

HELL LESS POPULAR WITH METHODISTS.

REV. J. A. FAULKNER of Drew Theological Seminary has given to the world his opinion on this subject, in the columns of *The Methodist Review*. We quote as follows:

HELL ONCE POPULAR.

"(1) It is within the memory of men now living that frequently the declaration was heard from the pulpit that there were infants and children in hell. (2) The descriptions of hell were frightfully realistic; that is, realistic as judged from a literal interpretation of the Scripture. Vivid pictures of physical torment were frequent. (3) The impression was made that the vast majority of mankind--including all, or nearly all, the heathen world--were doomed to eternal destruction [*torment?*]. (4) This doctrine formed a staple of preaching to an extent not known to-day. Then it was a frequent theme, now it is a rare theme in the pulpit.

WHY LESS POPULAR NOW.

"If we inquire the causes which have led to this change of emphasis and attitude toward the doctrine of hell, I think we may mention the following: (1) The growth of humanitarian sentiment. Thirty or fifty years ago there were severer ideas as to punishment in general, and a more calloused feeling in regard to suffering, than is the case today. Take the treatment of prisoners and the prevalence of capital punishment. Treatment that we would consider shockingly cruel, that would arouse a feeling of indignation in all minds, was then taken as a matter of course. It was so in regard to school discipline. I was in common school between 1865 and 1872. In years so recent as those, I say distinctly that the punishments in vogue were cruel and barbarous. But they were never so considered then. The growth of love, the larger influence of the spirit of Christ on society, has made an entire change in the atmosphere in which we live. That change has silently made obsolete and of none effect the kind of preaching that once was powerful on the minds of men. (2) Theological developments have also had their influence. Methodism has made familiar the thought that God deals not only justly with all men, but mercifully as well, that there is an impartiality in His treatment of souls, that men must be given an equal chance of salvation, that no man will be condemned for rejecting a Christ he never heard of, or for sinning against light he never had....

"(3) The better understanding of Scripture also accounts in part for the change in the thought of hell. Our familiarity with the modes of speech in the East, the intense imagery, the word-painting, the use of parable, figure, simile, with which Oriental speech abounds--all this has made us skeptical of the hard and matter-of-fact methods of our Western speech when it coarsely makes literal what the sacred writers left figurative. In other words we now understand that in that fresh, imaginative, child-like age the sacred writers, necessarily spoke, as Easterns, that the Holy Spirit had to use the only vehicle that was open to him, and that therefore we must seek to interpret in our Western tongue the truths that underlay the extravagant, tropical descriptions of the Oriental writers. The growth of the science of Biblical hermeneutics has had its share in modifying the old-fashioned ideas of hell.

"First, it has made sad the hearts of those whom God has not made sad. It has turned the hopes of thousands of devout believers into ashes, and filled the souls of God's children with tormenting doubts and dark forebodings as to their own salvation and the salvation of their friends. The brilliant and pious Henry Rogers expressed the despair which this doctrine wrought in him: 'For my part I should not grieve if the whole race of mankind died in its fourth year. As far as I can see I do not know that it would be a thing much to be

lamented.' Albert Barnes confesses to the same confusion of spirit: 'In the distress and anguish of my own spirit I confess that I see no light whatever. I see not one ray to disclose to me the reason why sin came into the world, why the earth is strewn with the dying and the dead, and why man must suffer to all eternity.' These two testimonials from eminent divines in England and America may be taken as representing thousands of similar questionings and thoughts of despair in those who have tried to realize the full meaning of the popular doctrine when it was a living thing: Second, the doctrine has worked havoc in turning those who otherwise [R2900 : page 342] might have been Christians into infidels. It was this which made an infidel of the elder Mill. 'Compared with this,' he says, 'every other objection to Christianity sinks into insignificance.' It helped make Theodore Parker a Unitarian. It gave an immense impetus to the spread of Universalism and Unitarianism, and afforded a ready fulcrum to the lever by which the preachers of these two sects lifted the people away from Christianity. It will be found that the preaching of hell, in the fashion common some years ago, works in an entirely opposite way from that which the preacher wishes: that is, it turns those away from Christ whom he desires to influence by a salutary fear, and those who are already Christians or on the way to Christ it fills with anguish, doubts and despair."

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We are glad to see this professor so candid and outspoken; and rejoice that the editor of *The Methodist Review* had the courage to publish the article. It will do good in the way of loosing the bonds of superstition and helping prepare some for the truth; yet it is deficient in that it does not go far enough and show up the basis of the error to be the misunderstanding and misrepresentation of God's Word through mistranslations, etc., which have deceived the minds of lay-readers and grossly misrepresented the divine character and plan. For these reasons it *tends* in the direction it condemns--toward Universalism and Unitarianism, with all that this means as respects a denial of the fall of man and of his redemption by the great ransom-price of Calvary. It means a loss of reverence for the Bible under the false supposition that it supports or in any degree sanctions this atrocious calumny against God and human reason.

Now is the time to properly assist those whom Dr. Faulkner may have awakened--before they stumble into skepticism. We know of nothing so helpful to such newly awakened ones as the pamphlet, "*What Say the Scriptures About Hell?*" followed by "*The Divine Plan of the Ages.*" We supply these "helping hands" or "Bible keys" at very low prices or loan them free to those who so request.

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ARE YOU WATCHING?

Are you watching for the "presence"
Of the Reaper of the field?
Knowest thou what "signs" proclaim Him
Tho' at present He's concealed?
Dost thou watch with straining vision
For the dawning of the day?
Can'st thou hear the legions tramping
On Emmanuel's highway?

Art thou faint with weary vigils,
Looking for thy coming Lord?

Have thine eyes grown dim with weeping,
Sick at heart with hope deferred?
Sore discouraged at the prospect
Of the field so full of tares,
And the Prince of Evil working
To encompass us with snares?

Sad indeed it seems, my brother,
When we view from earthly height;
For we fail to see the sunshine
That disperses present night.
Climb the peak, O, weary pilgrim,
Of our God's eternal truth,
And from thence behold the landscape!
Then shalt thou renew thy youth.

We'll not think God's arm is shortened
When upon that height we stand;
For His purposes are rip'ning,
And His own shall rule the land.
Tho the night precedes the morning,
Yet at last shall rise the Sun;
And the shadows quickly vanished,
Shall proclaim the morn has come.

Know his "presence" then, O pilgrim!
"In like manner" hath He come.
Reapers, now the sickle wielding,
Soon shall sing the "Harvest Home."
Tares are burning. Wheat is gath'ring,
Soon shall all be gathered in.
Welcome ye the "Lord of Harvest,"
Who shall triumph over sin.
A. J. Morris, M.D.

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