

those who believe in an endless Hell, as men of old believed in it, have a few weighty reasons for their belief. We are sure that those who believe in an all-embracing Heaven, as a few have believed in all ages, and as holy men in our day have declared themselves to believe, have many more and far weightier reasons for theirs. But this *via media*—this Hell keeping its endlessness, but losing its horror; this Heaven, keeping its exclusiveness, but losing the distinctness of contrast which alone gave its exclusiveness meaning—for this view we can see no reason whatever. It dismisses all reverence for the words of Christ, as they are written down in the Bible, for it encourages those he bids depart as cursed to believe that nothing very terrible awaits them. It dismisses all confidence in the omnipotent mercy of God, for it condemns a portion of those he has called into existence to remain for ever shut out from his presence. Its sole interest, we should suppose, consists in the proof it offers to the historian of belief, that the thing it would galvanise is dead.

It is from this point of view that we consider the subject. We aim at appreciating some of the influences which have produced a great change in the belief of the religious world, and on the influence which this changed belief is to exercise in its turn. It is difficult, perhaps impossible, for any one to describe the belief of others without implying his own, but the first object being more than sufficient for our space, we would, as far as possible, exclude the second.

We cannot believe, on the mere ground that the religious world has kept its sanity, that any large number of persons, in any age, believed in an endless hell in the same sense that they believed in an endless heaven. Nor do we think that attention has ever been sufficiently directed to the significant fact that the words of Christ most often relied on to prove the endlessness of future punishment are especially and, it would seem, designedly adapted to increase the very disbelief they are often quoted to rebuke. Who are they whom Christ bids depart into eternal punishment? The profligate, the scoffer, the hardened criminal? They are in no danger, it appears, which they do not share with most of us. The command, "Depart from me, ye cursed," is addressed to those who have led the life of the average member of society, doing little harm, but less good. There are many men—and if you must divide the world into good people and bad people, not bad men—in whom the slightest approach to that self-sacrifice which is the first condition of service would affect their friends just as a miracle would. We would suggest a common specimen of humanity,—he shall be modest, honourable, and not without a certain magnanimity, oblivious of small slights, patient under absolutely inevitable inconvenience; and yet to see him make the effort necessary to help the unprosperous, the despised, and the forlorn would be as astonishing as to see him fly. Unless any one is very fortunate or very unfortunate, we describe the bulk of his acquaintance in the most favoured stratum of English society. And yet this is exactly the character that is shut out from heaven, by the decision relied upon for the fact that any one is shut out from heaven! Is it morally possible to consign in thought this proportion of our fellow-men to the fate, as generally understood, which those words promise them? No doubt it was almost always impossible, at all events in the ages with which we are comparing our own. But while opinions may long survive their meaningless utterance, their justification in the face of a growing denial, which they absorb in spirit as they defy it in words, seems to us their knell. And it is the last which we find in the greater number of these essays. What is it in the temper of our time which has led us to reject a dogma which no one, but a solitary mystic here and there, has ventured distinctly to deny for a period of seventeen centuries? This is the question we seek to answer.

The characteristic of our own age which we should fix upon as its most distinctive peculiarity, in contrast with a period comparatively recent, is something which on its best side, we may call a keen sense of reality, and on its worst, a want of reserve. We could mention one or two books of our day, remarkable for the intimacy to which they admit the reader, which could not have been written at an earlier date; and it must strike every one, we should think, who comes in contact with memorials of the past, how much less they tell us about the inner life of the persons concerned than any contemporary memorials would. It would be extremely difficult to strike the balance of loss and gain in the change, but we may reckon it on the side of gain that we cannot deceive ourselves about what we believe as easily as our fathers could. When people shut out any subject from their intercourse with others, they may indeed shut it into a region of

the most intense belief, but it is more common among average persons that they cease to think about it at all. They accept the accredited formulas which touch on it without conscious insincerity, and they really do not know that this state of mind is different from belief. Now, we are disposed to claim for our own time the high praise that it renders this state of mind difficult. And a great deal of the apparent diminution of belief in eternal punishment is simply the discovery of its unreality. It is like opening a box we have kept carefully locked for years, and finding it empty.

A contrast more evidently connected with the change is that of our increased humanity with the harshness of a past generation. The contrasted bias of an age when pickpockets were hanged in batches, and an age in which murderers escape unless their crime is one of peculiar atrocity, comes out also in the fact that one generation believed in an endless hell, as far as it is possible to believe in such a thing, and the other disbelieves in it. There is an anecdote in the life of Sir Samuel Romilly curiously illustrative, we think, of this change of feeling. In the year 1807 a sailor was hanged for taking part in a mutiny on board a ship, from which his absence at the time of the mutiny was clearly proved, on evidence brought forward in the interval between his conviction and his execution. His Judge had, however, an excellent case, being no less than the confession of the supposed criminal. He had been undefended by counsel, and had employed some friend to draw up his defence, which this person had actually thought safest to throw into the form of a confession of guilt and a flowery declaration of remorse, probably supposed to be very telling by the half-educated advocate. So that a man who would have had no difficulty in proving an alibi actually made a false confession of guilt. How deep and lively must have been the sense of vindictive enmity on the part of the law, when an innocent man under suspicion thought his only hope was in an appeal to its mercy!

But what we now desire to point out is the complication of this change with the first we have noted. Long before the reform of the penal law, its harshness was so much hampered with the scruples of a growing humanity, that its operation was fitful and spasmodic to the last degree. The same offence, brought under the sentence of two different Judges, would be visited respectively by a few weeks' imprisonment and a life-long banishment to Botany Bay. Now there are persons in every age who think punishment ought to be lenient, and others who think it should be severe, but that it should be certain would now-a-days be the starting-ground of every one who had anything to say about it. Yet it was one of the shrewdest thinkers of the eighteenth century—Paley—who fixed upon this capricious execution of the laws as a subject of eulogy; and Romilly had in his legal reforms to answer an argument which, remarkable for many reasons, may be noted without irreverence as being almost remarkable instance of the "follies of the wise." What our legislators meant by saying that a man should be hanged for stealing a few yards of silk in a shop or a handkerchief from a pocket, said Paley, was that the Judge should have the power of hanging him, if there were any peculiar circumstances in the theft to make it desirable. "By this expedient, few actually suffer death, while the dread and the danger of it hang over the crimes of many. The life of the subject is spared, as far as the necessity of restraint and intimidation permits, yet no one will adventure upon the commission of any enormous crime from the knowledge that the laws have not provided for its punishment." In other words, it is adduced as the crowning merit of the English penal law that it consists, in a large measure, of empty menace! Now note the bearing of this view on that of future retribution. Men can but expect from a Divine governor that which they deem best in human government, and if the wisest thing the human law-giver could do was to threaten all with a penalty which he meant to carry out, perhaps, on one in ten, no doubt that was the course of the Divine law-giver also. It is true that the words of the Son of God seem to surround with peril the future of this well-bred man of the world, that brave officer, that distinguished lawyer. But in fact, they are in no greater danger of being damned, than some poor man who has stolen five shillings' worth of ribbon from a shop to buy bread for his starving family is of being hanged. His offence, as well as theirs, comes within the letter of the Act, but all that is implied in either case is that the culprit will owe his impunity to an act of mercy.

Reasoning such as this is impossible to our generation. For us, the vague make-believe of a future Hell must either gain reality or disappear. Many reasons besides that which we have endeavoured to point out tend to prevent its becoming real. One of the most im-

portant is the influence, both reflex and direct, of physical science. Its direct influence is not small. Sin, from the point of view of the mere man of science, must ever remain wholly what, in some degree, no doubt, it actually is,—transmuted misfortune. The study of a world in which nothing is ever destroyed or created, disqualifies the student for the very conception of that mysterious reality in face of which the spirit which recognises it claims, not that it shall be transmuted or modified, but that it shall cease to be. But note well this,—it is not the endlessness of future retribution in which men under such an influence cease to believe, it is any future retribution whatever. And this is true in some degree, though, perhaps, in a less degree, of what we have termed the reflex action of physical science,—its influence on the course of theological speculation. We allude to a kind of influence the connection of which with physical science many persons would be inclined to deny altogether, for it has been strongly exerted by some thinkers who were ignorant of, and not interested in, physical science. And it would be a still greater cause of protest among their disciples, should they mistake our view of the influence of these men on those who only half-accepted their teaching, for our view of their own belief. But you have never appreciated any opinion, till you have considered how it looks from below, and the belief, which we are inclined to connect, however unapparent may be the connection, with the lessons of science, that the present life is the scene of God's judgments, and not only that which is to come, seems to us to become the denial of any judgment whatever, the moment it passes out of the atmosphere of a holy mind. Nature has, for many of us, become the revelation, and not the mask of the Supernatural, the same kind of change as came over the science of the seventeenth century, when Bishop Wilkins entitled his account of the Earth's place in the solar system "Discourse concerning a new Planet," has passed over the spirit of our time. The life of earth has in like manner been in our day kindled with the glow of a distant heaven, and claimed, in its newly discovered brightness, a kindred with the stars. Its most perplexing dispensations have been vindicated as signs of the coming of the Son of Man. Its most distinctly physical laws have been regarded as instruments of discipline, whereby men's spirits are to be trained into reverence for the divine order. Now, while it is possible to discern among the various incidents of experience some evidence that the Power that rules this world visits with displeasure such sins as drunkenness, sloth, and flagrant dishonesty, even in these cases punishment is fitful and uncertain, and in the case of evil of a much deeper dye we cannot trace it at all. Not even drunkenness and some forms of dishonesty are quite so widely remote from the spirit of Christianity as a life of hard, consistent devotion to self, and indifference to everything but self, and it cannot be denied that such lives are often prosperous and satisfied. If the justice of Heaven is but that of earth on a larger scale, the "eternal fire" denounced against those who pass by with indifference the needy and the suffering is an empty figure indeed.

It was not an empty figure to the holy men to whose teaching in some measure this change is due. It is not an empty figure, we will venture to say, to any spirit which has ever listened in silence and awe to the voice of conscience. Samuel Johnson knew something of the unquenchable fire, in his self-imposed penance in the market-place at Lichfield for the pain his disobedience had inflicted years before on the father he could so seldom have grieved in any way. Byron must have known something of it, when he wrote the lines which, more than any other known to us, suggest the pang, of which he says:—

"But in that instant o'er his soul
Winters of Memory seemed to roll,
And gather in that drop of time
A life of pain, an age of crime.
Though in Time's record nearly nought,
It was Eternity to Thought!
For infinite as boundless space
The thought that Conscience must embrace,
Which in itself can comprehend
Woe without name, or hope, or end."

All know something of it, we believe, except those who have deliberately chosen the life of self and the world. We ought to be very slow indeed to decide of this or that individual that he belongs to this class. But can we look at this world, and deny that such a class exists?

Now the question is,—Does this Divine Order by which the guilty are punished exist only with regard to those who accept it? Does it lie with every man to decide whether he will or will not live under this law? Those on whose teaching

we are commenting believed most firmly that God was the ruler of mankind, not of good men only, or even of men who desired to be good. Nevertheless, there was much in the effect of their teaching to produce the opposite impression. To them, the one aim of life was a more complete subjection to the Divine Order. By the very law of their being they yearned after the reward which, in the Zendavesta, is sought of God,—“To come under Thy authority, for all eternity.” This was their heaven, they sought no other. But there are many who desire nothing of God but to let them alone. Are they always to have their will in this matter? They do apparently, as far as this world is concerned. Is this to continue for ever?

When Whitfield was preaching his most denunciatory sermons, an anonymous writer, whom we have no hesitation in identifying with the pure and gentle Byrom, thus addressed him, in verse which, whatever we may think of its poetic merit, seems to us an effective answer to all who question our gain in deliverance from the black shadow which those only can appreciate who remember it as darkening their childhood. We give the following protest against an endless Hell as a complement to the far more striking description of an eternal Hell we have quoted above, and also as the best summary known to us of all that can be said against the popular doctrine:—

"Think, teacher, think, and answer,—Art thou sure
That Mercy, which for ever shall endure,
Endures no longer to the sons of men
Than the short space of threescore years and ten?
Is this God's favour to his creature—man—
His wrath eternal, and his love a span?"

It seems to us one of the deepest causes for thankfulness in the present age that we have been encouraged in this protest against endless evil by some of those who regard sin with a horror as deep as it has ever stirred in any human spirit. But if we would be just to those who take the opposite side, let us remember that the world has to a great extent ceased to believe, not so much in the endlessness of future punishment, as in its existence. Heaven and Hell have passed away together. We have exchanged the infinite divergence of good and evil for an infinite prolongation of their confused blending. For our own part, we are thankful for deliverance from the belief in infinite Divine wrath and finite Divine love, even at this price. But we do not conceal from ourselves that it is a great price, and that a religion from which awe has passed away, may seem to some who best know the meaning of faith, an evil hardly less than a religion of fear.

J. W.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

THE FUTURE OF CYPRUS.

[TO THE EDITOR OF THE "SPECTATOR."]

SIR,—In your number of June 29th there is a clever and suggestive article upon the possible annexation of the Island of Cyprus by the British Crown. Surely the calm and liberal-minded *Spectator* cannot wish us to trample upon the rights of these luckless Cypriotes by refusing them their true position,—that of a Greek province; surely no thoughtful student of history would wish to see English labourers mixed with the Greek inhabitants of Cyprus, as their rivals or their masters, to produce another Ireland, as a problem for our future statesmen. I quite admit that the abolition of Turkish rule in the island would be an advantage of no mean order to both the Christian and Mussulman inhabitants, for the Pashas who govern them have, as a rule, been lazy and rapacious, but I most heartily protest against the notion of our colonising Cyprus as we colonised New Zealand and Natal. The Cypriotes, although few in number, for the splendid territory they occupy, and woefully ignorant and backward, on account of Turkish oppression, are nevertheless members of the great Hellenic family, and will no more submit to "improvement" off the face of the earth by rum and rifles than would their warlike kinsmen in Crete. During the heroic efforts of the Greek revolution of 1821, the Cypriotes were agitated by a short but determined struggle between the Crescent and the Cross, which sufficed to show the vitality of the national Greek feeling in the island, though it was found impossible to make head against the numerous resident Mahommedans. These resident Mahommedans, or Cypriote Turks, talk Greek in their homes, and are simply the descendants of certain among the islanders converted by force at the time of the Turkish conquest. They bear a much larger proportion to the Cypriote Christians than do the Cretan Turks to the Cretan Christians, hence the Pashas have found their task of governing Cyprus comparatively easy. Since the war of the revolution, fifty