

נתיבות עולם

עמדו על דרכים וראו ושאלו לנתיבות עולם ירמיהו שז

"THE OLD PATHS."—JER. vi. 16.

NUMBER 38.]

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 30, 1836.

[PRICE ONE-PENNY.]

To the fool, who hath said in his heart, There is no God, it is a matter of little consequence, whether the religion of his forefathers afford a reasonable ground of hope or not. He may therefore consistently neglect all inquiry into the nature and evidences of that religion in which he happened to be born. He does not believe in it, whatever it may be, and such an inquiry could have no interest for him. Not so with the Jew or the Christian, who honestly believes, as he has been taught, that there is, in another world, an abode of bliss, and another of woe. His earnest desire must be to know how he may attain to the one and escape the other; and if his religion does not afford him a hope, a reasonable, well-grounded hope of salvation, it is not worth the having. We say a reasonable hope, for as it has pleased God to endow us with reason and understanding, and to give us his Word to guide our reason, no other hope can or ought to satisfy us. In examining, then, the modern Jewish religion, one great test of its value is, whether it affords a hope on which a reasonable man can rely, and upon which he can hazard his eternal welfare. We think not, and we have already given some reasons for this opinion. The inconsistency and contradictory nature of the Rabbinic doctrines respecting justification and atonement appear to us so glaring as to destroy all confidence in the hope which they propose: and the custom, which prevails at this and other festivals, of praying for the dead, proves, beyond a doubt, that the Rabbinic hope is a mere delusion. Amongst the prayers of the Feast of Tabernacles, we find the following declaration and prayer:—

נתגים בתפלות ישראל לחידי נשמות אבותיו ביום כפור ובשלוש רגלים ביום מוחתו די לאודי ההספדה: וזכור אלהים נשמת אבא מורי פ פ פ שדוק לעלמו בעבור שחיי נור זדוקה בעדו בשטר זה חזא נפשו צדורה בצדו הדמים עם נשמת אברהם יצחק ויעקב שדו רבקה רדל ולאד ועם שאר צדיקים וצדקניהו שבגן עדן ונאמר אמן: וזכור אלהים נשמת אמי וכו'.

"It is customary among the dispersions of Israel, to make mention of the souls of their departed parents, &c., on the day of atonement, and the ultimate days of the three festivals; and to offer for the repose of their souls.

"May God remember the soul of my honoured father, A. B., who is gone to his repose; for that I now solemnly vow charity

for his sake; in reward of this, may his soul be bound up in the bundle of life, with the souls of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah, with the rest of the righteous males and females that are in Paradise; and let us say, Amen."

"May God remember the soul of my honoured mother," &c. (Prayer for the Feast of Tabernacles, p. 156.) Now this custom and this prayer show that the Jews themselves do not believe in their own doctrines, nor put any trust in the hopes held out by the oral law; for if they did, they would never observe this custom nor offer this prayer. If they believed that their departed parents were already safe—that their merits, or the merits of their ancestors, or the day of atonement, &c., had procured for them pardon and eternal life, why should they offer alms, and pray that God would accept the alms as a ransom for the deceased? The fact of making such a vow and offering such a prayer proves, that the Rabbinical Jew has no ground for believing in the salvation of even his own father and mother; that on the contrary his belief is, that they have not been bound up in the bundle of life, and that they are not in paradise with Abraham and the other saints; but that they are in some other place, whence he hopes, by his prayer and his alms-giving, to ransom them. Here, then, we see that the Rabbinical hope is a mere delusion. After all his fasting and ceremonial observances, he has no hope after death of going to the mansions of the blessed. His sad prospect is, that when he goes hence, he must go to the place of punishment, and there abide until the prayers and alms-giving of his children purchase his liberation. According, then, to this doctrine, every Jew and Jewess dies without pardon, for if they were pardoned, they would not go to the place of punishment, and if they did not go to the place of punishment, there would be no necessity to offer alms in order to deliver their souls. So then, after all the pretensions and promises of the rabbies, they here fairly confess that all the hopes which they have held out are a mere lie and a delusion; that none of their observances can deliver the soul, and that even after the dread hour of death, the survivors have still to undertake the work of saving the deceased.

This inference follows inevitably from the

custom and the prayer which we have just considered; but it does not rest solely on these. The oral law furnishes other adequate proof, that the Jewish survivors of a departed parent do not believe that he is safe, and that therefore a dying Jew can have no hope of his own salvation; for it requires the surviving son to repeat a certain prayer for his departed parent, and that for many months, in order to procure his release, as we read in the *Joreh Deah*—

“כ"ג דהגו לומר קדיש על אב דאם בתרא י"ג חדשי וכן דהגו לחסיד נביא לחתול שבת במצא שבוהו שהוא חזון שחורין הנשמות ליהנם ולשאתן מחללי ומקדש ברים פרהו אביו ואמו מזיננם ;

“Therefore the custom is for twelve months to repeat the prayer called Kaddish, and also to read the lesson in the prophets, and to pray the evening-prayer at the going out of the Sabbath, for that is the hour when the souls return to hell; but when the son prays and sanctifies in public, he redeems his father and his mother from hell.” (376.) Now every child who observes this custom, makes a public confession, that his deceased parent is not enjoying the bliss of Paradise, but suffering the torments of hell. This is but a poor hope for a child respecting his parent, the very utmost limit of which is, that he is not one of the notoriously wicked, and that he may perhaps, by his prayers, get him out of the place of torment. But if he believes in the oral law, he must be convinced that his father or mother, with all their exertions, and notwithstanding the merits of their forefathers, and the benefits of the day of atonement, died in sin, sunk into perdition, and that he must now undertake the work of their salvation. The dying Jew, therefore, has no hope when he dies of being admitted to a state of happiness; he cannot die with the peace of one who knows that his sins are forgiven, but must look forward with horror to at least eleven dreary months of punishment in the abodes of the damned. The doctrine of the Talmud is, that those who die in communion with the Synagogue, or who have never been Jews, are punished for twelve months, but that Jewish heretics and apostates are doomed to eternal punishment.

פושעי ישראל גונון פושעי אומות העולם גונון יחדין לגיהנם ונידונין בה שנים עשר חדש לארץ שנים עשר חדש גונון כלה ושמתן נשמתם הוה מסורתי הוה כשר דגל צדיקים שנאמר ומשחם רשעים כי ידה אשר תחת כשרת גליכם אבל המינין המסוימות המאוקרותן שנאמר בתורה ושכחו בתורתם הוה חסדים ושפשו מדכי צבור ושנתנו הוהיה באין דיים ושחמאן החשיאו את דרבים כגון ידעם בן נכש חבירי יחדין ליהנין ונידונין בה לדורי דורות ;

“Israelites who sin with their body, and also Gentiles, descend into hell, and are judged there for twelve months. After the twelve months their body is consumed and

their souls burnt, and the wind scatters them under the soles of the feet of the righteous, as it is said, ‘Ye shall tread down the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet.’ (Mal. iv. 3.) But heretics, and informers, and Epicureans, who have denied the law or the resurrection of the dead, or who have separated from the customs of the congregation, or who have caused their fear in the land of the living, who have sinned, or caused many to sin, as Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, all such go down to hell and are judged for ever.” (Rosh. Hashanah, fol. 17. I.) According to this, the dying Israelite ought to expect twelve months of torment, and his surviving son ought to repeat the prescribed prayer for twelve months, but the rabbies have commanded that the prayer should be repeated only for eleven months, to intimate that the deceased was not so wicked as to be obliged to remain all the time of torment.

והגו שאין אומרים קדיש והלא רק י"א חדשים כדי שלא יעשו אביהם ואמו רשעים כי משפט רשע י"ב חדש ;

“The custom is, not to say Kaddish more than eleven months, so as not to cast a reproach on the character of the deceased father and mother as if they were wicked, for twelve months are the term appointed for the wicked.” (Joreh Deah, 376.) From this it is clear that a dying Jew's expectation must be to endure the torments of hell for at least eleven months; and when he is dead, his son confesses, in the most public manner, and the appointed prayers of the Synagogue confess, of every departed Jew, that he died in sin, and was not worthy to enter into the bliss of paradise; and express, moreover, their conviction that his portion is actually with the damned. Thus it is evident that Judaism holds out no hope of the forgiveness of sins, and that all its prescribed observances are of no avail in the hour of need. A Jew's sad contemplation on his death is, then, that he is going down to hell, and his hope of liberation is based upon the prayers of his son, or upon the fact of his being an Israelite. But is this a reasonable ground of hope? No hope of salvation can be reasonable which is not built upon a plain promise of God. Our reason can tell us nothing about either heaven or hell; and therefore no speculations of our own can satisfy us respecting either one or the other. The only satisfactory testimony can come from God's revealed will; but, in the whole volume of the Old Testament, there is not one promise declaring that an Israelite shall be delivered from hell after twelve months' punishment, or that the son's public prayers in the synagogue shall deliver the father. This is all the mere invention of the rabbies, without the least warrant from the Word of God. It is, therefore, not a hope on which

any reasonable man can rest in peace. The sum of the whole matter is, that every Jew expects to go to hell, and that he has no promise of God to assure him that he shall be redeemed thence. Judaism is not, therefore, a religion which affords a rational hope of salvation. In asserting that every Israelite must go down to hell, it teaches that sin is not forgiven by God, but must be atoned for by the personal suffering of the offender; and that happiness cannot be enjoyed until personal satisfaction has been yielded by twelve months' torments. Now if this principle were true, there could be no salvation at all. Sin, as being an offence against an infinite Being, is infinite in magnitude, and therefore requires infinite punishment. The justice of God is also infinite, and requires an infinite satisfaction; so that if this satisfaction is to be rendered by the personal suffering of the offender, that suffering must be infinite, that is, it must endure for ever and ever, and thus salvation is altogether out of the question. The Jewish hope is, therefore, unwarranted by Scripture, and contrary to reason, and, we may add, inconsistent with itself. In the custom and doctrine which we have just considered, a dying Jew is taught to hope that he shall be delivered from that place of torment, whither he is going, either on account of his son's prayers, or on account of his Jewish origin. But on his death-bed he is taught to believe that his death will be an atonement for his sins, for in his dying confession, these words are put into his mouth:—

אדם קרבה עון ספקדו למות • ודא מידעו משה
 לכל חסאמי • לכל עונתי • לכל משי סדסאמי
 ושעירי ושסעתי מיום ודעתי :

“But if the time of my visitation to death be near, O let my death be an expiation for all my sins, iniquities, and transgressions, wherein I have sinned, offended, and transgressed against thee, from the day of my existence.” These two doctrines are plainly contrary the one to the other. If death be an atonement for all sins, then, when it is once suffered, all these sins are forgiven, and there is no need of further punishment in hell for twelve months. But if this further punishment be inflicted, then the death of the individual is not an atonement for his sins. The Jew may choose which of these hopes he pleases; but whichever he may assert to be true, the other is necessarily false; and if one be false, then the oral law teaches falsehood, and cannot be depended upon with respect to the other. There is, then, in these two statements, a glaring inconsistency, which makes them both suspicious in themselves: and the Word of God is as opposed to this last statement, as to the former. The Bible represents death as a consequence and punishment of Adam's sin, not as an atonement: and hence

it is that infants die, who have never committed actual sin, and do not need an atonement on that account. Death is, therefore, a punishment, and that which is a punishment can never be an atonement. The dying Jew, then, if he be a reasonable man, has no hope that can yield him peace and consolation in that solemn hour. He prays that his death may atone for his sins, and yet believes the very contrary—that he is going down to the place of the damned, and that his son will have to undertake the work of his redemption. How any thoughtful man, especially how any Israelite who has read the Law and the Prophets, can be content with such a religion, we cannot comprehend. The very essence of religion, the very consideration that gives it any value, is the comfort which it affords to the departing sinner. If it cannot soothe, support, and comfort him in the hour of death, it is not worth the having. The Christian faith is very different, and, in our opinion, far more in accordance with the Old Testament. We believe, in the first place, that there is a full and perfect pardon for all sins by the atonement of the Messiah, so that the sinner who dies in repentance and faith, is delivered from all punishment and other consequences of sin, and enters at once into the abodes of the blessed, there to await the morning of the resurrection. The Old Testament promised that Messiah should bear our sins. The New Testament tells us that He has borne them, and that therefore we can “now be justified from all things from which we could not be justified by the law of Moses.” (Acts xiii. 38, 39.) It tells us that “God made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Cor. v. 21); and “that if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus, the Messiah, the Righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” (1 John ii. 1, 2.) We believe, therefore, that Messiah has borne all that we ought to have borne, as the Prophet says—

מכר שדמנו מלוי נדברנו נשא לנו :

“The chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed,” (Isaiah liii. 5,) and that now we are delivered. There is no twelvemonth of torment awaiting those whom Messiah has redeemed, neither do we trust in our own death as a possible atonement. Our hope is firmly fixed, and, therefore, though sinners, we can die in peace, resting on the salvation which God himself hath wrought, in no fear of the torments of the damned, but humbly expecting, for the Messiah's sake, to be admitted into the mansions of the blessed. Resting on this hope, the Christian can say, “To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” (Philip. i. 21.)

He can look forward from death to the glorious consummation, as St. Paul did, who, when the hour of his martyrdom approached, was enabled to say, "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." The Christian expects after death not to spend twelve dreary months in hell, "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: if so be, that being clothed, we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life." (2 Cor. v. I—4.) Such is the hope which Christianity holds out, and it is hardly necessary to prove that it is more satisfactory, and more calculated to convey peace to the conscience of a dying believer, than the dread prospect of twelve months' sojourn in the place of torment. This in itself proves, that Christianity is greatly superior to Judaism, and even affords a presumption that Christianity is true. Reason tells us, that if God has given a revelation at all, that revelation must contain the way of obtaining pardon for sins, and be able to administer consolation to the dying. In this respect Judaism fails. It promises forgiveness and justification to a thousand ceremonial observances, but in the hour of man's extremity, it tells him that there is no way of pardon, but that he must go down into torment, and expiate his sins by actual suffering. This system cannot, therefore, be of God. Christianity, on the contrary, has the

first great essential in religion; it informs man how he can obtain forgiveness, and tells him how to die in peace; and the system of pardon and consolation which it proposes, is in exact accordance with the doctrine of Moses and the prophets. Moses promises pardon to an atoning sacrifice. Isaiah says, that Messiah is to be the true atonement; and Christianity rests upon these two principles. The Jew himself must admit, that our hope has at least a strong appearance of truth, and that we have the letter of the Old Testament in our favour. We have, therefore, more reason to trust to Christianity, than he has for resting on Judaism, which has not even a semblance of proof, and is as far from the letter as from the spirit of the Old Testament. We would earnestly request of every Jew to consider what is his hope in death, and what is his prospect after it? Can he be content with that which Judaism offers? Can he be happy in the prospect of twelve months' torment? Or, can the repetition of Kaddish afford him any hope of liberation from that place, whither his sins have brought him?

He cannot pretend to have any warrant from Scripture. Where does Moses tell a Jewish child to say Kaddish for his deceased parent, or that the saying of it will deliver the soul from the grasp of Divine justice? And reason does not offer a greater measure of consolation. Reason says plainly, either that the deceased is guilty or not guilty; either, therefore, justice demands that he should be punished or delivered. In the one case the prayer is unavailing, in the other unnecessary. Reason says that God either pardons or punishes; but that there is no middle way. Judaism then offers a hope equally unwarranted by reason and Scripture, and thus forsaking a poor sinner in the hour of his extremity, is not worthy of the profession of any one who uses his reason, or reveres the Word of God.

London:—Sold at the London Society's Office, 16, Exeter-hall, Strand; by James Duncan, Paternoster-row; and B. Wertheim, 57, Aldersgate-street. This publication may be had by applying at No. 5, No. 7, or No. 13, Palestine-place, Bethnal-green.

Macintosh, Printer, 20, Great New-street, London.