

OF SCRIPTURE TERMS USED TO EXPRESS
 "ETERNITY," WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE
 TO FUTURE PUNISHMENT.

A FEW years ago I published three *Letters on Future Punishment*. In the argument I called attention to the fact that each of the three forms of words used to describe the eternity of God, of the worship paid to Him, and of the blessedness of the righteous, is applied also to describe the eternity of the state of those who die in sin and unbelief. These forms are three: (a) Some form of the singular of αἰών—εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, *for ever, for evermore*; used of God (2 Cor. ix. 9), of Christ (John viii. 35), of the redeemed (John vi. 51, 58), and of the wicked (Jude 13). The following variants are also found: εἰς αἰῶνα (2 Pet. ii. 17), εἰς ἡμέραν αἰῶνος (2 Pet. iii. 18), εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ αἰῶνος (Heb. i. 8, *for ever and ever*). (b) Some form of the plural—εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων, *for ever, for evermore, for ever and ever*; used of God and Christ (Rom. i. 25, 1 Pet. v. 11, 2 Cor. xi. 31), of the saved (Luke i. 33, Rev. xxii. 5), and of the wicked (Rev. xix. 3, xx. 10). Variants are: τῶν αἰώνων, *eternal* (1 Tim. i. 17), εἰς πάντας τοὺς αἰῶνας; used of God (Jude 25), εἰς αἰῶνας αἰώνων (Rev. xiv. 11), τοῦ αἰῶνος τῶν αἰώνων (Eph. iii. 21, *world without end*). And (c) αἰώνιος, always rendered *eternal* or *everlasting*: used of the eternal God (Rom. xvi. 26), and of the eternal Spirit or of Christ (Heb. ix. 14); of the eternal inheritance, the eternal life, the eternal glory, the eternal kingdom which the eternal gospel gives (Heb. ix. 15, 1 Tim. vi. 12, 2 Tim. ii. 10, 1 Pet. v. 10, 2 Pet. i. 11, Rev. xiv. 6); and of the eternal judgment, the eternal punishment, the eternal fire, the eternal destruction of the wicked (Heb. vi. 2, Matt. xxv. 46, 41, 2 Thess. i. 9).

The second of these phrases (εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων) is found apparently only in the New Testament, though there

is a similar phrase, in the singular, in the Old. In the Epistles it occurs seven times in doxologies addressed to God. In Revelation it occurs fourteen times, and is applied to God and to Christ, to the saints, and to the state of the wicked. It is the only form of *αἰών* found in that book.

Of these phrases, (a) and (b) are used of future time fifty-seven times, and in every case they are all three used of God and of the righteous and of the punishment of the wicked. The third phrase (c) is used of future time sixty-eight times, and is applied in the New Testament to God, to the blessedness of the saved, and to the punishment of the wicked; and to nothing else. Matthew, Mark, John (in his Gospel, Epistles, and Revelation), Peter, Jude, and Paul, all use one or more of these phrases, and apply them to one or more of the three things I have named, and to nothing else. Not unfrequently the phrases are used in the same context to describe "eternal consolation" and "eternal destruction," "eternal life" and "eternal condemnation," "darkness for ever," and "reigning for ever." There is no diversity of meaning in these phrases in the New Testament, and no such looseness or indefiniteness of usage as some have supposed.

It may, no doubt, be asked whether these expressions, which differ in intensity, differ also in meaning—in extent of duration. Does *εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα* imply a shorter "everness" than *εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας*? I think not. The Authorized Version translates the singular *for evermore* (Heb. vii. 28) as well as *for ever*, and it is frequently applied to God and to Christ. The plural it translates *for ever, for ever and ever, for evermore*. And both singular and plural are applied in the same context to the godly (Luke i. 33, 55). The fact is, that in common life the phrase *εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα*, like the simpler form *ἀεὶ*, and like the English phrase "for ever," came to have a lighter meaning, though there is no certain instance of that meaning in the New Testament. Hence

arose the more emphatic expressions found in English and in Greek. *Evermore*, in truth, is of no longer duration than *for ever* in its proper sense. So the English translators thought, using each form for singular or plural. In *εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα*, the "everness" is regarded as one and indivisible; in *εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας* (for ever and ever), the "everness" is regarded as made up of "evernesses," which together form the "everness" proper.¹ I may add however that translators should mark uniformly the three different Greek expressions, which correspond, in fact, to our own. *For ever*, *for evermore*, *for ever and ever*, represent exactly different Greek forms, and ought to have been used accordingly in the English versions, though not on the ground that they represent different degrees of duration.

In the *Letters* I state that I deal with *New Testament* usage alone. Twice however I generalize, and affirm that the above phrases are the only phrases in *Scripture* used to describe the future duration of the worship, etc., paid to God, of the blessedness of the righteous, and of the punishment of the wicked. In Canon Farrar's volume on *Mercy and Judgment* he questions, and even denies, this last statement with sadness and surprise. He asks whether I have not read passages in the LXX. where stronger expressions are used of God and salvation than are used of the punishment of the wicked. He also gives a number of expressions in the New Testament or elsewhere which he thinks are stronger than these, and are not applied to the state of the wicked. I do not complain of this appeal, though perhaps one or two phrases used might have been spared. The question is simply a question of fact, and our judgment should follow the evidence. This evidence I proceed to supply. I will give first the Hebrew phrases for eternity used in the Hebrew Scriptures; then the renderings of the LXX. and of the English version, with specimen passages

¹ See Thayer's edition of *Grimm and Wilke's Dictionary*, sub voce.

where each expression is applied to the duration of the praise, etc., offered to God, of the blessedness bestowed on righteousness, and of the punishment of the wicked. As the quotations are taken, for convenience, from the Authorized Version, allowance must be made for well-known variations of psalm or verse when comparing them with the Hebrew and the Septuagint.

I. לְעוֹלָם (?), *perpetuity, to the end.* εἰς τέλος, etc.

Ps. xvi. 11, "pleasures for evermore"—applied to the happiness of the righteous. So Ps. xlix. 19, "never": LXX. *ἕως αἰῶνος*; Heb. לְעוֹלָם עַד .

Job xx. 7, "he shall perish for ever"—of the wicked.

Isa. xxxiii. 20, "for ever," εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα χρόνον, describing the security of Jerusalem.

Isa. xxxiv. 10, "for ever and ever" (לְעוֹלָם וָעוֹלָם), "to the very last," a strong form, generally rendered εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα χρόνον; here very feebly and exceptionally, εἰς χρόνον πολὺν—applied to the punishment of the wicked.

II. עַד (?), *duration, futurity, eternity* (sing.): and עַד עַד , *duration of duration* (pl.).

Ps. lxi. 8, "for ever," εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ αἰῶνος, or εἰς αἰῶνα αἰῶνος (Ps. xxi. 6), of praise offered to God (sing.).

Ps. xxii. 26, "for ever," εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ αἰῶνος, of the blessedness of the righteous (sing.).

Ps. cxxxii. 12, 14, "for evermore," "for ever," *ἕως τοῦ αἰῶνος, εἰς αἰῶνα αἰῶνος*—of God (pl.).

Isa. xxvi. 4, "for ever"—of believers (pl.).

Ps. xcii. 7, "destroyed for ever," εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ αἰῶνος, of the punishment of the wicked (pl.).

Ps. lxxxiii. 17, "let them be troubled for ever," εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ αἰῶνος—of the wicked (pl.).

III. לְעוֹלָם , and with לְ prefixed, *perpetuity, etc.* *ἕως τοῦ αἰῶνος, ἕως εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, εἰς αἰῶνα αἰῶνος, αἰῶνιος*, "for ever"—used nearly three hundred times of God and the righteous, and some thirty times of the punishment of the wicked. Other less usual renderings are *ἕως αἰῶνος τῶν αἰῶνων* (Dan. vii. 18), *εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας* (for the sing., Mic. iv. 7) as *εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα* is used for the plural. לְעוֹלָם , the nom., is also translated by *αἰῶνιος*, the adj., and is applied to "everlasting life" as well as to "everlasting contempt" (Dan. xii. 2).

IV. Other combinations are found, especially with עַד עַד : עוֹלָם עוֹלָם

עַד, עַדְּוָם, עוֹלָם, עוֹלָםְלְעוֹלָםְ. These are generally rendered (more than twenty times) εἰς αἰῶνα αἰῶνος, or εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ αἰῶνος, or εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα καὶ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τὸν αἰῶνος.

Rare and exceptional modes of rendering—attempts to bring out the fulness of the expression—are the following:

Εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα καὶ ἐπέκεινα ("beyond," Mic. iv. 5), "for ever and ever."

Ἔως τοῦ αἰῶνος ἔτι, Isa. xlv. 17, "world without end."

Εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα καὶ ἔτι, in Dan. xii. 3, "for ever and ever," and in Exod. xv. 18 (with ἐπί

instead of εἰς), "for ever and ever."

The phrase is used of God and of the righteous. It is also used of the wicked, *olam va-ad*, in Ps. ix. 5, "for ever and ever," though there the LXX. translates the phrase εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα καὶ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ αἰῶνος.

Ἔτι itself is used in connexion with the punishment of the wicked in Rev. xviii. 22-24, as it is of the righteous in Rev. vii. 16; and with οὐ and μὴ, and is rendered "no more at all."

So with a neg. in Ps. xlix. 19, "never." LXX. ἕως αἰῶνος; Heb. חַצְּקָ עַד.

Two or three facts need to be noted in connexion with this list.

1. Various as the Hebrew expressions are—some fifteen combinations—they are all expressed by forms and combinations of αἰών, and rarely is any other form used. In some five hundred passages αἰών is used to translate the many combinations of the Hebrew words; and though in a dozen places or so εἰς τέλος is used, and in four or five places ἔτι, the general rendering of all these forms is αἰών, while the variants ἔτι and εἰς τέλος are used of punishment as well as of reward. In the Old Testament αἰών is occasionally used, as עוֹלָם is, of a temporary "everness"; but in by far the great majority of cases it has its full meaning, and in the New Testament, when applied to future time, it has no other meaning, unless the phrase "eternal punishment" is an exception. The phrases αἰεί, ἔς αἰεί, πάντοτε, (εἰς τὸ) διηνεκές, παντελής, which Canon Farrar suggests would have been decisive, are never used in the

Old Testament to express eternity, either of God or of the righteous; nor are they used (as we shall see) for that purpose in the New.

2. It seems clear that the Greek words of the LXX. were used like the Hebrew words, and like our own *for ever* and *for ever and for ever*, not because the simple form did not mean "for ever," but because "for ever" was sometimes applied in those languages, as in our own, to express the continuity of a temporary "everness," and it was deemed important to guard against this meaning. The various forms were in fact interchangeable, as they are in the English Scriptures. עַד, for example, may mean eternity, and is applied to God (Isa. lvii. 15); but it may mean also continuousness, like the *dictator perpetuus* of the Romans; and hence it is translated sometimes by the plural εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας (Ps. lxi. 8). עַד עַד, again, the plural, is translated by the singular (Ps. cxxxii. 13, 14). עוֹלָם, the sing., is translated by εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας (Ps. lxxxv. 5, civ. 31; Dan. iv. 31), and עוֹלָמִים by the singular (Isa. li. 9, Dan. v. 10). Even the phrase עַד וְ, appended to other words, which Canon Farrar deems so remarkable, and is translated four times by ἔτι or ἐπέκεινα, is generally translated by combinations of αἰών only, and by combinations less strong than the τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰῶνων of the New Testament. This inconsistency of rendering, where the meaning is undoubted, shows that in Greek, as in English, "ever," "evermore," "ever and ever," each expressed proper "everness" of duration.

I now come to consider some particular words which, it is said, would be decisive if Scripture used them; and as Scripture does not use them of future punishment, the duration of it is either simply indefinite or is not revealed.

"There are two very simple adverbs in the New Testament," says Canon Farrar, "either of which would have been regarded as decisive." One is αἰεί, the other πάντοτε;

each, he adds, is used eight times, but not once of future punishment.

"The glory of Christ lasts to 'all the ages' (*εἰς πάντας τοὺς αἰῶνας*). That phrase would have been regarded as decisive; so would various combinations of *οὐδέ* or *ἐς αἰεί* and *ἀνευ τέλους*. *Εἰς τὸ παντελές* is a strong phrase, and occurs *once*; and *εἰς τὸ διηνεκές* is a strong phrase, and occurs *twice*. Why is neither used of future punishment? Why is not the stronger and clearer word *ἀίδιος* used? And how is it that an adjective is employed which is far more frequently used of things not endless but terminable?" Such are the statements and questions of Canon Farrar.

These seem grave objections. But they are easily answered. In fact, the details and the principles are alike wanting in accuracy.

It will be conceded that the eternity of God and of the blessedness of the righteous is revealed and described in the Old Testament—of God certainly, and the eternal blessedness of the righteous probably; while in the New Testament both are clearly revealed. And yet, with one or two exceptions, none of the words which it is said would have made the doctrine clear are found in the LXX. Nor are they found in the New Testament; or, if found, they have no reference to eternity.

αἰεί is used twice in LXX. of the Old Testament, in two passages only, Psalm xciv. 10 (*not* in the Hebrew or in the English version) and Isaiah li. 13, and in neither place is eternity implied. In the New Testament *αἰεί* does not generally mean eternally in the eight passages where it is found (Mark xv. 8, Tit. i. 12, 1 Pet. iii. 15, etc.).

Strong negative combinations of *οὐδέ*, *οὔτέ*, *οὐ μή*, etc., or similar words, are found, Matthew xii. 32, Mark iii. 29 (*οὐκ . . . εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα*), *οὐ μή* with *ἔτι*. These are at least as numerous in the New Testament as in the Old.

Ἐς αἰεί is not found either in the Old Testament or in the New, nor is ἄνευ τέλους. πάντοτε is found in the New Testament two and forty times (not eight times, as Dr. Farrar states), and is never found in the Old. In the New it implies eternity in only one or two passages: "The poor ye have *always* with you"; "*always* bearing about in the body," etc.; "*always* ready to give a reason for the hope," etc. "Ever with the Lord" may mean eternally; but it would be a feeble proof, if it stood alone. Εἰς τὸ παντελής and εἰς τὸ διηκεές are not found in the LXX. In the New Testament παντελής occurs twice (not once) and διηκεής four times (and not twice only). Eternity is expressed by neither of them in any of the passages. Παντελής, like the other form of the word, ὀλοτελής (1 Thess. v. 23), means complete for all purposes, and διηκεής means continuous, the (*dictator*) *perpetuus* of the Romans. Any good dictionary will give the meaning; and in Bleek's *Commentary on the Hebrews* the meaning is proved by a large number of passages. See also Luke xiii. 11 (for παντελής), and Hebrews vii. 3 and x. 1 (for διηκεής). Αἰδῖος is said to be a strong, clear word; but again let me note that it is not found in the LXX. Once it is used in the New Testament of God (Rom. i. 20), and once, in Jude 6 (not of a temporary fire, as Canon Farrar states, p. 388, but) of angels kept in everlasting bonds under darkness unto judgment. Both αἰδῖος and αἰώνιος are from αἰεί, and are the only derivatives of αἰεί used in Scripture. Εἰς πάντα τοὺς αἰῶνας is said to be decisive; but, it is added, it is only used of God. Again the remark applies, neither is it used in the Old Testament, and it is used only once in the New. Moreover is it stronger than εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τῶν αἰῶνων, or than εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰῶνων, which last phrase with its articles is used in the New Testament to describe God's glory, the Church's blessedness, and the punishment of the

wicked? That *αἰώνιος* "is far more frequently used of things not endless" is surely a mistake. We are dealing with Scripture usage. Sixty-six times *αἰώνιος* is used of future time in the New Testament. Can any student mention six passages, including all that speak of future punishment, in which the things spoken of are not as lasting as the being of God and the blessedness of the redeemed? Even in the case of the Old Testament the result will not be very different if we keep in mind two things: first, when dealing with the Hebrew, a language that expresses its adjectives largely by nouns, we must include *εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα* and its kindred forms under *αἰώνιος*, and treat both as adjectives; and, secondly, the expressions applied to Israel have allusive reference to the kingdom of Christ and to believers. What is a limited eternity when applied to the type is a real eternity when applied to the antitype. The "for evers" of Psalm lxxii. are not properly limited to the literal "king's son," and the "everlasting joy" of those who return to Zion is not really a blessing that ends with the Jews. Under these two conditions, a very large proportion of the expressions that seem to speak of what is endless really speak of what is endless, and they justify the conclusion that even in the Old Testament the common meaning of *αἰώνιος* and its Hebrew equivalents is eternal. If it is not, then the eternity of the blessed God and the eternity of the blessedness of the righteous are not revealed. In the New Testament certainly the general meaning of the term *αἰώνιος* is clear.

May I not say then, the words which Canon Farrar thinks would make all clear are most of them not used in the Old Testament at all, and in the New are not applied to God and to the blessedness of the righteous? If in a few passages of the LXX. (five in all) there are what seem to him stronger expressions than those used of the wicked

(ἔτι, etc., or its equivalent), then I remark that such expressions are simply variant renderings of Hebrew words which are generally translated by some form or combination of αἰών, and that in fact they are used of the punishment of the wicked as well as of the blessedness of the righteous.

In answer to these facts, Canon Farrar suggests that αἰώνιος does not refer to time at all, but means super-sensuous and spiritual. This notion is not new, but it is modern and peculiar. Three distinct grounds have been assigned for this meaning. First, it is said that αἰών comes from ἄημι, to breathe; and as spiritual comes from *spiro*, to breathe, spiritual is a fair and literal translation. Secondly, it is said αἰῶνες is used in Gnostic philosophy for spiritual beings, emanations from God, good and bad; and as God is a spirit, these emanations are spiritual. A third explanation of this meaning, an explanation adopted by Canon Farrar, is, that as ὁ αἰὼν οὗτος is "this world," and ὁ αἰὼν ἐρχόμενος is the future world, the reign of the Messiah and that new world is spiritual, αἰώνιος meaning spiritual. These philological reasons amount to very little. The derivation of αἰών from ἄημι finds small favour with modern lexicographers, as it found none with Aristotle (see *Cremer's* second, third, and fourth editions of Grimm, and Thayer's *Grimm's Wilke's Clavis*). The Gnostic philosophy is later than most of the Old Testament, and cannot have suggested the meaning of αἰώνιος. And as for Canon Farrar's suggestion, that because the coming kingdom is spiritual, therefore αἰώνιος means spiritual, it is liable to the objection that the Jewish αἰὼν was not spiritual, but earthly, and αἰώνιος alone could not have expressed a *spiritual* quality.

Nor must it be forgotten that αἰών is essentially descriptive of time and duration. Ἄπ' αἰῶνος and εἰς αἰῶνα can have no other meaning; while the adjective αἰώνιος takes its meaning from the Greek noun, and is nearly always in

the LXX. the rendering of the Hebrew noun עֹלָם or עֹלָמִים. There is nothing "spiritual" about them, and these words are translated in the Old Testament by αἰώνιος upwards of a hundred times.

The general reader can judge for himself of the accuracy of Dr. Farrar's explanation. The coming world or age is spiritual, therefore αἰώνιος means spiritual, is the argument. But the Jewish world is called an αἰών too. Is that spiritual also? What does Canon Farrar make of the announcement that to God belongs "eternal," *i.e.* spiritual "power" (1 Tim. vi. 16)? How can Christ be said by the eternal Spirit, *i.e.* by a spiritual Spirit (whether His own nature or the Holy Ghost) to have offered Himself unto God (Heb. ix. 14)? How could the gospel have been kept in silence for "spiritual ages," though now revealed (2 Tim. i. 9). How is God blessed unto the spiritualities (εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας)? How is glory to be given to Him unto all the spiritualities of spiritualities? How can no fruit be found on the barren fig tree unto the spirituality?

No doubt there are combinations of αἰών—eternal life, for example—which make mere continuance of being "very poor" translations of the thought. The Life is itself holy, spiritual, blessed. But this fulness is not in "the eternal," but in "the life." Once understand what the life is—the true life: and eternal life expresses it all, far better than "spiritual, supersensuous existence."

In short, the notion that αἰώνιος means supersensuous or spiritual is philologically a mistake, and it makes a poor sense of most of the passages in the New Testament where the expression is found.

I repeat therefore the conclusion to which I had previously come. The three forms of expression used in the New Testament to describe the duration of God's glory and the duration of the blessedness of the righteous are also

the forms used to express the duration of the punishment of the wicked. I now widen the statement, and re-affirm that it is equally true of expressions used in the Old Testament. The phrases moreover which Dr. Farrar thinks stronger, and which would have decided the question of the duration of the punishment of the wicked (*ἐς αἰεί*, for example) are either not used in Scripture to describe God's eternity and the blessedness of the righteous, or they are rare and human renderings in the LXX. of Hebrew words which are the common expressions for continued duration, and are as such rendered *εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα*, etc., and are applied to all the three things to which I had affirmed that they are applied. If not found in Scripture at all (as *ἐς αἰεί*), or if found only as very occasional human variants (*καὶ ἔτι*, etc.) used in translating the same Hebrew phrases, nothing can be made of them in connexion with this argument.

In this paper I have kept throughout to questions of philology. Other questions there are, no doubt, connected with this awful theme; but they are beyond my present purpose. One practical lesson remains.

Every form of words employed in the Gospels to describe the everness of the Divine nature and the blessedness of the righteous is employed to describe the everness of the punishment of the wicked. The last two are generally found in the same context, each the complement of the other. The same terms are used by Paul in his Epistles for the same purposes. In Revelation, the form used to describe everness is the strongest of all—*εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων*. Whatever terms are used in the Old Testament to describe the first two are used also to describe the third. These words are used everywhere without qualification of any kind, and again and again. There is no hint in any of these contexts of a larger hope; and no suspicion seems to be felt by the writers that their message dis-

honours God or shocks the consciences of men. Is it not our safer course to deliver the gospel as Christ delivered it, and Paul and John? We may think that "destruction" is literal, and that the time will come when all sin and sinners will have ceased out of the universe of God. We may think that Christ's supremacy means that all intelligent natures will be at last lovingly subject to Him, and that the enemies who become "the footstool of His feet" are among His dearest friends. Finding relief in such an issue, we may be tempted to omit or to tone down or to explain away the sharp, strong, decisive utterances of our Lord addressed so often to the selfish, the impenitent, and the disbelieving. But this temptation we must resist. Christ, who was love and righteousness incarnate, who knew the meaning of all the texts that are quoted in favour of a larger hope, never allowed them to stifle His warnings or to soften His descriptions of "the wrath to come." To preach to sinners a larger hope, *i.e.* another chance, or the final salvation of all men, is not the message of the gospel. It is without sanction in appeals of inspired men; and it may precipitate the very ruin it professes to deplore. Fear and love are both among the motives whereby men are drawn to God; and it is at our peril that we cease to use either of them. Surely it is not too much to ask that we use Christ's own warnings, and so commend our message to men's consciences as well as to their hearts. To find offence in Him or in His words is not the spirit of faithful servants.

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