

BROWNLOW NORTH:

THE STORY

OF

HIS LIFE AND WORK.

BY THE REV.

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MOFFAT.

POPULAR EDITION.

London:

HODDER AND STOUGHTON,
27, PATERNOSTER ROW.

MDCCCLXXIX.

VIII.

BROWNLOW NORTH'S THEOLOGY AND PREACHING.

“The creeds have gone, so speaks the age;
The era of the sects is past:
Forward in spite of saint or sage,
True freedom has begun at last.
Not faith in God, but faith in man
Is pilot now, and sail, and oar;
The creeds are shrivelled, cold, and wan,
The Christ that has been is no more.”

HORATIUS BONAR, D.D.

“MR. NORTH,” said the late erudite and distinguished divine, Dr. John Duncan of Edinburgh, one day, in the house of Dr. Moody-Stuart, “you are an untrained theologian.” “Very untrained,” was the reply. “You mistake me, sir,” was Dr. Duncan’s rejoinder; “I laid the emphasis not on ‘untrained,’ but on ‘theologian.’” He sometimes spoke of Mr. North, whose addresses he often listened to with the humility of a little child, as a “born theologian.” The celebrated Dr. Cook, of the Irish Presbyterian Church, gave a similar testimony to that of the Free Church Professor, saying to a number of his ministerial brethren who had been listening to Mr. North, that “he was one of the best theologians among them all, and that his preaching of Christ for Christ’s own sake, accompanied by the Spirit’s power, led those who hung upon his lips to open their whole hearts for a whole Christ.” To give one more testimony of a different sort, we may mention that Mr. Jenkinson, who has for twenty years undertaken with so much acceptance the responsible charge of the Sabbath evening meetings in the Free Church Assembly Hall in Edinburgh, remarked one day, after having secured Mr. North’s services, “Now my mind is at rest for a week. Mr. North is the only lay-preacher who has preached in this Hall, whom no one has ever come to me to object to, on the ground of some real or supposed mis-statement of doctrine.”

We have narrated his conversion, the marvellous success of his ministry, and the influence it has had on our country, and we naturally enquire next, What was the cause of this success? Some will say, it was because he was a layman. But though he started alone as a lay-preacher, he was followed by multitudes of others, none of whom achieved anything like his success, except Mr. D. L. Moody. Others have said, it was curiosity that drew such crowds to see one who had been known as a man of the world, living a fast life, now standing up as a preacher of the gospel. This might have drawn crowds for the first year, or at most two; but it cannot account for the fact, that to the end of his life, through twenty years of labour, the audiences that flocked to listen to him were limited only by the capacity of the church or

hall in which he was advertised to preach.

The great secret of his success, coupled with the fact that he possessed natural eloquence, and subject to the sovereignty of the Divine Spirit, who uses whom He will, undoubtedly lay in his doctrine commending itself to the intellects and hearts of men. For Brownlow North was a great doctrinal preacher. He was eloquent, but his eloquence consisted in the clear, powerful, and earnest statement, exposition, and application of great doctrines. He had not the thrilling pictorial power of Dr. Thomas Guthrie, the marvellous fecundity of illustration and the musical voice of Charles Spurgeon, the telling command of simile and analogy of William Arnot, or the exhaustless fund of anecdote of D. L. Moody. With Brownlow North doctrine was everything. His style was terse and plain, but unadorned. He had no rounded periods, no graceful similes, no oratorical peroration. Often voice and words both failed him in the climax of his most earnest appeals. His power lay in the solemn and forcible statement of his doctrines, in his convincing proof, and in his thrilling application of them. And what is remarkable is that he derived his theology mainly for himself from a study of the Holy Scriptures. He drew it from no schoolmen, creeds, or confessions. He preached therefore, not in the technical terminology of divines, but in the language of Scripture and of ordinary every-day life.

If the physician finds it desirable, after the antidote to the small-pox virus has passed through a number of human systems, to replenish it from its original source, it is as desirable for the physician of souls to rectify his antidote to the poison of sin, after it has passed through many human systems, by drawing it afresh from the fountain-head. If the mariner finds it needful, from time to time, to correct the results of his dead-reckoning by direct observations of the heavens, it is as needful for those who navigate the bark of the Church, throughout the angry and treacherous seas of life, to correct the dead-reckoning of their log-books by new observations of the sure words of prophecy, the heaven-hung lights that shine in the firmament of our night. It will satisfy some, and provoke others, to find that the result of this fresh set of careful and prayerful observations, made by a hard logical head and a clear eye, is almost an exact photograph of what is known as the theology of the Reformation.

In preaching, Mr. North very much confined himself to the leading landmarks of theology. Although he had a competent knowledge of Greek, and occasionally refers in his annotated Bible to the original reading, his mind was of a dogmatic rather than critical cast, and he commonly studied the Bible in English. He seized and preached the leading aspects of each doctrine rather than those that are subordinate, and avoided the handling of secondary points as being more suitable to the pastor than the evangelist.

From the first dawn of spiritual life within him, Mr. North applied him-

self to get a clear and scriptural view of the doctrines revealed in the Word. At Dallas, before he had begun to preach, he used to walk with Mr. Davidson, the minister, and talk over these subjects; and one day, when calling at the manse, after some conversation he pulled out of his pocket the memoir of Dr. Nettleton, and read aloud the conclusion of a sermon by the great American Evangelist on the perseverance of the saints, which he had been studying.

His preaching gave a fresh impetus and influence to old truth in our churches. One of our theological professors has remarked, that there was a wave of divinity students who came under the spiritual power of Mr. North's teaching, were impressed by it at the time, and bore the impress afterwards. Let us examine what this teaching was. It can be summarised under a few leading heads, which were his favourite and characteristic topics.

I. "GOD IS."

THE EXISTENCE, PERSONALITY, AND PRESENCE OF GOD.

"It is a blessed thing that we are not placed amid the grinding and wheeling of a great machine of a universe without guiding hand or animating heart. There is a God, there is a God; Jehovah, He is the God; Jehovah, He is the God."—REV. JOHN DUNCAN, LL.D., D.D.

"THE subject of 'God' is lacking in reality,"¹ was the remark of the editor of a leading French publication, when an article was offered him by Paul Leroux, on "God." Brownlow North invested the question of God's existence with the most intense actuality. This grand essential truth he made the foundation of all his discourses. In the prominence which he gave to it, his preaching differed as much from the ordinary run of preaching, as the vividness with which he presented it differs from the mode of its presentation in most discourses and treatises on this subject.

In his hands the truth of God's existence became a tremendous and burning reality, borne in upon the convictions and consciousness of his hearers with terrific force. With him the being of God was no problem, no *quod erat demonstrandum*, satisfactorily proved by the ordinary chain of evidence, but not unfrequently leaving the mind that has acquiesced in the inevitable conclusion as far from this God, of whose existence it is logically convinced, as it was when it stood in doubt of it. When once the hearer was convinced of the existence of God, he pressed upon him the fact that that existence involved most momentous consequences to himself; that it was a personal God of whose existence the soul was convinced, even the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; the God who formed us for His glory; the God against whom we have sinned, who is to be our Judge at the last day, and is our Judge even today; the God with whom we, one and all of us, have to do.

The God whose existence he thus felt himself called upon to preach was not presented as the God of the man of science, the Great First Cause, or the God of the student of philosophy, the great subject of speculation and of contemplation; but as the God of the Bible, the God of the patriarchs, prophets, and apostles, the God of the spirits of all flesh, and the God whose claim to be his God the rebellious sinner is daily rejecting; a God who is a Person, the Hearer of prayer, possessed of freewill, love, and other personal attributes.

In his last published work he writes: "I believe there are numbers of what are called learned and deep-thinking people, who profess to believe in God, and who would be troubled in their minds if they thought they were

¹ "La question de Dieu manque d'actualité."

not honouring God, whose God in reality is no better than an idol of their own creation. They believe the revelations of their own intellect, rather than the revelations of Scripture; and while they acknowledge a God of the universe, a God of nature, a God of creation, they know nothing of the only living and true God, the God of the Bible.”² His teaching was that the God of nature is the God of Revelation also. *God is*, were two words which he used to announce with most solemn emphasis in his oral addresses, and which he not unfrequently prints in capital letters in his published works. They formed the basis of all his preaching, the foundation of all his theology, and that, not in the way of a postulate taken for granted by the preacher, but as the first great doctrine which the human heart naturally was prone to call in question, which required to be intelligently believed by every true and acceptable worshipper, and not only believed, but realized.

The evidence on which he mainly rested this truth was the internal evidence, that the mind of man craves for a god, and is so constituted that it cannot do without a god of some kind; that we have an inborn, intuitive consciousness of the existence of an Almighty, All-wise, Omnipresent, and altogether Holy God; that our conscience tells us of a God who is a righteous Lawgiver and Judge; that the God revealed in the Bible exactly meets these cravings and intuitions, and this testimony of our nature; that His words appeal to our hearts as the voice of the great God; that the blindness which leads many men to doubt or deny His existence is engendered by sin, and is both a willing and a sinful ignorance,—a darkness loved by the blind man. In the fourteenth Psalm, which Mr. North was continually quoting, the fool’s denial of the existence of God is shown to be the result more of his moral than his mental obliquity. God’s existence is an indisputable corollary from man’s sense of guilt.

The fact that Brownlow North gave such prominence in his preaching to this doctrine, may be naturally traced to his own spiritual experience at the time of his conversion, which we have already narrated. The intensity and protracted character of the temptation to embrace atheism as a refuge from conviction and alarm were singular, but the temptation itself is by no means uncommon, and, alas, in many cases not unsuccessful; and other eminent men of God there have been, who have gone through as deep and painful a spiritual conflict on this very doctrine. Especially has this been the case with those who were being fitted by the Divine Spirit for awakening others, or for dealing with other awakened consciences. Dr. John Duncan, of Edinburgh, went through a similar experience. Dr. Duncan had indeed gone further than Mr. North, having for a period embraced speculative atheism. He said to Dr. Moody-Stuart, “I first saw clearly the existence of God in walk-

² “Christ the Saviour and Christ the Judge.”

ing along the bridge at Aberdeen: it was a great discovery to me: I stopped, and stood in an ecstasy of joy at seeing the existence of God.” And to another friend he said, “When I was convinced that there was a God, I danced upon the Brig o’ Dee with delight, though I had a fear that He would damn me.”

Mr. North regarded atheism as the capital sin, and brought the charge of it home with convincing power to many hearts which had been in the habit of considering themselves very far removed from it. He showed that the man who took for granted God’s existence, and imagined he assented to it, was really denying it, unless his intellectual assent to the doctrine carried with it the practical consequences of submission and obedience to that God in whom he professed to believe. Few who heard his striking appeals can, even after the lapse of twenty years, forget the impressiveness with which he depicted the “folly” of the atheist, whether he belonged to the speculative or the practical class, showing that he was a “fool” in God’s sight today, and would one day be exposed as a “fool” in the sight of the whole universe, whatever his reputed wisdom or acquired human knowledge might be.

The fact that a preacher who had the ear of Scotland as no other had it at the time, having access to churches of almost all denominations, having the power of attracting crowded audiences wherever he went, moving from town to town and district to district, and awakening the interest and attention of almost every class of society in these districts, should have been led to press so powerfully upon the multitudes whom his voice reached, the existence of a Personal God, was surely a providential preparation of large numbers of the Scottish people for withstanding those assaults upon this fundamental doctrine, both covert and avowed, which were made by Sceptics, Materialists, and Positivists during the later years of this evangelist’s work, and are likely to be made for years to come, as persistently, by many of our leading literary and scientific men. This doctrine stands on the forefront of the Decalogue, and the histories of the ethical systems of the world from which it is absent prove, by their very failure, that it is the necessary basis both of religion and morality.

The Materialism or Nature-worship of our leaders of science of today appears to be a return to the earliest, and one of the subtlest, forms of heathenism, viz., the Baal-worship which arose soon after the Deluge, and spread from Assyria well-nigh throughout the whole human race, consisting in a worship of law, light, and life. The earliest and the latest religion of man’s unaided intellect are essentially the same, almost the only difference being that it is taught today in university class-rooms and public lecture

halls, instead of temples, high places, and stone circles.³

Of this scientific Pantheism Mr. North says, "If a man elects to place his hope of salvation on the doctrines of research or science, on the teaching of his own or any other human wisdom, and refuses to receive the Bible in the spirit of a little child, he must stand or fall by his own election, but let such a man remember, *if the Bible is true he is lost*. A God who did not so love the world as to give His only begotten Son to be a propitiation for man's sins, is a God that has no more existence than 'Ashtoreth the abomination of the Sidonians,' or Melcom the abomination of the children of Ammon.'" This fatal teaching is now being spread by the public press, in Books, Reviews, Magazines, and Newspapers, in the most subtle disguise, through the length and breadth of our land; but while the faith of many will falter, and of many fail, there are multitudes who were so forewarned and forearmed against the ensnaring nature of this delusion by him whose labours are the subject of this sketch, that the sleight and cunning craftiness of men cannot shake their belief in the central truth that "GOD LIVES."

Again Mr. North writes: "I believe there is nothing more necessary to salvation in the whole Scripture than the reception of this name of God, I AM. So important do I feel it to be, that I think I have alluded to it in every tract that I have written, and very, very often in my sermons and addresses. Whenever God has a purpose of mercy either to an individual or to a nation, His first teaching is, I AM. Surely then I cannot do wrong in making it my first teaching."

In a sermon preached at Elgin in Nov. 1862, from the text, "The things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. iv. 18), he said, "The Bible tells us that the just shall live by faith, that faith is a condition of salvation. Believe in God. In the eleventh of Hebrews, at the sixth verse, we have the definition given us of the smallest degree of faith with which it is possible to please God. 'He that cometh to God must believe that *He is*.' I believe that that verse is the *first verse* in the whole Bible that a man or woman requires to get into the heart. Till you have got the substance of that verse into your hearts you are without saving religion in the sight of God. Now if I could give to every one in this large congregation a practical belief that GOD is, that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is really a God that sees us, and hears us, and will save us if we come to Him, I would be glad to shut this Bible and go home and bless God for it to all eternity; for I believe this is the grain of mustard seed which will grow into the great tree in the end."

"It is not more true that every man by nature is born a fool, than that by

³ We must remember that at an early period it inoculated the Christian Church with priestly celibacy, tonsure, and virgin worship, and probably also with altar-lights, and the sunward position in devotion.

nature he is born an infidel, an unbeliever in the very existence of the God of the Bible.”

The real and immediate Presence of God with the true worshipper, was a truth which Mr. North was in the habit uniformly, in almost all his discourses and published works, of building upon the solid foundation which he had laid in the doctrine we have examined. It is in itself a direct corollary from the truth of the Divine Existence—God is, therefore God is here beside me, and hears me,—omnipresence being one of the necessary attributes of the Divine Being. His favourite text, Heb. xi. 6, brackets the two truths as necessary to be believed in by every accepted worshipper. No ministering priest of old could have appeared to realize more vividly the immediate presence of the great unseen God, hid from him only by the thin veil of sense that obstructed his bodily vision of the most Holy, but could not obstruct the vision of faith penetrating within the veil. His sense of the Divine Presence was so manifest, not only in his discourse, but in the solemn awe of his eye, his gestures, and his whole bearing, that even one who had entered the house of God in a light spirit was often constrained to exclaim, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not;” he felt himself in the presence-chamber of the King of kings. Those who left the place of worship unimpressed with the sense of God’s immediate presence, could not possibly leave it without the persuasion that the preacher at least was possessed by this belief, or delusion if such it were, and were constrained to acknowledge that others were dealing, or imagined they were dealing, not only with abstract doctrine, but with a real and most august Person unperceived by the outward eye, or even by the eye of reason.

It was no pantheistical presence that he preached, but a personal presence, the presence of a personal Saviour as well as a personal Creator. A text which he loved, because it had brought much comfort to his own heart, was, “The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon Him, to all that call upon Him in truth.”

This belief in the Divine Omnipresence may be compelled by logical argument, but it is by faith alone, and under the teaching of the Word and Spirit, that it becomes a saving truth. This was what Mr. North taught. The worshipper did not feel that he needed any assistance from sense, such as is given by the Church of Rome in her crosses and crucifixes, her pictures, shrines, and altars, to aid him in concentrating his attention, to depict to himself the unseen, and to excite his devotional feelings; or any such irrational dogma as that of transubstantiation, to bring near to man’s sense a God who has been already apprehended as very near to his faith.

Speaking of the period of his conversion, he says he was led to the conviction that God had seen him during his long course of sin, and therefore saw him now when he was on his knees before Him: “I took the answer to

my prayer from what He said who was in the room with me. My burden fell off, and I rejoiced in a pardon according to the word of the Lord.”

“No man can really be said to believe that ‘God is,’ who does not believe that He is present when he prays to Him, and hears and sees him.” “God always is present with us. To realize this, to believe it, and to act as if it were a truth, is what we should seek for before all things. Let us ask ourselves if we would and do feel it joy to be in the Lord’s presence. To many the very idea of being in God’s presence is horror of horrors. This is because they are unconverted. Never rest till you are enabled to desire God’s presence, and to rejoice in it”

II. "IT IS WRITTEN."

THE INSPIRATION AND DIVINE AUTHORITY OF HOLY SCRIPTURE.

"The Bible, not the priest, nor the ordinance, nor the Church,
That book of books, next to the Christ whereof it ever telleth,
Is still the heaven-blest fountain of conversion and salvation;
It comforteth with equal care the pauper and the statesman;
The mother for her sailor-boy hath stored it in his locker,
The rough backwoodsman pondereth its pages in his cabin."

TUPPER.

BROWNLOW NORTH had an intense veneration and love for the Bible, as the word of the living God. It was enwoven with his whole spiritual experience. From that day in Elgin, when striking his hand upon his open Bible, as his eye rested on the text Rom iii 22, he exclaimed, starting to his feet, "If that scripture is true I am a saved man," till the day twenty years afterwards, when on his dying bed in the house of a stranger he turned to a young officer, and said, with his fast ebbing breath, "You are young, in good health, and with the prospect of rising in the army: I am dying; but if the Bible is true, and I know it is, I would not change places with you for the whole world," that Bible was the daily food of his soul, his lamp in the night, his teacher, his counsellor, his trust, and his treasure. Never for an hour did he swerve from his childlike faith in these Scriptures of truth, or from his manly allegiance to all the doctrines, precepts, and promises of the Divine Word. And he spent his whole time, talents, and toil in preaching to the people, wherever they would come to listen, all the words of this life.

No listless listener could see him open the sacred volume, and hear him read even the introductory psalm of the service, without being sensible that the preacher was thoroughly convinced that this volume was indeed the very word proceeding out of the mouth of God, and was of Divine origin from its beginning to its close. And the impression made upon the hearer by his opening and reading of the Bible was not effaced, but was steadily increased, by his handling and expounding of it throughout his whole discourse. So far was there from ever being any lightness in his handling of the Scripture, that many times in every service the sense that he was reading and preaching the living word of the living God seemed to be almost overpowering. No high priest in the Holy Place could have handled the Urim and Thummim with greater awe and reverence than this preacher treated the Divine oracles. He believed that the word of God was the sword of the Spirit; and the very remarkable effects upon the consciences, understandings, and lives of men, wrought through him by this instrument, fully bore out his belief. With many others, he could say, "experto crede;" and the argument from experience and experiment, which is now appealed to as the surest test in many of the sciences, must be allowed its rightful place in

the science of theology.

He did not go into questions of biblical criticism, nor enter the arena of controversy regarding points that are classed under the technical term of "Introduction" to the study of the doctrines of Scripture; his calling as an evangelist did not entitle him, and his training and cast of mind did not fit him for this field. With him the human authorship was the shell, the Divine authorship the kernel. There lay the germ of life. The botanist or the artist may study the seed-vessel, with its relative perfections or imperfections, but the husbandman thinks mainly of the seed on which his whole hope of harvest hangs.

The title, "the Word of God," was to him no empty phrase, no euphemism, for the "word of good men," as it is with many. It meant simply what it expresses, that it is the utterance of the mind and will of God. He never looked upon the Bible as containing the words of God hid among the words of His servants, nor preached that Word as one who was searching for grains of Divine truth buried in the sands of human opinion, for nuggets of gold hid in mounds of ore. He preached the Word as precious gold already examined, tested, and guaranteed by its Author. His creed was the creed of Protestantism.

He riveted every argument with, "*It is written;*" he barbed every arrow of appeal with, "*What saith the Scripture?*" and ever seemed to tremble lest he should be found diminishing aught from that Word, or adding aught to it.

Regarding Scripture from the Reformers' point of view, as a full Divine revelation of the rule of faith and duty, and an inspired record of the history of God's dealings with our race, and declining to discuss debateable details, he placed it in a position of absolute and infallible supremacy; and though his mind was not of a poetical cast, he loved, according to the use and wont of the Scottish pulpit, to spiritualise the histories of the Old Testament. Attacks upon the inspiration of the Scripture had begun even at the commencement of his ministry, but it was only towards its close that the Church became so painfully familiar with them. Of those views which subvert the full divinity of the Word he had the greatest horror, and once in a public address in Edinburgh he stated that before coming to town he had conducted a large Bible-class for a popular and esteemed minister, and had been both grieved and alarmed by the views of inspiration which were expressed by the young men attending it.

A military officer writes thus, and his experience was that of multitudes: "Brownlow North was of great service to me in leading me to pay particular attention to each verse of Scripture, and to take more notice of the meaning of each word in it. He was most helpful to me *on* the Word, though not the first to point me to it." He taught the doctrine of inspiration not scholastically or controversially, but dogmatically and experimentally,

and as a question of life and death to the individual rather than to the Church. The former, however, includes the latter.

While not claiming for him any originality in his teaching on this point, we must recognise his claim (along with that of the other lay preachers who followed him) to the gratitude of the Church of Christ in this land, for his clear, bold, and unwearied proclamation and enforcing of the grand foundation truth of living Protestantism, viz., the full divinity of the Holy Scriptures, and consequently their supreme authority as the only ground of faith, rule of life, and judge of religious controversies, in opposition to all human tribunals whether of tradition and Church authority, as set up by Romanism, or of human reason as set up by Rationalism. In the face of current tendencies in religious as well as in worldly circles such teaching was of the last importance.

Men and women who were led, after they came to years of understanding, to rest their hopes for eternity on the revelation of God as thoroughly divine, and *on nothing else whatever*, will not be lightly induced to abandon what they, like their fathers, have found to be a Rock unshaken, and that cannot be shaken, for the quagmire of Church authority and tradition, or the quicksands of current opinion.

We have only space further to note on this great doctrine that Mr. North always regarded the written Word not only in an historical light, but as containing the direct answer of a present God to our petitions. The order of his teaching was, God is,—God is a person,—God is present,—God has spoken,—or rather God speaks, in the revelation He has given us. His position was, that a silent God is a God unrevealed, that a God unrevealed is a God unknown, and he shrank from such a thought with all the intensity of his nature, as did the Psalmist of old when he cried, “Be not silent unto me, O God; lest, if Thou be silent unto me, I become like them that go down into the pit” (Psalm xxviii. 1). He emphatically taught that the answer to prayer is to be sought, not in any mystical internal idea or feeling, any more than in any external sign, but in the written Word, as well as in the works of providence and grace. This Word is instinct with life, and comes to us as if newly uttered by the mouth of God.

If any other ever earned the title of “the man of the book,” assuredly this man did. He spent hours every day in hard and prayerful study of its pages. To anxious inquirers his undeviating counsel was, “Go home and read your Bible.” His farewell words before his last illness to an intimate friend were, “Dear —, there is nothing for any of us but the Bible.” The words written of another were eminently true of him, “*To him the Bible was alone and altogether the book.*” It was his constant companion and counsellor, his study all the day, and to a large extent his library. One of the favourite resting-places of his soul was the testimony, “Heaven and earth shall pass

away, but my words shall not pass away.”

III. "YOU ARE IMMORTAL."

THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL AND THE ETERNAL DURATION OF SPIRITUAL LIFE AND DEATH.

"My own brief life should teach me this,
That life shall live for evermore,
Else earth is darkness at the core,
And dust and ashes all that is."

TENNYSON.

"Shall these poor elements outlive
The mind whose kingly will they wrought?
Their gross unconsciousness survive
The godlike energy of thought?"

WHITTIER.

THE first tract which (so far as we can recollect) Mr. North published, bore the title "*You are Immortal.*" It has often been reprinted since. It opens with these words, "Reader, you are an immortal being. You have been born, and you will have to leave this world, but you can never cease to exist. You *must* live for ever! It is of no avail to you that you are so debased by sin that you would wish to be like the brutes that perish. . . . I know that all this may seem very dreamy and unreal to you, but it is nevertheless true." The immortality of the human soul, and its endless existence in a state of holiness and blessedness, or of corruption and misery, were statements which were constantly upon his lips.

Many an audience has been startled and riveted by his saying sharply, "I can tell you to a minute how long your life is to be: it is to be as long as the life of God." He did not bring forward these old truths and commonplaces of religion, these great facts found in the revealed Word concerning the duration and the destiny of men, to meet the views of materialists and annihilationists, but to awaken to a sense of the powers of the world to come those who were lying on the lap of carnal pleasure, lulled asleep by this world's syren song; to arouse prodigals, poor or rich, feeding upon the husks of the swine-trough, forgetful alike of their origin and their destiny, to a sense of the dignity of their nature which they were debasing by indulgence in vice; and to arrest men immersed in the business and the cares of this life, absorbed wholly in its enterprises and its gains, by the view of that future state of existence into which they must ere long enter, and for which they were making no preparation. Such men, if they are to be changed in their habits and pursuits, converted to God, and led to live for God and eternity, and not for self and time, must be brought to realize that they are immortal beings.

Brownlow North with marvellous vividness and dramatic power, as well as with the most intense solemnity and earnestness, used to open up before the crowded audiences, whom he was called on from the very beginning of his ministry to address, the vista of their eternal existence. One might have heard a pin fall on the floor, or the rustle of a ribbon on a thoughtless head, as these immense crowds, thronging aisles, passages, and pulpit-stairs, hung on the preacher's lips as if afraid to draw their breath, drinking in the message with eyes as well as ears, while he told them that they were endowed with immortality, and in his own favourite phrase, "could no more go out of existence than could God."

Such plain statements, supported by well-known Scripture texts, were blessed to produce saving impression upon many souls, by awakening them out of the torpor of spiritual death. This truth, like that of the existence of God, is not only one of the foundation-stones of the Christian religion, but, at least in the form of belief in a future spiritual state, and apart from the distinctively scriptural doctrine of the resurrection of the body, has held the same fundamental position in every system which has prevailed to any extent in the world, and which has had any claim to be recognized as a religion containing even some broken fragments of truth that proclaim their Divine origin. Yet this heritage of our race is now attacked by the materialistic physicists and speculative philosophers of our day; and we see the thoughtless sensualist and the sordid seeker of gain joined and abetted in their practical denial of the soul's immortality by the pale student from his museum, who has anatomised the body of man, and studied his nervous organization, till he forgets that besides his corporeal he has a spiritual existence which his scalpel and galvanic battery can neither touch nor test. He too says, "Tomorrow man will die;" and, alas! this theory, which is utterly subversive of the Christian faith, is even advocated by some apparently earnest ministers of religion.

This annihilationist theory is much more prevalent, and even fashionable, now than when Mr. North began his preaching; but at so early a period as the spring of 1859 a gentleman who had adopted these views wrote to him from Paisley, objecting to his constant and dogmatic statements that the human soul is immortal. His letter, which is a long one, filling two very closely written sheets, argues in terms that are gentlemanly and courteous, but very decided, against Mr. North's position that man, as his objector fairly states it, "possesses a part that cannot die, nor be put to death." Thus Mr. North was quite aware that there was a then nascent error to which his teaching was diametrically opposed, and that his preaching was more offensive to the supporters of this tenet than that of most ministers, who, while firmly believing in the soul's immortality, did not give it the same prominence in their preaching. "The second death," Mr. North writes, "is

something different from annihilation:” and in his annotated Bible he repeatedly states his belief that it consists in being forsaken by God—the death which, as he held, Adam died on the day that he fell—and the death which the eternal Son of God endured on Calvary, when He cried “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” The theory that the death of the soul is annihilation thus struck at Mr. North’s view of the Atonement, viz., that Christ saves sinners by suffering their death, for confessedly His human nature was not annihilated.

The lines of argument which Mr. North took in defending what he preached on this subject were two. The first was that the Creator had communicated to man at his origin a nature similar to His own, and which therefore was endowed with immortality as one of its natural and inalienable properties. So both heathen and Christian teachers have reasoned, “We are the offspring of God” (Acts xvii. 28); and no advocates of evolution, whatever be their theory as to man’s body, have a right to dictate to the believer as to the origin, and therefore the destiny, of that mysterious spirit by which we are allied much more closely to the God who tells us He breathed it into our corporeal frame, than by that frame we are allied to the animal creation. His second argument was, that nothing will satisfy the desires and cravings of a man’s spirit but having the eternal God as his portion: therefore we draw the conclusion that a man who craves for an eternal satisfaction must be himself eternal in his nature. Still his main proof was the teaching of God’s Word. He says, “It is from the Bible we learn that we are immortal, and only from the Bible that we learn how to escape an immortality of evil and inherit an immortality of glory.”

But Mr. North’s teaching was opposed not only to the views propagated by the annihilationist, but to those held and taught by the believers in the theory of universal final restoration; and by this latter class his teaching was bitterly attacked, even in the columns of some of the most widely circulated religious periodicals. In one of his letters to Lord Kintore, he says, “There is a paper advocating the non-eternity of punishment, has published a long notice abusing me.”

The line of proof he adopted on this subject was the direct and infallible testimony of Scripture, which he used, not only to prove the naked immortality of the soul of man, but in support of his teaching, in accord with that of the Church in all ages, that while some have the blessed reward of everlasting life, others receive the woeful doom of everlasting death. This truth is a very awful and mysterious one, never to be handled by any without the greatest awe and tenderness; and in dealing with it those who are teachers and stewards of the mysteries should also surely see that they keep most scrupulously, in all their statements, within the limits and the expressions of the written Word. It may be that there is not always due care taken that our

preaching, both in its terms and in its application to those to whom pertains this awful future, does not transgress the limits of inspiration, and that it is handled with the tenderness of those who have drunk into the spirit of the Eternal Son, who first clearly revealed an eternity of sin and sorrow, as well as an eternity of holiness and joy. We have been told by a Christian lady, an intimate friend of the late Principal Candlish, that on one occasion she observed his eyes filled with tears when conversing with her on this very awful subject, and the current views on it.

In the margin of his New Testament, opposite Matt. xxv. 46, the words of which are “These shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal,” Mr. North notes, “The duration of the punishment of the wicked and the life of the righteous are equal.” This fact that the same word is employed in these two clauses, should be enough to satisfy most persons of fair and unprejudiced judgment. The word is ‘*aiōn*’, and any objection taken to its meaning “everlasting” on the ground of its etymology cannot invalidate Mr. North’s common-sense argument, when we consider that the philosophical Greeks and Romans certainly had an idea of eternity, and both used this word to express it. Those who are inclined to criticise Mr. North’s doctrine on this subject should remember also that he was not writing a speculative treatise regarding the destiny of such exceptional classes or cases as have not had the full means of grace; but that he was preaching to those who were daily rejecting the Saviour, and resisting the Holy Spirit (on which sins he laid the greatest emphasis in all his preaching), and who by so doing were in imminent danger of sealing themselves up in final impenitence. Of the sin against the Holy Ghost our Lord says (Matt. xii. 32) that “it shall not be forgiven, neither in this world, neither in the world to come;” while the Holy Spirit says in Heb. vi. 4-6, that it is impossible to renew such sinners to repentance, on grounds that are independent of the lapse of time. This is surely “sin unto death.”

The awakened soul has very usually an instinctive fear that it may have been guilty of this sin which inevitably incurs eternal judgment, and shrinks from it as from the brink of the bottomless pit. The time of its commission is not necessarily, or always, coincident with that of departure from this life. Our Lord speaks of it as sometimes, perhaps often, taking place previous to death, among those who have enjoyed the clear light of the gospel. This, and not the death of the body, is mentioned in Scripture as the termination of the day of grace.

“There is a point, we know not when,
A line, we know not where,
That marks the boundary of men
To glory or despair.
To pass that limit is to die;—”

and it well becomes us to inquire with deep concern, with the experienced divine who wrote these solemn lines, the late Dr. Alexander of New York,

“Oh where is that mysterious bourne
By which our path is crost,
Beyond which God Himself has sworn
That he who goes is LOST?”

How a state of final and eternal impenitence and hatred of God can be anything but a state of final and eternal separation from God, and therefore misery and death, the objectors to this scriptural truth have never shown.

Of this terrible state of irremediable impenitence Mr. North often spoke, and thus writes, “If we are willing to give up sin and to go to Christ, we cannot have committed this sin;” and again, “The man who has a good thought left is not left of God.”

To the Edinburgh University students he said, “I believe that the sin against the Holy Ghost is grieving the Spirit once too often. No man who has a good thought in his heart, the least desire to go to God, let him be a hundred years of age, and his sins what they may be, has committed the unpardonable sin. But though I say that a man eighty or a hundred years old may turn to God, yet I believe there are people, (and who shall say how young the youngest is now in hell, or yet walking on this earth?) against whom God has sworn in His wrath that they shall never enter into His rest. ‘Wherefore the Holy Ghost saith,’—He puts His own name to it, and I think in a book written entirely by the Holy Ghost, this is an awful word, as if He would call particular attention to it,—‘Today if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts.’”