

*THE FINAL DESTINY OF THE EVIL AND OF  
THE GOOD.*

THE subject of Eternal Punishment has of late fallen somewhat into the background, and other questions have pressed for solution. Echoes of the great controversy of a past generation alone remain to remind us of the stern and eager discussion that arose in the revolt against the generally accepted doctrines of the older Evangelicals concerning the future state of the impenitent. Some of the greatest leaders of thought were engaged in the conflict, including Tennyson and Whittier, poets of the Larger Hope, George Macdonald amongst the novelists, Farrar and Samuel Cox amongst the theologians, all of whom were more or less sympathetic towards, if they were not thorough-going exponents of, the doctrine of Universalism. There were many, however, on the other hand, who whilst their hearts went out towards this movement could not wholly commit themselves to a full acceptance of the doctrine. Even so liberal a teacher as F. D. Maurice experienced the difficulty occasioned by "the boundless power of resistance" in ourselves to the holy love of God, and could see nothing but the darkness that enveloped the whole subject. There were difficulties on both sides, but practically all agreed that as the voice of Scripture was not sufficiently conclusive one way or the other, and that philosophy could yield nothing more than a faint hope and trust, the question must be left as undetermined. They could but fall back upon the assurance that the Judge of all the earth would do right and that somehow good would be the final goal of ill.

Now it seems to us that to have taken one step further would have provided what promises to be a solution, tentative and provisional, at least. And it is this solution that we

are attempting to suggest in outline, somewhat, it must be owned, in abstract form, as it is only in this way that we can deal with ultimate problems. But in order that we may present the destiny of the wicked in the strongest light it will first be desirable to indicate some aspects of the state of blessedness promised to true believers in Christ and those who accept the Gospel message.

Without attempting to collect the numerous passages in the New Testament which refer to the fullness of life which those will enjoy hereafter, who are in Christ, we may very well state that in all cases it is the survival of the individual consciousness and the entire personality that is clearly implied. Not only so, but there will be a "body" provided in order that the personality may not be depleted or impoverished or found "naked." The redeemed ones shall see their Saviour's face, they shall know as they are known, they shall be with Him to behold His glory and share in His triumph. There is no indication whatever of anything approaching to absorption in the Infinite or the loss of personal qualities or personal identity. On the contrary it is life at its fullest and best and the intensifying and the quickening of all the spiritual and personal powers and functions. The blessed ones shall be like their Lord, transformed into His likeness, manifested with Him in glory, with His name written in their foreheads.

This enlargement and realisation of the soul's fullest powers as personal in the ideal must be regarded as necessary from a philosophical point of view. The return of the many into the one is not a loss of the particular differentiations in the universal, but an enrichment by the attainment of a higher synthesis of unity. The individuals will not thus be separated from the totality of being, but they are distinctive and unique, and by the medium of love are brought into fuller reciprocal relations with the Divine. Love in its com-

plete form involves reciprocity between individuals, all of whom are in turn subject and object; but if the individuals should come to be completely merged into the ocean of being, love would fail for want of subject and object.

This conception of love, with its tendencies and purpose, is, we think, the best corrective to that form of mysticism which leans towards Pantheism. Love defeats itself when it tends to destroy personal freedom. Whatever identity of aim and purpose, endeavour and interest there may be in mutual love there can be no blending of the respective centres of consciousness, else the possibility of reciprocal relations is lost. To become one with Christ and with the Father is to strengthen and deepen those relationships which constitute the unity, and surely every power of the spiritual life and every function of the soul will be developed, matured and enriched in the exercise of a sacred and holy love. So far from the will being lost, merged or superseded, it is in harmony with the law of freedom that what makes for life at its fullest and best leads to perfect the freedom of the will. The will is only fully free when it tends to the development of the highest functions of our spiritual life, or rather freedom is maintained and developed only when its determinations are in the direction of the development of the personality as a whole. Hence the familiar paradox holds good that the will is only perfectly free when it is fully surrendered to the Divine Will.

We hold, therefore, that the future for those who belong to Christ is not a submergence but a true and blessed fulfilment and realisation of the personal self in the life beyond. And, moreover, as Dr. Denney has conclusively shown in his Drew lecture on Immortality, it has to be won. (EXPOSITOR, viii Series. pp. 1 ff., 118 ff.) "To him that overcometh, to him will I give to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God." The faith that overcomes the world secures

the kingdom. We are to lay hold upon eternal life. In our patience (or our persistence) we come to possess our souls. It is quite clear that faith which determines and involves the surrender of the will to Christ is that which brings out, develops and perfects the essential activity of the soul. Life is won not by quiescence, by passive contemplation nor by ecstatic raptures alone, but by entering upon and by claiming through faith the life which is life indeed.

Let us now turn to the other category, the destiny of the wicked and finally impenitent. Inasmuch as punishment is an ambiguous term we will avoid it for the present and consider the element of suffering in its relation to spiritual conditions. Suffering is related to death in so far as it heralds its approach, and it may prove to be a deterrent and prophylactic. Nevertheless suffering is contradictory to death, inasmuch as there cannot be suffering when death ensues, for suffering involves a certain degree and measure of conscious life. Suffering ceases at death, and we are told that the wages of sin is death.

In a universe ruled by love, even a perfectly holy love, suffering is never an end in itself. It is remedial when vicariously borne, but it is always intended to subserve the ends of health and life. As a deterrent, a prophylactic or a warning its purpose is beneficial, and life is not only maintained and developed, but it is strengthened and enriched through the instrumentality of struggle and suffering. Prolonged suffering may seem to cause death, but it is always open to argue that the disease or injury which causes death produces the suffering as well, and that it would be a far worse condition of affairs if this were not the case.

All analogy seems to suggest that so long as a soul is suffering on account of sin it is not in a finally hopeless state. So long as the conscience is aware of the wrong that is done and is sensible to the loss of God's favour and love, so long

as the soul is miserable on account of irreparable evil wrought in this earthly life, the life of that soul is not really extinct. "Weeping and gnashing of teeth" or even remorse would be impossible, unless there were present the consciousness of shame and guilt, and where this consciousness exists the state of that soul cannot be wholly abandoned. The fear, on the other hand, is that this wholesome state of suffering should finally cease and that the evil come to be felt not as evil but for that soul become its good.

The hope of final restoration and restitution of all lost souls is perhaps fainter than appears to a superficial philosophy. It can hardly be supported with confidence from Scripture, and the philosophical grounds will hardly bear close analysis. It may be that the probational element of this present life is fairer as a test of character and choice than we are disposed to imagine. Whilst we cannot suppose a definite credal test to be submitted to souls in view of the future state, neither can a fixed objective standard of morals be applied. But that there is in every man the consciousness of a distinction between the higher and the lower and an ideal which may be embraced or rejected, and that there is a sense of shame, guilt or dissatisfaction when the higher is refused and the actual falls short of the ideal, can hardly be disputed. The distinction may be relative and vague, but it is there present to the consciousness, and some power of moral choice is possible wherever man as man is found. Christ comes to every man in that ideal in every age and place. The will may be determined in favour of the higher and better self, and it may be sufficient for the present that the impression should be made to give the soul its bent for eternity.

Machinery just meant  
To give thy soul its bent,  
Try thee and turn thee forth, sufficiently impressed.

We do not of course assert that Christ is nothing more than the soul's ideal, still less that there is no need of a revelation of the redemptive work of the Saviour and its due presentation, but that where there is no light but that of the moral ideal, however faint and dim, the Christ does come with His saving grace in the form of that ideal. In ante-Christian days, or in the darkness of heathendom, this moral appeal is presented even though the full truth can only be found in the presentation of the Gospel.

Without that moral choice—the choice of the highest and the best—we know that the soul is bound to deteriorate, and the direction towards evil will tend to be confirmed unless the soul is renewed and sent back upon its choice. Possibly with many the choice of direction is all that can be achieved in this life, but it is sufficient if it is sincere and final, and doubtless the alternatives are more clearly presented than we know, and possibly this power of determination is given to all.

The ground that we have for hope in eternity for those who have lost their chance in this life is very uncertain indeed, especially if we are to be judged not by our actual attainments nor by any absolute standard, but by the direction given to our lives by the choice of the higher, in which we are all helped by God's Good Spirit and the saving grace of Christ, even though we may not fully know the source of the power placed at our disposal.

The penalty of wrong determination is ultimately death. It is the natural result of the final rejection of Christ. If the mercy of God in Christ is unable to change the will, so long as its freedom is maintained nothing in the nature of suffering as such can do this, unless indeed the suffering occasions the sense of need and the consciousness of the loss of God's favour and presence. But even then the choice must be made in the surrender of faith through the power of the

Holy Spirit. But the crucial question comes in, may not the will confirmed and reinforced by habitual resistance hold out through all eternity? Sin is not a mere isolated act, it is a disposition, a direction and determination of the will, and in consequence that of the whole being. And although the perverted will may be in a state of unstable equilibrium, yet we must contemplate the possibility of final resistance. We cannot suppose that if the will of man continues to be obstinately opposed to God that that will can ever be forced without the loss of freedom and of the will itself. What then is to happen in such cases?

Now we know that the repeated and continuous assertion of the will in the direction of evil will ultimately result in the loss of moral freedom. The will is only free to do right in the sense that a right choice alone secures and maintains freedom. A life of successive acts of righteous judgments and decisions is that which tends to develop, perfect and realise the personality as a whole and in consequence to strengthen and mature the freedom of the will. On the other hand, to do wrong is to lose personal power and efficiency and in consequence the freedom of choice. Our personal liberty may be used to curtail and destroy itself, and a man who does wrong often and long enough will come to have no will at all.

What then if in the case of hardened sinners personal freedom is lost in the very nature of things, and in consequence all that constitutes the essential self-hood? The personality that is distinctively an end in itself is lost in the Universal Consciousness, and God's glory which was to have been realised through the personal consciousness finds other ends for its fulfilment. The last state of that man is worse than the first, for he began as a free agent, he finishes by losing his centre of conscious determination. It were better for that man that he had never been born, for the end for which he was born is realised otherwise than by his conscious existence.

The forfeiture of one's personal being in the loss of the free will is, we take it, the eternal sin, eternal punishment. The spiritual "stuff" out of which we are created does not pass out of existence necessarily, but it is merged in the totality of being, and is absorbed in the eternal fount of existence. Personal identity, the unity of the distinctive and unique experience is recalled and blended in the universal consciousness.

This is indeed the greatest of all punishments, greater even than eternal suffering, for "who would lose, though full of pain, this intellectual being?" It does not follow, however, that this very punishment may not be a loving, as it is a just, dispensation of the Divine Government. It may be that the lost soul, in wandering through the solitudes of a self-determined isolation from God, is sought and found by the Infinite Love. Whilst the will cannot be persuaded it may be vanquished and compelled to return, but by the compulsion it would lose its distinctive self-hood and be encompassed and overwhelmed by the love which knows no defeat.

This conception of the matter seems to fit into the symbolism of the New Testament. "The worm that dieth not" can hardly mean eternal remorse—it may mean something even worse, eternal loss—the loss and eternal destruction of that divine gift which has become a decaying and destructive element in the world of spirit, the perverted will; thus the worm is for ever destroying that which destroys. The eternal fire, the fire unquenchable, is surely the fire of God's infinite holiness and purity, which shall consume all destructive and disintegrating elements, and in which all impenitent souls shall be absorbed. The fire prepared for the devil and his angels must surely devour in its purifying flame all those forms of being and of force which have opposed the Divine will.



There is no idea of torture here, it is rather the triumph of a holy love in spite of the opposition of human wills and all inimical forces and agencies. God shall be all and in all and the consuming fire shall embrace all being, and even the unwilling elements shall be mastered by its fervent heat. Good will be the final goal of ill, but the will-power which is finally allied to ill must be recalled and overwhelmed in the triumph of good.

This hypothesis may seem to divest the future state of the terrors which it would have for evil-doers, and for the hardened and impenitent. It might seem to be a consoling thought to the careless that it does not signify how we live in this life, as we shall be made good without any trouble in the next. But at what cost? The loss of that which most properly constitutes one's own true and distinctive self. To be made good against our will is the loss of that choice which is the crowning glory of our manhood. To be made good in spite of oneself through the refusal to exercise the power of choice is an unspeakable and an eternal loss. Whether it be felt to be so, or not it is in reality an incalculable, an irreparable loss.

This doctrine is not identical with that known as Conditional Immortality. We can all accept the view that eternal life is conditioned by faith in Christ, but that there should be a limited period and varying degrees of suffering for the wicked to be followed by annihilation or extinction seems to be somewhat aimless and purposeless. The doctrine here advocated is not that the impenitent are annihilated, but that their freedom, constantly abused, is recalled and forfeited in the inevitable course of things. Suffering, we think, is never retributive alone, it either leads a soul to turn from that which causes the suffering or it renders the soul indifferent and hardened to the penalty.

Nor are we advocating the doctrine of the Nirvana of Bud-

dhism, still less the Nifheim of the ancient Norsemen. It is neither unconscious existence on the one hand nor nothingness on the other. It is an absorption into the flame of life in which good is determined for us and we become no longer ends in ourselves. Spiritual entities cannot pass out of existence, but they may lose themselves in a higher unity. If there are those of a mystical turn of mind or Pantheists whose dreams seem to resolve themselves into an extinction of personality such as we have described, surely it must be because they have not taken into full account what in their rapture the loss of a distinctive consciousness and personal freedom involves. It would be as we have indicated, the loss of the power to reciprocate the love of God and the heart to appreciate and return that love in full.

In conclusion, it is only necessary to bring the two conceptions of the fate of the wicked and the destiny of the good into contrast. In the one case the divine purpose is accomplished in spite of our wrong determination, in the other we are graciously permitted to share in bringing about that purpose and are included within the divine plan and voluntarily lend ourselves to the working out of God's will. In the one case the end in view in the creation of the living soul is forfeited and frustrated, in the other, each believing soul becomes an end in itself. In the one case the essential nature of the human soul as an originating activity is suspended, in the other, God's glory is consummated in the perfection and fulfilment of our being, and His glory is the triumph of all we have aimed at and hoped and worked for. God has formed us for Himself, and His glory consists in the good, the ultimate good, of those upon whom His love is set.

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