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Christian Theological Seminary

CHRISTIAN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY 32311

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Blacksville,
Penn.*

DO THE HOLY SCRIPTURES TEACH

THE ENDLESSNESS OF FUTURE PUNISHMENT?

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A LECTURE:

BY

MOSES E. LARD.

LEXINGTON, KY.:
Transylvania Printing and Publishing Company.
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Return to
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FUTURE PUNISHMENT.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

The question I am now to investigate is this: *Do the Holy Scriptures teach the endlessness of future punishment?* The Holy Scriptures teach a doctrine either by actually asserting it or necessarily implying it; and what they do not thus teach is not taught in them—it is not a doctrine of the Bible. Hence, if endless future punishment be a doctrine of the Bible, it is therein either actually asserted or necessarily implied. Is it a doctrine of the Bible?

CONCEDED—APPEALED FROM.

That our common English Testament contains passages which, in the popular and modern sense of their terms, distinctly assert the doctrine can not be candidly and intelligently denied. Whether these passages be few or many, whether they assert simply or variedly, is immaterial here. They certainly exist, and certainly assert the doctrine. Do these passages give the full true sense, no more, no less, of the sacred original? If so, then, confessedly, the question is closed; and all doubt touching it should at once come to an end. But if these passages do not thus give the sense of the sacred original; if they give too much, or too little, or give what they give in a manner doing that original injustice, then indisputably an appeal from them is legitimate; and the question which they are supposed to settle may fairly, and without just prejudice to him who does it, be reopened for investigation. That appeal, without now stopping to state why, is here taken; and a re-trial of the passages is proposed.

TWO PRELIMINARY PROPOSITIONS.

In entering upon the present task, not surely an un-

hazardous one, I lay down the two following propositions—two propositions which are certainly neither designed to settle any thing nor to anticipate any thing, but merely to keep the mind in trustworthy equipoise, namely: First Proposition—No man if left to himself, no man uninfluenced from on high, should want the punishment of the future to be endless. The punishment of the future is, in part at least, the punishment of human beings, the punishment of fellow creatures, I care not how fallen or what guilty of, fellow creatures still, creatures endowed with the same sensibilities, with the same keen sense of pain, as ourselves. No living man can, if he have a heart at all, want one of these his fellow creatures punished endlessly. He can not want even his worst, his basest enemy, the enemy that has done him the deepest wrong—he can not want even him thus punished. Much less can he want any one else. Second Proposition—But every man should be willing to believe the punishment of the future endless, provided the Scriptures so teach. In the present case, as in all others, we should be in glad subjection to the divine truth. Not one dissenting or modifying wish should be entertained by us for a moment. What the Scriptures say should be the whole volume of our faith, and its hitherto; and where they grow silent, we should stand still, reverent and mute.

POINTS TO BE ELIMINATED.

But here, in the very outset of our undertaking, I deem it prudent to eliminate, or dismiss from present view, certain points, or tenets of Scripture, which lie not, as I hold, within the limits of the questionable, and which therefore should not be allowed to become involved in, or in any way affected by the present investigation. On these points or tenets I lay significant stress, and beg my hearers to remember that they are not passed by, with this brief notice, because unimportant or of no consequence, but solely because they are so clearly and conspicuously taught in the word of God that no question can be made of them. The points are the following:

OF SATAN.

First Point: That there is just as certainly a personal Devil as there is a personal God. For by whatever arguments, *mutatis mutandis*, we establish the personality of the one, we establish also the personality of the other. If the one has individuality, so has the other; if the one is intelligent, so is the other; if the one has a will, so has the other; if the one knows right from wrong, so does the other; if the one speaks, so does the other; if the one plans with reference to the future, so does the other; if the one has power and wields it with design, so does the other; if the one is a ruler, so is the other, and so on to many particulars. All these traits, together with others that might be enumerated, are either actually ascribed to Satan in plain unfigurative terms of the Bible, or they are implied of him in plain unrheterical affirmations therein found respecting him. It is impossible to deny the personality of Satan, and at the same time defend the Bible as veracious and determinate in its meaning. It means nothing, if Satan be a myth.

Satan is a creature, and therefore not eternal as to past existence; he was originally pure, and by sinning made himself what he is; he was from the first endowed with vast power, but was never almighty. This power he still retains. He is consummately intelligent, but not omniscient. He has restricted access to all human beings, and by his influence over them induces all to sin. He is the origin and fountain of moral evil. He is a moral agent, and as such responsible for his conduct. He will be judged for his evil deeds, and punished commensurately. Such in terrible outline is Satan.

OF HELL.

Second Point: That there is just as surely a literal hell as there is a literal heaven. If when the New Testament speaks of hell, it speaks apocryphally or deceptively, then no living man can show that it speaks ingenuously or truthfully when it speaks of heaven. If the one place has no real existence, neither has the other,

Third Point: That hell is a place or state of punishment, a place in which those of the human family who die impenitent or disobedient to Christ will be punished after death, punished for the sins of this life, surely and inexorably punished. On the nature or kind of this punishment no question is here raised. It is sufficient, for my present purpose, that there is certainly punishment in hell. The kind is a question foreign to this investigation.

THE REAL QUESTION STATED.

Fourth Point: That this punishment runs either *eis ton aïōna*, into the coming age, or *eis tous aïōnas*, into the coming ages; or in other words and simply, that it is *aïōnion*, *aïōnion* in length, or in kind, or in both. This much is indisputable, and therefore may be safely conceded. But now assuming, not affirming, the Greek expressions here used to be measures of length, the question emerges, How far from the moment of commencement, or how far into the future, do these measures carry the punishment or mark its continuance? How far by means of them can human thought trace it? Or is the punishment still endless beyond the last possible or conceivable limit of these measures? This is the real and only question which it is the purpose of this speech to investigate. And let my hearers carefully note that in applying the word limit to these measures, I am not speaking of an actual limit, but only of a possible or conceivable one. The conception is of the purely ideal.

HOW THE INVESTIGATION SHOULD BE CONDUCTED.

In conducting the investigation of the awful question, now here more sharply and clearly stated, our procedure should be marked by most solemn caution and faultless candor. Not one wish, unsanctioned from above, should be allowed to sway us even in the slightest degree; nor should a single preliminary, essential to any important end, be left unstated. Even thus guarded and admonished, we may possibly not be safe. Our task is not wholly free from risk, but it must be fear-

lessly performed. A solitary, noble wish should now absorb us all—*the wish to be right*.

THE TWO CHIEF ASSUMPTIONS.

Accordingly, the two broad and general assumptions which underlie, like a basis of imperishable rock, all that is, on the present occasion, to be said, are that God is absolutely just, and the Bible is true. These assumptions I beg you all to regard as postulates high above doubt, and therefore not to be questioned.

THE QUESTION HOW NOT SETTLED.

Further, the question in hand is not to be settled by sanctions of orthodoxy, nor by applying to it any other purely human tests. Especially is it not to be settled by mere dogmatic assertion. The vote of the crowd and the clamor of the dogmatist are nothing here. We have in hand a question of fact, a question therefore not determinable by mere human volition, nor yet by traditions of the past. Our great question must be settled by what the Bible actually asserts or necessarily implies; and if not thus settled, it must be left open. No attempt must be made to close it arbitrarily, or to close it thus and so, merely because we happen to want it thus and so closed. The authoritative indecision of inspiration must not be capriciously disturbed by us. Just as the Bible disposes of the question, we must accept it. No effort is allowable to cloud with doubt inspired certainty, none to illumine or dissipate inspired uncertainty.

OTHER PRELIMINARIES NECESSARY.

But we are still not prepared to enter upon the more decisive features of our task. Much that is preliminary is yet necessary. We are engaged on an inquiry into the duration of future punishment. But this inquiry is closely connected with another inquiry, an antecedent and underlying inquiry, an inquiry therefore which can not be safely ignored or passed in silence. That inquiry is, *What is sin?* Sin is the thing to be punished in the future. What do we know of it? Have we ever

severely analyzed it, and do we now grasp it in thought in its essence? Do its constituent parts stand out each boldly and sharply defined for us? Have we penetrated to the uttermost its occult and subtle nature; and do we understand it? In its magnitude and ominous outlook into the future, is all quite clear? Have we laid a line to its far-reaching and countless consequences equal to the task of enumerating and measuring them? Its deadly and unwasting power—lies it open and revealed to our intelligence? These questions suggest to us much that we do not know, very little that we do.

SIN DIFFICULT TO COMPREHEND.

Sin, we are divinely told, is the transgression of law. But this description clearly does not unfold for us the nature of sin. It merely classifies sin. It determines sin to be an act, and constitutes a complex name for it; but it affords no exhaustive insight into it. We learn from the description merely what acts are sins. They are those acts which consist in the violation of God's law. Beyond this we learn nothing.

When I say of a given agent, this is electricity, clearly I impart no information respecting electricity. I merely construct a verbal mark or coin a name which serves to designate an unknown and mysterious power. On that power my name throws no light. By the name my mind is merely directed to an object; but from that object it rebounds dark as before it was directed to it. And so of sin. When told that it is the transgression of law, I am not informed in regard to sin. My look is merely directed to a particular act, but of the true nature, power, and essence of that act, I am ignorant still. Thus it is that the more nearly we attempt to approach sin, the more resolutely to lay hold of it, the more impalpable it seems to become. It glides from our vision, our touch, and even our thought like a nonentity. We know it to be existent and real, yet feel it to be indefinable and elusive as life. How impenetrable is the mystery which wraps sin away from our common sight; yet how real is the entity which makes its presence known to us, and felt by us, in a thousand pains within

us, and in boundless ruin without us. Truly we know not what sin is.

SIN STUDIED IN THE LIGHT OF ITS CONSEQUENCES.

But let us now, for a few moments, attempt the study of sin in the light of some of its consequences. The study will help us, surely not to know sin, but to realize how unsearchable it is. For this purpose I select, as most pertinent to my object, the first sin ever committed. This sin is selected, not because it is known to be, within itself, worse, or more disastrous in its results, than any other sin, for this is not known; but simply because its results, being, in part, matter of history, are therefore known; whereas the consequences of other sins, being not of record, are, for the most part, unknown.

God had said to Adam, Genesis ii, 17, "of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat." This was the law, a clear, unconditional, prohibitory law, with its tremendous penalty annexed. The sin consisted in eating a single bite from a single piece of the fruit of this tree. More than a single bite and a single piece need not be supposed. In this single act of eating, sin took its origin on earth. Now, I venture to assert that a more trivial sin than this was, has never been committed; and that a more trivial one is impossible to human conception. Indeed, our difficulty is in seeing how, or on what principle, even God himself could erect the act into a sin. Certainly, trivial as the act was, it violated his will. This made it a sin, but how, is hidden. The word trivial is here used, not absolutely, but solely for the sake of distinction. What now are some of the consequences of this sin? For all of them no one can pretend to know. The following is a partial reply:

God condemned the man to a life of unnatural toil; he blighted the earth with a curse and every thing on it, on his account; he expelled him from the garden of Eden and from the tree of life, and withdrew from his presence never to reappear in it again. Nay more, from that moment, and by that act, the man became depraved both in mind and body; and thence on he rapidly de-

teriorated. At last the man died, his wife died; and all his posterity either have died or will die. This state of death, with its accompanying countless sufferings, has now lasted for six thousand years; and were the earth in its present form, and human nature in its present form to continue for a hundred thousand more years, death would still reign as at this day—and all this as a consequence of one trivial sin, and in the nature of punishment for it. Well may we, even in astonishment, repeat the question—*What is sin?* Do we comprehend; can we comprehend, in its whole nature and multiform influences, that occult and deadly thing which has induced, not only these results, but even more?

And still besides, do we comprehend, or can we, how sin has touched God, how it has affected him, pierced him, wounded him, grieved him, dishonored and insulted his authority and tainted his memory for ever? For there, in that memory, in God's memory, at this instant, as a foul *locum tenens*, sticks that sin, as in the initial moment of its existence, its consequences mounting up high as to heaven, and dipping down deep as to hell, and stretching measurelessly away into eternity. Do we know how God views sin, or understand the ponderous and iron necessity which he lies under to punish it? I would as promptly attempt to grasp the conception of the infinite as attempt to comprehend sin. I boldly venture to think that not one created intelligence in the universe comprehends it. Indeed, if even God himself comprehends it in its totality, it is because he comprehends the infinite. For us, sin is an unknown and profoundly mysterious entity. We shall never compass it.

AN IMPORTANT CONCLUSION.

But now, from these premises, results one most important conclusion, a conclusion for which I have been most solicitous to prepare the mind of my audience. The conclusion is this: We are, by force of the joint fact and extent of our ignorance in regard to sin, estopped, utterly estopped from criticising, or pronouncing any judgment upon, the mode in which God

punishes it. We are almost wholly ignorant of the nature of the thing punished. Consequently we are incompetent either to assess the proper kind of punishment, or to fix its duration. God alone is equal to this. Therefore, if after death, or at most after the great judgment, God punishes each sin a thousand years—this is right, and we can not demur. We are debarred by ignorance from expressing a judgment. Or, if God punishes sin endlessly, this too is right, and we are without reply. Our ignorance still restrains.

Hence, all the judgments that men have pronounced upon the various divinely appointed punishments recorded in the Bible, are of little real weight; and they are entitled to no very extensive reply. The punishment of Adam, we have been told, is fearfully disproportionate to his offence. And so of Achan and his family; so of the Amalakites; so of Ananias and Sapphira, together with many others. But each of these cases is a case of punishment for sin, actual, admitted sin; and confessedly we know not what sin is. How dare we then, in our ignorance, attempt to pronounce that such punishments are disproportionate, or excessive, or any thing else but right? The attempt is the height of presumption.

A DIFFICULT QUESTION.

Precisely how to dispose of sin has, in all ages, been a difficult question. That wrong-doing, or crime, or sin should be punished is the judgment alike of civilized and savage mankind. The judgment is universal. However much countries and peoples may differ as to what crime is, or sin is, in one thing at least they all agree—that sin should be punished. From this agreement there is no dissent. But, on approaching sin to deal with it, men have always encountered two insuperable difficulties, namely: First, what kind of punishment shall be inflicted? Secondly, how long shall the inflicted punishment run? In all time past, halls of legislation and courts of law have been troubled and perplexed over these two questions; and no law-maker or juror ever yet felt perfectly clear on either.

THE POINT ILLUSTRATED.

In order to render this the more apparent, grant me the use of an imaginary case. Suppose the question before a legislature to be, what shall be the penalty of petty larceny—what, specifically, shall be the penalty for stealing a sack of flour worth two dollars and fifty cents? What, my audience, do you say the penalty shall be? Shall the criminal be confined in the county jail? and why in the county jail? Is it clear to you that this is the exact punishment that should be inflicted? Or would you whip the criminal? and why would you whip him? Are you certain that this is the precise penalty that should be inflicted? Or would you compel the criminal to stand in the pillory? and why stand in the pillory? Have you a better reason for this form of punishment than for any other that decides you in its favor? Or would you ball and chain the criminal and compel him to perform hard labor? Have you a decisive reason for this? The plain truth is, no man can answer these questions satisfactorily to himself. We do not know what sin is, especially we do not comprehend its moral nature; nor can we trace its infinite human ramifications; nor do we understand its offensive bearings upon God. Hence our inability to assess its merited penalty.

But suppose the kind of punishment to be prescribed by the statute, and that only the duration of it remains to be fixed. How long shall the criminal lie in the jail? Shall he lie ten days? and why ten days, and not eleven? Or why ten and not nine? Or why exactly ten, and not ten and a half? or why not nine and a half? Are you sure that ten, just ten, is the number? No juror is certain here. Or how long, exactly how long, shall the criminal stand in the pillory? Thirty minutes, or forty, or one hour and forty? Or how many stripes shall he receive? Ten, or twenty, or the old traditional thirty-nine? Or how long shall he wear ball and chain, and be compelled to work hardly? Ten days, or twelve, or six? These questions an upright juror can not answer. He shrinks from the responsibility. Indeed men,

while punishing sin, feel that about all they can safely do is to avoid extremes. They aim to be neither too lenient on the one hand, nor too severe on the other. Beyond this they fear to venture. All this comes of our ignorance of sin. We know not what it is; hence our timidity in dealing with it.

A COMMON SENTIMENT OF MANKIND.

But while the conviction is universal that sin ought to be punished, there is still another and different conviction running parallel with this, a conviction quite as prevalent, bold and deep-rooted as it is, to the effect that punishment ought at last, some how, to come to an end. This conviction is as broad and original as the other. Indeed the notion of endless future punishment is not native to the human soul. It is a compulsory after-thought, incapable, it would appear, of holding its footing except by violence. Nothing short of the authority of God can awe us into acquiescence in it. Among convictions, the most overwhelming and unwelcome to the human mind, that to which men yield the last and most reluctant assent, is the conviction of endless future punishment. If the Bible do not most distinctly, and with painful clearness teach it, certainly the Bible should at once be freed from the imputation. But if, on the other hand, the Bible distinctly propounds the doctrine, let all in reverent humility accept it, in the firm belief that in the far-distant future, at the great judgment, it will be fully explained even to us, to whom it is now so dark a problem, and be shown to be not only absolutely right, but a stern necessity from which even God has, in justice, no escape.

Moreover, if any all-potent and inexorable necessity exists for punishing sin endlessly in the future, and surely it will not be so punished, except under force of such necessity, let it be forever borne in mind that we, and not God, have created that necessity. We have committed the sin; and the sin must be disposed of. But two modes of disposing of sin are open to God—he must be enabled and permitted to forgive it, or he must punish it. He is under bond here, and without

relief. We, by our sins, have laid the burden on him. That he assumes it with infinite reluctance, it is pleasing to hope. But the most solemn and inflexible of all the necessities God is under, is the necessity of being right. This he can not be and allow unremitted sin to go unpunished. Punish it he must, if he can not forgive it. But the blame for this is wholly ours, and not even by implication his. He is free. But at last, after much preparation, I am glad to say, we are ready for our main question.

MAIN QUESTION.

The duration of future punishment, if even proximately determinate, will be found to be measured by the Greek words *aiōn* and *aiōnion*, either alone, or as qualified by such other definitive words and circumstances as attend them in the Bible. If either of these words, either by itself, or as qualified in any way in the Bible, ever certainly denotes the strictly endless, then intuitively, if as thus qualified, that word be found applied to the punishment of the future, it may denote it as endless. Not that it will certainly do this, but only that it may do it. But if, on the other hand, either word is ever found clearly to bear a limited meaning, or to signify limited periods, then, if that word is applied to the future punishment, it must, in that case, be shown that the word has not such limited meaning, otherwise the proof for endless punishment there fails. Or, if either of these terms be found to have, in use, one unvarying meaning, and that meaning is the strictly endless, then, if that term is ever applied to the punishment of the future, that punishment must be held to be endless. But if the meaning of the word is variable, if it sometimes denotes the endless, and at others the ended or endable, then, when the word is applied to the punishment of the future, nothing can be concluded as to the duration of that punishment. It can neither be inferred to be endless nor endable; *but it must be held to be strictly indefinite in length*. These propositions will, I believe, be found to embrace the whole of the several conditions under which the duration of future punishment is to be determined.

AIŌN EXAMINED.

The word to be first examined is *aiōn* (αἰών). If endless punishment be taught in the New Testament (confessedly it is not taught in the Old) the root of the doctrine exists in this word; or rather and more strictly, the root of the endless exists in it. If, in other words, the doctrine of future punishment contains the notion or fact of the endless, it derives that notion primarily from *aiōn* as its verbal source; and if it does not contain it, as thus derived, it hardly contains it at all. From *aiōn* comes the measure of future punishment. What then is the origin or derivation of the word? The question is important from two considerations: First, it may assist us in an effort to ascertain the meaning of *aiōn*; and, secondly, it affords an opportunity of correcting an error which has prevailed in some minds respecting its etymology. The word has been thought by some to be derived from the Greek adverb *aei* (ἀεί) which means *always*, and from the Greek present participle *ōn* (ὄν), which signifies *being, existing*, *ōn* being from the verb *eimi* (εἶμι) which means *I am, am in being, or exist*. According to this derivation, *aiōn* is a compound word, and signifies *always-being, or being-always, the continually-existing*. From this it would follow that in the phrase, punishment *eis ton aiōna*, the meaning would be punishment running into or taking place in the *always-being* or the *endless-being* of the future. Certainly such punishment *might be* endless; but that it is so, is neither asserted nor implied in the phrase. All that the phrase asserts is that the punishment *runs into* or *takes place in* the endless future; but that it lasts all through that future, or continues as long as it continues, is not said, and therefore is not taught. Yet this is precisely what *aiōn*, as a compound word, is used to prove. How much this etymology of *aiōn* has contributed to infix the notion of endless punishment in the popular mind is immaterial here. It has certainly lent aid to that effect. But the etymology is just half wrong. *Aiōn* is not a compound word. On the contrary, it is a simple word, being formed from *aei* alone.

The *ōn* is purely terminal; and it was affixed merely to convert an adverb into a noun, and for the sake of inflexion, or to mark the distinction of cases. It adds no other force or sense to *aei*.

ORIGINAL FORM.

The original form of *aiōn* (αἰών) was *aiFon* (αιφόν). It contained the ancient Greek digamma F or double gamma, that is, double g, which had the sound of our w. But in the course of time the digamma began to be dropped from between vowels; and at last it disappeared from the language. *Aiōn* in Greek and the Latin *ævum*, pronounced *æwum*, were from the same original root in the parent language, *aiōn* dropping the w sound, and *ævum* retaining it in the letter v, as is the case with many other Latin words. From the same original root of *aiōn* and *ævum* comes also our word *ever*, in the sense of *ævum*. *Ævum*, therefore, is now the closest representative *aiōn* has in any language; indeed it represents it precisely; and *ævum* means *age*—an age of definite length only when made so by qualifications, one of indefinite length when unqualified. Hence, age in English, in the sense of *ævum*, is the exact equivalent of *aiōn*, and therefore its true meaning. From this it follows that our phrase *forever*, which is one of the very forms of speech used in the New Testament to signify *the endless*, means no more than for the *ævum*, that is, *for the age*. *Forever* therefore denotes simply the indefinitely lasting or continuing, and not necessarily the endless, as is so generally assumed. But in an investigation, such as the present, we should deal frugally in assumptions. Fact and reality alone should guide us.

DEFINED.

Aiōn is, by a high classic authority, thus defined: "A lifetime, an age, a generation, a long period of time, indefinite duration, eternity." Thus we now have both the etymology of the word, and its several classic meanings. We shall find, moreover, that *aiōn* strictly carries these meanings, both in Old Testament and New. Its

meaning in the Bible is hardly even slightly peculiar, if it be so at all. The word has about the same import everywhere, varying it only with varying subjects.

USAGE OF AIŌN.

But etymology, though of very high value, is not the surest and most satisfactory means of ascertaining the import of a word. Usage is our most trustworthy reliance. It is both more authoritative and more decisive. What then is the usage of *aiōn* in the New Testament? The passages now to be cited are designed to furnish the reply. I wish the collation to be, if practicable, sufficiently ample to be final.

I. And Jesus answering said to them, the children of this world (this *aiōn*, this age) marry and are given in marriage; but they that shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world (that *aiōn*, that age) and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage. Luk. xx, 34, 35.

Here we have two great *aiōns* contrasted with each other, a marrying *aiōn* contrasted with a non-marrying. The former *aiōn* reaches from before the first marriage among men to the resurrection of the just. Its limit in the past is the commencement of marriage; its limit in the future will be the end of marriage. But beyond these extremes it has no known existence to us. It is a whole-time *aiōn*, or an *aiōn* embracing the whole period of human life in the flesh. The non-marrying *aiōn* begins at the resurrection of the just, and stretches away beyond it, no one can tell how far. All we here learn of it is that in it the saved will be angel-like in two respects: they will not marry, nor can they die. Of its duration we learn nothing. But an *aiōn*, limited on this side, and limitless on that, is most likely purely ideal, a mere nonentity.

II. And the Lord commended the unjust steward because he had done wisely; for the children of this world (this *aiōn*, this age) are, in their generation, wiser than the children of light. Luk. xvi, 8.

Here again the expression "this *aiōn*," this age, includes the whole of time from the fall of man to the end of the present-life period. It includes, in other

words, the whole time during which there will be "children of this world" and "children of light." Such children however have existed from the origin of sin; and they will continue to exist to its end. But since the period of their existence is the period covered by the *aiōn*, it follows that the *aiōn* covers the whole period of human life in its present form. The *aiōn*, therefore, of the present passage, and that of the preceding one, are identical. They cover the whole lifetime period of man, but with it end.

From these two instances, it appears that one prominent use of *aiōn* is to cover large cycles of time together with all their included events. But whether it ever denotes the strictly endless is not yet apparent.

III. Whoever speaks a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world (this *aiōn*, this age) nor in the world to come (the *aiōn*, the age, to come). Matt. xii, 32.

In this passage, we clearly have two distinct *aiōns* spoken of, the one an *aiōn* present at the time of speaking, the other an *aiōn* then to come or then future, and both of them *aiōns* in which forgiveness is realizable. For it could hardly be undelusive to speak of not being forgiven in an *aiōn* in which forgiveness is impossible. So to speak, it is true, could raise no false hope in regard to the particular sin named; but it would almost certainly raise it in regard to other sins; and this has actually been done by this very passage as popularly interpreted. "This *aiōn*," I am disposed to accept, meant the Jewish *aiōn*; for the Jewish *aiōn* was still in force—under it Christ was then living, and under it the sin referred to was committed. If this be so, then the "coming *aiōn*" meant the Christian *aiōn*, or the *aiōn* of Christ's actual personal reign. In neither *aiōn* is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit pardonable. Here then are two *aiōns* both included in the great marrying *aiōn* of the preceding passage, the one ending with the Jewish dispensation, the other ending when Christ quits the mediatorial throne to return to this earth. From

this passage again nothing is learned showing that *aiōns* are endless.

IV. And the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David; and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever (for the *aiōns*, for the ages) and of his reign there will be no end. Luk. i, 32, 33.

A more exact view of this passage may be obtained by a slightly closer rendering, thus: He will reign over the house of Jacob *into* the *aiōns* or ages, and of his reign there will not be an end. All that the passage asserts is that Christ's reign over the house of Jacob would continue or run *into* the *aiōns* or ages then future. He is not to reign *for*, or *during* these ages, that is, throughout their whole extent, but merely *into* them. At least this is all that is certainly asserted. Consequently to render the *eis* of the passage *for*, conveys a false idea—it conveys too much. Its meaning clearly is simply *into*.

But the most important feature of the passage, to the present investigation, is yet to be noticed. From the passage we learn that the phrase *eis tous aiōnas* does not, within itself or alone, necessarily signify the endless. This phrase occurs in the passage. Yet immediately after it, it is added, "and of his reign there shall not be an end, not be a *telos*. Now had *eis tous aiōnas*, alone, and by itself, denoted the endless in Christ's reign, this qualifying clause would not have been used. In that view, the clause is wholly superfluous. This is conclusive. It is a divine comment on *eis tous aiōnas*, showing that the notion of the endless is not inherent in it; and if not inherent in *eis tous aiōnas*, how much less is that notion in *eis ton aiōna*.

But even the clause "of his reign there shall not be an end" is not to be taken without limitation. Even it does not here signify the strictly endless. Christ's reign is to come to an end, and he is to deliver it up to the Father. 1 Cor. xv, 24. The clause therefore can mean only that after Christ begins to reign, he will reign uninterruptedly, or without a break, till all has been effected for which his reign was inaugurated.

This much is certainly meant; and it is almost certain that more can not be.

V. The harvest is the end of the world (end of the *aiōn*, age), and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burnt in the fire, so shall it be in the end of the world (end of the *aiōn*, age). Matt. xiii, 39, 40.

VI. So shall it be at the end of the world (end of the *aiōn*, age); the angels shall come forth and sever the wicked from the just. Matt. xiii, 49.

VII. For then must Christ often have suffered since the foundation of the world; but now once in the end of the world (end of the *aiōns* ages) has he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. Heb. ix, 26.

VIII. Now all these things happened to them for examples; and they are written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the world (ends of the *aiōns*, ages) are come. I Cor. x, 11.

From these passages we learn several important lessons concerning *aiōns*. 1. That all of those mentioned have ends. They determine or run out, and afterwards have no known existence. 2. That the *aiōn* mentioned by Matthew (for he mentions but one) will not close till after the great judgment; and that it will then terminate in the final separation of the wicked from the righteous. 3. That the *aiōns* mentioned in Hebrews had their end at the death of Christ; and that those in Corinthians had theirs not far from the same time. Most likely, therefore, though they are spoken of in different letters, they are the same *aiōns*. What these *aiōns* were, or where they began is not clear. The one mentioned by Matthew is most probably a whole-time *aiōn*, that is, an *aiōn* covering the whole of time from the creation of man to the last day. Those mentioned by Paul may be religious *aiōns*; but of their characteristics or differences we know nothing.

But the most noteworthy feature of all these *aiōns* is their terminableness. They have all either already come to an end, or they will hereafter do so. Indeed, an endless *aiōn*, whether as to the past or the future, is a thing unknown in the Bible. It has in fact no known existence.

IX. God who at sundry times and in divers manners spoke in

time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by his Son, whom he has appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds (made the *aiōns*). Heb. i, 1, 2.

God by Christ made the *aiōns*, made all of them; for thus comprehensively must we take the language. It must be so construed as to include all *aiōns*, even to the last one. *Aiōns* then are created things. They have no independent existence of the creative power of God. But can this be said of eternity, in our sense of the word? Eternity is not a created thing. *Aiōns* then are not its equivalent in length in the past; can they possibly be its equivalent in length in the future? Conceivably they may be. But are they? None can answer yes.

X. Fear not; I am the first and the last; and he that liveth and was dead; and behold, I am alive for ever and ever (*eis tous aiōnas tōn aiōnōn*, for the ages of ages. Rev. ii, 17.

Christ is now, since his resurrection, alive *eis tous aiōnas tōn aiōnōn*. What do these words mean, or, as an expression, in what sense are they to be taken? They, at first sight, seem designed to comprehend the whole period of Christ's present existence. He is to live, not here, merely *into*, but *during*, or throughout the whole extent of *the ages of ages* yet to come. The expression, therefore, wears the appearance of a measure of length, and seems intended to point out how long Christ is now to live. But does the expression really do this? Within and of itself it does not. It merely marks Christ's life as reaching through all the *aiōns* signified, but not as reaching beyond them. But no one ventures to think of that life as bounded by mere created periods, or as confined within them, and as being, beyond them, extinct. That life we conceive of only as endless in the high, measureless sense of the word. But this comes not from the expression in hand. It inheres inextricably in our notion of Christ as an all-infinite being. It is he therefore who imparts the notion of the endless to the expression, provided it really contains it, and not the expression which imparts the notion to him.

But should it still be insisted that this expression is the very form of speech which, above all others, is designedly used, in the New Testament, to denote the strictly endless in Christ's future life; and that it is most wrong to disquiet its import, I reply that I have not the slightest wish to disquiet the real import of the expression. But, on the other hand, neither am I willing to receive as its import a meaning which is not in it. That Christ's future existence is as endless as that of God himself I profoundly believe; yet I feel that I do no injustice when I reverently question whether the expression in hand is meant to convey that idea. The great error of men, in reasoning from this and other expressions of Scripture, relating to the future, consists in drawing from them more comprehensive conclusions than they warrant. In this, as in many other cases, we really read our traditional convictions into the Bible, not its meaning out of it. It is high time that this illicit procedure was corrected.

XI. Wherefore if food causes my brother to stumble, I will eat no flesh *for ever*—*eis ton aiōna*. 1 Cor. viii, 13.

Here *eis ton aiōna* can bear but one possible construction. It covers only so much as then remained of the apostle's natural life. His meaning is, I will eat no more (such) flesh while I live. In no dignified view can he be made to say, I will eat no flesh after I am dead. This would be trifling. The not-eating was limited to this life; and the period of the not-eating is the period covered by *eis ton aiōna*. The phrase is often, in the New Testament, used thus narrowly. It is so used in the case of the blighted fig tree. Matt. xxi, 19.

But here I shall close my citations from the New Testament, showing the usage of *aiōn* therein. From the passages, thus adduced, it appears that the word is used to cover any cycle or period of time, whether long or short, past, present, or future. The word is the close, if not the exact equivalent of our word age. It marks duration of definite length, only when sharply qualified. When unqualified, the word denotes simply an age of

unknown length. But that it ever, in the New Testament, signifies a period or age, endless in duration, is not apparent. That it *may* do so, I will not deny; but that it *does*, I have not discovered.

My next inquiry respects the import of *aiōn* as determined by Old Testament usage. This usage, in the present investigation, is high and authoritative. Indeed, in effect, it is virtually decisive. For should the Old Testament usage of *aiōn* yield the same import as the usage of the New Testament, the meaning of the word may be held as settled. What then is the Old Testament usage, and what the import it yields? Our procedure, in reply, may be rendered the more intelligible by a preliminary or two.

By the Old Testament here, is not meant our common English Old Testament, but the Greek Old Testament, commonly called the Septuagint. The Septuagint is a translation direct from the Hebrew; and it was made, as is probable, about 290 years before Christ. The word septuagint means seventy; and this version is called the Septuagint version because it is supposed to have been made by seventy learned men. This however may be doubted.

The Septuagint version is the form in which the Holy Scriptures were chiefly known and read in the time of Christ, and in the times immediately succeeding him. With this version, accordingly, the apostles were more familiar than with any other form of Holy Writ. This is shown by the fact that where the New Testament contains citations from the Old, in five cases out of six, the passages cited are from this version.

It was the Septuagint version, therefore, more than all other books besides, that served to mold, for the New Testament writers, their thoughts and peculiar dialect, in so far as these were derived from the Old Testament. Hence, naturally, the import of *aiōn* in the Septuagint would become the import of the word in the New Testament.

OLD TESTAMENT USAGE OF *AIŌN* AND *OLAM*.

But *aiōn*, as now implied in what has just been said,

is itself a translation; and to this fact great weight is due. *Aiōn*, in the Septuagint, is the translation of the Hebrew word *olam*. This word is thus defined by a Hebrew Lexicon of high authority: 1. generally, "a time hidden, time indefinite or unlimited."—2 specifically of the past, "of old, from ancient times; time everlasting, without beginning; from everlasting."—3 specifically of the future, "very long, indefinite duration to come; for ever, not endless; eternity, everlasting duration." The word has other meanings, but the preceding are all that are pertinent to the present investigation.

Now it so happens that *olam*, in every instance of the concurrence of the two words, either imparts its own peculiar meaning to *aiōn*, or it modifies the meaning of *aiōn* as a simple Greek word. In other words, *olam* causes *aiōn* to conform to itself, or be colored by it. In either case the influence of *olam* is very marked. Perhaps it would be still nearer the reality to say that, where the two words concur, they are virtual synonyms, so nearly are they allied in usage and in sense.

Hence an important antecedent inquiry, even to that respecting *aiōn*, would seem to be, What is the usage of *olam*? But as the usage of both words can be successfully inquired into at the same time, I shall investigate them together. By this plan I can be more brief, can complete my induction of cases in shorter space, and make comparisons as I proceed. The following passages will serve to illustrate the usage of the two words:

1. And I heard the man clothed in linen, who was upon the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand to heaven, and swore by him that lives for ever—lives for *olam*, lives *eis ton aiōna*. Dan. 12-7.

That *olam* is here used to cover the whole future of God's existence seems most probable. It certainly has no reference to the past. Nor is it here a word of time, but strictly a word of the future; and if it be limited in import, the limit is not known. Accordingly, *eis ton aiōna*, here the equivalent of *olam*, must signify the

whole future of God, his endless existence. But the terms borrow this vast import from God, as we shall presently see. They get it, so to speak, from the accident of discourse. It is not inherent in them.

2. Behold, the man has become as one of us, to know good and evil; and now lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat and live for ever—live for *olam*, live *eis ton aiōna*. Gen. 3-22.

If the primeval life was perpetuated by eating from the tree of life, as seems most probable; and if that tree was itself endowed with endless life, then both *olam* and *eis ton aiōna* here signify the endless future. Certainly there is no apparent necessity for taking the terms in a more restricted sense; since conceivably, at least, Adam's life might have been perpetuated endlessly, even after he sinned.

3. One generation passes away, and another generation comes; but the earth abides for ever—abides for *olam*, abides *eis ton aiōna*. Ecc. 1, 4.

If by the earth here is signified the earth in its present form, and as excluding its renewal after the great judgment, then both *olam* and *eis ton aiōna* are to be taken in a limited sense. But if, by the earth, is meant the earth simply as a created body or thing, and as including its future renewal, then *olam* and *eis ton aiōna* signify an endless existence. The latter I accept as the true view.

4. For his merciful kindness is great toward us; and the truth of the Lord endures for ever—endures for *olam*, endures *eis ton aiōna*. Psl. 117-2.

That the truth of God will endure commensurately with his own existence, no one for a moment questions. Here then is a clear case of *olam* and *eis ton aiōna* stretching over, and embracing the whole of the endless to-come. Their import is simply limitless.

Now, if *olam* and *eis ton aiōna* uniformly had the meaning they seem so clearly to have in these four passages—if they had that meaning always and everywhere; then if *eis ton aiōna* carried this meaning into the New Testament, and never there assumed any

other; and finally, if the future punishment of the wicked were said to run *eis ton aiōna*, and the phrase were left wholly unqualified by word or fact—in that case we should be compelled to allow that the punishment of the future is endless. But this is far, very far from being the fact. Yet the phrase is held to involve the notion of the endless in future punishment. In regard to no other subject known to me, do Christians generally reason so inconsequently as in regard to future punishment. The cause of this is, no doubt, a blind pre-determination to have the conclusion just as they have pre-thought it, not otherwise. But we must drop all preference for a special conclusion, before we can ever reach the true one.

But I now present a few passages of a class having quite a different meaning from that of the four passages just examined.

5. And all this land that I (God) have spoken of, I will give to your seed, and they shall inherit it for ever—inherit it for *olam*, inherit it *eis ton aiōna*. Exod. 32-13.

The descendants of Abraham have long centuries ago ceased to own and occupy the land here spoken of. Their title to it lapsed in their rejection of Christ. It is consequently not now theirs, nor is it apparent that it will ever be theirs again. They are most probably permanently dispossessed.

Here now both *olam* and *eis ton aiōna* cover a period lying between the first occupancy of the land of Canaan by the posterity of Abraham, and their expulsion from it shortly after the death of Christ. We can actually count the years included in the *olam* or *aiōn*. The period is definitely measurable.

6. For their anointing shall surely be an *everlasting* priesthood throughout their generations—a priesthood for *olam*, *eis ton aiōna*. Exod. 50-15.

When Christ became High Priest over the house of God, the priesthood of Aaron and his sons determined, or came to an end for ever. For all the future it now remains a thing of the past. It can never be revived.

The *olam* and *aiōn*, therefore, of the passage include

a period of time reaching only from the anointing of Aaron to the ascension of Christ. The period is exhausted within these limits. It is definite in length and ended.

7. And he (Manasseh) built altars in the house of the Lord, of which the Lord had said, in Jerusalem shall my name be for ever—for *olam*, be *eis ton aiōna*. 2 Chron. 33-4.

Long ages have now elapsed since the name of God ceased to be in Jerusalem, in the special sense of this passage; and it may never be there in that sense again. From the death of Christ to the present day, that city has been left of God desolate. It is without his house, without his people, and without his name.

Here, therefore, both *olam* and *aiōn* denote, not merely a terminable period, but a period which has long since actually terminated or run wholly out. An ended cycle is all the words signify here.

8. Ye shall take them as an inheritance for your children after you, to inherit them for a possession; they shall be your bondmen for ever—for *olam*, *eis ton aiōna*. Levit. 25-46.

That the people, here spoken of, have, centuries since, ceased to be the bondmen of Israel, no one will deny. They have perished from history, perished most likely from the earth, and so necessarily have perished from servitude. Not one of them is known to be left.

Thus again are *olam* and *aiōn* seen to cover a limited period of time, a period long ago ended. Not one trace of it remains. It is wholly gone.

9. Thou shalt take an awl, and thrust it through his ear to the door, and he shall be thy servant for ever—for *olam*, *eis ton aiōna*. Deut. 15-17.

Of course, the moment the servant here mentioned died, his term of servitude expired. Up to that event, it might reach, beyond it, it could not. The hole in his ear might descend with him into the grave, but not so his servitude. The close of life closed that.

Now, in the present case, both *olam* and *aiōn* include only so much of this servant's life as remained after the prescribed ceremony was ended. The whole period, therefore, covered by the terms could hardly, in

any case, exceed fifty years; and in most instances, it would certainly fall short even of that. Here then the import of *aiōn* is exceedingly limited. It is narrowed down to less than the lifetime of a single man. Even five years might exhaust it.

GENERAL CONCLUSION.

Thus, now, from the examples just cited, it appears that while *olam* and *aiōn* may possibly be employed to comprehend the whole endless future of God, they are, at the same time, certainly used to signify so short a period as fifty years, or even less. The terms therefore are seen to be exceedingly flexible and variable in their import. They are time-words or period-words; but when unaccompanied by exact definitives, they impress no limit upon the times or periods they express. They are as indefinite as our words cycle, period, time, duration, existence, age.

SPECIFIC CONCLUSION.

Hence, when *eis ton aiōna* is applied either to the life of the future, or to the punishment of the future, nothing can be definitely concluded as to the length of either. Each may be, for aught that *eis ton aiōna* signifies to the contrary, endless as the years of God, or terminable as the cycles of the by-gone. The phrase measures no definite length into the future; nor does it measure any into the past. An *aiōn* gone, and an *aiōn* to come are alike unmeasured for us. We must therefore possess some other more determinative instrument or criterion of duration than the mere word *aiōn*, before we can ever know how vast or how limited any period of the past or of the future is. Whether the Bible contains such instrument, I stop not here to inquire.

AIŌNION.

But, at last, I come to examine the great word *aiōnios*, or as I shall uniformly use the neuter, *aiōnion*. By most persons, this word will be regarded as the decisive factor in the present investigation. It is highly important, certainly, but hardly more so than *aiōn*.

Neither word can be dispensed with; and each, in its place, performs an important function. *Aiōnion* is the word used in the following momentous text:

And these (the wicked) shall go away into *aiōnion* punishment, but the righteous into *aiōnion* life. Matt. 25-46.

What does the word *aiōnion* signify here? This is now, for the remainder of this investigation, the great question; and on it, we can not be too patient nor too thorough.

Aiōnion is a Greek adjective, either formed directly from *aiōn* itself, or derived remotely from its root. Consequently, as thus formed or derived, *aiōnion* must signify either something pertaining to an *aiōn* or to *aiōns*, or something like them in one or more respects, or something partaking of their nature. Accordingly, the phrase *aiōnion* punishment must mean either punishment taking place in an *aiōn* or *aiōns*, or punishment lasting through them, or it may mean both. More than this, in comprehension of meaning, will hardly be claimed for the phrase.

Now, in the Savior's expression, just quoted, "These, the wicked, shall go away into *aiōnion* punishment"—what is the import of the word punishment? It must signify either punishment that is to take place in the *aiōn* or *aiōns* next succeeding the present one, that is, after death; or punishment lasting through that *aiōn* or those *aiōns*; or the word may include both these ideas; and let us here concede that it does. The wicked then are to go away into the punishment of the next *aiōn* or *aiōns*, which is a punishment lasting through them. But does this determine that punishment to be endless? Upon one hypothesis only it does. If the next succeeding *aiōn* or *aiōns* be itself or themselves endless, then, intuitively, the punishment which is commensurate with it or them is endless. But now decisively, is that *aiōn* endless; or to put the question as comprehensively as it can be put, do all the future *aiōns* combined, which are mentioned in the New Testament, make up, or are they the equivalent of one vast and endless future? No living man can advisedly say that they are. On the

contrary, the duration or length of these *aiōns* is absolutely indeterminable and unknown. Here, therefore, endless future punishment fails of proof.

PROCEDURE SIMPLIFIED.

But let me now, for a moment, vary a little my procedure. I have been using the learned words *aiōn* and *aiōnion*. This is hardly intelligible, and certainly not attractive to the common hearer. Let me, therefore, drop these foreign words, and use, instead, their plain English equivalents. *Aiōn* means *age*, simply and indefinitely *age*—this is indisputable. *Eis* means *into*, *for* or *during*; *ton* is the same as *the*. Hence, *eis ton aiōna* means *into the age*, or *for the age*, that is, *during it*. *Aiōnion* I shall accept, though not clear that it is correct, as a measure of length. It signifies then, I shall allow, in simple terms, *lasting during an age*, or where *aiōn* is plural, *lasting during ages*. Moreover, since the ages in question are all future, we will let the word mean *lasting during future ages*. This phrase may be a little clumsy; but it is clear, and I shall therefore use it. Let us now repeat the great text of Matthew, and we shall become more intelligible.

These (the wicked) shall go away into punishment *lasting during the future ages*, but the righteous into life *lasting during the future ages*.

This is positively all that the Savior can be made to assert. Does it yield the conclusion of endless future punishment? On one condition only, it does. If the future ages themselves are endless, then, confessedly, is the punishment which lasts through them endless. But are those ages endless? They may be; they may not be. The doubt here implied, no uninspired mind can dissipate. But until this doubt is dispelled, the duration of future punishment remains uncertain. Hence, the passage does not yield the conclusion of endless future punishment. Indeed, it yields simply no conclusion at all on the point.

NOVEL QUESTION.

But here, before proceeding to determine the usage of *aiōnion*, I wish to introduce, by way of episode, and

to examine a somewhat novel question, but one which nevertheless can not well be ignored in this investigation. The question is this: Can God adequately punish sin? If he can, all just men will say he must. The question is not, will he adequately punish it; but *can he?* The popular reply will no doubt be—Certainly he can. But this reply may be hasty. Let us then not accept it at once.

ADEQUATE PUNISHMENT—WHAT?

Adequate punishment consists of two, and only two constituents. The first constituent is the precise *kind* of punishment which, as assessed by infinite wisdom, ought to be inflicted on sin. The second constituent is the exact *length*, as measured by infinite justice, that the right kind of punishment ought to run. Punishment, absolutely right in kind, and absolutely just in length, is adequate punishment. Nothing else is. *Can God inflict it?*

But the question is not yet before us, with sufficient precision. It is not exactly—Can God adequately punish sin generally, that is, sin of any kind; but specifically, can he adequately punish human sin? Human sin is not all sin; nor possibly is it the worst form of sin. It is peculiar sin, because committed under peculiar circumstances.

We come into this world with a frail and very susceptible nature. For this nature we are not responsible. We are responsible merely for the proper use of it. We live in a world abounding in temptations; and these temptations touch us at every point. Moreover, these temptations are manipulated by a great and overmastering mind in the person of Satan. Neither for these things are we responsible. We are responsible simply for the proper or required resistance. Now, under these circumstances, we sin. Certainly the circumstances are not justifying. But are they even mitigating? *I believe even God so regards them.* Then they must be taken into the account in fixing the punishment of sin. The real question, therefore, is—Can God adequately punish human sin, committed under these circum-

stances? God is infinite in power, infinite in resources, and all eternity lies before him. Now, it is positively shocking to say that he can not adequately punish human sin. Yet this is precisely what we must say, provided future punishment be endless. Endless punishment is punishment still running; and punishment still running is not adequate. Whenever punishment becomes adequate, it must end. Therefore, if future punishment be endless, it is so, because God can not adequately punish sin. No one will accuse him of punishing sin simply because he can. He punishes it only because he must. Hence, if he punishes sin endlessly, it is because he has no other escape. He can not punish it adequately. It is absolutely awful to affirm this of God. I am afraid even to think it, much more to say it. *Not if the Bible teaches it*

AIÖNION AGAIN.

But I am again ready for *aiōnion*. What is the usage of the word? For, on its usage, more than on any thing else in it, the conclusion will depend which is at last to be drawn from it. The following passages will exhibit the word in those features which are pertinent to this investigation:

1. And Abraham planted a grove in Beersheba, and called there on the name of the Lord, the everlasting God—the *aiōnion* God. Gen. 21-33.

Why is God here called the *aiōnion* God? In other words, what characteristic or fact is the word employed to express? The answer is not obvious. 1. God may be called the *aiōnion* God because conceived of as making the *aiōns* (Heb. i, 2), or as inhabiting them. When we ourselves call him the God of eternity, we often mean no more than the God who inhabits eternity. Indeed, we use the epithet, in this sense, quite as frequently as in any other. 2. Or God may be called the *aiōnion* God, because regarded as living or existing through all *aiōns*. But which of these two views is *aiōnion* used to signify? No one can say. Granting, however, that *aiōnion* is used as a measure of existence, the only existence it measures is existence in, or through

aiōns. It measures no existence lying beyond *aiōns* or independent of them. But are *aiōns* the equivalent of eternity? The answer is impossible. But until *aiōns* are shown to be the equivalent of eternity; and until it is also shown that *aiōnion* measures existence through them, in this vast sense—until this is done, the endless is not deducible from *aiōnion*. That God is endlessly existent is one fact; that *aiōnion* is here used to measure that existence is quite a different fact. The former, I profoundly believe; the latter, I gravely doubt.

2. He (God) stood, and measured the earth; he beheld, and drove asunder the nations; and the everlasting mountains were scattered, the *perpetual* hills did bow—the *aiōnion* hills. Hab. 3-6.

Now, granting the very utmost that can possibly be claimed here; granting that the hills spoken of are to last through all time and even beyond it; granting that they will constitute a part of the new earth of the next or spiritual state; granting, in other words, that, in substance and in form, they are, in fact, of endless existence; and granting further that *aiōnion* is here used to signify this existence—granting all this, what follows? Indisputably, that *aiōnion* is shown, in one case, at least, to signify the endless. That this is obtaining that notion for the word through rather too many concessions, will, no doubt, be taken notice of. Still, let us concede the notion to the word. To my mind, it seems, I confess, almost certain that, in this passage, *aiōnion* is a measure of existence. The hills are hardly called *aiōnion* because located or existing in *aiōns*, but because lasting during them. At least, this strikes me as the better view. Hence, the preceding liberal concessions.

3. He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised; and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an *everlasting* covenant—for an *aiōnion* covenant. Gen. 17-13.

Here the covenant of circumcision is called an *aiōnion* covenant. Now let us concede, as I believe it to be true, that *aiōnion* is used to measure the length of that covenant or the whole period during which it will be in force. How great is that period to be, or what will be its length? That circumcision will cease with

the resurrection of the dead, no one will deny. Beyond that event, there will certainly be no such rite. Hence the covenant is to last only from its establishment in the family of Abraham to the resurrection. Consequently the word *aiōnion* covers only that intervening period. But that period is certainly to terminate. Here, therefore, *aiōnion* is indisputably shown to have only a limited meaning. The period denoted by it is to run out and cease to exist.

4. Behold I give to him (Phinehas) my covenant of peace; and he shall have it, and his seed after him, the covenant of an everlasting priesthood—the covenant of an *aiōnion* priesthood.—Numb. 25-13.

That the priesthood of Phinehas has long since expired, no one can deny. It has utterly ceased, never to be revived. Not even a trace of it remains, except on the page of the historian. But it is called an *aiōnion* priesthood. Some *aiōnion* things then are not only terminable, but actually terminate, and afterwards have no existence. If, now, this is true of an *aiōnion* priesthood, why may it not be true of *aiōnion* punishment? Or how is it that the word can apply to terminable periods of the past, but only to endless ones of the future? These are troublesome questions.

IMPORT OF AIŌNION.

Now from these examples, *aiōnion* is seen to be a word of very variable import. This, however, is no more than was to have been expected in a derivative from *aiōn*. The word covers periods of every degree of length, from the whole existence of God to an ended and by-gone priesthood. From its mere presence, nothing can be inferred as to the length of the periods it expresses. Within itself, it is wholly indefinite when denoting the indefinite and unknown. It never signifies definite periods merely of itself. It signifies them only when they are made definite by something else than the word itself. The subject to which the word is applied must render it definite, if it becomes so at all. Of itself it contains not that idea.

Let us now put what has here just been said to the test. For this purpose, we will predicate the words

age, duration, cycle, period, first of the past; and we will impose no limit on the import of these words, unless *aiōnion* itself imposes one. What then does the expression *aiōnion* age signify? Does it signify an endless, or an endable past age? It clearly signifies neither. It simply signifies a past age of indeterminate length; that is, an age of no certain or known length. And so with all the other words enumerated. But let us now predicate these words of the future in precisely the same way. What then signifies the expression *aiōnion* duration—does it signify endless or endable future duration? It signifies neither as such. It signifies simply indefinite future duration, or duration of no ascertained or known length. The notion of the precise or determinate is not in it. And so of *aiōnion* punishment. It signifies a continuing fact of the future. But how long will the fact continue? Does *aiōnion* contain the answer? Especially, does it reveal or signify that the fact will continue endlessly? Nothing, it seems to me, but blind devotion to a particular theory can so maintain. *Aiōnion*, when predicated of future states, conditions, or periods, has no definite import. It imposes or measures no precise or certain length.

But if, in reply to this, it be said that the endless itself is indefinite; and that this is the precise indefiniteness which *aiōnion* is used to signify, I answer that whenever this is shown to be the fact, it will be time enough to notice it. Till then it is treated as of no importance.

AIŌNION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.

But I now cite a few passages from the New Testament, showing how *aiōnion* is used in it. Certainly the usage of the word varies much less here than in the Old Testament. But, as will readily be seen, this diminished variableness adds nothing to the definiteness of the word. All the uncertainty of the Old Testament attaches in the New. But I must not anticipate.

I. But [which mystery] now is made manifest, and by the writings of the prophets, according to the command of the everlasting God—of the *aiōnion* God. Rom. 16-26.

If *aiōnion*, anywhere in the New Testament, certainly signifies, or certainly carries the idea of the strictly endless, undoubtedly it is here. Does it here certainly carry that idea? God is called the *aiōnion* God. But why? Is he so called because he made the *aiōns*, environs himself in them, and inhabits them, or because he exists through them? He may be so called for either of these two reasons, or for both. Let us now concede that he is so called for both. He is then called the *aiōnion* God, in part, because he exists through all *aiōns*, past and future, through all and every thing that is called, or named, or is *aiōnion*. Does this fact prove *aiōnion* existence to be endless? If the whole of future duration or being is *aiōnion*, or if there is no existence or being lying beyond the *aiōnion*, then, indisputably, does the fact prove that existence to be endless. But if the *aiōnion* future be not the whole of the future, or be not the equivalent in length of eternity, in that case, the fact does not prove the existence endless. Is now the *aiōnion* future the whole of the future, or the equivalent in duration of eternity? The question is absolutely unanswerable. Hence, the fact that God is called the *aiōnion* God, does not prove endless future existence. It simply proves *aiōnion* existence, no more.

But let us grant, what I have certainly no wish to question, that in the expression *aiōnion* God, the epithet *aiōnion* is intentionally used to signify that God's existence is endless. What then? *aiōnion* so signifies, not because the notion of the endless is in it, but because it is in God. It merely labels a pre-existing notion in God. It does not impart that notion to him. On the contrary, the notion or fact existed in him infinite ages before *aiōnion* had an existence. The word, therefore, merely stands for the notion; it receives it, not gives it.

But suppose we wish to ascertain the duration or length of some future fact, as future punishment. Within itself, this fact does not reveal its length, nor, independently of *aiōnion*, can its length be known. But, it will be said, the simple circumstance of the fact being *aiōnion* determines its length. Not obviously cor-

rect. It may determine only its *quality*, not its length. In the expression temporal suffering, the word temporal merely locates the suffering in time. It does not measure it. And so with the expression *aiōnion* punishment. *aiōnion* may merely locate the punishment in future *aiōns*, not measure it.

But to this, it will be replied, the *aiōnion* God is the eternal God, and *aiōnion* punishment is eternal punishment. But this begs a question. Is the epithet *aiōnion*, when applied to future punishment, known to signify the same attribute or fact, as when applied to God? No man can, with full knowledge, so affirm. God and future punishment are widely different entities. In the former, the notion of the endless inheres absolutely, and with no dependence on *aiōnion*: not so the latter. *aiōnion* borrows its notion of the endless, when it carries it at all, from God or from something like him in duration; but future punishment must obtain the notion, if it ever has it, from *aiōnion*; and yet *aiōnion* does not uniformly carry the notion. This fact renders all inferences from the word, involving the endless, doubtful. Rather, it shows that such inferences are *nonsequiturs*.

2. As Sodom and Gomorra, and the cities around them, acting lewdly like them, and going after other flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the punishment of *everlasting* fire—*aiōnion* fire. Jud. 7.

For what purpose is the word *aiōnion* here applied to the fire that consumed the cities of this passage? Is it applied to denote that the fire was endless? Surely not. The fire was certainly *aiōnion*; yet it soon did its work and became extinct. But the punishment of the future is also *aiōnion*. In what sense? Is it *aiōnion* in the same sense in which the fire was, that consumed these cities? Certainly not, many will reply. But why not? An *aiōnion* fire in time comes to an end; but *aiōnion* punishment in the future is endless. Yet we are never arbitrary nor inconsistent.

But the word *aiōnion* is not used in this passage to signify duration or length, but to express *quality*. *aiōnion* fire is a *kind* of fire. It is the fire of the

future *aïōns*, and is therefore called *aïōnion*. And so precisely with *aïōnion* punishment. *Aïōnion* signifies *kind or quality*, not length. *Aïōnion* punishment is the kind of punishment which will be inflicted on the wicked in the future *aïōns*. Its duration or length will, no doubt, be very great, but how great is unknown. It may, for aught that is revealed to the contrary, be endless as the existence of God, or terminable as the fire that left Sodom and Gomorra in ashes. Of its ultimate length, the Bible says nothing.

3. Now, to him who is able to establish you according to the revelation of the mystery which was kept unrevealed in *times past*, but is now made manifest—kept unrevealed in *aïōnion* times. Rom. 16-26.

That the mystery, here spoken of, is the fact and plan of human redemption through Christ will not be questioned. Previously to the commencement of the period denoted by the "now" (*nun*) of the passage, this mystery had not been revealed. Up to that time, it had been kept secret. But at the beginning of the "now" period, it was revealed. Moreover, the period preceding the "now" period was divided into times (*chronois*); and these times are called *aïōnion*. But at the beginning of the "now" period, these "times" were wholly past. No part of them then remained to reach beyond that beginning. They were by-gone things. Here, now, we have the word *aïōnion* applied to periods of the past, actually terminated and non-existent. They were, at the time, ended and utterly gone. Further, no one *aïōn*, of all those in the future, is known to exceed in length even the shortest of these "times" or cycles of the past. Nor is the whole number of future *aïōns* known to exceed the number of these past "times." Yet *aïōnion* can apply to these "times" or cycles of the past, and so denote the certainly ended; but when applied to the periods of future punishment, it must be compelled to denote only the certainly endless! How can this be? Especially, how can it be, when *aïōnion* is applied to the future periods with no mark, or sign, or hint, that it means more than when applied to the past? The reply is not likely to occur soon.

A VICIOUS MODE OF REASONING NOTICED.

But no better place than the present will occur, to notice one of the vicious current modes of reaching the conclusion of endless future punishment. That mode consists in drawing from given scriptures a conclusion as certainly true, which is only possibly true, or if probably true, probable only in the lowest degree. I now proceed to amplify the point here made.

The strongest expression in the New Testament for future human punishment is *basanismos eis aïōnas aïōnōn*—*torment for ages of ages* Rev. 14-11. Whether this torment will be inflicted on all the wicked dead, I stop not to inquire. It will certainly be inflicted on a part of them. The expression *torment for ages of ages* divides itself into two clauses. The "ages" of the second clause are component; the "ages" of the first are composite. That is, the "ages" of the second clause compose or make up those of the first. Now, how many ages does each clause undoubtedly contain? The word ages is plural in both clauses. It must then, in the first clause, contain at least *two* ages. Less than two it can not contain; more, it may, but this is not certain. The word, in the second clause, must contain at least *three* ages, in order to be component, and not to be simply identical, in length, with the two ages of the first clause. More than three ages would be an assumption. Five ages, therefore, are all that the two clauses are certainly known to contain. Moreover, the largest of these ages can not be shown to include so much as a thousand years. Yet, from these two clauses, not certainly known to contain more than five ages, and all these ages together not known to cover so many as even five thousand years—yet from these two clauses, I repeat, is drawn the immense conclusion of endless future punishment. In what other case, I ask, except the present, would men of penetration fail to detect this astounding inconsequence? With dogmatists, this may pass for reasoning, but not so with logicians.

But in reply, it may still be said, both the composite and component ages may each include a million of ages,

and each age may contain a million of years. I frankly grant it. What next? What conclusion is necessitated by the merely *may be*? Simply none. From what *may be*, what *is* never results. Especially, from what merely *may be*, the conclusion of endless future punishment can not result. The certain *to-be* is deducible only from the *certainly-is*, not from the barely possible.

4. He shall receive a hundred-fold now in this time and in the world to come eternal life—in the *aion* to come *aionion* life. Mrk. x: 30.

This passage is not cited because of any peculiarity it exhibits in *aionion*, but because of the light it seems to throw on its meaning. He who has done certain things, "now in this time," shall receive in the *aion* to come, the *age* to come, *aionion* life. That is, he shall receive, in the age to come, *the life of that age*. This gives the exact sense of the passage. What now is the life of that age? Certainly it is the life peculiar to it, the sublime life the redeemed will live in it, and by consequence, the life which will last through it. No one, I believe, will question this. Here, therefore, *aionion* is seen to denote a *kind* of life, not to measure it; or, if it measure it at all, it measures it only incidentally. The life, as such, has length; *aionion* denotes the life as such, and therefore incidentally measures it.

And so in regard to *aionion* punishment. It is the punishment peculiar to the future *aions* or ages, the punishment which will take place in them. It is a *kind* of punishment; and it will prove endless, only on condition that those *aions* are themselves endless. But the endlessness of those *aions* can never, in this life, be shown. Neither, consequently, can the endlessness of future punishment be shown.

But I here close my quotations from the Holy Scriptures. The passages, now cited and noticed, will, I doubt not, be deemed amply sufficient to exhibit, with all necessary fullness, the usage of both *aion* and *aionion*. Additional passages would lead only to virtual repetitions of what has already been said. They could only protract the investigation, not strengthen the conclusion immediately to be drawn.

CONCLUSION FROM THE WHOLE INDUCTION.

Now, from the whole of these passages, both those from the Old Testament, and those from the New, what is the real and justly warranted conclusion? Is it not this—That both *aion* and *aionion* are words of exceedingly variable import; that at one time they may signify the endless, and at another, certainly the endable or ended; and that neither has any one uniform or unvarying meaning in the Bible? If this conclusion be not the necessary and true one, I see not how any conclusion can possess these characteristics.

CONCLUSION ON THE MAIN QUESTION.

Therefore, from all the premises and reasonings now before us, I conclude that the question, *Do the Holy Scriptures teach the endlessness of future punishment*, is not settled in the New Testament; that the New Testament pronounces no decision on it; and, consequently, that no uninspired human mind will ever, in this life, be able to say whether that punishment is, beyond the ages into which it runs, endless or endable. Over the ultimate duration of future punishment, it seems to me, a darkness settles down impenetrable by the unaided finite mind. This conclusion may not be fully satisfactory; and I readily grant that it is not; but this surely is one of those instances in which non-decision, though not satisfactory, is far more satisfactory than decision. If God's word does not reveal an endless future punishment, its failure to do so gives me, at least, no pain.

CLASSIC MEANING OF AIÖNION.

But it is proper to inquire next, how closely the meaning of *aionion*, as now determined by its usage in the Septuagint, and in the New Testament, corresponds with its classic meaning. On this point, but little need be said. Pursuantly, I cite from the first Greek Lexicon that presents itself, the following definitions of *aionion*: "Of long duration, lasting; *sometimes* everlasting, perpetual, eternal; *sometimes* lasting through life, as *aeternus* in Latin." This I take to be a compressed, but

fair *conspectus* of the several meanings of the word. From it, moreover, you will readily perceive that *aionion* means in the Bible nearly, if not precisely, what it means in the classics. The word may denote the endless, when applied to a subject which carries that idea; or it may denote only a brief human life. Hence, when it is applied, even as a measure, to a subject of unknown duration, it never determines the length of that duration. It is a word of most indefinite import, when used of simple duration, state, or being. In such cases, it settles nothing. But the duration of future punishment can not be determined, independently of *aionion*; and *aionion* does not determine it. Therefore, the duration of future punishment is not known; and if its duration be unknown, certainly it is not known to be endless.

OBJECTIONS NOTICED.

But the conclusion, now reached in this speech, will be strongly objected to. The present, therefore, seems the proper place to notice objections. The real question, however, on the present point, is not whether the conclusion reached is open simply to objections; for this it may be, and still be true; but whether it is open to any one valid objection which necessitates its falsity. If this be so, it should promptly be rejected. The following then, are, perhaps, the most cogent objections that will be urged:

First objection: If future punishment can not be shown to be endless, neither can future life. But this objection assumes too much. The following is its proper form: If future punishment can not be shown, by *aionion*, to be endless, neither can future life. This I readily admit; and I deny that either future punishment or future life can, by *aionion* alone, be shown to be endless. If the word, when applied to these future conditions or states, signifies the endless, the fact is unknown, and, therefore, can not be shown.

But because future life can not be shown to be endless merely by *aionion* alone, does it follow that it can not be shown to be endless at all? Evidently not.

is perfectly competent to establish the endlessness of that life by other proofs of Holy Writ besides *aionion*. A fact is often established in one way, when it could not be in an other. Now, in proof that future life is endless, and before proceeding to the next objection, I submit the following five arguments:

IS FUTURE LIFE ENDLESS?

1. The whole provision of God, in nature and in Christ, is a provision for human life—a provision, since sin, to refine it, elevate it, advance it. From the embryonic life we advance to the present better life; from the present better life, to purified christian life; from purified christian life, to the future spiritual life, and so on. And in the future spiritual life, we shall doubtless advance from the first heaven to the second; from the second, to the mysterious and ominous “third” of Paul; from the “third,” possibly to the fourth, and so on through all *aions*, and away beyond them into the *aionless* and nameless future. But, if future life is to come to an end, all this stupendous provision is worse than useless—it is sheer waste. It can not be believed, without reflecting upon God, that it would ever have been made for a mere terminable life. It must, then, have been made for a strictly endless one.

2. “Because I live, ye shall live also.” Jno. xiv, 19. This was spoken by Christ, with reference to the whole life of his disciples. It therefore includes their future life, and, most probably, was spoken with strict reference to it. But the reason for the life spoken of is that Christ himself lives; and this reason is an endless reason. Now, as the life itself will certainly continue as long as its reason continues, it therefore follows that the future life of the redeemed is endless.

3. “Those that shall be accounted worthy to obtain that age can not even die any more, for they are angel-like.” Luk. xx, 35, 36. Christ speaks this of the redeemed, in the age next succeeding this. The redeemed of that age then “can not die.” Moreover, this expression must be taken in its strongest and most comprehensive sense. The redeemed of the next age

can die no more—they can not die at all. Intuitively, then, if they can not die, their life is endless. Here, therefore, endless future life is most distinctly taught. But where in the Bible is it said that future punishment *can not end*? The answer is, no where. But why is it not said, if this be the fact? The reply is, this, most likely, is not the fact, and therefore it is not said.

4. "This mortal must put on immortality." 1 Cor. xv, 53. Or, more fully: This mortal body is to put on immortality, or it is to become deathless. Either then it never can die, in the future, or it never will. Nor is this deathless endowment limited to *aiōns* or ages of the future, or bounded in any other way. It is simply boundless. But why is the body of the future to be deathless? Evidently, because the inhabiting spirit itself is deathless, and therefore requires such a body. A mortal spirit in an immortal body would be a most unnatural union. But a deathless body and a deathless spirit, united in the same individual, constitute our severest conception of endless future life. Here again, therefore, endless life crops boldly out, being asserted as to the body, and implied as to the spirit. More fully, it could hardly be taught.

5. "Midway between its street [the new Jerusalem] and the river, on this side and that side, is a tree of life, bearing twelve fruits." Rev. xxii, 2. As a tree of life stood in the ancient garden of Eden, before man fell; so a tree of life is to stand in the sublime city of God, on the renovated earth, after the great judgment. It is called a tree of life, not because it originally gives life, but because it perpetuates it. The future life will draw its continuance from it. Now, as the redeemed will have uninterrupted access to this tree; and as the tree will perpetuate their life, so long as they have access to it, it therefore, of necessity, follows that the life so perpetuated will be endless. In order to test the accuracy of this conclusion, let us attempt to deny either of the two following propositions: that the redeemed will have uninterrupted access to the tree; or that it will perpetuate their life. Obviously, neither proposition

can be denied. Consequently, here again future life is shown to be endless.

Now, finally, on this question, let us mass all five of these arguments; and if, in their united force, they do not necessitate the conclusion of endless future life, it would be difficult to imagine or devise the premises, from which such conclusion could result. Consequently, from all that has now been said, I feel fully justified in holding the two following propositions as conclusively established, namely: 1. That future life is endless; and 2. That the duration of future punishment is indeterminable. But I am again ready for objections.

OBJECTIONS RESUMED.

Second objection: If future punishment be not endless or eternal, then we have no word or words with which we can aptly translate Matthew xxv, 46. This objection is really too much in the nature of a special plea to be entitled to a grave reply. But, in order to test it, I will cite the passage from Matthew, and as I do so, will use the first and second of the definitions of *aiōnion*, already quoted in this speech. The passage: These, the wicked, shall go away into punishment of *long duration*; but the righteous into life of *long duration*. This translation, though I deem it at fault in a single respect, I have no hesitancy in pronouncing better and truer to the sacred original than that found in our common English New Testament. But even this translation, though good, may possibly be improved, by using the second of the preceding definitions, instead of the first, thus: These, the wicked, shall go away into *lasting* punishment; but the righteous into *lasting* life. This rendering, upon the hypothesis that *aiōnion* is a measure of future punishment, is almost faultless. It is at once about as definite, and about as indefinite, as *aiōnion*; and this is precisely what it should be to be true. But I should prefer a translation differing from both of these, namely: These, the wicked, shall go away into *the punishment of the future age*; but the righteous into *the life of the future age*. It will be long, I conjecture, before a

rendering, juster than this to the divine sense, will be proposed. It merely locates future punishment in the next succeeding age, but with no attempt to indicate its length; and this is exactly what *aionion* does. More than this is certainly gratuitous.

Third objection: Not to teach that future punishment is endless, is to embolden the wicked to persist in sin. But, if we teach at all, we must teach the truth, no matter what the consequences may be. It is not, however, certain that the effect here foretold would follow. It might; possibly it might not. The objection is conjectural. To teach the wicked that if they die in sin they will surely be punished in hell; that only the duration of that punishment is indeterminable; that for aught we can know to the contrary, it may be endless; that, in any event, it will last, at least in the case of some, for ages of ages—how teaching the wicked this is to have the effect to cause them to persist in sin, I am candid to say, I can not see. True, the wicked might abuse the doctrine; and what doctrine of the Bible is it they have not abused?

But how is it in a somewhat similar case, about which there is no doubt? We teach the sinner, and correctly so, that though he may sin out his three score years and ten, yet if, in the very last day of his earthly life, he becomes truly and correctly obedient to Christ, he shall be saved. Does this teaching embolden the sinner to persist in sin? Possibly it may in exceptional cases. But whose fault is it? Is it the fault of the doctrine, or of the sinner? Indisputably, it is the fault of the sinner. We never, however, think of declining to teach the doctrine, because it may be abused. And so in regard to future punishment. Let us teach the whole truth; and if men will still dare abuse it, the fault is their's. We who teach are free.

Fourth objection: To teach that the length of future punishment is not decided, is to unsettle a long-held and deep-rooted faith of Christians. This may be so. But the question is not, who holds the doctrine of endless future punishment; nor how long

has it been believed; nor yet is it deep-rooted; but is it founded in divine truth? If the doctrine be thus founded, no harm can accrue to it, from even the most unsparing investigation; but if it be not thus founded, let it perish from all minds. They will be the happier for the riddance. My motto is, now that the controversy, touching the duration of future punishment, is on us, let it be prosecuted to exhaustion. The agitation will prove healthy. No doctrine has a claim on any man's credence, which can not survive the last test of both logic and criticism. "Let-me-alone" has ever been the clamor of shallow error. There is nothing in the present objection. It is not worth a thought.

But I here close my replies to objections. I have aimed to notice those only, which I supposed would be held to be the weightiest. As for others that might be adduced, they are of too little importance to merit the slightest attention.

Further, there are certain other passages of Scripture which, I admit, have a bearing on the duration of future punishment. These, had I time, might possibly receive brief profitable notice. But if those passages now examined, which are certainly such as are chiefly relied on in proof of endless future punishment—if these do not sustain the doctrine, you may rest well assured that no others do. I have noticed the strongest, feeling no solicitude as to the effect of the weakest.

If the punishment of the future be endless, there is no apparent good reason why the fact should not be so transparently revealed, as to be unattended by a single doubt. No evil, except by abuse, could result from such revelation; but evil might result from concealment. The wicked might say, after death, had we known the full penalty of sin; had the whole truth been revealed to us respecting it, we would have repented. We did not repent, because we had no reason to anticipate so dreadful a penalty. But, on the contrary, if the punishment of the future be endable, there is a most obvious reason for not revealing the

46 fact. Did men know certainly that it is endable, they would undoubtedly take most dangerous liberties with the divine requirements. But if they are left in doubt, especially if they are left to fear that the punishment of the future may be endless, as it may be, I can see no harm to come of it. Men are hardly more apt to venture rashly into dangerous uncertainty, than into dangerous certainty.

CAN ANY GOOD RESULT?

But, now suppose it to be concluded with severe logical correctness, and to be taught, that the duration of future punishment is both undecided and indeterminable, can any good result from the conclusion? Suppose none can, we must still insist on the conclusion. But, if the conclusion be true, as it certainly is, good is just as sure to result from it as truth is from God, and therefore the necessary antecedent to good. In what form, or in what volume, this good is to come, is not in issue. It will surely come.

2 But, I can see at least one important good that is to result. There is a large class of thoughtful men of the day, men of high morality and judicial fairness of mind who, on the question of future punishment, reason thus: God can not, in justice, be the author of endless future punishment. The Bible teaches that he is. Therefore the Bible is not from God. Thousands of men, such as I have just described, are to-day, by force of this curt argument, rejecting the Bible. Cause them to see that the Bible contains no warrant for their fatal syllogism, and at once they cease to oppose it. They appeal from the Bible, because of what they suppose it teaches, not from God. To him they are more than ready to refer the issue. They profoundly believe he will do right. They are therefore willing to abide his decision, but reject the supposed hard one of the Bible. The conclusion herein reached, will affect these men well, and through them, it will well affect the truth.

TWO OTHER RESULTS.

Nor is this all. There are still two other implied results of the conclusion now reached, of too much de-

structive force against error, to be passed in silence. It is held by some that the punishment of the wicked will end in their annihilation. This, however, is a decision—a decision to the effect that future punishment will come to an end. But the Bible contains no decision on the duration of future punishment. Therefore the conclusion of the annihilationist is false. The future annihilation of the wicked is not even hinted at in the Bible.

Again, the Universalist teaches that the punishment of the wicked will come to an end; and that, ultimately, they will all become pure and happy. But this, too, is a decision, a bold dogmatic decision that future punishment will end. The Bible, however, enounces no decision on the duration of future punishment. On the contrary, it wholly abstains from a decision. It does not even imply one. Its only decision is severe non-decision. Therefore, the doctrine of the Universalist, touching future punishment, is wholly false. It contains not one vestige of truth. Moreover, the non-decision of the Bible is really the only overwhelming refutation of this seductive error. It completely extinguishes it.

A PREDICTION.

In conclusion, I pause only to make one prediction. The more scholarly and thoroughly men investigate the duration of future punishment, the more numerous will they accede to the conclusion of this speech. No event of the future is more certain than this. Many thoughtful men no longer believe the traditional theory. Belief in endless future punishment is destined to wane. With it, moreover, is doomed the present tyrannous orthodox sentiment which denies to dissent freedom of speech. Men dare not now utter aloud their convictions on the subject. But the day is at hand when they will be free. Manly independence will, at last, assert itself; and intolerance will grow gentle. Mark the course of coming events, and remember this foretelling.

PERSONAL PARAGRAPH.

Finally, I beg you, my respected audience, to allow me the privilege of a single short paragraph, personal to myself. Let no one who hears me now, or who may hereafter, read what I say, impugn my motives, or attribute to me any dishonorable aim. I am no adventurer after questionable notoriety. No motive prompts me to this performance save inextinguishable love of truth. I am now, at my age, too near the judgment of my God to be actuated by any less noble incentive. The investigation which has led to the conclusion, now so frankly expressed, I have tried to conduct with faultless candor. Moreover, my convictions have been uttered without reserve, unheeding of inkling peril. I pray you, therefore, believe that I aspire only to the defence of the true, and to relieve from needless odium the benevolent name of my Great Master. If I have succeeded, in any degree, in placing *Him* before you in a less repulsive light than he has heretofore occupied, a proud ambition is gratified. Last of all, if the dark future now looks out upon you more enchantingly; and if, in addition to this, the ultimate doom of our poor lost kindred looks less overwhelming and shocking than in the past, it is enough. My achievement is complete.

May this
appeal?