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## Immortality.

A REPLY TO DR. PETAVEL.

BY PROFESSOR THE REV. J. AGAR BEET, D.D., RICHMOND.

DR. PETAVEL'S courteous and thoughtful open letter has had my careful and repeated study. It claims, and shall have, from me a careful reply.

It will be well to begin by restating the issue between us. On p. 193 of my book I give the result of my research as follows:—'To sum up. The writers of the New Testament agree to describe, with more or less definiteness, the punishment to be inflicted in the day of Christ's return as actual suffering and as final exclusion from the blessedness of the saved.' So far Dr. Petavel agrees with me. But he goes beyond me by asserting that the Bible teaches, not only the final exclusion of the lost, but also their ultimate extinction; and invites me to go 'one step further' and join him in this position. This step, however, I cannot take until I find, in Holy Scripture, solid ground on which to tread. This, after much careful search, I have not found.

On the other hand, I do not find, either within or without the Bible, any clear disproof of, or serious objection to, Dr. Petavel's teaching. But this absence of disproof does not justify, in the absence of positive proof, acceptance of the teaching in question as true and reliable. To accept a statement as true simply because it cannot be disproved, is a common and dangerous fallacy. I therefore differ both from those who assert that the lost will ultimately sink into uncon-

sciousness, and from those who assert that they will continue in endless suffering. On these matters the Scriptures, as I read them, give no decisive judgment. On p. 193, quoted above, I say: 'They give no ground for hope that the agony of the lost will ever cease; but they do not plainly and categorically assert its endless continuance.' In Dr. Petavel's books and open letter, and in the Bible, I cannot find anything which justifies 'one step further' than this.

Dr. Petavel objects, on p. 408, to my criticism that he has 'mixed together and identified two distinct issues, viz. the essential immortality of the soul and the ultimate extinction of the lost, and accepted as proof of the latter every disproof of the former.' This criticism I must leave with those who read his book. With much ability he has shown that the former doctrine has no place in the Bible; but, in my opinion, he has given no valid proof of the latter. Yet he confidently accepts it as taught there. His quotations; also, from the Fathers, while clearly proving that the writers had no conception of the essential immortality of the soul, fall far short of proving that they taught that the lost will ultimately fall into unconsciousness. This issue does not seem to have been clearly before them. For their language about the lost is, from this point of view, sometimes ambiguous. As an example, I may refer to the interesting passage quoted by

Dr. Petavel, on p. 410, in proof that Athanasius held the ultimate extinction of the lost, in which we read: 'Henceforth, being in a dying condition outside it (paradise), they abide in death and corruption.' These last words, especially the word *abide*, might be taken as asserting the permanent existence of the lost. This apparent contradiction shows the need for great caution when drawing inferences from the casual words of ancient writers about issues which were not before them. Yet Dr. Petavel quotes these writers with confidence as holding his view. This seems to me a confusion of distinct issues.

Dr. Petavel objects to my use of the word *ruin* to describe the fate of the lost. He argues (1) that 'the term is not scriptural.' But I have tried to show that it is the nearest English equivalent for the Greek word ἀπόλλεα constantly used in this sense throughout the New Testament; a nearer equivalent than the renderings (A.V. and R.V.) *destruction, perdition, lost*. Surely I can go outside the English versions to find equivalents for the Greek words used in the New Testament.

He further objects (2) that the 'word would be simply a metaphor'; and quotes me as saying that metaphor 'is a most uncertain basis of doctrine.' Originally all or nearly all our words were metaphors. But, by use, many of them have gained definite meanings apart from the original metaphor. Such is the word *ruin*. We frequently talk of a man as *ruined* without any thought of a ruined building; and the word conveys at once a definite meaning. In my book, I have not once used it as a metaphor; still less have I built anything upon the metaphor. I have used it merely to convey a definite meaning. Moreover, I have carefully defined the meaning intended. So on p. 111 f.: 'The word before us conveys always the same root idea. It denotes utter and hopeless ruin, the complete failure of the maker's or owner's purpose for the ruined object; whether it ceases to exist or continues a worthless existence.' So again on p. 114: 'The word means, as we have just learnt, neither extinction of consciousness nor endless conscious torments, but simply the loss of all that makes existence worth having.'

My correspondent objects (3) that the metaphor 'is all the more "unsafe" because it is inadequate, being taken from the domain of architecture, while man belongs to the organic, and to the spiritual

world. An architectural ruin is inanimate.' But this objection is equally valid against magnificent metaphors of Holy Scripture, e.g., Mt 16<sup>18</sup>, 'I will build My Church'; Eph 2<sup>20-22</sup>, 'Built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the head corner-stone, in whom every building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom also ye are being built together for a dwelling-place of God in the Spirit.' Also 1 P 2<sup>5-8</sup>, and elsewhere frequently. Indeed, this architectural metaphor is a conspicuous feature of the New Testament. All metaphors are inadequate. They therefore need to be most cautiously interpreted. But they are of immense value as an intelligible means of presenting abstract truth. In my book, however, I have not made use of the metaphor in question; and I have warned my readers of the danger involved in the use of metaphor.

The objection (4) that I 'have not been able to give a proper definition of the ruin specified' has been already overturned by my definitions, quoted above, of the sense in which I used the word *ruin*.

Dr. Petavel adds (5): 'Had you attempted to define the meaning of this figure of speech, you would surely have detected that it is misleading, as suggesting a false notion of perpetuity.' The former part of this sentence is, in view of the clear definitions quoted above, which are elsewhere repeated, altogether inexplicable. It must be due to oversight. Moreover, the metaphor of a ruin does not suggest perpetuity. If a house were so damaged that it would never again be inhabited, we should call it a ruin even if we knew that within six months every brick would be removed and a new house built in its place. Similarly, to speak of souls as finally ruined, in no way suggests their endless permanence. And I have again and again said that in my opinion this is not taught in the Bible. That this is my opinion, Dr. Petavel, at the bottom of p. 409 b, himself admits.

Dr. Petavel brings, on p. 410, analogies from 'the universal law of decay' and from geology, and an inference (7) from the wisdom of the Creator, which suggest that lost souls will eventually cease to be. These suggestions are legitimate as matters for speculation. But they are no part of the teaching of the Bible. And, in our ignorance of the unseen world, they seem to me an altogether insufficient ground for reliable judgment about the fate of the lost.

He thinks (6) that the word *ruin* may be turned against my own position. 'When is a building utterly ruined? Is it not when "there shall not be left one stone upon another."' But the ancient temples of Egypt are utter ruins, even though many stones remain, one upon another.

My critic also, on p. 409 *a*, tries to take me up on a small detail by saying that I teach that 'the future punishment of the finally impenitent is utter and final ruin, and refuse to make any assertion about their condition.' He adds that this sentence 'seems somewhat self-contradictory; is not ruin a condition?' My meaning is made perfectly clear on pp. 123, 124: 'The words before us make no assertion about the condition of the lost, *i.e.* whether they will continue in a worthless and wretched condition, or sink into unconsciousness. For, as we have seen, the word *destruction* does not denote extinction but only the loss of all that gives worth to existence. Nor can we infer from this use of the adjective *agelasting* that the persons destroyed are themselves agelasting. For it describes not the persons destroyed but the destruction which awaits them . . . Consequently, the passage before us makes no assertion about the condition of the lost except that they will be ruined, and that their ruin will continue to the utmost limit of the writer's thought.' There is no contradiction here.

After finding fault with my use of the word *ruin*, Dr. Petavel comes, at the foot of p. 411, to his own proof that the lost will ultimately sink into unconsciousness. His chief proof is the word *destruction*. He says that their fate is 'clearly revealed in various passages referring to the ultimate destruction of the confirmed rebels; this destruction, to my mind, a synonym of the less popular word annihilation, and it *distinctly specifies* the fate of which you assert that it "is not defined in unmistakable language."

He begins by attempting to show that I contradict myself by saying in one place that the word 'never means extinction,' and in another that it 'does not always mean to reduce to non-existence.' This apparent contradiction is easily explained. Taken by itself, and apart from its context, the word means only, as I have tried to prove, to deprive the object destroyed of whatever gives worth to existence, without further thought of what becomes of it. But sometimes the context shows that the writer uses the word in a sense

more definite than, taken by itself, it conveys. For instance, in the quotation from Plato, on p. 109 of my *Last Things*, the writer is careful to make clear that by destruction he means annihilation: 'May perish and be destroyed, immediately on her release from the body issuing forth dissolved like smoke or air, and in her flight vanishing away into nothingness.' This definition gives to the word when subsequently used by Plato this more definite sense. It is all-important, especially in interpreting an ancient book, to distinguish between the sense conveyed by the word itself and the sense conveyed by the same word in some definite context.

My correspondent admits, on p. 412 *a*, 'that the word does not always mean total and final extinction.' If so, he is bound to show, when appealing to this word in proof of the final extinction of the lost, that in the passages adduced it has this definite meaning. Your readers must judge whether he has done so.

As an example of different meanings of the same word, Dr. Petavel quotes, on p. 412 *a*, the word *man* in Jn 16<sup>21</sup>: 'Joy that a man is born into the world.' This is a very unfortunate example. For the strange words just quoted are due to the lack of an English equivalent to the Greek word *ἄνθρωπος*, which means a human being of either sex or any age. With the masculine article, it denotes a male; with the feminine, a female. Here there is no article. Accurately translated, the words mean, 'joy that a human being has been born.' The word *man* represents another Greek word, *ἀνήρ*.

The remainder of Dr. Petavel's argument is little more than an admission of the correctness of my assertion that the word *destroy* does not always mean annihilation. He says, on p. 412 *b*: 'In the Greek language, a man is said to be destroyed, to become as *non-existent*, when he has lost either his bodily life, or the most beloved member of his family, his fortune, his power, his reputation,' etc. So again: 'The moral character of the dissolute men alluded to by Dion Chrysostom was gone, it existed no more, and, in the writer's judgment, a man without a moral character had ceased to be a man. The same applies to Mark Antony, and to the companions of Ulysses, whom Circé had turned into swine.' But these men were not annihilated. Yet they were said to have been *destroyed*. And this last word, applied to them, is appealed to by

Dr. Petavel, when used of the lost, as proof that they will be annihilated. Similarly, on p. 413 a: 'The old world was not annihilated by the flood, but its outward arrangement was brought to an end, and the word used (κόσμος) chiefly calls our attention to an outward arrangement.' But the old world is said to have been *destroyed*. In short, Dr. Petavel admits that the word on which he relies has not always the meaning he gives to it when used to describe the fate of the lost; and he has done nothing to show that in this last connexion it has the special and narrower meaning he ascribes to it.

My correspondent says, on p. 413 a, that, if the word rendered *destroy* does not convey the idea of bringing to nought, the Greek language has no word which conveys this idea. This may be admitted. When Plato wished to convey this idea, he found it needful to define his meaning by a careful circumlocution, as I have shown in my quotation on p. 109. In practical life it is seldom needful to convey the idea of annihilation. And, when required, it is easily done, as Plato does it, by the addition of a few defining words.

The teaching of the Old Testament occupies only a small place in my exposition of the future punishment of sin, not for want of authority, but because we find there so little which adds to the

plain and abundant teaching of the New Testament. On the other hand, for the meaning of the word *eternal* I have frequently quoted the Old Testament because of its frequent use there.

Dr. Petavel asks me to go with him 'one step further.' If he will show me in the Bible words describing the fate of the lost and implying clearly their final extinction, I will go with him. But such words with such clear meaning, I am, after prolonged search, unable to find. There are passages and groups of passages which at first sight seem to teach the extinction of the lost or the ultimate extinction of evil; as there are others which describe their continued suffering without any hint of its cessation. But in neither case do the words of Holy Scripture justify confident assertion. And he who speaks in God's name is bound to go no further than the written Word clearly warrants.

At the same time, I readily admit that the advocates of what they call 'Conditional Immortality' have done good service by exposing the baselessness of the popular doctrine of the intrinsic and endless permanence of the human soul. They have also done good service by demanding a reconsideration of the whole matter; and by protesting against a theory long dominant in the Christian pulpit which, as I believe, goes far beyond the teaching of Holy Scripture.

## Recent Foreign Theology.

### Bruston on 'The Logia.'<sup>1</sup>

PROFESSOR BRUSTON of Toulouse, whose views on the Oxyrhynchus Fragment have been already partially laid before our readers (see THE EXPOSITORY TIMES, February 1898, p. 221), has published a tractate, which will be a useful addition to the Logia literature. He still maintains his adherence to the view of Abbé Batiffol that the transcription of the text should be in the reverse order of that adopted by Grenfell and Hunt.

This little work is supplemented by a note on

<sup>1</sup> *Les Paroles de Jésus récemment découvertes en Égypte, et Remarques sur le texte du fragment de l'Évangile de Pierre.* Par C. Bruston. Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, 1898.

three passages of the *Gospel of St. Peter*, which, in the opinion of Professor Bruston, have not been correctly given by the editors.

### Krüger's 'Nachträge.'<sup>2</sup>

THIS is a very useful appendix to Professor Krüger's work, *Geschichte d. altchrist. Litteratur in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten*, which forms one of the well-known series, 'Grundriss d. Theol. Wissenschaften.' The voluminous literature and the rapid progress of patristic studies speedily

<sup>2</sup> *Nachträge zu Geschichte der altchrist. Litteratur.* Von G. Krüger. Edinburgh and London: Williams & Norgate, 1897. Price 9d. net.