

SHACKLES BREAKING.

The following is the brief report of a sermon of a Presbyterian minister of this city, delivered to his congregation not long since and clipped by us from a Pittsburgh daily paper. It serves to show the drift of intelligent thought on certain subjects. Though this Brother shows in this sermon no evidence that he understands God's plan or has any special insight to the teachings of Scripture on the subjects, yet it does show that he has a *reasonable mind* and is honest enough to express his convictions in a manner which, to say the least, must endanger his title, honors and salary in Babylon.

We pray that the Lord may guide him into the truth more and more. As he gives evidence of some reason and candor, two indispensable qualities for growth in grace and knowledge, if he also be *wholly* consecrated to the Lord and not to a sect, or creed, so that he shall rejoice to sacrifice *all* for the truth, counting not his life dear unto him, [R523 : page 2] then doubtless he will be owned and esteemed of God proportionately as he becomes disowned and dishonored by a worldly system, *called* the Church, but which is now given up and "spued out." The extract is as follows:

"Yesterday morning the Rev. E. R. Donehoo delivered a sermon which is at variance with the old and accepted idea of the future life. The following extracts give an idea of the Reverend gentleman's views:

"For the work of a man shall he render unto him and cause every man to find according to his ways. Yea, surely God will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert judgment."-- [Job 34:11-12](#).

The old doctrine of the literal hell of fire and brimstone is not very strenuously urged even by the most rigidly orthodox in these days. Nor has the surrender of this idea been followed by a declining confidence in the authority of Scripture. It cannot be denied that in proportion as the harsh and cruel dogmas of Christian doctrine, which once were the constitutional elements of every pulpit discourse, are abandoned, the beauty and harmony of Divine truth begins to appear. There was a time not very far distant when the chief argument employed in persuading men to give up sin, was in so picturing the condition of the lost in hell as to inspire the impenitent with terror and thus drive them through sheer fright into the fold of believers. The idea of present reward, from the pursuit of that which is in itself good and true and virtuous was scarcely ever brought into view. Through the influence of such instruction, it became the settled conviction amongst a large class that one or the other fate awaits every one immediately at death: Hell with its unmitigated miseries or Heaven with its unmingled joys. To have failed of the heavenly standard, even in the slightest degree, is to plunge into the deepest and most hopeless abyss of hell eternally. To have spent a lifetime in open and defiant rebellion against God, and yet in the final hour to have repented and sued for mercy is to escape every torment of the damned and to attain to all the bliss in store for the righteous.

Such are the teachings with which sinners have too often been terrorized and saints regaled. All this may be good theology, which I doubt, but of this I feel perfectly assured that it is out of all proportion to the ordinary views of justice and equity, and utterly out of accord with the dictates of enlightened reason. If human courts should undertake to administer the law on any such principle, the judges would be held up to public scorn and society would rise up with the one common impulse to protest against such a partial, unjust and inhuman method of procedure. The punishment must have some relation to the enormity of the offense before the community will quietly acquiesce in its infliction.

The great error with too many religious teachers has been that they have constructed their theology, so far at least as heaven and hell are concerned, not from the word of God, the only reliable authority at hand, but from the distorted and ghastly visions of Dante, or the equally grotesque and wholly unreliable imaginings of

Milton, or the monstrous conceits so characteristic of the revivalists of the last century.

The rule laid down by Christ is the safe one and in harmony with every portion of revealed truth: "Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required." The application of this rule should set at rest forever the delusion so often entertained that God will dispense indiscriminate rewards to His friends and indiscriminate punishments to all who have broken his law. The doctrine taught by Christ is that the more light the greater will be the punishableness of sin. To the Pharisee of his time he said: "If ye were blind ye should have no sin, but now ye say 'we see,' therefore your sin remaineth." And James bears like testimony: "To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin." Knowledge carries corresponding responsibility. "If I had not come and spoken unto them they had not had sin, but now they have no cloak for their sin." From this we learn that a knowledge of the gospel brings with it a responsibility to accept it.

While increased knowledge brings with it increased responsibility it must not be therefore inferred that mere ignorance will of itself constitute an excuse. The ignorance may be self-incurred, it may be guilt, neglect of available opportunities to inform oneself, in which case no mitigation in the punishment may be expected.

What is true of punishment is as true of rewards. The reward will be in proportion to the service done and work rendered and character sustained and duty discharged. Each man here and now is determining for himself what degree of misery or happiness shall be meted out to him in the eternal world. And however strictly the great Judge will punish every transgression, I have no fear that Satan's dominions will bear any proportion to those of an omnipotent King. After sin has been thoroughly punished and every rebel consigned to his doom the redeemed shall be made up of all ages and climes, innumerable as the sands of the sea shore, not one excluded from heaven's joys in the end, but those who deliberately invoked their awful doom."

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