

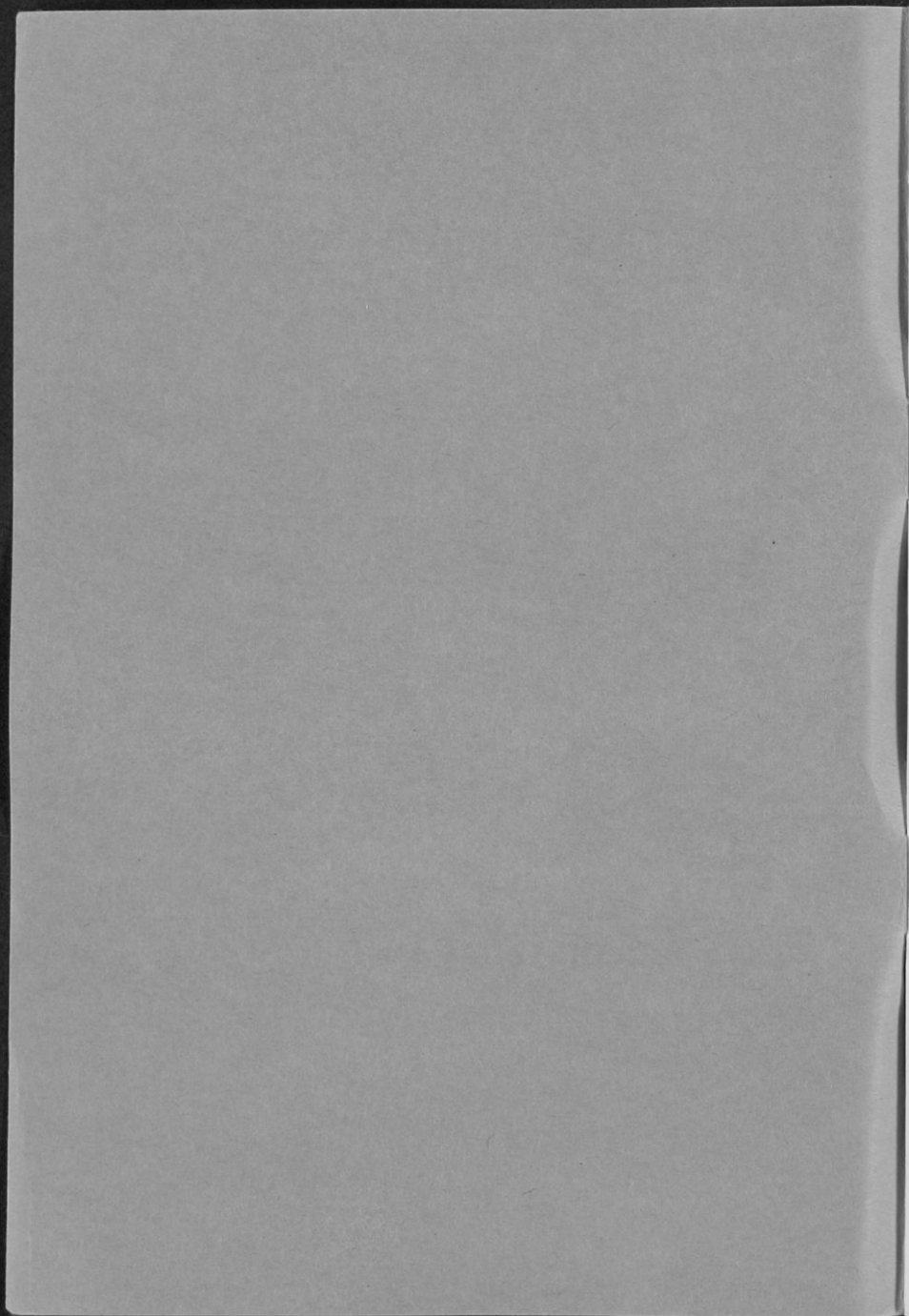
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Eternal Punishment

By
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ETERNAL PUNISHMENT

I.

THE JUDGMENT.

"Arise, ye dead, and come to Judgment."



HOW various are our feelings as we think of death. To a pious Christian who is suffering from illness, it is a happy release from pain. To a soul burdened with sins unconfessed, unforgiven, it is a dark abyss, the thought of which he instantly expels from his mind. But good or bad, we all know that we are moving ceaselessly along a street that ends in a court room, where Christ is enthroned as Judge, and where we are to be arraigned for trial. Alas, that so many of us add fault upon fault, as step by step we shorten the distance between us and the stern glance of our Judge! Moreover, this awful preparation for our trial goes on under the continual observation of the Judge Himself, for as Job says: "Doth He not consider my ways, and number all my steps?"¹

To a carnal man the future state is covered with darkness and enshrouded in the mists of death. Who shall guide us in its ways and show us even its nearest borders?

¹Job xxxi. 4.



CONSCIENCE.

Every Christian has within himself the guide book of Eternity in his own conscience. His memory is God's pen, which has inscribed upon the tablet of his soul the narrative of his life, with all its good and ill. Each conscious act, word, or even thought is written there, to be rigidly inspected finally by Him Who made the record. Death is the door which leads into the court room of Jesus Christ, our Creator, our Master.

"The kingdom of heaven," says Our Lord, "is like to a king who would take an account of his servants."² Not seldom the accounting begins without any warning, except the constant reproaches of conscience; the example of others snatched quickly away; the admonitions of devout friends. Look at your physical system, how complicated it is, and how easily it may break down. For every organ there are various mortal maladies. Look about you. The world you live in is filled with menaces of destruction.

DEATH'S VOICE.

Death says, "I own the air you breathe; I sow it with evil pestilence as a farmer sows his field with grain. I own the earth you tread, and it conceals my fatal drugs. I have secreted poison in half the plants of the meadow and woods. I have the choice of a thousand ways of killing you. I command a vast army of accidental fatalities. Both open and secret

²Matt. xviii. 23.

are my battles against your life, and never yet have I lost a battle."

Such is the proclamation of death. "Behold the Judge standeth before the door."³ Death is the door, the Judge is Jesus Christ. Yet, oh, my God! I go on full of self-complacency, with absolute assurance of the future. *My* King will never come, *my* accounts will never be examined.

Can it be that God's word is true for *me*? "The Lord trieth the just and the unjust."⁴ Oh, Jesus! I have many defects, but none of them is so full of criminal folly as my ignoring the future citation of my soul before Thy awful tribunal. I deeply deplore this neglect, I promise to amend it, especially in my examination of conscience, which from this moment shall no longer be a mere formality, but a genuine anticipation of Thy dread scrutiny. No more counterfeit self-accusations! I will call to my side my guardian angel, destined to support my spirit, when it shall quail under Thy all-seeing eye, and I will beg him to share with me his knowledge of Thy justice, and his knowledge of my weakness.

REFLECTIONS.

Then indeed I shall know, not alone the foulness of my great sins, but the meanness of my little sins. For how often have I done and said trifling things, as I forced myself to rate them, which nevertheless were most unbecoming in a person of my calling. On that day I shall know the guilt of a bad temper, and

³James v. 9.

⁴Ps. x. 6.

taste the bitterness of remorse for uttering words wounding to the feelings of others. How would it sound—that hot, angry answer of mine—if spoken over my dead body in God’s judgment hall? Well does the Wise Man say: “In all thy works remember thy last end and thou shalt never sin.”⁵

St. Peter Fourier has said that in writing letters self-love drips from our finger tips into our ink, and through our pens on to our paper. How few of us realize that by tongue or pen we are incessantly drawing up evidence for or against ourselves at the divine tribunal according to the warning of Jesus Himself: “By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.”⁶

THE PARTICULAR JUDGMENT.

The soul stands alone before the Judge. Let the body sleep on, it is weary enough, but for the spirit the sleepless ages of eternity now begin. They begin with the judgment of its whole life by Jesus Christ, Whom it has lovingly worshipped or malignantly blasphemed. He stands robed in awful majesty, and He penetrates the soul with fear.

Ah! now is seen the difference between the things of time and the things of eternity, for in the coffin, enwrapped in rottenness, is all that is of the world, “the concupiscence of the flesh, the concupiscence of the eyes and the pride of life.”⁷ And all that is of God is brought by the soul from the world into the light of that divine Face. The very least thought of

⁵Eccclus. vii. 40.

⁶Matt. xii. 37.

⁷John ii. 16.

sorrow for sin, or sympathy for Jesus Crucified, or trust in His merits, or love of one's neighbor for His sake is there with its claim of everlasting merit.

The soul is covered with unforgiven sins as a body might be with ulcers, with spiritual sores which are now incurable forever. Alone, the soul must meet the Judge. The soul of a prince shall be as solitary as the soul of a swineherd; a master of twenty languages shall stammer out his answers as foolishly as an idiot. Wealth and honors are left behind, and only the works of love or of hate are now left to the soul. The guilt of unforgiven sins sinks deep into the soul, there to burn eternally.

The sinner caught in the snare of his own sins feels, rather than hears, the dread announcement: "I am the Lord Who searches the hearts, and proves the reins; Who gives to everyone according to his way, and according to the fruit of his devices."⁸

THE GUILTY ONE.

Oh, culprit soul at the tribunal of God, He knows all. He saw thee in every one of thy sins, for thou wert under His very eye when thou didst offend Him. He touched thee—His almighty hand was on thee, though thou knewest it not: His hand was on thee, His heart was turned against thee. The Heart that overflowed with kindness for the sinner during so many years, that sent so many warnings and pleaded by so many inspirations of grace, shall plead for its love never again, is done with warnings, and sits now upon the terrible throne of justice.

And the angel of record proclaims: "Now therefore stand up, that I may plead in judgment against you before the Lord, concerning all the kindness of the Lord which He hath shown to you."⁹

The Scripture says of the wicked man, that the devil shall stand "at his right hand"¹⁰ claiming his own, clamoring for that soul, whose innermost thought for so long, gave hearty and entire welcome to his foulest suggestions, whose every sense and faculty was willingly subject to his allurements. How awful now is the monster's gladness in his victory!

OUR HOPE.

How different shall be my case, I humbly trust. How joyful will I be, that Jesus Christ is my Judge, since my soul shall be all alive with love of Him. He is infinitely wise, therefore He reads my heart's loyalty to Him, as it breathes forth its timid yet confident greetings: "I found Him Whom my soul loveth, I held Him and I would not let Him go."¹¹ He is all powerful, therefore He is mighty to save me; instead of fearing His power, I am glad of it.

For the love of Jesus tempers the dread of the impending trial, and soothes the soul's anxious fears. With the yearning cry of the Psalmist it turns towards the Judge: "Say to my soul, I am thy salvation."¹² Lord, didst Thou not die for me? Have I not loved Thee as my salvation, and thanked Thee for Thy promise of heaven most sincerely? Now that I

⁹1 Kings xli. 7.

¹⁰Ps. cviii. 6.

¹¹Cant. iii. 4.

¹²Ps. xxxiv. 3.

am helpless before Thee let me not perish. "What a boon it will be at the hour of death," exclaims St. Teresa, "when we are going we know not where, to think we are to be judged by Him Whom we have loved above all things, with an ardor that has crushed self-love."¹³

THE GOOD.

How blessed the lot of that soul, who when he is cited to that fateful court may say truthfully: "Lord Jesus it is many a year since I willingly committed even a venial-fault against Thy love; I have persevered to the end; may I not ask of Thee the fulfillment of Thy promise? 'Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee the crown of life.'¹⁴ Oh, Jesus! great has been my guilt. I confess that at times I have been a vile sinner against Thy law and Thy light, and Thy adorable Self. But when my enemy cries out against me, Thou shalt be my defense, I will point to Thee and say: 'He loved me, He delivered Himself up for me.'¹⁵ Thy Blood, oh, Jesus, has ransomed me, Thy Spirit has long since accepted my repentance. The thought of Thee, my Savior, has been my mainstay for years; it has tempered my prosperity and comforted my adversity; the remembrance of Thy love on Calvary has aroused my sloth unto prayer and unto work; it has overflowed my soul with thanksgiving, it has consoled me in my doubts; it has flooded my death chamber with the yearnings of blessed hope."

¹³Way of Perfection, Stanbrook, ch. xl., 7.

¹⁴Apoc. ii. 10.

¹⁵Gal. ii. 20.

"Depart!" or "Come!" A simple word is spoken, and eternal joy or woe has begun.

"DEPART"!

"Depart!" Not: "Thou hast failed, but I give thee leave to try once more, armed against thy weakness by the memory of this day." No, not so, but thus: "Thy time of probation is past and gone forever. Although the world shall last yet thousands of years, not one moment of them all shall be thine. Many times over hast thou been pardoned and given further opportunity to love Me—never again. Dishonor and suffering and bitterness of spirit are thine forever. 'Depart!'"

"COME"!

When the joyful word, "Come!" is spoken, the Son of God causes the soul to behold, as in a noonday sun, the infinite goodness of God expended so lavishly upon it during its whole life, eliciting an adoration and love more rapt than the earthly ecstasies of any Saint. At the same time the happy soul beholds its good works shining with heaven's light, for Our Lord has said: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord, . . . for their works do follow them:"¹⁶ all works and words and desires which spring from love of God and man, even the least, even those that were forgotten, even such as the soul doubted were praiseworthy. Then what seemed life, a weary round of spiritual exercises, will be seen as a great ladder

¹⁶Apoc. xiv. 13.

reaching heavenwards into the Heart of Jesus, luminous with angels ascending upwards with the soul's merits, and coming downwards laden with God's plentiful graces. Then shall be realized our Savior's promise to souls "without guile." "Amen, amen, I say to you, you shall see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."¹⁷

Consider attentively those two words of Our Lord, "Depart" and "Come." The moment they are spoken thou art saved or lost, for He Who speaks them is thy divine Judge. What thou hast done settles thy fate for eternity, not what thou shalt do. Millions of sinners shall be saved in the future; thou, now or never. Thou shalt henceforth be unspeakably happy with God's own happiness, or unspeakably miserable with thy own unchangeable wickedness.

THE ETERNAL JUDGMENT

And now let us meditate briefly on the second judgment of God, the last or general one, which affirms the particular one, and promulgates its sentence to the whole world. As the body's destruction immediately preceded the individual soul's first arraignment before God, so shall the destruction of this material world go before the second arraignment, which is that of the entire race of man. Our Savior has prophesied it with much detail, beginning with the destruction of the universe: "And immediately after the tribulations of those days, the sun shall be dark-

¹⁷John 1. 51.

ened and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be moved."¹⁸ What a lesson this is of the vanity of all worldly things.

Judgment day has come, the last prayer has been offered, the last crime committed; the last hour is struck. The death sentence of the human race is uttered, for the end of the world is at hand. The heavens have passed away, the earth has been scourged by fire, that universal conflagration whose fierce rage is foretold in many parts of Holy Writ. "The day of the Lord," exclaims St. Peter, "in which the heavens shall pass away with great violence and the elements shall be melted with heat, and the earth and the works that are in it shall be burnt up."¹⁹ This busy world has been covered with flames and becomes a scorching desert, a dark and vacant orb wheeling through space. No sound of human voice is heard, nor voice of bird or beast, no dash of the waves of the sea, nor rippling of the waters of the streams; not a blade of grass nor a leaf of a tree is left. Our beautiful globe is now a vast solitude, a heap of ashes; let it perish! But no, for it is a shrine of God's love; it is the grave of His Saints and of His faithful children; it is about to be used as the hall of His justice.

THE END OF THE WORLD.

The hour is come. The darkness is pierced by a gleam from above, steadily brightening like the dawn of a new day, till in the midst of dazzling splendor

¹⁸Matt. xxiv. 29.

¹⁹2 Peter iii. 10.

the form of an angel is seen approaching the earth. "And I saw another mighty angel," says St. John, "come down from the heaven . . . and his face was as the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire . . . and he set his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot upon the land. And he cried out with a loud voice."²⁰ St. Paul speaks of this divine summons as the trumpet of God calling men to judgment: "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet, for the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall rise again."²¹

"ARISE, YE DEAD."

"Arise ye dead and come to judgment!" The dark vaults of hell resound with this command, and its inmates are driven forth upon the earth.

"Arise ye dead and come to judgment!" Purgatory ceases to be, and its penitent souls, glorious now with their perfect atonement, appear upon the earth.

"Arise ye dead and come to judgment!" Heaven suspends its happy anthems, and its millions and millions of happy spirits, in awesome expectation, wing their flight downward to the universal assembly of their race. All mankind must hear their Sovereign Master proclaim their eternal destiny.

As these souls in their countless myriads touch the surface of the earth, each one draws to him the ashes of his body, as the lodestone attracts the filings of steel, "for the dead shall rise again incorruptible."²² Behold the races of mankind mingling together for mutual judgment and for final farewell. Behold the

²⁰Apoc. x. 1, 2, 3.

²¹1 Cor. xv. 52.

²²1 Cor. xv. 52.

friends of God serene and beautiful, arrayed in the habiliments of heaven, passing in and out among the monstrous forms of the enemies of God.

THE REASON.

Let us pause to consider how rightly God claims the general judgment of all mankind assembled publicly together, since in no better way can He vindicate His honor.

Every sin of man is a shame to God, Who is man's Father and must feel the disgrace of His children. The honor of God is openly profaned by sinners, flagrantly so by certain classes of them, such as blasphemers, apostates, drunkards, wicked parents, unnatural children. These and all other sinners seem to defy God in their lifetime with immunity. His honor is, therefore, entitled finally to a public vindication. Furthermore, God's servants merit a public vindication, for they have been laughed to scorn by the impious. If a man forgive his enemies for Christ's sake, he is derided as a coward. If he is strict in the observance of the Ten Commandments, he is laughed at as a fool. If he follows a retired, prayerful life, he is called a misanthrope. If he yields up his rights to others for Christ's sake, he is scoffed at as mean spirited.

Now the great day has come when these faithful followers of Christ shall be vindicated. They shall be publicly exhibited not only as the friends of God, but as the only true men, the real type of our race and nature. With the end of the world comes

the end of the criminal folly of the wicked, and the justification of the wisdom of Christ's faithful adherents. Behold then the shame of the lost! We are told that what criminals most fear on the gallows is not the agony of death itself, but rather the shame of being hanged in public. It is worse than death to the guilty wretch to come out before the great mob, pinioned, bareheaded, the hangman shoving him forward, the gibbet looming overhead. So shall it be with every lost soul at the end of the world. St. Basil says that the shame of the judgment day will be a worse torture than the fire and darkness of hell itself.

HYPOCRITES.

Who can picture the misery of hypocrites on that day, and of those who have caused others to sin. Men seldom sin alone, though they may seem to do so. The most hidden wickedness does some harm to the sinner's fellow men, if only indirectly. It is just, therefore, that finally secret vice should be publicly unveiled. The last judgment is indeed a time of woe to secret sinners, a day of doom to hypocrites.

Two men were once in hot dispute, when one took up pencil and paper and began to write down what the other was saying. Instantly he stopped talking; and then said with much agitation: "I will not stand that, I will not say another word." Our conscience writes and pictures thus all our deeds and words with the truthfulness of God, so we carry in our own souls the principal witness of our good and evil, which is to be fully exhibited at the last day. "The Lord search-

eth all hearts," says Holy Scripture, "and understandeth all the thoughts of minds."²³ At the day of judgment He will make that prerogative common to all men—we shall know one another as God knows us.

If our vocation is perfection every sin is doubled by one of hypocrisy. Hypocrisy complicates the malice of other sins, deepens it, deceives men and outrages God. It is the meanest of vices, it makes one's life a living lie. At the last judgment it shall be allotted its full share of ignominy; on that day we shall be seen even as we are. Our Savior says of hypocrites and liars: "Without are dogs and sorcerers, and unchaste and murderers and servers of idols, and everyone that loveth and maketh a lie."²⁴ The reckoning of that awful day awaits liars and whisperers and mischief makers—the pest of communities and the ruin of families, wrenching asunder in hate those whom God has joined together in love. An awful day of manifestation and execration of sneaking sinners and underhand evildoers shall be that day of doom.

A PRAYER.

Christ's sentence will close the judgment day. Oh, let us not dwell on the sentence of eternal wrath launched against the wicked when the terrible arraignment is over. Please God *it is not for us*. Let us each and all humbly beg of the Almighty Judge: "Let my heart be undefiled in Thy justification that I may not be confounded."²⁵ When the sheep shall

²³1 Par. xxviii. 9.

²⁴Apoc. xxii. 15.

²⁵Ps. cxviii. 80.

be divided from the goats, let us trust that we shall be placed on the right hand of the Son of Man, that we shall look upon Him with perfect gladness, and respond quickly to His words of everlasting life: "Come, ye blessed of My Father, possess the kingdom prepared for you."²⁶ Dost Thou bid me come to Thee, oh, Jesus, Thou beloved of my heart? My eager ambition, my only joy, these many years has been to come to Thee, to remain with Thee forever. Now I hear Thy words of invitation, "Come, ye blessed," now I see Thy gracious arms outstretched to receive me. "Thy voice is sweet, and Thy face comely;"²⁷ yea, Lord Jesus, I come to Thee. Thy love shall be my joy throughout the eternal years; Thy Father's house my abiding place forever.

II.

THE PENALTY.

"Between us and you there is fixed a great chaos, so that they who would pass from hence to you cannot, nor from thence come hither" (Luke xvi. 26).²⁸

After the last day chaos will divide the human

²⁶Matt. xxv. 34.

²⁷Cant. ii. 14.

²⁸The complete text is this: "And the rich man also died, and was buried in hell. And lifting up his eyes when he was in torments, he saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried, and said: Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, to cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame. And Abraham said to him: Son, remember that thou didst receive good things in thy lifetime, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is fixed a great chaos, so that they who would pass from hence to you cannot, nor from thence come hither" (Luke xvi. 22-26).

race,—chaos, vacant, silent, immeasurable space, with neither earth beneath it, nor sky above it. On one side the bliss of Paradise, and the friends of God; on the other, torments and flames, and the enemies of God in eternal banishment. What a terrible fate. What horror can compare with the least possibility of such a doom. How business and pleasure and ambition fade away into foolish dreams, in presence of the thought of damnation; and how sin takes on its real aspect, for sin is the monstrous shape that opens the door of hell to us, and closes it upon us forever.

Let us feel in spirit that fire; let us look into those fierce and hateful countenances; let us listen to the blaspheming voices of the immense multitude of the lost, and draw therefrom lessons of fear of God, and desire for heaven.

A UNIVERSAL BELIEF.

To meditate thus has been the sad task of the more thoughtful men of every race from the beginning of the world. The eternal separation of the good and evil spirits has been a dogma of every religion, false as well as true. It was the belief of the ancient Hindoos in the dim ages of that earliest people. The sacred books of the Persians record the doctrine of eternal punishment before the days of Abraham, and so do the monuments of ancient Egypt. The Greeks and Romans were the most enlightened nations of antiquity, and in their degeneracy they had every reason to desire that iniquity should escape future retribution; yet their mythology teaches eternal punish-

ment in a thousand places, and that dread belief was taught even by their philosophers, who scoffed at the mythology and the superstition of the common people, and yet accepted the doctrine of the eternal separation of good and evil souls hereafter. We find it taught by Greek and Latin poets, historians, orators, and legislators. Indeed, the few leading pagans who refused belief in eternal retribution, usually denied immortality altogether.

It seems to have been inseparable from every enduring and widely-diffused religious belief in human history. Hell has a name in every tongue, ancient or modern, a place in every widespread system of morality. In our own times the sects which reject it are few and dwindling; and usually skeptical of other articles of religious belief. Why this common consent—as it may rightly be called—upon a religious tenet so unwelcome to sinful humanity? Perhaps God has supernaturally interfered to preserve this confession of His sovereign justice amid the ruin of faith in so many other truths of His original revelation. Or perhaps it is an inevitable conclusion from sound reasoning, and witnesses to humanity's native feeling of the absolute difference, here and hereafter, between good and evil. Men are constantly passing into eternity, some of them full of evil, others of good; and reason affirms that conditions so radical shall be considered permanent till evidence is given of a change. What is so essentially different as a bad spirit and a good one?—essentially, absolutely, eternally different. There is as much difference between

the bad and the good in this life as between hell and heaven in the next. This is one reason why men have made the existence of eternal punishment a universal dogma.

ARGUMENTS.

Some take refuge in the thought of a future probation, by means of which men bad in this life become good in the next. But this delusion is founded on no revelation of God, backed by no experience of human turpitude, derived from no process of reasoning. If men will be wicked for fifty years, how can you know that they will cease to be wicked after fifty centuries? Is not this life long enough for a fair trial of men's good will? Do men grow morally better in the process of sinning? And how, may we ask, is a period of probation which is *certain* to end in virtue, compatible with men's free will? The problem of the existence of evil and its future punishment is not without its difficulties; but how do you lessen them by transferring from time to eternity the change of a free soul from sin to repentance?

Others, relying on visionary interpretations of some texts of Scripture, abolish hell by substituting the annihilation of sinners at the point of death—a deeper mystery than hell itself. Annihilation is an insufferable, unthinkable mystery. Can either of these theories have been the true one all the time, whilst during long series of human generations every class of teacher, pagan and Hebrew and Christian, has taught the contrary?

CATHOLIC TEACHING.

You know that the Church of Christ stands or falls with this dogma, as venerable in the tradition of the ages as it is terrifying to human depravity. It is dogmatic Catholic truth that there is a hell in dire reality; that its pains are eternal; that impenitent sinners are there imprisoned at the moment of death; and that the penalties they suffer are various in accordance with their various guilt.

We need hardly dwell on the Scripture proofs, so numerous, so plain, so universally distributed through a book so true and so divine that it has God for its author. We could cite literally hundreds of passages. Recall the text of the discourse, in which Jesus Christ, the most loving heart that ever beat, the sinner's dearest, most constant and most patient friend, cites the words spoken to the unrepentant and reprobate souls in hell: "Between us and you there is fixed a great chaos, so that they who would pass from hence to you cannot, nor from thence come hither." It tells of the fiat of infinite power, sitting in judgment upon souls who have deliberately and finally spurned the advances of infinite love.

THE MYSTERY.

We are far from saying that there is no mystery here. But the nearer we approach God, the more do His infinite attributes overwhelm us with mystery. If God's justice were the only mystery, we should indeed be confounded. But is it so? Is that awful fact

a greater mystery than Calvary? Is infinite love less amazing than infinite justice? From whatever side we approach the divine majesty, we meet with incomprehensible truths. Look at that gibbet at the gate of Jerusalem: it is dripping with the blood of the God-man dying for sinners. Tell me, can you explain *that* more easily than the spectacle that appals us as we gaze into hell?

What, again, can compare in mystery with the criminal folly and the deliberate malice of an instructed Catholic calmly risking hell, year in and year out, for the sake of some disgusting self-indulgence?

UNITY OF DOCTRINE.

Mystery or no mystery, we must accept God's teaching through His Church. Whether it pleases us or not, we know that He is responsible for Catholic doctrine. Now divine truth is one. God's plan of time, eternity, reward and punishment is one. God, conscience, the reality of good and evil, probation here and recompense in joy or sorrow hereafter, the Atonement of Christ and its criminal rejection by mortal sin—all the facts and events and dogmas of religion make one inseparably connected body of doctrine. The garden of Eden, Sinai, Bethlehem, Calvary, the valley of the judgment, the prison of Gehenna, are all one revelation of the single purpose of the one God to save men. They are all an offer of infinite love by the Supreme Ruler of the universe, to be accepted or rejected freely, and with due recompense

in weal or woe in either case. Notice, then, that the denial of eternal punishment is usually a sign of universal doubt. It means the rejection of God's Church, the denial of the inspiration of Holy Scripture, of the Divinity of Christ, of the fact that He died for our salvation, or even of our need of salvation; and, too, it often ends in the denial even of the guilt of sin and of human immortality.

Christian faith, on the other hand, accepts all, and so it must be. I cannot be a Christian and take Christ's teaching piece-meal, picking and choosing what pleases me and rejecting the rest. And, practically speaking, we know that if there is any way whatsoever of dealing with God through conscience, it is based on the belief that as sure as there is a God, He has a plan of future rewards and punishments, both equally eternal. Reasoning minds, therefore, have all but universally given eternity as a quality of future punishment no less than of future rewards.

NATURE OF HELL.

Let us now consider the nature of the punishment of sinners hereafter. We know that hell is banishment from God. But that means from God's love, for from His presence there can be no escape, nor from His power: "If I descend into hell, Thou art there,"²⁹ exclaims the Psalmist; even in hell art Thou with Thy awful justice, with Thy everlasting reproaches. This it is that generates in the lost soul the essence of his suffering. Whatever else engages

²⁹Ps. cxxxviii. 8.

him, the thought of God is never absent, especially the thought of God's goodness. A moment's consideration reveals the torment of this mental state.

You know that mortal sin is turning away from God, as a soldier treacherously turns away from his colors and his country to join the enemy. Now, this aversion from God is always an insult to God, and is often openly contemptuous and presumptuous, a preference of something utterly vile, such as sensual indulgence, love of money or ignoble sloth. In hell this contempt of God will be turned into terror, aversion will be hardened into hatred—hatred of a Being that the reprobate knows is worthy of infinite love. No other suffering in hell can equal the sense of degradation of a Christian finding himself hating Jesus Crucified; and with this horrible feeling of hating God is the sinner's realization that God hates him—the final, complete conviction that he is and must ever continue to be an object of profoundest aversion to a being infinitely loving.

HATRED.

This fills the lost soul with a tumult of horror. There rages forever within him a torrent of baffled rage against God, of hate of the divine goodness, of blasphemous reproach against God. Something like this it is that is called the pain of loss. The reprobate soul has lost God as friend, and found Him,—(O how many times had he been warned that he ran the risk of it!),—as judge, as executioner, as the stern adjuster of right against wrong. The power that keeps the fire

burning him, that keeps alive the worm of remorse gnawing at his vitals forever, is the power of omnipotent deity, eternally, irrevocably vindicating His love, so long despised, so many times set aside, coldly and calmly, even with ridicule and scoffing. Now forever and ever the lost soul seeks to match God's infinite justice with an infinitude of hate.

Can you conceive a worse torment? Did you ever hear of a deeper horror? The more that soul suffers, the more he hates God; the more he hates God, the more he loathes himself. God—this is his thought—is infinitely good, and I hate Him with every atom of my being; Jesus Christ died for love of me, and my inmost soul burns with hatred for Jesus Christ. I hate Him with deliberate, unchanging, defiant hatred. A thousand times over He offered me His love and I refused it. I loved impurity and drink and money better. I rejected His love; and now He forces His justice upon me and I must accept it, and I must and I do return it with hate. I must curse Him, and I do curse Him forever. O well does Our Lord counsel us to fear not anyone who can inflict death of the body, but rather to fear "Him Who hath power to cast both soul and body in hell."³⁰ Yet this can never happen until our own malice has earned it.

LONGING FOR HEAVEN.

Coupled with this fierce conflict of the soul with its own better self—a war never interrupted, never to be followed by peace—is its equally constant longing

³⁰Luke xii. 5.

for the happiness of heaven. Think of a soul engulfed in hell, and yet never ceasing to long for heaven. What words can describe the misery of being shut out from Paradise: the loss of that glorious region we call Heaven, a place abounding in every beauty, its joys exceeding the brightest dreams of youth, the deepest yearnings of old age, all perfectly adapted to our nature, absolutely fitted to enrapture beings of our nature, "prepared for you," as our Redeemer proclaims, "from the foundation of the world."³¹

Reflect what it will be to realize the full bliss of such a state, and, at the same time, to be buried in a place of torments originally made for the devil and his fallen angels.³² To be shut out from Paradise by an irrevocable sentence; to be excluded from the perfect enjoyment of God, and of Christ; the sweet familiarity with the angels and saints in their bewildering variety of glory and of love; to be denied the least access to them, the most remote sight or sound of them, yet never to be able to forget them, nor cease to long for them while furiously cursing them; dwelling in the company of demons, the most ferocious, the most cruel of beings, and associated eternally with men and women the most abandoned, the most malicious.

Closely allied to the pain of loss is the pain that comes from the full realization of eternity. During every pain in hell, the lost soul breathes in and out the thought of eternity as if it were a mental fire.

³¹Matt. xxv. 34.

³²Matt. xxv. 41.

"Depart from Me, ye accursed, into everlasting fire"³³—these are the words of eternal farewell at the day of judgment.

ETERNITY.

Eternity! To the infinite mind of God it is an everlasting present; to Him there is neither past nor future, only eternal *now*. Not so to the created mind. The reprobate soul must wearily count over every hour of a succession of hours that never shall end. Number the drops of water in the ocean, and mark a hundred years for each drop; then add (if you can) all those years together; and now imagine (if it be possible) the myriads of millions of ages it would all amount to. To the infinite God it is nothing, not a brief half hour. But what would it be to me in such a place as hell, knowing as I must, while each moment wearily passes away, that when at last those myriads of millions of ages were done, my punishment would be no nearer its end than at the beginning.

Here, then, as is commonly supposed, is the seat of that awful state of mind we call despair. But I know not if it be so. The poet says that "Hope springs eternal in the human breast." Will not the reprobate suffer from delusive hopes of deliverance, an unbidden, unreasonable, dreamy expectancy of his being for some reason or other made an exception and saved at last? Delusive indeed, yet rising by instinct of nature only to torment and mock the soul more cruelly.

³³Matt. xxv. 41.

An army officer who lost his right arm in battle returned after a prolonged absence to the service, apparently quite recovered, but soon he resigned. "It is all right," he said, "when things are quiet; but if any danger or excitement arises, I feel the ghost of my amputated arm moving and pointing and waving in the air—it gives me an insufferable torment." So will the frightful delusion of hope, the very ghost of hope, torment the sinner. In his lifetime he presumed on God's mercy, he abused the divine patience; in hell he shall suffer accordingly.

Eternity! Never; Forever!—Forever; Never! Let us place those words *never* and *forever* on one side, and on the other the sum total of our sins, and strive to realize what they should mean to us to be forever damned; never saved.

THE FOLLY OF SIN.

O what a fool, what a monster of folly, to run the risk of spending eternal ages in such a place. Prayer would have saved him, and instead he blasphemed God; Mass would have saved him, and Confession and Communion, as they did save many of his bad companions, but he made a joke of such things, and he kept on in his wickedness. How often was he warned—and in vain; how many times did his very sins sicken him, and yet he returned to them.

The gnawing worm of memory, as our blessed Savior calls it,³⁴ that faculty which makes the lost

³⁴Mark ix. 45.

soul's life before and after death one, forces him to live his whole life over again—the drunkard in the saloon or at home in the midst of his children whom he is deliberately ruining; the libertine amid his evil company; the gambler with his cards; the sluggard amid his criminal neglect of holy Mass and of the sacraments. The reprobate miserably thinks over every hour of his existence, committing every sin over again; recalling every act, word, thought of malice or of foulness, all with the vividness of a memory preternaturally acute. Such shall be the thoughts of his mind throughout eternity. In memory he shall see his parents and his other devout friends, whose good example he disregarded, although they are far away in heaven, and he shall hear them again reproaching him as they did in life and weeping over him; he shall see and hear them in a dreadful memory forever and forever.

But enough, perhaps too much, of this terrible subject. Let us lift our eyes and our hearts away from the deep pit. It is not to be our dwelling place. No, the blessedness of heaven shall be ours. However much the envious demon may call up my sins against me—they are long since forgiven. However much he may invoke God's wrath against me, I invoke His love in my favor, I trust in His mercy with absolute confidence. I know that my Redeemer says of me, poor penitent sinner though I be: "Because he hath hoped in Me, I will deliver him: I will protect him, because he hath known My name."³⁵

Let us also do what we can to save our fellow men from hell. If we can do little else, let us at least pray. We can surely weep and mourn with the Savior of the world over the loss of so many souls for whom He died, lamenting with Him that for them His blood has been shed in vain.

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