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## FUTURE DESTINY OF SINNERS.

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BEFORE any one can persuade himself that the life of man is limited by his earthly career, and that death is identical with annihilation, he must do violence to reason, and utterly discredit his own intuitions. The consciousness that we live is always attended with an apprehension, at least, that the principle of life is immortal. Our very nature shrinks back at the thought of annihilation. We are conscious of a power of progression, which we are unwilling to believe shall be suddenly and abruptly terminated at the hour of death. Discard the idea of futurity, and the question is appropriate, Why do we live at all? Why are we thus endowed with all the faculties of a rational nature, if the whole is to terminate after the lapse of a few years, in which trouble and sorrow occupy so prominent a place? Is the only compensation for the disappointments we experience here a blank forgetfulness, a blotting out of our very existence? Revelation satisfactorily resolves the problem. It points to a continued existence beyond the grave; and if we admit this, we must also admit its further disclosures, that the life beyond shall be determined in its great characteristics by the moral features of the life which we now live. To the believer in Christ a glorious immortality is promised, in the enjoyment of which he shall have a full and complete compensation for all the mortal ills he now endures. A different destiny is reserved for the wicked. He does not accept the provision which God has made for his future glory, and although he will

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for ever live, his futurity will be of a very different character. It will be the perpetuation, the aggravation, the miserable consummation of his present unhappiness. It is to this future destiny of the irreligious that we now confine our remarks. If the subject is unwelcome, it is nevertheless important; and if it involves a truth which personally concerns us, it is unwise to divert our attention from it. Two classes of men profess to repudiate the doctrine of future retribution: one of these, admitting the truth of revelation, denies that the doctrine forms any part of that revelation; the other, discarding revelation, dismisses the doctrine as a mere dogma of priestly invention.

Without designing to enter upon a formal discussion of the topic, we purpose merely to suggest a few considerations which have a bearing on the general subject. The penal sufferings of a lost soul are expressed emphatically, although from the necessities of the case figuratively, in the holy Scriptures. We know the intense pain of fire when applied to human flesh, and we can form some conception of the agony which would result from the eating away of our flesh by poisonous teeth; and hence the suffering of a lost soul is compared to the excruciating torture which would be caused by the action of an unquenchable fire, and the ever-continued gnawings of an undying worm. Even admitting that there will be no material fire or worm, there will be that which they faintly symbolize. The language is not unmeaning; it is no exaggeration of the thing it is intended to express; it may, on the contrary, be presumed to fall short in its descriptive power of the reality. So, too, we can form some conception of the agony of body which can extort weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of the teeth; and these terms are used in accommodation to our experience, to denote the intense spiritual anguish of a lost soul. Language so emphatic would not be employed unless to express a torment which no language could ade-

quately describe. Any one who is racked by extreme suffering understands this inadequacy of words to embody his feeling, and especially in communicating any just idea of it to others; and hence language is resorted to which is regarded, by all but the sufferer, as exaggerated. Thus the aching head is spoken of as splitting, neuralgic pain as cutting with a knife, high fever as burning up. All this demonstrates that the body may be the subject of excessive suffering, in the hope of escaping from which many desire rather to die than live. The spirit is also susceptible of suffering even more intolerable than that which assails the material frame. How poignant may be our anguish from the loss of dear friends, or of property, or of reputation! How often are men driven by the force of it to suicide or insanity! And yet, under these circumstances, the body may be entirely free from pain, showing that the suffering is spiritual; and it is all the more terrible that the ordinary support is withdrawn. The spirit of a man will enable him to endure bodily troubles; but when the spirit, the usual support, is wounded and shattered, how can we bear up under the infliction?

There is, however, an unspeakably greater anguish of spirit than any we have referred to. When remorse preys upon the soul, human nature knows no greater suffering. Conscience is at first friendly and earnest in its expostulations with the sinner; if obstinately resisted, it usually becomes quiescent, and ceases its warnings; but in this case it is not dead, but dormant, and when again aroused, it comes as a fiend, to torment the soul with its scorpion lashes. He that sees the victim writhing under its inflictions needs no better exemplification of the nature of hell. It is often too horrible to behold; what, then, must it be to be felt and endured? The sins of a life start up in array. Each one comes as a fury armed to take vengeance. No softening names now serve to conceal its true character.

It eats into the soul like a living fire. Stripped of its disguises, it infixes its sting, and flashes its lurid fires. The soul, tossing in anguish, looks to the physician in vain; friends can afford no relief; the time for false flatteries is at an end. It looks back to be affrighted by the scenes of iniquity, now vividly portrayed, through which it has passed; and looking forward, it beholds an Almighty God armed with vengeance. Its state is described as a "fearful looking for of judgment."

Such cases may be regarded as extremes, although they are not of as rare occurrence as many imagine. They serve, at least, to show what the soul can suffer under the infliction of guilty pangs, even on this side of death. It is nothing less than hell begun here, and thousands carry in their bosoms this incipient hell. Death only furnishes the opportunity for its fuller development. Yes, it is solemnly true that multitudes are damned already. Conscience in them may not yet be aroused, but they are daily heaping up, by their sins, the fuel which is to burn with unquenchable fire. Thus we see what the soul may suffer before its disconnection from the body. Now, if death did no more than perpetuate the remorseful anguish which may now be felt, it would certainly be hell; but it is but a foretaste. The material body can only bear up under a limited amount of mental anguish; but the disembodied soul has immortal powers of endurance. When it passes into the eternal world, impenitent, Christless, hopeless, its despair is intensified. The time for repentance is then passed, it hears no invitations of mercy, it is left to prey upon itself.

The following may be considered some of the elements entering into this lost state:

1. The condemned will retain all the evil dispositions and passions which characterized them in this life. No change of character being effected in this life, none can be expected in the world to come. He that was filthy will be

filthy still, and hence there never was a delusion more unreasonable than that which induces an unregenerate sinner to expect a place in heaven, for which he is morally unfitted. All Scripture leads us to conclude that the impenitent sinners of this world will carry with them all their bad characteristics into the next; and as these evil passions and tempers, in their progressive increase of strength and dominion from year to year, were the sources of increased discontent and unhappiness, so they will be endlessly, in another world, where they will be inconceivably intensified. Imagine a world from which all good will be excluded, tenanted only by human fiends, in whom all the vile and hateful passions shall rage without limitation, and without their appropriate gratification; bitterness, and wrath, and hatred, and remorse disfiguring every face, and imparting fury to every tongue; fearful enough in this world, where they are kept within bounds by the restraints of religion and law, and far more terrible there, where these checks are for ever removed. Artificial distinctions may classify the ungodly in this world, separating the more vile from the more decent; but hereafter there shall be one perdition for all the unholy, and they shall be mingled together as one company.

2. Another element in this misery will be its progressive increase. Analogy sustains this view of the subject. In this life we see the inevitable tendency in the wicked to wax worse and worse. Every evil passion, by indulgence, becomes more imperious and over-mastering. It is true, without regard to the sex of the individual, that any moral evil in the heart grows with the growth, and strengthens with the strength, unless decisive measures are applied for its eradication. Envy, hate, wrath, lust, and other like evils bear very different aspects in their incipient and more matured exhibitions. The greatest and foulest sinners which now curse the earth with their presence, were once

infants in comparative innocence. They have arrived at their present bad eminence by progressive and perhaps almost imperceptible steps. There is not a single unregenerate sinner who has not been growing increasingly worse. It is the law of his nature. This degeneracy has been going on in a world where religion has thrown in its checks and restraints, and, of course, more or less modifying the natural law of deterioration. In the next world to which the sinner is bending his course, there shall be no religion to counteract this downward tendency of the soul. It will act out all the evils within it without restraint; it will necessarily become worse and worse; and as the innocent child degenerates in this world into the obdurate murderer, so in the next, the human nature will be converted into the devilish. This fact explains the ever-increasing hopelessness and misery of the lost. Suffering will not purify them, but exasperate and aggravate that inherent evil in them, which is the cause of their wretchedness.

3. Another element in this future woe, will be the bitter consciousness of the soul, that it is for ever shut out from the joys of heaven which it once might have secured. The sense we have of any pain or disaster under which we suffer here, is rendered more poignant by the persuasion that we might have escaped it, had it not been for our folly and recklessness. The reasoning of the lost will be similar. They will recall the time when they might have secured a title to heaven, but which they foolishly bartered for the imperfect and transitory gratifications of sin. Now they see heaven at a distance, beyond reach, and yet sufficiently visible to add to their pain by its contrasted felicity. Much, very much, is implied in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. The former was without a drop of water to cool his tortured tongue, and new emphasis is added to his torment by seeing Lazarus afar off in glory, and an impassable gulf between them.

Thus reasoning from analogy, we arrive at a conception of hell, which is not only confirmed, but greatly amplified by the holy Scriptures. Every man, until regenerated by the Spirit of God, carries the elements of hell in his own bosom. In a greater or less degree they are developed in this preliminary stage of being, and only await the transition to eternity for their complete development. The gospel is the only adequate remedy for a depraved humanity, and the only door of hope for otherwise doomed souls. Hence we may reasonably inquire,

1st. Whether it should be a matter of wonder that the gospel should be so earnest in its invitations, expostulations, and threatenings with sinners; and whether those who are appointed to preach, and who are supposed to have experienced its saving power, should deal in all plainness of speech, when warning sinners of the consequences of rejecting it? The gospel is the power of God to salvation, and those who are saved must be saved now. It is before, and not after death, that the fires of perdition must be extinguished within them. Sin must be crucified, their moral nature reconstructed, old things pass away, and all things become new; otherwise they must carry the principles of destruction with them into another world. Hence the earnestness of the cry, "Turn ye, turn ye; for why will ye die?"

2d. The question is appropriate, Can sinners justly complain if they perish, by persistently adhering to their sins and despising the gospel remedy? Do they not voluntarily choose death, when they choose to cherish the cause of it? If they resolve to sin, they resolve to encounter all its consequences here and hereafter.

The impressive admonition from God is, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world—for all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of

the world; and the world passeth away and the lust thereof." The pursuits of the world are thus characterized as not only irreligious, but transitory. The lust of the flesh may be imperious in its demands for gratification, the lust of the eye may seek satisfaction in all the appliances of wealth and fashion, and the pride of the human heart may resort to all the inventions of art; but these resources are not inexhaustible; they perish even in the using. And what are their effects? They estrange the heart from God, and divert the attention from what is man's chief end. They not only fail to prepare the heart for a better world, but prove positive hindrances. Soon their inanity betrays itself; disappointment and ennui succeed; and what is still more deplorable, they leave the heart obdurate and full of every bad passion. The votary of pleasure is exposed to a thousand ills, and when his appetite palls, he feels the beginning of hell within him. He has, in despite of the numerous sad examples around him, and in opposition to the faithful warnings of reason, revelation, and providence, made his election; he has chosen the world in preference to God and heaven; and all just ground of complaint is taken from him. He that sows the wind must expect to reap the whirlwind.

3d. If any desire to escape perdition, they must begin at once. Heaven is not to be obtained by a mere idle wish, or by an extorted repentance in the last disturbed hours of life; it is entered only by *striving*. An important preliminary work is necessary. The corrupt nature which, perpetuated throughout eternity, is the very element of hell, must be assailed, and overcome, and eradicated here. To retain it with all its bad passions and propensities is inconsistent with a rational hope of salvation. Heaven is happiness because it is holiness, and none can reasonably hope for its enjoyment, without aiming at its attainment now.