the New Testament, have stood as the Gibraltar of the dogma of endless punishment, are tested by a rigorous and impartial exegesis of the original language, it is found that they by no means *require* us to believe that doctrine, however they may *permit* us, without protest, if we have found other reasons for it.

The changed views of the interpretation of the words that have hitherto been regarded as decisive, which are now spreading among scholars in the orthodox churches and ministry, are illustrated in the following remarks of Professor Tayler Lewis. They are introduced here both as comment on the preceding criticisms, and as a text for our following inquiry respecting what the New Testament teaches by implication on the subject before us.

"It may be thought that this view of *'olam* and *æon* as having plurals, and therefore not in themselves denoting absolute endlessness, or infinity of time, must weaken the force of certain passages in the New Testament, especially of that most solemn sentence, Matthew xxv. 46. This, however, comes from a wrong view of what constitutes the real power of the impressive language there employed. The preacher, in contending with the Universalist, or Restorationist, would commit an error, and, it may be, suffer a failure in his argument, should he lay the whole stress of it on the etymological, or historical significance of the words *æon*, *æonian*, and attempt to

prove that, of themselves, they necessarily carry the meaning of endless duration. There is another method by which the conclusion is reached in a much more impressive and cavil-silencing manner. It is by insisting on that dread aspect of *finality*, that appears not in single words merely, but in the power and vividness of the language taken as a whole. The parabolic images evidently represent a *closing scene*. It is the *last* great act in the drama of human existence, the human *world*, or æon, we may say, if not the cosmical. It is (Matt. xiii. 39) the *end*, the *settlement*, the *reckoning* of the world, or more strongly (Heb. ix. 26), "the settlement of the worlds," when "God demands again the ages fled," Eccles. iii. 15. At all events, our race, the *beni ādhām*, the Adamic race, the human *æon*, or world, is judged; whether that judgment occupy a solar day of twenty-four hours, or a much longer historic period. There comes at last the end. Sentence is pronounced. The condemned go away *eis kolasin aiōnion*—the righteous, *eis zoēn aiōnion*. Both states are expressed in language precisely parallel, and so presented that we cannot exegetically make any difference in the force and extent of the terms. *Aiōnios*, from its adjective form, may perhaps mean, an existence, a duration, measured by æons, or worlds, just as our present world, or æon, is measured by years or centuries. But it would be more in accordance with the plainest etymological usage to give it simply the sense of *'olamic* or *æonic*, denoting, like the Jewish *'olam habba*, the *world to come*. 'These shall go away into the punishment [the restraint, imprison-

ment] of the world to come, and these into the life of the world to come.' That is all we can etymologically or exegetically make of the word in this passage. And so is it ever in the old Syriac Version [A. D. 100–150], where the one reading is still more unmistakably clear: 'These shall go away to the pain of the 'olam, and these to the life of the 'olam.'" (Excursus on Eccles. i. 3. Lange's Comment p. 48.)

CHAPTER II.

DOES THE NEW TESTAMENT TEACH THE ENDLESSNESS OF FUTURE PUNISHMENT BY DIRECT IMPLICATION?

PERHAPS the strongest apparent implication of the endlessness of future punishment may be thought to lie in what Dr. Lewis, as quoted at the close of the preceding chapter, calls "the aspect of finality" in which the New Testament portrays the future portion of the wicked. There can be no doubt that the New Testament represents the result of the present life as a finality, at least for an indefinite period. This is taught, literally, and figuratively, by a great number of texts. He who heard, and did not as Christ bade, was to suffer the utter overthrow of his house by the winds and waters (Matt. vii. 26, 27). Those who failed to go in with the bridegroom, and so came late to the feast, found the door shut, and no reply to their entreaties but, "I know you not" (Matt. xxv. 12). He who neglected the wedding garment was cast, bound, "into outer darkness" (Matt. xxii. 13). After death, an impassable gulf was "fixed" between happy Lazarus and tormented Dives (Luke xvi. 26). Whatever demurrers any critics may offer to the traditional application of these figures to the future world, rather than to the present,

they are to remember that Christ affirmed in the plainest speech, "if ye believe not, ye shall die in your sins." "Whither I go ye cannot come" (John viii. 21, 24). He explicitly showed the danger that a man might "lose himself, or be cast away" (Luke ix. 25). So the Apostle, after likening apostates to land that bears only thorns, "whose end is to be burned" (Heb. vi. 8), goes on to say expressly, that for such "there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries" (Heb. x. 25, 26). The invariable teaching of the New Testament is, that the judgment proceeds, and the future is assigned, according to "the deeds done in the body" (2 Cor. v. 10). Whosoever shall confess Me *before men*, him will I confess also before My Father who is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny Me *before men*, him will I also deny before My Father who is in heaven" (Matt. x. 32, 33). All such passages readily favor the doctrine of the endlessness of that state of future rejection to which they refer. In order, however, to be accepted as positive proof of that doctrine, something more is necessary that they should seem to agree with it. As unbiased critics, who seek for *proof-texts* rather than *pretexts*, we are bound to ask, whether that doctrine is the only doctrine with which such passages agree. It is necessary to know what interpretation such passages *exclude*, as well as what they may *include*. And we are obliged to acknowledge, that the theory of the endlessness of future punishment is *not the only theory that will agree with the language of despair*

which the texts now before us employ. If the wicked were ultimately to be annihilated as the result of 'æonian punishment," *that* prospect would agree equally well with the hopelessness of the tone in which their punishment is foretold.

Grant now that the New Testament represents the rejection and misery of the wicked in the future state as a finality. This no one will venture to deny with regard to the general current of thought, whatever he may endeavor to make out of a few texts that seem to form an eddy of the current (for reference to which see Chapter V.). The question that now meets us is, whether this finality is *relative* or *absolute*. Does it cover merely an indefinite *period*, however protracted, or rather *duration that never comes to a period?* Is it a finality for a single "æon," [1] or more, or "for the æons of the æons?" If the punishment of the wicked were to be perpetuated for an æon, or æonian period, of great duration, *that* prospect might not be inconsistent with the scriptural representation of the disposition made of the wicked at the last day as a finality. A finality, no doubt, but *how much of one?* is the question which we now reverently put to the Holy Oracle.

We are aware that, in proportion as the traditional interpretations are regarded as conclusive, this question may seem uncalled for, and even irreverent, as if God had already spoken too plainly to be misunderstood ex-

[1] Compare again Mark iii. 29, "hath not forgiveness *for the æon*, but is involved in *æonian* sin."

cept by unwilling ears. The reasonableness of our inquiry may appear, however, from a glance at another apparently absolute finality of doom, that was less of a finality than it seemed about to be. God originally said to Adam, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Genesis ii. 17). To Adam, who knew of death only what he had seen in animals, this must have seemed an absolute finality. And yet Adam would have been mistaken in constructing out of that apparently conclusive word *die* a speculative doctrine of extinction, based upon the patent "aspect of finality" which that word of penalty depicted to him. On the one hand, the sentence was bitterly fulfilled in a way unknown to Adam till disclosed by sad experience; and on the other hand, God did not, by the terms of His threat, preclude Himself from acting as emergency might arise.

Looking forward, then, into the indefinite succession of the "æons," we ask, Is there any clear decisive word of Scripture that shuts us up to the certainty that the result of the present life is an *absolute* finality to "the lost?"[1] — a term which, in passing, we may notice does not, as used in Scripture, always express finality, being applied even to some who in this world get saved, as in Luke xix. 10. Here is the point, where a strict and can-

[1] Such Scripture phrases as "lose his own soul" (Matt. xvi. 26), "lose himself or be cast away" (Luke ix. 25), although they cannot fairly be claimed in the exclusive interest of the annihilation theory, are yet, so far as "the aspect of finality" is concerned, as congruous with that theory as with the traditional doctrine.

did interpreter of Holy Writ, unwilling to be "wise above that which is written," is likely to collide with a dogmatism that insists on having everything settled. We have already noted the fact, that the annihilationist view of those passages which speak of the doom of the wicked as without hope is as easily reconcilable with their language as is the traditional view. And even restorationists contend with some plausibility that *their* views are not contradicted and excluded by the tone of despair in which the lost are spoken of. While many of them concede that no restoration of the lost has been revealed, so that no such doctrine can be preached as the word of the Lord (see Chapter V.), yet, say they, Supposing that the restoration of *any* of the lost were possible, it is by no means certain that such a hope would have been revealed before an experience of that loss, any more than the redemption was revealed to Adam in advance of his experience of sin and its deadly work. If we point to the declaration, "there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins" (Hebrews x. 26), we are challenged to show conclusively how far forward this "no more" reaches. Admitting that this "no more" represents the "fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries" as having then become inevitable, it is still denied to be identical with an absolute *nevermore.* We are also reminded that when Christ warned some of their final state, "Ye shall die in your sins; whither I go ye cannot come" (John viii. 21), He abstained from uttering the conclusive *never*, which would sentence them to

a strictly endless rejection. Even under the supposition of a possible restoration of *some, but not all*, it is still urged, might not the disadvantageous and wretched and desperate situation of the lost, *as a class*, be such as fully to warrant the despairing aspect of finality in which the New Testament depicts their doom?

We do not see, then, how a strict and candid criticism can deny that the class of texts now to be examined are, so far as can be judged by the specimens cited, *reasonably consistent with, at least, more than one theory of the future.* No one theory of the future can therefore be allowed to assert an exclusive claim to them as invalidating all contending theories. An examination of the particular texts that have been held to teach by implication the endlessness of the "æonian punishment" will show merely that they do not contradict it. The sort of exegesis that has made them serve as proof-texts for punishment absolutely endless is the same sort that has often quoted Genesis i. 26, "Let *us* make man in *our* image," in proof of the doctrine of the Trinity. But as accurate learning increases, the disposition lessens to use the words of Holy Writ as a balloon to float any meaning that we please to attach to them.

For an example of the dogmatizing that has forced this class of texts beyond the plain sense, we may cite John v. 29. On this text, "they that have done evil to a resurrection of judgment" (English version, "the resurrection of damnation"), Lange indulges in the following comment: "A resurrection from death temporal to death

eternal. Who can realize the awful idea!" (Comment. p. 192.) The idea of the Divine Judgment of wicked men is, indeed, sufficiently awful and real. But the idea of "*death eternal*" is so wholly imaginary in this passage, that we may well despair of "realizing" it just here, except by the aid of that lively fancy to which the learned commentator seems for the moment to have surrendered his sober judgment.

In like manner it has been too hastily inferred, from the "great gulf fixed" (Luke xvi. 26) between Lazarus and Dives, that Dives himself was "fixed" (Greek, "made fast") forever in the "place of torment." Professor Bartlett, in his recent tract, thus moralizes on the situation of Dives: "If even in Hades, before the resurrection and the judgment, all help and hope are so utterly excluded, how shall it be in *gehenna*, after the resurrection of the body, the 'resurrection of damnation,' and the final judgment?" We answer: Equally bad, if not worse; but it is singular that Professor Bartlett does not see that this judgment story does not begin to touch the question, *How long* are all help and hope to be "so utterly ex-excluded," and Dives to be "tormented in this flame?"

The scene appears to be laid in the middle state between death and final judgment, and "fixed" may signify what is unalterable *during that state*, according to the old maxim that, "as death leaves us, so judgment will find us." Nothing whatever is said of Dives's condition beyond the middle state. The situation, therefore, appears to be parallel to that of the angels in Jude 6, and

Barnes's comment upon that is equally pertinent to this. (See p. 28.)

If there is any subject on which expositors of the Bible should be strict constructionists, it is in regard to those partly revealed matters of the Divine administration which lie beyond the veil that separates "the things unseen and eternal" from "the things that are seen and temporal." These things preëminently "belong to the LORD our God" (Deut. xxix. 29). Only what He has plainly spoken can we speak with assurance. But when we proceed to draw inferences from our certainties *here* to God's secrets *there*, it behooves us to be on our guard, lest we assume to speak for God where He is silent; we are to take nothing for granted, lest we say what may misrepresent God.

When, however, the language of emotion, or of parables, has been put upon the rack of strict construction, the testimony elicited has been uncertain or contradictory. Such is the testimony which some suppose to be given by Christ's remark about Judas (Matt. xxvi. 24): "It had been good for that man if he had not been born." Dr. Lange notes appreciatingly the special application of the saying to "*that* man."[1] To which may be

[1] "*The Woe pronounced on Judas.* — It were better for him that he had never been born. This is held, and rightly so, to prove the perdition of the traitor. But when his *endless* perdition is established by this text, and the words are taken literally, orthodoxy must take care lest the consequence be deduced that it would have been better for *all* the condemned generally never to have been born, and

added, that a reasonable doubt exists whether we are justified in putting this gush of strong indignant feeling into the retort of logic, and undertaking to distill Olshausen's inference, that Christ could have anticipated only an endless misery for Judas, because any ultimate obtaining of everlasting happiness would render it a blessing to have been born. Keen logic, but out of place in our ignorance of the special thought that prompted Christ's remark. He spoke as He felt in view of what He saw coming upon Judas. Who of us is competent to say what it was in Judas's situation that then most impressed the Master's heart? The remark is, however, be it observed, as consonant with the theory of Judas's ultimate extinction, as with the theory of his endless punishment.

Nay, more, can any one fairly deny that Christ's remark about Judas is applicable, with reference merely to the present life, to men whom society has determined to put in the pillory of "shame and everlasting contempt?" (Daniel xii. 2.) Is it not perfectly just to say of a traitor like Benedict Arnold, with reference solely to his infamous place in his country's history, "It had been good

evil inferences be drawn as to their creation. But our Lord's expression *cuts off such abstract discussions;* it says only that it were better that he, 'that man,' had never been born. . . . . We should feel and realize the full force of this most fearful word; yet, without overstraining it, remembering that it is no *final judicial sentence*, but a burning expression rather of infinite pity." (*Comment. on Matt.* p. 473.)

for *that man* if he had not been born?" So the poet makes guilty Queen Guinevere to say in her despair, —

> "Shall I kill myself?
> What help in that? I cannot kill my sin,
> If soul be soul; nor can I kill my shame;
> No, nor by living can I live it down.
> The days will grow to weeks, the weeks to months,
> The months will add themselves and make the years,
> The years will roll into the centuries,
> *And mine will ever be a name of scorn.*"

But in the parable of the Unmerciful Servant (Matthew xviii. 23–35), attempts at strict construction have led interpreters of different schools in opposite directions. In verse 34, "delivered him to the tormentors *till* he should pay all that was due," Universalists have found restorationism, Romanists their purgatory, Calvinists the doctrine of an endless punishment — all in the pregnant monosyllable *till*. The Universalist and the Romanist assume, that the debt will sometime be paid; the Calvinist assumes, that it never can be paid. And so, controversialists on opposite sides press the same "*till*," as if it were the key of the whole question. Surely such word-play utterly perverts the parable, whose purpose was simply to teach the doctrine which James (ii. 13) puts in plain words, — "He shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy." As if our conclusions respecting the duration of future punishments at all depend on what may or may not have happened to that prisoner, after he disappeared from sight in the hands of "the

tormentors!" What if, in addition to the suppositions already set up, he actually died under torment in the interest of modern believers in annihilation!

The history of the interpretation of such a passage exhibits the spell which any prepossession as to the contents of Scripture always casts upon the interpreter, however endeavoring to construe language strictly. In this case, the general prepossession seems to have been the idea, that the Scripture will pronounce decisively on the duration of the "æonian punishment." But for any one to start with that prepossession to investigate the fact, is as likely to lead to a warped conclusion as is any other hearing of a case with the judgment formed in advance.

Another passage similarly misused is Matthew v. 25, 26, especially the last clause, "Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing." Professor Bartlett, following Meyer, regards this as teaching "an endless imprisonment," and that "the removal of sin from the prisoner is an impossibility." Theodore of Mopsuestia, the greatest theologian of the Eastern Church in the fifth century, took just the opposite view: "For never would He have said, 'till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing,' were it not possible for us, paying the penalty for our faults, to be freed from them." At the root of each view of the passage lies the mistaken presumption, that it teaches something about future punishment and its duration. Curious indeed are the contortions of commentators to explain on this presumption, who the "adversary" is. Clement

thought he was the devil, Augustine thought he was God, and so on. But the reference of the text to future punishment at all is as imaginary as in that other text, which is worth mentioning here only lest some reader should suppose that we do not know how he relies on it, viz: "If the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth there it shall be" (Eccl. xi. 3). Lange's view is more sensible than Meyer's, viz: "It embodies a principle of moral right in the form of a symbolic ordinance" (Comment. Matt. p. 114).

Still another passage where the reference which some think they find to a changeless future state is wholly foreign to the original thought, is in Rev. xxii. 11: "He that is unjust let him be unjust still," etc. Lange (Comment. p. 397) interprets as it follows: "If we seek for a common fundamental thought that shall lie at the basis of all four propositions, it is contained in the following words: 'Since the judgment is at the door, let every one quickly prepare himself for it after his own free choice.' That this very idea indirectly offers to the wicked the strongest admonition to repent, is self-evident." Dr. N. Adams very fitly remarks: "Among the closing words of the Bible these accents fall on their ears like the last notes of a bell that calls to the house of prayer." The context (verses 10 and 12), certifies that this call is to an immediate, present decision of the future state. That this is an unalterable decision for an endless future, may be true, but, as a conclusion from this text, it is to be reached only by one of those surprising jumps by which

some expositors are wont to leave their text far behind.

The idea presented by the popular phrase, "the Last Judgment," although this phrase is not biblical, has also had its influence in the misinterpretation of Scripture. The Scriptures represent that judgment as taking place at "the end of the world" (æon), so that it is the *Last* Judgment with reference to things *foregone*, and the "æon" then concluding. The remark of Schiller — "The world's history is the world's judgment," is biblically true, and suggests in what sense "the judgment of the great day" is the "last." The expulsion of mankind from Eden, the Flood, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the plagues of Egypt, the overthrows of Jerusalem, first and second, the fall of the Roman Empire, the French Revolution, the American Civil War, were all judgment days (or periods), forerunners of that which is to be both the "last" in the series of the present æon, and also the most comprehensive and decisive of all. But the obvious fact that *the existence of sin does not then terminate*, although put under restraint, throws some uncertainty upon the assumption that the last judgment of *this* æon is also the last with respect to *all* the æons of the illimitable future. In this uncertainty, we seek in vain for any clear word of Scripture to tell us whether the finality reached at "the Last Judgment" is an *absolute and ultimate finality* "for the æons of the æons," or rather a finality at most "for the æon" next succeeding, our situation in which will then have been settled.

In summing up the testimony of the class of passages now before us, it is not to be forgotten that in the traditional view they shine largely by borrowed light. They have been read in the light of central texts, like Matthew xxv. 46, which were once supposed to teach the endlessness of future punishment decisively. And were that supposition correct, some of these secondary texts fall in with a cumulative force almost tremendous. But the darkening of the sun darkens the planets. The main exegetical proof failing, the cumulative force of the argument vanishes, as the value of a row of ciphers vanishes, when the significant figure before them is taken away. Those leading texts having actually no express declarations to make of the endlessness of punishment, this second class of texts, when separately interrogated and made to speak to that point wholly by themselves, are found to have nothing more definite to say.

In concluding this part of our investigation, we now come to what many rely on as the strongest consideration of all. It is said that the great text (Matt. xxv. 46), however indecisive its direct statement may be shown to be, still teaches the endlessness of the "æonian punishment" by the plainest implication.

The duration of the punishment of the wicked, it is said, is directly implied by the admitted duration of the reward of the righteous. "Both states," says Dr. Lewis, "are expressed in language precisely parallel, and so presented that we cannot exegetically make any difference in the force and extent of the terms" (see pp. 30-

32). Certainly, the word *æonian* must signify as much for the wicked as the righteous. If, then, "æonian life" denotes something that is strictly endless, why does not "æonian punishment" denote something just as strictly endless? The question is apparently conclusive, but the counter-question remains to be put: Does the phrase "æonian life" *primarily* denote life of a certain *length*, or life of a certain *kind*? The idea of duration is involved in it, as will presently be shown, but is *duration* the *primary* sense of "æonian" as a description of "life?" The point now raised is, whether the fundamental idea of the expression be *quantitative* or *qualitative*. This point has already been suggested (see page 17), but postponed till the present stage of the inquiry should be reached. Thus far no exception has been taken to the traditional assumption that in Matthew xxv. 46, and other passages, the word *æonian* is to be *quantitatively* interpreted. But, even on this assumption, we have failed to find either any positive statement, or any direct implication, as to the duration of future punishment. If it be said that *æonian* denotes permanence according to the nature of the subject, who shall decide exactly what that requires (see pp. 6, 7)? Or if it denotes duration in the succession of coming æons, who shall certify whether it is duration through one æon only, or more than one, or all the æons? Now, however, the proof, that a rigid textual criticism has failed to find in some express utterance of the sacred text, is sought by way of inference from the *traditional quantitative interpretation of the*

phrase "ÆONIAN LIFE." It is time, therefore, to test the validity of this interpretation, on which so great an argument is now rested.

Granting, therefore, that the epithet *æonian* preserves a fixed meaning in the two members of the brief antithesis, and signifies as much for the wicked as for the righteous, it becomes an important question, *which is its primary sense*, — that which *belongs* to the æon or æons, or, that which *lasts through* the same? This question is one which the New Testament seems to answer very plainly. "Æonian life" *primarily* denotes a certain *kind* of life. It is the life characterizing the æonian state of the righteous, the life which is unfolded in the æon to come, having been communicated by Christ to the believer in the present æon, or world. The testimony of many passages is condensed in these few: "He that heareth My Word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, *hath* æonian life,[1] and shall not come into condemnation, but *is passed* from death unto life" (John v. 24). "He that believeth on the Son *hath* æonian life" (John iii. 36). "This is the record, that God *hath given* unto us æonian life, and this life *is in His Son.* He that hath the Son *hath* life, and he that hath not the Son of God *hath not* life" (1 John v. 11, 12). The Lord Jesus has Himself so defined this æonian life, as to make it perfectly apparent, that it primarily

[1] Where the original adheres so constantly to the phrase "æonian life," it is unfortunate that our translators did not adhere to the uniform rendering "eternal life," for which, in this and some other passages, they have less correctly substituted "everlasting life."

denotes, not life of a certain *length*, but, life of a certain *kind*. "*This is* the æonian life, that they may *know Thee*, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent" (John xvii. 3). Clearly, then, in this expression, the *qualitative*, not the *quantitative* idea, predominates. The æonian life, *primarily*, as defined by its Divine Author Himself, is *that kind* of life which is vitalized, formed, and blessed, by knowing God and His Son. The idea of perpetuity inheres in it, no doubt, but *how?* Not primarily. *Only so far as the qualities themselves, which characterize that life* (Matt. v. 3–9), *are vital, progressive, and enduring, is that life perpetual.* Precisely in the same way, then, does the idea of perpetuity inhere in the antithesis, "æonian punishment." This punishment, like that life, is *primarily* defined by the term "æonian" as of a certain *kind*, rather than of a certain *length*. Of *what* kind, the qualifying predicates, "judgment," "sin," "fire," "destruction," inform us. And as we predicate perpetuity of the life, secondarily, *because the characterizing qualities of the life seem to tend to perpetuity*, so in regard to the punishment, if we also predicate perpetuity of that, it must likewise be in a secondary sense, and for the similar reason, — that *the characteristics of the punishment*, the sin, the fire, etc., are such as *seem to tend to perpetuity*. Are these, then, of such a nature? becomes the next point of investigation in the inquiry whether the "æonian punishment" is endless or not.

Here, however, is the present resting-place of our argument. The doctrine that the punishments of the future

are endless, is not clearly announced by Divine Revelation. Neither by any express declaration, nor by any clear implication of Holy Writ, is it certified to us to be an article of the Christian faith. Future punishment, indeed, is made to stand out in prophetic solemnity as an awful reality. Only we are left in uncertainty as to its *duration*. That it is endless, is not declared by any unmistakable word of God. It may be endless, it may not be; what reasonable man would lightly expose himself to so much of woe as plainly threatens in the way of the transgressor, and in addition take the hazard of all that is unknown? There is much of terror in the very mystery in which the Scripture leaves the sinner to his fears on that point, surrounded with thronging images of suffering, — the darkness, fire, and worm, — the weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth. Everything, excepting that punishment is absolutely without end, seems to have been revealed, that can be imagined likely to deter a transgressor from presumptuously braving the unknown extremity of that terrible thing which is called "the wrath of God" (Romans i. 18).

This is all that can be certainly proved from Scripture by exact and unbiased criticism. Yet many, after having reached the limit of the terra firma of certainty, are not content without wading out as far as they can into the quaking bog of probabilities surrounding. For such it is possible to carry our inquiry a little farther, with results, however, which, at the best, are much less certain than those which we have now arrived at.

CHAPTER III.

IS THE ENDLESSNESS OF FUTURE PUNISHMENT TO BE INFERRED AS THE NATURAL RESULT OF SIN?

A PRELIMINARY word must here be said as to the changed nature of our inquiry.

Thus far we have dealt with a question of fact capable of a tolerably certain answer, viz: What is the actual testimony of Scripture as to the duration of future punishment? Our conclusions thus far are involved in no more uncertainty than attaches to any careful and unbiased application of the science of interpreting language.

But now we take up another question. The question now is not, *What do the Scriptures actually say*, or *abstain from saying?* But it is a question of a wholly different kind: *What inference can we most reasonably draw* from certain observable moral phenomena, namely, the tendencies of sin, in the light of what the Scripture says respecting them?

In answering this question we can no more say what is *certain*, but, at most, only what is *probable*, and perhaps not even that. The change in the nature of our inquiry, our evidence, and our conclusion, must be care-

fully noted at this point, and borne in mind as we proceed.

The question raised at the close of the preceding chapter was this: Is the "æonian punishment" represented to be of *such a kind* that, in the nature of things, it tends to become as endless as the "æonian life" of the righteous? We have to inquire, now, whether our experience, as illuminated by the Scriptures, *requires* us to infer, from the known nature of sin and of its punishment, the absolute endlessness of the "æonian punishment."

The punishment of sin, as the Scriptures and our own observation concur in teaching us, essentially consists in the wider spread and stronger hold of the malady of the soul. *Essentially*, we say, because it is evident that every other element of punishment, whether self-reproach, or a sense of God's direct personal displeasure, depends, so far as actually and normally experienced, upon this radical element. "His own iniquities shall take the wicked" (Prov. v. 22). Sin is an unnatural disease that taints, blinds, and paralyzes the spiritual nature, and both destroys the power of self-recovery, and neutralizes the means of recovery. The yielding of the will to evil cripples its power to resist the evil. Resistance to truth produces insensibility to the impressions of truth. One sin brings others in its train. The habit of sinning holds the wicked "with the cords of his own sins" (Prov. v. 22). Thus the hopeless thing about sin is that it is self-perpetuating; its punishment consists, primarily, in a deeper and deeper involvement in sin.

"This is the very curse of evil deed,
That of new evil it becomes the seed."

In this process the moral instincts become benumbed, or, in Scripture phrase, "the heart is hardened;" the moral tastes are reversed; evil and good change names and places before the blinded conscience (Isa. v. 20); alienation from God tends to an extinction of the God-seeking disposition; association with the wicked shuts out redeeming influences; "a moral momentum" in a downward way continually increases, and tends to become irresistible. The spiritual nature, thus corrupting more and more (2 Tim. iii. 13), tends to that mysterious condition which the Scriptures call "æonian *destruction*" (2 Thess. i. 9).

This, then, is the question with regard to the sinner, whom we see gravitating from worse to worse in a continually deepening fall. Is this process of destroying both soul and body in hell, as the Lord Jesus Himself has termed it (Matt. x. 28), *constantly progressive, and yet never complete?* Be it observed, that the Scripture has abstained from explicitly answering this question, and has left us to draw our own inferences from what it has revealed of the nature and tendency of sin to perpetuate its own punishment. If endlessness be characteristic of the "æonian punishment," it must be discoverable in the characterizing qualities and tendencies of the "æonian sin," the "æonian fire," etc.

A hint of an absolutely endless punishment seems, at first, to be given by the phenomena of *remorse*. Time

does not apparently blunt its fang. Long years do not appear to exhaust its ghastly fires. No river of Lethe seems capable of stilling, for any length of time, the painful wakefulness of the memory, that ever heaps fresh fuel on the perpetual flame. As long as the facts of guilt are capable of recall to the self-reproachful mind, so long the worm gnaws and the fire burns.

And yet even the pain of remorse is no exception to the law under which all pain by perpetual recurrence brings its own antidote of deadened sensibility. The tormenting power of remorse depends on its intermittency. Other thoughts come in, and break off the suicidal work. The sufferer continually hanging himself is as continually cut down by some relief, so as to recover, and go through the self-destructive process again. In proportion as remorse becomes continual, either callous despair or dull idiocy supervenes to assuage its pain.

In general, it may be observed that the Scripture represents the work of sin in the soul not as reformatory, but as destructive. If now we set aside the question of a possible restoration (for which see Chapter V.), there are before us two alternative suppositions, and only two, which may be expressed in a triple form, viz: Either this destructive work of sin runs on without end, or its tendency is to a limit, beyond which there is nothing more to be destroyed, and consequently nothing more to suffer. Either this worsening growth of sin continues unlimited, until even the least of lost sinners becomes an inconceivable colossus of iniquity, a vastly intensified Satan,

or it stops somewhere. Either the Almighty exerts his power to preserve hopeless sufferers in existence, for the sole purpose that they may perpetually endure destruction, or at length He permits them, when their disease has run its course and done its work, to lose that existence, which can no more be anything but to them a curse, to the universe a discord, and to Him a regret.

The objection is brought against the latter of these alternatives, that punishment cannot be the cessation of punishment. This is valid against the idea that the wicked lose their existence at death; not valid against the idea of their extinction under punishment at some time in the æonian future. In this case they actually suffer "æonian punishment."

It is further objected that "eternal punishment" is incompatible with a future loss of existence, because extinction is punishment end*ed*, eternal punishment is punishment end*less*. Not valid, since such a definition of eternal punishment simply begs the whole question outright.[1]

[1] We speak scripturally of "eternal punishment" only when we drop from the phrase the idea of *duration*, and mean simply the punishment *taking place in eternity*. That this is no modern liberal use of the word, our English Bibles bear witness in the phrase "eternal judgment" (Hebrews vi. 2), which Robinson's *Lexicon* refers to "the judgment of the last day," and which means simply the judgment *taking place in eternity*.

It is worth remarking that both "eternal punishment" and "everlasting punishment" have now become somewhat ambiguous terms. "Eternal punishment" conveys to one mind a quantitative, to another

With these alternatives, then, presented to our reason, we cannot find that the Scripture clearly pronounces in favor of either. Whichever we adopt, we are equally within the limits of the reverent liberty of belief allowed us by the silence of Scripture.

Against these considerations, however, there still lies, we are well aware, a specious objection. It is pronounced illegitimate thus to carry into the spiritual domain the analogy of the material world. Whatever force is to be allowed to this objection must come mainly, if not wholly, from our ignorance. That material analogies go some way into the spiritual world, is certain; how far they go is uncertain; we have no knowledge respecting spirit existing apart from bodily organization. But it is certain that we have no *facts* to contravene the presumption that spiritual organization and existence are as capable of disorganization and extinction by appropriate agencies as we know bodily organization and existence to be. There is neither fact nor testimony in the way of our inferring that the destructibility which characterizes the material world, has its analogies in the spiritual. It may be replied to this that matter itself is never destroyed, so far as we know, but only its phenomenal form

a qualitative idea. By "everlasting punishment" one means endless punishment, another means punishment that lasts till the subject of it ceases to exist, and a third means punishment that lasts till the end of the æon. In the majority of minds, however, "everlasting punishment" has become a sort of technical term, specially appropriated to the idea of an endless punishment.

and organization perish, while its elements are indestructible. That may pass, however, until some one rises to reveal a difference between the phenomenal form or organization, and the elements of spirit.

There are, however, two further considerations to be presented, which some may regard as making their own choice of an alternative more clear. One of these is from a word of Scripture, and the other is from a word which Scripture has forborne to speak.

We read in 1 John v. 16, of a "sin unto death." *All* sin is scripturally represented as death in beginning, as, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. ii. 17), or death in progress, as, "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. ii. 1). But *the*[1] "sin unto death" appears, by the way in which it is mentioned, to be "unto death" in a *specific* sense, different from that in which *all* sin is "unto death." The preposition translated *unto* in this text (πρός) denotes, says Robinson's "Lexicon" with reference to this passage, "a tendency and result." A result can hardly be the same as a process. "*Unto* death," therefore, in the *specific* sense in which the phrase is here used, would seem, at least in the obvious import of language which denotes "a tendency and result," more consistent with the idea of a limit, a *ne plus ultra* of death sometime reached, as a *result* and *end* of the destructive work of sin.

[1] The article *the* is not in the original, but, in place of it, the stronger word *that*, rendered in our version "it." Literally translated the verse reads thus: "There is sin unto death; not in regard to *that* do I say that he should make request."

Another view of this text, however, and one which harmonizes better with the idea of an endless punishment, considers that the sin referred to is "unto death" only in a more direct and immediate way than all sin is "unto death." Just so, while every sin against bodily health is unto physical death, as tending that way, some such sins are more directly and speedily "unto" such death than others. The text is doubtless capable of either view, and the reader's preference must depend not on grammatical but on ethical considerations.

The other fact to be noted in this connection is, that the Scriptures, which speak freely of *æonian sin, judgment, fire, punishment, destruction,* never use the expression *æonian death.* The phrase "second death," four times occurring in the Revelation of John (as Rev. ii. 11), only shows how near the Scripture comes to that other expression without using it, and serves to make more marked the thorough avoidance of it. Yet theology uses it, or what is meant to be its equivalent, and freely speaks of "everlasting death." So our hymn, —

> "Nothing is worth a thought beneath,
> But how I may escape the death
> That never, never dies."

It is difficult, for one who believes that the sacred writers were under a Divine superintendence in their use of language, to avoid believing that it is not without reason that the Scriptures invariably decline to employ a phraseology which the interpreters of Scripture have found so appropriate to their own views. And while we do well

to be modest in assigning reasons for the peculiarities of God's revelations to us, a conjecture may be offered for what it is worth.

Death is a word of double meaning. It may denote either a *state of modified existence*, or an *end of all existence*. In the former sense, we may speak of "a dead body." Non-existent as a *living* thing, it exists awhile as an *organized* thing tending to become utterly non-existent. In the latter sense, the influence of a person who has lost character is "dead," as having ended in utter non-existence.

Now death, as a spiritual *state*, exists, according to Scripture, even in this world; see Ephesians ii. 1, "dead in trespasses and sins." This state of death is well characterized by Professor Bartlett as "the absence of the power and exercise of certain functions, and not only so, but of their complete and normal exercise" ("New Englander," October, 1871, pp. 677, 678). If now the theological conception of a future *state* of endless conscious death be correct, then it becomes a question for those who hold that view, why the Scripture, so constantly applying the term "death" to an analogous spiritual state in the present, should so rigidly avoid applying it to the future state in connection with the epithet "æonian," so freely given to all other words denoting future punishment. Besides, it may be asked, would not the frequent occurrence of "æonian *life*" naturally have brought out the antithesis "æonian *death*," if that death, like the life, were a *state of existence*?

But if the scriptural conception of "the second death" were rather that of a *limit of existence reached*, than of a *state* of *modified existence continuing*, then the scriptural avoidance of the phrase "æonian death" is at once explicable as the avoidance of an ambiguous and easily misunderstood expression. In this view the scriptural preference of the word "destruction" (see 2 Thessalonians i. 9, "æonian destruction") would seem to be the substitution of a more definite word for a less definite.

Doubtless it will be said, these are mere speculations. Only as such are they presented, mere dim tapers, the only light procurable where no ray of Divine revelation penetrates the dense darkness that broods over the state of the impenitent dead. As it was plainly stated in the beginning of this chapter, we are no longer dealing with the *facts* of the Scripture testimonies, but at most with mere *probabilities*, in a point which the Scripture has abstained from deciding for us. Though the suggestions of this chapter were to be shown wholly devoid of value, yet such criticism would nowise touch the fact which this Essay has aimed to show, viz, That the Scripture has really nothing to say about the *duration* of the "æonian punishment." The speculations of this chapter are not urged upon the attention of any reader. They are presented to the many who are not satisfied to stop in their exploration of the future where the Scripture stops, merely to show how little we have to stand upon, when we pass beyond the terra firma of the Scripture testimony. For ourselves we prefer to remain ignorant,

where God has chosen to remain silent in a matter like this. But we affirm with the fullest persuasion, that a doctrine so fraught with horror as the *endless* conscious misery of fellow-creatures is not to be accepted as a tenet of the Christian faith on any less conclusive evidence than an unmistakable word of God. And none such can we find. Future punishment is indeed most positively announced by all the symbolism of pain and woe.[1] The *duration* and *result* of it are shrouded in a dread, impenetrable mystery by the terms that describe it. This mystery is not unveiled by any hints or allusions. It is not cleared up by any inference that can be drawn from what we know of the nature and the tendency of the "æonian punishment." The Word of God remits us to our own conclusions on the subject, and obviously suggests to him who is inclined to go on in sin, to take counsel of his fears in a prospect where enough that is dreadful is revealed to make the presumptuous pause before braving what is yet concealed of "the terror of the Lord" (2 Cor. v. 11). The single point of the *endlessness* of the "æonian punishment" is not yet revealed. It is not disproved by aught that is said. It may be true for aught that we yet know. But until we have received a

[1] It is invidiously and untruthfully assumed by some controversialists, that those who question the *endlessness* of future punishments doubt future punishment altogether. In the examination of candidates for the ministry, I have heard the test question on this point sometimes put in this form: "You believe in future punishment?" and I have seen the examiner satisfied with a simple assent, as if that carried everything!

positive revelation of it, we are not *required* to accept it as an article of the Christian faith. For aught that we yet know, it may not be true. But if we are not content to remain without any positive belief on this one point till it grows light (though the Apostle reminds us "that the law is not made for a righteous man," 1 Tim. i. 9), then we are left at liberty, so far as any voice of Scripture is concerned, to choose whichever of these two alternatives our own reason may approve, viz, The ultimate extinction of the sinning soul by the spreading cancer of its own decay, *or* the infinite continuance of the "destruction" of a finite being, upheld in endless being by Almighty power in order that it may be endlessly destroyed; like that "Prometheus bound," according to the Greek poets, on Mount Caucasus, whose liver, perpetually devoured by vultures, and as perpetually growing to be devoured unceasingly, gave an endless banquet to them, and to him an endless torment.

He who can be certain that these opposite alternatives bound the diverse possibilities of the case, will perhaps not be at a loss which to choose. But he who reflects, with Hamlet, that

> "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
> Than are dreamt of in our philosophy,"

will probably hold it wiser to wait in the dark just where the Word of God has left him, and, with Paul, to "judge nothing before the time until the Lord come" (1 Cor. v. 5).

CHAPTER IV.

THE HISTORICAL OBJECTION.

THE chief objection to the conclusion we have reached is derived from the *historical* view of the subject, which, however, when properly adjusted, will seem rather to countenance our position than to look the other way.

The majority of Christians have a justifiable repugnance to novelties in the interpretation of the Scriptures. The significance of the original Greek or Hebrew they do not feel competent to discuss, but they know what has been accepted for ages by the most learned and godly in the church, and in this they confide even more than in the special learning of modern lexicographers and grammarians. Some things, they are certain, may be considered as settled by this time. The verdict of what has passed for the most enlightened Christian reason is thus permitted to rule out of court, in advance of argument, questions that are raised from time to time as to what is actually taught us by evangelists and apostles.

It is possible, that this "safe" method of dealing with new interpretations of Scripture may be carried too far. The fact that it has been thought necessary to revise our common version of the Bible, and that the best scholars

of England and America are now laboring upon the task, should, at least, secure for any proposed new view of the meaning of words an unprejudiced hearing.

The historical objection to the conclusion reached by this Essay is presented in some such form as this. It is said: The doctrine of endless punishment is not attractive to any mind. How comes it, then, that the best minds in the church have for many ages recognized it in the New Testament, if indeed it be not there? This question, though weighty, is neither unanswerable nor difficult. The conclusions of the best minds as to what the Scriptures actually teach are liable, especially in uncritical ages, to be vitiated by wrong translations.

For instance, the notion that we "all sinned in Adam" came down to modern old-schoolism from Augustine, who built that theory on the Latin version of Romans v. 12, which reads, "in whom all sinned." Augustine ignored the Greek, which reads, "because all sinned." In Matt. xxv. 46, the Greek *aiōnios* (æonian) is translated in the Latin by *æternus*, which had none of that Hebraistic coloring that *aiōnios* had contracted in the Septuagint Version of the Old Testament (see p. 10), but expressed the idea of limitless duration in the absolute sense of our word *eternal*. This Latin version, from about the year 150, shaped the doctrine of the North African church, whose first theological teacher of note was Tertullian (*died about* 220), whose nature, as Dr. Schaff says in his "History of the Christian Church," was one of "ascetic gloom and rigor" (vol. i. p. 515). One of the oftenest

quoted passages of Tertullian's writings is a horrible description of the exultation of the saints hereafter over the torments of the damned. In that portion of the Christian world, where a great bishop like Cyprian called him "the master," it is known that the theory of the endlessness of future punishments prevailed to greater unanimity than in those regions of Christendom where Greek was the common tongue.

As modern ability to secure a more and more accurate understanding of the original tongues of the Bible advances, it is always in order, and of service, to examine and reëxamine traditional interpretations. And while the fact, that the doctrine of endless punishment has been so widely affirmed to be a doctrine of positive revelation, ought certainly to guard us from hasty or arrogant confidence in a different conclusion, it cannot be accepted as a prejudgment of the case, when we remember these two things. (1) That the progress of modern learning has obliged us to revise our interpretation of the Bible here and there in regard to *the past*, as in the book of Genesis. For instance, the Flood, once supposed on the strength of such passages as Gen. vii. 19, 20, to have overwhelmed all the land on the globe, Alps, Andes, and all, is now restricted to the narrow limits of the then inhabited district of Asia. It is not incredible that candid scholarship may see cause to revise our interpretation with regard also to the *future*. And (2), that other doctrines, which once were generally believed, are now preserved only in the museum of theological fossils.

The history of opinions respecting the future destiny of children dying in infancy is in point here. A large section of the Christian church still believes, as the whole church once believed, in the damnation of infants who die unbaptized.[1] And another large section still cherishes in

[1] What things the Heavenly Father is still supposed by some who repeat the Lord's Prayer to be capable of doing to little children, appears from the following extract from a Roman Catholic book, by Rev. J. Furniss, published in England, not long since, "for children"

"The fourth dungeon is 'the boiling kettle.' Listen, there is a sound like that of a kettle boiling. Is it really a kettle which is boiling? No. Then what is it? Hear what it is. The blood is boiling in the scalded veins of that boy; the brain is boiling and bubbling in his head; the marrow is boiling in his bones. The fifth dungeon is the 'red-hot oven,' in which is a little child. Hear how it screams to come out; see how it turns and twists itself about in the fire; it beats its head against the roof of the oven. It stamps its little feet on the floor of the oven. To this child God was very good. Very likely God saw that this child would get worse and worse, and would never repent, and so would have to be punished much more in hell. *So God in His mercy called it out of the world in its early childhood.*" (Quoted by Dr. J. F. Clarke in *Truths and Errors of Orthodoxy*, p. 360.)

Bad as this is, it may be doubted whether it involves a greater misconception of God than the following statement of Calvin:—

"Infants themselves, as they bring their condemnation into the world with them, are rendered obnoxious to punishment by their own sinfulness, not by the sinfulness of another. For though they have not yet produced the fruits of their iniquity, yet they have the seed of it within them; even their whole nature is as it were a seed of sin, and therefore *cannot but be odious and abominable to God.*" (*Institutes*, II. i. 8.)

its confession of faith a form of words, which commemorates an old belief that those infants are damned, whose names are not on the roll of God's elect: "Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved." [1] ("Westminster Larger Catechism," chap. x. 3.) Augustine and Calvin are both on record as believers in infant damnation, in accordance with their interpretation of the Scriptures. But, as the New Testament has been more carefully studied, the strictest orthodoxy, finding the Scriptures silent respecting the future destiny of those who die before the age of moral responsibility, has availed itself of the conceded liberty of belief on that subject, and has rested its present doctrine of the universal salvation of those who die in infancy chiefly on *a priori* conclusions respecting the probable dealing of Infinite Justice with infant creatures. It is largely by the fiat of our moral instincts, guided by such passages as

[1] "This plainly implies that non-elect infants are not saved. It is nonsense to speak of *elect* infants as saved, if *all* infants are meant. Besides, the added clause in the same paragraph, about the salvation of "all other elect persons, who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the word," settles the meaning of the passage; for, of course, not *all* of the heathen are here declared to be among the saved. Moreover, it is immediately declared that "others not elected" "cannot be saved." The framers of the Confession held that *de jure* all infants are lost; that *de facto* there are two and only two ways in which they can be saved — through the Abrahamic covenant, which saves the baptized among them, and sovereign election, which is not limited by the covenant." (Prof. Geo. P Fisher, in the *New Englander* for April, 1868, p. 338.)

Mark x. 14, that the monstrous dogma of infant damnation has been recently banished from the churches of the reformed faith.

So, too, a more liberal belief is now cherished in the orthodox churches respecting the future of those whom Dr. Schaff terms "such adult heathen as live and die in a frame of mind *predisposed* to receive the gospel," — who once were considered hopelessly lost because not having *actually* received a gospel that had never been preached to them. (See Dr. Schaff in Lange's "Commentary on Matthew," p. 229.)

If it be asked, Did not the ancients, accepting the sternest dogmas, have the same moral instincts as we? it may be said, they were undoubtedly under the influence of their times, in which the administration of human "justice" was harsh, sanguinary, and barbarous to a frightful degree. The generations that were familiar with severe punishments for slight offenses, and habituated to the axe, the quartering knife, the rack, the pestilential dungeon, the fiery stake, as the instruments of an arbitrary and cruel "justice," must have taken a more sombre and awful view than we of the administration of justice by the Almighty Sovereign. The ideas of such ages respecting the procedures of Divine justice must not be allowed to strain our interpretations of God's judgment-words.

Yet it would be an exaggeration to impute to the church of less humane and enlightened times than ours a correspondingly severe conception of future punish-

ments. Starting, as we view it, from a hint of Tertullian (*died* A. D. 220), who supposed that the slight faults of the righteous would be atoned for after their death merely by "a delay of their resurrection," the notion of *a middle state of purification*, for the benefit of baptized and penitent, but faulty, people on their way to heaven, was first stated, as Neander thinks, by Cyprian (A. D. 258); was declared by Augustine (A. D. 430) not "incredible;" was asserted by Gregory the Great (A. D. 604) "worthy of belief;" and, with varied amplification,[1] has become one of the most potent doctrines of that church which reckons more souls in her communion than any other in Christendom. Denying the benefits of Purgatory only to the unbaptized and the excommunicate, the doctrine, not only of the Roman Catholic Church, but of the Old Catholic from the third century, *has been, for all souls who accept her last consolations, practically restorationist.* As opposed to this, the doctrine of the reformed churches reacted with a severity, and sometimes an atrocity, quite foreign to the primitive age. The modern Protestant doctrine of hell has far exceeded in horror the views entertained, for instance, by that one church-teacher of the primitive period to whom Protestants are wont to accord a special reverence as a sort of forefather of the Reformation.[2]

[1] See Milman's *Hist. Lat. Chr.* viii. p. 224*f.*

[2] An extended statement of Augustine's views respecting future punishment, especially as contrasted with those of Calvinists, is given in *Brownson's Quarterly Review* for July, 1863. In Augustine's

As it has been with the doctrine of the future state of children, so it may be with the doctrine of the endlessness of punishment. It is not unlikely that the church may find that she has ignorantly added to that which is written in the book (Rev. xxii. 18). It may be that a more critical study of the original of our common version will show that the endlessness of the "æonian punishment" is not so decisively taught that it should be

view, says the writer, "eternal death is a subsidence into a lower form of life, a lapse into an inferior mode of existence, a privation of the highest vital influx from God in order to everlasting life, or supreme beatitude, but not of all vital influx, in order to an endless existence which is a partial and incomplete participation in good. . . . . There is no trace [in A.] of the idea that God hates a portion of His creatures with an absolute, infinite, and eternal hatred, and is hated with a perfect and eternally enduring hatred by them in return, to the utmost extent of their capacity. . . . . There is no trace of the idea that God has withdrawn Himself from a portion of His creatures, except so far as to retain them in existence: . . . . . that those who die in sin lose all that is good in their nature, and all good of existence, become completely evil, and continue to grow everlastingly in the direction of an infinite wickedness, which merits a corresponding degree of pain. On the contrary, St. Augustine teaches that God preserves in endless existence those creatures who have forfeited their capacity of attaining to the supreme good, because of the good of which they are still capable. . . . . However great their suffering from the pain of loss, or the pain of sense may be, according to the doctrine of St. Augustine, it cannot be such throughout eternity as to destroy the good of existence, and make it a pure, unmitigated, penal evil to live forever." It should be added, that Augustine's idea of infant damnation was correspondingly mild, though involving privation and suffering.

unhesitatingly received as an article of our faith. It may result, then, that we shall see ourselves permitted, as in a point where the word of the Lord has given no authoritative decision, to exercise our liberty of choice between the seeming alternative probabilities of the case, if indeed we cannot be content to leave the matter in that awful cloud of mystery in which the Scripture has left it.

The most definite, and apparently decisive, and also easily refuted form of the historical objection is presented in the persons of the primitive church-teachers. These have been summoned to testify that the New Testament conveyed to them, in their vernacular tongue, a very clear and positive doctrine of endless punishment. This appeal to the Greek Christian writers of the first few centuries is necessarily fallacious, when it is forgotten that they use the word *æonian* in the same indeterminate sense that it has in the Greek Scriptures. When we consider the elastic and variable use of *æon* and *æonian* in the LXX. Bible of the Apostles (see p. 4), and the evident imitation of that phraseology in the Gospels and Epistles, nothing is more probable than that the early Greek theologians, applying the same rules of interpretation to both Testaments, should themselves use these words in the same biblical way, when speaking of the future state. From oversight of this important consideration, and forgetting that "æonian punishment" probably means no more on the pages of Justin Martyr and

Irenæus than it means in Matthew, advocates of the traditional view have laid an easily contestable claim to the authority of the primitive church-teachers. Professor Bartlett, particularly, in his review of Mr. Constable's theory of the extinction of the wicked ("New Englander," October, 1871), speaking of "the cool assurance of appealing to the apostolic fathers" as witnesses against the traditional view, trips over this very fallacy of "coolly" assuming that, in their writings, the frequently recurring word *æonian* always means endless.

A comparison of the Nicene Creed with the Apostles' Creed shows that *æonian* had the same force in ecclesiastical as in the inspired writings. The Apostles' Creed (at least as early as A. D. 200) confesses belief in "the æonian life" (English, "life everlasting"). The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed (A. D. 381) gives as the equivalent of this, "the life of the future æon" (English, "world to come"). Precisely thus the old Syriac Version (A. D. 100–150) rendered Matt. xxv. 46: "These shall go away to the pain of the *'olam*, and these to the life of the *'olam*" (or *æon*).

If, now, the testimony of the *Greek* church-teachers of the first centuries be taken upon the whole subject, they by no means unite in the view that future punishments are endless.

Justin Martyr (died about A. D. 166), the first of the church-teachers who was eminent for learning, although, as Dr. Schaff ("History of the Christian Church," i. 484) has observed, "wanting in critical discernment," can be

quoted on more than one side. For the most part, he uses only the scriptural word *aiōnios* (æonian) in his allusions to futurity. In one passage, however (Apol. i. ch. 28), he uses the words "punished for the boundless æon" (*eis ton aperanton aiōna*), giving *æon* an epithet which the Scripture never gives it. It is noticeable, however, that this word "boundless" (*aperantos*), in the single passage where it occurs in the New Testament, "endless genealogies" (1 Tim. i. 4), signifies indefinitely long, rather than endless. It is possible, that no more than an extremely or indefinitely long *period* is intimated, where Justin says (Apol. i. ch. 8), that the wicked "are to undergo æonian punishment, and not only, as Plato said, for a period of a thousand years." Whether this is his real meaning, as it seems to us, the reader can better judge by comparing what he says, in his "Dialogue with Trypho," ch. v., on the immortality of the soul.

"But I do not say, indeed, that all souls die; for that were certainly a piece of good fortune for the wicked. What then? The souls of the pious remain in a better place, while those of the unjust and wicked are in a worse, waiting for the time of judgment. Thus some who have appeared worthy of God never die; but others are punished *so long as God wills them to exist and be punished.*"

In ch. vi., after saying that the soul exists because God wills, and no longer than He wills, he says, "whenever it is necessary that the soul should cease to exist, the spirit of life is removed from it, and *there is no more soul*, but it goes back to the place from whence it was taken" (Edinburgh translation, pp. 93–95).

Advocates of opposing views have generally quoted Justin only so far as he seems to agree with them. The above quotations fairly represent all that Justin has said upon the subject. If these quotations are combined, and allowed to qualify each other, it seems most likely that Justin regarded the æonian punishment as *indefinitely*, rather than *infinitely* long, and, in some cases, at least, designed to terminate, by the will of God, in loss of existence.

It is clear that Justin Martyr did not hold the notion of Dr. Hodge, which we have already referred to (p. 7), that the soul "is in its own nature imperishable"; — a notion which is the corner-stone of the doctrine that future punishment is endless, and, at the same time, is not capable of being demonstrated from the Scriptures.

About the same time that Justin suffered martyrdom, Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, a pupil, in early life, of the Apostle John, became a martyr. A letter from the church of Smyrna describing his martyrdom is extant, but of unknown authorship. It is noticeable that we find in this letter the same addition to the text Mark ix. 43, that has already been commented on (p. 19), viz, "never" for "not" — *e. g.*, "They [the martyrs] had before their eyes the fire that is eternal and never extinguished." As this letter was doubtless prepared under the care of the officers of the church, it is most natural to infer that that gloss upon the text was in accord with Polycarp's teaching. Whether the "never" was understood to mean absolutely endless duration, or whether it meant never until

the existence of the wicked ends, is still a question. Some light may be thrown on it by Polycarp's pupil, Irenæus.

The view of Justin as to the possibility of the "æonian punishment" terminating in loss of existence seems to be shared by Irenæus (*died about* 202). His relation, through his teacher Polycarp, to Polycarp's teacher, the Apostle John, is justly considered to give importance to his views. He says (Contra Hær. ii. xxxiv. 3), with reference to the saying of the Psalmist, that God gives life (Ps. xxi. 4), that "it is the Father of all who imparts continuance forever and ever to those who are saved. For life does not arise from us, *nor from our own nature;* but it is bestowed according to the grace of God. And therefore he who shall preserve the life bestowed on him, and give thanks to Him who imparted it, shall receive also length of days forever and ever. But he who shall reject it, and prove himself ungrateful to his Maker, inasmuch as he has been created and has not recognized Him who bestowed [the gift upon him], *deprives himself of continuance forever and ever.* And for this reason the Lord declared [Luke xvi. 11] to those who showed themselves ungrateful towards Him: 'If ye have not been faithful in that which is little, who will give you that which is great?'— indicating, that those who in this brief temporal life have shown themselves ungrateful to Him who bestowed it, shall justly *not receive from Him length of days forever and ever.*" (See Edinburgh translation of Irenæus, vol. i. pp. 252, 253.) The most natural inference to be drawn from

the expressions which we have italicized is, that Irenæus and Justin Martyr anticipated that the wicked would, *ultimately*, cease to exist.

The Alexandrian school of theology, as represented by its two great teachers, Clement and Origen, — the latter of whom (*died about* A. D. 253) was by far the greatest light of the first three centuries, — was, as is too well known to need proof, thoroughly imbued with restorationism. (See Neander's "Church History," i. 656.) The same is true of the theological school of Antioch, a century and a half later, as represented by Diodorus of Tarsus, and especially by "the Master of the East," Theodore of Mopsuestia (*died* A. D. 427), whom Dr. Dorner calls the first oriental theologian of his time. The views of the most illustrious disciple of Diodorus, Chrysostom (*died* A. D. 407), are represented by Neander as somewhat uncertain (Hist. ii. 676). Contemporary with Diodorus, Gregory of Nyssa (*died about* A. D. 395), "one of the most eminent theologians of the time," as Dr. Schaff observes in his "History of the Christian Church" (iii. 906), expounded and maintained the doctrine of a universal restoration "with the greatest logical ability and acuteness, in works written expressly for the purpose" (Neander's "Church History," ii. 677). The peculiar views of Augustine (*died* A. D. 430), the greatest of the teachers of the Latin, or Western Church, have already been stated. (See p. 69, note.) The quotation given on p. 20, note, exhibits Augustine as teaching that some who suffer for their sins after death are ultimately

saved. (See references in Hodge's Syst. Theol. iii. 877.)

In general, the following remark of Neander ("Church History," ii. 676) certainly does not exceed the truth, if indeed it comes up to it. "The doctrine of eternal punishment continued, as in the preceding period, to be dominant in the creed of the church. Yet, in the Oriental Church, in which, with the exception of those subjects immediately connected with the doctrinal controversies, there was greater freedom and latitude of development [and in which, also, we are to remember, the original language of the New Testament was the tongue in which every church-teacher taught and wrote], many respectable church-teachers still stood forth, without injuring their reputation for orthodoxy, as advocates of the opposite doctrine, until the time when the Origenistic disputes caused the agreement with Origen in respect to this point also to be considered as something decidedly heretical."

So far, then, as the historical objection to the conclusions of this Essay rests on the authority of the primitive church-teachers, especially of those to whom the Greek of the New Testament, and of the LXX. Old Testament, was their common tongue, it must give way. The unlearned reader, so far from needing to explore the dustiest alcoves of great libraries in search of patristic lore concealed under a dead language, will find all the information desirable on this point in those standard works of church history which are everywhere accessible. And the statements of these are too explicit for any can-

did reader to entertain further doubt. During the first five centuries, it was not inconsistent with a reputation for orthodoxy to believe and teach that the "æonian punishment" would some time terminate, either by the restoration or by the extinction of the sufferers. The *endlessness* of that punishment was first *authoritatively* announced as an article of the orthodox creed in the year 544, at the instance of the Emperor Justinian I., an authority in theological matters of equal respectability with King Henry VIII. of England.

From this source of authority the current of orthodox belief flowed to the ages of mediæval barbarism, — ages qualified neither by ethical character, nor biblical learning, to investigate the grounds of their received belief. It was on other issues that the Reformers joined battle with the Papal Church. The energies of the Reformed churches were long absorbed by questions vital to their very existence. In breaking with the Papacy, moreover, these churches could not divest themselves at once and wholly of those habits of thinking and believing which a thousand years of dominant tradition had made inveterate. And so it has not been until a comparatively recent time that the conditions favorable for a scientific reinvestigation of the traditional view have existed. And there can be no question, except among those who have made up their minds and shut their eyes, but that we shall do most wisely, in our historical retrospect, to look past the intervening ages of darkness, of strife, of unreflecting subjection to ecclesiastical authority, — it mat-

ters not how many such ages there are, — to the freer life of the primitive church, and to the statements of those who, by their oriental origin, their Greek tongue, and their nearness to the inspired fountain-head, may be regarded as better qualified than even a modern theological professor to understand the testimony delivered to them by the evangelists and Apostles.

The Lutheran Dr. J. C. Döderlein states the historical point as follows: "As to *public* teaching, the most ancient testimony against the end of future punishments is extant in a canon of Justinian's tractate to Mennas against Origen (ap. Harduin. vol. iii. Concil. p. 279), can. 9: 'If any one says or holds that the punishment of demons and impious men is temporary, and that it will have an end at some time, that is to say, that there is a restoration of demons or of impious men, he is accursed.' It is also evident that very many doctors held the same view. . . . . But that was not the confession of all, and the more highly distinguished in Christian antiquity any one was for learning, so much the more did he cherish and defend the hope of future torments some time ending." After mentioning some distinguished names, Dr. D. goes on to say: "This, however, was not the view of a few persons, and one privately entertained, but general, and maintained by many advocates. Augustine, at least ("Enchiridion," c. 112), testifies, that 'some, nay very many, pity with human feeling the everlasting punishment of the damned, and do not believe that it is to be so.' . . . . The following age, although a belief in perpetual torments

prevailed by authority, yet clearly did not lack milder views." (Instit. Theol. Chr. ii. pp. 199–202.)

After this showing how variously the Greek Testament was understood on this subject by these early church-teachers to whom Greek was a vernacular tongue, it is of less consequence to inquire how the Jews probably understood what the Gospels report Christ as having said about the "æonian punishment." The same varieties of belief as to the duration of future punishments prevailed before Christ, as after. The language of the Old Testament — the Jewish Bible — is sufficiently indecisive. Philo, nearly contemporary with the Apostles, and, outside of their circle, the most masterly Jewish intellect of that period, seems to have believed in the annihilation of the wicked, as the result of future punishment. His idea was, that the material world was to be destroyed, and the wicked "involved in its destruction." The testimony of Josephus as to the opinions of the body of the Pharisees is not as lucid as could be desired. It is impossible to know with certainty what views were held by Christ's Pharisee hearers (to which sect Philo himself belonged). Conceding the utmost, however, viz: that the Pharisees generally taught a strictly endless punishment, and that the mass of the people did not dissent, we are by no means obliged to regard Christ as indorsing such views by using language on which He knew they would put an extreme interpretation.

The point is illustrated by the reserve He used on

the subject of the resurrection. What He said about that, He knew was interpreted by His hearers in a gross materializing way, but, for good reasons, He let it go so ; He took no pains even to introduce the distinction, afterward made by Paul, between the "natural body" and the "spiritual body." So, also, when His disciples asked Him (John ix. 2), "Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?" — implying, on the questioner's part, at least a readiness to believe in the preëxistence of the soul, — Christ uttered no protest against that suggestion, as a modern theologian in like case would have "felt called upon" to do, but contented Himself with giving a simple negative to the direct question of personal responsibility.

Whatever were the views of the Pharisees as to the duration of future punishment, the point is wholly immaterial to the position we have taken. *The advocate of a future restoration* might indeed be called on to explain why Christ should speak as He did to hearers understanding as they did. But those who find no hope revealed in the æonian future for him who dies impenitent, can receive Christ's language on the whole subject as equally intelligible and consistent, whether the punished soul finally ceases to exist, or remains under punishment forever.

Dismissing, then, the appeal to the Jews as of no account at all, the historical objection finally appears, when evaporated, to leave, if anything, some residuum of evidence in our favor, by showing what varieties of opinion

prevailed on this subject within the limits of acknowledged orthodoxy, while as yet the Greek of the New Testament was a living tongue, and while the free Christian life of the martyr period had not run out into the dreary swamp of the subsequent polemic and formal orthodoxy. These varieties of opinion, so freely tolerated, seem to indicate the correctness of our view, as exhibited in the first and second chapters of this Essay, viz, *that no decisive voice can be recognized in the utterances of the New Testament as asserting plainly the endlessness of the "æonian punishment.'*

CHAPTER V.

RESTORATIONISM.

THE objective point of this whole discussion has been this: That the Scriptures really leave the duration of the "æonian punishment" an open question. This question, if indeed we do not deem it wiser to remain ignorant where God has remained silent, we are left at liberty, so far as any clear utterance of the Scriptures is regarded, to decide according to our own reason, in view of the nature and the tendencies of sin. This view now confronts a further question as to the reasonableness of the hope that the "æonian punishment," if, indeed, not endless, may issue in *restoration* rather than in *extinction.*

It may seem obviously consistent with what has been said of the tendencies of sin (pp. 52, 53), that if any go into the æon to come, impenitent, but not incorrigible, *not too far gone for recovery*, then there is nothing in the nature of things to preclude their restoration. Whatever probability may appear to any in this direction, has, however, to be qualified by two considerations: —

1. *By our utter ignorance of the decisive fact*, whether any particular soul be too far gone for recovery, or not. We begin existence with different capacities, which are so

variously modified by individual courses and experiences, that only God can tell what is possible for unpromising cases there, or even for cases that we here might call promising. No one can feel reasonably sure, that he who has rejected the Gospel of Christ in this life will prove corrigible amid such chastisements as may surround him there. The probability of restoration *there* for any that failed *here* can be indulged, at most, only upon conjectural grounds. For

2. *The Scriptures contain nothing whatever that positively guarantees the hopeful view.* There are some passages in the Epistles of Paul that at first seem to contain a hope for all. But this hope, when examined, is soon overcast with serious doubts.

For instance, he tells us that, "as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor. xv. 22). This looks to some like the restoration in Christ of all who fell in Adam. Others, however, understand it, that, as in Adam all who belong *physically* to Adam die, so in Christ those who belong *spiritually* to Christ shall be made alive; and they refer to the explicit statement of the next verse about "those who are Christ's." Others, again, think that all will be made alive in Christ, but *not all alike*, the wicked being raised up "by the office of the Judge, the righteous by the goodness of the Mediator." So that there is no possibility of all agreeing what this text really means.

Again, the prediction "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow" (Phil. ii. 10; compare 1 Cor. xv. 28),

is interpreted by one class of commentators to promise the final yielding of every revolted spirit to the universal Redeemer. But others hold that it is not implied that all shall bow to Christ *in the same way*, and that *that* must not be taken for granted. But all things shall be subject to Him *according to their different natures*, — the holy, subject loyally — the irrational creatures, instinctively — the lost, compulsorily. Here also there seems no possible agreement of interpreters.

So where we read (Col. i. 19, 20),[1] "It pleased the Father . . . . by Him to reconcile all things to Himself . . . . whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven" [2] (compare Eph. i. 10); the less hopeful interpreters note that nothing is said of those that may have been cast out from earth and heaven into hell, and they moreover question whether "all things" is not used *generically*, without reference to what may become of individuals, just like Paul's prophecy that "all Israel shall be saved" (Romans xi. 26), and James's greeting "to the twelve tribes" (James i. 1). Others, however, think they here see intimations of an universal restoration not conflicting with the doctrine of the "æonian punish-

[1] "This passage tortures the interpreters, and in turn is tortured by them." — *Davenant.*

[2] "Shall we then mistake, if we imagine that, even in the extra-mundane sphere, there are also fallen beings yet capable of salvation, and that into this sphere, whence came temptation and ruin into our race, there shall in return go forth blessed agencies of deliverance from this very race?" etc. (Dr. C. F. Kling, in Lange's *Commentary on* 1 *Cor.* vi. 2, p. 126.

ment" as given in the Gospels. The pure and lofty Christian spirit of Neander, taking this view, recognizes "the guidance of Divine wisdom that no more light has been communicated upon this subject." (See his "History of the Planting and Training of the Christian Church," revised translation, pp. 486, 487.

There is a celebrated battle-field of commentators in the first epistle of Peter (iii. 19, 20), where scholars of equal fame are found on opposite sides. The one part affirm that the translation should be, "He went and preached to the spirits [now] in prison *when once they disobeyed*," etc., and that this preaching, *contemporaneous with the disobedience*, was done by the Spirit of Christ in Noah, who is called by Peter (2 Pet. ii. 5) "a preacher of righteousness." The other part contend that our version is correct, and that the preaching was done *by Christ Himself*, in Hades, during the interval between His death and His resurrection, to those who *had been there* "in prison" for their disobedience since the Flood. What is said in the next chapter, about "the gospel preached also to them that are dead," favors the latter view, since ch. iv. 6, most obviously refers to iii. 19. It might be supposed to make for the restorationist view of this passage, that this preaching, if the latter interpretation be favored, took place *at the end of the æon*, or æons, that began with the repeopling of the world by Noah, and ended with Christ. But even upon the latter interpretation of this dubious text, we get no assurance that that preaching was *effectual* for the restoration of those that

listened to it, any more than it had been for the conversion of the larger part of Christ's Jewish hearers. So that if this text seems at first a single star of hope breaking forth from an inky sky, it is but a short, uncertain gleam, and all is dark again. But, further, supposing that we had positive assurance that those antediluvian sinners, or some of them, were restored, at the end of their æon of imprisonment, through the preaching of Christ, what valid ground would that afford for hoping in the future restoration of any who have hardened themselves against that very preaching of Christ amid all the redeeming influences of Gospel times?"[1]

[1] The late Professor James Hadley, LL.D., of Yale College, whose eminence as a Greek scholar was equaled both by his candor as a critic and by his piety, gave his views of the text as follows, in a private letter to the author: —

"The natural unforced interpretation of the text is this, — that Christ preached (*i. e.*, made the announcements and offers of the gospel) to departed spirits who were in confinement as a consequence of their disbelief and abuse of the Divine forbearance during the days of Noah. This meaning I should not dare to discard, — to say that the writer did not mean what his words, taken in their connection, naturally imply, — only on account of a supposed inconsistency between that meaning and the apparent meaning of other passages or writers in the Bible. I do not see that the Universalist can make out very much from the text as thus interpreted; for it does not state, or with any clearness imply, that the gospel was preached to any departed spirits other than those who perished in the Flood, or that even to those the preaching of the gospel actually resulted in their pardon and salvation. To infer that a person now living under the preaching of the gospel would have its offers continued to him

In general, it will be found that, whatever texts are supposed to harmonize with the hope of a restoration for some, or for all, the same texts harmonize at least quite as well with the unhopeful view. The result of the most careful searching of the Scriptures for some clear word on this question is fairly expressed by the following utterance of the American Unitarian Association: "It is our firm conviction that the final restoration of all men is not revealed in the Scriptures, but that the ultimate fate of the impenitent wicked is left shrouded in impenetrable mystery, so far as the total declaration of the sacred writers is concerned."[1]

after he has died unbelieving and impenitent, would be a prodigious *non sequitur*." (November 30, 1868.)

An article learnedly controverting this view of the text appeared from the pen of Professor S. C. Bartlett, D. D., in the *New Englander*, October, 1872.

[1] They go on to say: "Some of our number reject entirely the doctrine of final restoration, and hold that the Scriptures teach that a final judgment awaits the soul immediately after this life, and give little or no encouragement to the idea that the soul will have opportunity for repentance and reformation in a future state of existence. Those of us who believe (as the large majority of us do) in the final recovery of all souls, therefore cannot emphasize it in the foreground of their preaching as a sure part of Christianity, but only elevate it in the background of their system as a glorious hope, which seems to them a warranted inference from the cardinal principles of Christianity as well as from the great verities of moral science." (*Quarterly Journal of the A. U. A.* pp. 48, 49, vol. i. 1854. A revised reprint of a Declaration of Opinion in the *28th Annual Report, A. U. A.*)

When we find the Scriptures maintaining strict reserve upon a

If, however, any should insist that Scripture seems to have left the point indeterminate between restoration and no restoration, and therefore they may allow their moral instincts to fix it, just as in the other alternative between extinction and endless suffering, — if it be pleaded that, albeit we can get no decisive oracle, we still may

> "— gather dust and chaff, and call
> To what we feel is Lord of all,
> And faintly trust the larger hope,"

we are still constrained to insist that a solemn emphasis be laid upon the "*faintly*." Faint such a trust must be (so far as it is a *rational*, and not a *willful* trust), in face of the solemn silence of that Testament of "grace and truth" which came to us through Jesus Christ (John i. 17); faint, when reflecting on the ominous contrast to this silence, which the elder and austerer Testament presents, continually holding up, at the close of most woeful burdens of prophecy, the promise of a happy restoration of the punished nation to all the blessings of the broken covenant (Isa. xl. 1, 2). Such consoling hopes, attached even to denunciations of the penalties of Moses' law, certainly make the silence of Christ's Gospel all the more forbidding and full of despair (Heb. x. 28, 29). And fainter still must all trust in a happy solution of the awful mystery become before the adverse

doctrine which modern preachers attempt to put on such high ground as "the cardinal principles of Christianity and the great verities of moral science," that reserve appears to us as significant as it is stern.

probabilities that arise from the scriptural view of *the self-propagating, unnatural, disorganizing, destroying tendencies of sin.* To overbear and quell the fear that these inspire, *nothing less than the clear revelation of a supernatural hope will suffice, and such a revelation we have not received.* The utmost that we can reasonably say is, "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible" (Mark x. 27). If there be any hope for any, it has been concealed, perhaps as the day of death has been concealed, to check presumptuous sinners by the fear of falling unawares into irretrievable ruin. It must be admitted that, *on the most hopeful view that can be ventured,* the darkness resting on the æonian future of him who goes out of this world of grace an unbelieving Gospel-hearer, an impenitent sinner, alienated from his God, is sufficiently dense and appalling to rouse the living to work out their salvation "with fear and trembling" (Phil. ii. 12), fearing, as Christ has bidden (Matt. x. 28), Him "*who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.*"

CHAPTER VI.

ADJUSTMENTS AND READJUSTMENTS.

A FEW things deserve to be said in conclusion upon (1) the relation of the views here advanced to other parts of the evangelical system of doctrine, and (2) with respect to the present attitude of the churches which hold that system to the doctrine of endless punishment.

1. The views of this Essay are quite as consistent with a Trinitarian theology as with any other, and are held by a large number of persons — both of the clergy and the laity — who hold firmly to the Moral Government of God, the Deity, Mediatorship, and Atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Universal Sinfulness of mankind by nature, Justification by Grace through Faith, the Regenerating Office of the Holy Ghost, the Divine Authority of the Holy Scriptures, and a Future State of Rewards and Punishments, in which "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." These are the fundamentals of orthodoxy. But a cardinal mistake of Christians in all ages has been to put non-essentials among the fundamentals. Once it was baptism; again it was the manner of Christ's presence in the Lord's

Supper; now it is the duration of the sufferings of the lost.

The doctrine of this Essay, so far from being a divergence from orthodoxy, is presented as being more orthodox in a biblical point of view than the traditional doctrine. It is presented as *a restatement of the original doctrine of the Word of God*, in place of a traditional belief that has no better support than an inveterate misunderstanding of the Scriptures.

Whether the duration of the "æonian punishment" be definitely announced or not, the reality, so far as made known, seems to present a fully adequate ground for the intervention of our Redeemer. His redeeming work has precisely the same relation to the necessities of sinners, whatever the duration of the punishment to which they lie exposed. Moreover, the reality of that punishment, so far as foretold, even though one should adopt the hope that it may some time terminate, is fully adequate to awaken the most active sympathy for those who are in danger of it, and to stimulate the most earnest efforts to rouse them to escape it by repentance and conversion.

People sometimes talk as though belief in an *endless* punishment were the necessary mainspring of missionary labors for the heathen. One glance at John Howard, and the noble army who have given life and fortune to redeem fellow-creatures merely from earthly wretchedness, refutes the idea. It is true that belief in the endlessness of hell has actually been a mighty impulse to

missionary labors for the heathen, but is not the love of one's God, and one's brother man in Christ, as mighty, and, perhaps, even more pure?

But it may be doubted by some, whether the sanctions of the Divine law will not be weakened, if we admit the least possibility that the future sufferings of the wicked may prove to be less than absolutely endless. It is felt by some that this doctrine of endlessness puts a salutary pressure on the wicked, and that if this pressure be lightened, the law will be weakened. In regard to this it must be admitted that, if the practical tendencies of the conclusion reached by this Essay are really evil, then that conclusion, however plausible, is invalidated.

But experience testifies that it by no means follows, that lessening the penalty weakens the deterring power of the law. Suppose that penalties are excessive, as when theft and many minor offenses were punished with death under the English laws. When these blood-thirsty statutes were moderated to humane limits, it was not found that crime increased. Crime was even more rampant under the old-time rigor, than under the merciful administration of the present day. Or suppose that the punishment is not anticipated by the wrong-doer as certain. We have heard the admissions even of those who believe in the rightfulness of capital punishment, that an infliction lighter than the death-penalty, if *certain* and *speedy*, would more effectively deter from crime than an uncertain and remote gallows. It is not the distant evil, however great, but the immediate evil, though comparatively

less, that most affects men's minds. It is not because men are not sufficiently threatened, but "because sentence against an evil work is not executed *speedily*," that, as Ecclesiastes observed long ago, "the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (viii. 11). A single "æon" of suffering, when viewed as a presently impending certainty, is likely to be more efficacious to rouse a slothful soul from supineness in its sins, than an endless punishment which is viewed as far-off and problematical.

Against the fear that the law will lose an essential element of coercive power, if the endlessness of future punishment should cease to be insisted on, we may place the noteworthy fact, that Moses, in legislating for the Hebrews, retrenched the doctrine of future retribution to the extent of ignoring it altogether. Future rewards and punishments were a prominent article in the religious belief of the Egyptians who were his contemporaries. And it is a most singular fact, a fruitful theme of speculation[1] as to the reasons of it, that this divinely guided legislator, instead of purifying the familiar doctrine of future retribution from all the fables and fancies of Egypt, should have entirely suppressed that doctrine, and have secured his divinely dictated enactments by the sole sanction of temporal blessings for obedience, and temporal calamities for disobedience. In view of such a fact, it seems extravagant to intimate as many do, that a definitely announced endlessness of future suffering is essen-

[1] See Froude (*Short Studies*, ii. 25–28, 278); also, F. B. Zincke's *Egypt of the Pharaohs and of the Khedive*, chapter xxv.

tial in the present age to enforce the divine commandments. Such a fact would seem to indicate, that although the endlessness of the "æonian punishment" should no longer be accepted as an article of the Christian faith, no jot or tittle of the law of God would fail to command the same respect as ever.

But, it may be asked, has not the fear of an endless hell exerted salutary restraints over many minds? Have not rude, coarse natures quailed before it, and the profane been sobered by it? Admitting this, however, the question may be returned, Is it the *endlessness* of hell that most affects such minds, or is it not rather the horror and anguish of the Dantean picture in which their imaginations view the place? It is probably the simple truth to say, that the idea of the endlessness of hell, as distinct from its pains, has tormented saints more than it has troubled sinners. But so far as minds of finer feeling have found benefit from the doctrine of endless punishment, *they* would have derived equal benefit from a doctrine pruned to the limits of the Scripture teaching. In the minds of some devout Christians, the traditional doctrine has been the *decretum horribile*, that has taxed all the strength of their faith in God to prevent it from setting them adrift on a wild sea of skepticism. And very many who have accepted the doctrine as a revealed fact, receive it as a painful mystery, and find relief only in assuming that stronger reasons for it will be presented hereafter than any which have as yet been revealed. Many, we have no means of knowing how many, souls have been

thrown into a state of permanent antagonism to the moral government of God, or to what they supposed to be that, by the requisition which this doctrine has made on them for an extra-scriptural belief. It is simply true to affirm, that, in a just balance of moral results, the good alleged to have come of presenting the dogma of an endless and infinite punishment as a doctrine of Christ, will be found mixed with some grievous mischiefs to many sensitive, thoughtful, or skeptical minds.

If it might, for a single moment, be admitted that the assertion of an endless punishment goes beyond the truth, it would immediately be feared that the exaggerated doctrine would create heresy and skepticism by its recoil. Something of this sort seems to have actually resulted. The older Universalism certainly sprang up contradicting exaggerations and distortions of the doctrine of future punishment, that no intelligent orthodox preacher of the present day would perpetrate.[1] Over-statements give rise to under-statements. The doctrine of an *endless* punishment, made in the face of the exegetical and scriptural, the philosophical and historical considerations that lie against it, provokes a spirit of unbelief that is not content

[1] See for instance the following passage from so careful and cultured a pen as that of Jonathan Edwards. "He will crush you under His feet without mercy; He will crush out your blood and make it fly, and it shall be sprinkled on His garments so as to stain all His raiment," etc. What a revolting image — God treating a sinner like the insect swollen with loathsome and venomous juices, which in a moment of disgust and hate a man stamps under foot! (From Sermon, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.*)

with attacking the single word that challenged it. Before resorting to denunciation of this opposition, it may be wise to make sure that we are not gratuitously provoking some of it, by attempting to lay a burden of belief on men's minds which the Word of God does not lay.

Whenever heresy of any kind stirs up defenders of the truth to combat it, there are two questions for such to ask before entering the conflict. (1) Have we *under-stated* any truth which the heresy is trying to do justice to? (2) Have we *overstated* any truth which the heresy is trying to deny? A restatement of the truth, *complete, but not redundant*, proves then the best of antidotes. Such a restatement of the doctrine of the "æonian punishment," retrenching the theological dogma within the true biblical limits, as defined by a free but reverent scholarship in the spirit and method of an investigator rather than of an advocate, would be the most effective way of dealing with the Universalism, which, no longer restricted within denominational lines, is now diffused more widely than some suspect.

Many a preacher who would fain "persuade men" like Paul, in view of "the terror of the Lord" (2 Cor. v. 11), finds much of his preaching neutralized by a latent Universalism even within the walls of evangelical churches. So far as the threatenings of the Bible are suspected to be pressed for more than their reality, so far there is a tendency to take them for even less than their reality. So far as the doctrine of the future is suspected to be exaggerated, so far the doctrine of the present — the im-

portance of faith in Christ and a consecrated life — is suspected to be exaggerated. This skepticism which attacks the law behind the Gospel, as represented by many a preacher, weakens also the Gospel which he preaches in connection. It should be added here, that it is quite probable that a mischievous exaggeration of the efficacy of a "death-bed repentance" grows directly out of the exaggeration of that condition from which it is hoped by such means to escape.

Let us then make a sober estimate of the practical usefulness of the traditional doctrine of a literally endless hell. We must put beside it all the doubts and difficulties, metaphysical, ethical, and scriptural, that encumber it, and take off its point and edge; then, all the resulting uncertainty that attaches to it in a multitude of minds; then, also, all the dangerous skepticism that it generates upon the whole subject of future retribution. After such an estimate, it requires some confidence to deny that the doctrine of "æonian punishment," in all that *terribleness of mystery* in which the Scripture *half reveals and half conceals it*, if intelligently accepted, and earnestly applied as it is capable of being applied, would accomplish at least all the good that can reasonably be expected from the other.

The biblical picture of the impenitent sinner's future covers him with a cloud unrifted by a single ray. Our last look at him shows a soul in the grasp of an unnatural, self-propagating, destroying disease, and shows nothing to hinder that disease from running its course

from worse to worse, through unknown suffering, to an indescribable "destruction." Instead of words of hope, as the door of the æon to come shuts upon him, nothing is borne back to the living but this solemn admonition from the lips of the Redeemer himself: "Fear Him, who, after He hath killed, hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, fear Him" (Luke xii. 5). The mystery of such an exit from a world so full of gracious influences is terrible. This stern refusal of our Saviour and Judge to speak one word of hope for him who dies in his sins, involving his destiny in clouds and darkness from whose inscrutable bosom is heard only the rumbling of judgment thunders, while it taxes no mind with any excessive burden of belief, does burden the apprehension of the living sinner with a mystery as full of disquiet, and as salutary in moral impression as any more definite disclosure seems likely to have been. When the strong antipathies that were not unreasonably excited by the monstrous denials of "Ballou Universalists" shall have subsided, the evangelical churches will perhaps feel more ready than now to return from their old theological ground to the original biblical teaching. This remark brings us to the last point remaining for our present criticism.

2. The present attitude of "orthodox" churches toward the traditional doctrine is extremely inconsistent and unsatisfactory. The laity, especially the cultured sort, are to a considerable extent tinctured with the other views. They know that in England and Germany restorationism and annihilationism prevail to a wide extent

among intelligent and influential minds, that earnestly hold, in other respects, to the old doctrines of the reformed churches. And they can see no reason why divergent views of the duration and result of the "æonian punishment" should not be as compatible with orthodoxy in America as in Europe, and in the nineteenth century, as during the first five centuries of Christianity. The ministry, generally, feel bound to stand by the creed-article, so long as that stands, or at least not to disturb it. Many stand by it who are fully persuaded in their own minds, and look with antipathy upon the least dissent from extreme views. Many others, feeling the pressure of doubts, find relief in asserting to themselves that they believe whatever the Bible says, and still are not certain that they correctly understand what it says. Some of these are not willing, and some do not dare, to reinvestigate the dogma in an impartial, scientific method, lest they bring themselves into conflict with the creed which they are expected to defend. And some of these brethren have affectionately dissuaded the author of this Essay from provoking that personal reproach [1] which any intermeddling with the traditional belief would be likely to bring from the ignorant, the uncandid, and the intolerant, upon any one who ventures, however reverently, to intimate a doubt whether, upon this momentous doctrine, we have read the words of our Lord

[1] "Our brother man is seldom so bitter against us as when we refuse to adopt at once his notions of the infinite." (*Friends in Council*, Am. ed. p. 24.)

aright. Here and there a council of Congregational churches lets a man into the pastorate — amid murmurs of dissent — who confesses a faint private hope of the salvability hereafter of some who did not appear to get saved in this life. A prominent doctor of divinity, fortunately perhaps for himself no more a candidate for a pastoral charge, but still in good Congregational fellowship, not long ago occupied "The Christian Union" for a half year with a presentation of liberal views from an historical standpoint. Meanwhile the creed-doctrine of an endless punishment is seldom discussed from the pulpit, and never willingly heard by the pews. Occasionally the denominational weekly undertakes to stretch the slack chords to concert pitch by a reiteration of the old arguments. Meanwhile the Restorationists are continually pointing at our embarrassed, uncertain, divergent, and apparently transitional views. This state of things on our side gives them a manifest advantage on the whole subject. They feel sure of their position; we, as a body, do not feel equally sure of ours. It is the duty of the hour for scholarly men among us, holding to *the supreme authority of the written Word of God*, to reinvestigate the whole subject in a spirit as free as science herself from bondage to creed-forms, and animated by a pure desire, whatever may become of traditional beliefs, to get at the exact objective truth so far as God has revealed it, *and no further* For where the minds of so many earnest Christians are still in such suspense as now, upon a doctrine

heretofore supposed to be so clearly revealed as this, it becomes altogether probable that, with reference to their inquiries, a fresh illustration will be given to that undying maxim of the pastor of our Pilgrim fathers, that "God hath yet more truth and light to break forth from His Holy Word."

THE END.

INDEX OF TEXTS REFERRED TO.

APPENDIX A.

THE following synopsis of the various uses of *'olam*, as the precursor and mould of the New Testament *æon*, is taken from Gesenius's *Hebrew-English Lexicon.*

A) Properly "hidden," specially *hidden time, i. e.*, obscure and long, of which the beginning or end is uncertain or indefinite, *duration, everlasting, eternity*, spoken:

1. Of time *long past*, gray antiquity, as Gen. vi. 4, mighty men which were *of old* (from *'olam*).

2. Often also of *future* time, *ever, forever*, in such a way that the limitation is to be determined from the nature of the subject. Thus,

a) Specially in the affairs of single persons, *'olam* is sometimes put for the whole period of life, as, *a servant forever* (of *'olam, i. e.*, not to be set free in all his life (Deut. xv. 17). Sometimes put for *very long life;* Ps. xxi. 4, *length of days for ever and ever* (*'olam va 'ed* [like our *for ever and aye*]).

b) As pertaining to a whole race, dynasty, or people, and including *the whole time* of their existence until their destruction. 1 Sam. ii. 30, *thy family shall serve me forever* (to *'olam*), *i. e.*, so long as it endures.

c) Nearer to the *metaphysical* notion of *eternity*, or at least to an eternity without end, approach those examples in which *'olam* is attributed to the earth and to the universe. Eccl. i. 4, *the earth abideth forever* (for *'olam*). So of human things which refer to a period after death, *e. g.*, sleep of *'olam, everlasting sleep*, for death, Jer. li. 39, 57; house of *'olam*, his *everlasting house*, long home, Eccl. xii. 5.

d) The true and full idea of *eternity* is expressed by *'olam* in those passages where it is spoken of the nature and existence of God, who is called (Gen. xxi. 33) the *God of 'olam*. Of him it is said (Ps. xc. 2), *from 'olam and unto 'olam Thou* art *God*.

e) Of a peculiar kind are those passages where the Hebrews by hyperbole ascribe *eternity* in the metaphysical sense to human things, chiefly in the expression of good wishes; *let my lord the king live forever* (to *'olam*), 1 Kings i. 31.

PLUR. *'olamim*, *ages*, *everlasting ages*, like Gr. αἰῶνες [*æons*], *i. e.* a) *ages of antiquity*, Is. li. 9. b) *future ages*, the remotest future, Ps. lxxvii. 7.

B) *The world*, like Gr. αἰών [*æon*], hence *love of worldly things worldly-mindedness*. So Eccl. iii. 11, *although He* (God) *hath set the love of worldly things* (*'olam*) *in their heart, so that man understandeth not the works of God*. [So in the New Testament. "Be not conformed to this world" (*æon* — Romans xii. 2) is equivalent to "Love not the world" (*cosmos* — 1 John ii. 15).]

APPENDIX B.

THERE is a noticeable peculiarity in the language used by Christ, as compared with the language used by others, in speaking of future duration.

It is true, in general, that the New Testament imitates the Old Testament, in its view of duration past and future as comprehended in an indefinite succession of world-periods (*æons*); *e.g.*, Luke i. 33, "He shall reign over the house of Jacob for the æons;" 1 Cor. ii. 7, "which God ordained before the æons;" 1 Cor. x. 11, "the ends of the æons;" Eph. ii. 7, "in the æons to come;" 1 Tim. i. 17, "the King of the æons."

But the language of Christ Himself presents a marked exception to this. *Christ never speaks of the* ÆONS, *but only of the* ÆON. He applies this designation sometimes to the present world, and sometimes to the future. (See p. 10, *Note.*) But His invariable phrase with apparent reference to a permanent future is the *eis ton aiona* (εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα) discussed on pp. 13–17. Once He uses it in contrasting the transient relation of a servant with the permanent relation of a son (John viii. 35), and once in pronouncing an irrevocable curse upon the fig-tree (Mark xi. 14); but elsewhere mostly in promises to the believer: "shall live forever;" "shall never see death;" "shall never perish;" "shall never die;" "that He may abide with you forever" (John vi. 51, 58; viii. 51; x. 28; xi. 26; xiv. 16); once only He uses it in warning (Mark iii. 29).

How, then, does this peculiarity in Christ's language affect our interpretation of His teaching? This inquiry divides into two: —

1. Does "the æon" which Christ promises the believer refer to a *definite period*, a single æon among many, or does it denote an *indefinite permanency* (see p. 16)? Considering the frequency with which the LXX. on the one hand, and the epistles of Paul on the other, speak of "the æons," is Christ's invariable use of the singular, "the *æon*," to be deemed without significance? Christ knew the LXX. by heart, and Paul was familiar, we may believe, both with the LXX. and with his Master's teachings. Is it possible, then, that "the æon" of Christ's warnings and promises is simply the æon of His mediatorial reign, which began at His resurrection, and shall end after the last enemy, death, has been destroyed (1 Cor. xv. 24–28)? Without asserting this to be the correct interpretation, one may say there is ground for regarding it as reasonable. Were it to be adopted, the promise of immortality would be in no way abridged. *That* rests upon the most specific assurance:

"Because I live, ye shall live also" (John xiv. 19). To live with Christ to the end of His mediatorial kingdom surely contains the guaranty of all that may be beyond.

2. If, however, the suggested interpretation be rejected; if "the æon" that Christ speaks of be held to be simply the permanent future state; we meet a question which starts from the point established on page 16, viz., that the phrase, "for the æon," denotes a permanency which varies from a comparatively brief period to endlessness, *according to the nature of the subject*. Taking now the single passage in which Christ uses this phrase in warning, "hath not forgiveness for the æon" (Mark iii. 29; see pp. 18, 20, 35), how does the nature of the subject define the extent of the phrase? Is the nature of the subject such, that the doom threatened *must* be endless punishment? Here we have to consider both the nature of the punished soul, and the nature of its punishment. Is the soul, then, possessed of an immortality that *cannot* be lost or taken away? Is its nature such, that it can never, under any circumstances, cease to exist? Or, as to the punishment threatened, is this of such a nature that, once begun, it *must* endlessly continue? Each of these questions must be affirmatively answered, before we can derive *from the nature of the subject* the notion of endlessness which does not belong to the indefinite and elastic phrase, "for the æon." And the answer, be it observed, is to be drawn, if it can be, from the Scriptures, not from philosophy.

APPENDIX C.

It is possible that the question at issue between the extreme annihilationists, who hold that every man loses his personal existence at death, and the eternitarians (if one may coin a

term for convenience), who hold that every man must retain his personal existence forever, is to receive fresh light from a reëxamination of the Biblical doctrine concerning the *soul* (ψυχή) and the *spirit* (πνεῦμα); a distinction between which is made in the New Testament more clearly than it is recognized in our current thought. Compare 1 Thess. v. 23; Heb. iv. 12. The last cited passage is specially significant, as intimating that an exact discrimination between the soul and the spirit is difficult, and the dividing line sometimes imperceptible except to divine intelligence, yet a line by no means imaginary, but establishing an essential difference between the two closely united elements.

In a satisfactory discussion of the subject, the following points, among others, would probably come up: —

1. Whether the *pneuma* ("spirit"), rather than the *psyche* ("soul," often translated "life"), is the element of our being, in virtue of which we are, or become, immortal. Compare John vi. 63, where a general truth seems to be stated. In very many passages of the Bible the *psyche* stands for the assemblage of the sentient, perceptive, and emotional faculties which man has in common with the lower animals. Compare Gen. i. 24, and ii. 7, where "living creature" and "living soul" stand for the same original (ψυχὴν ζῶσαν, LXX.). Compare also 1 Cor. xv. 45 (where the same original recurs again), and 46, where "natural" stands for the more literal "psychical." So in verse 47, as compared with verse 46, "earthy" corresponds with "psychical," and "the Lord from heaven" corresponds with "spiritual." So further in verses 48 and 49.

2. Whether it is possible for the *pneuma*, as an element of the human being, to remain unformed, or to be aborted, as parts of the physical organism sometimes are, — the mammæ in an adult man, for instance. Or, whether the biological doctrine of "arrested development," as now held, may have a real

analogue in pneumatology. If so, it might be that some whole races of mankind ("pre-Adamite?") might fail of immortality. The Bible certainly recognizes a distinction between "the natural man" (rather, the "psychical," one in whom the *psyche* predominates) and the "spiritual" man (in whom the *pneuma* predominates. See 1 Cor. ii. 14, 15; also Jude 19, where "sensual" stands for "psychical"). The question is, How far can this suppression of the *pneuma* be carried, and with what result upon future existence?

3. Whether the human *pneuma* has inherent and necessary immortality, or only a capacity for immortality, a receptivity for the inflow of the Divine *pneuma*. Compare Rom. 8: 11; 1 Tim. vi. 13, 16. Whether, then, personal immortality is probable in the *permanent* severance of the dependent *pneuma* from the One Source of Immortality, and if so, on what grounds.

4. Whether the human *pneuma* severed from the divine may be able to maintain its life for a period in privation and suffering, unable either to perish at once, or to become immortal.

5. Whether, in many points of this whole subject, after stating the apparent possibilities, we must not be content to leave much unsettled, untouched by dogmatism, and reserved to Him Who alone is able to discriminate perfectly "between soul and spirit" (Heb. iv. 12).

APPENDIX D.

As to the scriptural argument for the view that existence, whether conscious or personal, or both, ceases at death, it is mainly drawn from the Old Testament. This is enough to discredit it, in view of the grand principle that "life and im-

mortality" have been "brought to light by the *gospel*" (2 Tim. i. 10). To construct a satisfying, or even a correct doctrine of the future state from the Old Testament is like resorting to the text-books of fifty years ago for adequate information in physical science. To say this, is by no means to speak against the inspiration of the Old Testament as compared with the New Testament, but merely to do justice to the patent fact which Biblical study has developed, that the Scriptures are characterized by a *progress of doctrine* from first to last.

APPENDIX E.

Extracts from Letters to the Author.

From a Presbyterian Clergyman in the Interior.

I do think you have shown the way out of that dire perplexity and distress, in which, as it seems to me, every candid, thoughtful Christian must often have found himself, especially a Christian minister, endeavoring in presence of acute objectors to vindicate the merciful God.

From the Same.

You have done a great service to one at least, who has had many a struggle with the terrible church-doctrine. I had begun, however, to struggle into the light. For some years the opinion, that there must be some awful mistake about the matter of torments literally endless, had possessed me with the strength of an all but settled conviction. But still here were these terrible passages of the New Testament which, I ought to be ashamed to say, I had not examined in the spirit of a true scholar, but had indolently allowed the English version to

blind me, much as your note on page 19 shows that even such a theologian as Dr. Hodge had allowed the same to blind him.

From another Presbyterian Clergyman in the Interior.

I was deeply impressed by your book. I do not remember ever to have read a book that has taken deeper hold of me. I believe it will modify all my future thinking and preaching.

From a Congregational Pastor at the West.

I think you have clearly shown by a most fair and searching scrutiny of the Bible language, worthy of the highest praise for its conscientious scholarship and completeness, that the Bible leaves us in a state of nescience with regard to the continuance of punishment. It becomes more and more apparent from your book, that the old doctrine is only upheld by forced constructions of Scripture; — that in their zealous belief in the dogma the most upright scholars have read into the words a meaning that never rightly belonged there.

From the Same.

I am exceedingly glad you published this little tractate. It is courageous, able, original, devout, and cannot fail to make a decided impression on all thoughtful and scholarly readers. I have no doubt the old polemics will fight right along in the old entrenchments, as though there had been no new light; but this helps to put the matter on a better basis, and a true one, and you deserve the thanks of the churches.

From a Congregational Pastor in New England.

I have read the work with exceeding satisfaction. Its conclusions are essentially those to which I came years ago on wholly different grounds, and in which I have ever since been at *rest*, although supposing that they *seemed* at variance with some verbal statements of the Scriptures. The first two chapters of

this little book have removed this last ground of doubt. They seem to me unanswerable, decisive, final.

From another New England Pastor, also Congregational.

I wish I could let you know how much your book has helped me.

From a letter written to a friend, by a Clergyman connected with a Theological Seminary of one of the Orthodox denominations.

I have just read the book by Dr. Whiton, which you gave me. I regard it as the best, the most concise contribution to the relief of "orthodoxy" from abominations, and to the rational and Scriptural relief of serious Christians, within my ken.

I have for many years held the intemperateness of orthodoxy — entirely, I had almost said — largely, at any rate, responsible for the growth of scepticism within and without the church of God.

I wish every theologian, and every clergyman, who has not done up all his thinking, would read the book, and always study Scripture in the spirit of the author thereof, — I mean, of this little book. I think the result would be many saved from absolute infidelity, many from pronounced and bald Universalism — some from the mad-house. I purpose having an extra copy for lending.

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