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THE
ANNIHILATION THEORY

Compared with Holy Scripture

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THE ANNIHILATION THEORY.

THE doctrine of the immortality of man has been so generally accepted by believers in the Bible, that the new views upon the subject which have been brought into prominence during the past few years have somewhat startled theologians, and caused them seriously to reflect upon the nature of the evidence on which their ideas are based. We propose in the following pages to consider the theory of the Annihilation of the Wicked, which may be briefly stated as follows: "All men are not immortal—heathens and children die to rise no more, but those who have been instructed from the Scriptures will rise again at the general resurrection, when the good will be endowed with immortality, and the wicked will be annihilated." We shall endeavour to show that this theory is not the theory of the Bible, which, when rightly understood, teaches:—

- I. *That* the good and the evil live again.
- II. *That* their life is continuous.
- I. In *Matthew* xxiv. 51 and xxv. 30, a distinct re-

ference is made to a state of punishment allotted to the wicked, for "weeping and gnashing of teeth" cannot be predicated of those annihilated.

In Matt. viii. 11, 12, "Many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven: but the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." We have mention made of two conditions or states or places of existence, one for the good and one for the wicked. The same truth is plainly taught in the parable of the sheep and the goats. It may be said, however, that being "cast out into outer darkness" means annihilation. This, however, can scarcely be a correct view of the matter when that state is described as one "where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." If the wicked are annihilated, what can be the meaning of Rev. xxii. 11-15, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still; and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still; and he that is holy, let him be holy still. And, behold, I come quickly; and My reward is with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be. I am Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last. Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie."

It will have been observed that we have, as far as possible, avoided the use of controversial terms in our remarks,—it is not worth our while to argue for mere words. The real question is not as to places of any particular name, “Hades,” “hell,” or any other, but whether the good and evil ever live again.

Having adduced testimony on this head, we now proceed to show that Scripture teaches us that *man* never ceases to exist, but that the event we call death is simply an emigration from the Old World to the New. This brings us to our second division—

II. That the life of man is a continuous state of existence.

(a) The Lord, speaking to the unbelieving Pharisees, said, Luke xx. 37, 38, “Now, that the dead are raised, even Moses showed at the bush, when he called the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. For He is not a God of the dead, but of the living : for all live unto Him,”

The plain meaning of this passage is, that though the Sadducees thought that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were then non-existent, they were in reality still living at the time that the Lord spake to Moses at the bush.

(b) When David's child was taken from him he found comfort in the thought, “I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.” If this passage is the expression of a truth, it is quite sufficient to annihilate the idea that children cease to exist when their places on earth become vacant. There could be no comfort

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in the idea that the child itself was dead and done for : but in the thought that, though absent from the body, it was still living in a world where he should some day rejoin it was comfort indeed.

(c) The scene upon the Mount of Transfiguration, Luke ix., where the disciples saw Moses and Elias talking with their Master, also teaches us that those we regard as dead still live. We are aware that an attempt has been made to evade the force of this illustration of the doctrine of immortality by calling the matter a dream, because it is called a "vision," and "vision" and "dream" are sometimes used in the Bible as convertible terms. But every student of Greek knows that *the word "eidon," here translated "they saw," never means to dream, but invariably implies not the mental act of perception only, but the object of it also.*

(d) The parable of Dives and Lazarus (Luke xvi.), if it teaches anything, teaches that the event of death does not destroy either the good or the wicked, but that both continue to exist in a state of consciousness in harmony with their lives on earth. Of course this is a parable, but it is a parable intended to teach us something, viz., that the good and the evil live again.

(e) The Apostle says, "To live is Christ, and to die is gain,"—to die could never be gain if it meant that existence was to be suspended. To die is gain to the Christian, because his absence from the body brings him present with the Lord, agreeably to 2 Cor. v. 1-4, "For we know that, if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God,

an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: if so be that being clothed, we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened; not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life."

(f) Just one other passage on this head, John xi. 26, "Whosoever liveth and believeth in Me, shall never die." The proof is here complete that there is no such thing as an interval between death and the resurrection.

So far we have only adduced what we may call the affirmative evidence in favour of immortality. We are aware, however, that there is a good deal to be said on the other side, and we will endeavour in fairness to meet the most salient points relied on in favour of the theory of the annihilation of the wicked.

Objection I. That "hades," often translated "hell," simply means the grave. We may, in passing, recall to the reader's mind that we have not based our arguments upon *words* merely, but upon the broad ideas involved in the passages we have quoted. But apart from this consideration, the objection is not a true one. Hades is sometimes translated hell, and sometimes the grave, but really it does not mean either exactly. It means the first home of the dead. Hence Josephus, in his discourse concerning Hades, says, "Now as to Hades, wherein the souls of the righteous and the unrighteous are detained, it is necessary to

speak of it. Hades is a place in the world not regularly finished ; a subterraneous region, where the light of this world does not shine. . . . This region is allowed as a place of custody for souls, in which angels are appointed as guardians to them, who distribute to them temporary punishments, agreeable to every one's behaviour and manners," etc. Without committing ourselves to the views of Josephus in their entirety, it is manifest in what sense the term was used by ancient writers, and that it did not mean *the grave*.

Besides *Hades*, however, the word Gehenna is used about eighteen times in the Greek Testament, and it also means something distinct from the grave. No argument against the future existence of the wicked can be legitimately based upon the *original* of Holy Writ.

• Objection II. That no doctrine of Immortality was revealed to the Jews. We are quite willing to admit that the Jewish ideas upon this subject were very vague, but to say that they knew nothing of the matter contravenes the Lord's words previously quoted (Luke xx. 37, 38). It is certainly said that "life and immortality were brought to light by the Gospel," but if this means that there was no immortality either actual or promised before Christ came into the world, it means also that there was no life. Further, the passage not only refers to life and immortality, it says, "Jesus Christ hath abolished death," and yet naturally, as to their bodies, men die now as they ever did.

Objection III. That the Bible often speaks of death as an extinction of being.

(a) "For the living know that they shall die, but the dead know not anything; neither have they any more a reward," etc. If this bears on the subject at all, it proves too much for the believers in the annihilation of the wicked, viz., that there is no future, no reward for the good.

(b) "He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust. As for man, his days are as grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth: for the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more" (Ps. ciii. 14-16). If we interpret this passage according to the views of those who quote it in support of the theory that man is simply a material being (dust), then by a similar carnal reasoning it tells us that there can be no future resurrection into this world,—“the place thereof shall know it no more,” and this applies to the good as well as to the evil.

(c) Eccl. iii. 19, 20. "For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath: so that a man hath no pre-eminence above a beast: for all is vanity. All go unto one place: all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again." If in the widest sense of the expression men are not superior to beasts, then death makes an end of us entirely, and the talk about resurrection and eternal life for the good is a fable.

But why look at passages of this kind in this sense, which is evidently not the one intended. Of course there is a sense in which the death of man is like that

of the beast, that which dies knows nothing, and has no more a reward, that which goeth into the grave cometh up no more. But there is a sense in which man has an undoubted pre-eminence above a beast, a broad line of distinction between the two hinted at in Eccl. iii. 21, "Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?" In the 8th Psalm we have a very explicit statement upon this head, "What is man, that Thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that Thou visitest him? For Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of Thy hands; Thou hast put all things under his feet."

If man's pre-eminence above the beast is not in the body and bodily life, then it must be in the spirit and spiritual life. Our bodily or natural life is like that of the beasts, and ends at death, but while the Bible nowhere speaks of a *future* for the brute creation, it speaks very plainly of a future for man; it tells us that men are responsible beings, that they are a little lower than the angels, and that "the wicked go away into everlasting punishment, and the righteous into life eternal."

(Before leaving Objections II. and III. we would draw attention to the inconsistency of those who tell us that the doctrine of immortality was first taught by the Lord Jesus, and yet found their own denial of immortality upon the teachings of those who lived prior to the Lord's Advent.)

Objection IV. There are passages that tell us that the wicked shall be destroyed, and that the sinning soul shall die.

In dealing with this objection, which appears to be the strongest, we must begin by getting a clear understanding of the Bible use of the terms death and life. Death and life have each two meanings. Death means, 1st, the end of earthly existence; and 2ndly, existence in a state of sinfulness. Life means, 1st, mere existence; and 2ndly, existence in a state of holiness. Hence we frequently find that those who in the ordinary sense of the term are living, are described as dead, and those whom we term dead are said to be alive. We have an illustration of this in John v., "He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but *is passed* from death into life" (verse 24). Here a state of condemnation (defined in verse 29 as a state in which men do evil) is described as a state of death from which men pass, by hearing and believing, into a state of life. This passing from death to life is further explained in the following verse, "The hour is coming, and NOW IS, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live." This verse has often been supposed to refer to the general resurrection of dead bodies at some future day, but it seems to us much more reasonable to suppose that it refers to the change wrought in human souls, who emerge from their states of carnality at the sound of the voice of Jesus (at the

hearing of His words, verse 24). This is spoken of in Ephesians ii. 1, "You hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins," and the same change is alluded to by another Apostle: "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." All these passages would be simply non-understandable unless we were aware of the double signification of the terms death and life. Take another instance:—"If a man keep My saying, he shall never see death" (John viii. 51), and another, "He that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die" (xi. 25, 26). We well know that the event we call death happens to all, yet there is a sense in which the good "never die," "never see death." The Apostle Paul very clearly defines the position: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh; that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit. For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the spirit the things of the spirit. FOR TO BE CARNALLY MINDED IS DEATH; BUT TO BE SPIRITUALLY MINDED IS LIFE AND PEACE" (Rom. viii.

1-6). To the same purport we read, "In the ways of righteousness there is life, and in the pathway thereof *there is no death*" (Prov. xii. 28), and again, "She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth" (1 Tim. v. 6), and again, "This my son was dead, and is alive again" (Luke xv. 24).

These passages seem clearly to indicate that the death of sin means something else than extinction of being.

It may, however, be objected again that the Bible says, "The soul that sinneth it shall die" (Ezek. xviii. 20). This is certainly true, but *it does not mean shall cease to exist*, as may be evident from a perusal of the context. "But if the wicked will turn from all his sins . . . he shall not die" (verse 21). As to bodily life all die, therefore either this statement is untrue, or it refers to some other kind of death and life.

The theory of the annihilation of the wicked is supposed to derive some support from the Lord's words, "I give My sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish." But according to the theory named, they do perish for a time at any rate. Man is said to be *dead*, perished, even when alive in this world, when he is carnally minded or dead in trespasses and sins.

We have endeavoured in this brief view of the subject to allow Scripture to be the interpreter of itself, and submit that the following points are clearly established:—

I. That the natural life of man ends like that of the beasts.

II. That while, however, the beasts never live again, men do.

III. That those who have passed away from earth are still living.

IV. That the wicked are promised everlasting punishment, and the righteous life eternal.

V. That the death of the wicked man's soul means an existence of vice and consequent misery.

VI. That eternal life means existence in a state of virtue and consequent happiness.

Of course, in a pamphlet of the present size, it has not been possible to enter minutely into all the bearings of the subject *pro* and *con*; we have preferred to let Scripture speak for itself in words far more convincing than any that we could utter. We commend the thoughts here expressed to the candid attention of believers in Holy Writ, in the full confidence that it will manifestly appear that the teaching of THE BOOK is in favour of the doctrine of the immortality of all men, a doctrine whose practical tendency is to induce a love and practice of virtue for its own sake, and for the sake of its results in time and in eternity, and a loathing and abandonment of evil on account of its nature and *its* results in time and in eternity. We regard the doctrine of annihilation as a doctrine tending to make wicked men more reckless in their sinning by removing the wholesome restraint of fear—the only restraint that can possibly affect those who love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil.

The Bible exalts the nature of man, the annihilation theory degrades it. The Bible appeals to us as immortal beings—the annihilation theory regards us as merely temporal beings. The Bible places us a little lower than the angels, the annihilation theory puts us on a level with the brutes that perish.

Do not mistake our meaning on the question of immortality. We do not possess any inherent immortality—it is because the Lord lives that we live also, “in Him we live and move and have our being.” The stream of life flows continuously from Him; and that the life that flows into us is of a higher order than that which animates the brute creation is evident from the fact that we are endowed with spiritual freedom and rationality. Though now we inherit tendencies to evil, by Divine Grace we may invert our natures, and choose the good and inherit the kingdom of heaven. It is worth our while to consider very carefully “How much then is a man better than a sheep?” (Matt. xii. 12.)