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Religious.

THE FUTURE STATE OF THE WICKED.

The Rev. Dr. Angus, President of the Baptist College, Regents Park, London, has written for the *Christian World* a series of three letters on the doctrine of Eternal Punishment. As this subject has been somewhat under discussion in some parts of this province, we have thought that our readers generally would be glad to know the views of one so able and reliable as Dr. Angus, on the subject; and we therefore propose to copy them:

LETTER I.

Nothing New in Modern Views.—Sadness and Instructiveness of this Fact.—Future Punishment Reasonable and Scriptural.—Its Nature.—For whom Prepared.—Duration.—Summary.—Is the Endlessness Restricted?—Is the Punishment Annihilation?—Is it Conditional?—The large Hope.—The Question one of Interpretation simply.—Lessons.

1. There is nothing new under the sun. With nearly twenty centuries looking down upon us, we are discussing the same questions as occupied the first Fathers of the Church. Trichotomy—the doctrine of man's threefold nature—body, soul, and spirit, was taught by Justin Martyr, who held that common men are composed of only two parts, body and soul, while Christian men have a third—the spirit—just as now the doctrine is taught by Delitzsch, and Mr. Heard, and Mr. White. Then, as now, these views were rejected by the majority of thinkers, Tertullian taking the lead against them. The annihilation of the soul of the wicked was taught by Arnobius and Tatian, as also in more recent times by Hobbes and Whiston, by Dodwell and John Taylor, of Norwich. The doctrine was denounced, on the other hand, by Tertullian and Origen, as in later times it is denied by most theological writers. The fathers generally regarded future punishment as eternal, while a few thought with Origen that all—devils and men—would be finally saved, though his statements are not always consistent, and the very truth he did not preach, thinking it mischievous to the unconverted. In the last century the same doctrine, under the name of Universalism, found defenders in Chauncy and Vidler, and opponents in Jonathan Edwards and Andrew Fuller. The thing that is the thing also that has been. There is nothing new under the sun!

2. The fact is at once sad and instructive. Sad, for nothing seems to get settled; men are everlastingly repeating themselves, and in their boasted progress they only pace round the same circle of folly or of truth. Yet instructive, for no new thing has happened to us. Ancient Greek-speaking writers were evidently less clear about the "only possible meaning" of some Greek words than some modern Grecians are said to be. Nor must we complain if each generation has its own work, its own truths to defend, its own victories to win. Sad and instructive, too! Specially instructive will it be if it teach us to think less of great names on either side, and send us away to study God's Word with renewed humility and prayer.

3. But while the doctrine of future punishment—its reality, its nature, its duration—is to be settled only by an appeal to Scripture is it worth nothing that the doctrine itself is highly reasonable. The idea of the existence of the soul after death, which future punishment presupposes, is found among nearly all nations. Almost equally wide-spread is the belief in some retribution. There is probably no thinker who will assert that whatever a man may be whenever he leaves this world he will share at once the glory of the Blessed God. If such a belief were entertained, to die would be everywhere gain. Suicide would cease to be evidence of insanity, and murder would be the easiest way of fulfilling the great law of love.

Apart, therefore, from all revelation men are generally ready to admit that punish-

ment of some kind must be awarded at last to successful wrong-doers. The traditions of all civilized nations, the commonest argument on behalf of another life, the whispers of conscience which are ever suggesting that sin means punishment, first or last, the very principles that underlie all government—all teach that while "Abel's blood cries out from the ground, and Cain goes off welcomed to the arms of the daughters of Nod," the whole history of these two is not yet finished; and that, in short, the prosperity that often attends a bad man even to the grave, is not all the portion of his cup. The wrongs of the world would become intolerable if the body had no soul, earth no hell, creation no Judge!

4. What all men feel to be reasonable, what good men trust to as just, the New Testament reveals as true. The doctrine of a future punishment is a clear and essential part of its teaching. By no conceivable perversion of our Lord's words, by no toning down of their meaning as figurative or parabolical, can we get rid of the conviction that it was His intention to teach that there is a "wrath to come," a state of being that is "accursed," and that its penalties are in proportion to our wrong-doing. Yes; in God's Word His wrath is as certainly revealed—I will not say as fully—as His love. Generally both are set forth in the same books often in the same chapter and verse. Nay, more, it is the wrath that gives scope for the love. Deny that the world is perishing, and the love which dies for it becomes unmeaning. Men may not think of it, but the denial of our ruin and misery is the denial of the value of our salvation too. We have destroyed ourselves; therefore is it that we bless God, that in Him is our help found.

5. But we fairly ask, What does Scripture say further of the nature of this punishment and of the duration of it? Hear then as to its nature, how it is described and for whom it is prepared.

"All that are in their graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; they that have done evil,—their life summed up as the doing of what is profitless and vain,—to the resurrection of condemnation" (John v. 29). "He that believeth shall be saved; he that believeth not"—or as in John iii. 18, 36, he that disbelieveth—"shall be damned" (Mark xvi. 16). "All things that offend" (i. e. that create sin), "and all them that do iniquity"—words that describe a lawless life—"shall be cast into the furnace of fire. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. xiii. 41). "These" (that refused to feel for and help our Lord's brethren) "shall go away into everlasting punishment" (or chastisement); but the righteous unto everlasting life" (Matt. xxv. 46). "When the Lord cometh the servant who knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes, but he that knew not . . . with few" [Luke xii. 47].

"As many as have sinned without law shall perish without law, and as many as have sinned under law shall be judged by the law . . . in the day when God shall Judge the secrets of men according to my Gospel by Jesus Christ" [Rom. ii. 12-16]. "The Lord Jesus Christ is to be revealed from heaven inflicting just punishment on them that know not God, and on them that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ—the which shall pay, as righteous punishment, everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His might" [2 Thess. i. 8, 9]. "For those who go on sinning wilfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth a fearful awaiting [or reception] of judgment, and a fiery indignation, soon to devour those who oppose" [Heb. x. 28]. "Verily the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly [the pious, the reverent], and to reserve under punishment (or chastisement) the unjust unto the day of judgment" [2 Peter ii. 9]. "The heavens and the earth are treasured up for fire unto the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly [impious, irreverent] men" [2 Peter ii. 7]. "The Lord cometh to execute

judgment and to convict all the ungodly of all the deeds of their ungodliness which they have in ungodliness committed, and of all the hard things that ungodly sinners have spoken against Him" [Jude 15]. "And when at last the sea shall give up the dead which are in it, and death and Hades shall give up the dead that are in them, they will be judged every man according to his works, and whosoever is not written in the Book of Life,—has not his name on the roll of the living,—will be cast into the lake of fire" Rev. xx. 13, 14, 15]. "This is the second death;" "and there the cowardly, and unbelieving, and abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and idolaters, and all liars, have their part." [Rev. xxi. 8.]

These passages, so awful in themselves that to write them makes the hand shake, and to hear them makes the ears tingle, are rendered the more awful by the fact that they are taken from the teachings of our Lord and four of His disciples who largely shared His spirit. He was incapable of exaggeration or of passion. They wept with Him over the sins of men, and devoted their lives to save them. In no case are their words the utterances of extravagance or of temper. The announcement they make of a future judgment is the language, as one of them tells us, "of soberness and truth;" and the wrath which men have to fear is "the wrath of the Lamb"—the wrath of exhausted mercy, of rejected and unavailing love.

6. The duration of this punishment is set forth in terms equally explicit. "The blackness of darkness is reserved for them for ever" (eis aionas) (Jude 13). The same phrase is used to describe the happiness of the redeemed, "which abideth for ever" (Jno. vi. 51, 58, Jno. ii. 17); the glory of Christ, who as Son and priest "abideth for ever" (Jno. viii. 35, 2 Pet. iii. 18, Heb. vii. 17, 21, 24); the honor of God, who is "blessed for ever" (Rom. i. 25).

The smoke of the persecuting Babylon of the Revelation ascendeth up "for ever and ever" (eis lous aionas ton aionon) (Rev. xix. 3); and the worshippers of the beast and his image are "tormented for ever and ever" (Rev. xiv. 11). The same phrase is applied to the happiness of the righteous, who "reign for ever" (Rev. xxii. 5); to the blessedness of Christ, who is worshipped "for ever and ever" (Rev. v. 11-13); and to God, to whom be glory "for ever and ever" (Gal. i. 5, Phil. iv. 20).

The wicked are said also to go away into everlasting (aionios) punishment (Matthew xviii. 8, xxv. 41-46, Mark iii. 29). They suffer the penalty, the righteous penalty of everlasting destruction" (2 Thess. i. 9). The same phrase is used to describe the happiness of the righteous, who go away into "everlasting life" (Matt. xix. 29, xxv. 46, Mark x. 30, John iii. 15, 16, Rom. ii. 7, 2 Cor. iv. 17), and to the glory of the everlasting God (Rom. xvi. 26, 1 Thess. vi. 16).

These are the only phrases used in Scripture to set forth the duration of the future glory and happiness of the redeemed, the duration of the honour and blessedness of God Himself, and all are used to set forth the punishment with which these are visited who reject the Gospel. Every form of words employed in Scripture to describe everlastingness our Lord and His Apostles employ to describe the state of those who die in sin and disbelief.

7. Here, then, we have the character of the condemned and their destiny. They are doers of what is evil, of what is lawless, of what is not loving and kind, of what is not according to God's will. They sin under law; they go on sinning wilfully; they obey not the Gospel; they oppose themselves; They obey unrighteousness. They are sensual, selfish (ex eritheias), impenitent, disbelieving. They know not God; they love not Christ; they resist the Spirit—terms that describe not single acts so much as states and habits; in short, a settled character. It is not that these men have stepped into the broad road; they walk in it, and follow it. These trees fall as they have come to lean; and they lie, so far as we can judge, as they fall.

Their destiny is described as condemnation or judgment, as complete condemnation [damnation as it is now called], as receiving judgment and fiery indignation, as not seeing life for the wrath of God abideth on them, as being sent away into outer darkness, as being cast alive into hell, into everlasting fire, in which they are tormented day and night for ever, as being sent away into everlasting chastisement, into everlasting righteous punishment, into everlasting destruction; and—

The duration of this destiny is described by all the forms of expression that are used in Scripture to set forth the everlastingness of the blessedness of heaven itself.

Whatever alleviations there may be of these awful truths—and alleviations I believe there are—I can find none in questioning the truths themselves. The language—of which I have given only samples—is too clear, and frequent, and strong.

8. I know indeed that these terms descriptive of everlastingness are sometimes used in a narrower sense. "The everlasting hills," "His children shall sit upon His throne for ever," fulfilled in the case of the descendants of David by their occupying the throne of Judah as long as it remained a kingdom. These are instances, just as in other languages "the true artist is said to paint for eternity," and "a thing of beauty is a joy for ever." No one can question this restricted use of the terms. But two things have to be remembered.

First, men speak of this restricted meaning as if it were quite common in Scripture, whereas it is really rare even in the Old Testament, while in the New Testament it is questionable whether it is found at all. The only passage is in Jude, where Sodom and Gomorrah are said "to suffer the righteous punishment of eternal fire," and this instance is by no means clear. There is certainly no case in the New Testament in which "everlasting" has the narrow meaning, when used of the future, unless it be in relation to future punishment itself. And, besides, the words occur in contexts where they are found already in their proper meaning ["everlasting punishment."] To interpret them literally in one clause and restrictively in the next, and do this again and again a dozen times, is therefore a practice that no sound principles of interpretation can defend.

9. I know, also, that it is said that as the reward of the righteous is life, so the reward of the wicked and of the disbelieving is death—destruction from the presence of the Lord; and that, as life is existence, so death or destruction is annihilation. This is Mr. Minton's argument, as it was also Mr. White's before him. It is also the argument of the English writers of the last century, though it found little favour with the Greek-speaking Fathers of the early age. But the argument involves, as it seems to me, an entire misunderstanding of the meaning of terms. No doubt we who believe have eternal life before us, and are waiting for it, as the finally impenitent disbelieving have death and perdition before them. But these are half-truths only. If we have believed our everlasting life is begun. It dates not from the morning of the resurrection, but from the day of our conversion. When we believed "we passed from death unto life;" and our everlasting life is only the perpetuation and completion of what we have already. So of the impenitent. They are dead in law, already sentenced as is the condemned malefactor; dead to holy feeling, as the blind man is dead to the beauties of color, the deaf man is dead to the harmonies of music; dead to practical holiness, as the man whose motive muscles are paralysed is dead to all activity; dead to happiness, even though they be living in pleasure." And so, as John tells us, "they abide in death." As their present state of death and destruction is not annihilation, neither is the perpetuation of that state. Eternal death in short [if the phrase may be allowed], is the consummation of the present condition of all who believe.

10. There is yet another mode of setting aside this teaching. It is said that the passages quoted do not affirm that any will be punished eternally, but only that punish-