

un-Christian conduct. This is especially the case as regards impurity; for whether the fact be explained on religious or non-religious grounds, it has more to do with unbelief than has the speculative reason.

Will you pardon a somewhat unmannerly illustration of this grim truth? One evening, the story goes, in the course of the mess-room dinner at an Indian cantonment, an officer, flushed with wine, took to quizzing the chaplain of the regiment. 'I cannot believe in the Bible, you know.

There are so many things in it which nobody could accept. Jonah and the Whale, for instance: what do you make of that?' The chaplain knew his man. 'Yes,' he retorted, looking him straight in the face, 'there are many things in the Bible which are difficult; but there are other things in it which are quite plain. The Seventh Commandment, for instance.' The quizzing ceased.¹

¹ D. Smith, *Man's Need of God*, 103.

The Doom of the Lost.

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THE November number of THE EXPOSITORY TIMES contains a most valuable article on 'The Doctrine of a Future State,' by Dr. A. Plummer, author of well-known commentaries on several books of the New Testament. He rejects, as not taught in the Bible, and as misleading and dangerous, the doctrine of the endless suffering of the lost; and rejects also, as its underlying and supporting root, the doctrine of the Immortality of the Soul, *i.e.* the endless permanence and consciousness of all human souls. He also calls loudly and justly for a full reconsideration of the whole matter.

This article is an independent and strong confirmation of the teaching of my volume on *The Last Things*. Dr. Plummer's position is precisely my own, namely, that the various writers of the New Testament agree to announce the utter and final ruin of the lost; but do not assert their endless permanence and suffering. This conclusion he supports by expositions and arguments almost identical with mine; especially the references to, and quotations from, Plato, Cicero, Irenæus, Athenagoras, Tertullian, and Augustine. While gladly accepting this welcome confirmation, I shall in this paper supplement it by some account of the history of the discussion, and some practical remarks about the whole subject.

Until a time remembered by many still living, the theory current in all Churches was that the doom of the wicked will be endless suffering as terrible as the excruciating bodily agony caused by fire. This doctrine, common in all pulpits sixty years ago, no one dares to preach now. But comparatively few venture publicly to disown it; and still fewer propound something better in its place.

Yet for many years past there have been voices-crying in the wilderness and, with more or less wisdom, denouncing this popular error; *e.g.* a volume by the Rev. E. White, entitled *Life in Christ: Four Discourses*, etc., published in 1846, and a much larger one, with a similar title, in 1875. In these volumes the writer repudiated the above theory; and traced it, as does Dr. Plummer, to the doctrine of the Immortality of the Soul. This protest was accompanied, and as I think weakened, by an attempt to prove the ultimate extinction of the lost; and by some other doubtful arguments. The same teaching was ably set forth by the Rev. H. Constable, M.A., in a work entitled *The Duration and Nature of Future Punishment*, published in 1869, and frequently reprinted.

Soon after Mr. White's larger works, there appeared a small volume entitled *Future Punishment*, by Dr. C. Clemence, who enumerates theories: (1) Universal Restoration, (2) Annihilation, (3) Absolute Endlessness of Suffering and Sin, and (4) his own opinion, namely, that 'In Scripture the Duration of Future Punishment is left Indefinite.' By this last opinion, Dr. Clemence evidently means that the Bible is quite definite about the finality of the doom of the lost, but leaves open the possibility that they may ultimately sink into unconsciousness. Of the other theories, he says: 'We do not accept the first, for it seems to us *against* Scripture; nor the second, for it *distorts* Scripture; nor the third, for it *goes beyond* Scripture.' In other words, he anticipated the teaching afterwards set forth by myself and Dr. Plummer.

Dr. Clemence seems to me to have himself gone 'beyond' the teaching of the Bible, by saying that 'No human spirit reaches the crucial point of its

probation till it has come into contact with the claims of Christ for acceptance or rejection.' He overlooks Ro 2¹⁴⁻¹⁶, where Paul asserts that in the law written in their hearts the Gentiles have a standard by which they will be judged in the Great Day.

In close agreement with Dr. Clemence, except the point just mentioned, I wrote a series of articles published in *The Expositor* for January to June 1890. My volume on *The Last Things* (Hodder & Stoughton) appeared in 1897; the fifth edition in 1905. In this volume, I discussed the teaching of the New Testament on the topic before us; and endeavoured to show that its various writers agree to assert plainly that the punishment of the wicked will be utter and final ruin; that the Synoptic Gospels and the Book of Revelation teach that this ruin will be accompanied by actual suffering; but that nothing in the New Testament justifies the assertion that this suffering or the existence of the ruined ones will be endless. In my view, the precise nature of their doom lies hidden in the secret purpose of God.

Soon after my volume appeared, I was delighted to find that it had been anticipated in a volume by W. E. Gladstone, entitled *Studies Subsidiary to the Works of Bishop Butler* (Clarendon Press). At considerable length he calls attention, as I do, to the confusion caused by the frequent use of the term 'Immortality of the Soul,' sometimes to mean its survival of death; at other times, the endless survival of all human souls: and he protests strongly against this last doctrine as not taught in the Bible, and as being a great disturbing element obscuring and confusing the whole matter of the doom of the lost.

A writer in the *London Quarterly Review*, October 1910, p. 302, says 'that touching future punishment, Mr. Gladstone committed himself to views which are neither catholic nor modern, which can neither claim the authority of Scripture, nor the support of Reason in the highest and best sense of the word. But, on p. 227 (smaller edition) of the above work, Mr. Gladstone utterly repudiates such committal. His suggestion is quoted in full on p. 310 f. of my *Last Things*. To the words I have quoted, he adds, 'Let me repeat that my object in this strain of remark is not to suggest the acceptance of doctrines, hardly even to open possibilities. . . . I open one or two doors of mere speculation, to remind other speculators that they are many; that

the prospect which they disclose is not inviting to the cautious and thoughtful mind; and I suggest again and again the question whether there is any safer course than to accept the declarations of the Holy Scriptures which award the just doom of suffering to sin, and leave the sin and the suffering too, where alone they can be safely left in the hands of the Divine and unerring Judge.'

The reviewer says that Mr. Gladstone was not a theologian. Perhaps not. But, in spite of a rather wearisome verbosity, his learned, intelligent, cautious, and plain-spoken treatment of this subject, setting in clear light its main points, and written amid the severe strain of his public life, puts to shame many professed theologians.

Dr. Gore, Bishop of Birmingham, in vol. ii. pp. 210 ff., of his *Practical Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans*, in a note on this subject, mentions and accepts the teaching of the above volumes by Mr. Gladstone and myself; and restates it in concise and accurate language much better than mine.

The root of all the errors against which the above writers protest is the doctrine of the Immortality of the Soul, *i.e.* the endless and conscious permanence of all human souls, which in the latter part of the second century crept unperceived into the Christian Church. That it came from Plato, we learn from Tertullian: see my *Last Things*, p. 214. It was welcomed as a useful deterrent from sin; and has lived on to our days. But it has no vestige of support in the Bible: for no sentence is found there which could not have been written by one who utterly repudiated this doctrine.

Moreover, in the New Testament, 'Eternal Life,' which is practically the same as 'Immortality,' is always spoken of, not as an endowment common to man, but as a reward of the righteous, *e.g.* Mt 16¹⁶, 17, 29, Jn 3¹⁶ 5²⁴, Ro 2⁷ 6²², 23. The future state of the wicked is never once called 'life': it is 'the second death.' Nor throughout the Bible is there any suggestion of the endless permanence of all human souls.

This last negative assertion finds singular confirmation in an interesting volume by Dr. S. D. F. Salmond, first published in 1895 (T. & T. Clark), entitled *The Christian Doctrine of Immortality*. This title, he explains, in the preface to the First Edition, by saying, 'Life, eternal life, the immortality of the man, not the immortality of the

soul, is the message of the Bible, alike in Old Testament and in New' (in the O.T., the only mention of it is Dn 12²; and the references to a life beyond death are few and obscure). Dr. Salmond thus seems to repudiate the popular doctrine. But on p. 487 he quotes with approval a writer who says that the notion of a soul immortal enough to live through death, but not immortal enough to live for ever, is too childish to be entertained.' On p. 497 he asks, 'If man is not inherently immortal, why should the sinful man subsist at all after death?' The answer is easy. God has decreed that, whatever a man sows, this he shall also reap. And, because for this reaping there is not space in the present life, He has decreed that after death comes Judgment, this involving conscious existence at least for a time. But this moral necessity for the survival of the wicked affords no proof or presumption that they will abide for ever in suffering. For we can conceive no moral ends to be gained by endless permanence of evil in this awful form, an abiding blemish on the rescued and glorified universe of God.

Dr. W. N. Clarke, in his very able *Outline of Christian Theology* (T. & T. Clark), p. 192, writes that 'Man is immortal, i.e. the human personality is undying. The spirit is the person, and what is here affirmed is that the human spirit, with its essential powers in which it resembles God, is destined to live on endlessly. A human being will never cease to be a human being.' This assertion he supports by three arguments which refer only to the survival of death, and to the immortality of the righteous. On p. 198, he adds, 'Christ does not affirm in so many words that all men live for ever, but He powerfully teaches it by His attitude and mode of appeal to men.' But of this Dr. Clarke gives no proof or presumption.

That these two writers, while asserting or assuming the Immortality of the Soul, bring no proof that this doctrine was held by the writers of the New Testament, is strong presumptive proof that it was not taught by them or by Christ. And they illustrate two opposite results of this baseless doctrine: for Dr. Salmond seems to accept the traditional belief of the endless suffering of the lost, while Dr. Clarke seems to cherish a hope of their ultimate salvation. They thus, for very insufficient reasons, ignore another alternative which

the writers of the New Testament leave open, namely, the ultimate extinction of the lost; an alternative less exposed to objection than either of the two alternatives just mentioned.

But Dr. Clarke does well in saying that nothing in the Bible justifies the assertion that the destiny of all, including little children, is fixed at death. On the other hand, we find there no hint of any probation beyond the grave. Of this silence, the frequent appeal to the altogether obscure passage, 1 P 3^{19, 20} 4⁶, so often appealed to as suggesting a further probation, is a clear indication. Such passages are a very unsafe foundation for theological doctrine, or even speculation. On this whole subject, we must admit the limitations of our knowledge. The Sacred Records were given, not to gratify curiosity touching the fate of others, but to show us a path in which we may ourselves walk safely with assured hope. The case of those, in any land, who have not heard fully and fairly the offer of salvation, or were incapable of understanding it, we must leave in the hands of Him who died for all men.

The solemn topic of Retribution beyond the grave is, like all else most worth knowing, surrounded, as to details, by impenetrable mystery. But all that we need to know is absolutely certain. Seen in the light of the imperative majesty of the inborn Moral Sense, which Paul calls 'the Law written in the hearts' of all men, the imperfect retribution of the present life reveals clearly a retribution, within the veil, of reward and punishment. In addition to this earlier revelation, Christ announced for all who put faith in Him and walk in His steps, endless blessedness with God in heaven; and, for all who reject this great salvation, utter ruin, the loss of all that gives worth to existence. His earliest followers believed, and report Him as teaching, implicitly, that this ruin will be final. All this, His heralds are bound to proclaim, in His name. But, as it seems to me, more than this, we have no right to say.

What, above all, is most needed is that our best scholars and theologians take us into their confidence, and give us fully, frankly, and without reserve the results of their own research, and of their most mature thoughts, on this all-important and solemn topic. If they would do this, I believe that we should find, in reference to it, a fair approach to unanimity.