

Is the Revivalists' Gospel True, or is it False?

A SERMON,

PREACHED AT ST. GEORGE'S HALL, LANGHAM
PLACE, APRIL 25, 1875, BY THE

REV. CHARLES VOYSEY.

PSALM CIII., 9. "*He will not always be chiding, neither keepeth he his anger for ever.*"

MY task this morning is anything but easy and pleasant; and at its outset I ask for a fair and candid weighing of my words, as in the face of God I desire to say nothing but the simple truth. I have undertaken to make some answer to the all-important question, Is the Gospel preached by Messrs. Moody and Sankey true, or is it false? The issues which depend on this alternative are enormous, whether we consider them in their bearing on our own individual destiny or as affecting the welfare of all mankind. On such a momentous theme, it is not merely foolish but heinous to halt between two opinions.

The documents from which I draw the particular statements of this Gospel are (1.) An elaborate account of the New Evangelists published by Ward, Lock and Tyler, and

Rev. C. Voysey's sermons are to be obtained at St. George's Hall, every Sunday morning, or from the Author (by post), Camden House, Dulwich, S.E. Price one penny, postage a halfpenny.

sold at every railway book-stall in the kingdom. (2.) The book of Hymns and Songs used in the revival services. (3.) Two pamphlets containing many sayings of Mr. Moody's, collated by the Rev. A. S. Herring, with the object of getting subscriptions for a Church which he is hoping to build. (4.) The various reports of his sermons which have appeared in the newspapers.

On every ground, I would not for the world misrepresent the doctrines I am about to attack; and I emphatically repeat my conviction that these men thoroughly believe what they say, and think they are doing God service.

I go further still, and say that they are far more consistent in making all this stir than the thousands of clergy who hold pretty nearly the same opinions and yet make comparatively but little effort to rescue their brethren from perdition.

Now, what is their great theme, the key-note of all their preaching and the essence of all their hymns? It is Jesus. In their own language, it is "The old old story, of Jesus and his love." And in order to get at the kernel of their Gospel, it will be necessary to raise a few questions.

1. Who is this Jesus?
2. In what was his love for man manifested?
3. What benefit did his work on earth procure?
4. How came man to be in need of that benefit which they call salvation?
5. Was it God, or was it the Devil, whose wrath was pacified by Christ's death?
6. What is the penalty for disbelieving "the old old story?"

I think when we have answered these questions in the exact sense, if not always in the exact words, of the Revivalists, we shall have before us a clear conception of what they teach.

1. Who is this Jesus?

Nothing less than Almighty God; infinite and eternal God. Only trustworthy as a Saviour because he is God; one of their hymns contains these two lines:—

“O Jesus the crucified! Thee will I sing,
My blessed Redeemer, my God and my King.”

So entirely is this taken for granted, that seldom in the sermons is any reference made to a contrary opinion. The Revivalists—much to their credit—never touch scholastic theology at all. I do not suppose the doctrine of the Trinity ever enters their heads; but they undoubtedly believe in the true Godhead of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. When they go to Heaven they expect to meet, face to face, God the Father and God the Son, as distinct as any two persons on earth; though why they never speak hopefully of seeing also God the Holy Ghost, I have not been able to discover. At all events our first question needs no further reply. They believe that Jesus is a God—God’s Eternal Son.

We turn next to the fact that nearly all their songs and sermons are upon the love of Jesus. It is only just to say that in quantity and emphasis this theme predominates over every other, and may be called the cardinal doctrine of their Creed. The question then to be next answered is,

2. In what was the love of Jesus manifested?

It was in taking upon himself a human form and then dying upon the cross that he might thus bear the whole weight of the punishment due to the sins of mankind.

A hymn entitled *Substitution*, gives an exact answer to our question:

“O Christ, what burdens bowed thy head!
Our load was laid on Thee;
Thou stoodest in the sinner’s stead,
Didst bear all ill for me.
A victim led, Thy blood was shed,
Now there’s no load for me.

Death and the curse were in our cup—
O Christ, ’twas full for Thee!
But thou hast drained the last dark drop—
’Tis empty now for me.
That bitter cup—Love drank it up;
Now blessings’ draught for me.”

This is only one specimen out of scores that I could quote. The whole Hymn Book rings with the same note. Let us ask in passing, Who can wonder at men loving Jesus, if Jesus so loved men? *His* heart must be a heart of stone

who could withhold his love and gratitude for such a deliverance!

The third question, "What benefit did his work on earth procure?" is partly answered by the hymn just quoted. The benefit is two-fold (*a*) the cancelling of a debt due by the sinner, the release from a sentence of eternal woe; and (*b*) the peace of mind which the knowledge of that cancelling or release brings with it. Sinners are not only set free from an awful penalty, but they are delivered from their fears of it, and are assured of everlasting happiness instead of everlasting misery.

To quote again from the Hymns :

"Your many sins are all forgiven,
Oh hear the voice of Jesus ;
Go on your way in peace to heaven,
And wear a crown with Jesus.

All glory to the dying Lamb!
I now believe in Jesus ;
I love the blessed Saviour's name,
I love the name of Jesus.

His name dispels my guilt and fear
No other name but Jesus ;
Oh how my soul delights to hear
The blessed name of Jesus!"

Who, I ask again, can wonder at such absorbing regard for Jesus, if the "old old story" be true?

I pass on to the fourth question, "How came man to be in need of that benefit which they call Salvation?"

Here again, as in the matter of the Godhead of Jesus, we find very little information. The preachers studiously avoid controversy unless it be forced upon them. They take for granted that their hearers believe already that they are lost and doomed through Adam's fall and their own transgressions; and that for these sins they deserve to be cast into an endless hell. One hymn certainly contains the doctrine :

"God loved the world of sinners lost
And ruined by the fall ;
Salvation full at highest cost
He offers free to all.
O 'twas love, 'twas wondrous love,

The love of God to me ;
 It brought my Saviour from above
 To die on Calvary."

But though the repulsive doctrine of the curse against mankind for the sin of our first parents, and the still more awful sentence of everlasting torments, are not obtrusively prominent in either sermons or hymns, the preachers rest upon these frightful tenets just as much as they do on the Godhead of Jesus. Their preaching would be sheer nonsense if the story of the fall and the doom of mankind and the reality of hell-fire were to be by them for one moment doubted. All their rapture for Jesus and their songs to his love turn upon the supposed reality of this awful curse from which he is believed to have saved them. Salvation, on *their* lips, is the correlative of eternal damnation ; the former has no meaning in their theology without the latter. In a sermon Mr. Moody says, " I believe in the old-fashioned hell, if I did not believe in hell for ever, would I come here to preach night after night ?" Indeed it is here chiefly that their movement deserves the name of a Revival, inasmuch as the doctrine of a lost and ruined race, of an everlasting fire for the damned was rapidly dying out and the belief in it considerably modified. The theology of Mr. Maurice and his school has shaken also the belief in substitution. If the Revivalists produce any desired effect on their hearers, it will be to restore these horrible doctrines to the position which they have recently lost, and to excite afresh fears which were nearly quelled. I am therefore not misrepresenting them when I affirm that the doctrines of the fall and the consequent doom of mankind to endless, hopeless, misery lie at the very foundation of their Gospel that Jesus came and died to save us.

The fifth question, Was it God, or was it the Devil whose wrath was pacified by Christ's death? may be readily answered by some more verses of a hymn already quoted :

" Jehovah lifted up his rod—
 O Christ, it fell on Thee !
 Thou wast sore stricken by thy God,
 There's not one stroke for me.
 Thy tears, Thy blood, beneath it flowed ;
 Thy bruising healeth me.

Jehovah bade His sword awake—
 O Christ, it woke 'gainst Thee!
 Thy blood the foaming blade must slake;
 Thy heart its sheath must be—
 All for my sake, my peace to make;
 Now sleeps that sword for me."

If any further reply to this question be needed, we have only to turn to Mr. Moody's sermon on "The Blood," which seems to have been elicited by a letter he had received asking, "If believing in Christ's death or the shedding of His blood as an atonement for sin, be the only way by which a sinner can be saved, how is it that Christ himself never spoke of it in that way?, nor do we find it mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles as the Gospel preached to the Gentiles." Mr. Moody, in reply to this letter "wondered how this person had read his Bible. God helping him he would answer the question, because he believed that the Blood was the foundation of all their hopes. Take the Blood out of the Bible and he would not carry it home. That book did not teach anything else. For the last 4,000 years it has been telling the one story that man was saved by the Blood. The first glimpse they caught of the Blood was in the 21st verse of the 3rd Chapter of Genesis, in which it was stated that unto Adam and his wife the Lord made coats of skin. Skins could not have been got from animals without the shedding of blood. In the next chapter it was stated that Abel brought of the firstlings of his flock, and that the Lord had respect for Abel's offering, but no respect for the offering of Cain. Why? Because there was no Blood in it. Abel came to God according to God's way. Cain came in his own way. He was like a great many who were saying now, What have I to do with blood: Why can I not come in my own way; if I do about as nearly right as I can, will it not be all right with me? Cain did not see why his beautiful fruit should not have been more acceptable than a bleeding lamb, which was repulsive to him; but Abel came by way of Blood, and his offering was accepted. There were a great many Cainites now who did not like the doctrine; but he challenged them to find in the Bible any other way to Heaven save by Blood. There was no doctrine that the world attacked so much as that of the Blood; but the more the world assailed him (Mr. Moody) about it, the more thoroughly he was con-

vinced he was right. The whole Bible went the moment this doctrine was touched. It was a terrible thing for a man to speak contemptuously out of any pulpit of the doctrine of Blood ; and he did not know when he was more shocked than when he heard a minister of the Gospel in Dublin say of the doctrine of the precious Blood of Christ that it was the doctrine of the shambles. It was horrible—damnable. Might God keep them from trampling the Blood of Christ under foot !”

There can be no doubt then on this head. It was the wrath of God and not the wrath of the Devil that was appeased by the Blood of Christ.

The sixth and last question is one that must have some little interest for us, “What is the penalty for disbelieving the old old story ?”

Again a verse of a hymn shall be our answer :

“But if you still this call refuse,
And all His wondrous love abuse,
Soon will He sadly from you turn,
Your bitter prayer for pardon spurn.
‘Too late ! too late !’ will be the cry,
Jesus of Nazareth *has passed by.*”

“Almost persuaded, harvest is past,
Almost persuaded, doom comes at last
‘Almost’ cannot avail ;
‘Almost’ is but to fail !
Sad, sad, that bitter wail—
‘Almost’—*but lost.*”

“*A Terrifying death-bed.*—A man had often been lovingly warned, but no heed was taken. The unexpected messenger showed itself. The agonising soul cried aloud, “The harvest is passed, the summer is ended, and I am NOT saved !” (Jeremiah viii. 20.) Weaker, he said it a second time ; in a very faint whisper he again breathed it out, and instantly expired. Yes, my dear unsaved friends, he died a Christless death, was wrapped in a Christless shroud, was put into a Christless coffin, and lowered into a Christless grave.”

In a sermon entitled *For or against Christ ; this night or never*, Mr Moody said “he believed thousands were trembling in the balance between heaven and hell. Every

one of them, must decide the question for themselves (*sic.*) That very hour they would receive Him and be saved, or reject Him and be damned."

This is a pleasant prospect for you and me, and I think our anxiety to test the truth needs no apology. If it be true, we are "in a parlous state" instead.

I pause herefor one moment to gather up in the fewest possible words the Gospel which these revivalists preach, that there may be no mistake as to what we are about to attack. All mankind were doomed for the sin of our first parents, and for our subsequent sins, to everlasting woe. God was so angry with men, that, but for Christ he would have sent them all to hell. Christ, however, came down to earth and shed His blood; God looked at the Blood and was satisfied. He accepted the sufferings and death of Christ instead of the everlasting sufferings of mankind, but only on one condition, viz:—that men should accept it on their parts as He had done on His part—should take it and believe it and be thankful. Then they should be forgiven, and saved, and go to heaven; but that if they did not believe it, they should be damned after all, and Christ himself would turn against them, become their fierce judge, and in the words of Mr Moody "they would be lost for all eternity."

Now, until very lately this has been the main Creed of Christendom. Of course each church or sect adds something to it of its own. But they all agree in a lost and doomed race, a dying, and bleeding God, and a salvation all owing to Him. Messrs Moody and Sankey are only giving us the old story of orthodox Christianity, the message of the greater part of the New Testament, the "the Gospel once for all delivered to the saints." They are now saying in striking and novel language what the whole Church and aggregate of Churches (except the Unitarian) have been saying ever since the day of Pentecost. So when we challenge the truth of their Gospel, we are challenging what the whole world recognizes as the Christian Faith, which, however erroneously it may be claimed to be based on the authority and teaching of Jesus himself, is commonly called Christianity. Moreover, it strangely shows itself as the common element in all the divisions of Christendom, except the Unitarian. A revival

of this Faith would be a revival of universal Christianity in which every church and sect would share. No one calling himself an orthodox Christian ought to breathe a word of complaint against Messrs Moody and Sankey's doctrines.

I now proceed to analyse this Gospel, and shew the grounds on which I impugn it and declare it to be false.

May I not lay down as axioms that no doctrines can be true which are based on a primary falsehood; and that every proposition must be false which declares or implies that God is unjust? I pass then from the structure of this Gospel to the very foundation, and analyse the cardinal assumption on which it all rests. It is over and over again repeated that God cursed all mankind with an exceedingly bitter curse and sentenced the whole of our race to endless torments in hell, as a punishment for sin.

There is no shadow of doubt that nearly the whole of Christendom has imputed to God this sentence of doom. In spite of all they say about His love for lost sinners in sending His Son to save them, there the awful charge stands arrayed against Him of having pronounced this most unjust and cruel sentence. He, the Maker of all things made this pit of everlasting fire for the endless torment of his frail creatures. We need not think of its matchless cruelty, but only ask Was it just and right? Did man deserve such an awful fate? I demand an answer to this question from every minister who preaches to me the Gospel of Salvation by Christ. I claim to be told on what grounds of eternal justice, even the most awful sin which man or devil could commit, can be punished with endless, hopeless woe without a chance of repentance? Even if the sinner had been born absolutely perfect, with fullest measure of reason and moral power, in sovereign command of every faculty, and had entered into solemn contract with the Almighty to do His bidding without fault or wavering, and had, in spite of these overwhelming advantages and responsibilities, set his Maker at defiance and drawn a host of his fellows into rebellion—even then, I say, a Being who had the power over him, and who had the right of vengeance, would be a fiend of the blackest dye if he condemned that rebel to never-ending torture. But how awfully aggravated is the injustice

ascribed to God in the damnation of a creature like man. Putting aside the use of Adam and Eve as exceptional, the whole of their posterity were born weak and sinful, and more ready for evil than for holiness. Nay, the Gospellers are never weary of expatiating on our total depravity by nature, and our utter inability to keep the laws of God. And yet they dare to say of the most Holy and Righteous God that He has doomed us frail sinners to everlasting Hell, in order that the Majesty of His Law might be vindicated! I demand an answer from these preachers; Is this right and just? Is it conduct which the Old Testament at all events bids us imitate? Is it not the exact opposite of that mercy and love which their God Jesus is believed to have shown? Further, the damnation so unjust as against frail sinners is more unjust still as against unbelievers; for men cannot control their beliefs, they must believe as they are convinced, and this is an intellectual process over which they can exercise little or no control. Indeed, there is everything to induce them to believe, for the Gospel says they will escape the awful damnation and win an endless bliss if they will only believe it; therefore if anyone refuses to believe, it is because he cannot help it. So whether the doom of hell be pronounced against sinners, as sinners, for their own and Adam's transgression, or against unbelievers for their unbelief, it is a monstrous and inexpressible injustice; and all the sins of the whole world piled up together are righteousness itself—are as white as snow—compared with the infamy, the black-hearted fiendishness of sending one soul to perdition.

The doctrine of hell, then, is in our view the most fearful blasphemy which can be spoken against God, and therefore it cannot be true. Therefore, since it is absolutely false, mankind are not, nor ever were, in danger of eternal damnation; never needed the salvation which these preachers proclaim; therefore they did not need Jesus or anyone else—God or man—to bear their punishment in their stead; if there was no hell to be saved from, they wanted no saviour; if there was no burning wrath of Jehovah against them, they needed no mediator to slake it; if no death nor curse were in their cup, they needed no Christ to drink its bitter draught. The dying love of Jesus, and the precious Blood flowing to

hide men's guilty stains from the eye of the Christian Moloch, are all a myth, a pure fable, as little worthy of credit as the labours of Hercules or the banquet of Thyestes. And it is not our fault that we utter this unwelcome rejection of their Gospel. It is theirs and theirs alone. They have put into our hands this very weapon to strike at the vitals of their Gospel. They have kept on telling us that Christ came to save the lost; that he would not have come at all, but to rescue us out of the burning pit of destruction, and so we have only to echo their words and to shew the helpless falsehood of their whole Gospel by exposing the utter falseness and impiety of the fundamental assumption on which the whole fabric is based. This conclusion was long foretold by the orthodox themselves. The very first time that the eternity of Hell-fire was questioned, they murmured in sorrow and fear that if *that* went, Christianity would soon follow. A Bishop once told me that if I did away with everlasting Hell, there would be no ground for the atonement, and if the atonement were needless, so also was the Incarnation and so too were all the miraculous events of Christ's life and death. He was quite right. He had been at the Bar and knew how to reason. I deliberately therefore denounce the Gospel according to Messrs. Moody and Sankey, and the prevailing teaching of Christendom, as utterly false and fabulous, resting entirely on a proposition inherently untrue, because it charges God with the most wicked of crimes and the most cruel injustice.

Time forbids me to say more to-day. I only wish that this challenge or one of a similar kind may be sent to these popular preachers and by them fairly met and answered. If they are in earnest, as we may well believe, they will surely find it to the interest of their cause to meet and not to evade this challenge, to look again at the very foundation stone of their religion, lest the whole fabric fall unawares upon themselves and their deluded followers, and in its fall may crush and bury all the good and pure and lovely thoughts which, in spite of its falsehoods, still cluster around "the old old story of Jesus and his love."

LONDON :
CARTER & WILLIAMS, Steam Printers, 14, Bishopsgate Avenue,
Canomile-street, E.C.