

The Secret of India's Greatness.

By His Holiness Jagadguru Sri Sankaracharya of Sri Govardhana Peetha.

VII

The Doctrine Of Eternal Hell.

And that Eternal Hell, mind you, is really and strictly Eternal, because they do not accept rebirth too! Once you have made even an honest mistake,—whether it be through your own want of care in analysing the historical and other material placed before you, or whether you have never even had such material placed before you and therefore no chance at all of determining the matter well,—once you have made the mistake of not believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, the Prophet Muhammad and so forth, then what do they say?

They tell you in all seriousness that, because of this, you have committed an irreparable blunder and an inexpiable sin, for which the one and only punishment prescribed is Eternal Hell and that no chance will be given to you, *even in another birth*, for repenting and retrieving the errors of this birth!

The Utter And Horrible Injustice Of It.

Such an attitude would have been bad enough and unjust enough in all conscience, even if the great Founders of these religions had, from the very time of the Creation of the World and all the time, carried their message to all the inhabitants thereof and taken adequate steps to convince them of the truth and the correctness of the teachings in question and yet, owing to lack of or

deficiency in intellectual acumen, analytical power, discriminating capacity and so forth, these poor people had failed to recognise and worship God's Prophet, only Son or other such Founder of the Religion in question! But, as a matter of fact, what do the Scriptures of these very religions themselves say on the historical aspect of this matter? When was Christ born, when Muhammad, when Zoroaster, when Buddha and when Confucius? Not according to us, but according to the accounts contained in the very Scriptures of these very religions themselves, all these great Teachers of Humanity were born thousands of years *after* the world was created! Now, our Śāstras declare that the world really began its existence millions of years ago; and Modern Science, too, proclaims the same thing through its Geological and other discoveries! But let us, just for a moment and just for argument's sake, keep aside the testimony of our Śāstras and of Modern Science and grant that Christ, Zoroaster, Buddha, Confucius, Muhammad and others were born only *a few thousand years after* the birth of the world; and let us, even on that hypothesis, consider the meaning and the implication, for instance, of the dictum: "Unless thou believest on the Lord Jesus Christ, thou shalt go to Eternal Hell!" Leaving out, for a moment, the persons who came into this world *after* the birth of Christ and after the beginning and completion of the preachings of Christ and who, in spite of all the splendid opportunities given to

them, deliberately shut their hearts to Him out of imperviousness to the Truth or even wanton "cussedness" and so forth, let us take the case of the millions of persons who were born into and lived in the world, and even went out of it, ages before He was born! What about them? Should they, too, be consigned to Eternal Hell, because, forsooth, they did not believe in and worship the Lord Jesus Christ, who was to take birth long centuries after they had passed out of existence? Where is the justice of such an arrangement? Was it *their* fault that *they* were created earlier and that *He* who was to be their Saviour was born centuries later? If God had really made such an arrangement for the Salvation of Souls on earth, all that an impartial person can say on the matter is, that *if* anybody was at all at fault herein, it certainly was *not* the fault of the poor people who were created and who died long before their Saviour was born, but it must have been the fault of the inconceivably and ridiculously stupid God Almighty who must have had better common sense than to make, but actually did make, such a blundering arrangement which was absolutely incapable of fulfilling the purpose ostensibly in His view! Even in Human Law, where people are swayed by *Rāga and Dweṣa* (i. e., by partialities and by hatreds) and other passions which often degrade Man to the level of the beast and sometimes alas! even lower still, we never find Legislation of this most unjust type which takes such retrospective effect too and which, these professed Preachers of the Word of God would have us believe, a just and a merciful God to have been, to be and to remain, continuously guilty of! The very conception of such a doctrine is the rankest

treason to God and the vilest blasphemy imaginable!

The Contradiction Therein.

In this connection, it would not be out of place for us to note that, whatever these "preachers" of Christianity may say on the matter and whatever text or texts they may cite in support of such statements of theirs from certain particular portions of the Bible (including the New Testament), there is yet the eloquent and significant fact that Christ Himself, at one place, makes it clear beyond doubt that this is an impossible position for any rational and honest thinker to take up hereon! We refer to the incident in which Christ speaks of *Abraham being in Heaven!* If we will only remember that Abraham lived and died several thousands of years before Christ's nativity and that *he* therefore could not possibly have had faith in and worshipped Christ in the manner demanded by these preachers of Christianity and if we ask them how then it happened that, under such circumstances, Abraham managed to escape from Eternal (or even Temporary) Hell and got access to Heaven, well, in reply to this, they naturally do (as they necessarily must) say:—"Yes, it is perfectly true that he could not have known about Christ and have faith in *Christ as such*, but he had faith in the Lord Almighty, looked dimly forward to a coming Redeemer and possessed various good qualities of character and of heart which rendered him eligible for a place in Heaven!" Well, this answer is quite sufficient for our purpose. If, by and on account merely of Faith in God and the possession of a few of the various elements and factors which go to form a Righteous Character, Abraham could

find his way to Heaven, an identically similar rule must and will, naturally and necessarily, hold good for other people of other times, of other climes and of other faiths, too, who have never heard about Christ or, even after hearing about Christ, have quietly and honestly pursued their own original paths of simple Faith in God and of Righteousness! In other words, they too must therefore be entitled to a similar safe niche of their own in Heaven!

The Positive And the Negative

Sides.

We have, of course, no quarrel with a Christian Preacher when he comes and says: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved". In fact, our very position is that Faith *as such* (whatever person or object be the subject thereof) is *ipso facto* bound, in its own time, to *save*. Our quarrel is merely and solely with the obverse or the negative side of this proposition, namely, that "Unless thou believest on the Lord Jesus Christ, thou shalt go to Eternal Hell". To take a simple secular instance, one can easily understand, readily appreciate and entirely agree with any one's statement that a certain doctor could and did cure a hopeless invalid who was in the last stage of Consumption, Diabetes, Typhoid or some other such disease and that, by resorting to that doctor, any one of us in a similar predicament could hope for immediate and lasting relief; but if the person goes further and says that that doctor alone can cure such diseases and that no one else in the world did, does or can ever possibly do it, no one in his right senses would be willing to accept such a sweeping proposition as correct! The position is exactly similar with regard to the

question of the Salvation of Souls, too.

The example of the apostles themselves.

It is interesting to note hereon that, when called into dialectics of comparison of Christianity with other religions, the Apostles themselves refused to be drawn thereinto and contented themselves with stating that they could but speak of the things that they themselves knew! They thus adopted the perfectly correct positive method of confining themselves to their own experience of the Spiritual benefit actually derived by them from their acceptance of Christ as their Lord, Master and Saviour; and they always fought shy of comparisons and contrasts with things which they themselves knew naught about! And this is the only rational attitude for any reasonable person to take on the matter. But the later Christian Theologians have always and consistently insisted on instituting such comparisons and contrasts and consigning the followers of other religions, not to a comparatively lower level of Happiness in Heaven, but to Hell, Positive, Absolute and Eternal! Exactly similar is the case with the preachers of the Mahomedan and other faiths also!

The Sanatanist Position.

Whereas, thus, the preachers of all the various religions of the world come and tell us that Eternal Hell is the sure and only lot of the followers of other faiths and of other paths, here, in Sanātana Dharma, it is not so; nay, we here have positive provision for all! *We* consign nobody to Eternal Hell. On the contrary, our Scriptures say specifically and categorically, in so many clear and unambiguous terms, that every person who honestly follows, in all

sincerity, any one path of Righteousness is bound to reach Humanity's Goal, namely, of Oneness with Divinity! This is a unique feature of Sanātana Dharma, which alone should suffice to place Sanātana Dharma—from the standpoint even of mere breadth of mind and sheer width of vision—on a higher plane than all the other religions of the world!

A Modernist Objection Answered.

At another place and on another occasion, while speaking on this subject, we had occasion to hear a non-Sanatani objector putting forward the curious and unhistorical explanation that this description (of ours) of Sanātana Dharma's attitude towards people of *all* religions was not historically correct, that it was an invention of the agile-brained Vivekananda in America for placating and pleasing the western world with the idea of the superior Liberality of Heart to be found in Sanātana Dharma, and so on! We answered and silenced that objector on that occasion by quoting clear texts from the most ancient Sanātani scriptures, going to show that it was not the invention of Vivekananda but the simple Historical Truth of the matter that Sanātana Dharma had absolutely no quarrel with—and, much more therefore, could not consign to Eternal Hell—people of other faiths!

Some Texts On The Subject.

Some of these Scriptures we proceed to quote. For instance, there is the clear text of the Smṛtis, which says:—

धर्मो यो वाचते धर्मो न स धर्मः कुधर्मं तत् ।
अविरोधी तु यो धर्मः स धर्म इति निश्चयः ॥

“That religion which comes into conflict with another religion is not *real*

Religion but *false* religion; and that Religion which stands alongside of and lives in peaceful amity, absolute concord and cordial co-operation with other religions—that alone is the true Religion.”

(2) And then there is the other world-renowned text, which says:—

आकाशात्पतितं तोयं यथा गच्छति सागरम् ।
सर्वदेवनमस्कारः केशवं प्रति गच्छति ॥

“Just as the rain falling from the sky (whether it falls into the Ganges, or the Jamuna, or the Narmada, or the Cauvery or the Tamraparṇi or even in your silvery Cooum (at Madras) or elsewhere, finally finds its way to the ocean, similarly does all worship (sincerely and humbly addressed) to any Deity (from the heart) lead ultimately to that one and only Omnipresent, Omnipotent and Omniscient Lord of the Universe.”

(3) Similarly, there is Bhīṣma's great doctrine:—

यं पृथग्धर्मचरणाः पृथग्धर्मफलैषिणः ।
पृथग्धर्मैः समर्चन्ति तस्मै धर्मात्मने नमः ॥

“Before that Almighty Lord whose nature is *Dharma*, and whom different Adhikāris with different tastes and desiring different fruits of action and belonging to different Dharmas, worship and propitiate with their different Dharmas—before Him I prostrate myself”.

And then, in the *Bhagavadgītā* too, we have the beautiful texts which say:—

ये यथा मां प्रपद्यन्ते तांस्तथैव भजाम्यहम् ।

(IV. 11)

“In the exact manner in which people resort to me, I respond to them.”

यो यो यां यां तनुं भक्तः श्रद्धयार्चितुमिच्छति ।
तस्य तस्याचर्त्वा श्रद्धां तामेव विदधाम्यहम् ॥

स तया श्रद्धया युक्तस्तस्याराधनमीहते ।
लभते च ततः कामान् मयैव विहितान् हितान् ॥

(VII. 21-22)

“Whichever object, body or image the devotee tries to adore with faith at heart, that very faith of his I stabilise (*i. e.*, make permanent); and, armed with that faith, he performs his worship thereof and secures therefrom his heart’s desire, which I have myself ordained.”