

# PRACTICAL RELIGION.

BEING PLAIN PAPERS ON THE DAILY DUTIES, EXPERIENCE,  
DANGERS, AND PRIVILEGES OF PROFESSING CHRISTIANS.

BY

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Fourth Edition.

LONDON:

WILLIAM HUNT AND COMPANY,

12, PATERNOSTER ROW.

1887.

## XXI.

### ETERNITY!

*“The things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.”—2 COR. iv. 18.*

A SUBJECT stands out on the face of this text which is one of the most solemn and heart-searching in the Bible. That subject is *eternity*.<sup>1</sup>

The subject is one of which the wisest man can only take in a little. We have no eyes to see it fully, no line to fathom it, no mind to grasp it; and yet we must not refuse to consider it. There are star-depths in the heavens above us, which the most powerful telescope cannot pierce; yet it is well to look into them and learn something, if we cannot learn everything. There are heights and depths about the subject of eternity which mortal man can never comprehend; but God has spoken of it, and we have no right to turn away from it altogether.

The subject is one which we must never approach without the Bible in our hands. The moment we depart from “God’s Word written,” in considering eternity and the future state of man, we are likely to fall into error. In examining points like these we have nothing to do with preconceived notions as to what is God’s character, and what *we think* God ought to be, or ought to do with man after death.<sup>2</sup> We have only to find out what is written. What saith the Scripture? What saith the Lord? It is wild work to tell us that we ought to have “noble thoughts about God,” independent of, and over and above, Scripture. Natural religion soon comes to a standstill here. The noblest thoughts about God which we have a right to hold are the thoughts which He has been pleased to reveal to us in His “written Word.”

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<sup>1</sup> The following pages contain the *substance* of a sermon which I preached, by invitation, in the nave of Peterborough Cathedral, on the fourth Sunday in Advent, 1877,—the *substance* and not the precise words. The plain truth is, that the sermon was not intended for publication. It was preached from notes, and was one of those popular addresses which will not bear close reporting. A style of language which satisfies the ear when listened to, will seldom satisfy the mind when read. On receiving a manuscript report from the publisher, I soon found that it would require far more labour to condense, correct, paragraph, punctuate, and prepare the sermon for the press, than to write it out roughly from my own notes and recollection. From want of time I had no alternative but to adopt this course, or to object altogether to publication. The result is that the reader has before him the matter, order, heads, arrangement, and principal thoughts of my sermon, but not, I repeat, the precise words.

<sup>2</sup> “What sentence can we expect from a judge, who at the same time that he calls in witnesses and pretends to examine them, makes a declaration that however, let them say what they will, the cause is so absurd, is so unjust, that no evidence will be sufficient to prove it.”—*Horbery*, vol. ii. p. 137.

I ask the attention of all into whose hands this paper may fall, while I offer a few suggestive thoughts about eternity. As a mortal man I feel deeply my own insufficiency to handle this subject. But I pray that God the Holy Ghost, whose strength is made perfect in weakness, may bless the words I speak, and make them seeds of eternal life in many minds.

I. The first thought which I commend to the attention of my readers is this:—*We live in a world where all things are temporal and passing away.*

That man must be blind indeed who cannot realize this. Everything around us is decaying, dying, and coming to an end. There is a sense no doubt in which “matter” is eternal. Once created, it will never entirely perish. But in a popular practical sense, there is nothing undying about us except our souls. No wonder the poet says

“Change and decay in all around I see:  
O Thou that changest not, abide with me! “

We are all going, going, going, whether high or low, gentle or simple, rich or poor, old or young. We are all going, and shall soon be gone.

Beauty is only temporal. Sarah was once the fairest of women, and the admiration of the Court of Egypt; yet a day came when even Abraham, her husband, said, “Let me bury my dead out of my sight.” (Gen. xxiii. 4.)—Strength of body is only temporal. David was once a mighty man of valour, the slayer of the lion and the bear, and the champion of Israel against Goliath; yet a day came when even David had to be nursed and ministered to in his old age like a child.—Wisdom and power of brain are only temporal. Solomon was once a prodigy of knowledge, and all the kings of the earth came to hear his wisdom; yet even Solomon in his latter days played the fool exceedingly, and allowed his wives to “turn away his heart.” (1 Kings xi. 2.)

Humbling and painful as these truths may sound, it is good for us all to realize them and lay them to heart. The houses we live in, the homes we love, the riches we accumulate, the professions we follow, the plans we form, the relations we enter into,—they are only for a time. The things seen are temporal.” “The fashion of this world passeth away.” (1 Cor. vii. 31.)

The thought is one which ought to rouse every one who is living only for this world. If his conscience is not utterly seared, it should stir in him great searchings of heart. Oh, take care what you are doing! Awake to see things in their true light before it be too late. The things you live for now are all temporal and passing away. The pleasures, the amusements, the recreations, the merry-makings, the profits, the earthly callings, which now absorb all your heart and drink up all your mind, will soon be over. They are poor ephemeral things which cannot last. Oh, love them not too well; grasp them not too tightly; make them not your idols! You cannot keep them, and you

must leave them. Seek first the kingdom of God, and then everything else shall be added to you. "Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth." Oh, you that love the world, be wise in time! Never, never forget that it is written, "The world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." (Col. iii. 2; 1 John ii. 17.)

The same thought ought to cheer and comfort every true Christian. Your trials, crosses, and conflicts, are all temporal. They will soon have an end; and even now they are working for you "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." (2 Cor. iv. 17.) Take them patiently: bear them quietly: look upward, forward, onward, and far beyond them. Fight your daily fight under an abiding conviction that it is only for a little time, and that rest is not far off. Carry your daily cross with an abiding recollection that it is one of the "things seen" which are temporal. The cross shall soon be exchanged for a crown, and you shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God.

II. The second thought which I commend to the attention of my readers is this:—*We are all going towards a world where everything is eternal.*

That great unseen state of existence which lies behind the grave, is for ever. Whether it be happy or miserable, whether it be a condition of joy or sorrow, in one respect it is utterly unlike this world,—it is for ever. *There* at any rate will be no change and decay, no end, no good-bye, no mornings and evenings, no alteration, no annihilation. Whatever there is beyond the tomb, when the last trumpet has sounded, and the dead are raised, will be endless, everlasting, and eternal. "The things unseen are eternal."

We cannot fully realize this condition. The contrast between now and then, between this world and the next, is so enormously great that our feeble minds will not take it in. The consequences it entails are so tremendous, that they almost take away our breath, and we shrink from looking at them. But when the Bible speaks plainly we have no right to turn away from a subject, and with the Bible in our hands we shall do well to look at the "things which are eternal."

Let us settle it then in our minds, for one thing, that the *future happiness* of those who are saved is eternal. However little we may understand it, it is something which will have no end: it will never cease, never grow old, never decay, never die. At God's "right hand are pleasures for evermore." (Ps. xvi. 11.) Once landed in paradise, the saints of God shall go out no more. The inheritance is "incorruptible, undefiled, and fadeth not away." They shall "receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away." (1 Pet. i. 4; v. 4.) Their warfare is accomplished; their fight is over; their work is done. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more. They are travelling on towards an "eternal weight of glory," towards a home which shall never be

broken up, a meeting without a parting, a family gathering without a separation, a day without night. Faith shall be swallowed up in sight, and hope in certainty. They shall see as they have been seen, and know as they have been known, and “be for ever with the Lord.” I do not wonder that the apostle Paul adds, “Comfort one another with these words.” (1 Thess. iv. 17, 18.)

Let us settle it, for another thing, in our minds, that the *future misery* of those who are finally lost is eternal. This is an awful truth, I am aware, and flesh and blood naturally shrink from the contemplation of it. But I am one of those who believe it to be plainly revealed in Scripture, and I dare not keep it back in the pulpit. To my eyes eternal future happiness and eternal future misery appear to stand side by side. I fail to see how you can distinguish the duration of one from the duration of the other. If the joy of the believer is for ever, the sorrow of the unbeliever is also for ever. If heaven is eternal, so likewise is hell. It may be my ignorance, but I know not how the conclusion can be avoided.

I cannot reconcile the non-eternity of punishment with the *language of the Bible*. Its advocates talk loudly about love and charity, and say that it does not harmonize with the merciful and compassionate character of God. But what saith the Scripture? Who ever spoke such loving and merciful words as our Lord Jesus Christ? Yet His are the lips which three times over describe the consequence of impenitence and sin, as “the worm that never dies and the fire that is not quenched.” He is the Person who speaks in one sentence of the wicked going away into “everlasting punishment” and the righteous into “life eternal.” (Mark ix. 43-48; Matt. xxv. 46.)<sup>3</sup>—Who does not remember the Apostle Paul’s words about charity? Yet he is the very Apostle who says, the wicked “shall be punished with everlasting destruction.” (2 Thess. i. 9.)—Who does not know the spirit of love which runs through all St. John’s Gospel and Epistles? Yet the beloved Apostle is the very writer in the New Testament who dwells most strongly, in the book of Revelation, on the reality and eternity of future woe. What shall we say to these things? Shall we be wise above that which is written? Shall we admit the dangerous principle that words in Scripture do not mean what they appear to mean? Is it not far better to lay our hands on our mouths and say, “Whatever God has written must be true.” “Even so, Lord God Almighty,

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<sup>3</sup> “If God had intended to have told us that the punishment of wicked man shall have no end, the languages wherein the Scriptures are written do hardly afford fuller and more certain words than those that are used in this case, whereby to express a duration without end; and likewise, which is almost a peremptory decision of the thing, the duration of the punishment of wicked men is in the very same sentence expressed by the very same word which is used for the duration of happiness of the righteous.”—*Archbishop Tillotson on Hell Torments*. See *Horbery*, vol. ii. p. 42.

true and righteous are Thy judgments.” (Rev. xvi. 7.)

I cannot reconcile the non-eternity of punishment with the *language of our Prayer-book*. The very first petition in our matchless Litany contains this sentence, “From everlasting damnation, good Lord, deliver us.”—The Catechism teaches every child who learns it, that whenever we repeat the Lord’s Prayer we desire our Heavenly Father to “keep us from our ghostly enemy and from everlasting death.”—Even in our Burial Service we pray at the grave side, “Deliver us not into the bitter pains of eternal death.”—Once more I ask, “What shall we say to these things?” Shall our congregations be taught that even when people live and die in sin we may hope for their happiness in a remote future? Surely the common sense of many of our worshippers would reply, that if this is the case Prayer-book words mean nothing at all.

I lay no claim to any peculiar knowledge of Scripture. I feel daily that I am no more infallible than the Bishop of Rome. But I must speak according to the light which God has given to me; and I do not think I should do my duty if I did not raise a warning voice on this subject, and try to put Christians on their guard. Six thousand years ago sin entered into the world by the devil’s daring falsehood,—“Ye shall not surely die.” (Gen. iii. 4.) At the end of six thousand years the great enemy of mankind is still using his old weapon, and trying to persuade men that they may live and die in sin, and yet at some distant period may be finally saved. Let us not be ignorant of his devices. Let us walk steadily in the old paths. Let us hold fast the old truth, and believe that as the happiness of the saved is eternal, so also is the misery of the lost.<sup>4</sup>

(a) Let us hold it fast in *the interest of the whole system of revealed religion*. What was the use of God’s Son becoming incarnate, agonizing in Gethsemane, and dying on the cross to make atonement, if men can be finally saved without believing on Him? Where is the slightest proof that saving faith in Christ’s blood can ever begin after death? Where is the need of the Holy Ghost, if sinners are at last to enter heaven without conversion and renewal of heart? Where can we find the smallest evidence that anyone can be born again, and have a new heart, if he dies in an unregenerate state? If a man may escape eternal punishment at last, without faith in Christ or sanctification of the Spirit, sin is no longer an infinite evil, and there was no need for Christ making an atonement.

(b) Let us hold it fast *for the sake of holiness and morality*. I can imagine

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<sup>4</sup> “There is nothing that Satan more desires than that we should believe that he does not exist, and that there is no such a place as hell, and no such things as eternal torments. He whispers all this into our ears, and he exults when he hears a layman, and much more when he hears a clergyman, deny these things, for then he hopes to make them and others his victims.”—*Bishop Wordsworth’s Sermons on Future Rewards and Punishments*, p. 36.

nothing so pleasant to flesh and blood as the specious theory that we may live in sin, and yet escape eternal perdition; and that although we “serve divers lusts and pleasures” while we are here, we shall somehow or other all get to heaven hereafter! Only tell the young man who is “wasting his substance in riotous living” that there is heaven at last even for those who live and die in sin, and he is never likely to turn from evil. Why should he repent and take up the cross, if he can get to heaven at last without trouble?

(c) Finally, let us hold it fast, *for the sake of the common hopes of all God’s saints*. Let us distinctly understand that every blow struck at the eternity of punishment is an equally heavy blow at the eternity of reward. It is impossible to separate the two things. No ingenious theological definition can divide them. They stand or fall together. The same language is used, the same figures of speech are employed, when the Bible speaks about either condition. Every attack on the duration of hell is also an attack on the duration of heaven.<sup>5</sup> It is a deep and true saying, “With the sinner’s fear our hope departs.”

I turn from this part of my subject with a deep sense of its painfulness. I feel strongly with Robert M’Cheyne, that “it is a hard subject to handle lovingly.” But I turn from it with an equally deep conviction that if we believe the Bible we must never give up anything which it contains. From hard, austere, and unmerciful theology, good Lord, deliver us! If men are not saved it is because they “will not come to Christ.” (John v. 40.) But we must not be wise above that which is written. No morbid love of liberality, so called, must induce us to reject anything which God has revealed about eternity. Men sometimes talk exclusively about God’s mercy and love and compassion, as if He had no other attributes, and leave out of sight entirely His holiness and His purity, His justice and His unchangeableness, and His hatred of sin. Let us beware of falling into this delusion. It is a growing evil in these latter days. Low and inadequate views of the unutterable vileness and filthiness of sin, and of the unutterable purity of the eternal God, are fertile sources of error about man’s future state. Let us think of the mighty Being with whom we have to do, as he Himself declared His character to Moses, saying, “The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression and sin.” But let us not forget the solemn clause which concludes the sentence: “And *that will by no means clear the guilty.*” (Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7.) Unrepented sin is an eternal evil, and can

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<sup>5</sup> “If the punishment of the wicked is only temporary, such will also be the happiness of the righteous, which is repugnant to the whole teaching of Scripture; but if the happiness of the righteous will be everlasting (who will be equal to the angels, and their bodies will be like the body of Christ), such also will be the punishment of the wicked.”—*Bishop Wordsworth’s Sermon on Future Rewards and Punishments*, P. 31.

never cease to be sin; and He with whom we have to do is an eternal God.

The words of Psalm cxlv. are strikingly beautiful: "The Lord is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy. The Lord is good to all: and His tender mercies are over all His works.—The Lord upholdeth all that fall, and raiseth up all those that be bowed down.—The Lord is righteous in all His ways, and holy in all His works. The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon Him, to all that call upon Him in truth.—The Lord preserveth all them that love Him." Nothing can exceed the mercifulness of this language! But what a striking fact it is that the passage goes on to add the following solemn conclusion, "*All the wicked will He destroy.*" (Psalm cxlv. 8-20.)

III. The third thought which I commend to the attention of my readers is this:—*Our state in the unseen world of eternity depends entirely on what we are in time.*

The life that we live upon earth is short at the very best, and soon gone. "We spend our days as a tale that is told."—"What is our life? It is a vapour: so soon passeth it away, and we are gone." (Psalm xc. 9; James iv. 14.) The life that is before us when we leave this world is an endless eternity, a sea without a bottom, and an ocean without a shore. "One day in Thy sight," eternal God, "is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." (2 Pet. iii. 8.) In that world time shall be no more.—But short as our life is here, and endless as it will be hereafter, it is a tremendous thought that eternity hinges upon time. Our lot after death depends, humanly speaking, on what we are while we are alive. It is written, God "will render to every man according to his deeds: to them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: but to them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath." (Rom. ii. 6, 7.)

We ought never to forget, that we are all, while we live, in a state of probation. We are constantly sowing seeds which will spring up and bear fruit, every day and hour in our lives. There are eternal consequences resulting from all our thoughts and words and actions, of which we take far too little account. "For every idle word that men speak they shall give account in the day of judgment." (Matt. xii. 36.) Our thoughts are all numbered, our actions are weighed. No wonder that St. Paul says, "He that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." (Gal. vi. 8.) In a word, what we sow in life we shall reap after death, and reap to all eternity.

There is no greater delusion than the common idea that it is possible to live wickedly, and yet rise again gloriously; to be without religion in this world, and yet to be a saint in the next. When the famous Whitefield re-



vived the doctrine of conversion last century, it is reported that one of his hearers came to him after a sermon and said,—“It is all quite true, sir. I hope I shall be converted and born again one day, but not till after I am dead.” I fear there are many like him. I fear the false doctrine of the Romish *purgatory* has many secret friends even within the pale of the Church of England! However carelessly men may go on while they live, they secretly cling to the hope that they shall be found among the saints when they die. They seem to hug the idea that there is some cleansing, purifying effect produced by death, and that, whatever they may be in this life, they shall be found “meet for the inheritance of the saints” in the life to come. But it is all a delusion.<sup>6</sup>

“Life is the time to serve the Lord,  
The time to insure the great reward.”

The Bible teaches plainly, that as we die, whether converted or unconverted, whether believers or unbelievers, whether godly or ungodly, so shall we rise again when the last trumpet sounds. There is no repentance in the grave: there is no conversion after the last breath is drawn. Now is the time to believe in Christ, and to lay hold on eternal life. Now is the time to turn from darkness unto light, and to make our calling and election sure. The night cometh when no man can work. As the tree falls, there it will lie. If we leave this world impenitent and unbelieving, we shall rise the same in the resurrection morning, and find it had been “good for us if we had never been born.”<sup>7</sup>

I charge every reader of this paper to remember this, and to make a good use of time. Regard it as the stuff of which life is made, and never waste it or throw it away. Your hours and days and weeks and months and years have all something to say to an eternal condition beyond the grave. What you sow in life you are sure to reap in a life to come. As holy Baxter says, it is “now or never.” Whatever we do in religion must be done now.

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<sup>6</sup> “The Scripture never represents the state of future misery, as a state of purgation and purification, or anything like analogous to a state of trial, where men may fit and qualify themselves for some better state of existence: but always as a state of retribution, punishment, and righteous vengeance, in which God’s justice (a perfection of which some men seem to render no account) vindicates the power of His majesty, His government, and His love, by punishing those who have despised them.”—*Horbery*, vol. ii. p. 183.

<sup>7</sup> “This life is the time of our preparation for our future state. Our souls will continue for ever what we make them in this world. Such a taste and disposition of mind as a man carries with him out of this life, he shall retain in the next. It is true, indeed, heaven perfects those holy and virtuous dispositions which are begun here; but the other world alters no man as to his main state. He that is filthy will be filthy still; and he that is unrighteous will be unrighteous still.”—*Archbishop Tillotson’s Sermon on Phil.* iii. 20. (See *Horbery*, vol. ii. p. 133.)

Remember this in your use of all the means of grace, from the least to the greatest. Never be careless about them. They are given to be your helps toward an eternal world, and not one of them ought to be thoughtlessly treated or lightly and irreverently handled. Your daily prayers and Bible-reading, your weekly behaviour on the Lord's day, your manner of going through public worship,—all, all these things are important. Use them all as one who remembers eternity.

Remember it, not least, whenever you are tempted to do evil. When sinners entice you, and say, "It is only a little one,"—when Satan whispers in your heart, "Never mind: where is the mighty harm? Everybody does so,"—then look beyond time to a world unseen, and place in the face of the temptation the thought of eternity. There is a grand saying recorded of the martyred Reformer, Bishop Hooper, when one urged him to recant before he was burned, saying, "Life is sweet and death is bitter." "True," said the good Bishop, "quite true! But eternal life is more sweet, and eternal death is more bitter."

IV. The last thought which I commend to the attention of my readers is this:—*The Lord Jesus Christ is the great Friend to whom we must all look for help, both for time and eternity.*

The purpose for which the eternal Son of God came into the world can never be declared too fully, or proclaimed too loudly. He came to give us hope and peace while we live among the "things seen, which are temporal," and glory and blessedness when we go into the "things unseen, which are eternal." He came to "bring life and immortality to light," and to "deliver those who, through fear of death, were all their life-time subject to bondage." (2 Tim. i. 10; Heb. ii. 15.) He saw our lost and bankrupt condition, and had compassion on us. And now, blessed be His name, a mortal man may pass through "things temporal" with comfort, and look forward to "things eternal" without fear.

These mighty privileges our Lord Jesus Christ has purchased for us at the cost of His own precious blood. He became our Substitute, and bore our sins in His own body on the cross, and then rose again for our justification. "He suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us unto God." He was made sin for us who knew no sin, that we poor sinful creatures might have pardon and justification while we live, and glory and blessedness when we die. (1 Peter ii. 24; iii. 18; 2 Cor. v. 21.)

And all that our Lord Jesus Christ has purchased for us He offers freely to every one who will turn from his sins, come to Him, and believe. "I am the light of the world," He says: "he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."—"Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."—"If any man thirst, let

him come unto Me and drink.”—“Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out.”—And the terms are as simple as the offer is free: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.”—“Whosoever believeth on Him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John viii. 12; Matt. xi. 28 John vii. 37; vi. 37; Acts xvi. 31; John iii. 16.)

He that has Christ, has life. He can look round him on the “things temporal,” and see change and decay on every side without dismay. He has got treasure in heaven, which neither rust nor moth can corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal. He can look forward to the “things eternal,” and feel calm and composed. His Saviour has risen, and gone to prepare a place for him. When he leaves this world he shall have a crown of glory, and be for ever with his Lord. He can look down even into the grave, as the wisest Greeks and Romans could never do, and say, “Oh, death, where is thy sting? oh, grave, where is thy victory? oh, eternity, where are thy terrors?” (1 Cor. xv. 55.)

Let us all settle it firmly in our minds that the only way to pass through “things seen” with comfort, and look forward to “things unseen” without fear, is to have Christ for our Saviour and Friend, to lay hold on Christ by faith, to become one with Christ and Christ in us, and while we live in the flesh to live the life of faith in the Son of God. (Gal. ii. 20.) How vast is the difference between the state of him who has faith in Christ, and the state of him who has none? Blessed indeed is that man or woman who can say, with truth, “I trust in Jesus: I believe.” When Cardinal Beaufort lay upon his death-bed, our mighty poet describes King Henry as saying, “He dies, but gives no sign.” When John Knox, the Scotch Reformer, was drawing to his end, and unable to speak, a faithful servant asked him to give some proof that the Gospel he had preached in life gave him comfort in death, by raising his hand. He heard; and raised his hand toward heaven three times, and then departed. Blessed, I say again, is he that believes! He alone is rich, independent, and beyond the reach of harm. If you and I have no comfort amidst things temporal, and no hope for the things eternal, the fault is all our own. It is because we “will not come to Christ, that we may have life.” (John v. 40.)

I leave the subject of eternity here, and pray that God may bless it to many souls. In conclusion, I offer to every one who reads this volume some food for thought, and matter for self-examination.

(1) First of all, how are you *using your time*? Life is short and very uncertain. You never know what a day may bring forth. Business and pleasure, money-getting and money-spending, eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage,—all, all will soon be over and done with for ever. And you, what are you doing for your immortal soul? Are you wasting time, or

turning it to good account? Are you preparing to meet God?

(2) Secondly, where *shall you be in eternity?* It is coming, coming, coming very fast upon us. You are going, going, going very fast into it. But where will you be? On the right hand or on the left, in the day of judgment? Among the lost or among the saved? Oh, rest not, rest not till your soul is insured! Make sure work: leave nothing uncertain. It is a fearful thing to die unprepared, and fall into the hands of the living God.

(3) Thirdly, would you be *safe for time and eternity?* Then seek Christ, and believe in Him. Come to Him just as you are. Seek Him while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. There is still a throne of grace. It is not too late. Christ waits to be gracious: He invites you to come to Him. Before the door is shut and the judgment begins, repent, believe, and be saved.

(4) Lastly, *would you be happy?* Cling to Christ, and live the life of faith in Him. Abide in Him, and live near to Him. Follow Him with heart and soul and mind and strength, and seek to know Him better every day. So doing you shall have great peace while you pass through “things temporal,” and in the midst of a dying world shall “never die.” (John xi. 2 6.) So doing, you shall be able to look forward to “things eternal” with unflinching confidence, and to feel and “know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle be dissolved we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” (2 Cor. v. 1.)

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P. S.

SINCE preaching the above Sermon I have read Canon Farrar’s volume, “Eternal Hope.” With much that this book contains I cannot at all agree. Anything that comes from the pen of such a well-known writer of course deserves respectful consideration. But I must honestly confess, after reading “Eternal Hope,” that I see no reason to withdraw anything I have said in my Sermon on “Eternity,” and that I laid down the volume with regret and dissatisfaction, unconvinced and unshaken in my opinions.

I can find nothing new in Canon Farrar’s statements. He says hardly anything that has not been said before, and refuted before. To all who wish to examine fully the subject of the reality and eternity of future punishment, I venture to recommend some works which are far less known than they ought to be, and which appear to me far sounder, and more Scriptural, than “Eternal Hope.” These are “*Horbery’s Enquiry into the Scripture Doctrine of the Duration of Future Punishment*,” “*Girdlestone’s Dies Iræ*,” the Rev. C. F. Childe’s “*Unsafe Anchor*,” and the Rev. Flavel Cook’s “*Righteous Judgment*.” “*Bishop Pearson on the Creed*,” under the head “Resurrection,”

and "*Hodge's Systematic Theology*," vol. iii. p. 868; will also repay a careful perusal.

The plain truth is, that there are vast difficulties bound up with the subject of the future state of the wicked, which Canon Farrar seems to me to leave untouched. The amazing mercifulness of God, and the awfulness of supposing that many around us will be lost eternally, he has handled fully and with characteristic rhetoric. No doubt the compassions of God are unspeakable. He is "not willing that any should perish." He "would have all men to be saved." His love in sending Christ into the world to die for sinners is an inexhaustible subject.—But this is only one side of God's character, as we have it revealed in Scripture. His character and attributes need to be looked at all round. The infinite holiness and justice of an eternal God, His hatred of evil, manifested in Noah's flood and at Sodom, and in the destruction of the seven nations of Canaan,—the unspeakable vileness and guilt of sin in God's sight,—the wide gulf between natural man and his perfect Maker,—the enormous spiritual change which every child of Adam must go through, if he is to dwell for ever in God's presence,—and the utter absence of any intimation in the Bible that this change can take place after death,—all, all these are points which seem to me comparatively put on one aside, or left alone, in Canon Farrar's volume. My mind demands satisfaction on these points before I can accept the views advocated in "Eternal Hope," and that satisfaction I fail to find in the book.

The position that Canon Farrar has taken up was first formally advocated by Origen, a Father who lived in the third century after Christ. He boldly broached the opinion that future punishment would be only temporary; but his opinion was rejected by almost all his contemporaries. Bishop Wordsworth says,—“The Fathers of the Church in Origen's time and in the following centuries, among whom were many to whom the original language of the New Testament was their mother tongue, and who *could not be misled by translations*, examined minutely the opinion and statements of Origen, and agreed for the most part in rejecting and condemning them. Irenæus, Cyril of Jerusalem, Chrysostom, Basil, Cyril of Alexandria, and others of the Eastern Church, and Tertullian, Cyprian, Lactantius, Augustine, Gregory the Great, Bede, and many more of the Western Church, were unanimous in teaching that the joys of the righteous and the punishments of the wicked will not be temporary, but everlasting.”

“Nor was this all. The Fifth General Council, held at Constantinople under the Emperor Justinian, in 553, A.D. examined the tenets of Origen, and passed a synodical decree condemnatory of them. And for a thousand years after that time there was an unanimous consent in Christendom in this sense.” (Bishop Wordsworth's "Sermons," p. 34.)

Let me add to this statement the fact that the eternity of future punish-

ment has been held by almost all the greatest theologians from the time of the Reformation down to the present day. It is a point on which Lutherans, Calvinists, and Arminians, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and Independents have always, with a few exceptions, been of one mind. Search the writings of the most eminent and learned Reformers, search the works of the Puritans, search the few literary remains of the men who revived English Christianity in the eighteenth century, and, as a rule, you will always get one harmonious answer. Within the last few years, no doubt, the “non-eternity of future punishment” has found several zealous advocates. But up to a comparatively modern date, I unhesitatingly assert, the supporters of Canon Farrar’s views have always been an extremely small minority among orthodox Christians. That fact is, at any rate, worth remembering.

As to the *difficulties* besetting the old or common view of future punishment, I admit their existence, and I do not pretend to explain them. But I always expect to find many mysteries in revealed religion, and I am not stumbled by them. I see other difficulties in the world which I cannot solve, and I am content to wait for their solution. What a mighty divine has called, “The mystery of God, the great mystery of His suffering vice and confusion to prevail,”—the origin of evil,—the permission of cruelty, oppression, poverty, and disease,—the allowed sickness and death of infants before they know good from evil,—the future prospects of the heathen who never heard the Gospel,—the times of ignorance which God has winked at,—the condition of China, Hindostan, and Central Africa, for the last 1800 years,—all these things are to my mind great knots which I am unable to untie, and depths which I have no line to fathom. But I wait for light, and I have no doubt all will be made plain. I rest in the thought that I am a poor ignorant mortal, and that God is a Being of infinite wisdom, and is doing all things well. “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right.” (Gen. xviii. 25.) It is a wise sentence of Bishop Butler: “All shadow of injustice, and indeed all harsh appearances in the various economy of God, would be lost, if we would keep in mind that every merciful allowance shall be made, and no more shall be required of any one, than what might have been equitably expected of him from the circumstances in which he was placed, and not what might have been expected from him had he been placed in other circumstances.” (“Analogy,” part ii. ch. vi. p. 425. Wilson’s edition.) It is a grand saying of Elihu, in Job, “Touching the Almighty, we cannot find Him out: He is excellent in power, and in judgment, and in plenty of justice: He will not afflict.” (Job xxxvii. 23.)

It may be perfectly true that many Romish divines, and even some Protestants, have made extravagant and offensive statements about the bodily sufferings of the lost in another world. It may be true that those who believe in eternal punishment have occasionally misunderstood or mistrans-

lated texts, and have pressed figurative language too far. But it is hardly fair to make Christianity responsible for the mistakes of its advocates. It is an old saying that “Christian errors are infidel arguments.” Thomas Aquinas, and Dante, and Milton, and Boston, and Jonathan Edwards were not inspired and infallible, and I decline to be answerable for all they may have written about the physical torments of the lost. But after every allowance, admission, and deduction, there remains, in my humble opinion, a mass of Scripture evidence in support of the doctrine of eternal punishment, which can never be explained away, and which no revision or new translation of the English Bible will ever overthrow.<sup>8</sup> That there are degrees of misery as well as degrees of glory in the future state, that the condition of some who are lost will be far worse than that of others, all this is undeniable. But that the punishment of the wicked will ever have an end, or that length of time alone can ever change a heart, or that the Holy Spirit ever works on the dead, or that there is any purging, purifying process beyond the grave, by which the wicked will be finally fitted for heaven, these are positions which I maintain it is utterly impossible to prove by texts of Scripture. Nay, rather, there are texts of Scripture which teach an utterly different doctrine. “It is surprising,” says Horbery, “if hell be such a state of purification, that it should always be represented in Scripture as a place of punishment.” (Vol. ii. p. 223.) “Nothing,” says Girdlestone, “but clear statements of Scripture could justify us in holding, or preaching to ungodly men, the doctrine of repentance after death; and not one clear statement on this subject is to be found.” (“Dies Iræ,” p. 269.) If we once begin to invent doctrines which we cannot prove by texts, or to refuse the evidence of texts in Scripture because they land us in conclusions we do not like, we may as well throw aside the Bible altogether, and discard it as the judge of controversy.

The favourite argument of some, that no religious doctrine can be true which is rejected by the “common opinion” and popular feeling of mankind,—that any texts which contradict this common popular feeling must be wrongly interpreted,—and that therefore eternal punishment cannot be true, because the inward feeling of the multitude revolts against it,—this argument appears to me alike most dangerous and unsound. It is *dangerous*, because it strikes a direct blow at the authority of Scripture as the only rule of faith. Where is the use of the Bible, if the “common opinion” of mortal man is to be regarded as of more weight than the declarations of God’s Word?—It is *unsound*, because it ignores the great fundamental principle of Christianity,—that man is a fallen creature, with a corrupt heart and understanding, and that in spiritual things his judgment is worthless. There is a

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<sup>8</sup> Horbery alone alleges and examines no less than one hundred and three texts, on his side, in his reply to Whiston.

veil over our hearts. “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him.” (1 Cor. ii. 14.) To say, in the face of such a text, that any doctrine which the majority of men dislike, such as eternal punishment, *must* therefore be untrue, is simply absurd! The “common opinion” is more likely to be wrong than right! No doubt Bishop Butler has said, “If in revelation there be found any passage the seeming meaning of which is contrary to natural religion, we may most certainly conclude such seeming meaning not to be the real one.” But those who triumphantly quote these words would do well to observe the sentence which immediately follows: “But it is not any degree of a presumption against an interpretation of Scripture, that such an interpretation contains a doctrine which the light of nature cannot discover.” (“Analogy,” part i. chap. ii. p. 358. Wilson’s edition.)

After all, what the “common feeling” or opinion of the majority of mankind is about the duration of future punishment, is a question which admits of much doubt. Of course we have no means of ascertaining: and it signifies little either way. In such a matter the only point is, What saith the Scripture? But I have a strong suspicion, if the world could be polled, that we should find the greater part of mankind believed in eternal punishment! About the opinion of the Greeks and Romans at any rate there can be little dispute. If anything is clearly taught in the stories of their mythology it is the endless nature of the sufferings of the wicked. Bishop Butler says, “Gentile writers, both moralist and poetic, speak of the future punishment of the wicked, both as to duration and degree, in a like manner of expression and description as the Scripture does.” (“Analogy,” part i. chap. ii. p. 218.) The strange and weird legends of Tantalus, Sisyphus, Ixion, Prometheus, and the Danaides, have all one common feature about them. In each case the punishment is eternal! This is a fact worth noticing. It is worth what it is worth. But it shows, at all events, that the opponents of eternal punishment should not talk too confidently about the “common opinion of mankind.”

As to the doctrine of the *Annihilation of the Wicked*, to which many adhere, it appears to me so utterly irreconcilable with our Lord Jesus Christ’s words about “the resurrection of damnation,” and “the worm that never dies, and the fire that is not quenched,” and St. Paul’s words about “the resurrection of the unjust” (John v. 29; Mark ix. 43-48; Acts xxiv. 15), that until those words can be proved to form no part of inspired Scripture it seems to me mere waste of time to argue about it.

The favourite argument of the advocates of this doctrine, that “death, dying, perishing, destruction,” and the like, are phrases which can only mean “cessation of existence,” is so ridiculously weak that it is scarcely worth noticing. Every Bible reader knows that God said to Adam, concerning the



forbidden fruit, “In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely *die*.” (Gen. ii. 17.) But every well-taught Sunday scholar knows that Adam did not “cease to exist,” when he broke the commandment. He died spiritually, but he did not cease to be!—So also St. Peter says of the flood: “The world that then was, being overflowed with water, *perished*.” (2 Peter iii. 6.) Yet, though temporarily drowned, it certainly did not cease to be; and when the water was dried up Noah lived on it again.

It only remains for me now to add one more last word, by way of information. Those who care to investigate the meaning of the words “eternal” and “everlasting,” as used in Scripture, will find the subject fully and exhaustively considered in *Girdlestone’s “Old Testament Synonyms,”* ch. 30, p. 495; and in the same writer’s “*Dies Iræ*,” ch. 10 and 11, p. 128.