

## THE ETERNITY OF HELL.

On this all important subject we shall say nothing that will have the least pretence to originality; but shall confine ourselves to stating in a few words the precise teaching of the Church, and then give some extracts from the letters of J. J. Balmes to a sceptic. The subject is of the deepest importance, and of awful interest. Nothing concerns man more intimately.

The Church, instructed by her divine Founder, and resting on the express words of Holy Scripture, teaches, "that those who die in a bad state—that is, in mortal sin—shall suffer punishment without end." This is the dogma; whatever may be said about the site of this place of punishment, or about the degree and quality of its pains, is not of faith, and belongs to those points on which it is lawful to hold different opinions without wandering from Catholic belief. What we do know—for the Scripture says so expressly—is that these pains are awful; and what more do we require? Terrible pains without end! Is this idea alone not sufficient to deprive us of all curiosity regarding all other questions that might be started on the subject?

How is it possible, you say, that a God, infinitely merciful, could chastise with such rigour? How is it possible, I answer, that a God infinitely just, should not chastise with such rigour, after calling us in vain to the way of salvation through the many means with which He supplied us during life? When man offends God, the creature outrages the Creator, a finite the Infinite Being; this, then, demands a chastisement in some sense infinite. In the order of human justice an attack is more or less criminal, according to the class or rank of the person offended. With what horror a son who ill-treats his parents is regarded! What circumstance more aggravating than to offend a person in the very act of bestowing a favour on us? Well, now make an application of these ideas. Recollect that in man's offence against God, there is the rebellion of nothingness against an Infinite Being; there is the ingratitude of a son to his father; there is the disrespect of a subject to his Supreme Lord; of a weak insignificant creature to the Sovereign of heaven and earth. How many motives to intensify the fault; how many reasons to increase the severity of the punishment! For a simple attempt against the life or property of an individual, human law chastises the guilty with the pain of death—the greatest of all earthly pains, and exerts itself, does violence to itself, to inflict an infinite chastisement, by depriving the victim of all the goods of society for ever. Why, then, cannot the Supreme Judge also chastise the guilty with punishments which shall last for ever? And remember, human justice is not satisfied with repentance. The crime once consummated, the penalty follows, and it is not enough that the criminal may have changed his mode of life. God asks for a contrite and humble heart. He does not desire the death of the sinner, but that he be converted and live; nor does He discharge the fatal blow on the head of the delinquent without placing life and death before him and giving him the choice, without offering a friendly hand, through the aid of which he might escape from the edge of the precipice. Whom, then, can he blame but himself? Where is the repugnance or cruelty of these ideas? It is easy to deceive the incautious, by pronouncing emphatically *eternity of pain and infinite mercy*; but examine the matter profoundly; attend to all the circumstances connected with it, and the difficulties which at first sight presented themselves disappear like smoke. The secret of the most deceptive sophisms consists in the artifice of presenting to view one side of objects only, and approximating two ideas, which, if they appear contradictory, it is because the intermediate ones which connect them and harmonise them are left out. We all know that the most celebrated authors amongst the enemies of religion often solve the gravest and most complicated questions with an ingenious remark or a sentimental reflection. As all things have so many different aspects, it is not difficult for an acute genius to seize on two points, whose contrast may sharply wound the mind; and if to this be added something to interest the heart, it costs little trouble to upset, in the mind of the incautious, the best grounded system of doctrine.

God does not look at things with the eyes of men, nor are His immutable decrees subject to the caprices of our sickly reason; and there can be no greater forgetfulness of the idea we should form of an eternal and infinite Being, than to insist on His will accommodating itself to our foolish wishes. So accustomed is the present age to excuse crime and interest itself in the criminal, that it forgets the compassion which, on undoubtedly more just titles, is due to the victim; and gladly would it leave the latter without reparation of any kind, if it could spare the former the suffering he has deserved. Accuse as you may the dogma of the eternity of punishment of severity or cruelty; say that such a tremendous chastisement cannot be reconciled with Divine mercy; we shall answer, that neither can the want of this chastisement be reconciled with Divine justice; that the world would be surrendered to chance, and in many of its events the most repugnant injustice would be discovered, if there were not a terribly avenging God waiting for the culprit on the other side of the tomb, to demand from him an account of his perversity during his sojourn on earth.

What! Do we not at every step behold injustice haughty and triumphant; mocking the abandoned orphan, the destitute sick, the ragged and hungry poor, and unprotected widow, and insulting with its luxury and dissipation, the misery and other calamities of these unfortunate victims of its oppression and plunder? Do we not contemplate with horror heartless fathers, who, by their dissipated conduct, fill with anguish the family of which God has made them the head; hurrying to the grave a virtuous consort; plunging their children into misery, and transmitting to them no other inheritance but the sad recollection and the baneful results of a scandalous life? Do we not sometimes find unnatural sons, who cruelly insult the grey hairs of him who gave them being; abandon

him in misfortune, or never speak a word of consolation to him, and by their irregularity and insolent petulance, shorten the days of his afflicted old age? Do we not find infamous seducers, who after surprising the candour and staining the innocence of youth, cruelly desert their victim, and surrender it to all the horrors of ignominy and desperation? Ambition, perfidy, treason, fraud, adultery, malediction, calumny, and other vices that enjoy such immunity in this world, where the action of justice is restricted, and there are so many ways of eluding and suborning it. Have not all these to meet with an avenging God, who will make them feel the weight of His indignation? Must there not be one in heaven to hear the moans of innocence demanding vengeance?

(To be continued.)

## POOR MEXICO.

[From the *Catholic Columbian*.]

NOTWITHSTANDING all that one constantly hears against Mexico, there is still an immense amount of true piety in the mass of the poor people, and no Catholic can witness their tender devotion to our Lord and His Mother, as also to the saints, without being deeply touched.

To the poor Indian there, the political changes around him, the wars into which he is often inveigled, scarcely knowing for what he fights, are like a dream compared to the reality of his reverence for our Lady, and his faith in the Blessed Sacrament.

Often, during our stay of some months in the capital, we would see one of these loving creatures, carrying a heavy load, pause devoutly at the entrance of a church to offer up some simple prayer. We cannot help remembering, too, as Holy Thursday draws near, the devotion with which this festival of the Blessed Sacrament was celebrated in Mexico, notwithstanding the poverty to which the Church had been reduced by the State robberies.

Great zeal was displayed in the decorations, and it was curious to observe how, with the cheapest materials, most striking effects were produced. It would sound almost ridiculous if I were to say, for instance, that instead of the rich gilt mouldings which distinguished some of the churches, others substituted rows of oranges ornamented with silver foil, yet such was indeed the case, and although one who had not seen it would scarcely believe so, the general effect was fine. Then there were beautiful grasses, which had been cultivated under different degrees of light, and shaded up from the palest to the brightest hue of green. The most striking thing of all, however, on entering some of the churches, was to see a long table, stretching almost the entire length of the sanctuary, and at it seated the life-sized figures of our Lord and the twelve disciples.

Many people would, perhaps, prefer a more ideal picture of the Last Supper, but for the poor Mexican there is nothing that answers so well as this life-like representation to bring up before him most vividly that "wondrous night" of our Lord's life.

In the afternoon we went at the invitation of a holy priest to witness a very touching ceremony. In imitation of our Lord's humility several pious ladies washed and wiped the feet of twelve poor beggars, and waited on them afterwards at a bountiful repast which had been provided for the poor, hungry creatures. After this the remainder of the afternoon was passed in visiting the different churches, which were thronged with devout souls, for every one is expected to visit at least seven churches on this great day.

The pilgrimages from church to church are all made on foot, as no carriages are used from Holy Thursday morning till Holy Saturday, and even people who do not consider themselves at all pious respect this custom. During that time, also, there are, of course, no bells rung, and the silence that reigned throughout the city seemed in itself a prayer.

"Poor Mexico" is, perhaps, after all, not so much to be pitied, for in spite of the impiety of the upper or ruling class, there are millions of hearts that beat with the warmest love for our Lord and His Blessed Mother, by whom they surely will never be forgotten.

GILLET.

## LOUISE LATEAU.

MGR. CHATARD, Rector of the American College in Rome, who is now on a visit to this country, recently visited Louise Lateau while on his way from Rome. A letter to some of his friends describing his impressions is published in the *London Tablet*, and from it we reproduce the following interesting extract:—

"On the evening of the 8th of February, 1877, I reached Menage from Paris, and immediately walked over to the village of Bois d'Haine. I went to call upon the Curé, M. Niels, to whom the rector of the Belgian College at Rome, Right Rev. Mgr. Van den Branden de Reeth, had been good enough to write in my behalf. The worthy Curé was very kind, and received me into his house, saying he was sorry I had not come earlier, as he had just come from visiting Louise Lateau and I could have accompanied him. Two young French priests arrived at the same time, and arrangements were made for seeing the ecstatic of Bois d'Haine on the morrow. She was to receive Holy Communion at about half-past six o'clock. We were ready in the church at a quarter past six next morning, and the Curé very considerably asked me if I wished to take her the Blessed Sacrament. I thanked him, and after receiving the Pyx with one Host, I started, accompanied by the two priests above referred to, MM. Chabe, Principal of the College of Roubaix, and Gillet, one of his professors, the former with the lantern, and the other with the bell. After ten minutes' walk over the meadows, we came to the modest habitation of the servant of God, and found there several persons, women, sisters of Louise, and one or two of the friends of the family. The usual prayers