

ARTICLE V.

OBJECTIONS FROM REASON AGAINST THE ENDLESS PUNISHMENT OF THE WICKED.

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IN the following discussion it is proposed to consider, *first*, the proper source of information on the subject of future punishment; *secondly*, the bearing of the scripture testimony; *thirdly*, the force of the objections to endless punishment; and *fourthly*, the proper mode of overcoming objections.

I. Who but that Being to whom all the future is present, and who will determine the awards of the judgment, can inform us whether the retributions of the righteous and the wicked will be, alike, eternal? We cannot be so certain of the duration which justice must assign to the punishment of the unbeliever, as to be able to affirm that it cannot be continued without end. We cannot pretend to have, in our reason, any positive knowledge of the condition of the lost, like that founded on the testimony of a competent witness, that we should place it in competition with the word of Him who can neither falsify nor be deceived. The speculations of the pure reason, concerning the facts of another world, might be allowed some weight, in the absence of all reliable means of information; but to set them in opposition to the divine testimony, would be the same error in theology, as the denial of the facts of astronomy would be in physics, because inconsistent with the Ptolemaic system. It is no more the province of reason to supply the facts of the world to come, than it is to furnish the facts of the natural world. Man is but the interpreter of nature; and it was just when this truth began to be recognized, that the first decided impulse was given to the science of nature. So likewise is man only the interpreter of a revelation; it does not belong to him to make a revelation, or to revise and improve that which has been made. The philosophy, falsely so called,

which determines, in advance, the facts of a new dispensation, in a world without end, is like those natural philosophies which were framed before the phenomena of nature had been studied. We might guess, as well as we were able, what is likely to happen hereafter, if the only mind that is directly cognizant of the everlasting future, had not furnished us with all needful information. But having the sure word of prophecy, we do well that we take heed to it as to a light shining in a dark place. Our guesses can no more withstand the light of his testimony, than the Ptolemaic system could withstand the true system of nature. If it could be supposed possible that a number of finite minds should be present to all the future, and directly observe the eternal punishment of the wicked, their testimony would dash all opposing theories in pieces. How much more frail must all human conjectures be, which conflict with the word of Him whose knowledge is infallible, and who cannot lie.

Those who endeavor, by interpretation, to eliminate from the scriptures the doctrine of an endless punishment of the wicked, tacitly acknowledge that they are of divine authority. Supposing them to be the word of man, it would be immaterial what they taught on this or any other subject. No theorizer could then be anxious to bring them into agreement with himself. It is only with persons who thus recognize the authority of the scriptures while denying the eternity of future punishment, that we have any controversy. They admit that the declarations of the Bible respecting the penal sufferings of unbelievers are the best possible testimony concerning a fact. They grant that it is just as impossible to conceive that this testimony should be false, as that God, who is essentially and necessarily omniscient and true, should be himself deceived or should deceive others. We therefore have a right to expect that they will, in consistency with themselves, submit to the teachings of the scriptures. Their reason must be admitted to be fallible; the reason of other persons, who differ from them, may have discovered the truth; when there are so many clashing opinions, no one can pretend that *his* faculties, which indeed are

not superior to those of any other man, can be trusted with absolute certainty. No speculations of our reason can stand in opposition to *any* good testimony. No presumptions we might favor can influence, or tend to influence, any sound mind, in opposition to the *divine* testimony. In these circumstances, it is right to expect that a person in doubt about the eternal duration of future punishment, and appealing to the scriptures, will not impose his preconceived views upon the sacred text, and make it speak his mind; but will suffer his own views to be determined by the inspired word. He will come to the sacred oracles, not to dictate, but to learn.

II. Now to one in this candid temper, it must seem to be agreeable to the teachings of the New Testament, that the retributions of the wicked will be of the same duration as those of the righteous. An interpreter having no opinion of his own on the subject, but seeking to found one on the basis of the scripture testimony, must conceive that the word translated *everlasting* and *eternal*, in our English Bible (Matt. 25: 46), "these shall go away into *everlasting* punishment, but the righteous into life *eternal*" (for it is one and the same word), must express the same thought, when it is predicated of the pains of the lost, as when it qualifies the blessedness of the saved. If he supposes that it affirms endless duration of the latter, he must take it in the same sense when applied to the former. Should he make a difference between the recompense of the evil and the good, when the scriptures have made none, he would abandon his proper character as an interpreter of the revelation, and would assume that of a prophet. The word rendered *eternal*, appropriately designates the endless duration of the happiness of God's people, and it is accepted in this signification. Why does not the same epithet, when it is connected with punishment, as fitly denote an unlimited retribution of sorrow? No one can pretend that it does not, without forsaking his true position as an interpreter of the authoritative word of Christ.

Again: it must appear, to the candid student of God's

word, that the everlasting punishment which is denounced against the enemies of Christ, is a state of suffering. It could hardly occur to one who has no theory to support, that the absence of all feeling and all consciousness is punishment. It seems essential to the idea of punishment that it is an infliction, on a person, of some kind of pain. If no *person* is punished, there is no punishment. If no person is *aware* that he is punished, there is no punishment. Everlasting punishment is thus everlasting consciousness of pain, inflicted on account of sin. To say that everlasting punishment is annihilation, or a stroke of divine power that puts one forever beyond the reach of any further penal infliction, seems to be self-contradictory and absurd. And a further absurdity is involved in an infliction of *everlasting* non-existence: the supposition, namely, that non-existence is a state that lasts forever, and which the wicked will endure; whereas, they must have already endured their punishment before their annihilation, in the anticipation of that event. Annihilation might more fitly be called an eternal deliverance from punishment. The humble disciple, the mere learner, who sits at the feet of Christ and hears his word, will therefore understand by punishment, as it is denounced by our Lord, a condition of pain. He who puts the other construction, just alluded to, on his language, comes to the holy oracles to impose a meaning upon them, not to take one from them; to act the part of a rationalist philosopher, not of a believing Christian.

The scripture context confirms this view of punishment. Those who will be condemned of Christ will be sent away into everlasting fire. Of what is this an image, but of everlasting pain? We need not fear that we shall exaggerate the sufferings of lost men, if we represent them just as they are set forth by our Lord. Shall we dare to pronounce a milder sentence of condemnation on sinners than the infinitely merciful Saviour? Does he mean, by everlasting fire, a stroke of divine justice that ends the existence of the wicked, and excludes forever all possibility of an infliction of pain? The fire of perdition is also that which is "prepared for the Devil

and his angels." The enemies of Christ will share in their punishment. We learn from the Revelation (20: 10), that *their* doom will be infinitely more dreadful than that of a deliverance from all evil by annihilation: "They shall be tormented, day and night, forever and ever." This is that punishment prepared for them; and into this punishment all, standing on the left hand of the judgment-seat will be sent. It cannot be affirmed that sinners of our race will not have the physical power of endurance to sustain so heavy a weight of condemnation. Their life is not their own, but was imparted, and is upheld, by the power of God; and he is able to continue it as long as he sees that it may be necessary for the ends of justice. Moreover, a passage in the Revelation (which can be understood of nothing but this very retribution prepared for the fallen angels, and to such a reference of which no serious objection can be made) tells us that certain of the wicked of this world there described, will be tormented, with fire, forever and ever, and will know no rest, day nor night. Rev. 14: 10, 11.

It is certainly a fearful thing for a sinner, who knows that he himself is justly condemned and personally deserves all that the justice of God has in store for his enemies — for every man, therefore, it is a fearful thing — to believe that Christ will hereafter appear, to take such vengeance as this on them that know not God and obey not the gospel. But it is a much more fearful thing to deny it. Let God be true and every man (who would mitigate the severity of His denunciations against sin) a liar. When our Lord foretold, in the presence of Peter, the sufferings he should endure at Jerusalem, that falsely-benevolent disciple said to his Master: "Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall not be unto thee." But the Saviour turned and said unto Peter: "Get thee behind me, Satan; for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men." So likewise may it be said of every man who is more compassionate than Christ towards unbelievers. Their benevolence is not mercy, it is license. They are more concerned for the enjoyment of sinners, than for the righteousness of God. They would strip

his justice of nearly all its terrors ; would reduce the evil of sin and punishment, to a minimum ; would go far to place themselves among the number of those false prophets who cry peace and safety, when God says there is no peace. Christ is as much engaged for the righteousness of God as he is for the salvation of men. In him righteousness and peace have kissed each other. Shall we pretend to be more merciful than Christ ?

We ought, therefore, to interpret his words as the just judge interprets the laws of the state. The upright judge does not consider what the law ought to be, even although it is the law of fallible, sinful men. He is not set to make the law ; but to ascertain and apply it. He may be a man of humane, tender feelings. It may shock his sensibilities to pronounce sentence of death on a fellow man, every way as estimable, by nature, it may be, as himself. But if he gives way to his compassionate regard for the happiness of the miserable criminal, and misconstrues the law, and instructs the jury to acquit, he himself becomes a sharer in the guilt of the crime.

The word of Christ is more authoritative than the law of the state. To add anything to it, or subtract anything from it, is to place ourselves on a level with Him whose supremacy over us is absolute. It is an inconceivably severe penalty, we admit, which Christ has attached to our refusal to minister unto Him, by feeding and clothing his naked and hungry poor. What Christian can bear to think that many of his acquaintances, many of his associates and friends, perhaps the members of his own household, the very partners of his blood, are obnoxious to the penalty ? But what is his office as an interpreter, and, so far as the duty of Christian instruction devolves on him, an expounder of Christ's word ? May he consider, under the dictation of the pure reason and the promptings of natural feeling, what justice requires, what benevolence craves ? Like the upright judge, he must take the law as he finds it : he must declare the mind of Christ. If he alters Christ's revelation, to make it more agreeable to his own sense of right or his tender feel-

ings, he properly brings upon himself the plagues that are written in this Book. He makes himself a participant in the guilt of those whom he would shield from the penalty of the law. If the judge becomes a criminal, even when he administers imperfect human laws according to his own views of right and the impulse of his compassion; how much more obviously criminal must he be, who substitutes his own notions of right for the declared righteousness of God!

We are taught that Christians are to sit on Christ's throne, and to be, in some sort, judges of the world and even of angels. Supposing it were possible for them innocently to entertain the opinion that Christ, the Lamb of God, who shed his blood for the sins of the world, could be too severe; they must, as upright judges, give their decisions according to the law. It is written, that the wicked shall go away, from the tribunal of Christ, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. Have we any alternative but to declare the law? Shall we join ourselves, in character and destiny, to him who said to our first parents: "Ye shall not surely die?"

Personal feeling should not influence our interpretation of the divine law on the one side or the other. It is not necessary that the judge should save himself from the imputation of cruelty by construing the law in favor of the criminal. The faithful administration of justice does not imply any want of kindness. Benevolence is as compatible with rigor in the exercise of judicial authority, as paternal affection with the infliction of stripes upon a child. "He that spareth his rod hateth his son; but he that loveth him, chasteneth him betimes." If the execution of penal justice has not for its object the benefit of the criminal, it does him no injury. It is the giving to him of that which is his due — the payment of his wages — the satisfaction of his claim. The desert of evil must not go unrewarded any more than the desert of good. All unrighteous action of creatures cries to Heaven for a recompense; and, in a perfect government, it will receive it. Righteousness bears sway, and there is a state of moral order, where the law is obeyed; and so there

is, where the just penalty is inflicted. If it were not for the partiality felt by every offender towards his own interest ; if every offender could vindicate his own rights in a perfectly unselfish spirit, he would claim that the debt of penalty due to him should be paid, as earnestly as that an equivalent should be given him for valuable services rendered. Penalty is the reward which wrong-doing merits. When it has been paid, no further demerit remains ; guilt is removed, a state of moral order is restored. Penalty is the proper and necessary atonement for sin ; and the sinner who adequately feels the need he has of this satisfaction, will comprehend that penal justice is not cruelty. The sentiment of justice is not a feeling of personal hostility to offenders, that it should repel us to the opposite extreme of connivance at sin. If the punishment of the wicked is a voluntary infliction of pain, of inconceivable severity and of endless duration, according to the plain words of Christ, we need not soften his denunciations, to save him from the reproach of taking a malicious pleasure in the sufferings of his enemies. Is the upright judge vindictive or malicious ? It is more honorable to Christ, as well as more consonant with the character of interpreters and learners, that we should suffer his words to convey to our minds their natural impression.

But we have not cited all the scripture testimony on the subject under consideration. The punishment of unbelievers, which is declared to be alike eternal with the happiness of the righteous, is also negatively represented as continuing without end. The everlasting fire is never quenched. Mark 9 : 43—48. Literal fire cannot burn forever ; it must go out when the fuel with which it is supplied is all consumed. The literal unquenched fire is one that is not extinguished by man. In this view, it is a figure of the everlasting fire. The punishment which Christ will inflict on his enemies, he will never bring to an end.

The advocate of the doctrine of annihilation says, however, that it may come to an end by the extermination of the object on which it is inflicted. Where, then, we ask, is the force of the threatening ? — in this : that the fire is inextin-

guishable, and utterly consumes the sufferer? That would afford a desirable means of escape from the wrath of God. The objection mistakes the nature of the symbol: the significance of the fire consists in its being a tormenting agent. It was the misery of the rich man that he could get no relief from the torment of the flames. The punishment of the worshippers of the beast (Rev. 14: 10, 11), was not to be utter destruction, but everlasting torment in the fires of perdition. The meaning of the image by which the punishment of the wicked is depicted, appears thus to be, that their pains shall never come to an end. It is noticeable, also, that the epithet *ἀσβεστον* is defined, in the passage itself, as that which "is not quenched," not as that which is unquenchable; and further, that it is connected with another image, which can signify nothing else but that the punishment will continue without end: "their worm dieth not." On the whole, from the design of the representation as intended to persuade men from the "terror of the Lord," from the nature of the emblem made use of, from the explanation which is given of its significance in many passages, from the connection in which it is found, we conclude that here the doctrine is revealed, in a negative form, of endless punishment.

But this conclusion, let it be remarked, is not slowly and laboriously deduced by the reader. It is agreeable to the plain and obvious sense of the words of scripture. The sacred text might have been left to produce its own impression, if the attempt had not been made, by persons unwilling to believe that a God of benevolence will punish sin forever, to evade the force of the terms used by our Lord in relation to the subject. The objector has sought, through the words of Christ ingeniously misinterpreted, to set forth his own views of future retribution. He will not allow the infallible testimony of scripture to inform him what is to be hereafter, but insists on shaping the testimony to make it agree with the suggestions of his fallible reason. He does not assume towards the Lord the position of a humble disciple, but of a teacher and patron. He does not try his reason by the Lord's word, but he tries the Lord's word by his

reason. He says not, as he ought, the Lord has revealed this doctrine, therefore it is reasonable, and right, and good ; but he says, it is an unreasonable and odious doctrine, and therefore the Lord has not revealed it. Now this last is undoubtedly a valid conclusion from such a premise ; but who has a right to lay down such a premise, when the infallible teacher seems so clearly to have informed us that there shall be no end to the misery of the wicked ? Does any man know so certainly the exact demerit of sin, or the relation which its eternal existence and punishment has to the glory of God, as to be able to deny successfully what the Son of God himself seems to have affirmed ? Future events, ascertained by the perfectly satisfactory testimony of Christ, are *facts* as certain and established as any that history records. Is it reasonable to deny well authenticated facts, because we, in our shortsightedness, cannot understand why they should be suffered to exist ? The facts of the future are as stubborn as those of the past ; our unbelief will not annihilate or alter them.

But to proceed with our examination of proof-texts. Many passages speak of a state of penal suffering as final. One of these is in John 3 : 36 : " He that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." The exclusion from heaven of unbelievers will be permanent ; and the positive infliction of punishment will continue without end. The wrath of God, being represented as something felt by the unbeliever, must be understood of the suffering which wrath brings upon its object. The lost are not dead in the sense of being insensible to pain ; the opposite of life, in respect to future retributions, is the felt "wrath" of God ; *this* is eternal death. The effect of the divine anger is not annihilation. To say that an experience of wrath is "on" one who is not, and that such a non-entity is punished by being forbidden to pass from under the wrath of God into existence, is absurd. The evil from which unbelievers shall never escape into eternal life, is evidently that elsewhere shadowed forth as the torment of the wicked in the fires of perdition, which will allow them no rest, day nor night, forever.

A perverse ingenuity might suggest, that, although unbelievers, continuing in that character, will never see life, yet they may renounce their unbelief, and thus escape from the wrath of God. It is clear, however, that a hypothetical case is not contemplated; the truth intended to be conveyed is not, that if one should remain in unbelief he would be forever punished, but that persons of that character will actually suffer without end from the displeasure of God. And the theory of an eternal probation is put to rest by the revealed fact, that there will be a day of decision, a crisis (*κρίσις*), after which there will be no changes of destiny. The wicked will then go away into everlasting punishment. The Master of the house will rise up and shut to the door, and none of those who are without will afterwards gain admission. A time will come when there will be no more invitations to believe and be saved. Christ himself will then say to unbelievers, "depart from me all ye workers of iniquity." There is "a day of wrath and of revelation of the righteous judgment of God," against which the hard and impenitent of heart are "treasuring up unto themselves wrath," as the wages of their sin.

It is not our purpose to present the full scripture argument, but to show, by citing a sufficient number of proof texts, that the eternity of future punishment is not objected to from any uncertainty respecting the purport of the divine testimony. An argument of this sort would not be conclusive with an infidel. But whoever professes his belief in the divine authority of the scriptures, must yield his objections when he sees that they conflict with the plain meaning of the word of God. If it should appear to him reasonable, in the absence of a revelation, to suppose that sin and misery must ultimately come to an end, under the government of a Being of infinite goodness and power, it must also appear quite as reasonable to give an unquestioning assent to what that Being has said. In fact he *does* submit to his authority, virtually, in regard to every disputed matter of faith, when he receives the scriptures as his word. It is involved in the idea of a revelation from God that it cannot be false.

It is further implied that we do not ingraft our meaning upon it. God's word conveys his own mind, not the mind of the reader. And it follows from this, that the obvious meaning is to be received. If we prefer one which is less obvious, because we entertain a different view of the subject-matter from that which the plain sense of scripture would teach, we substitute our mind for the mind of God. The letter is God's, but the meaning is ours. And even this empty concession to Him of the letter turns to our advantage, because it seems to give the sanction of divinity to our view. We assume to know already what the revelation should contain. We come to the Bible to dogmatize, not to be instructed. If in other instances we receive the truth, as being coincident with our notions, it is not on the ground of faith in God. We are unbelievers in spirit, as well when we agree with, as when we differ from, the inspired word.

The purport of our argument, therefore, so far as it has proceeded, is to convince the professed believer in the scriptures, that it is infidelity to interpret them so as to make them inculcate the doctrine of a limited punishment of the wicked. This form of rationalism is as really a rejection of the sacred oracles, as that which openly repudiates their authority. We do not admit, however, that our mode of dealing with objections against the endless punishment of the wicked, although it is opposed to rationalism, is contradictory to reason. To use reasoning for the purpose of putting down reason is suicidal. On the contrary, we maintain that it is the highest reason to yield implicit faith to the divine testimony. Nothing is more reasonable than to believe that whatever doctrine God has revealed is consistent with reason. The objector says: it is reasonable to think that God will not allow the evil of sin and its punishment to exist forever. We say: it is reasonable to believe that what God has said is true. And we leave it to the rationalist himself to decide which of these principles reason must receive in preference to the other. There can be no doubt what his decision must be, if he does not take refuge in atheism.

III. In further remarking on the subject, we propose to

show that the objection to the *eternal* existence of sin and its penalty is as valid against *any* suffering for sin. If it is a good reason why moral and physical evil should not exist forever, that a God of infinite power and infinite goodness will bring them to an end, it is as good a reason why they should not exist for a moment.

Why, then, is it, that eternal sin and suffering are thought to militate with the character of God? Would their eternity render them a very great evil? And is it true that the goodness of God is opposed to no evil but that of the greatest magnitude? Is the existence of a little sin and suffering consistent with holiness and benevolence, but the existence of a larger amount of the same an evil too great to be borne? God hates sin for what it is in itself; and therefore he hates *all* sin. God is perfectly benevolent, and therefore he cannot take pleasure in *any* suffering in itself considered. It is not the *degree* of moral and physical evil that renders them inconsistent with his goodness. "He is of purer eyes than to behold" any "evil and cannot look on iniquity." Hence the mystery of his allowance of sin during the short life of man on the earth, as expressed by the prophet: "Wherefore," then, "lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?" If the moral purity of the Almighty is a reason why he should not suffer sin and its consequence to exist *forever*, it is equally a reason why he should not allow it to *begin* to exist.

But moral and physical evil are not wholly prevented, notwithstanding that in themselves God can have no pleasure in them. That reason which is as incompatible with the temporary as with the eternal existence of sin and sorrow, does not, in fact, forbid the former, it may not forbid the latter. It does not prove the existence of evil to be impossible in time; the fact of sin and misery everywhere stares us in the face; it cannot prove it to be impossible in eternity.

There is in truth a greater mystery in the permission of sin in the present world, than in its continuance in a world of retribution. Unpunished sin appears to be a reproach to

the justice of God. Its guilt is desert of pain of a degree which will adequately express its hateful nature. A just Moral Governor cannot suffer it to escape the proper retribution. But there is not, at present, any fitting testimony of God's hatred towards the sins of men, in the painful consequences which it brings with it. Many of the notoriously wicked are more prosperous apparently than many of God's people. "Their eyes stand out with fatness, they have more than heart could wish." God's people are sorely tried by the inequality they witness. Bitter "waters of a full cup are wrung out to them," till they are constrained to say: "How doth God know, and is there knowledge in the Most High?" If the existence of sin in the future state, where it will be accompanied with a suitable recompense, and may therefore be regarded as an evil corrected, so far at least as it respects the divine administration; if sin punished will be a stain upon the divine perfections, what must be thought of sin so apparently triumphant as it is at present? Does not the reason of the objector tell him that this is a condition of things which ought far less to be tolerated, than the penal sufferings of the future state? But this seeming reproach to the divine administration is before his eyes; he cannot blink it out of existence. May not that less mysterious state of things to which he objects, exist hereafter; and may not the reason which will justify its existence, continue to justify it without end?

The objector ought to show that there is a difference in principle between a limited and an unlimited duration of evil. He ought to show that sin and penalty are not evil in themselves, but that it is only eternal sin and penalty whose existence cannot be justified. He feels concerned for the honor of God, as compromised by the latter. Everlasting sinfulness and sorrow would necessarily be an evil, and if God should permit it, he would be involved in the evil; so he reasons. But he can hardly feel satisfied in reducing the evil to a minimum. For then he will have to grant that God is not absolutely perfect — that he is a little tolerant of an evil, which he ought wholly to suppress. But what is

the difference whether our Moral Governor is a little wanting in goodness or more seriously deficient? It is essential to our idea of God that he is absolutely faultless. We could not adore him as God, if we could conceive him capable of the slightest deviation from the line of rectitude. Any argument against eternal punishment that would condemn the existence of that moral and physical evil which we cannot but see and acknowledge, is as truly atheistic as that which supposes that with him there is neither good nor evil. Iniquity everywhere abounds; its painful effects are too manifest to be denied. They exist by the divine permission; God could have prevented them. Yet God is infinitely holy, and just are all his ways. We cannot explain his conduct. "His righteousness is like the great mountains; his judgments are a great deep." But he is God, and therefore there is no flaw in his administration.

It behooves the rationalist, then, to find a reason for condemning eternal sinfulness and infliction of penal evils, which will not embrace in its sweep the moral disorders of this present evil world. The reason which he does give, is that God is good, and can have no pleasure in sin and suffering. But does he not hate that wrong doing with which the world is filled and under the burden of which it groans? The reason given by the objector for the faith that is in him seems to condemn the permission of the manifold evils of time; for our life we cannot see why it does not. And it comes to this, that there is no God in whose sight the heavens are not clean, and who charges his angels with folly, who is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and who cannot look on iniquity.

If the rationalist would lay the responsibility for the moral evils of the world on the free agency of man, why may not the same apology be found for the eternal existence of sin and punishment? Is it said, that the possibility of sin is implied in free agency, that that which is possible may become actual, and that the prevention of sin among free agents is not an object of power? So likewise it is possible, we might reply, that free agents should sin forever, that it

does not belong to omnipotence to prevent it, and that eternal sin merits, and under the government of a just God must suffer, eternal punishment. If sin be an incident of freedom which it does not belong to power to prevent, it may surely be an eternal incident of freedom.

Besides, it belongs to omniscience to foresee the bad use of freedom which any might make; and, on the supposition that God cannot allow anything to exist with which he is displeased, he could forbear to create such free agents as would do evil and merit punishment. He knew what man would do when he made him, but he chose that man should exist, and therefore also that the sin which was the foreseen consequence of his creation, should exist. He therefore had even more responsibility for the beginning of man's wickedness, than he will have for its perpetuation, if it is an incident of freedom. On the supposition, however, that man is not intended for immortality by his nature, and that God will annihilate the wicked, he can prevent the permanent abuse of freedom on the part of the sinner. But then, he could also cut him down in the first moment of his sin. Why does he not, if a little sin is as truly hateful to him as a larger measure, and if the hatefulness of sin is a reason why it should not be permitted. The rationalist must grant that he ought. *We* maintain that he is able to justify himself; but we will not attempt to justify him. "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight." For some reason, which we cannot fully comprehend, which possibly we do not even apprehend, except in the most general way, that it is for his glory, we must admit that it is right and best for God to keep sinful men alive and coerce them by his power. For this is just what he does, and he does himself no dishonor. Why may we not believe that he may do the same forever? We see that he is not under the necessity, as a God of boundless moral perfection, to prevent sin to the utmost extent of his power — that though in itself hateful, he finds good reason to uphold it; we may conceive it possible that the same or other reasons may exist, why it should never be exterminated. A "thus saith the Lord" can easily command our faith.

We have considered the relation of moral evil, thus far, to the moral perfections of God. We have seen that his hatred of evil cannot be urged as a ground for the belief that he will not suffer it to exist forever. But we may consider the relation of sin and punishment to his power. And we remark, that there is no more reason why the *eternity* of moral evil should be incompatible with omnipotence, than why their existence in *time* should infer want of power in God. It cannot be alleged that sin must be God's necessity, if it exists forever, but that it is subject to his control, if it is limited in duration. Why should it be thought that an eternal permission (which implies superiority) is an impossibility; that if it exists without end, it exists by its own power and in defiance of the Almighty? The sinner is dependent for his existence on God. The continuance of his existence forever would not convert it into self-existence. He could not acquire independence by being eternally upheld. The immortality of the people of God is admitted. Does their immortality render them any the less dependent? Must everything that is finite in its nature be of limited duration, even if it should be the pleasure of God that it should never perish? And if the sinner might have his *being* in God in a world without end, would he not also *act* by God's permission, and derive from him the power to sin?

Is it said that God would certainly put an end to sin if he could, because it is the object of his abhorrence? The answer is at hand, that he hates *all* sin, yet all sin is not prevented; therefore he is unable to prevent it, and *any* sin is his necessity, and a triumph over his authority. The argument proves too much.

Every kind of necessity for the existence of sin is not incompatible with omnipotence. It is necessary that God should have regard, in his government of the world, to his own glory. When he permitted the existence of sin, he must have sought to glorify himself; for he could propose to himself no higher end, and he could not act without an end. In determining to make a free agent who should live forever, who would fall into sin, would never repent, and

would subject himself to everlasting punishment, he must have governed himself by the consideration of what his glory required. But this necessity is that of the highest reason, not the necessity of force. If it should exist forever, and should have a constraining force, it could not be pretended that God was, in any dishonorable sense necessitated. Or if it could, the same reason for the temporary allowance of sin, must likewise be admitted to place him under the law of natural necessity.

We may suppose the highest good, not in the sense of happiness but of the just ground of happiness to intelligent beings, was a constraining necessity to our Maker. It could not move him contrary to justice. But, justice being satisfied, it might be conceived to influence the Supreme Intelligence in the introduction of sin, and in its perpetuation and punishment. If no one is injured, and therefore no one can justly complain, we may rejoice that God pursues a course, in his administration of this world's affairs, which will be productive of the largest measure of good, although a necessary condition should be the introduction of sin. Good comes out of evil, as when the truth of God more abounds unto his glory through the punishment of men's sins. Can it be thought that God has not a view to this good when he permits the sins? That which *we* seek, we always pursue as something good. That which is absolutely good we are bound to seek. And we cannot conceive that God is free from the same necessity. It would be dishonorable to Him and to us not to be under its influence. But if it should be contended, that it would render Him the subject of fate, it must be conceded that the influence of this motive would be alike fatalistic, whether it led to the first beginning, or the perpetuation of sin.

IV. We will conclude this discussion with the remark, that whatever difficulty the existence and everlasting continuance of sin and punishment may occasion, our faith may and ought to overcome it. We are bound to love God with all the heart from the first moment of moral agency, and therefore to believe that he is worthy of our supreme affection, whatever may be his relations to evil.

A Perfect Being is the first principle of religion. We cannot allow ourselves to call it in question, because, if it were doubtful, it would be doubtful whether the essence of all real goodness ought to exist within us — the supreme love of an absolutely Perfect Being. The existence of God cannot require to be demonstrated for the purposes of practical religion, whatever may be thought of the possibility of a satisfactory proof. It would be our duty to go about the work of demonstrating the existence of God in a spirit of love to Him. Nothing can be rightly done without that spirit. It would be necessary in this case, to act the part of an advocate, and determine in advance what the conclusion of the reasoning must be. We should be obliged, furthermore, to reject that kind of proof from which we could only deduce a probable conclusion. We must not suffer ourselves to regard it as a contingent truth, whether an infinitely glorious Being claims the adoration of all rational creatures. We must not, therefore, form our conclusion from a balance of probabilities. It must not be submitted to the test of an inductive argument whether *He* exists, whom it is a sin not to love with all our hearts, from the beginning of our moral life. The issue we make with the atheist must not be put on the ground that what we see of design in the creation is proof of an infinitely benevolent designer. We cannot properly admit that the degree of our faith should be only just in proportion to the number of instances of benevolent intention we can allege; and that instances of apparent evil should be allowed to detract so much from the validity of the proof. That is not a successful argument which only shows that it is likely the world was made by a good being; that there is a preponderance of good over evil in his works of creation and providence, and he is on the whole worthy of love; that possibly the instances of seeming evil might be explained in consistency with the supposition that God is absolutely good. The atheist comes out of the discussion victorious, if the conclusion of the reasoning is, that it is only probable there is a perfect Being who is worthy of, and may justly claim our supreme love. Our obligations are not condi-

tioned on the result of such a demonstration. They are perfect, despite the imperfection of such an argument, or any appearance of evil in the world, which would countenance the belief that God is not absolutely good. Nothing so morally necessary, so imperatively binding, can be conceived as that duty on which all other duties are founded — to love God supremely. And just as necessary as supreme love to God is the conceived perfection of the divine character. We must believe that he cannot do evil. We must believe that the necessity of his perfections is just as great as of his existence: that if he is, he is boundless in goodness; that to deny his supreme excellence, is to deny his being. The rationalist, who concedes to the atheist that the certainty of the divine existence rests on inductive proof, concedes everything. He grants that God may possibly be an imperfect being; that he can do evil; that what he does in nature, or rather what to our finite apprehension he appears to do, is proof of what he is; that, as there is apparently a mixture of good and evil in the world, so there is, or may be, a mixture of good and evil in the Author of nature. By consenting to submit the question of the existence of God to the test of an inductive argument, he virtually yields the matter in dispute.

One who would be a consistent atheist should deny the reality of sin, and affirm that our consciences deceive us when they convict us of guilt in leading a godless life. The allegation of the fact of sin as evidence that there is no God of boundless moral perfections, is insufficient for the purpose; for why is it that sin is so great a mystery in God's universe, but that there is just such a Being to be sinned against. Want of supreme love to God, which is what we mean by sin, would not be the hateful thing it is, but for the existence of a God of supreme excellence. He who points to sin and penal evils for proof that the moral government of the world is not well administered, tacitly admits that one who justly requires us to love him with all our hearts, does really exist. His objection is self-contradictory and nullifies itself. There can be no consistent opposition to the moral

attributes of God which affirms the fact of sin. Sin is an offence against a moral authority who justly claims our supreme affection. The rationalist of the type now under consideration should either hold that there is no foundation for moral distinctions, and that holiness and sin are chimeras, or should grant that the mystery of sin and penal suffering does not afford reasonable ground for doubting the holiness and goodness of God.

Difficulties in religion must be overcome by a firm adherence to first principles. We must accept it as necessarily and immutably true that God is a perfect being. If we cannot see why there should be sinners in the world, when God hates all sin and is able to prevent it, we should never yield our conviction that there is good reason for the permission of moral evil, because it exists under the government of a perfect being. We should not allow ourselves to judge of the divine character solely by appearances, and from what we see of evil to infer, either that God takes pleasure in it, or that it is too strong for him, and has obtained a triumph. But assuming, with a confidence not to be shaken, that his character is spotless, we should overcome all the suggestions of unbelief by the faith that the administration of a perfect being must be without a fault. We should judge of what God *does* by what he *is*. We should hold it as an axiom — a truth certain and indisputable, and a test of moral conclusions — that God can do no wrong. Appearances are deceptive; God must ever be true to himself. It was “by” this “faith that Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac, and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, to whom it was said, that in Isaac shall thy seed be called.” It is the only right mode of removing doubts, because it is essential to our perseverance in holiness. We cannot love God as God, in which our holiness consists, if we do not believe, all things to the contrary notwithstanding, that his will, without which nothing comes to pass, is a perfectly righteous, benevolent, and reasonable will.

We do not insist that difficulties should be overcome by the arbitrary determination that we will have none. We

need not take the position that there is a radical difference between holiness and sin, and that there is a Being whom it is holiness to love and sin to hate, in mere wilfulness. The conviction is spontaneous that holy and sinful character, and all that is implied in them, are realities. They display themselves before us, and we give our testimony concerning them, just as we do in regard to the events that impress themselves on our senses. We may doubt *what* a man's character is, but that he is either a saint or a sinner we cannot doubt. Do not bad men, whose moral sensibilities are exceedingly obtuse, feel an involuntary respect for persons who profess the fear of God and act accordingly? Do they not believe that there is an essential moral difference between such persons and themselves? Was it a mere fancy of Peter, which led him to exclaim, when a supernatural event awakened in his mind the conviction that he was in the presence of a divine being, "depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord?" We predicate holiness and sin of men with the same certainty as we do knowledge and ignorance, wisdom and folly. We do not see them with our eyes; neither do we *see* human intelligence in the conduct of mankind. They are not of a nature to be seen. Yet they directly reveal themselves to us. And as we can refer to nothing but intelligence itself for proof that it exists, so we can evince the reality of holiness by nothing but holiness. It is an indemonstrable reality, yet as undeniably certain as any fact of mind or of the outward world, the existence of all of which it surpasses the power of our logic to prove. The conscience of every man testifies against his own sinfulness, and convicts him of guilt or desert of punishment, and leads him to anticipate that the retribution which ought to be inflicted will be meted out to him, if there be no just way of deliverance. Indeed, the reality of sin and guilt is the great mystery that is objected to the divine government.

If, then, the belief in holiness and sin is so facile; if we find sin in ourselves and observe it in others; if all history declares it, and the creation itself groans and travails in pain on account of it, it can require no arbitrary determination of

will to assume that which is implied in these moral facts. Is God really obeyed by some men? Is God really sinned against by all? Does the evil of disobedience consist in opposition to perfect moral excellence, self-subsisting, immutable, eternal? Does all this enter into our idea of sin? The mode of overcoming difficulties arising out of the existence of moral evil, which has been insisted on, does not, then, require of us a blind, unreasonable faith.

It is pertinent to the object of this discussion to say, that, to a firm believer in the first principle of true religion, as thus exhibited, it is not material whether a less or a greater degree of mystery obscures his counsels. A being who cannot do wrong, will not forfeit the confidence of the believer, because he permits sin to continue without end, and inflicts upon it the endless retribution it merits. The responsibility for the sin, from its very nature as sin, will forever attach to the sinner. And in a righteous government sin must draw after it punishment as its proper consequence. Happiness is better in itself than suffering; but suffering, as penalty for sin, is better than happiness would be in its place — as much better, as justice is better than license, and order is better than confusion. The holiness of God obliges him to inflict it, just as imperatively as it previously required of the now fallen sinner that he should perfectly obey his will. The law was to be fulfilled, in the first instance, by obedience; but having been broken, it must not be trampled in the dust; it must be reinstated in its authority, and the sin which was not prevented must be blotted out. God must provide a sufficient *amende* for the transgression; and this he does by the infliction of an adequate penalty. He maintains his character as a righteous Sovereign, preserves among his subjects a state of moral order, and makes perfect satisfaction for sin, by visiting it with deserved punishment. He blots out the sin he permits; it no longer stands a reproach to his holiness and justice. The question may still be asked: Why does he not secure the righteousness of the law by preventing sin and punishment? And we might offer some plausible conjectures in the way of reply. But we choose

to insist, that the character of God, as we must conceive it, is a sufficient guaranty that sin, with punishment and with redemption, will be the occasion of greater honor to Him, than would have been a state of sinless perfection; and, furthermore, that eternal sin and eternal punishment, the last being the just and necessary consequence of the first, can be believed to be a part of the divine plan, on the infallible testimony of God's word, with as little difficulty, as we can believe that our own sin, and the unrest it brings, were foreordained of Him.

ARTICLE VI.

HYMNOLOGY.

[Continued from Vol. XVI. p. 229.]

THE TEXT OF HYMNS.

THE criticism on the text of church hymns is always perilous. They are associated with the most imposing scenes of the present life, or with the august realities of the future. If they become suggestive of mere verbal disputes; if their faults be made more prominent in the popular mind than their excellences, their sanctity is impaired. It is easy to lessen the influence of these odes, because many of them abound with faults. Some of the best of them are disfigured by mixed metaphors, strained comparisons, incongruous images. They live by their own spiritual power, which triumphs over their literary defects. Indeed, their rhetorical blemishes are, in one respect, a positive gain to the influence of the poetry; for they set off, by contrast, its vital force, and attest the superiority of pure and fervid sentiment over all the graces of style. But their diction is still open to criticism. It is easy to make this criticism, and to expose many