

ORIGINAL SIN' AND ETERNAL PUNISHMENT.

A Fresh Study by C. L. PARKER

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PREFACE.

THE chief importance of all Doctrines is the effect they have upon our estimate of God. It is not enough to believe that there is a God: millions of people have no doubt about that. What matters is, "What does the believer say about God?"

It is dangerous to say what is untrue about a man in public; for there is a law of slander which may call one to account. It is far more dangerous to say what is untrue about God; for, not only is there His displeasure to fear, but also there is the responsibility of leading others into error about the most vital of all subjects, the character of God.

All religious teaching has perforce these two sides. Proverbs 25,13 calls attention to the former. "As cold of snow in the time of harvest so is a faithful messenger to them that send him: for he refresheth the soul of his masters." Whoever does, or does not, listen to the teacher, his Master does, and is either refreshed or nauseated by what He hears. "So then because thou art lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." (Rev. 3,16.) God is obliged to listen to the most foolish and even wicked things that are said about Him all over the earth, in Hindu and Buddhist Temple, in Mohammedan Mosque and Spiritist Seance. Even in those places of worship which are set apart for Christians He will hear the most contradictory and usually illogical beliefs propounded, and watch the hearts of His own children troubled and misled by the multitude of voices. It is hardly too much to say that it is well nigh impossible for a young Christian convert to find his way out of the forest of conflicting doctrines into which he must plunge at conversion. He will hear of Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Baptist and many other forms of Christianity: and there is a host of heretical sects such as Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh Day Adventism, Christadelphianism, Christian Science, to bewilder him still further. Surely this must be a sore trial to the Almighty, and a constant source of sorrow and even anguish. How lovely to be able to refresh the soul of God, as Job did, in face of pious but incorrect orthodoxy!¹

Matt. 23 draws our attention to the other danger. Our Lord's awful denunciation of the religious teachers of His day, who made their pupils twofold more a child of Hell than themselves, is enough to give edge to James' words. "My brethren be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation." (James 3,1), and to send the teacher to his knees again and again, seeking for truth and deliverance from error.² Peter points out that false teachers are to be the bane of Christianity, even as false prophets ruined Judaism: and so it has turned out, especially in these last days.³ Flocks follow shepherds, and many a flock has been robbed and spoiled through the perversity of its shepherd. Our Lord has a special place for the faithful steward who gives the right food in time of need to his people.⁴

How then to account for the multitude of doctrines? Is the Book at fault through obscurity or error? If that be so we must give up the doctrine of inspiration, and let the Bible be renamed "Man's Word"! No; the fault must lie with us, the teachers. So often we have not considered that stricter judgement that awaits us,⁵ but imagined that we could teach what suited us with impunity. St. Paul and St. Peter speak of teachers whose motives were mercenary,⁶ or wicked,⁷ or who sought popularity,⁸ or feared consequences.⁹ No doubt laziness too can play its part,¹⁰ or pride,¹¹ or reverence for tradition,¹² and refusal to receive correction from another's mouth.¹³ Whatever the cause, the History of the Church has by its multiplying of sects and doctrines shown to us the weaknesses of human nature and the fierceness of the attack which Satan has made upon us.

In the final analysis the only thing that matters is the verdict of The Great Absent Teacher who listens to His pupils who sit in His seat, "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat" (Matt. 23,2). Let us then fill our cups with snow water and put them to the Master's lips and earn a great reward.¹⁴

If we can but speak to people the truths that Our Lord wants them to hear, we shall indeed be comforters of Him who was betrayed by His own disciple. If we can pass around a correct likeness, and not a caricature of the Truth, we shall stand for ever in the Kingdom of Heaven, and our little candle will shine bright and unashamed by the side of the Great Sun of Truth in that day.

		8		
		9		Gal. 1,10.
		10		Gal. 2,12.
1		Job 42,7-9.	11	Heb. 6,1-14.
2		2 Peter 2,1.	12	2 Tim. 2,15.
3		2 Tim. 4,3.	13	1 Tim. 6,3-5.
4		Matt. 24,45-47.	14	Mark 7,7-13.
5	1 Cor. 4,1-5.	James 3,1.		John 9,34.
6	2 Pet. 2,3. 2 Cor. 2,17. 1 Pet. 5,2. Titus 1,11.			
7	Acts 20,30. Eph. 4,14.			

INTRODUCTION.

THIS particular booklet has been called forth because of the deep fog which surrounds the doctrines of "Original Sin" and "Eternal Punishment". It is not too much to say that much of the contempt which honest men have poured upon Christianity has arisen from a wholesome refusal to believe some of the things which are put forward as unquestioned matters of Christian Faith. Just as the Roman Catholic Church has repelled many by its obvious errors—as instanced by the latest doctrine, necessary to saving faith, of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary—so also has Protestantism asked men to believe the incredible, and even the wicked. Some in revolt have thrown away the baby with the bathwater: others have subsided into an uneasy silence on the matters, and, when challenged by the unbeliever, have had to refuse battle, or else attempt to defend the indefensible with the sword of Ecclesiastical Authority.

The malady is deep-rooted and inveterate. For hundreds of years the influence of St. Augustine and others has swayed the minds of Christians, and through the Roman Church laid down a track, by this time worn hard by the unreflecting feet of thousands, which has led into confusion and error. Particularly is this so in regard to the character of God, which has been besmirched and twisted out of all recognition: until, instead of a God of Love who is the soul of generosity and long-suffering and mercy, we have a Despot who

is a bundle of contradictions: loving enough to send His Son to die for sinners but too careless to make sure that they heard about it: not willing that any should perish but knowing that the vast majority would: the essence of unselfishness and yet creating this groaning world for His own glory and pleasure.

No effort can be too great to rescue the reputation of our Lord from these aspersions and to enable every man to worship Him with a satisfied mind as well as a loving heart, and to drive the antagonist into the confusion of folly.¹

There is no conflict between faith and reason: indeed the Christian faith is the only reasonable way of thinking, and men will go to Hell if, having seen and understood it, they reject it for their own selfish ends. God in all things appeals to our reason;² there is no higher court of appeal: if a thing is irrational or self-contradictory no man can be justified in accepting it as true however great the pressure. God's one weapon in the fight against error is The Truth, the Arm of the Lord, "to whom is the Arm of the Lord revealed?" (Isa. 53,1). There is such a thing as the full assurance of understanding which is the goal of the healthy believer,³ and God's words are all plain to him that understandeth.⁴ The surrender of the intellect to authority, whether it be to that of some powerful church, or of some modern ideology, is the final abdication of humanity. The Holy Ghost came for the express purpose of leading the Church into all truth. He is never happier than when bringing the infant child of God to the stature of the fullness of Christ in faith and knowledge.

The Bible was written, not for great intellects, but for simple babes.⁵ Its truths are so obvious that to deny them is the greatest crime, worthy of death, and impatient of any defence, "he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16,16), "that they all might be damned who believed not the truth" (2 Thess. 2,11-12). It is the things that worldly men believe, such as Mohammedanism or Evolution or Christian Science, that have to be believed against the evidence and the plain dictates of common sense, in which clever but wicked men have to think up every conceivable kind of argument that can serve to bolster up a bad case.

On the contrary the wisdom of God is so plain that John was able to write it in words of one syllable; while the wisdom of men invariably requires a particular sort of jargon that only the initiated can understand, correct thinking dresses itself in homespun; it is foolishness and muddle-headedness that requires verbal frills and furbelows if it is to be acceptable. God is angry with men not just for evil living, but also for devious thinking wherewith to defend it, so that in the end their minds are permanently damaged and unable to think straight at all. "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind".⁶ The murder of the intelligence is as grave a crime as the searing of the conscience, and truth is the seed plot of morality.

The appeal of this Booklet then is to the logic of The Truth and the very plain overwhelming statements of the Scriptures, in which the most important doctrines are stated and restated in such a variety of ways that they cannot be misunderstood by a candid mind.

The aim of the Booklet is that the Reader may end up by being completely satisfied with his understanding of the Love and Wisdom of God, perfectly willing to engage any opponent in argument with no awkward reserves at the back of his mind, and devoid of the strife and bitterness which always go with the championship of error.

¹ Titus 1,9-11. ³ Col. 2,2. ⁵ Matt. 11,25. Isa. 28,9.
² Isa. 1,18. ⁴ Prov. 8,9. ⁶ Rom. 1,18-32.

CHAPTER ONE. THE PILLARS OF ALL THEOLOGY.

THERE are two fundamental Truths of Christianity which will be laid down as the pillars of all theology. The first is that God is Love: the second that the will, though not the actions, of men is free.

God is Love.

The statement is not that God is loving, i.e. capable of love, but that He is Love, i.e. incapable of not loving. The Love of others is His Nature and dominates all His thoughts and actions. All other emotions of the Almighty, His anger, His jealousy, His compassion, His vengeance, are but the varied reactions of His Love under different circumstances. When He is most angry it is still the Anger of Love: when He scourges every son whom He receives it is only a manifestation of His Love, arising from a longing that in this way His son may come to honour.

Not only is God passively unselfish, He is also actively benevolent. It is not enough that He should not seek His own happiness: He must also be ceaselessly engaged in seeking that of others.

The most dangerous and devastating of all lies is the thought that God created the Universe for His own glory or pleasure. The mistranslation of Rev. 4,11 "For thy pleasure they are and were created" corrected in the R.V. to "Because of thy will they were, and were created" is a reflection of the bad old theory of the divine right of kings, and has led to the absurd contradiction that a God who is Love yet created the Universe for His own pleasure, and so was selfish.

The truth of course is that The Almighty needed nothing to give Him pleasure, but was already completely happy in the love of His Son and Spirit; but that out of sheer unselfishness He jeopardised that perfect happiness and entered upon a course which was bound to bring Him sorrow, solely in order that there might arise an Eternal Kingdom in which countless myriads might share His own happiness for ever.

While it is true that God does seek His own glory, it is quite untrue that He created the Universe for His own glory. God seeks His own glory solely for our sakes, and not at all for His.

As an illustration, The Judge at The Old Bailey is most punctilious in seeking his own glory, and will commit you to prison for contempt of court, if you refuse to obey his ruling. He does this however for the sake of the ordinary citizen, who will not be able to obtain justice if the Judge is despised. It is very far from the truth to say that the Judge invented the legal system in order that he might be honoured! On the contrary the legal system was invented for the well-being of the citizens, and for their sakes the Judge is to be treated with respect!

So The Almighty insists upon being treated with the honour due to Him, because only so can those He has created live in peace and tranquillity and freedom from fear of aggression. Where law is despised and its custodians are weak the wicked prey upon the righteous, and happiness is impossible.

Let us therefore settle once and for all in our hearts that at the centre of the Universe are three Persons, who unitedly have given up all thought of their own happiness, if by any means they may secure that of their creatures, and are willing to make any sacrifice of their own interests if only this may be achieved. The Godhead is, in one word, wholly unselfish and devoted to its Creation. Love is at the Centre of the Universe.

Man is Free.

The one overwhelming fact about man—and angels too!—is that his will is free, although not of course his actions. Had this not been so there could have been no sin. For sin is the selfish desire of a free will which has it in its power to will otherwise.

In this one enormous fact lies the explanation of the Universe as we know it, "travailing in pain together until now", and as we are one day going to know it, divided into Heaven, Earth, and Hell. God has put it into the power of man to will in opposition to His own will and so bring His whole creation to ruin and misery, as we see it before our eyes. Yet, though God will be unable throughout eternity to change the wills of the finally unrepentant, He is able at any moment to prevent them putting that will into effect, and Hell will be the abode of those who, desiring to do evil, find no way of putting their desires into action, but are held "silent in darkness", malignant but powerless.

It is therefore the will of man that is the battleground. That will may find itself in the battle of life so imprisoned by the lusts of the flesh and mind that it knows itself to be a helpless captive led into actions which it loathes: but no power of sin can prevent the will desiring its liberty! And where that will exists, however feebly, God is able to deliver in a moment and send it on its way rejoicing in its new found freedom.¹

In this battle of the will there must come a moment when the final choice either for good or evil is taken. After that the soul either plunges down into the foul depths of selfishness and cruelty, or else soars upwards into the delights of love and fellowship. The cruel man seeks and finds ever new ways of grinding others under his heel: the loving man finds his heart increasingly occupied with the happiness of others, who are also concerned with his happiness, and procure it more successfully than he could ever hope to do unaided!

It follows therefore that in our consideration of the Doctrines under discussion we shall rule out at once any solution which suggests that God is not perfect in Love, or that man can be the final victim of forces beyond his control. Any answers to be acceptable must posit the complete unselfishness and unlimited benevolence of God, and the equal ability of man to be the master of his own fate for weal or woe, and to accept or reject the Love of God. When God gave man a free will, He made him free even to hate Himself.

¹ Rom. 7,1-25.

CHAPTER TWO. CONFLICTING THEORIES OF ORIGINAL SIN AND ETERNAL PUNISHMENT.

SO much has been written upon the subject of Original Sin and Eternal Punishment that it is impossible to consider all the sub-divisions: but the main theories fall under five headings:

Predestinarian Theories.

Universalist Theories.

Born in Sin Theories.

Pelagian Theories.

The Dead Sin in the Flesh Theory.

We will examine each theory briefly and see how it passes the two tests of The Love of God and the Free Will of Man.

Predestinarian Theories.

The root thought of such theories is that God, being by Nature absolute, has the right to do whatever He wills, and not only cannot, but should not, be withstood. He has no duties to anyone, while for their part His creatures have no rights and only duties towards Him. The world was created by Him for His glory and pleasure, and He has a perfect right to do what He will with His own. It is therefore open to Him to create some beings for Heaven and others for Hell just as He chooses, without any reference to their wishes or

deserts but simply to please Himself. They base their theories chiefly upon the picture of the Potter having power over the clay. (Jer. 18,1-10.)¹

All such theories are dashed to pieces upon the Rock of God's Benevolence, by which He does nothing to please Himself, "For even Christ pleased not Himself" (Rom. 15,3), but only considers the well-being of His creatures. Love seeketh not her own,² and God in His creating sought nothing for Himself, but rather, at His own expense, the happiness of those He loved.

It is impossible, and a contradiction of Scripture, to state that it was the pleasure of God to create beings for Hell: for He is most careful to state that He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked,³ and He makes it clear that His desire is universal salvation,⁴ for He is not willing that any should perish. It was impossible for God to create beings for eternal punishment, or to use His power to hurt a sparrow. Men can do many things which are impossible for God, who cannot deny Himself or do anything which is unloving, unwise, powerless or untrue.⁵

The smallest examination of Jer. 18,1-10 which is the root of Rom. 9,21 makes it clear that, so far from teaching that God is responsible for the shape of the vessel, Jeremiah is reminding Israel that it all depends upon them! God will do the best He can for all, but Israel must repent if she wants Him to make her a vessel to honour. Pharaoh had so misbehaved himself that he left God no alternative but to make an example of him, to deter others from similar wickedness. It is the free will of the clay which decides the Great Potter what to do with it: and the Potter having made up His mind, will change it, if the clay will change his!

N.B. 1. The Predestination and Election of God are represented in Scripture as being dependent upon His Foreknowledge, and not vice versa. Men are not depicted as acting because God has forced their wills: but God is said to predestinate them to do what His Foreknowledge knows they will want to do, "whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate" (Rom. 8,29).⁶ Were it not so any moral judgement of the actions of a man who fulfils prophecy would be impossible: he could always successfully plead that he was the victim of *force majeure*. Yet although Judas did but fulfil a prophecy in his betrayal of Jesus he was not thereby justified, but was blamed as one who was doing his own, and not God's, will.

In the same way the Election of God still needs the full concurrence of our wills, if it is to be effective. "Wherefore the rather brethren give diligence to make your calling and election sure" (2 Pet. 1,10).⁷

N.B. 2. There is a sense in which the will of God is always done. "Him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will" (Eph. 1,11). There is also a sense in which only One Man has done the will of God, His own Son. Neither sin nor its punishment were the will of God: yet sin will not be able in the long run to deter God from having His own way, though not the perfect realisation of the longing of His loving heart that all men should be saved.⁸ God is not able to govern the will of man, but only his actions. Will can be persuaded, but not forced. The Predestinarian is afraid of derogating from the Majesty of God if he gives to any creature the power of resisting His will; and he falls thereby into the mistake of attributing Hell to the will of God, and taking from man any responsibility for it, or indeed for anything. The truth is that by giving man will, God has enabled him to resist His Love for ever, but only to his own undoing, not God's. God continues with His everlasting plan of happiness, but is obliged to leave His enemies outside in misery. To defy God's will means to ruin oneself, not to discomfit the Lord. Although God cannot control our wills, He can and does prevent us putting our will into action: only that amount of action is allowed to the wicked as will fit in with God's loving plan. The evil deeds of men will turn out for good: all others He will restrain. "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain" (Ps. 76,10).

Universalist Theories.

In these theories the main emphasis is laid—

- (a) Upon The Love of God which is stated to be so powerful as to be finally irresistible, and
- (b) Upon the Sovereignty of God, which would be defeated if any were found able to withstand His Power.

All such theories break down upon the truth of the will of man. In giving will to man God voluntarily gave him the ability to withstand even Himself so far as will, though not so far as action, is concerned. This He did, since He desired the most valuable thing in the world, Love: and it is the essence of Love that it is voluntary. Love cannot be forced even by Love, as many a disappointed lover has found! When God gave man will He gave him power to hate or to love, and only the man can decide which he will do! The furthest that God can go is to leave a man no reason for hating Him; and this He did at Calvary with the offer of eternal happiness. After that all who hate God will do so without any valid reason, but simply from a hatred of goodness and happiness, and a preference for evil and unhappiness.⁹ Those in Hell will have no desire to come out of it and enjoy the happiness of God's Kingdom, but only to come out and destroy that happiness in malicious selfishness.¹⁰ As we have already seen, The Almighty will be Sovereign over the actions of men, and will only leave them free to desire evil to their own entire incapacitation.

N.B. 1. It is worth noticing that, actually, these theories are found to depend not upon the soul's glad response to the Grace of God, but upon the chastening effect of indefinitely long periods of punishment after death, so that their ultimate salvation will spring from the fear of further punishment after they have spent "ages of ages" in torment. It is pain that is to be the purifier of the soul, not gratitude and love. Age-long torment is to succeed where Calvary has failed.

N.B. 2. All Universalist theories are also obliged to embarrass themselves with the translation of the Greek word *aiōnios*. This is the word which is invariably used about God,¹¹ The Gift of God,¹² Salvation,¹³ our

inheritance.¹⁴ Any attempt therefore to whittle down its meaning from "everlasting" to "age-long" or something of the sort only throws a doubt upon the eternity of God and our heavenly life!

The meaning of the word *aionios* is fixed by 2 Cor. 4,18. The things which are seen have already lasted for ages from the beginning of the creation; so that we should be obliged to translate "The things that are seen are temporal" i.e. last for ages. "but the things that are not seen are *aionia*" i.e. last for ages!

So also with the Greek words "unto the ages of the ages" usually translated "for ever and ever". They are used to describe the duration of God's life,¹⁵ of Christ's life,¹⁶ of the Redeemed,¹⁷ and the torment of the lost.¹⁸ It is perfectly clear what these words meant to a Greek: he had no other words wherewith to express himself. Had there been a Greek word for eternity in common use he would not have chosen it, for eternity has a hint of monotony about it, whereas "ages of ages" compels us to envisage ceaseless change and development, as the wisdom of God unrolls its manifold plans of enjoyment.

N.B. 3. The dreadful words of Phil. 3,19—"whose end is destruction"—and the like words in Heb. 6,4-8; 10,26-31 hold out no hope of a happy eternity to those who have trampled under foot the Son of God.

N.B. 4. Yet in his rejection of some theories of Eternal Punishment the Ultimate Reconciliationist has been nearer to the heart of God than those who have held them. He has at least seen the awful horror of Eternal Torment, and revolted from the thought of vast masses of mankind being tortured by God in eternal fire without having had the least opportunity of escape offered to them! It is not in his estimate of the character of God that he has erred so much as in his practical denial of the freedom of the will of man, and his refusal to accept the plain statements of Scripture, that the torment of Hell is everlasting.

"Born in Sin" Theories.

There are three types of such theories to be considered: but before doing so it is worth pointing out that neither of the two phrases, "born in sin" and "original sin", occur in Scripture: they are man-made, and have no divine warrant behind them. They have however been so often repeated that very many Christians are sure that they are in the Bible until asked to find them.

A. Imputed Guilt.

The first theory takes the ground that as the righteousness of Christ is imputed to the saint when he is born again, so the guilt of Adam was imputed to all Adam's children. Some would even go so far as to say that even if a man could himself live a sinless life, he would still deserve to go to Hell for what Adam did.

The Two Great Errors of This Theory

1. In the first place it is not "the righteousness of Christ" which is imputed to the saint, but simply "righteousness" or "justification", two translations of the same Greek word. The convicted felon who has done his time comes out of prison "justified" or "righteous", and it is a legal offence to speak of him any longer as a criminal or convict. He has "paid" for his crime, he is "justified", and re-enters society as a free man. But that does not mean that he is also credited with all the virtues of his country's most famous citizen! No man can have the virtues or sins of another man imputed to him: nor will God impute to any man the perfect righteousness of Christ. He has the name which is above every name.

"The righteousness of Christ" is a phrase which means the perfect character of Christ, and the theory, which holds that this is imputed to the sinner, is responsible for the grave doctrinal error that, when the Christian stands before the Judgement of Christ, God will not see him but only Christ, and will therefore count him as perfect. This is of course completely unscriptural, and makes nonsense of the race for the crown of which Paul speaks in 1 Cor. 9,25, and of the danger of losing that crown of which the Lord speaks in Rev. 3,11.

It is not "the righteousness of Christ" which is imputed to the sinner, but His death. Christ paid our penalty by His death on Calvary, and upon certain terms God accepts this as our death. The terms are, that we agree that the wages of sin is death and that God ought justly to kill us; that we repent of our own sin, which act gives a guarantee for the future; and that we gratefully accept the sacrifice of Jesus on our behalf which kills "the old man" and starts us on our new life with a clean heart. So long as we hold this faith firm unto the end there is no question of our coming into judgement of life or death. Eternal life with God is ours, unless we deliberately throw it away in hatred and contempt and thus commit spiritual suicide.¹⁹ But Paul desired that we should not merely be saved, but be saved with glory,²⁰ and it is the deeds done in *our* body, not in Christ's, which will bring us shame or glory as the case may be.²¹

2. In the second place there is an entire misunderstanding of the meaning of the word "guilt". The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines it as "the having committed a specified or implied offence". To say that a man is guilty means that he is the man who committed the deed either actually or through an agent, and carries with it the necessity of his having been privy to the act. It is impossible for a man to be accounted guilty of having committed an action which was done before his birth by a man of whom he has never heard! Such theology springs from ignorance of the meaning of words, and the absence of any ordinary sense of justice. It is a grievous thing to attribute to the Almighty an outrageous act of injustice which would be criminal in a man! "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. 18,25). "Yea, and why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?" (Luke 12,57).

N.B. 1. It may be well to refer here to Exod. 20,5, which is generally misquoted by leaving out the last five words "of them that hate me". If sons follow their father's hatred of God and share in their sins, then of course they will share in their punishment, but not otherwise, e.g. Joshua 7,24. It would have been difficult

for Achan to have dug up the floor of his tent without the knowledge of his family! It is of course impossible for The Lord, who is righteous in all His ways, to blame children for what their parents have done: and in the Bible God makes this very plain. Yet the theory we are considering makes God break His own law and commit an injustice which is forbidden to men. Amaziah did not kill the children of his father's murderers, that he might obey God; neither did God Himself kill the children of Korah in spite of their father's sin.²² Yet God is represented as having killed all Adam's children for what Adam did! No: the whole eighteenth chapter of Ezekiel is a deliberate repudiation by God of just this doctrine, held by Jews and lately by Christians, that the children's teeth are set on edge by their father's sins!²³ Cain and Abel were not born "Dead in Sin" because of what their father had done. They died in spirit because of what they themselves did, "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that *all* have sinned" (Rom. 5,12).

N.B. 2. 1 Cor. 15,22, "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive", is often brought forward to support this theory. But this verse, and the whole chapter, is about the resurrection of the body. Adam and his seed did not die physically because of his sin being imputed, but simply because God took away the Tree of Life, that man should not have to live for ever in violence and unhappiness. Had not God done this, Adam and his children would have gone on eating of the Tree of Life and so would have lived for ever: but Eternal Life in the violence which was the outcome of Adam's sin would have been no blessing. As the years went by Adam must have been shocked and frightened at what "one little sin" had produced!²⁴ The first physical death that men experience is because Adam by his sin deprived them of their perfect food, without which the human body falls into decay and death (cf. Rev. 22,2). So even innocent babies may die before doing good or evil. The second time men lose their bodies, in the Lake of Fire, is for their own sin, after they have been raised to life in the second resurrection.²⁵ If this verse were to refer to the soul and spirit, it would force us to believe in universal Salvation! Note that it does not say "all in Adam", but "in Adam all": and so not "all in Christ", but "in Christ all": first Christ Himself, then they that are Christ's, then "the dead" at the second Resurrection (1 Cor. 15,23).

N.B. 3. Romans 5,12 is, quaintly enough, often quoted to prove the very opposite of its plain meaning. The verse states that, although sin and death came into the world through Adam, they passed through to his descendants not because Adam sinned but because *all* sinned. In other words "the soul that sinneth it shall die", and all men with the single exception of "the man Christ Jesus", have like a flock of sheep followed Adam's bad example and suffered the same fate.²⁶

The death of every man's body is due to the absence of the tree of life, caused by Adam's sin: the death of every man's spirit is due to his own sin, not that of Adam. So even the Christian Saint, whose sins are forgiven through the blood of Jesus, yet dies physically through lack of the tree of life: but this is a blessing; for who wants to be burdened for ever with flesh which derives from Adam, and is a constant source of trouble and temptation?²⁷

Up to the time of Christ's Resurrection physical death carried with it spiritual death, and saint and sinner alike descended to Hades, though to different sides of it. "Before I go whence I shall not return, even to the land of darkness and the shadow of death; a land of darkness, as darkness itself; and of the shadow of death, without any order, and where the light is as darkness" (Job 10,21-22).²⁸ It was this that held the Old Testament saints in bondage all their lives. But after Christ's Resurrection this was changed: "the Gates of Hades" could not imprison the Church of God, but they ascended to be in spirit with the Lord, "having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better" (Phil. 1,23),²⁹ and were in Paradise awaiting the first Resurrection.³⁰ The thought of physical death brought tears to Hezekiah's eyes, but joy to the heart of Paul!

N.B. 4. In like manner Rom. 5,18-19 is often completely misunderstood. If these verses meant that Adam by his sin forced men into death, they must mean that Christ by His obedience forced men into life! But we know perfectly well that this is not the meaning. On the contrary Christ's obedience only benefits those who of their own free will repent, believe and copy His obedience,³¹ and so Adam's sin only killed those who deliberately disobeyed and copied his sin. If the condemnation which followed Adam's sin was universal without reference to the will of man, then the justification which follows Christ's obedience must also be universal without reference to the will of man: a very pretty argument for the Universalist, and one which he is not slow to use!

B. "Born in Sin" under God's Wrath.

This theory teaches that all men, being "born in sin" after the sin of Adam are therefore incapable of doing right or even wanting to do right. They are by nature born dead in trespasses and sins, and therefore inevitably fall under the wrath of God who hates sin and is too holy to look upon it.

They must therefore, unless saved by God, spend eternity in hell for the sins which they have unavoidably committed because of their fallen nature.

They sin, as the scorpion stings, because it is their nature to do so. Eph. 2,1-3 is quoted in support.

C. "Born in Sin" but not yet under God's Wrath.

This theory also states that men are born in sin and cannot avoid sinning: but teaches that, because they cannot avoid it, God does not blame them for it, but only for rejecting His offer of salvation in the Gospel, if they hear it. This theory is usually vague about the fate of those who die without hearing the Gospel: but

both B & C, as well as A, deny any possibility of what is erroneously called "a second chance", i.e. the hearing of the gospel after death.

Fundamental Misconceptions of B and C

Both B & C suffer from the same fundamental error which led Nicodemus astray in John 3,4. They speak as if man consisted of one instead of three parts—body, soul and spirit: and as if man were the father of all three.

The Bible statement is that the first pair, Adam and Eve, were made by God in all three parts: but that God has designed to share the creation of all subsequent human beings with the parents, He Himself supplying the soul³² and the spirit³³ and the parents supplying the flesh.³⁴ Thus God has only made two bodies Himself, those of Adam and Eve, which were perfect. All other bodies have been passed down from parent to parent. It is in the flesh of the body that the effects of Adam's fall have been felt, for no parent has ever been able to hand down perfect flesh to his children.

Thus every man finds in his flesh desires which will tempt him to sin and should be resisted.³⁵ You only need to read vv. 2 & 12 of James 1 to understand that this temptation is a blessing to man, and the very way whereby he was meant to pass from innocence to purity, from weakness to strength. God never meant anyone to live without temptation; for temptation is not sin but opportunity of victory and the royal road to strength of character. So that even Christ was tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin (Heb. 4,15). It was indeed The Holy Spirit who drove Him into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. So also was it God who allowed Satan into Eden, that by the rebuttal of his lies and slander the love of Adam and Eve for God might be perfected and their hearts made strong in loyalty. We may compare also the temptations of Job and Abraham which clothed them with eternal glory.

To meet this temptation from the flesh however, the soul of every man, which is made by God and therefore perfect, has the help of a living spirit which is also God's gracious gift. Thus two parts of every child that is born come from God, and only the third part, its flesh, from its parents. Now it is impossible that God should create either an evil soul or a dead spirit—all God's works are perfect—and therefore in the creation of every child, however unsatisfactory its flesh may be, its soul and spirit are perfect; and therefore the child is fit for heaven, since to get there it would have to leave its only imperfect part, the flesh, behind. These theories say that little children are born in sin and therefore fit for Hell: but God says that "of such is the Kingdom of Heaven" (Mark 10,14). He cannot mean that Heaven is for those who are "by nature depraved in soul and dead in trespasses and sins"!

N.B. 1. It is well in passing to notice that the Bible attributes to the flesh sins which we would put down to the soul.³⁶ It is therefore impossible not to have wrong desires; but Jas. 1,14-15 states quite plainly that it is not the presence of wrong desires that kills a man but the yielding to them. Rom. 7,8-11 makes an identical statement, and both together state that the soul is born with a living spirit, which only dies after the commission of deliberate sin, thus agreeing with Ezek. 18, and 1 Tim. 2,14. It cannot be too often emphasised that temptation is not sin—Christ had temptation but not sin—and that temptation does not kill, but only sin.

N.B. 2. 2 Cor. 5,1-11; 7,1 show how important is purity of the flesh; for, when once anything wrong has entered the brain or the members, it is there for as long as the flesh lasts, and can be handed on to one's children. Heredity is indeed a dread physical fact when once sin has entered the flesh. We may inherit father's desire for drink or Aunt Mary's proneness to bad temper as well as mother's level headedness or Uncle Tom's courage! And with the solicitations of our fallen flesh the soul will have to strive, as did Eve, with those of Satan.

It was for this reason that, once sin had entered Adam's flesh, God decided that nothing less than its destruction and the provision of new and perfect flesh in the Resurrection would meet the case. The Christian can by the power of God be kept free from fleshly sin, but he cannot be immune from fleshly temptation, till the day when the hour of groaning is over, the redemption of the body is his, and he knows the spotless clothing of his "house from heaven".

N.B. 3. Incidentally the statement "The soul that sinneth it shall die" proves that the soul is not born dead in sin; for a dead soul cannot die but is already dead. Only the living can die.

N.B. 4. The passage in Ps. 51,5, "Behold I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me", only states the same truth. All that David got from his mother was his flesh; his soul and spirit were God's work. Were it not for doctrinal bias we should understand from this verse that it was his mother who was in sin at his conception, not David. Suppose the verse read "in bitterness, or joy, did my mother conceive me!" we should unhesitatingly refer the bitterness or joy to his mother not to David, as is grammatically correct: "in sin" is an adverbial phrase qualifying the verb, not the object.

Many scholars have pointed out that the fact that, when asked by Samuel to bring out his sons, Jesse did not produce David, valiant and spiritual though he already was,³⁷ and that his brethren, like those of Jesus, never seem to have been his close associates but rather to have despised him,³⁸ seems to show that there was some slur on his birth. If this be so David is a fitting type of Christ who also, though untruly, lay under this imputation of being "born of fornication",³⁹ since Mary could not produce His father, and everybody knew it!

Whether this be so or not, it remains the fact that all David got from his mother was his flesh, and that in any view of the case that flesh was sinful.

N.B. 5. So weak is this theory that even Ps. 58,3 is brought in to support it, "The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies". The Psalmist is here speaking in a highly poetic vein—even the "wickedest" little child must wait for a few years before it knows the difference between right and wrong and begins deliberately to tell lies! (Isa. 7,15-16)—and is contrasting those, who seem to delight in evil from an early age, with those who on the contrary like Samuel, David, and John the Baptist, so far from going astray from the womb, were filled with the Holy Ghost and spake the words of God to all Israel.

N.B. 6. In the consideration therefore of the two "Born in Sin" theories B and C (see page 11), it must be kept in mind that children are not born in the condition of death and sin so often attributed to them. They come into the world with a pure soul which is alive to God through the spirit which He has given them: and they have the added advantage of a personal Angel with instant access to God.⁴⁰ So lovingly and thoroughly has The Almighty provided for every little one; for all are dear to Him and He is not willing that any should perish.

So far as its flesh is concerned, every child will indeed find that this is a source of temptation to it: but this is to be regarded as a blessing which is to make it hate evil and love good. Rom. 7,7-25 and Jas. 1,14-15 describe in detail the process by which the soul having at last become aware of evil, is, like Eve, solicited by it and deceived, not forced, into thinking that it is making a good bargain by selling itself to sin,⁴¹ and then experiences the death of the spirit, having chosen to live without God. God sent Satan into Eden, not to cause the Fall, but to prevent it, by provoking the necessity for constant victory over temptation.

N.B. 7. St. Paul in Rom. 7 & 8 draws a very clear distinction between the mind of the flesh and the mind of the soul, and represents the soul that has once sold itself to "sin in the flesh" as not responsible for its actual actions, but after its initial surrender, a helpless captive obliged to obey a tyrannous Master, and needing a Saviour to set it free. Thus the will, though not the actions, of a sinner is free: although obliged to do evil the sinner is not obliged to want to do it. And if, and when, the soul looks upon sin as a hateful monster, it can be set free by The Lord. It is only when not only the actions but also the will of the sinner are evil, that the case is hopeless, and even God can do nothing for him except keep him eternally helpless and harmless in Hell. It is the will of man that is the battleground: his actions can be forced by God, Satan or man: but his will—never!

N.B. 8. Finally therefore we are to remember that a man can undergo two changes of nature. When born he is a human being fit for the kingdom of Heaven and alive to God. When he sins he becomes "dead in trespasses and sins" and suffers the first change to that of a deliberate sinner, dead to God and deservedly under His wrath. Eph. 2,1-3 does not speak of men as "dead in sin", but as "dead in trespasses and sins wherein they walked". It was the sins in which they, not Adam, walked which killed them and changed their nature from that of a lamb in the Arms of Jesus to that of the ass of Exod. 13,13, doomed to destruction.

Upon the new birth he suffers yet another change and becomes, not what he was at birth a son of man and a servant of God, but, marvellously, a son of God and a partaker of the Divine Nature. Thus a man may experience 3 natures, that of a pure son of man, that of a dead enemy of God, that of a living son of God.⁴²

These two "Born in Sin" theories, however, mislead by attributing to man at birth the nature which he only possesses after he has sinned and become dead in actual trespasses and sins which he has committed,⁴³ not in a sin which someone else committed centuries before!

The Errors of Theories A and B.

The first two theories have in common the imputation to God of injustice and folly: injustice, because they attribute to Him wrath against man, either for what they have not themselves done or for what by their nature they are bound to do: folly, because it is stupid to make something which is only capable of a certain course of conduct, and then blame it for pursuing that course!

If men by their nature are obliged to sin then God is wicked so to create them, foolish to be angry when they do sin, and unjust to blame them for so doing.

Repentance Impossible.

Further, repentance is impossible for those born in sin, for if any man really is incapable of avoiding sin, it is impossible for him to repent of it when he has committed it. He cannot possibly be ashamed of doing what he is forced by his nature to do.

He might regret that he had been given so bad a nature; but for this he would of course blame the One who had made him so inefficiently. The scorpion could not possibly be ashamed of its sting: though it might envy the butterfly its harmless beauty!

Guilt Eliminated.

Actually the statement that men are born in sin does away with all possibility of a feeling of guilt for sinning, and of being brought to repentance. It is not repentance that such a man needs but a better birth! As an historical fact this attitude towards sin is enshrined in the aphorism *humanum est errare*, or "it is only human to sin", which is always quoted as an excuse for the evil that men do. Press this teaching and you soon arrive at the attitude, that it is really God's fault that men sin, and that you can't expect to be too

good in this life. It is often remarked that there is no conviction of sin, even amongst Christians, nowadays. This is the inevitable and bitter fruit of this deadly doctrine. If you tell a man often enough that he is born to sin you can't expect him to fall down before God in contrition and shame! The immediate answer of a man who is told that he was born in sin is that he has had a raw deal, and has a legitimate ground of complaint against those who did such an evil thing, whether it be God or his parents. It would really be true that it would have been better never to have been born at all, than having been born to find that one had no chance of going right!

As a matter of experience even the New Birth, perfect though it is, is not sufficient by itself to keep a man from sinning, for it is not the soul which is born again but the spirit. The soul is only "adopted",⁴⁴ and needs by constant surrender to the spirit to learn a new way of life in a new home.⁴⁵ Nothing that God is able to do can take away from a man the freedom of will which is his birthright, nor put him into a condition in which he cannot sin. It is not inability to sin which God gives us by a sovereign act of His own, but the ability to refuse of our own will to sin, in the light of the truth He has shown us through our spirit. The Kingdom of God will not be a society of those who cannot sin, but of those who will not sin. If God could do anything which would compel men never to sin He would do it for all, for all are objects of His love, and He is not willing that any should perish. God's power over the soul is limited to the persuasions of Love and Reason and the beginning of His opportunity is that change in the will of man, called Repentance.

So these two theories offend against both of our cardinal doctrines—The Love of God, and The Freedom of Man. They paint a God of unreasonable anger and foolish reasoning; and a man free only to desire and do evil: so that he must regard himself at worst as an unlucky victim of circumstances, a patient needing a doctor, not a sinner needing forgiveness. This false Christian Doctrine kisses the worst of Modern Psychology in an unholy alliance, explaining away true guilt, and taking from man the full responsibility for his actions. It provides a perfect excuse for everyone who gives way to his unfortunate nature!

Indeed in its final analysis it does away altogether with the concept of sin, which is that of a free will breaking law deliberately, and replaces it by the concept of the necessary and inevitable outworking of a faulty nature; which is the doctrine of the Materialist and the Unbeliever, the Hindu and the Buddhist, the Evolutionist and Psychiatrist!

As a matter of fact those who hold such theories are guilty of hypocrisy, even if it be partly unconscious and caused by lack of reflection, like those who, through unwillingness to believe in Divine Healing, declare that sickness is a blessing from God, and then hasten to the Doctor to get rid of the blessing!

If these theories were true, every parent who caught its child lying or stealing would explain to it that it mustn't worry, because God has made it that way, and that because it is depraved it couldn't help doing so! So also the Judge would not blame the criminal for giving way to his unfortunate propensities for crime, but would explain to him that as a matter of fact we were all in the same boat, and only giving expression to our fallen nature, which God has created. This is the exact position of many anti-Christian Psychologists and they walk hand in hand with St. Augustine and his theories.

But in actual practice does the Christian preacher of Original Sin excuse either his own children or the criminal on the ground that it was impossible for them to avoid sin owing to their God-given nature? Is not our practice the very opposite of our theory? We treat them as if they ought to be ashamed for having behaved so badly, when there was no need to do so. It is only in theological controversy that we blame Adam for what our neighbours have done. In ordinary life we blame them!

The Error of Theory C.

The third theory is a rebound from the folly of the first two. Realising that it is impossible for God to blame the sinner for his sinful nature, for which he is not responsible, it boldly declares that God does not blame man for sinning for He knows that he could not avoid it, but only for refusing to be saved from that sin. It is not till the Gospel is heard and rejected that man is condemned.

This theory also involves itself in a mass of difficulties. **In the first place** it means that the unevangelised heathen cannot be condemned by God, no matter how wicked they may be! In this way it is a direct contradiction of Romans chapters 1-3, which declare that all men have knowledge of God quite apart from the Gospel, and are guilty before Him for not living up to that knowledge. This theory however makes it impossible for God to judge the vast majority of mankind at all: for only a very small proportion of those who have lived since Christ rose from the dead have ever heard of His Name.

Also in the second place it would really be safer never to have heard the Gospel and so to be in no danger of judgement! The Missionary would be obliged to tell his audience that up to his arrival they were secure from judgement, but that now they are in real danger! Neither would he be able to tell them that God was angry with them for what they had already done, however cruel: but only that, if they refused his preaching, God would begin to be angry with them for the first time. They might well wish that he had never come to preach to them!

In the third place even at the Last Judgement The Lord would be unable to deal with those folk who had never heard the Gospel: for they would be able to plead in their defence that they had only lived according to their nature for which they were not to blame, and had never come under the condemnation of having heard and rejected the Gospel.

Finally this third "Born in Sin" theory, like the other two, labours under the difficulty of having made repentance impossible, and thus having made void the Word of God, which commands all men everywhere to repent. Although Rom. 1-3 holds out no hope of salvation to the unevangelised world, it does call for repentance, and blames the sinner for his hardness of heart and impenitence. There is not a single hint in these three chapters that the sinner cannot avoid sin and so is not to blame for it, as this theory states. On the contrary God's anger is said to be upon the sinner *before* he hears the gospel, because he sins deliberately when he need not, and therefore ought to be repentant for having done so.

It is impossible to repent of coughing or snoring or being ill. These things are natural to us, and a man has no say in the matter, nor any ability to avoid doing so. So also it would be impossible to repent of sinning if one's nature made it impossible to avoid doing so. So that upon examination this theory turns out to be as unscriptural and illogical as the other two.

Error always ends in absurdity and self-contradiction. It is only truth that becomes clearer the more it is examined and tested. No wonder men have been so perplexed at these various statements about the grounds of God's condemnation of them that they have given it up in despair, and either surrendered in an unthinking way to Authority which has left their consciences untouched, or else decided that it is all very mysterious and too difficult to try to understand, or, worst of all, that it is a mere illogical hodge-podge, not worth worrying about.

Yet actually God is the soul of Justice and Fair Dealing, generous to the heights of self-sacrifice, and wholly upon the side of His creatures. He is slow to anger and condemns no one without being forced to do so by the facts. His judgement is such that all who see it are more likely to complain of His long-suffering, as did Elijah and Jonah, than to cavil at its severity.

The one desire in the heart of God when moved to condemnation is to give time before punishment in which to bring the criminal to repentance and enable him to escape the due reward of his deeds. "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3,9).⁴⁶ So far from blaming men for what they can't help, He is loth to condemn them for what they can help, and is always ready to listen to an excuse or covering for what they have done, "when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him" (Luke 15,20).⁴⁷

Pelagian Theories.

What a relief to turn from the murky fog spread round the Truth by the Bishop of Rome, St. Augustine, to the purer air of the British Theologian Pelagius! It has been a grievous tragedy that Augustine was able to pollute the pure water of life with the two foul streams of "Original Sin" and "The City of God." The former has misled generation after generation of Christians into the follies of Infant Baptism, and besmirched the reputation of the Almighty with injustice and stupidity: the latter laid the foundation upon which the dreadful edifice of the Roman Catholic Church was later raised.

Pelagius reacted violently against the Augustinian theory of Original Sin, and for his temerity suffered excommunication and the confiscation of his goods: but unfortunately he rushed, to the other extreme, teaching apparently that man was not affected by Adam's fall, but only followed his bad example, being able to refrain from sin by his own strength of will. This is much nearer the truth than Augustine's theory, and has the merit of making man responsible for his actions and so justly under the wrath of God if he sins. It is strange that the ministry of Angels to children of which Our Lord speaks in such emphatic terms is entirely neglected in the consideration of this matter. It is only the child who sins in spite of the helpful presence of its Angel that is under the wrath of God.

Pelagius, however, seems to have omitted (a) the real change brought about in the flesh of children through the sin of Adam. "For I know that in me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing" (Rom. 7,18); (b) the fact of the cooperation of the Almighty with the parents of every child, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3,6). Pelagius therefore, and those that follow him, while on sounder lines than Augustine, was apparently open to the charge of teaching that man could live righteously by his own strength without any need of the grace of God.

The Bible Doctrine of Dead Sin in The Flesh.

There is no need to enlarge upon explanations that have already been given. It is enough to recapitulate the following leading truths.

1. Children are the result of a combination of Divine and human activity: the parts which God alone can give, soul and spirit, are of course perfect, and only the part which comes from man is imperfect owing to inherited, but dead, sin in the flesh. "For without the law sin was dead", "Now then it is no more I that do it. but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing."⁴⁸ What a joy then to realise that in every birth The Lord Himself has taken a hand and given spirit to the helpless babes of even the wickedest parents! (Zech. 12,1.) The illegitimate offspring of sexual irregularity are accepted by God and even at times form rungs in the Royal Ladder that led to The Messiah.⁴⁹

2. All children are therefore, through their living spirit, alive to God and capable of knowing God, having the further grace of a personal Angel with instant access to the Almighty.

3. When, however, moral law enters a child's heart sin revives, for the strength of sin is the law: where there is no law there is no transgression and God is not angry until Law has been broken.⁵⁰ At this point

both sin and soul are alive, and temptation begins; for the now-living "sin in the flesh" proceeds to tempt the soul, and as in Eve's case by deceit enters it, and kills it. For this the soul is justly to blame, as were Adam and Eve, for rejecting the Knowledge of God which would have kept it pure, and doing that for which it would have blamed another. "Therefore thou art inexcusable O man, whosoever thou art that judgest, for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things" (Rom. 2,1-3).

4. All passages alike stress the fact that the soul only dies when it commits sin, up to that point being alive to God, and by His grace able to resist temptation, and therefore justly under His wrath when it deliberately and unnecessarily chooses to do that for which it would blame another.

5. Temptation is a blessing allowed by God to strengthen our moral nature and give the soul victory over the flesh, the inevitable point of weakness. "The spirit truly is ready but the flesh is weak" (Mark 14,38). Thus it was the Holy Spirit who led Christ into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil, and into the Garden of Gethsemane.⁵¹ Temptation, though the pathway to victory and honour, is not rashly to be approached in one's own strength, but only at the direct leading of the Holy Spirit and at God's time, as in the case of Abraham at Mt. Moriah (Gen. 22,1-14). The temptation of a fool leads to disgrace and failure, for pride goeth before a fall: only the wise are blessed thereby and promoted to honour, as were Daniel and the three Children.⁵²

6. It is not always realised that temptation to be disobedient to the Law of Love is inevitable to the purest soul. Both Lucifer and his Angels, and Adam and Eve, were all created perfect and lived in perfect surroundings; yet all fell to a temptation which derived its strength from the natural desire to please themselves and have their own way, rather than obey someone else. It is inevitable that we should desire happiness but we are not to purchase it at another's expense.

The safety of the soul lies, not in the absence of temptation but in immunity to its blandishments, won as the result of experience. Adam and Eve were meant to know good and evil not by eating of the tree and thus committing evil, but by resisting the lies of Satan and driving him from the garden by continuous resistance and refusal.

The fight, though not the defeat, of Adam and Eve and Everyman (Rom. 7,7-25), is inevitable, and is the only path to victory and final perfection of character, and security against any possibility of failure in the future.

7. Sin has no existence by itself, and was not created by God, who created all things. It is simply a possible attitude of soul, and its existence depends solely upon the will of the sinner. If all sinners repented all sin would disappear: it is only the eternal refusal of sinners to repent which will keep sin in eternal existence. God is in no way responsible for it: He has created free wills, but not evil wills, as some theologians have stated, thus making God the Author of evil. Sin was the child of the first Will which chose evil, although the possibility, but not the actuality of it, lay dormant in the freedom of the will: but sin has no separate existence by itself: it is only a possible attitude of will, leading to sinful actions of body.

1 cf. Prov. 16,4. Rom. 9,6-25. Eph. 1,11.²⁹ John 11,25-26.
2 1 Cor. 13,5.³⁰ 1 Cor. 15,23. Rev. 20,5-6.
3 Ezek. 18,30-32.³¹ Rom. 1,5; 16,26. 1 Pet. 1,2.
4 2 Pet. 3,9.³² Isa. 57,16. Jer. 38,16.
5 Numb. 23,19. 1 Sam. 15,29. Mal. 3,6. 2 Tim. 2,13.³³ Num. 16,22. Zech. 12,1. John 3,6. Heb. 12,9.
Titus 1,2. Heb. 6,18. Eccl. 12,7.
6 1 Pet. 1,2. Acts 2,23.³⁴ John 3,6.
7 cf. Rev. 17,14—"and faithful".³⁵ Gal. 5,19. James 1,14.
8 1 Tim. 2,4.³⁶ Gal. 5,19-21.
9 John 15,25.³⁷ 1 Sam. 16,18.
10 Ezek. 38,10-13.³⁸ 1 Sam. 17,28.
11 Rom. 16,26.³⁹ John 8,41.
12 Rom. 6,23.⁴⁰ Matt. 18,10.
13 Heb. 5,9.⁴¹ 1 Kings 21,25. 2 Kings 17,17. Isa. 50,1; 52,3.
14 Heb. 9,15.⁴² Matt. 11,11. Rom. 8,15. 2 Pet. 1,4.
15 Rev. 4,9.⁴³ Eph. 2,1-3.
16 Rev. 1,18.⁴⁴ Eph. 1,5. Rom. 8,15.
17 Rev. 22,5.⁴⁵ 1 Tim. 3,15.
18 Rev. 14,11.⁴⁶ Gen. 6,3. Eccl. 8,11. Jonah 3,4. Rom. 2,4-5.
19 2 Pet. 2. Heb. 6,4-8; 10,26-29. Jas. 2,13. Rev. 2,21.
20 2 Tim. 2,10 and 20.⁴⁷ Matt. 11,21-24. John 15,22-24; 9,41; 8,1-11.
21 2 Cor. 5,10. 1 John 2,28.⁴⁸ Rom. 7,8, 17.
22 Ezek. 18, esp. vv. 19-20. Deut. 24,16.⁴⁹ Judges 11,1. Matt. 1,3 & 5 & 6.
2 Chron. 25,4. Num. 26,11.⁵⁰ Rom. 4,15; 5,13. 1 Cor. 15,56.
23 cf. John 9,2-3.⁵¹ Mark 1,12; 14,32-38. Heb. 4,15; 5,7.
24 Gen. 3,22-24; 4,8-24; 6,11, 12.⁵² Luke 22,28. Phil. 2,7-11. Heb. 2,18. Jas. 1,4 & 12.
25 Rev. 20,5. 1 Pet. 4,12, 13. Rev. 2,10.
26 Isa. 53,6. Rom. 3,23.

27 Mark 14,38. 2 Cor. 5,1-8.
28 Ps. 49. Eccl. 8,8; 12,7. Luke 16,19-31. Acts 2,26-28.

CHAPTER THREE. ETERNAL PUNISHMENT.

Without doubt, of all Christian Doctrines the Doctrine of Eternal Punishment is the most obnoxious to the ordinary man. The brain reels at the enormous horror of it. The thought of Eternity alone has an almost frightening effect upon the mind, as if it were a concept too big for us to assimilate, which tore us out of our ephemeral and natural way of thinking: but when we are asked to accept the possibility of that Eternity being spent in torment, then the soul at first starts back in shock and refusal, and men have desperately sought some way out of the dreadful doctrine. It has been said that Eternal Punishment should never be preached except with tears; and when it is found preached in anger, or lightness, we can be sure that the preacher is but a foolish or insensitive user of words, which he has not comprehended in his heart. For of a truth it is a dreadful subject with which we now have to deal, sufficient to sober the most light-minded and bring the least reflective to earnest thought.

We will not argue again its reality, but will take for granted that The Lake of Fire is as scriptural as the New Heaven and the New Earth, with the same duration as they, and that Satan will be but one of the many, who will suffer its unending torments. There are however many problems connected with this doctrine which call for solution, if we are able with a full heart to praise the Love of God in providing such an awful place. We shall as before find the answers to our difficulties in the two basic truths that God is Love, and man's will is free. But first it will be well to put on one side certain unscriptural views which cause much misconception.

CHAPTER FOUR. MISTRANSLATION.

The unfortunate mistranslation in the A.V. of the Old and New Testament, of the Hebrew word "Sheol" and the Greek word "Hades" by the English word "Hell" is responsible for much confusion in the minds of Christians. This mistake is always corrected in the R.V.: but not everyone possesses or uses a copy; and so, many verses are misunderstood, sometimes with grave results. The verses in which this mistranslation occurs in the N.T. are Matt. 11,23; 16,18. Luke 10,15; 16,23. Acts 2,27 & 31. Rev. 1,18; 6,8; 20,13 & 14.

Hades is the Greek name of the place to which the souls of the dead go: the Jews call it Sheol. Until the time of our Lord's resurrection it had two sides, the one for those who believed in Jehovah, the other for those who did not. These two sides are depicted in our Lord's own parable of Dives and Lazarus.¹ Neither side was desirable in itself, though the wrong side was a place of torment, and the right side one of rest and comfort. Even the believers were unsatisfied, being only in Abraham's bosom, and not in God's presence, and all their life-time they were in bondage to the fear of what lay ahead. Death was never pleasant.² For unbelievers it was a place of positive torment, especially for those who had heard and refused the truth.³

After our Lord's resurrection however, a change took place. Those who believed in Him could no longer be held in death by the gates of Hades, but ascended in spirit into Paradise to be with Him till the first Resurrection.⁴ All however who are not born again by faith in the Lord Jesus continue to go as they did before, not to Hell but to Hades; whence they will emerge at the second Resurrection to face the last Judgement. Then "if" any man's name is not found written in the Book of Life he will be cast into the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20,15) R.V.

The great difference between the wrong side of Hades and Hell itself is that, although both are places of torment, yet everyone comes out of Hades, which is itself destroyed, but out of Hell no one ever comes. Hades is the temporary prison in which the wicked are kept waiting the judgement of the Great White Throne; Hell is the eternal prison from which no one will ever escape when once judgement has finally been passed. Even Satan is not cast into Hell till after the Millennium.⁵ The phrase, much in use, about all those who die unsaved going immediately into "a Christless eternity" is therefore wrong. All the dead will be raised at the Second Resurrection, and there will come face to face with Christ their Judge.⁶

It is clear then, that it is not till after the unsaved have come out of Hades that final judgement will be executed. There is an "if" in the Bible about the results of this judgement, because the great company of the dead will include widely different groups of men.⁷ On the one hand there will be those who, in the words of our Lord, have no excuse to offer but are determined sinners against full light; "If I had not come and spoken unto them they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin. He that hateth me hateth my Father also. If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father. But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause" (John 15,22-25). On the other hand there will be those whose blindness will be an excuse which He will accept: not that they would not have been sinners but that they would not have had the great sin of which He was speaking, "If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth" (John 9,41). Another A.V. mistranslation of the Greek word for "judgement" by "condemnation" in John 5,24, and "damnation" in John 5,29, has led some to conclude that all who come to the last Judgement will be damned. They say that there is no "if" about it; but this is unscriptural and unjust.

¹ Luke 16,19-31. ⁴ Matt. 16,18. Luke 23,43. John 11,25-26.
² Job 10,21-22. 2 Kings 20,1-5. cf Phil. 1,21-23. ⁵ Rev. 14,9-11; 20,1 - 21,8. Jude 6.

CHAPTER FIVE. SIN and SIN.

It would be good to elaborate the distinction which our Lord makes between these two kinds of sin in John 9,41 & 15,22-24; Matt. 12,31-32.

(a) In the first place there is the sin referred to and described in Rom. 1,18 - 3,20. This is the sin of breaking the Moral Law. It has two sides to it, corresponding to the two divisions of the Ten Commandments: there is sin against God and sin against man. The first is dealt with in Rom. 1,18-32; the second in Rom. 2,1-16. The peculiar case of the Jews is dealt with in Rom. 2,17 - 3,18. The final summing up is that so far as the Moral Law is concerned all the world is guilty before God, since everybody has broken that Law.

Then Paul goes on to point out that for such guilty sinners God has provided a way of escape through the blood of Jesus Christ. This salvation can only be offered to sinners: the righteous do not need it! But in the Law there was no way of escape once the Law had been deliberately broken; Law never forgives, not even the Law of Moses.¹

The light then, spoken of in Rom. 1,18-20 & 2,14, 15, was enough to show men the way of life and to keep them in it, as our Lord said to the Rich Young Ruler who enquired what he must do to inherit eternal life.² But once the Law had been broken it had no salvation to offer. The wages of sin was death, and had to be paid. While therefore it is true to say that the heathen have had an opportunity of living right according to the light of Creation and Conscience, it is quite untrue to say that they have had any opportunity of salvation when once they have sinned: for "there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved"³ and as Paul says "how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?"

If, however, the light spoken of in Rom. 1,18 - 3,20 were indeed enough not only to show the way of life to the righteous, but also to save a sinner who had forsaken it, there would be no need to send missionaries to the heathen at all, since they would already be in possession of a way of salvation without hearing of the Cross and the Resurrection of Christ! But this is to mistake the whole point of these opening chapters, which is to show that the heathen world was in need of salvation since it had disobeyed the light that it had, and so was justly under the wrath of God. Had it had no light it could not have been guilty before God, and so would not have needed forgiveness.

Those who believe in any of the doctrines of being "born in sin" do not believe that the heathen have had any "chance" of "going right" at all; and since they have had "no chance" of hearing the Gospel either, they really teach that the great majority of human beings will go to everlasting torment, without having had "any chance" either of going right or of being saved! What a slander both upon the righteousness and the Love of God! It seems inconceivable that anyone could bring themselves to believe such a terrible thing of a God who is Love.

(b) In the second place there is the sin mentioned by our Lord in John 9,41; 15,22-25. This Sin is so enormous that our Lord speaks as if no other sins counted in comparison; "If I had not come and spoken unto them they had not had sin", He says. He describes this sin as a whole-hearted hatred for His Father and Himself in the light of His perfect teaching backed up by His perfect works. It is irrational hatred of God in the light of full understanding. There is nothing to be said in extenuation of such sin: it is the sin of Satan who urged Job through his wife to curse God to His face. Even the men of Tyre and Sidon, of Sodom and Gomorrah, had not gone so far as this, but would, as our Lord Himself said, have repented if they had had the opportunity which was given to Bethsaida and Chorazin!⁴ We are to remember here that the men of Sodom and Gomorrah had actually had the testimony to The Living God of Melchizedek, Abram, and Lot. Yet this testimony had not been backed up by such works as our Lord performed in Galilee, which would have produced repentance. No man therefore is hopeless in our Lord's eyes until he has committed this sin of deliberate rejection of the Gospel of God preached in the convicting power of the Holy Ghost; "but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men" (Matt. 12,31). The horror of this Sin is that even God has no argument left wherewith to bring such men to repentance: this hatred is eternal (Mark 3,29 R.V.).

To sum up therefore: all the world have had the opportunity of living up to the light they had; and all the world, including Christians, have failed to do so: a very small part of the human race has however also had an opportunity of salvation offered to it in the Name of Jesus. This salvation was to have been offered to "every creature"; but, as The Lord knew, great continents filled with people had not yet been discovered nor would be for hundreds of years. It follows therefore that the vast majority of men will arrive at the Great White Throne of God condemned by its breaking of the Law, but never having had any opportunity of accepting the Salvation of God, since it has never heard the Name of Jesus. So far from needing a "second chance" they have not even had a first chance!

¹Acts 13,38,39.

²Matt. 19,16-17. Rom. 7,10.

³

⁴Matt. 11,20-24.

Acts 4,12.

CHAPTER SIX. NO CHANCE AFTER DEATH?

At the back of this slogan of "no second chance" lies the idea that a person cannot hear the Gospel after death. Whatever the motive behind this doctrine, it is quite untrue. Peter tells us plainly in his first Epistle, that Our Lord Himself went down to the spirits in prison and preached the Gospel to them.¹ These particular spirits were peculiarly wicked, for they had left their proper heavenly dwelling place and assumed human bodies, in order that they might live as men on earth and beget giants: yet even to these monsters, who had been plunged into darkness by God and encountered the judgement due to men, since they had chosen to live like men; even to these dangerous sinners, long since dead, was the Gospel preached by our Lord Himself, that they might once more "live to God". We do not know whether they accepted this salvation, but we know that for the first time "the Gospel was preached also to them that are dead" in order that they might live.¹

The mere use of the word "chance" in connection with Eternal Punishment betrays a complete misapprehension of the character of God. He who knows the sparrows and numbers our hairs is not the one to leave to chance the eternal fate of those He died to save! Neither has He allowed the eternal destiny of human beings to be taken out of His Divine Power and put into the hands of fallible men. We have seen already that, to those who men could not reach, He Himself carried the Gospel. Yet it is erroneously imagined that at the Last Judgement, when all stand before The Saviour of the World, He will be unable to make known to those who have never heard of Him His undying love for them upon the Cross; or else will be obliged to explain to them that, since owing to one circumstance or another the Gospel did not reach them upon earth, it is now too late for Him to help them in any way! What a fantastic nightmare of the human brain! God is not willing that any should perish, and that Great White Throne, before which men stand, will be radiant with His Love and tender Mercies which are over all His works.

God leaves nothing to "chance", least of all the eternity of His creatures. It is only after His righteous Judgement that any will be cast into the Lake of Fire. And the Judge Himself tells us that at that day He will take into account, not only what men have actually done, but what they would have done under better circumstances! (Matt. 11,20-24). In other words, not only is God not trying to condemn men, but He is doing everything He can to save them, and putting down to their account everything that can be said on their behalf. The passage just referred to exactly corresponds to the other passage in John 15,22-25.

It is only refusal to accept the mercy of God after a perfect opportunity has been offered that seals the doom of any man. It is only those who trample under foot the dead body of The Son of God who are beyond hope.² Christ died for every sin except the unpardonable sin of refusing salvation.

¹ 1 Pet. 3,18 - 4,6.

² cf. Heb. 6,4-6; 10,26-29.

CHAPTER SEVEN. THE BIBLE DOCTRINE OF HELL.

We are now in a position to consider the Bible Doctrine of Hell. Eternal Punishment is a Judgement which is forced upon a God who is Love by the free will of a creature. God is responsible for the eternal happiness of His Creation; but that happiness does not just depend upon the Love of God but also upon the loving obedience of His creatures. It is the inescapable duty of God to make sure that no sinner is allowed to ruin the success of His plan and the happiness of His creatures. It is necessary therefore that, if any creature should finally set his will to do this dreadful thing and defy the Love of God and seek to gratify his own desires at the expense of others, God should not fail to step in and prevent him from putting his will into action. If it is impossible for the Love of God to bend his rebellious will, then it only remains for the Power of God to prevent his hurtful actions. And this is exactly what God has planned to do.

The first death, by destroying a man's body, prevents him from putting any of his desires into action, whether they be good or bad. A man's work ceases when his body dies, even though his desires remain. The first death comes upon all men through the withdrawal of the Tree of Life after the sin of Adam: it reaches blood-washed saint and sin-dyed sinner, elder and babe alike.¹ It was necessary that this should happen in order that we might be freed from the disabilities and temptations of sinful flesh. It is also, as Paul says in Rom. 1,32, the fitting reward of men who, against the light given by the Creation and their own conscience, have unnecessarily put out that light and outraged that conscience, and sought not the will of God nor the happiness of others, but their own selfish pleasures. And even the repentant saint, who has spent his life in the service of God, will still find it a relief to be freed from the burden of this body and the trials of human life.²

The second death however will not be due to the absence of the Tree of Life, but to the Judgement of God at the Great White Throne. At this Judgement all the dead will be raised in their bodies to give an account of the deeds they have done in them. The Judgement of those that are Christ's will have taken place a thousand years before at His return. This last Judgement however is the judgement of the dead. At it by his works will no man be justified before God, but the whole world will be found guilty of having broken the Law. There will however be found amongst them those who have not only broken the Law, but have also seen and hated both Christ and His Father without a cause, and have trampled Christ under their feet in unrepenting scorn. Thus will they have already sealed their eternal doom and wait only to suffer the sentence that has been already passed.

The rest however, though guilty of this first sin of breaking the Law, have not committed the second sin of refusing forgiveness, for they have as yet had no such offer made to them, nor have they ever heard the

name of Jesus. For all such our Lord has laid down the principle upon which He will judge them in Matt. 11,20-24. He will take into account what they would have done, if they had so heard. He has made it clear in John 9,41 & 15,22-25 that He will not hold people responsible for not believing what they have not heard; and Paul sums up the whole matter in Rom. 10,14, "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" All such will make clear what they would have done on earth had they heard and understood the Gospel by what they actually do in Heaven when they do at last see and hear the Saviour for the first time! They will find themselves before The Great Judge and His fellow judges,³ who would willingly have told them the truth upon earth had it been possible to do so: and they will give them the same answer as they would have given upon earth. Some have cavilled at this, saying that it will be easier to believe when you see: but they have forgotten that the Christian Church was founded upon Apostles who resolutely refused to believe till they did see! Christ definitely states that final condemnation cannot be passed upon those who have not seen. Instead of grudging those who do see, let us eagerly believe in the greater blessing of those who have not seen and yet have believed!⁴

At this point let us remember that the salvation at the Great White Throne is not the salvation of the Sons of God who reign in Heaven. The Bride of Christ will already have been living and reigning with Christ in Heaven for a thousand years. This latter salvation is the salvation of "the nations of them that are saved" and live upon the New Earth, being ruled and shepherded by the Royal Family from the New Heaven.⁵ It is for this cause that the Book of Life is open at the Last Judgement, that the names of those who would have repented may be found written therein by the foreknowledge of Almighty God.⁶

Finally, what is the nature of, and reason for Eternal Punishment? The reason for Eternal Punishment is Eternal Sin, "whosoever shall blaspheme against the Holy Spirit hath never forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin" (Mark 3,29 R.V.). It is not the retribution for the comparatively few sins which even the wickedest man is able to commit in the few short years of human life. It is rather the retribution for the eternal determination to go on sinning, if possible, throughout eternity. Just as it is possible for a free will to come to eternal decision never to sin, so it is possible for it to come to an equally eternal decision not to repent: and this calls forth from the Judge of all the earth the equally eternal decision to prevent the sinner putting his desires into action. Over his will, man is sovereign: over his actions, God.

In Hades the sinner will suffer retribution due to his evil deeds. It would seem from his concern for his five brethren that this was already working in Dives' heart. But in the eternal punishment of Hell there is no thought of remedy, nor any difference of severity: it is in every case the same punishment for the same sin, eternal death for eternal rebellion. Since the Almighty cannot persuade the sinner to lay down his arms, it only remains to take those arms away: and this the Almighty will do by burning up his body in the Lake of Fire. Without a body one may desire, but one cannot do: one may long, but one cannot act. And thus the sinner will be rendered harmless for eternity, filled with evil desires but unable to put them into practice. Of the anguish of disembodiment we get a picture in the awful concern of the disembodied demons lest they should be deprived of their one hope of doing evil through the possession of someone else's body, be it only a swine's; and their petition that they should not be sent into the abyss.⁷ For the wicked will not only be disembodied, but will be confined to the Lake of Fire and thus prevented from ever again interfering with the lives of others. It is difficult for the Christian to comprehend that he is going to live for ever and ever. If only we did we should be overwhelmed with joy and glory more often than we are. It is equally difficult to comprehend the unending despair and torment of the unrepentant: we should be equally overwhelmed with horror and dread if we did. Were we to suspect that there was any "chance" about it, or that anything could be done in any way to change it, we could never rest till something was done. Instead of this in spite of the awful horror of Hell we shall still be thankful that Our God has done His duty and secured the happiness of the New Heaven and New Earth for all the ages of eternity. We shall sing "true and righteous are the judgements of Love".

¹ Rom. 5,14. Heb. 9,27. 1 Cor. 15,20-22. ⁴ John 20,24-29.
² Rom. 8,23. 2 Cor. 5,4. ⁵ Rev. 21,24.
³ 1 Cor. 6,2. ⁶ Rev. 17,8.
⁷ Luke 8,28-33.

CHAPTER EIGHT. SOME MISUNDERSTANDINGS.

(a) Degrees of Suffering in Hell?

A misunderstanding of Luke 12,47, "And that servant which knew his Lord's will and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes", and other similar passages, has led people to speak as if there were degrees of punishment in Hell, so that one man would find it more tolerable than his neighbour. "But I say unto you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee" (Matt. 11,24) is quoted in support. But our Lord's words in the Matthew passage refer not to Hell but to the day of judgement: and the more tolerable nature of the case will lie in the fact that the Judge Himself will bring forward the prisoner's plea that had he had a full opportunity he would have repented. In Luke 12,47 Our Lord is referring not to His enemies but to His own servants, for whom great chastisement is waiting after death if they have madly thrown away their opportunities and earned the title of "wicked servant".¹ Even the scourging of sons will vary in severity according to the gravity of the disobedience. Here may the inheritance be lost, and the unfaithful son find that a faithful

servant of the Jewish dispensation has been chosen to wear his crown and rule over him. King's son though he may be, "A wise servant shall have rule over a son that causeth shame, and shall have part of the inheritance among the brethren" (Prov. 17,2). But in Hell the punishment in every case is the same because in every case the crime is the same; for all have sinned alike, and loathed their Creator with unmixed hatred and eternal rebellion and trampled on His Salvation with a common determination. If any man will sit down and quietly consider the possibility of facing an eternal future of despair and inactivity, unlit by a single ray of hope, and sharpened by everlasting remorse and hatred he will find himself growing cold with an awful horror, and crying out lest such a shocking portion be his. The fear of the Lord will indeed be the beginning of wisdom, and terror will lend speed to his feet as he flies to His God with tears and crying and rests not till he has found safety and forgiveness.

(b) Physical Suffering in Hell?

Another misunderstanding, this time of Isa. 66,24 quoted by Our Lord in Mark 9,43-48 and referred to in Luke 16,23-25 has led to the curious idea that God will provide the wicked with a strange kind of body, fire-resisting and worm-defying, which shall go on in endless physical torment. How the theologians of the dark ages vied with each other in inventing fresh and more awful horrors for Hell! Dante's Inferno is an example of this perverted and diseased imagination which still persists in Roman Catholic Orthodoxy. The very simple truth is of course that it was upon carcasses lying in the valley of Hinnom outside Jerusalem, that the fire and worms of Isa. 66,24 fed, that is, bodies out of which the soul had already fled. How irrational to imagine a special worm capable of living for ever in fire! The actual horror of the fire and worm is, that never again will the soul regain its body nor see the light of the sun. As it says in Dan. 7,11 "the beast was slain, and his body destroyed, and given to the burning flame." We are told of course that so far from Dives' tongue being on fire in Hell it was lying in the tomb in Palestine and there would decay. The phrase "lying in Abraham's bosom" was the ordinary Jewish description of the faithful dead waiting with faithful Abraham for the resurrection of John 11,24. Between death and resurrection the soul is bodiless, not a perfect condition, but one relieved by the fact that in spirit the dead Christian is conscious of the Lord in Paradise. "For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ: which is far better" (Phil. 1,23). It is helpful to remember that even the saints' resurrection bodies are not eternal by themselves, but would perish, as did Adam's perfect body, were it not for The Tree of Life, which is restored to them in Paradise, and on the New Earth.² Much less are the resurrection bodies of the wicked, for whom no such provision is made, everlasting!

There are other accounts of the state after death given, e.g. in Job 10,21-22. Isa. 14,9-19. Ezek. 28,18; 32,21-32. These do not coincide with the first picture of worm and fire, nor with each other, but are all attempts to make clear to the reader some side of the condition of death. The actual facts, however, which it is intended to illustrate, are those given us of Our Lord's death: His body was in the tomb,³ His spirit had returned to God,⁴ and His soul was in Hades suffering "the pains of death".⁵ With this agrees Paul's "absent from the body".⁶ Job's "darkness" pictures the complete blotting out of all perception after death: Isaiah's fire and worm the awful fact that the body has been destroyed in Hell (Matt. 10,28): Isaiah's "thrones" the contrast between the death of Lucifer, Hitler, and Mussolini, cast out like abominable branches, carcasses trodden underfoot (Isa. 14,19), and that of Edward the sixth and George the fifth! Ezekiel's "ashes" picture the final destruction of Lucifer's body (c.f. Isaiah's worm in 14,11), and his "bed" (Ezek. 32,25) the long physical sleep of death. So the comfort of Lazarus points to the cessation of his earthly sores. Bringing, however, all these various passages together literally one would be forced to state that Scripture says that the dead in Hades are sitting on thrones, sleeping in beds, being eaten and covered by worms, groping in darkness, burning in a blazing lake! It is only by vivid pictures that God can give us a full view of the nature of death and illustrate the various pains of disembodiment.

Some may have the thought that physical pain in fire would be more awful than disembodiment, and look upon the latter as an attempt to belittle the fearful nature of Hell. Yet actually is there any worse condition even upon the earth than a creeping paralysis which kills the senses one after another, touch, sight, hearing, speech, taste, and finally leaves the soul helpless and hopeless in an immobile body? So at death the soul finds itself bereft of all its senses, bodiless, inert and hopeless. The feelings of such a soul are given in Ps. 73,19, "utterly consumed with terrors." Yet the vital point is that this frightful condition is due not to God's desire to hurt, but simply to His inescapable duty of depriving them of their bodies, which they would only misuse to the hurt of others. God is being as kind as He can be in providing such a Hell, not as cruel! Yet this kindness is unspeakably awful!

(c) The Edge off Evangelism?

There is also hovering in the background of this doctrine the fear that, if it be true that all men must hear and refuse the Gospel before they can be sent to Hell, the edge will be taken off Missionary and Evangelistic enthusiasm, since, even if the Gospel does not reach them in this life, it will in the next, so why worry? But it is never right to do evil that good may come, nor to speak a lie for the same purpose. The following considerations will put a very different complexion on the matter. The Missionary or Evangelist does not preach simply because he has been smitten with grief at the awful fate of the heathen, nor because he has the only message which can bring sweetness and peace and hope into their earthly lives, but because he has been selected and sent by God Himself, and woe betide him, if he does not obey His Master.⁷ It has been foreknown by God that only an insignificant proportion of men would hear the Gospel in this life: there were even whole continents not discovered for hundreds of years, and millions upon millions

in China, India, Africa, Mongolia, who have never heard the name of Jesus, and so have died in their sins. Moreover The Almighty has for this Christian Age allowed Satan and his hosts to do all that they could to prevent the spread of the Gospel! How different it will be in the next Age, when the earth will be full of the Knowledge of The Lord as the waters cover the sea, and the covering that is over the face of all peoples will be done away, and salvation easy for all.

The truth is that during this particular Age The Lord God is doing a peculiar thing never to be repeated. He is seeking from the Nations a people for His Son, which shall live and reign for ever with Him in Heaven over the nations of the Earth. It is only during this particular Age that this marvellous Heavenly Salvation is to be offered to men. Before this Age and after it, the salvation that is offered is Eternal Life upon the New Earth: only during these few years is God seeking a Heavenly Bride for His Son. The Missionary of this Age has therefore a peculiar message to take, and he knows that, even if the eternal salvation of men may not depend upon his efforts, yet this "so great salvation" (Heb. 2,3), this salvation "better" than that of the Old Testament (Heb. 11,40), does depend upon him, and that after death no man will be able to hear the precise message that he might have taken. It does then matter, and matter very greatly, whether this particular message is taken in this life: for after it this offer cannot be made. It does then rest with the Missionary whether men are to be given the opportunity of going to be with Christ after death and during the Millennium, or of receiving the due reward of their deeds in the pains of Hades until the Second Resurrection. Surely this is a sufficiently great responsibility to have upon one's shoulders, without adding to it the burden of men's eternal destiny! Indeed if only in this life may salvation be received, a man might well be forgiven for sinking back in despair at the contemplation of the unnumbered millions already in Hell for eternity, and wonder whether in the face of such an irretrievable disaster the few that might be saved through his Ministry would really matter much! Gravest of all is the realisation that if this be true then Our God has been unforgivably careless of human life, and unspeakably wicked and foolish in allowing Satan and his hosts of angels and demons such unchecked liberty to hinder the spread of the Gospel during this Age, instead of immediately doing what He will do in the next Age, shutting them up in the Abyss!

God has then revealed to us that, having failed to find amongst angels those who could be trusted to reign over the earth as kings and priests, He decided during this Age to choose those, who, having withstood all the temptations of Satan and his hosts, will justify Him in entrusting to their care the work of World Government, which their tempters bungled and ruined.⁸ Only those, who by such overcoming will approve themselves to their Father, will receive the inheritance of Firstborn Sons.⁹ The way to the Throne will be the same as Christ's, obedience in the face of fierce temptation.¹⁰

It was Satan who unwittingly enabled Job to earn imperishable glory: it will have been Satan who by his unremitting opposition will have enabled God in front of the whole World to exalt His Son and His Sons to the positions of honour of which they have proved themselves worthy.¹¹ It is in this Age that the eternal happiness of the Universe will be secured by the begetting and education of its future Rulers.

It is impossible to imagine the agonies of mind through which men have passed when they have first caught sight of this deadly lie, that only an insignificant fraction of the world's population has any possibility of escaping eternal torment in Hell: or to count the number of those who, believing this to be Christianity, have revolted against its barbarity, and either forsaken the Lord, or else even fought against His people. The evangelist has no greater handicap to his powerful preaching of the Cross, than the practice of prefacing his offer of salvation in Christ with a totally unreasonable and unloving picture of His Father. So far from blunting the edge of his sword the true doctrine of Hell will enter his hearers' hearts with inescapable conviction of the certainty of their doom.

To sum up then. The aim of Hell is not to make things as painful as possible for the sinner, but simply to secure the Kingdom of Heaven for ever from all unhappiness and danger. Hell is in fact the Divine Prison in which the eternal sentence of preventive detention is carried out. As in all God's actions its *raison d'être* is Love, love of the righteous, and a determination that never again shall their bliss be jeopardised. "Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?"¹² saith the Lord God. The punishment of the wicked will be no more than they themselves have forced upon the Love of God, and His wrath will be unmixed with mercy,¹³ only because mercy will have been offered, and causelessly and finally refused. So will the smoke of their torment ascend ceaselessly up as a token that the wages of sin is indeed death and that God is not mocked. The happiness of the Millennium will have been ruined when Satan is let out of prison,¹⁴ but there will be no repetition of that tragedy: the gates of Hell will close for ever upon its prisoners, and peace will reign for the Ages of the Ages.

¹ Matt. 25,26, 30.⁸ Heb. 2,5.
² Rev. 2,7; 22,2. cf. Ezek. 47,12.⁹ Jas. 1,12. 1 Cor. 9,25-27. Rev. 2,10; 3,11.
³ Luke 23,52, 53.¹⁰ Phil. 2,8-9.
⁴ Luke 23,46.¹¹ Heb. 2,10.
⁵ Acts 2,24-31.¹² Ezek. 18,23.
⁶ 2 Cor. 5,8.¹³ Rev. 14,10.
⁷ Eph. 4,11. 1 Cor. 9,16. ¹⁴ Rev. 20,7-9.

CONCLUSION.

The character of God is immutable and perfect and beyond the reach of men: but His reputation rests wholly within the power of His Creatures. In the wisdom of God the greatest of all His creatures, the

anointed Cherub, has been allowed throughout the Ages to carry on a campaign of unceasing and unscrupulous slander against that reputation. Lucifer became Diabolos, the Slanderer, whose one aim is to besmirch the character of God in the eyes of His Creatures, Angelic and human. It is against this Enemy and in this conflict that the Sons of God are engaged in ceaseless warfare, countering lie with truth, and hatred with love. There is nothing so valuable as a true estimate of the character of God, for this alone can set us free from fear, now and in eternity. It is with a single-minded desire to expose some of the wiles of the Devil wherewith he has deceived the children of God for centuries that this Booklet has been written. God has since the days of the Reformation been drawing the attention of His family to truth after truth; and now would free us from the age-long errors connected with Original Sin and Eternal Punishment, which have caused tremendous suffering and perplexity to us; and explain to us that actually He is burning with personal Love for all His Creatures, and wholly reasonable in all His dealings, being in fact far more long-suffering than any of His People! How slow have the Reformed Churches been to free themselves from the errors of the Middle Ages, how reluctant to give up their ways of thought!

Let us then in conclusion contrast that which Satan has made us believe about Our God, and that which His Word teaches. **The Great Slanderer of God has told us:—**

1. That God has condemned the whole human race for Adam's sin.

2. That in consequence of Adam's sin all are "born dead in trespasses and sins", and unable to avoid sin even if they had such a desire, since they are by natural birth the children of wrath.

3. That God therefore not only is angry with us for breaking His Law, which it is impossible for us to keep, but also is justified in sending us to eternal torment because we are obliged to follow this sinful nature, which He has given us.

4. That God is also justified in making this eternal torment as painful as possible because He hates sin.

5. That although He has loved us sufficiently to give His Son to die for our sins, yet He has not arranged that more than a tiny proportion of the world's inhabitants should hear about that Salvation; and that in consequence the vast majority of His Creatures will spend eternity in Hell without having had any possibility offered them of avoiding this frightful fate.

6. That if, through no fault of their own, men do not hear of this salvation during this earthly life, God will be debarred from making it known to them at the last Judgement.

The Word of God on the other hand has told us:—

1. That no man dies for his father's sin, and that consequently Cain and Abel did not die for Adam's sin.

2. That men die spiritually because of their own sin.

3. That children are born by the grace of God spiritually alive to Him and of such a nature that He can say 'of such is the Kingdom of Heaven': and that each child is also provided with its attendant angel with instant access to The Father. From this it follows that when each person sins, he sins because he wants to, and not because he has to. In other words Adam fell "by voluntary transgression", and his posterity, like a flock of sheep, have followed his example.

4. That God will send men to Hell, not in order to torment them, but in order to safeguard their victims: and that the torment will be wholly mental, since their second body will be consumed in the Lake of Fire, just as their first body rotted in the grave. This torment will be utterly real and unspeakably awful; but that will be unavoidable, because to leave the unrepentant their bodies a second time would only lead to a perpetuation of the age-long "groaning and travailling in pain together" of the Universe, since they are finally determined to continue their evil way of life, and have rejected all offers of mercy. God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, nor any satisfaction in their suffering. Indeed in Hell they will no longer be able to hurt one another, as they did upon the earth!

5. That God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should have an opportunity of salvation; and that He has said that He will take into account, not only whether a man has accepted salvation, but also whether he would have accepted it, if he had heard.

6. That to the wickedest men that ever lived, God the Son has already in person preached the Gospel after their death, in order that they might live to God the Father.

We have divine warrant for realising that it is difficult for old bottles to hold new wine, or drinkers of old wine to turn to new. But this "old wine" of Roman Catholic tradition is not wine at all but poison. Judaism did contain the truth of God, and was hard to surrender: but these particular doctrines of Original Sin and Eternal Punishment, which we have been considering, have never held the truth of God, but been from the beginning Satanic. Let us cast them aside as we have jettisoned the Mass and Baptismal Regeneration of Infants and Indulgences and Mariolatry, and let us go once more to the Bible with open minds and ask ourselves whether these things be so or not. We shall find it impossible to reconcile the Doctrine of the Dark Ages either with the Love of God or the Freedom of Man's Will: but the word of God will satisfy us upon both scores. We shall find that the truth makes man exceedingly sinful upon his own account, not Adam's, and the Lord God exceedingly loving and solicitous of His Creatures' welfare, as indeed He is. The fact that God is Love is the greatest truth in the Universe. In it lies the explanation of all that has happened. From it will flow for all who believe it Ages of Ages of infinite Joy and Peace.

NOTE:

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