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**CHAPTER II**  
**Eternal Death**

IN what will the eternal state of the lost consist? this is now our question. We hold that it will not consist in an eternal life spent in pain of body or remorse of mind, but that *a state of utter death and destruction* is that state which will abide forever. The length of time which this process of dissolution may take, and the degrees of bodily or mental pain which may produce it, are questions which we must leave to that providence of God which will rule in hell as in heaven. Scope is here provided for that great variety of punishment which the reprobate will suffer hereafter, from that which in its justice is terrible to the sufferer, to that which, with equal justice, is by him scarcely felt at all.



2. We need not stop to argue that between this view of punishment and that which maintains an eternal existence in pain there is no comparison. The present life shows us this. When hope has ceased to cheer the future, men willingly lay it aside for death; when pain has made it a weary burden, the friends of the sufferer thank God for its termination. "Better not to be than to live in misery," was the judgment of Sophocles; and we ever find the wretched, when suffering has become excessive, calling upon death as upon a friend.<sup>1</sup> So the close of each agonized life in hell would be longed for there; would send a thrill of relief throughout the habitations of the blessed.

3. It will be well here to say a few words on the reason which has from a very ancient period led a majority of Christians, as from a period still more ancient it led a large part of the Jewish Church,<sup>2</sup> to hold the doctrine of an eternal life of pain; as it will be requisite to show that this reason is without foundation, before we proceed to the establishment of our own view. It will be seen that this same reason led another class of minds, with a, like irresistible force and with an equal propriety, to the other great error here controverted, viz.:—Universal Restoration.

4. Before the preaching of the Gospel, the highest order of heathen philosophy had framed for its satisfaction a theory of the immortality of the soul. While the great mass of mankind had absolutely no hope of any future life;<sup>3</sup> and while far the greater number of philosophers taught that death was for all an eternal sleep;<sup>4</sup> there were "high spirits of old" that strained their eyes to see beyond the clouds of time the dawning of immortality. Unable, as we are able, to connect it with God as its source, and with his promise as their assurance, they framed the idea of an immortality self-existing in the human soul. Egypt, the prolific mother of religious error, appears, from the best authorities in our hands, to have been the source of this idea.<sup>5</sup> But it was

extracted from the tombs and the hieroglyphics of Egyptian priests by the brilliant and restless curiosity of Greece. Socrates, and his great pupil, Plato, presented it to the human mind wherever the Grecian intellect penetrated, and the tongue of Greece was known. Cicero recommended the theory of the Academy to his contemporaries in his "Tusculan Questions." They did not indeed teach it at all consistently, nor do they appear themselves to have relied with any firmness on its reality.<sup>6</sup> It was with them a great hope fitfully entertained, rather than a sober conviction. "I have perused Plato," Cicero sadly complains, "with the greatest diligence and exactness, over and over again; but know not how it is, whilst I read him I am convinced; when I lay the book aside and begin to consider by myself of the soul's immortality, *all the conviction instantly ceases*. It is indeed doubtful whether any of the great minds of antiquity in their esoteric or inner faith held more than the tenet of Buddhism, which teaches that the soul, originally derived from Deity, is at length to be re-absorbed and lost in Deity again:

"That each, who seems a separate whole  
Should move his rounds, and fusing all  
The skirts of self again, should fail,  
Remerging in the general Soul."—TENNYSON.

5. However this may be, those of whom we speak presented to the common mind an idea not so vague as this. The conception of it kindled their imagination, and the discussion of it afforded a theme for their logical powers. According to it, the soul was possessed of an inherent immortality. It had no beginning and could have no end. What was true of one soul was equally true of all souls, good or bad. They must live somewhere, be it in Tartarus, or Cocytus, in Pyriphlegethon, or the happy abodes of the purified. This idea, sublime for a heathen, passed readily and early into the theology of the Christian Church. Philosophers, converted to Christianity, brought with them into their new service too much of their ancient learning. Heedless of Paul's warning voice against philosophy in general,<sup>7</sup> they considered that a considerable portion at least of Plato's philosophy must be exempted from the apostolic condemnation. We find accordingly the Platonic philosophy of the soul's immortality running through and blending with the theological reasoning of Athenagoras and Tertullian, of Origen and Augustine.<sup>8</sup> Teachers who should have consulted only the oracles of God, leaving behind them their heathen lore as Moses left behind him the learning of Egypt, supplemented those living oracles with theories drawn from a brilliant Greek philosophy, which was in its turn suggested by the priest-craft taught in Egyptian temples. Their theory was that the life of the wicked must be as eternal as the life of those here redeemed and brought to Christ, because every soul of man was immortal.

6. A moment's reflection will show us that a dogma of this kind could not remain idle. It *must* influence irresistibly in one direction or another this whole question of future punishment.<sup>9</sup> It *must* mould the entire doctrine of the Church upon the subject. According as men connected it with one truth of Scripture or another, it *must* give rise to two opposite schools of thought. Connect the immortality of the soul with the scriptural doctrine of the eternity of punishment, and you inevitably create the dogma of eternal life in misery, *i.e.* of *Augustine's hell*. Connect it with another great truth of Scripture, the final extinction of evil and restitution of all things, and you as inevitably create *Origen's Universal Restoration*. For each of these opposing theories there is exactly the same amount of proof, viz.:—Plato's dogma and a dogma of the Bible; and if

Plato's dogma could be proved to be a scriptural doctrine, then, by every law of logic, Scripture would be found supporting *two contradictory theories*, or, in other words, would itself destroy all its claims to authority.

7. Accordingly, this philosophical idea of Plato is found influencing most powerfully and most unfairly *the interpretation of Scripture from the second century down to our own time*. An example of this will probably show this more forcibly than any words of ours. Tertullian is commenting upon our Lord's teaching in [Luke 19:10](#): "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save *that which is lost*." (Vulgate, *quod perierat*). No one knew better than Tertullian the primary and proper meaning of the Latin verb *pereo*, and that it meant, "to vanish," "to die," "to perish," "to be annihilated." Why would he not attach this meaning to it when he was commenting upon the text of the Latin version? Here is his own account: <sup>10</sup> "We, however, so understand the soul's immortality as to believe it lost, *not in the sense of destruction, but of punishment*, that is, in hell. And if this is the case, then *it is not the soul which salvation will affect, since it is 'safe' already in its own nature by reason of its immortality*; but rather the flesh, which, as all readily allow, is subject to destruction." <sup>11</sup> Such was the influence upon the interpretation of Scripture which his theory of the soul forced upon Tertullian. It led him to deny to the terms of God's word what he knew to be their primary and proper meaning, and to affirm that the salvation of our Lord had no relation to the human soul, but only to the bodies of men! A similar influence this theory has had upon theologians down to the present day.

8. It is true, indeed, that while the Fathers as a general rule considered the question of future punishment under the impression that every soul of man was immortal, they did not attach to the soul the idea of all *essential immortality and an existence from all eternity* as Plato did. Their juster notions of the Deity prevented their going to this length; and they generally acknowledged the soul as the creation of God, having a beginning in time, and allowed that He who had given it existence, could take that existence away. But in supposing that God gave to the soul an *inalienable existence, i.e.*, an immortality not affected by any conduct upon man's part, of which no creature could deprive it, and of which God would not deprive it, they in effect laid down a dogma which had the very same influence upon their views of future punishment as if they had adopted the dogma of Plato to its fullest extent. An immortality that *never would* be taken from the soul, and all immortality that *never could* be taken from it, would have precisely the same bearing upon the future of man. In either case he must live on for ever, whether in misery or in happiness. In a subsequent chapter we will show the actual influence of this dogma upon the doctrine of the Church, leading first to Augustine's fearful theory of everlasting misery, and then, in the revulsion of human thought from this, to Origen's theory of universal restoration.

9. Now the immortality of the soul, whether as held by Plato, or by the Fathers in general, was a mere fancy of the human mind. As to any *essential* immortality which belonged to it of its own proper nature there is no Christian writer or thinker of any weight who now dares to maintain it. It was, as Pliny justly called it a figment; and even Socrates, with all his noble language, evidently feared that his favourite notion was no sounder than the figment which the Epicurean Pliny contemptuously called it. <sup>12</sup> Scripture denies it altogether. An essential immortality it does not allow to be the attribute of any creature, however exalted. To one Being only—to God—does it allow to have "life in Himself;" of one Being only—God—does it allow such an immortality to be an attribute. <sup>13</sup> Here, as in every thing else, Scripture is the book of the highest reason. That

which has had a beginning may have an end. That on which God has bestowed life He may and can inflict death. The highest intelligences as much as the lowest must depend on Him for the continuance of their life. Let Him withdraw his sustaining power and the mighty archangel becomes a thing of nought, as completely as the insect which dances in the sunbeams for an hour and then passes away for ever. "Immortality," says Calvin, "does not belong in the propriety of speech to the nature either of souls or of angels; but is derived from another source, the secret inbreathing of God."<sup>14</sup>

10. The idea that God has bestowed upon men, or upon any part of human nature, an inalienable immortality finds just as little sanction in the Scriptures. The expression "immortality of the soul," so common in theology, is not once found in the Bible from beginning to end.<sup>15</sup> In vain do men, bent on sustaining a human figment, ransack Scripture for some expressions which may be tortured into giving it an apparent support. The phrase, "living soul," applied to man at his creation,<sup>16</sup> has been by many Christian writers, utterly ignorant of Hebrew, supposed to imply such an immortality. *The very same phrase, however, in the original language of Scripture had been applied to the lower creation before it was applied to man.*<sup>17</sup> The threefold description of man, as having body, soul, and spirit, has been by others supposed significant of his inalienable immortality. Whatever be meant by this distinction, it cannot in any measure support the inference based upon it; as the lower creatures are allowed in Scripture to be possessed not merely of body and soul but of spirit likewise.<sup>18</sup>

11. But an *inalienable* immortality is expressly asserted in Scripture *not* to have been bestowed upon man at his creation.<sup>19</sup> We do not deny that man was made in God's image; and that a very important part of this resemblance consisted in man's not being subject to death as the lower creatures were. Immortality was given to man at his creation.<sup>20</sup> This priceless gift was one of the gifts which a bountiful Creator bestowed upon a favoured creature. *But it was alienable.* It might be parted with; it might be thrown away; it might be lost. So He, the Lawgiver, said, when, in giving immortality, He also added the warning, "In the day thou eatest, thou shalt die." What is more: *this immortality was alienated: this priceless gift was thrown away and lost.* Man sinned, and lost his immortality. As Irenaeus expresses it, "Man, disobedient to God, was cast off from immortality."<sup>21</sup> And so God said Himself, when to fallen Adam He declared: "Dust thou art; and unto dust shalt thou return."<sup>22</sup> *Sinful* man is not by nature immortal but mortal. He has lowered himself to the level of the beasts that perish. If immortality is to be his again, it must be as *a gift restored, and not inherited.* It must become his by virtue of some new provision of grace which reinstates him in the place he lost. *This was the Gospel of Christ.* It was to give back the eternal life which man had forfeited, that he came into the world: "God was manifested in human form for the renewal of eternal life."<sup>23</sup>

"If then, as annihilated by sin, the soul was ever forfeit,  
"Godhead paid the mighty price, the pledge hath been redeemed;  
"He, from the waters of oblivion, raised the drowning race,  
"Lifting them even to Himself, the baseless Rock of Ages."<sup>24</sup>

Subsequent examination will, however, show us that Christ has not, as some suppose,<sup>25</sup> bestowed this priceless gift on all; but on some only of the fallen race. It is the believer only who can say with David, "he redeemeth my life from destruction."<sup>26</sup>

12. Before we proceed to establish our view of future punishment by the direct testimony of Scripture, it will be necessary to remove an objection very commonly made to it, and which has great force with very many minds. The objection is this—that what is no longer *felt to be punishment by the party who is punished, is no punishment* at all: that it ceases to be a punishment the moment it ceases to be sensibly felt. This was one of Tertullian's chief reasons for his view of eternal misery.<sup>27</sup> He reasoned precisely as those heathen reasoned, who, in trying to reconcile man to his inevitable fate, tried to reason him into the belief that *death was no evil*.<sup>28</sup> Yet, when even such men looked on into the limitless future, into that endless life which man can conceive of and longs to make his own, because in truth it was his birthright once, they corrected their idle reasoning, and without the Christian's promise of eternal life in Christ, called *endless death an endless injury*.<sup>29</sup> Such it is even to him who has ceased to feel the loss of life, and, since the life restored to man through Christ is all eternal life, it follows that its loss, inflicted as a punishment, is a punishment of an everlasting nature.

13. And here the first death affords a perfect analogy to the second. From the earliest records of our race *capital* punishment has been reckoned as not only the greatest but also the most lasting of all punishments; and it is only reckoned the greatest because it is the most lasting. A flogging, inflicted on a petty thief, inflicts more actual pain than decapitation or hanging inflicts upon a murderer. Why then is it greater and more lasting? Because it has deprived the sufferer of every hour of that life which but for it he would have had. *Its duration is supposed co-existent with the period of his natural life*. "The laws," says Augustine, "do not estimate the punishment of a criminal by the brief period during which he is being put to death; but by their removing him for ever from the company of living men."<sup>30</sup>

14. The conclusion drawn from this is sometimes sought to be got rid of by representing the real punishment of death to consist in its exposing the party put to death to those sufferings which are supposed by many to follow during the intermediate state from death to resurrection.<sup>31</sup> Whatever may be believed of the reality of such sufferings, it is, however, certain that human governments in their apportionment of punishments never took anything of this kind into their thoughts at all. Death, as a legal punishment, is reckoned the very same punishment, *whatever be the character of the person thus punished*, whether he has been an upright or a wicked man, one likely to suffer punishment or reward. The idea of death as the most lasting of all has not been confined to Christian nations; or to believers in a future life of rewards and punishments; but was accepted before the time of the Gospel, and by individuals and nations who did not believe in a future life at all. The Sadducee, the Epicurean, and the Atheist, held it just as well as the Platonic philosopher, the Christian father, or the Egyptian priest. Justin Martyr expresses the idea well, when, speaking of heathen persecutors who, as he expressly states, "believed that there was nothing after death," says: "They kill us with no intention of delivering us; but cut us off that we may be deprived of life and pleasure."<sup>32</sup>

15. Now all this is readily applied to the future life and to future punishment. The loss of every year of the life which the sinner might have had is a punishment, and because the life is eternal the punishment is eternal also. There is here no straining of argument to make out a case. The argument is one which man's judgment has in every age approved as just, whether it agreed or not with his view of future retribution. "Good things," says the Christian father, Irenaeus, who held our view, "good things are eternal, and without end with God, and, therefore, the loss of these is

also eternal and never-ending." "May it not," says the great Dutch divine, Hermann Witsius, who himself held the Augustinian view of punishment, "may it not, in its measure, be reckoned an infinite punishment, should God please to doom man, who is by nature a candidate for immortality, to total annihilation, from whence he should never be suffered to return to life?" And President Edwards, of America, who also held the Augustinian view, yet distinctly agrees with us. "*Endless annihilation*," he says, "*is an endless or an infinite punishment*. It is an endless loss of, not only all the good a man at present enjoys, but of all that good which he would have enjoyed throughout eternity in the state of bliss to which he would have been admitted, if he had never sinned. This, in an endless duration, would have amounted to an infinite quantity of good. Annihilation, therefore, is an infinite punishment, both as it is *endless*, and as the quantity of good lost is infinite.... Final annihilation then is an infinite evil, as it is inflicted in disapprobation of sin."<sup>33</sup>

16. In arguing thus we have argued at the greatest disadvantage to ourselves, for we have confined our attention to the parties actually punished, while we have left out of right the grand object of all-wise punishment, viz., the lesson taught by it to those who have not offended. Viewed in this light, eternal death inflicted on sinners is *eternally felt*, and has an eternal influence on the parties whom it was intended principally to affect. The actual sinner suffered as he deserved—if not less, certainly not more. His death then intervenes to afford its eternal lesson to all future times. Those who rejoice in immortality are for ever warned by the aspect of its loss. Milton draws the fallen angels as shuddering at the thought of the loss even of their life—lowered, shattered, with no aim or object but evil:—

To be no more: sad cure; for *who* would lose,  
Though full of pain, this intellectual being,  
These thoughts that wander through eternity?

And the genius of Pascal rebukes the thought that makes light of the loss of existence:—"Is it a thing to speak of flippantly"? Is it not a thing, on the contrary, to speak sadly of, as of all sad things the saddest?"<sup>34</sup>

17. A vast amount of misconception, and consequently of needless controversy, has arisen from the mistaken idea that eternal death is not properly eternal punishment. One class of reasoners, holding eternal punishment, think it necessary to argue against eternal death as not being its equivalent; while another class, holding more or less the doctrine of eternal death, feel bound to argue against the eternity of future punishment, from not perceiving that the eternal death which they hold is in truth its full equivalent. One class, again, imagines that in proving eternal punishment they prove eternal life in torment; and the other that, in overthrowing the notion of the latter, they have overthrown the former also.<sup>35</sup>

18. We will here merely add that the terms "everlasting destruction," "eternal death," etc., taken by us as properly descriptive of our theory of the future non-existence of the wicked, are the very terms used by the best writers of the periods before and after the birth of Christ, when they would describe the eternal loss of life and existence by beings who had once possessed life. The Grecian writer calls such a condition "a death that never dies;" the Roman Cicero calls it "everlasting death;" Lucretius calls it "immortal death," "eternal death;" even Tertullian, though

his theory constantly compelled him to confound life with death, when he would describe a state from which there was no resurrection to existence, can find no stronger, truer description of it than "eternal death," "everlasting destruction."<sup>36</sup>

## Footnotes

1. [Job 3:21](#); [Jer. 8:3](#); [Rev. 9:6](#); WITSIUS, Covenants, i., iv. xiv. BAXTER, Saint's Rest, c. v., 12; CICERO, Tusc. Disp., i. 46.
2. JAHN, Archae. Bib., s. 317; BARTLETT, Life and Death Eternal, p. 384; GIBBON, Decline and Fall, c. xv.; WHITMORE, Doctrine of Immortality, p. 21; DENNISON, Perishing Soul, Letter xiii.
3. [Eph. 2:12](#); [1 Thess. 4:13](#); JUSTIN MARTYR, 1st Apology, c. Ivii.; TERTULLIAN, On the Resurrection, c. i.; CALVIN, on 1st Thess. iv. 13; CHAMBERS, Information for the People, ii. 437, PLATO, Phaedo, par. 29.
4. ATHENAGORAS, Plea for Christians, c. xii.; TATIAN, Address to the Greeks, c. xxv., TERTULLIAN, De Anima, c. iii.;Ibid., De Spectaculis, s. 30. CICERO, Tusc. Disp., i. 31; GIBBON, Decline and Fall, c. xv. 11; LANDIS, Immortality, c. iii. s. 25.
5. PEROWNE, J. J. S., Immortality, p. 37; HERODOTUS, b. ii., s. 23; BUNSEN, Egypt's Place in Universal History, iv. 639; WHITMORE, Immortality, c. i.
6. PEROWNE, J. J. S., Immortality, preface vii., p. 45.
7. [Col. 2:8](#); [1 Cor. 1:22](#); [3:19](#); [1 Tim. 4:28](#).
8. ATHENAGORAS, p. 31, A, 53 D., Edition Paris, 1615; TERTULLIAN, De Anima; ORIGEN, vol. I 486 B; vol. 2. c. 8, C. E. Rothomagi, 1668, AUGUSTINE, De c. 4, Dei. xx1 3.
9. Hooker, Eccl. Pol., v. 2..
10. TERTULLIAN, On the Resurrection, c. xxxiv.
11. PLINY, Natural History b. vii. c. 56; Apology of SOCRATES, c. 32 and 33;
12. [John 5:26](#); [1 Tim. 6:16](#).
13. CALVIN, on [1 Tim. 6:16](#).
14. Mr. MAUDE'S paper on Immortality, Rainbow, March, 1869; Rev. W. KER'S Popular Ideas on Immortality, 31.
15. [Gen. 2:7](#).
16. [Gen. 1:20, 21](#).
17. [Gen. 7:15-22](#); [Ps. 104:29](#); [Eccl. 3:19-21](#).
18. [Gen. 2:17](#).
19. Wisdom ii. 27; DENNISTON, Perishing Soul, pp. 127-131; PLATO, Phaedo, par. 55.
20. Irenaeus against Heresies, b. iii., s. ii.; LANDIS Immortality of the Soul, p. i. c. iii., s. 26.
21. [Gen. 3:19](#).
22. IGNATIUS to the Ephesians, 100:19.; LANDIS, Immortality, p. i., c. 3. s. 21.

23. TUPPER, Proverbial Philosophy.
24. DENNISTON, Perishing Soul, p. 131.
25. [Ps. 100:3, 4](#); [102:28](#); [John 5:20, 40](#).
26. On the Resurrection, c. xxxv.
27. CICERO, Tusc. Disp., i. 36, 37; LUCRETIUS, b. iii.
28. CICERO, Tusc. Disp., i. 47.
29. City of God, xx1. ii—Abp TILLOTSON, Eternity of Hell Torments, p. 412.
30. BARTLETT, Life and Death, 289.
31. First Apology, c. lvii.
32. IRENAEUS against Heresies, iv., v. xxvii; xi. iv; WITSIUS, Covenants, i., v., xiii.; BLAIN, Death not Life, 12th ed. p. 80; DENNISTON, Perishing Soul, p. 80; Pensees De PASCAL, S. P., art. xi; WESLEY'S Sermons, "Of Hell," sermon 78:
33. Pensees De PASCAL, second part, art. xi; YOUNG, Night Thoughts.
34. Eternity of Future Punishment, G. SALMON D.D.; Eternal Punishment. J. W. BARLOW, M.A.; Religious Tendencies of the Times, J. GRANT, i. 268.
35. qavnatoz Çaqanatoz Amphis Gynaecoer, i.; mors. simpiternum malum; CICERO, Tusc. Disp, i. 42; mors immortalis, mors aeterna; LUCRETIUS, Lib. Tert; mors aeterna AEternus Interitus;
36. TERTULLIAN. On the Resurrection, c. ix.