

ENDLESS TORMENTS UNSCRIPTURAL

– BY REV. CHARLES KINGSLEY – MAY 9, 1857. –

ABOUT *endless torment*. – (Keep that expression distinct from *eternal*, which has been mixed up with it, the former being what the popular creed really holds.) You may say:

"(1) Historically, that,

"(a) The doctrine is found nowhere in the Old Testament, nor any hint of it. The expression, in the end of Isaiah, about the fire unquenched and the worm not dying, is plainly of the corpses of men upon the physical earth, in the valley of *Hinnom*, or *Gehenna*, where the offal of Jerusalem was burned perpetually. Enlarge on this, as it is the passage which our Lord quotes, and by it the meaning of His words must be primarily determined.

"(b) The doctrine of endless torment was, as a historical fact, brought back from Babylon by the Rabbis. It was a very ancient, primary doctrine of the Magi, an appendage of their fire-kingdom of Ahriman, and may be found in the old Zends, long prior to Christianity.

"(c) St. Paul accepts nothing of it as far as we can tell, never making the least allusion to the doctrine.

"(d) The Apocalypse simply repeats the imagery of Isaiah [R4884 : page 363] and of our Lord; but asserts, distinctly, the non-endlessness of torture, declaring that in the consummation, not only *death*, but *hell* shall be cast into the Lake of Fire.

"(e) The Christian Church has never really held it exclusively till now. It remained quite an open question till the age of Justinian, 530, and significantly enough, as soon as (200 years before that) endless torment for the heathen became a popular theory, purgatory sprang up

synchronously by the side of it, as a relief for the conscience and reason of the Church.

"(f) Since the Reformation it has been an open question in the English Church, and the philosophical Platonists, of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, always considered it as such.

"(g) The Church of England, by the deliberate expunging of the 42nd Article, which affirmed endless punishment, has declared it, authoritatively, to be open.

"(h) It is so, in fact. Neither Mr. Maurice, I, nor any others who have denied it, can be dispossessed or proceeded against legally, in any way whatsoever.

"Exegetically, you may say, I think, that the meanings of the word *aion* and *aionios* have little or nothing to do with it, even if *aion* be derived from *aei*, always, which I greatly doubt. The word is never used in Scripture anywhere else in the sense of *endlessness* (vulgarly called *eternity*). It always meant, both in Scripture and out, a period of time. Else how could it have a plural – how could you talk of *the aeons* and of *aeons of aeons*, as the Scriptures do? Nay, more, how talk of *houtos ho aion* (which the translators, with laudable inconsistency, have translated 'this world'), *i.e.*, this present state of things, 'Age,' 'Dispensation,' or Epoch. *Aionios*, therefore, means, and must mean, belonging to *an* Epoch, or *the* Epoch; and *aionios kolasis* is the punishment allotted to that Epoch. Always bear in mind – what Maurice insists on, and what is so plain to honest readers – that our Lord and the Apostles always speak of its being in the end of the Age or *Aion*, not as ushering in a new one; that the Lord would come to judge and punish the old world, and to create a new one out of its ruins; or rather, as is better expressed, to burn up the chaff and keep the wheat; *i.e.*, all the elements of food, as seed for the new world.

"I think you may say that our Lord took the popular doctrine because He found it, and tried to correct and purify it, and put it on a really moral ground. You may quote the parable of Dives and Lazarus.

"He there represents Dives as still Abraham's child, under no despair, nor cut off from Abraham's sympathy, but under a direct, moral training, of which you see the fruit. He is gradually weaned from the selfish desire of indulgence for himself, to love and care for his brethren, a divine step forward in his life, which of itself proves him not to be lost. The impossibility of Lazarus' getting to him, or *vice versa*, expresses plainly the great truth, that each being where he ought to be at that time, interchange of place (*i.e.*, of spiritual state) is impossible. But it says nothing against Dives rising out of his torment, when he has learned the lesson of it, and of his going where he ought to go. The common interpretation is merely arguing in a circle, assuming that there are but two states of the dead, 'Heaven' and 'Hell,' and then trying at once to interpret the parable by the assumption, and to prove the assumption from the parable. Next, you may say that the English word *damnation*, like the Greek *katakrisis*, is perhaps *krisis* simple, it simply means condemnation, and is (thank God) retained in that sense in various of our formularies, where I always read the words, *e.g.*, 'eateth to himself damnation,' with sincere pleasure, as protests in favor of the true and rational meaning of the word, against the modern and narrower meaning.

"You may say that Fire and Worms, whether physical or spiritual, must, in all logical fairness, be supposed to do what fire and worms do do, viz., destroy decayed and dead matter and set free its elements to enter into new organisms; that, as they are beneficent and purifying agents in this life, they must be supposed such in the future life; and that the conception of fire as an engine of torture is an unnatural use of that agent, *and not to be attributed to God without blasphemy*, unless you suppose that the suffering (like all which He inflicts) is intended to teach man something which he cannot learn elsewhere.

"You may say that the catch, 'All sin deserves infinite punishment, [R4884 : page 364] because it is against an Infinite Being,' is a worthless amphiboly, using the word infinite in two utterly different senses, and being a mere play on sound; that it is directly contradicted by Scripture, especially by our Lord's own words, which declare that every man (not merely the wicked) shall receive the due reward of his deeds – that he who, etc., shall be beaten with few stripes, and so forth; that the words 'He shall not go out till he has paid the uttermost farthing,' evidently imply (unless spoken in cruel mockery) that he may go out *then; and that it is scandalous for Protestants* to derive from thence the opposite doctrine, while they call the Papists rogues for trying to prove the perpetual virginity of the Blessed Virgin Mary from exactly the same use of *heos*.

"Finally, you may call on them to rejoice that there is a *fire* of God, the Father, whose name is Love, burning forever, unquenchably, to destroy out of every man's heart and out of the hearts of all nations, and off the physical and moral world, all which offends and makes a lie; that into that *fire* the Lord will surely cast all shams, lies, hypocrisies, tyrannies, pedantries, false doctrines, yea, and the men who love them too well to give them up, that the smoke of their *basanismos* (*i.e.*, the torture which makes men confess the truth, for *that* is the real meaning of it; *basanismos* means the *touch*-stone by which gold was tested) may ascend perpetually, for a warning and a beacon to all nations, as the smoke of the torment of French aristocracies, the Bourbon dynasties, is ascending up to Heaven and has been ever since 1793. Oh, Cooper – Is it not good news that *that* fire is unquenchable; that *that* worm will not die? They tried, *we* tried, in our ignorance, to quench that fire, when we put Louis XVIII. on the throne. But the fire burned up him and our chaffy works. The parti *pretre* tried to kill the worm which was gnawing at their hearts, making them dimly aware that they were wrong, and liars, and that God and His Universe were against them, and that they and their system were rotting and must die. And they put poor Poerios and

Madiais in prison, and showed all the signs of weak terror, suspicion, spite; but they cannot kill God's worm, Thomas Cooper.

"You cannot look in the face of many a working, Continental priest without seeing that the worm is at his heart. You cannot watch their conduct without seeing that it is at the heart of their system. God grant that we here in England – we parsons (dissenting and church) – may take warning by them. The fire may be kindled for *us*. The worm may seize *our* hearts. To judge by the temper of the 'Record' and the 'Morning Advertiser,' it has its fangs in some of our hearts already. God grant that in that day we may have courage to let the fire and the worm do their work – to say to Christ, These, too, are Thine, and out of Thine infinite love they have come. Thou requirest truth in the inward parts and I will thank Thee for any means, however bitter, which Thou usest to make me true. I want to be an honest man, and a right man! And, of joy, *Thou* wantest me to be so also. Oh joy, that though I long, cowardly, to quench Thy fire, I cannot do it. Purge me, therefore, O Lord, though it be with *fire*. Burn up the chaff of vanity and self-indulgence, of hasty prejudice, *second-hand dogmas* – husks which do not feed my soul, with which I cannot be content, *of which I feel ashamed daily* – and if there be any grains of wheat in me, any word or thought or power of action which may be of use as seed for my nation after me, gather it, O Lord, into Thy garner.

"Yes, Thomas Cooper, because I believe in a God of Absolute and Unbounded Love, therefore I believe in a Loving Anger of His, which will and must devour and destroy all which is decayed, monstrous, abortive, in His Universe, till all enemies shall be put under His feet, to be pardoned surely, if they confess themselves in the wrong and open their eyes to the truth. And God shall be All in All.

"Those last are wide words. It is he who limits them (not I who accept them in their fulness), who denies the verbal inspiration of Scripture."

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