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[No. 13.]

ON

THE TRUE NATURE

OF

HELL AND ITS MISERIES.

SECOND EDITION.

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THE term "Hell" involves in it an indefinite variety of interesting particulars, which are too frequently either entirely overlooked, or regarded as things fanciful, visionary, and of no account. In some instances, too, the term is reprobated as a mere term, applied to a non-entity, and therefore expressive of nothing which has either substance, reality, or existence. Thus, in the creed of several at this day, who call themselves Christians, the term Hell is altogether expunged, and it is insisted that there is no such place, because, as they conceive, it involves a contradiction to suppose that a God of infinite mercy would allow His creatures to be punished eternally for crimes, which, in the nature of them, could bear no proportion to an everlasting torment. Others, however, cannot so easily give up the idea of a place of future and endless punishment, and therefore they contend, and this on the authority of the Sacred Scriptures, that there is such a place as hell, and that it is the eternal receptacle of all wicked and abandoned people; but then, with this well-grounded persuasion, they mingle so much of their own fancy and gross imagination, that the hell which they frame to themselves bears no manner of resemblance to that which is announced in the Sacred Scriptures, and which really exists. Thus some insist, and this on the authority of Tertullian in his Treatise *de Anima*, that hell is an abyss in the centre of the earth: others again assert,

with the celebrated Whiston, that the comets are to be conceived as so many hells, appointed, in the course of their trajectories, or orbits, alternately to carry the damned into the confines of the sun, there to be scorched by its flames, and then return them to starve in the cold, dreary, dark regions beyond the orb of Saturn. The reverend and learned T. Swinden again, in his "Enquiry into the Nature and Place of Hell," insists that the sun itself is the local hell: and the arguments he adduces in confirmation of his opinion are, first, The capacity of the sun; secondly, Its distance from, and opposition to, the Empyreum, which has usually been looked upon as the local heaven; thirdly, That the Empyreum is the highest, and the sun the lowest place of the creation, considering it as the centre of our system.

And as the *place* of hell is thus disputed, so likewise is the nature of its torments, and also their duration; some contending that hell-torments are to be regarded as the effects of material fire, in which the wicked are perpetually burning, whilst others consider them as resulting from pangs of conscience, others as torments in general, announced for the purpose of striking offenders with terror. A variety of sentiment also prevails about the duration of these torments, some being disposed to believe that they are temporary, continuing in some cases for a longer, and in some for a shorter period, and that when they have effected the purpose of purification, they will instantly cease, on which occasion the tormented subjects will be restored to a state of peace and bliss. Others again believe that the torments of the wicked hereafter will be eternal, and that this eternity of misery continues without any change, intermission, alleviation, or mitigation whatsoever, as a proof of the vindictive justice, or, as some conceive it, the wrath of the Almighty against His offending creatures.

But the reader will be glad to turn his attention away from these vague, unsettled, and visionary notions respecting the infernal abodes, to the consideration of the