

# Christian Messenger.

A REPOSITORY OF RELIGIOUS, POLITICAL & GENERAL INTELLIGENCE.

"Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit."

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## Poetry.

For the Christian Messenger.

### TO SPRING.

Come, gentle Spring with all thy charms,  
And take us from cold Winter's arms  
To thy embrace;  
Come with thy evercheering smile,  
Send peace and harmony the while  
Before thy face.

Come with thy music and thy mirth,  
Come with thy variegated earth,  
And clear blue sky,  
Come with thy soft and healthful breeze,  
But come, O, come not with disease,  
To force the sigh.

Come with thy lengthened days again,  
Long with pleasure, short with pain  
And wasting care;  
In dark abodes of poverty  
Where sickness dwells and misery,  
Come kindly there.

Come with sweet labor's sweat and glee,  
And raise the hum of industry  
In every land;  
Bring broad Atlanta's favoring gales,  
Let commerce spread her whitening sails  
From strand to strand.

Come with power the lost to save,  
Come with freedom to the slave,  
A second birth;  
Come with the olive branch of peace.  
Let swords be sheathed and bloodshed cease  
O'er all the earth.

Come with light to age and youth,  
Unveiling error, spreading truth  
Throughout the world;  
Come with blessings from above,  
And let the banner-fold of love  
Be wide unfurled.

Kentville, 1865. S. S.

## Religious.

### ON ETERNAL PUNISHMENT.

BY JOSEPH PARKER, D. D., OF MANCHESTER, ENGLAND.

Evangelical churches believe and teach that the finally impenitent will "go away into everlasting punishment;" that, if men slight their opportunity of exercising repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, they will be condemned to endless remorse. This is objected to on various grounds presently to be examined. I undertake to prove that *society does in this matter precisely what it condemns in the government of Almighty God.* If God punishes the finally impenitent for ever, man does the same thing, and does it necessarily; necessarily, because of the demands of the moral universe without, as well as the axioms of the moral principle within.

It is objected that there is no *proportion* between time and eternity, and consequently that to punish man eternally for doing wrong in his short lifetime is inequitable. While it is not denied that punishment is due, it is contended that there should be some proportion between the crime and the penalty.

In answer to this objection, let us read the law of proportion in the light of human procedure. If I understand it properly, it amounts to this—that a day's crime should be met by a day's punishment; that the man who does wrong on Monday should be punished on Tuesday, and restored to confidence and friendship on Wednesday. "Not exactly that," the objector replies; "but," he continues, "say that a day's crime should be met by a month's punishment, or a year's." Indeed! What is the proportion between one day and a month, or one day and a year? Does nothing depend on the *nature* of the crime? For example, a man picks a pocket: would the objector say that a month's imprisonment would be enough? Another man takes away a life: would the objector say that a year's punishment would suffice? But why should the one be punished a month and the other a year? It is urged that the *nature* of the crime determines that. Indeed! After all, then, it is not a question of time, but a question of *turpitude*. In reality it would appear that the *time* in which a crime is com-

mitted has nothing to do with the question of punishment. Nor should it have anything. Imagine a criminal pleading that, as he took away a fellow-creature's life in a moment, he should be punished according to the *time* he occupied in the awful deed! Why, it requires less time to destroy a life than to break a house; but, on the principle of proportion (which proceeds entirely on the question of time), the burglar should undergo longer punishment than the murderer! What would be the *right* proportion of time between breaking a house and the length of punishment? I shall show presently that society knows nothing about such proportion—ignores it entirely—and would be speedily disorganised if it proceeded upon any such principle in the case of an impenitent felon.

Those of you who insist upon proportion, answer this inquiry: Thirty years ago a man forged your name for a thousand guineas; he did it in an hour; a few dashes of a practised pen, and the deed was done! That man never owned the act, never uttered a penitential word, was sent to prison for ten years, and now he is in society; have you forgiven him? have you restored him to your confidence? have you invited him to the society of your children? is he once more at your desk? You answer, *No*; but what becomes of your own argument founded on *proportion*? Remember the man was confined ten years for a deed done in an hour? Was not that enough? Think of an hour multiplying itself into ten years, and say whether you can reasonably demand *more*. But you say the man is *impenitent*; precisely so, and that is the very basis on which the Divine adjudication proceeds! You say that if the man had truly repented of his sin, and had brought evidences of his sincerity, you would have forgiven him; be it so; this is the Gospel itself, the very thing which your misjudged Creator does; for "if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." The sum of my answer is this, If a man continue to be *impenitent* respecting any crime, he is as guilty of that crime on the *last day of his life* as he was in the very hour of its accomplishment. Time has no influence upon his guilt. It is purely a question of the heart and life. And so long as he is impenitent he ought to be marked and avoided. Society does this; society punishes (more or less lightly, more or less directly) all impenitent offenders against its laws, and punishes them throughout their whole lifetime, which is as much of eternity as its retributive influence can encompass.

Look at this question of proportion in another light; a man who has maintained a good reputation for half a century as a pure, upright, noble man; who has figured on countless subscription lists as a benefactor of the poor; whose name was the synonym of benevolence;—has been detected in the commission of a crime. That crime was being attempted secretly. The perpetrator little imagined that any eye was upon him. The fact is published, and how does society treat the tower which the man was fifty years in building? How? Why, society throws it down, and forgets half a century of goodness in one day's discovered villany! Where is the law of *proportion* in this case? Why not take off *one day* from the fifty years' reputation, and regard the crime as but a spot on the sun of a brilliant life? By so doing society would be rendered insecure, all guarantees of morality would be loosened, and character would be shaken at its foundations.

This argument of proportion is utterly fallacious. No crime is self-contained. All actions have influence. What is done in an hour may affect men through all generations. Long after the pebble is at the bottom of the lake the circles multiply and expand on the surface.

A second objection will help us still farther to see the fallacy of the argument founded upon proportion. It is argued that as virtue is its own reward, and vice its punishment, so the sinner is sufficiently punished while upon earth, and need not have hell superadded. I answer—if there is anything in this argument, it holds equally true of *heaven*, and, therefore, as virtue is its own reward, man is sufficiently honoured here, and need not be called into heavenly felicity. By parity of reasoning this latter position is impregnable. I shall not, however, rest the

argument on this obviously true position, but shall maintain that *punishment is not regenerative*. The whole issue may be staked upon that declaration. The objector makes his fatal mistake in imagining that punishment may *regenerate* the criminal. Many religious persons, too, err on this point. Hell itself, if it were allowed to be intermediate and not final, could not convert man to Christianity! It might terrify men—impose terrible restraints upon them—but as to changing the heart and bringing rebellion to its knees, it might be as powerless as a passing storm.

Take an instance: a felon has undergone a term of imprisonment, yet he may leave the prison as great a felon as he entered it. The mere fact of his having been in gaol six months does not make him an honest man. The law could touch only his *body*, his *heart* all the while might be plotting further schemes of crime. Punishment in itself is not a regenerator. Nor does the objector himself think so. Would the objector admit such a felon into his house, or wish him to be the companion of his sons? Does not the objector himself feel unsafe in the very presence of such a man? At this moment in one pocket you have money and in another you have a gold watch: now hear me,—*the person who is sitting next you is a ticket-of-leave man!* You start! Be calm, I pray you! Remember your own smooth-faced and amiable philosophy which teaches that vice is its own punishment, and therefore the man has been tormented, and remember that you insist on *proportion*, and that this man has been in the colony and has earned a fair reputation there! Still, one hand is on the money, and another on the watch. Why, if punishment necessarily regenerates the heart, the man is as good as you are and as much to be trusted. Invite him home! Hold friendly intercourse with him upon colonial life! Don't punish the man *for ever*; where is the *proportion* between a day's crime and life-long infamy? *Where?* The objector denies the very creed he advocates! He would have God's *infinite holiness* do what his own *faded morality* cannot do! He would have the *Sun* overlook defects which his own *rushlight* brings into startling prominence! He would have a *King* embrace a filth from which a *pauper* would recoil. Remember that the question is one which appeals to your *moral sense*, not to your *philosophy*, not to your *benevolence*, but to your sense of right and wrong; and if *you*, whose moral faculty has been blunted and perverted, can with horror from the idea of fraternising with an impenitent convict, how can He, whose purity is infinite and unchangeable, look with benignity on a man whose heart is full of uncleanness, whose lip is burning with blasphemy, and in whose hand is the rebel's weapon? "Yet saith the house of Israel, the way of Lord is not equal!"

The objector fails to see that the argument which he rounds upon vice being its own punishment is practically denied in all the penal arrangements of society. If vice is its own punishment why should the thief be imprisoned or the murderer executed? Why not leave each to the tormenting remorse of his own reflections? Why add the punishment of the treadmill to the scorpion-thong of conscience? The fact is, that vice is its own punishment only to a very partial degree. By repetition of crime the conscience is hardened. The young thief trembles as he touches the lock at midnight, but the veteran burglar is as steady in the darkness as at noonday. The sinner, therefore, has merely to repeat his crimes in order to escape their punishment; for he who now blushes in anger may one day be calm in murder!

A third objection alleges that Almighty God should issue a universal amnesty; should throw open every prison-door in the universe; should say to devils, "You are forgiven," and to lost men, "Receive your liberty." This would be pronounced kind, benevolent, magnanimous! This, it is suggested, would be worthy of God. Think of it! Every devil liberated; every lost soul at liberty; the son of perdition mingling with the sons of God! Such is the picture, and it is more pictorial than philosophical. To the objection a twofold answer may be returned:

1. An amnesty could not work any moral change. This is the forgotten point, or the point misunderstood. Suppose the monarch were to issue a universal amnesty, and that to-

morrow every convict were unchained, every thief once more on the highway, every murderer again at large, every incendiary free; what then? Would the convict, the thief, the murderer, the incendiary be good members of society? Would they throw off their *nature* in throwing off their prison garments? No, truly. The amnesty, instead of being a blessing, would be a curse; liberty would be turned into licentiousness; and virtue would be thrown down in the streets. If the insane idea of a universal amnesty were suggested, all virtuous England would protest against it; fathers and mothers would pray that the day of its fulfilment might never dawn; such an amnesty would be like the lifting up of flood-gates that waters of destruction might overflow the land.

What, then, would God's amnesty do? Would a demon be less a demon on one side of a prison door than on the other? Does the door make the demon.

2. This leads me to repeat that *forgiveness requires the consent of two parties*. An enemy cannot be turned into a friend without the concurrence of the man himself. It seems easy to say, "I forgive you," but what does forgiveness amount to if the party addressed should be impenitent and obdurate? You may say, "I shall not do you any injury: I shall let you alone;" all that can be done is mere *negative*. Do you urge that Almighty God should do this? Be it so; to be *let alone* by God is to be orphaned; to be outside heaven is to be in hell; not to be within the brightness of His smile is to be quaking under the outer darkness of His frown!

Few things are more flippantly spoken about than *forgiveness*. It is thought that forgiveness is independent of repentance. You may pardon an offence against *yourself*, but you cannot pardon an offence against *righteousness*. You may rise superior to the merely *personal* consideration, but if you trifle with the demands of morality your very forgiveness is a sin, and your magnanimity is a fraud.

It comes to this, then, that even God Himself cannot forgive a sinner apart from the sinner's own will. Is it anything merely *personal* that Almighty God denounces? Can the sinner do God any harm? Can the mightiest chief in all the armies of hell pluck one star from the sky, or keep the light of the sun, or dry up the springs of water, or forbid the seasons to visit the earth, or reverse the succession of day and night? Is God alarmed for His *physical* government? He? Why, He weigheth the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance, and He taketh up the isles as a very little thing! He? Why, He sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers before Him! By the glance of His eye He could wither the universe; by a word He could remand all beings into nonentity. Understand, then, that they are not offences against *power* which He remembers and punishes, but offences against *holiness*! He has to maintain the public virtue of the universe. He can smile at the hand which smites His throne, but not at the heart which rejects His law. That is a poor and mean idea of forgiveness which takes note of the *personal* element alone; and that only is the true idea which goes back to great principles, and forgets the *personal* and perishing in the *spiritual* and everlasting.

For example: a child disobeys his parent by breaking open a door and intruding into a forbidden room. Is it the injury against the door which the parent feels so deeply, or the *disobedience* against his will? Does he dwell on the *physical* injury or on the *moral* offence? Were it merely a question of the door, the matter would be forgotten in a moment, or referred to with a smile; but as an infringement of parental authority, it wounds the heart and assails the foundations of domestic government. Even so, with infinite exaltation of meaning, is it with God. He looks at the  *motive*. He judges only by the *spirit*. So that while He could despise the mightiest *physical* rebellion which Lucifer could lead, He could weep over a child's first lie, a heart's first sin!

The justice of the sentence of eternal punishment is most clearly apprehended when viewed in connexion with the *atonement*. Hell seems to me most just and necessary when I view the universe from the Saviour's