

# THE POPULAR ARGUMENTS AGAINST ENDLESS PUNISHMENT

UNSATISFACTORY AS A SURE GROUND OF HOPE.<sup>1</sup>

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“Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden. . . . And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die.”—GENESIS iii. 1, 4.

WITH a heart which craves to sin, a plausible doubt counts for much more than it is worth. If men listened to reason, they would no more brave a chance than a certainty of a useless danger or loss. This should be our decision as to a life of sin, unless we can certainly demonstrate that there is neither judgment, nor heaven, nor hell. There is no man who will deliberately say that a life of piety and purity detracts, on the whole, from our earthly well-being or honor. As long, then, as there is a possibility of future retribution for a life of sin, to choose such a life is as gratuitous a folly as though the transgressor saw the future punishment before him. But to this reasonable conclusion the sinful heart refuses to listen. It seizes on the imagined doubt and magnifies it into a shield of impunity. Satan understood this weakness of human nature. Hence, he began his seduction of our first parents by suggesting a doubt (vs. 1), and then irrationally leaps to a denial (vs. 4). He trusted to the force of temptation on the heart to make his victims follow him blindly across this chasm of evidence.

The very same process is now taking place in a multitude of souls throughout Protestant Christendom, and, it is not unnatural to suppose, at the prompting of the same tempter. The death denounced against the first transgression was not so much bodily as spiritual—the death of the soul rather than of the body; so that the doubt raised by Satan’s first question is substantially the same with that which is now enticing the minds of

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<sup>1</sup> A sermon preached in the chapel of Union Theological Seminary, and published by request of the students.

sinful men. Hath God said that final impenitence in transgression shall be followed by everlasting death? May we venture to doubt this? Such is the question by which men are now really deceiving their own hearts. They strive to see at least plausibility in the pleas of those who deny—an easy task for a heart yearning after license in sin! And when this stage is reached, they then proceed to cast away restraint, just as though they had certainly proved that there is no hell. Let but the head decide that *it is questionable* whether God hath said so, and the heart rushes to the practical conclusion, “Ye shall not surely die.”

One mode by which men sometimes find a pretext for rejecting the solemn truth is to get up a species of resentment against what, they say, is the temper of Christians in testifying to it. They charge that our severity and harsh dogmatism cause us to take a cruel delight in asserting terrible dogmas. They even claim to enlist all the benevolence and amiability on the side of the skeptical position. Now, to this I reply, that I have no dogma whatever to assert at this time. It is impossible that I can have any interest in asserting unnecessarily that the second death waits on sin, for I am a sinner myself. The judgments of God are just as formidable to me as to you, my unbelieving brethren. I have no more ability to endure them, or to escape their condemnation, than you. Could I be so insane as to dig out a hell, of set purpose, in the spirit of bigotry, into which I know I am as certain of falling as you, except as I have a hope of deliverance through the sacrifice of Christ? Sure I am, that if hell can be disproved in any way that is solid and true, and consistent with God’s honor and man’s good, there is not a trembling sinner in this land that would hail the demonstration with more joy than I would. Can any of you give that demonstration? Let us see it. Let us see whether it will answer as a foundation on which I may venture an immortal soul. I repeat, I have no counter proof, at this time, to advance. My only purpose is to show you how I have endeavored to find some footing in the sentiments on which the doubters seem to build, and how the footing has utterly failed *me*. I have painfully studied the speculative logic and the wire-drawn criticisms by which what seems to be the plain declaration of Scripture is impugned, and have found nothing there but a pavement of mist. It is not with

these I would deal now. I have placed myself in sympathy with the more practical sentiments which I perceive infecting or swaying the minds around me. I have felt them with all the force which the interests of a common guilt and a common dread could give. But I wish to tell you simply the results to which my sinful soul has been unwillingly forced as to these so influential sentiments, and I would show you how baseless they are as foundations of any solid hope that sinners shall not surely die.

I. Men are, after all, much more influenced by feelings than by analytic reasonings. Here is one sentiment which is, doubtless, doing its work with all to hide the formidable side of this question from our minds. There is great comfort in numbers. Man is a social being. He is largely governed by the example of those nearest to him, and it is easy and grateful to our indolence to imitate and to save ourselves mental effort by thinking as the multitude thinks. When we see the vast majority advancing with gayety and confidence in the path our hearts crave to follow, we seem to have all that mass between us and the peril, and we are incredulous that death can consume all this affluence of life in order to get to us. Now, when we set this doctrine in contrast with the actual feelings and conduct of the world, we see that everybody is evidently acting as though the doctrine of a hell could not be true. If the world thought it certainly true—nay, if there were but a probability it might be found true, then the simplest child can see how all the sinful world ought to act. Every sinner should ask: Is it so that I am condemned already, except I repent and find deliverance by faith? That this sentence is the everlasting curse of the Almighty? That it is to fill my soul and body with intolerable torments? That hope is to depart for ever and ever, and eternal despair is to gather up the infinite aggregate of future woe, and in every conscious instant crush my soul with the tremendous prospect? That all this is to go on and on, parallel with the eternity of God; and that between me and this death there may be but the step between health and sickness, or present security and sudden accident? Is this my peril? “Horrible! oh, horrible!” Then what time have I for pleasure? what business with the riches which perish in the using? I ought “to say of laughter, It is mad; and of mirth, What doeth it?” Everything

except the one means of escape from this infinite woe, ought to be loathsome for its frivolity. I ought to have time for nothing but prayer; every breath ought to be a cry, and tears ought to be my drink until the mercy of Christ pluck me from the awful verge. Thus ought every sinner to agonize. And this wide world ought to be a Bochim. Who can gainsay it?

But what do we see? The world eats and drinks, marries and gives in marriage, pursues riches, earthly pleasure, yea, seeks to "kill time," as though it had too much of it; sings and dances, and fills its atmosphere either with jest and laughter, or with new insults to this awful Judge; in a word, studies to act precisely as though it were certain there is no hell. Now, has all the world gone insane? Is all the keen sagacity which we meet everywhere in its worldly pursuits and rivalries clean turned into madness? So it would seem, if this doctrine of a hell were true! But it is hard for a denizen of this world to conclude thus of his own kind, as well as of himself; and, therefore, the practical feeling of doubt comes, like a penetrating tide, into the soul, that somehow the ghastly dogma cannot hold. Who has not felt the seductive influence, not reasoned out perhaps, possibly only semi-conscious, yet seducing the soul back from the rough, harsh warning of conscience into luxurious relief by the plea, "Ye shall not surely die"?

But, my friends, there was one discovery which, so soon as my unwilling reason was constrained to look at it, dashed all the ease and solace which my deceitful heart was drawing from the sentiment. I was compelled to see that if the Bible is true, and man's nature what my own observation evinces, the pleasing inference has only a foundation of clouds. Suppose, as the Bible says, it is the nature of the sin which imperils to produce this very insensibility? Suppose that warning should be sober truth, which tells us to beware of "being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin," so that it is literally true; that "madness is in men's hearts while they live"; and that this dense callousness is itself one of the surest symptoms of the reality of the disease? If I were to find a freezing man in the snow, and he were to answer my rousing appeal by the assurance that he was suffering no evil, and needed nothing except the balmy sleep to which he wished to resign himself, I should understand well that this ease was but the symptom of approaching death. So, if this spiritual

torpor of the world may perchance be only the indication of the approaching frosts of spiritual death, then plainly it is madness for us to argue safety from it. The Bible represents also that this benumbing and deluding quality of sin is one of the very features which has caused a God, at once all-wise, just and benevolent, to estimate it as so immense an evil, and has constrained him to adopt means so stern for curbing it. Can this be true? Can you or I refute it? And when we turn to our own observations, do we see that in fact human experience does contain frequent monitions of a solemnity and dreadful awe precisely appropriate to these revealed facts; that God does indeed from time to time lift a corner of the veil which mercifully hides the pit of despair, and makes men hear in anticipation the wails of its torment in the cries of guilty death-beds, the catastrophes of dying nations, the ghastly ravages of plague and war, and that men refuse to hearken and strive to forget the salutary warning? Then we have before our eyes the proof that *sin can make a world as mad, as insane*, as we saw the argument of the Bible implied. Alas, yes! we see men all around us, under parallel influences of deceitful lusts, shut their eyes to known and experimental dangers. We see the drunkard madly jesting of his "pleasure and jollity," when every worldly wise man except himself sees *delirium tremens* grinning over his shoulder. We see even woman, intoxicated with flattery, rushing into the snaky coils of the seducer, while every one but she perceives nothing but the envenomed fang that is to poison her soul. Yes, they go "as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life." With this solution assigned by Scripture for men's insensibility in spiritual danger, and this stubborn confirmation of its reasonableness in my own experience, I can no longer find any solace or hope in the blindness of the world to its own destiny and duty. It only enhances the fearful picture, and its perverse example adds a formidable obstacle to all the others which exist between me and my safety.

II. Another plausible but most practicable element of doubt arises from the example and deportment of professed Christians. How should they act for themselves, they who profess to have the vision of faith, if they saw the doctrine certainly true? The hope of deliverance they already have in Christ might indeed exempt them from the anguish which should fill the souls of the

guilty and condemned; yet should they feel that they had a race to run with perdition to make good their exemption. To this every power of their souls should be bent every hour of every day, like the muscles of a racer upon the course. Is not this what their Bibles enjoin? Should they not say to themselves:

“Be this my one great business here—  
With holy trembling, holy fear,  
To make my calling sure”?

“And what should be their demeanor towards us sinners?” doubting men may ask. “Do they indeed know that we are ‘condemned already,’ and that but a few uncertain years or days divide us from that unutterable hell? Do they see us insanely wasting, as they judge, our fleeting opportunity, and trifling on the brink of so unspeakable a fate? With what a visage, then, should they not meet us! Tears ought to break forth at the sight of us, as one would weep at the sight of a felon on his way to the gallows; every cheek ought to turn pale at our meeting, and there ought to be no time nor heart for anything but ‘entreating us night and day with tears’ to flee from the wrath to come! Surely this would be but the natural behavior for them. But what do we actually see? We spend days and months with these believers in future endless torments, and the time is all filled up with worldly jest or worldly aims; they pursue what we pursue, and apparently live for what we live for. They jostle us at every turn in our eager race for this world’s honors and pleasures. They seem to have neither thought nor care for our approaching misery. What, now, are we to conclude? That these kind, cordial, jovial friends and brothers of ours, who are so generous in relieving our little earthly evils, are harder than the millstone, and more cruelly indifferent than a wild beast to our immense and certain misery? This, surely, is a harsh conclusion! Must we not rather conclude that these good, kind, believing people, who have the faith and know what is true, have discovered that sinners ‘do not surely die’; that their dreadful creed is somehow a pious fiction, and the warnings of their preachers are not expected to find a reception in their literal sense?” Such is the doubt as it forms itself in the private thought of many a transgressor, or as it flows, unformed but influential, in their unreasoning feelings. Alas, that Christians should give so much ground for this doubt! Alas, that the most plausible and influ-

ential argument that contradicts the warnings of God should be the drowsy example of his professed people! Alas, for the blood of souls, which will be found partly in our skirts in the day when God shalt call these doubters to their account! Forgive, O Christ, this unnatural contradiction, and deliver us from the woe which is denounced on "those by whom the offence cometh." Forgive us, ye deceived souls, for the mischief we have done you in thus assisting you to drug your own consciences. And we beseech you, believe us not, trust us not, for we are verily unworthy to guide you. But now let me tell you, doubters, the reasons why I have been compelled to conclude that this inconsistent example of professed believers furnished me no ground of confidence whatever that I should not surely die by my sins. I found that I could not trust to it one instant: *First*, because I saw that it was every way likely, probable and natural, that the faith of weak Christians should be benumbed by that same "deceitfulness of sin" which we have found deluding the unbelievers into an insane rashness. This Bible of theirs, the same Bible which tells of the hell we are so unwilling to admit, explained that spectacle of the weak Christian forgetting his own faith; explained it with a consistency so clear that it made the rising hope of security in sin die within me. It told of indwelling sin. And as I replied, How wrong, how perverse, that sin should still work, and work inconsistencies so glaring in quickened souls, it rejoined: Well, you have there but another and a more formidable illustration of the malignity of sin, that it can thus poison and mislead the hearts even of those in whom the Holy Ghost dwells! We read lately in the journals of French workmen in a deep pit who fell stupefied by the foul air, and while in momentary danger of death, were already as helpless as corpses. But as we learned further how the healthy men who descended to their rescue also became stupid and staggered and fell, we shuddered more than at first at the malignancy of that poison. Suppose that God may take this view of sin in Christians and of the guilty callousness it produces, I can see nothing there but another reason why he should hate it the more, and should judge the sternest measures proper in order to curb it.

But *second*: I saw, upon closer inspection, that the sorry, common sorts of believers were less callous to my danger than I had supposed. I found they often rebuked themselves for that

timidity which had shrunk from warning me to flee from wrath. I discovered a cause, a cause not unnatural, which kept them silent, even when yearning to speak some word of awakening; and that was my own observed callousness. They knew that I knew my peril, and yet saw me reckless. They heard the most solemn admonitions of the pulpit launched at me, pointed with all the human force which study, preparation, and burning earnestness could give; but they fell from my heart blunted as by a shield of adamant. It was, if not right, yet how natural for them to say in their discouragement: "What can we do? Our words will be yet more vain!" Thus I discovered that they limited their efforts to prayer for me in secret. Yes, not seldom after an interview, when all their converse with me had seemed of the earth earthy, they went away and prayed in secret that my eyes might be opened. Thus I found that, after all, I had much over-estimated their apparent callousness to the fearful truth.

Then, *third*: I could not but observe that there was a difference among these Christians. Some compelled much more of my respect by the honest consistency of their lives. And I always found that, just in proportion to this, these few did approach that mode of living and striving which their solemn creed demanded. They obviously were "working out their own salvation with fear and trembling"; they did meet me and greet me with the aspect of tearful and solemn concern, and they did not forget to warn me of the coming wrath, even with a fidelity which was irksome and offensive. Thus, wherever I extended my observation, I found that, just in proportion as the Christian's integrity of life commanded my respect and confidence, that life was most nearly squared upon the theory that hell is real! A Paul, for instance, that apostle whose sturdy heroism inspired even my dead heart with a thrill of moral admiration; who had seen invisible glories, and heard words which it was not lawful to utter, braved seas, and robbers, and prisons, and scourges, and deaths that he might "warn every one night and day with tears." Thus I was forced to say to myself, how absurd to put my chief trust touching this momentous question on the very kind of Christians for whom I have scarcely enough respect to confide in them in an ordinary bargain! If I am to derive any inference as to the question whether I must surely die

for my sin, it is the men I respect most whom I had better regard, distasteful as is their solemn conviction.

But, once more, there has been one Man on earth who was of all others best qualified to judge of the urgency of a sinner's condition on earth and the degree of his danger, and of all the beings who have ever lived among men was the truest, the most disinterested, and the wisest. He knew the real state of the case, for he came from the other world, and thus had the advantage of the perfect knowledge of an eye-witness. This was the man Jesus. And he is the one being who has literally lived and preached and toiled up to the full standard of that zeal and devotion demanded by the claims of eternity. Let any one look at him, and infer from his proceedings what was his sense of the case. The one aim of his life was "to seek and to save that which was lost." To this every power and every day was devoted with a zeal so intense that his worldly relatives said, "He is beside himself"; and his disciples beheld in his burning career a fulfilment of the prophecy: "The zeal of thy house hath eaten him up." Laborious days of teaching were followed by whole nights of prayer. Not one hour did he ever divert to the pursuits of business, or ambition, or pleasure; and, after a ministry of superhuman energy, he submitted his life itself to a cruel sacrifice for the redemption of your souls from the fate whose infinite bitterness he alone could appreciate. Here, then, is the safest example from which to infer the real truth, whether we shall surely die for our sins. Jesus must have felt that hell was real; for there is no other solution of his career.

III. Again, some who pretend to speculate more profoundly argue that the eternal ruin of sinners is inconsistent with the appearances of things which providence itself has instituted. "The order which he has impressed on this earth and our mortal life is not such as a wise and consistent God would have selected, if our race were, indeed, moving to such a fate." And here, say they, we argue, not from the actions or feelings of our fellow-men, who may mistake, but of the Sovereign Judge himself. "Consider, then," say they, "what the aspect of this world should be if this dogma of an endless hell were true. Take in all the consequences which are involved, in all their horror: that all, all the thronging millions who compose our generation, except the few consistent Christians, are going straight

down to that tremendous doom, one single instance of which, if properly conceived, should be enough to make a world stand aghast; that all the successive generations which fill the centuries are born only to inherit this fate, save so far as the tardy efforts of this delinquent church may rescue a few; that mortal life is then, in most men, but an unutterable curse! But, if all this is literal, what is this earth but a charnel-house of dead souls; a yawning gateway through which men may be borne into hell! Would God ever have put it into man's better nature to rejoice in the birth of children, or have said, 'Blessed is he that hath quiver full' of these arrows of the strong man, if our paternity only avails thus, in most cases, to multiply the instances of immortal ruin and woe? In what scenery of woe should not such a world have been draped? It should be like the condemned ship, which floats away in the dark night, with its black flag, freighted with its load of crime and despair, to the solitary ocean. Its atmosphere should be darkness visible, its sole occupation the wailing agony of entreaty. The globe itself should blot the sky with its disk, and be followed as it rolls in its orbit by a dirge of pitying angels, while its fair sister-spheres should veil their light at its approach, even as a tender woman would cover her face from the sickening horrors of the scaffold. Such should God have made the home of a race who 'were by nature children of wrath.' But what has he made it? Behold its light and beauty and beneficence! Lo! its scenery is gilded with sunlight and overarched with azure. 'He sendeth the springs into the valleys which run among the hills. They give drink to every beast of the field. By them shall the fowls of the heaven have their habitation, which sing among the branches. He watereth the hills from his chambers; the earth is satisfied with the fruit of his works. He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man, that he may bring forth food out of the earth; and wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengtheneth man's heart.' And throughout this beautiful earth 'he setteth the solitary in families'; he invites man to hope and joy by social sympathies, and teaches the mother's heart to sing for joy that a man is born into the world. Do not nature and providence, then, refute this gloomy and saturnine view of man's destiny?"

Glad should I be, my hearers, to read the appearances around us thus; but, alas! there is another side of the picture which must be viewed. The earth is full of blessing? Yes; but it is like the vale between Ebal and Gerizim: the curses are over against the blessings. Gloomy night answers to day, tempest to calm, freezing winter to teeming summer, desert to fruitful field; the poison grows beside the flower and the fruit, and death waits on life—the death which is to every heart the monster-evil. And when the man has viewed the whole scene, and tasted all that earth can give, his reluctant testimony is, “Vanity of vanities”! Nor are all the aspects of Providence smiling! Turn your eyes to the darker scenes, which fill all the larger pages of history, where human crimes and divine retributions have made this sinful earth an Aceldama. Harken to the scream of the oppressed upon the rack! Hear the roar of battle, the crash of falling cities, the wail of ruined nations! Does not our earth, after all, sometimes seem dark enough to be indeed the vestibule of hell? And when we examine more narrowly the conditions of man’s existence here, we find the same strict doctrines evidently applied on earth which underlie the future retributions: that man is required to fulfil a probation for his own welfare, under responsibilities to comply carefully with the conditions prescribed him, or else receive from the course of nature itself a stern and inexorable recompense. Does outraged nature, when the time has come for her to pronounce her final doom on the glutton, the drunkard, the debauchee, hold her hand, or hearken to entreaty? Alas, no! she shows herself as inexorable as the darkest dogma of the Calvinist.

How, then, shall this strange mixture of good and evil, this seemingly capricious juncture of mercy and wrath, be explained? The only solution I know is the one which Scripture proposes. It is this: that, had man’s doom been immediate and absolute, like that of the fallen angels, then the world, which is his home, would have been unvisited by one ray of mercy or light. But because the seed of the woman was appointed to bruise the serpent’s head; because God would first offer man atonement through the death of his own Son before he shuts him up in death, therefore it is that he has made us for the time “prisoners of hope,” and adorned our prison with all these alleviations in order that they might allure us to the footstool of gospel mercy.

“Account that the long suffering of our God is salvation.” (2 Peter iii. 15.) “The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance.” (Rom. ii. 4.) “He left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.” (Acts xiv. 17.) Thus every terrestrial blessing, from the daily food which refreshes the hunger of an hour up to the children which fill your homes with love, is a voice to remind you of that amazing sacrifice of infinite love to which God was moved by his infallible knowledge of the depth of your everlasting doom, and to woo you to flee to this city of refuge before it is too late. This is God’s explanation of his earthly dispensation of good and evil to man. Does it furnish any solace to that man who is resolved to slight the only atonement? Surely there could be no mistake so tragical and so perverse as that which wrests this ministry of mercy into an argument for contumacy. Here is a state prisoner, accused, tried, condemned, locked up, awaiting his condign punishment; but because the king and the king’s son have so thorough an apprehension of the horror of that fate which justice will inflict, therefore they cast about for some way of escape, whereby “righteousness and peace may kiss each other.” It is found at length in this amazing plan, that the king’s son shall drink the cup of death in his stead. So, to prepare the way for the message of this ransom, the gloom of the condemned cell is lighted with the sun; the fetters of the doomed man are relaxed; he is fed with dainties from the king’s own table, and the cheering voices of hope penetrate his despair, inviting him to reconciliation through the son. But now the perverse wretch begins to abuse the very overtures of mercy, to argue that his sentence was not just, and the king knew it and never dared to execute it; that all this doom and threatened destruction had been only an unsavory jest. To that man “there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation.” His unbelief, by a dreadful alchemy, converts every fleeting blessing into an abiding curse, and stores it in the treasury of wrath against the day of wrath.

There is no safe footing here, then, for a doubt whether “we must surely die” if out of Christ. The Bible explanation of the mercies sinners experience is too consistent; to the gospel despisers too terribly consistent and reasonable. And in the light

of that explanation every earthly mercy has a voice which, even in its sweetest accents, implies that there is a hell as it cries, "Turn you to the stronghold, ye prisoners of hope!"

IV. But some, driven from God's providence, resort to his character for arguments to sustain the doubt as to his purpose to punish forever. They ask whether the justice, wisdom, and goodness of God will not forbid his forever destroying a being whom he has himself formed for happiness. Men ask, for instance, How can it be just in God to punish a puny creature eternally for a sin committed in this short life? They claim it as almost a self-evident truth that temporal punishment is sufficient for temporal sin. Now, I might dwell upon several thoughts which have presented themselves to my mind neutralizing the probability of this position. I was reminded, for instance, that neither the course of nature nor human law measures its penalties by the length of time consumed in the transgression. But sometimes the recklessness of a moment incurs a result from the laws of nature which fixes calamity and pain on the whole future life; and a murder, which it required a few moments to perpetrate, is justly punished with an everlasting banishment from this life and all its benefits. One cannot but think, again, how the estimate of his sins may be affected by the infinite glory and majesty of the Being at whom they are aimed. If the youth who strikes his own parent, for instance, is justly held far more guilty than the common brawler, how high may not the aggravations of our guilt against the Universal Father rise? But our very sinfulness and unbelief unfit us to weigh this element of our case fairly. We cannot rise to the impartial estimation of God's exalted rights and honor; we are too selfish and blind. Look, then, at another thought. None but atheists are so insolent as to deny that temporal sins deserve temporal punishment. Suppose, now, that you should *continue sinners after death, while paying off the score* of your earthly transgressions? Why not? Yes, *why not?* Because you will then be suffering punishment? We do not see that God's chastisements of you in this world have had any tendency as yet to make you any better; why should you count on them to make you better there? Or because your habits and evil principles will then be so confirmed by a life of sin? Which is easier to bend, a twig or a tree? Or because the company of hell will be so edifying or improving

to your heart? Hardly! Take, then, one sober, honest look at yourself, and answer me, what is the likelihood that you, who are an obstinate sinner now, will not be a sinner then? You, whose resolutions of repentance have hitherto been so absolutely worthless; you who cannot be in the least restrained from your sins by the near prospect of a retribution so heavy that you are now murmuring at its weight? But should the prediction of Scripture prove true, that he who is unjust now will be unjust still, and he who is filthy now will be filthy still; and should you be heaping up a second mountain of transgressions while you are paying your debt for the first, when will you ever finish? There is the question which ruins all your hope. Be God's justice what it may, obviously no reasonable being, who has once resolved to curb rebellion by penalty, can consistently stop punishing until the criminal stops rebelling. To do so before would be impotent child's-play. But after you have on this earth rejected Christ, who is to help you to cease rebelling? Who is to intercede for you with the avenging Judge to hold his hand? I see not where your hope is to hang.

"But God is supremely wise and kind!" How do you know he is? From the Bible? The same Bible that tells me, "God is love," tells me that he "turns the wicked into hell, with all the nations that forget God." (Ps. ix. 17.) Which side of this statement must we take? And if we reject either, then the Bible ceases to be of authority with you for both; it no longer authorizes us to say God is love. Or will you turn from it to God's works and plead that "the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord"? (Ps. xxxiii. 5.) When we look there we "behold both the goodness and severity of God" (Rom. xi. 22); death set over against life; calamity against blessings; war against peace; sickness and pain against health; "distress of nations and perplexity" against prosperity. And when you bid me infer that God's wisdom and goodness forbid his destroying forever even a guilty creature, whom he himself formed for immortal happiness, then I know that we have both gone far beyond our depth. Who can find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is higher than heaven; what canst thou do? It is deeper than hell; what canst thou know? Look around, and so far as your earthly wisdom can read his dispensations, do you not see him daily permitting the most ardent aspirations of your fellows to end in

vanity, despair and death? Do you not see him permitting millions of young infants, in whom he had implanted the seeds of reason, and love, and happiness, and beneficent action, die like the budding flower that drops from the tree with its undeveloped germ to rot on the ground? How is that? Do we not see him rain on the salt, barren ocean and the unpeopled deserts, while the vales on which the children of men hope for their daily bread, and whose clods they have watered with their sweat, shrivel from drought? How many men, judging by earthly reason, have ever been content to die as satisfied with the results of their life? The one thing, the only thing that is certain to us all, is that we must die; and so far as earthly wisdom can see, "How dieth the wise man? Even as the fool dieth!" Thus, when I see this awful God stamp "vanity and vexation of spirit" on all the hopes of man, I cannot undertake to decide what awful severities on the guilty he may not purpose to execute in another world. He has worlds under his government. His purposes span eternity. "Clouds and darkness are round about him; but justice and judgment are the habitation of his throne." (Ps. xcvi. 2.) Feeble man, we are out of our depth! There is here no standing ground for any hope. Let us, then, go back and hear what message the Lord himself hath been pleased to send us out of his Word. And when we look there, the most striking fact is, that the clearest, the most dreadful declarations of the eternity of the unbeliever's ruin are those uttered by Jesus. Men sometimes babble of a difference, even a contrast, between the theology of Paul and of his Master. They talk of Paul as the austere logician, excogitating a rigid system of dogmas; they prefer, they say, to turn to the teachings of the "meek and lowly Jesus," whose theology is that of love. Well, one thing we do know: never was there love like unto his love! It surpassed the love of woman. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." He laid down his for his enemies! No man can see one trait of cruelty in this Jesus; for his life was a ministration of kindness, not to the deserving, but to the "publican and sinner." Never did the cry of human woe strike his ear in vain; never did human anguish appeal in vain to his soul while on earth. And he knew, also, the real facts; for he came from the world of spirits and thither he went back. How comes it, then, that this meek and loving Jesus uttered

his warnings against hell in words sevenfold more frequent and solemn than the "austere" Paul? Is this also done in love? Yes; the beauty of his beneficent life and death permits us to think nothing else. If, then, it is the tenderest heart in the universe which cries out to us most fearfully, "Beware of the pit!" what shall we think? Is it because he who knows best and loves us best is most fully informed of its inevitable certainty and its intolerable pains? Hear this Divine pity, then—Mark ix. 43, 44; Matt. xviii. 34, xiii. 41, 42, xxv. 30-46; Luke xvi. 23-26; Rev. vi. 16, 17.

What, then, is the part of reason for you? As I said at the outset, I have no dogma to advance. I have no interest in arguing that there is an everlasting hell for impenitent sinners. If any man can prove that there certainly is none, by any evidence honorable for God and safe for man, sure I am that no man's soul will be more rejoiced than my sinful heart. I have but one parting word to utter, and that is so plainly just that it needs no argument. It will be well for you to *look thoroughly* into this doubt before you trust yourself to it. Your eternity is at stake! And if, after your faithful, honest and exhaustive examination, you are constrained to feel that there is a possibility that Jesus may be right and Satan wrong on this point, it will be best for you to come with me to the safe side, and hide under the sacrifice of Christ.