

Whence Eternity?

Alexander Thomson

WHENCE ETERNITY?

THE inspired Scriptures never speak of eternity. They describe nothing as eternal. They contain no term which in itself bears our time sense of everlasting. As eternity is not a subject of revelation, our present object is to discover how and when this unscriptural term gained entrance into theology, with most disastrous results. As this is really a historical investigation, it will be necessary to allude to a considerable number of historical events, and to quote from a number of by-gone translators and their versions. It is hoped that such a study, along with an examination of various primitive words dealing with time, will dispel any doubts in the minds of those who do not feel thoroughly assured regarding the use of the word *eonian* in place of *eternal*. It may be stated, without fear of contradiction, that the more one explores into the early centuries of Christendom, the clearer does it become that a corrupt theology was alone responsible for displacing the teaching regarding the eons by a dogma respecting "eternity".

One statement in English Bibles which perhaps more than any other has led men's minds astray is found in Rev.10:6. Wiclif (1380) rendered this, "Tyme schal no more be", having been partly misled by the Latin Vulgate of Jerome (A.D. 380), which he used as his basis. Could he have had the Greek text as a basis, the likelihood is that he would not have used the word "time". Jerome rendered it, "Time will not be further" (*tempus non erit amplius*). While his translation is on the whole a most faithful and excellent one, in some cases the words he utilizes do not quite match the Greek he translates.

The result was that Wiclif became the medium through whom inaccurate or false terms passed into English theology and into our modern Bibles, where they have become stereotyped. The consequences have been very far reaching and most deplorable. Further examples will be cited anon. The Authorized Version reads, "there should be time no longer". The CONCORDANT VERSION reads, "there will be no longer delay". This makes clear and simple sense, and presents no difficulty. But the erroneous rendering which has persisted for over five hundred years since the time of Wiclif is quite out of harmony with the context. Anyone can see that after the events detailed in the tenth chapter of the Unveiling, there is an entire millennial period to follow, during which "time" continues. The Revised Version has a reading similar to the A.V., but corrects this in the margin to "there shall be delay no longer".

Nevertheless, the false notion that Time must some day end and Eternity commence, still clings to theology. All that the Scriptures reveal is that the eons will terminate (1 Cor. 10: 11; Heb. 9: 26), but it seems clear that time of some kind or other must continue.

When it is revealed that certain things are to continue after the eons have terminated, or when anything is described as being interminable, a distinct negative particle is used in the Greek to denote this, as in the following examples:

- Luke 1: 33 of His kingdom there shall be *no consummation* (*ouk estai telos*, NOT WILL BE FINISH).
 1 Co. 15: 42 it is roused in *incorruption* (*aphtharsia*, UN-CORRUPTION).
 53 this mortal must put on *immortality* (*athanasia*, UN-DEATH, death-less-ness).
 1 Pet. 1: 4 an allotment incorruptible and undefiled and *unfading* (*amaranton*, UN-FADING).
 Heb. 7: 16 the power of an *indissoluble* life (*akataluton*, UN-DOWN-LOUSED).
 1 Ti. 1: 4 *interminable* genealogies (*aperanton*, UN-OTHER-SIDE).

As the eons are to terminate, it follows that all that is eonian must finish, or be swallowed up in that which follows. Even dooms, which are described as eonian, such as the fire of Matt. 18:8, the extermination from the face of the Lord, of 2 Thess. 1:9, and the eonian judgment of Heb. 6:2, shall terminate in due season. In vivid contrast to such merely eonian doom stands the awful doom of the city of Babylon, as portrayed in Rev. 18:21-23, where within the compass of three verses occurs the solemn negative expression *nevermore* (*ou mê eti*, NOT NO STILL), no fewer than six times:

“Thus Babylon, the great city, will be hurled down, and she may be found in her *nevermore*. And the sound of the lyre singers and entertainers, and flutists and trumpeters shall be heard in you *nevermore*; and every artisan of every trade may be found in you *nevermore*; and the sound of a millstone shall be heard in you *nevermore*; and the light of a lamp may be appearing in you *nevermore*; and the voice of the bridegroom and bride shall be heard in you *nevermore*.”

Even to God the Scriptures do not ascribe eternity. What need is there to describe Him as eternal? Would it not be almost an affront to use such an epithet of One who must, in order to be God, be eternal? We speak not of “wet rain” falling from the clouds. Were it not wet, it would not be rain. In the beginning of Genesis, the fact of God, and the existence of God, are taken for granted. No attempt is made to explain Who God is and whence He came, or to account for His existence. Nature demands His existence, and faith assumes Him. That He is the “eonian God” (Rom. 16:26) is a distinct and added revelation. Just as evil is a special feature of the eons, so God is seen as the “eonian God” during the same time. While it is not possible for God to be more than eternal, He is more than eonian. Upon a lead tablet found in the necropolis at Adrumetum, in the Roman province of Africa, near Carthage, belonging to the early third century, the following inscription is scratched

in Greek, "I am adjuring Thee, the great God, the eonian and more than eonian (*epaiōnion*) and almighty, the One up-above the up-above gods". Deissmann requires to render this as follows: "the eternal and more than eternal and almighty, who is exalted above the exalted Gods".

The Hebrew Scriptures are written almost entirely in pure Hebrew. There are very few words which are not Hebrew. So with the Greek Scriptures. They contain few words which are not of pure Greek. But our English Bible is very different. Had it been rendered in simple, homely, native English words alone, it would have read very differently. It is true that numerically the great bulk of the words employed are pure English, but many of the important doctrinal terms are words adopted either from Latin or Greek. The German Bible is very much more pure German than the English Bible is pure English. What is the most important thing in the Scriptures for the sinner? Many will answer, Salvation. Yet this important term only came into use in the English language about the twelfth century, say eight hundred years ago. It is a purely Latin word. At that time it bore the meanings both of safety or salvation, and of health. The believer's salvation was his "health". Salvation occurs not once in the Anglo-Saxon Scriptures (680-900 A.D.), or in Wiclif's version (1380 A.D.). Wiclif always uses the word "health", although he uses the terms "make safe" and "safe". The old word used for the Saviour was Haelend, or "Healer". Not only does He make one safe, but He heals. Tyndale, in the year 1526 A.D., was the first one to use the word salvation in the Scriptures, and he used it once only, in John 4: 22 ("for salvacion commeth of the Jewes"). Wiclif had, "for heelthe is of Jewis"). Thereafter the fine old English word "health" dropped out, and was completely displaced by the imported but now most important Latin word "salvation".

While it is true that the revival of learning and letters in the fifteenth century greatly enriched the English language, it drove out thousands of very fine English words. Previous to that time, it had sometimes been necessary to use a double word to give the necessary meaning in the Scriptures. Thus, in the Anglo-Saxon Gospels of about the time of King Alfred, about a thousand years ago, the following expressions are met with: leorning-enicht (learning-knight) for disciple (a Latin word); hundredes ealdor-man (alderman of a hundred) for centurion (also a Latin word); bocere (book-wer, bookman) for scribe (another Latin word); big-spel (near-story, example, like German *Bei-spiel*) for the Greek parable.

Eternal is one of the many hundreds of words which gained entrance into English during the Renaissance. Previous to that time, it was completely unknown. No such word appears in any old English scriptures. Instead of it, there is found a simple little word with the meaning of eonian, or something like that, spelt *ece*, of which more will be said later. In fact, it may be laid down as a rule that no language had, for some time after the first century A.D., any term to denote eternity.

Some of the following facts may at first sight seem somewhat startling, yet that is because they are not widely known. Had the old English Bibles been translated direct out of the Greek, instead of from the Latin Vulgate Version of Jerome (380 A.D.), it is very probable that the word eternal would never have been found in our modern Bibles and theological terminology at all. But for the Norman Conquest of England in 1066 A.D., which brought many French words into the English language (and French is largely decayed and corrupt Latin), and drove out many native English words, we should most probably now be using not eternal, but *ece*, the old equivalent of eonian. On the other hand, had the sack of Constantinople by hordes of Turks from

Asia taken place prior to the Norman Conquest, instead of in 1453, the likelihood is that we should have had the Greek term *eonian* incorporated into English, instead of the Latin *eternal*. The capture of Constantinople by the Turks was of enormous importance to Europe. It was then the great center of learning, especially Greek learning. When it was sacked, hosts of learned doctors were scattered abroad all over Europe, carrying with them the knowledge of the Greek tongue and the treasures of Greek literature. It is hard to believe that for over a thousand years, up till the year 1453, Greek was almost unknown or forgotten in most of Europe. Even in Italy, which formerly had been dominated by Greek, it became almost unknown. Very few quotations from Greek poets are to be found in Italian writers from the sixth to the fourteenth centuries. No Greek was taught publicly in England until about 1484, when it began to be taught at Oxford University. Erasmus, the great Dutch scholar, learnt Greek at Oxford and subsequently was Professor of Greek at Cambridge from 1509 till 1514, during which time Tyndale studied there. Erasmus issued his first Greek New Testament in 1516. This was the first Greek New Testament printed for sale. The first Greek grammar for well over a thousand years was published at Milan in 1476, and the first lexicon four years later. As an English scholar expressed it, "Greece had arisen from the grave with the New Testament in her hand". About this time great German scholars even changed their names to Greek ones, so fashionable had the study of Greek become. Schwartzerd (black earth) became Melanchthon; Hausschein (house-shine) was discarded for Oecolampadius; Gerhard attained fame as Erasmus; Horn took on more dignity as Ceratinus.

HOW THE LATIN LANGUAGE AFFECTED THEOLOGY

In order to understand aright the word "eternal", it is necessary to make a review of linguistic conditions

in Greece and Italy before and after the days of Paul.

The classical Latin tongue was one out of many that were spoken by the early inhabitants of Italy. At first it was only the dialect of a small area around Rome. Other dialects which in the course of time mingled with it were of a very different type, such as the Etruscan. Many colonies of Greeks existed in early times in the south of Italy, so that this part was known as "Great Greece". From the dawn of authentic history the Greek language may be seen exerting a strong influence over Italy. When in B.C. 454 the Romans desired to establish a code of laws, they dispatched commissioners to Greece to study and report upon the laws of Solon at Athens. What in later times became the polished dialect of the district of Latium was not the language of the common people, just as the classical Greek of the poets and dramatists was not the common speech of the people. The everyday language of Greeks was much the same as is found in the Greek Scriptures, known as the *koinê*, or "common", or vulgar tongue. Latin was the speech of the patricians, of the literary world, of the politicians, of a comparatively small section of the people. It came to occupy the position of a partly artificial dialect amid many other widely differing dialects.

One effect of the rapid conquests of Alexander the Great (B.C. 334-323) was that Greek became the language of government and literature throughout most of the then civilized world. It became the *lingua franca* of countries such as Palestine and Egypt. About the year B.C. 280 Rome was mistress of all Italy except some of the Greek cities in the south. These succumbed by B.C. 276. Sixty years later Rome was interfering in the affairs of Greece itself, and by B.C. 189 Rome was mistress of Greece.

Nevertheless, Greek continued to be the fashionable speech in Italy for a long time. In the time of Dionysius Thrax (about B.C. 80), the children of gentlemen in

Rome learnt Greek before they learnt Latin. Dionysius was the author of the first Greek school grammar ever compiled in Europe, published in Rome in the time of Pompey (about B.C. 50), which became the basis of all subsequent Greek grammars, and was the book used in schools for centuries. This small and elementary work of only a few pages is still in existence. The first history of Rome was written at Rome in Greek by Fabius Pictor about B.C. 200.

In the first two centuries A.D., Greek was very generally used in Rome. In addition to Latin, numerous other dialects might be heard in the streets of Rome and throughout Italy, and the Greek language served as a common medium whereby all might communicate with each other. For this reason, there was no need for Paul to write his epistle to Rome in Latin. As he was much too sensitive to write to them in a tongue they would not understand, it is clear that the Roman church must have been quite at home with the Greek tongue. For a similar reason, there was no need for a Latin version of the Scriptures in Italy for about a hundred years after Paul's time. It is of profound significance to note, that when the first Latin version was made, it had its origin, not in Italy, but in North Africa. Of the manuscripts extant belonging to the Old Latin version, that is to say, the version in use before the time of Jerome (380 A.D.), the majority may be recognized as being of the "African" type.

It is here necessary to explain that what became the Roman province of "Africa" was in early times the Canaanite colony of Carthage, in North Africa, near Tunis. This colony was founded by the cities of Tyre and Sidon, and some have sought to identify Carthage with Tarshish (as the Greek version of Isa. 23:1). Carthage ruled over the large islands of Sardinia and Corsica, and over part of Sicily also. Warfare with the rising military power of Rome was inevitable. Three

long struggles, known as the Punic (or Phœnician) Wars, took place between B.C. 264 and 146, culminating in the complete subjugation of Carthage, which now became a province of Rome.

Henceforth the speech of this Roman colony was Latin, but it was the Latin dialect of about the middle of the second century B.C. This is important. The Latin dialect of this time was very different from what it became a hundred years later. Polybius, the Greek historian, states, about B.C. 150, that the best informed Romans of that time could not understand without difficulty the language of the former treaties entered into between Rome and Carthage, less than a hundred years before. Horace, who died about the time Christ was born, confessed that he could not understand the old Latin Salian poems, and he infers that Latin had so greatly changed within a few hundred years that no one else could understand them. Quintilian (born 40 A.D.) states that even the Salian priests could scarcely follow their sacred hymns. The purest era of Latin in Rome was during the hundred years before Christ came. It was then that the language became fixed and polished.

Carthage, however, being a colony, at a considerable distance from Rome, spoke a somewhat different Latin than did Rome. It was free from the influence of Greek. Just as the Scandinavian spoken in Norway and Sweden has diverged much from the old Scandinavian of a thousand years ago still spoken in Iceland; as the "taal" of the Boers in South Africa has diverged much from the Dutch of Holland; as the English carried to America three hundred years ago has preserved certain words and meanings and lost others, so the Latin transported to Carthage came in course of time to diverge, in certain respects, from the Latin spoken in Italy and Rome. As invariably happens in such cases, certain old expressions and nuances were preserved which died out elsewhere, while in other cases fresh nuances came into use.

It is to Tertullian, a Latin of Carthage, who lived from about 160 to 220 A.D., that we are indebted for our first knowledge of the existence of the Old Latin version of the Scriptures. He was the earliest of the Latin Fathers. The manuscripts of this version in existence show that the Latin employed was very different from classical Latin, being more vigorous, yet marked by solecisms (or improprieties in the language used—what would appear to others as errors in grammar and violations of syntax and idiom). It may have been originally a translation from the Greek made by comparatively illiterate people, or the language may be due simply to the differences in dialect between the Latin of Rome and the Latin of Carthage. So long as the Old Latin scriptures remained in North Africa, they continued with little or no change, but immediately they arrived on the soil of Italy, a great disturbance took place. Old words in use in Carthage were found to be unintelligible to the Romans, while new words coined there were not understood. Words in both countries had, in the course of two or three centuries, taken on distinctive and divergent nuances of their own. The provincial solecisms and roughnesses of the African version were patched up and corrected by means of the Greek version current in Italy, and in course of time the result came to be indescribable confusion. There were said to be as many versions as manuscripts, though this is no doubt somewhat of an exaggeration. Upon Jerome fell the arduous task of attempting to bring about harmony out of this confusion, and the outcome was his version of the Latin scriptures which in after times, from the thirteenth century onwards, was known as the "Vulgate". Hitherto, for about six hundred years, the Greek Septuagint version had held the field, and there was intense and prolonged opposition to Jerome's version. This was the Bible which was to dominate most of Christendom for a thousand years, right up to the Reformation. Jerome, however, in his

revision, while correcting obvious errors and setting right what seemed to be bad Latin, was very conservative otherwise. Many expressions he left as he found them. Whatever may have been his own views regarding the future, he does not appear to have revised two Latin words, fraught with profound significance, which he found in the old version. These are both words used to render the Greek word *eon*, as Latin, like Gothic and Armenian and English, found two words necessary, *seculum*, from which we have our word "secular", and *aeternus*, from which have descended the fateful words "eternal" and "eternity". Sometimes, as we shall see, the Greek *aiōn* (*eon*) was rendered by one of these two Latin words, and sometimes by the other. Not only so, but when the Greek shows the word *eon* twice or thrice in one clause, (as in "for the *eon*, and for the *eon* of the *eon*") the Latin frequently shows both *aeternus* and *seculum*. This alone ought to be sufficient to prove that the two Latin words could have the same meaning, more or less, and it will be our present purpose to demonstrate that originally the two words differed little in meaning, but that theology, chiefly through the dominating influence of one man, imparted to *aeternus* a nuance alien to its derivation and original usage.

We shall now examine the derivation of these two Latin words, one of which was destined to exercise such a profound influence over the minds of men for so long, an influence not in accord with truth, and by no means for the glory of God.

ETERNAL AND SECULAR

Seculum is defined in Latin dictionaries as meaning a generation, an age, the world, the times, the spirit of the times, and a period of a hundred years. That which is secular pertains to the present world, especially to the world as not spiritual. In French the word has come to mean a century, besides meaning age, time, period, and

world (*siècle*). The future *siècle* is the "life to come". In the French Bible, "for the eons of the eons" is rendered by "to the *siècles* of the *siècles*", following the Latin Vulgate. The other Romance languages follow the same construction, Italian using *secoli*, and Spanish *siglos*. Irish and Gaelic use *saoghal*, Roumanian uses *seculi*, and even Basque has *secula*. That is to say, Bibles in these languages render the corrupt "for ever and ever" correctly, or nearly so.

Seculum is sometimes derived from the same root that gives "sequel", meaning time as "following". Before the rise of words to express eternity, time was viewed as flowing onwards, generation following generation into the dim future. Others derive *seculum* from the root that gives section, as meaning time cut off, divided, or decided.

Long ago in Rome, periodic games were held, which were called "secular" games. Herodian, the historian, writing in Greek about the end of the second or beginning of the third century, calls these "eonian" games. In no sense were the games eternal. Eonian did not mean eternal any more than a *seculum* meant eternity.

Among the many inscriptions in the Catacombs of Rome is one to the memory of a girl of fifteen years who had died. It is inscribed to "Aurelia, our sweetest daughter, who departed from the *seculum*" (or world,—*quae de saeculo recessit*). Some of the old Roman writers use the word in the sense of the utmost lifetime of man, a century. It may be said that every hundred years the race of man is completely changed. Some people change little within a generation, but after a hundred years the entire physical appearance of the race has altered.

The famous Council of Trent, in Italy, sitting from 1545 to 1563, decreed that "This same ancient and Vulgate edition, which by the long use of so many centuries has been approved in the church itself, is to be held authentic in public readings, disputations, sermons and

expositions; and no one is to dare or presume to reject it under any pretext whatever". The word used for "centuries" is *saeculorum*, *seculums*.

Trajan, who was emperor of Rome from 98 to 117 A.D., wrote to Pliny regarding the conviction of those who professed the Christian faith. Such were not to be specially sought out or hunted, yet if accused and convicted must bear the punishment. He adds that accusations against them which were not signed were not to be accepted on any account, as this was the "very worst example that could be shown, and pertains not to our *seculum*".

Tertullian, born about 160 A.D., in one of his many writings, referred to "a mighty shock impending over the entire world, and the conclusion of the *seculum* itself".

Lactantius, born about 260 A.D., speaks of the "learned ones of this *seculum*". Eusebius, the historian of the early Church, born about 265 A.D., gives an account of the trial of certain martyrs from Africa in the year 180. The martyrs showed a most indomitable spirit when interrogated by the proconsul. Speratus, their leader, replied, "The empire of this *seculum* (world) I do not recognize". The proconsul pressed them to take thirty days to reconsider. Speratus replied, "In a matter so straightforward there is no reconsideration". Eusebius goes on to relate that the martyrs would reign with God through "all the *seculums* of the *seculums*".

Writing about "Our Lord's Miracles", Eusebius alludes to "magicians who have ever existed throughout the *seculums*". This is a reference to past ages.

These examples are sufficient to show that *seculum* was used very much as the Greek *aiōn*. No case can be cited in which it refers to endless time.

We shall now consider its usage by Jerome in the Latin Vulgate Version. Those who maintain that the

Greek *aion* signifies eternity or "for ever" would do well to consider very carefully Jerome's renderings from Greek into Latin. Out of about 130 occurrences of *eon* in the Greek New Testament, Jerome renders by *seculum* 101 times, while he uses *aeternum* 27 times. If by the latter word he meant eternity, he is very inconsistent. It is to the Latin versions that we must look for the origin of the pernicious system, or rather lack of system, of giving to the Greek *eon* two diverse meanings. In every occurrence in the Unveiling, of the expression "for the eons of the eons", Jerome has, "for the seculums of the seculums", which Wiclif, with studied carefulness, rendered by "in to worldis of worldis", just as five hundred years before Wiclif's time the Old English glosses of Latin manuscripts gave "world" for *seculum*. The following are some of the expressions used by Jerome: "from the seculum", "from the seculums", "for the seculum", "for the seculums", "before the seculums", "this seculum", "that seculum", "the consummation of the seculum", "the consummation of the seculums", "the ends of the seculums", "in the seculum of the seculum", "the future seculum", "the coming seculum", "the impending seculums", "the seculum of this world". In Jude 25 he renders by, "before the entire seculum, and now, and for all the seculums of the seculums". Wiclif here has, "bifor alle worldis and now and in to alle worldis of worldis". Tyndale, coming one hundred and fifty years after Wiclif, has the utterly inadequate and bald and totally erroneous "now and for ever", although the Rheims version (1582 A.D.) has, "befoer al worldes, and now and for al worldes evermore".

In Eph. 2:2, Jerome has "the seculum of this world" (C.V. "the eon of this world"). Wiclif did not understand this, and originated the guess, "the course of this world", which was slavishly copied by those who came after him.

Turning to the Greek word *eonian*, which occurs seventy times in the New Testament, Jerome does not render about three quarters of them by the word *secular*, and one quarter by *eternal*, but no less than sixty-five times does he use the latter (*aeternum*), while *secular* he uses only twice (2 Tim. 1:9 and Titus 1:2), "before times secular" (*ante tempora saecularia*). As forty-three of the seventy occurrences refer to life, he was unable to say, "secular life", and therefore invariably puts "eternal life".

We thus see that Jerome's renderings of the Greek *aiōn* completely shake our confidence in him here. By his inconsistency he really contradicts himself. Had Jerome been as consistent in rendering the Greek into Latin as Wiclif was in rendering Jerome into English, we should never have had our Authorized Version in its present form. In every case where Jerome uses *seculum* to represent the Greek *aiōn*, Wiclif uses "world", while in place of Jerome's *eternum* for this word, Wiclif always has "without end". For the adjective, *eonian*, Wiclif well nigh invariably for Jerome's *eternum* puts "everlasting".

An examination of Jerome's (Gallican) version of the Psalms from the Greek Septuagint reveals further strange inconsistencies. Generally speaking, he renders the Greek "for the eon" (*eis ton aiōna*) by "into eternity" (*in aeternum*), while the compound occurrences of eon, such as "for the eon of the eon", he renders by "for the *seculum* of the *seculum*". It was not expedient for him to say, "into the eternity of the eternity", or "into the eternities". The expression "for the eons" (*eis tous aiōnas*) he was obliged to render "for the *seculums*" (*in saecula*), as in Ps. 61:4; 72:17. In the same way, in Psalm 145:13 he renders by "a kingdom of all *seculums*", which corresponds to the Hebrew and the Greek and the A.V. margin.

In keeping with these apparent rules, he renders the

compound Greek expression, "for the eon and for the eon of the eon", by the Latin "into eternity and into the seculum of the seculum" (*in aeternum et in saeculum saeculi*), as in Ps. 9:5; 10:16; 45:17; 48:14; 52:8; and 148:6. Yet the same Greek expression, "for the eon, and for the eon of the eon", he renders simply by "into eternity" in 72:19, while it is rendered in 119:44, 145:1, 2, 21, by "into the seculum, and into the seculum of the seculum". Exceptions to the seeming rule are found in 44:8; 52:9, and 75:9, where the Greek "for the eon" is rendered "into seculum" (*in saeculum*), while in 73:12 it is rendered "in seculum" (*in saeculo*). In the last mentioned verse, even Jerome could not bring himself to believe that the ungodly prospered "for eternity". In Ps. 90:2 he renders the Greek "from the eon till the eon" (A.V. "from everlasting to everlasting Thou art God") by "from seculum and till seculum". Yet the very same Greek expression he renders in 103:17 by "from eternity and till eternity" (*ab aeterno et usque in aeternum*). Probably Jerome was only translating after the system of the Old Latin version, which had existed for two hundred years before his time. If that is so, he must have had serious misgivings, if *in aeternum* meant "for eternity" or "into eternity". In Micah 5:2, where the Old Latin had "from the days of seculum", Jerome altered to "from the days of eternity" (*a diebus aeternitatis*).

We shall now bring forward verses in which the two Latin words we are studying seem to be equated. In 1 Chron. 29:10 the A.V. reads, "Blessed be Thou, Lord God of Israel our father, for ever and ever". The Hebrew and the Greek both read, "from the eon and until the eon". In Neh. 9:5 the Hebrew and the Greek have the same reading as in 1 Chron. 29:10 (A.V. "Bless the Lord your God for ever and ever."). In both of these verses the Vulgate has, "from eternity until eternity". Yet in Jer. 7:7 and 25:5, where the A.V. speaks of

dwelling in "the land that I gave to your fathers, for ever and ever", and the Hebrew and the Greek both have "from the eon and until the eon", the Vulgate has, "from *seculum* and into *seculum*".

How did the Vulgate translate those verses which speak of "the eon and beyond"? This expression, Dean Farrar tells us, was decisive to Origen, and so it ought to be to all who wish to believe God. In Isa. 45:17, the A.V. reads, "ye shall not be ashamed nor confounded *world without end*". The Hebrew reads, "for the eons of the future". The Greek has, "till the eon further". The Vulgate has, "until the *seculum* of the *seculum*".

An extraordinary surprise awaits us when we consider two verses wherein the Vulgate is, to say the least, bewildering. We have been reckoning the Latin *in aeternum* of Jerome's day as meaning "for eternity" or "into eternity", whatever it may have meant two or three hundred years before his time. It stands beyond all doubt that by *seculum* Jerome meant a limited period of time, an eon, but by *aeternum* he seems to have meant something different. Did he mean "eternity"? Or was this Latin word still used in the loose way it had been used long before his time, as meaning indefinite future time? Farrar says that even the Latin Fathers who had a competent knowledge of Greek knew that *aeternum* was used in the same loose way, for an indefinite period, in Latin writers, as *aiōnion* was used in Greek. Exodus 15:18 reads in the A.V.: "The Lord shall reign *for ever and ever*". The Hebrew carefully limits this reign to "the eon and further". The Septuagint expands this into "the eon, and still more an eon, and further". Jerome astounds by actually rendering by "*into eternity and beyond*" (*in aeternum et ultra*). The same Latin reading is also found in Micah 4:5 (A.V. "We will walk in the name of the Lord our God *for ever and ever*"). where the Hebrew reads, "for the eon and further", and the Greek reads, "for the eon and beyond".

It is now necessary to examine the origin of the word "eternal". Whatever the Latin word meant in the time of Jerome, it certainly did not signify endless three hundred years earlier. Professor Max Müller said of the root of this word, that it originally signified life or time, but had given rise to a number of words expressing eternity, the very opposite of life and time. He says the Latin *aevum* (which corresponds almost letter for letter with the Greek *aiōn*, eon, thought to have been originally *aivon*), became the name of time, age, and its derivative *aeviternus*, or *aeternus*, "*was made to express eternity*". These are the words of an authority who was quite unbiased in this matter.

This statement resembles one made by Phavorinus in the sixteenth century in the famous "*Etymologicum Magnum*", a large tome giving the derivations of all Greek words, as handed down from a very much earlier time. The word *aiōn* (eon) is defined, among other things, as "the life of mankind", and there is cited "the seven eons from the creation of the heaven and earth until the general resurrection of humanity". Phavorinus, the editor, adds "*aiōn* is the imperceptible (*aidios*) and the unending (*ateleutêtos*), as it seems to the theologian"! What he meant was that originally the word never meant unending, but this meaning had been injected by theology. Indeed, he spoke truth, as it is theology, and theology alone, which in any language has imported into time-words the thought of endlessness.

Before returning to the Latin, we shall cite one more similar yet very instructive case. The Emperor Justinian was the greatest of the Eastern (Byzantine) Emperors. He reigned from 527 to 565 at Constantinople. In the year 534 he published in fifty volumes the world famous "*Justinian Code*" of Laws. This was a digest of the Greek and Roman constitutions, ordinances, and legal decisions, culled from two thousand manuscript volumes, and it forms the basis of most medieval and modern codes

of law. In the year 540, Justinian made arrangements for the calling together of the famous local council of four years later. He was determined that certain doctrines must be suppressed. In setting forth the position when writing to the Patriarch Mennas of Constantinople, he discussed the doctrines with great ability. In particular, he wished it made very plain that the life of the saints was to be everlasting, and that the doom of the lost was to be likewise. Yet he did not argue that the word eonian meant everlasting. Nor did he claim that the word eonian had hitherto been misunderstood. In setting forth the orthodox position of the Church of that time, he did not say, "We believe in *eonian* punishment", as this was exactly what Origen, three hundred years before, had maintained and believed. In fact, Origen, who exulted in the truth of the reconciliation of the universe, definitely used the word eonian with reference to fire and doom as meaning a limited time. But writing in the very expressive Greek language, Justinian says, "The holy church of Christ teaches an *endless eonian* (*ateleutêtos aiônios*) life for the just, and *endless* (*ateleutêtos*) punishment for the wicked". Justinian knew quite well that by itself eonian did not signify endless, and he therefore added a word the meaning of which is quite unequivocal, a word not found in the Scriptures. This letter of Justinian, which is still in existence, ought to convince anyone who is in doubt, regarding the true scriptural meaning of the word eonian. It may be added, that the Council, though expressly convened in order to stigmatize the teachings of Origen, one of which was that punishment was only temporary, condemned his views generally, but did not anathematize his teaching regarding the reconciliation of all. It was not until the year 696, at Constantinople, that a Council publicly condemned this doctrine of Origen *for the first time*, the glorious teaching being called "drunken ravings as to the future life of the dead".

We must now return to the Latin word *aevum*. This is defined in dictionaries as meaning, lifetime, life, age, mankind living at a particular time. From this word, through the form *aeviternus*, comes the adjective *aeternus*, which is our "eternal". *Aevum* is never found in Latin standing for endless time. In the Roman Catacombs is the tomb of Albana, who died at the age of forty-five. Her sorrowing husband, Placus, marked her resting place with the following words, "This grief will always (*semper*) be mine during lifetime (*in aevo*)". Further on is inscribed, "Lie in peace—in sleep—you will arise". Neither of these two words, therefore, *semper*, from which comes *sempiternal*, and *aevum*, from which comes *eternal*, here meant endless.

Another stone bears the inscription, "eternal home" (*domus eternalis*). This is on the tomb of a believer, so that this could not be his everlasting resting-place. Another stone states that Aurelius Felix, who died in January at the age of fifty-five, was "snatched home eternally" (*raptus eterne domus*). The author of a book on the Catacombs is obliged to explain that such inscriptions "do not imply any want of belief in the resurrection on the part of those who erected them", because a word apparently meaning "eternal" is found on them. He did not see that this word only meant "eonian", although he refers to a similar expression in Eccles. 12:5, "Man goeth to his long home" (C.V. "to his eonian house").

The old Latin writers used *aeternum* in the same sense as Greek writers used *aiōnion*, as meaning eonian. Thus Cicero, who died B.C. 43, says of the future, "Springtime will be *aeternum*", that is, enduring, eonian. At present springtime is brief, fleeting, seasonal. He was referring to a spring which will endure. He also refers to God by the same term, as the enduring One. Ovid, who flourished about 9 A.D., speaks of warfare in the same sense.

As the word eon is really a transliteration of the Greek *aiōn*, its nearest English equivalent may be found in the word "age". The origin of this word is very interesting. It traces its descent back to the Latin *aevum*, which is the equivalent of the Greek *aiōn*. *Aevum* produced *aevitas*, which became shortened to *aetas*. From this was formed another form, *aetaticum*, a Low Latin term. In France this was slurred into *edage*, then into *aage*, which arrived in England as *age*.

How then, did the Latin *aeternum* and the Greek *aiōnion*, which both originally referred to that which is eonian, come to signify "eternal" in our modern sense? There is no doubt that these words have been "made to express" what is eternal, the instrument in every case being theology. The process seems to have been somewhat as follows.

There have always been some among the sects who have held harsh views regarding the doom of the sinner. The Pharisees and the Essenes are said to have believed in conscious future punishment. The Essenes believed in unintermittent (*adialeipton*) and "deathless" punishment. It is natural for those in whose hearts the love of God has not been dynamically shed abroad to look upon death as the end of all for mankind. The truth of the eons became lost very quickly after the time of the apostle Paul. No one after him appears to say a word about it. Even Origen believed that this present world or eon was the conclusion of many eons. He inferred that there are still many eons to come, not only two. On the other hand, there arose the Gnostic sects, one of which was that of the Valentinians, named after Valentine, a native of Egypt. They flourished in the second century. According to them, the original source of all existence was the abyss, out of which, when life was developed, sprang the eons, male and female, through whom God revealed Himself. These eons, along with God Himself, together made up the fullness or *plērōma*.

Matter they looked upon as evil, and the harmony of the *plêrōma* had been upset by God's having come into contact with matter. In order to restore harmony, there was a new emanation of two eons, Christ and the Holy Spirit. At the conclusion of the world, Christ would introduce His Bride along with all the spiritual ones into the Fullness, and all matter, by which is evidently meant all evil, would return to its original nothingness. Another sect taught that seven eons proceeded forth out from God. Eusebius says that Tatian also invented "some invisible eons like the Valentinians", but Tatian may have preserved some relics of primitive truth. Even in this darkness one can perceive glimmerings of the truth. God made the eons through His Son (Heb. 1:2). God planned out the eons, and is now utilizing them as His scaffolding. The eons seem to synchronize with the presence of evil, when it requires to be coped with.

The collapse of the truth of the eons left the way open for pagan error to re-assert itself and foist itself upon scripture teaching. So long as the Greek language was well understood in Italy, so long would *aiōnion* retain its force as meaning "eonian", and not only so, but it would tend to keep its Latin equivalent *aeternum* tied down to the same signification, in Italy. But an influence was arising in the second century in North Africa which was to change everything, and compel these terms to bear, in theology, a meaning they never had originally. It is more than probable that the Latin *aeternum* bore in North Africa a sense slightly divergent from what it bore in Rome. It may have signified not only "eonian", but something in addition, or something more vague. It seems by that time to have been coming to signify what it later signified everywhere, not only that which has no *seen* or *revealed* limit, but also that which is actually *without* a limit. With us, that which is "endless" may be either that which for the present or for the time being is without an end, or of which the end is not observed,

or it may signify that which never can or will have an end. The following illustration will make this clear. Leading into the city of Chester in England is an old Roman highway, which, for about three miles, is quite straight, as Roman roads very often were, besides being very flat and monotonous. At the conclusion of a thirty mile walk one day, this part of the road was, to the eye, and to the feelings of the traveler, endless. It was possible to look along the road for over a mile, and observe traffic and pedestrians, but no end to it could be seen. In one sense, the road was endless, yet all the time the city to which it led could be discerned in the distance. The Roman roadmakers were intensely practical. As often as possible, their roads did not deviate by a foot, even though they had to traverse hills, and their roads all led to a definite destination. In the same way, the Latin-speaking theologians of the early centuries abhorred what was indefinite, or liable to be misunderstood. Speculation they shunned and banned. The statements of the Creeds which issued forth from the early Roman Church are noted for their extreme brevity. The requisite facts were stated in black and white so that there might be no dubiety as to what people must believe. Roman Law, and the Roman military power, functioned like machines—authority must be obeyed. So in the Roman Church individualism of thought was not encouraged. As there was much speculation concerning the cons and the future, the position must needs be stated categorically and dogmatically. Theology had lost the punctuation marks of future time, and something must be put in their place. Moreover, it was humbling to the Latin Fathers not to be able to delineate the future. If no one was able to chart the ocean of time, why not simply declare that it was boundless? Would not the Church wield far more power if it proclaimed in authoritative terms that eternal destiny was fixed here on earth? Was it not much more flattering to man to think that

the life he obtained upon believing was eternal life, while that which his faith had saved him from was an eternal doom? Who could believe in a special life for the eons, when all the facts concerning these eons had become obscure and blurred? As the truth regarding the eons was completely lost, we ought to be very suspicious regarding the dogma which became "orthodox" and catholic in a steadily apostatizing Church.

TERTULLIAN

At this point we must turn to Carthage in North Africa, and in particular to Tertullian, and take careful note of their profound and lasting influence over Christendom. Tertullian lived from about 160 to 220 A.D. Born at Carthage, he became a well-read scholar, an attractive orator and writer, a keen controversialist, and a clever lawyer. What Origen was, about the same period, to Greek or Eastern Christianity, Tertullian was to Latin or Western Christianity. He was the first one to set about systematically to explain the Scriptures in the Latin tongue of North Africa, and the first theologian to establish a technical Latin terminology for Christianity. It is no exaggeration to say that the choice of terms of this Latin scholar has profoundly affected all succeeding theological thought. It is to Tertullian that we owe such terms as trinity, substance, person, redemption, justification, sanctification, sacrament, and many more, including probably such as perdition, perish, destroy, punish, torment, damnation, dispensation, predestination, revelation, priest, mediator, minister, congregation, propitiation,—all terms from the Latin, although it is possible some of these may be due to Jerome. These terms are all different from the Greek words used, although some of the meanings correspond fairly well. Tertullian was the first writer to set out to expound the difficult doctrine of the "trinity", and to use this term, which, however, he does not use as a name for God. Dr.

Glover says, "He was the first man of genius of the Latin race to follow Jesus Christ, and to reset his ideas in the language native to that race". Archbishop Benson says, "When Tertullian began to write, theological Latin had to be formed". Harnack says, "What influenced the history of dogma was not his Christianity, but his masterly power of framing formulae". Up till his time Roman Christianity had been essentially Greek in form, but when he embraced it, Latin terms and thoughts were introduced, which gradually but steadily altered the whole character of its teaching, and paved the way for the Roman Catholic system of dogma. Dr. Swete says, "The Church in North Africa was the first Christian community so far as we know which offered the Eucharist for the benefit of the departed". One of the terms introduced by Tertullian was "satisfaction". Harnack says, "He was the first to regard definitely such ascetic performances as 'satisfaction' as propitiatory offerings by which the sinner could make amends to God". According to Tertullian, a comparatively brief ascetic punishment inflicted by the believer on himself took the place of what the damned were awarded—eternal punishment. It should prove instructive to glance at some of his other views.

Like many today, he could never come to grasp the important yet elementary fact that God is spirit. That God was conciliated was quite unknown to him and to those who followed in his steps. Being well trained in Roman law he looked on God much more as the Judge who gives the law and must be obeyed, than as the Father of all. All relations between God and man partake of the nature of legal transactions, and thus a good act by man brings satisfaction to God and merit to man. But the fundamental relationship is that of fear on man's part. The great difference between the Greek Church and the Latin Church consisted in this, that the Greek Church looked upon revelation as expressing *God in His*

relation to man, while the Latin Church began with man, and saw primarily *man as in relation to God*. God's measureless love and grace were viewed as at the disposal of man, or man was viewed as the fallen and guilty rebel measured up before the Judge. The one commenced with God and His love, operating all things in accord with the counsel of His will from past ages for the ultimate good of the race, ever seeking to draw man to Himself and instruct him with a view to his well-being and growth in grace. The other saw man as on probation, and God as the magistrate. Instead of men being gradually instructed in the ways and mind of God, they must subscribe without question or discussion to the Creed, the rigid and crystallized expression of the Latin Church's views. As Farrar says, the centre of Origen's system was God and hope, while that of Augustine's was punishment and sin; whereas Origen yearns for a final unity, Augustine almost exultingly acquiesces in a frightful and abiding dualism.

It was reserved for three great Carthaginians, Tertullian, Cyprian, and Augustine, so to influence the Latin Church that it deflected and declined into a system of dogmatic hierarchy and spiritual despotism. But Tertullian was the individual who set this current in motion. Through his powerful instrumentality Christendom, at the critical juncture, took the wrong turn, and his influence still prevails. Neander says of him, that his mind was often at a loss for suitable forms of phraseology, as he had more within him than he could express, and for this purpose he was obliged to create a language for the new spiritual matter, out of the rude Punic Latin. It has been said that Tertullian often makes use of words not found in general use outside of the very early writers, and that he often imparts to words a new or unusual force.

This, then, is the man in the hollow of whose hands lay the clay which was to be moulded into concrete Latin

dogma. This is the man in whose hands reclined the fate of the word *eternal*. What meaning did he give to it? Its old meaning, akin to the Greek *eonian*, or something beyond that? Being quite devoid of any understanding of the eons of Scripture, destitute of a real perception of the fact that God is love, unable to view God but as a stern Judge who must somehow or other be "satisfied" or placated, how was it possible for him to look on the mass of mankind otherwise than as damned? Augustine, who later outdid Tertullian and his doctrines, maintained that the whole human race was "one damned batch and mass of perdition" (*conspersis damnata, massa perditionis*), out of which a few are elected to salvation, while all the remainder are lost for ever. He beheld evil as a force integral in a universe apart from God, while Origen believed that all is out from God, even evil, which God must undo and banish. One who has no place for eons to come must needs look on the future as a shoreless eternity. Having failed to grasp what God had revealed concerning the eons, Tertullian had no alternative but to impart to the Latin word *eternal* that sense which it now bears. Not only so, but this special meaning of the Latin word, taking advantage of the steady decline of Greek as the language of theology and the rise and ascendancy of Latin, reacted upon, and was imposed upon, its Greek equivalent *eonian*, which henceforth in theology was "made to express" the meaning of *everlasting*.

At this point it will be interesting to bring forward the evidence of the ancient versions made from the Greek, and see whether they corroborate the conclusions to which we have come.

HOW THE OLD VERSIONS RENDERED AION

The Old Syriac version is thought to have been made from the Greek about the end of the first century or some time during the second century. The language is closely akin to Hebrew, and was very like the Aramaic

which was spoken in Palestine side by side with Greek in the first century. To translate the Greek *eon* and *eonian* it uses *olm*, which is exactly the word used in the Hebrew Scriptures, meaning "obscure", or "obscurity", that is, *eonian* and *eon*. The same constructions as occur in the Greek are shown, such as, from the *eon* (*mn olm*), for the *eon* (*l-olm*), this *eon*, that *eon*, for the *eons* to come, for the *eon* of the *eons* (*l-olm olmin*), the conclusion of the *eons*.

To prove that *olm* did not and could not stand for eternity, it may be stated that the Greek word *kosmos* (world) is generally rendered in the Syriac version by *olm*, as in John 1:10 (thrice), John 17:24, where the Syriac has, "preceding the disruption of the *eon*". The Syriac Version knew nothing about an eternity, and nothing in it is called eternal.

The ancient Gothic version is of peculiar interest to the English-speaking and German-speaking peoples. In it are preserved the sole relics of a Germanic tongue spoken round 350 A.D., which was very closely akin to the old German and old English spoken about that time. It was translated direct from the Greek, although only fragments have survived, mostly of the New Testament. It is a very faithful and literal rendering, and at times even reproduces the pronunciation of Greek words, where these are transliterated. Needless to say, being entirely free from the influence of Jerome's Latin version, it does not contain Latin terms such as *perish*, *damnation*, *perdition*, *torment*, *eternal*, *punishment*. It uses exclusively what were then native German words, very simple and elementary. The Gothic is the first rendering of the Scriptures into any Teutonic tongue. The Goths were a very virile people from the North of Europe, who dominated most of Europe about the time this version was produced by Wulfila. Spreading southwards, they overran Greece and Italy, and captured Rome in 410 A.D. Eventually they seem to have died out of the Mediter-

raean countries, and as a distinct people they became lost to history.

To show how close Gothic comes to modern English, it may be pointed out that the following words are either spelt or sounded exactly the same in each: all, arm, blind, brother, corn, daughter, door, dumb, finger, full, grass, hand, heart, hard, lamb, land, light, little, lust, while, white, year, young.

Very often the Gothic preserves the truth where modern English and German versions have become corrupt. Thus where the Anglo-Saxon version and the Authorized Version often put life instead of soul, the Gothic has soul (*saiwal*), as Wiclif generally has also. In Luke 6:1, where the A.V. has, "on the second sabbath after the first" (C.V. "on the second first sabbath"), Wiclif has "in the secunde firste saboth", the Angle has "on the after rest-day first", while the Gothic, one thousand years before Wiclif's time, has, "in sabbath second first" (*in sabbato antharamma frumin*). The Vulgate is also here correct. Similarly, in Mark 16:9, the Vulgate and the Gothic support the C.V. ("in the morning, in the first sabbath"), the Gothic reading "in morning, in first sabbath" (*in maurgin frumin sabbato*). Wiclif here departs from the Vulgate by putting, "erly in the first day of the wouk", while Tyndale is also wrong, with "the morowe after the sabboth daye".

How then does the Gothic render the Greek eon and eonian? For the adjective it has in every one out of twenty-four occurrences *aiweinos*, not very dissimilar from the Greek *aiōnios*. For the noun *aiōn* it shows *aiws* (or *aivs*) twenty out of twenty-five times, once it has life (*libains*), and elsewhere two other expressions. *Aiws* is the exact equivalent of the Latin *aevum* and the Greek *aiōn*. The following expressions are met with: *du aiwa* (to or for the eon), *in aiwins* (in the eon), *und aiw* (until the eon), *fram aiwa* (from the eon), *this aiwis* (this eon), *yainis aiwis* (yon eon, that eon), in the eon

to come, from the beginning of the eon. In 2 Tim. 1:9 the Gothic reads, *faur mela aiweina* (before eonian times), and in 2 Cor. 4:4, *guth this aiwis* (the god of this eon).

Unfortunately, we are not able to tell how the Gothic read in most of Paul's epistles and the Unveiling, as little has come down to us except parts of the four Gospels.

The Coptic version, made probably about the end of the second century, for use in Egypt, and still used there, appears to render the Hebrew *olm* and the Greek *aiōn* by *eneh*, a word which is defined in Coptic dictionaries as meaning nothing more than "time".

The Armenian version is ascribed to Mesrop (354-441 A.D.) and others. Conybeare says it "fits the Greek of the Septuagint as a glove the hand that wears it; keeping so close to the Greek that it has almost the same value for us as the Greek text itself, from which the translator worked, would possess".

For the Greek *aiōn* it generally uses *yavidyan*, a word meaning eon. Sometimes *ashkharh*, meaning "world", is used instead. In Eph. 2:2 (C.V. "the eon of this world") the two words are used together, *yavidyeni ashkharhis*, meaning the same as does the C.V. All the special expressions in the Greek containing *aiōn* (which are unknown to classical Greek) are found reproduced in the Armenian. In the Psalms, the same expressions which are found in the Septuagint occur in the Armenian, such as "for the eon and for the eon of the eon".

The root of the word *yavidyan* is *yaved*, which is shown in Armenian dictionaries as meaning "more, at most, a great deal". There is a verb, *yavyeloum*, which means to "add, increase, augment, grow". *Yavidyan* is defined as "age, life, world", but when used in a theological sense, it is obliged to take on the *opposite* meaning, of "eternity, perpetuity".

The Ethiopic version, in the semitic language former-

ly spoken in Abyssinia, is thought to have been made in the fourth or fifth century, from the Greek. It reproduces the usual Greek expressions containing eon. The word used is *olm*, exactly the same as in Hebrew and Syriac. In Jude 25 it reads, "and for all the eons" (*u-l-kul olmth*), showing the plural form. In Heb. 9:26 it reads, "at the conclusion of the eon" (*l-chlqth olm*). In Eph. 3:21 it reads, "in every generation and for the eon of the eon" (*b-kl-thuld u-l-olm olm*). In the Psalms it has a few times, as in 45:17, 48:14, and 52:8, "for the eon and for the eon of the eon" (*l-olm, u-l-olm olm*). That this word *olm* assuredly could not signify "eternity" is placed beyond all doubt by the fact that it is also used to represent the Greek word for world (*kosmos*) generally, as throughout John 17. It also stands for the Greek word for era (*kairos*), as in Mk. 10:30 and Luke 18:30, and even for generation (*genea*) as in Luke 16:8.

Old English versions were made not from the Greek, but from the Latin Vulgate, between the years 680 and 995. The four Gospels were done, and probably other parts. The Latin adjective *aeternum* (which Jerome used for eonian) is always rendered by the little word *ece*. Where Jerome for the noun has *seculum*, the Old English uses *worulde* (world) in all sixteen cases. Where Jerome has *in aeternum*, the Old English eight times has *ecnyse*, five times *never* (with a negative in the Latin), and once *ever*. The two words, *ece* and *world*, will amply repay a little investigation.

The once very common English word *ece*, which can be traced down till about 1260 (although it disappeared as an adjective soon after that), is stated to come from the Old English verb *ecan*, meaning to "prolong, augment, increase". The word survives as a verb, to eke, meaning to add, lengthen, and as an adverb, meaning, also, in addition. A nickname was originally "an eke name", that is, an added name. In Scottish Law, an eik is an addition to a legal document.

The reason why the simple word *ece* was forced out of English probably was that it was too equivocal. Theology was trying to make it stand for "everlasting", whereas it only meant "lasting". These latter terms were to take its place, as in *Cursor Mundi* (The Course of the World, a metrical version of Bible history, written about 1320), which has the line, "Through Jhesu come to life lasting" (Thorū Jhesu com to liif lastand). Soon after this time, the word everlasting took the place of *ece* and *lasting*, a transition which made a very great deal of difference.

In present day English, we may use the word "world" in two senses. We may speak of the world before the Flood as meaning the race of mankind that lived then, or society as it then existed, or we may speak of it as meaning the physical earth as it then was. The latter sense was quite unknown in Old English, and only began to creep in about the year 1200, when it was so used in the long poem, *The Ormulum*. Prior to that time, world meant only the lifetime of man, the living generation of men, society as a whole at any time. It answered well to the Latin *seculum*, and was used from about the year 700 to translate it. Then it came to mean the physical earth on which the generations of men lived, and in much more recent times it came to be used of others planets also.

It might here be remarked that an extraordinary change was going on in English speech between the twelfth and the fourteenth centuries. Up till the year 950 there was very little admixture of Latin or Danish words. The result of the Danish invasion meant that thousands of fine old poetic words became lost. From 1200 to 1280 was the most disastrous of all periods. A great many prose words disappeared, and the upper classes discarded English for French. For about eighty years after 1280 there was a vast inroad of French words to take the place of English words driven out of circulation, or forced to become merely dialectal. From about 1360 a new standard of English was spoken at Court,

and French ceased to be fashionable. It was what has been described as this "wild anarchy of speech" that was raging in England from 1300 to 1500 that caused many words to take on new meanings or lose their old meanings. These facts have been noted briefly merely because of their connection with John Wiclif, and so that we may understand more clearly his usage of the word "world".

WICLIF AND HIS VERSION

John Wiclif was probably the first person to translate the whole Bible into the English tongue. He was born about 1320, at the time when the language of England was in the melting-pot. He commenced by translating the Unveiling in 1356, and, with the help of collaborators, finished the entire Bible by 1382. Two years later he died. Well did he live up to one of his sayings, that "Christian men ought to travail night and day about text of holy writ". He is noteworthy as having been described as the one Englishman who during the past eleven hundred years was able to mold Christian thought on the continent of Europe. Not only was his private life irreproachable, but in his opposition to the claims of the Roman Church he was without fear of any man. In addition, he was a true scholar, and wrote a great many books, mostly in Latin. These became very popular in Bohemia (now part of the modern Czecho-Slovakia), as King Richard II of England had married the devout Princess Anne of Bohemia, a lover of the Scriptures. While at Prague university, John Huss came under the influence of Wiclif's writings, and in 1415 he was burnt at the stake for his faith. The followers of Huss became very numerous, and long-continued wars against them failed to extirpate them. Their powerful influence spread to the neighboring parts of Germany, including Saxony, where Martin Luther was born, who became a fearless champion of the Scriptures.

The Latin Vulgate version dominated Europe for the thousand years which lay between Jerome and Wiclif, and longer. No one seems to have thought in those times of a Greek original, and in any case, the Greek language was all but forgotten in Europe. The Catholic Church used Latin in its services, and Latin had displaced Greek completely as the universal language of courts and clergy and scholars. It will therefore be of great interest to observe how Wiclif rendered the Latin of the Vulgate, and to note his views concerning the future. We shall find that his language differs markedly from that used by the various translations which were made from the time of Tyndale, one hundred and fifty years after Wiclif, including Coverdale's (1535), Cranmer's (1539), the Genevan (1557), and the Rheims (1582), down to the Authorized of 1611. Never once does Wiclif use the expression "for ever", or "for ever and ever". Though he uses "everlasting", he never uses "eternal". Had the Authorized Version been the next English version to be made after Wiclif's it would never have found acceptance. As it was, it enjoyed the benefit of following closely on the lines of a number of fairly similar versions, which thus paved the way for it. Though the expressions used by Wiclif are far from perfect, great is the decline manifested in the next English version to be published, Tyndale's. Tyndale brought in "for ever", "for ever and ever", "for evermore", where Wiclif expressed no such thought. Instead of the Reformation and the revival of learning bringing in added light regarding the times to come, they brought about gross darkness and confusion.

As has been stated, Wiclif used "world" to represent the Latin *seculum*, which Jerome used for the Greek *aiōn*. Instead of the modern "for ever" and "for ever and ever", twenty-nine times he has "in to worldis" or "in to worldis of worldis". In Luke 1: 70 he has "from the world", where the A.V. has "since the beginning of

the world" (C.V. "from the eon"). In Eph. 3:9 he has "fro worldis", where the A.V. has "from the beginning of the world" (C.V. "from the eons"). In Unv. 15:3 he has "king of worldis", where the A.V. has "king of saints" (marg. nations, or ages. C.V. "king of the cons"). In Heb. 1:8 he has "in to the world of world" for the Latin "into the seculum of the seculum", where the A.V. has "for ever and ever" (C.V. "for the eon of the eon"). The following renderings from Eph. 3:21 may be contrasted:

- Wiclif: "in to alle the generaciouns of the worldis".
- Tyndale: "thorowout all generacions from tyme to tyme".
- Geneva: "throughout all generations for ever".
- Rheims: "unto al generations world without end".
- Coverdale: "at all times for ever and ever".
- A.V.: "throughout all ages, world without end".
- C.V.: "for all the generations of the eon of the eons".

In Heb. 9:26 Wiclif has "in the endyng of worldis", where the Rheims version also retains the plural, "in the consummation of the worldes". Tyndale, Coverdale, Cranmer and the Genevan all corrupt this into "in the ende of the worlde", which is followed by the A.V. (C.V. "at the conclusion of the eons"). Similarly, in Heb. 11:3, Wiclif and the Rheims preserve the plural "worlds", corresponding to the Vulgate seculums (C.V. "the eons"). In Heb. 13:8, Wiclif alone preserves some semblance of the truth, reading "in to worldis", where the later English versions have "continueth for ever" (A.V. "for ever"; C.V. "for the eons").

In 1 Peter 4:11, Wiclif has "in to the worldis of worldis". Tyndale wished to bring in eternity, and at the same time retain "world". He therefore rendered by "for ever and whyll the worlde stondeth". The other versions of about his time relapse into "for ever and ever".

In Psalm 90:2 anyone can see how much more faith-

ful Wiclif is to the Hebrew, which reads, "from olam until olam Thou art Deity".

A.V.: "from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God".

Coverdale: "thou art God from everlastinge and worlde with out ende".

Wiclif: "from the world and into the world thou art God".

We have seen that the Latin Vulgate had an extraordinary reading in Exodus 15:18, "into eternity and further". This must have seemed very strange to Wiclif and his assistants. They might have compromised by putting what the later versions put, "for ever and ever". But they wished to be as faithful as their light allowed them. Considering that they understood by "world" what we now understand by eon, it is greatly to their credit that we should find them rendering this, five hundred and fifty years ago by, "The Lord schal regne in to the world, and ferth'e" (further).

A rendering of Wiclif's which it is stated "many will find preferable to the Authorized Version" is found in John 11:26, "Eche that lyveth and bileveth in me schal not die withouten ende" for "shall never die". Only three times does Wiclif use the word never. None of these has any reference to life or salvation. In Mark 11:14 and John 13:8 he had:

Wiclif: "Now never ete ony man fruyt of thee more".

C.V.: "No longer may anyone be eating fruit of you for the eon".

Wiclif: "Thou schalt never waische my feet".

C.V.: "Under no circumstances should you be washing my feet for the eon".

But in the revision of Wiclif's Bible by Purvey (1388) this is altered to "now no more with outen ende" in the former case, while the latter reads, "Thou schalt not waische to me the feet in to with outen ende". In fact, Purvey altered about half or more of the occurrences of "withouten ende" into "in to with outen ende". It would therefore appear that both Wiclif and

Purvey did not feel satisfied regarding the expression "without end", which might be, and certainly later was, misunderstood. They must have had more than a suspicion that "without end" was not an adverbial phrase, equivalent to "endlessly", but really a noun, as in Latin and Greek, meaning a period of time whereof the end was not disclosed. Just as the periods or olams in Hebrew are "obscure" in duration, so Wiclif looked on the coming eons as periods whose ends were not defined. What we call the eon he called the "with outen ende".

THE WORLD

What did Wiclif understand by this word? We have seen that about his time the word was coming to take on a new meaning which it never had before, that of the physical world, whereas formerly it had only referred to the transient world of humanity as seen in connection with the passing course of time. Wiclif used it in the old primitive sense, as equivalent to eon. This was the sense in which the word was used in the Old English versions, for seven hundred years before Wiclif. To express the physical world or earth, Old English, and also Old German, used another term, middan-geard (middle-yard or ward), which was the middle region between heaven above and the region below. A sermon on Matt. 24:43 once much preached by Dan Michel of Northgate (1340), but very popular long before his time, contains the words, "Those that dwell in Thine house for worlds of worlds" (tho thet wonyeth ine thyne house in wordles of wordles). No one could have understood "worlds of worlds" as meaning a succession of new earths or of planets. The words meant ages, or eons.

Wiclif, it would seem, came near to restoring a great truth to its proper place. Had he had the Greek text before him, there is little doubt that he would have accomplished this. As it was, the inconsistency of the Latin Vulgate obliged him also to be somewhat inconsistent,

and this may be the reason why versions which came after his time most unfortunately used "world" in a sense different from his usage. By Tyndale's time, world had come to be used as meaning a state or place, rather than a limited period of time.

In his "Synonyms of the New Testament", Archbishop Trench draws a contrast between *kosmos* (world) and *aiōn* (eon), both of which are rendered in the Authorized Version by "world". In the case of *aiōn* he thinks more use might have been made of "age". He regrets that the translators did not somehow mark the difference between *kosmos* (*mundus*), the world contemplated under aspects of space, and *aiōn* (*seculum*), the same contemplated under aspects of time, as Latin, like Greek, has two distinct words, where we have, or have acted as though we had, but one. In a note he shows that the word "world", etymologically regarded, more nearly represents *aiōn* than *kosmos*. Our old word *weorulde* is composed of two distinct parts, and where the primitive pronunciation is preserved, two very distinct syllables are still heard. The former part of the word consists of *wer*, a man (like the Latin *vir*, as in *virile*, and the *-er* in words like *speak-er*, also the *wer-* in *werwolf*, the man-wolf). The latter part of the word is *ald*, or *elde*, meaning age or generation. World is therefore defined as "the generation of men". That there is a close connection between the old word world and "eon" was beautifully shown by the old Gothic version, which, in 2 Tim. 4:10 has, for "this present world" (C.V. "the current eon"), the reading, *tho nu ald*, meaning, "this now age".

Quite apart from the manner in which Wiclif translated the Scriptures, however, we are not left in any doubt as to his views regarding future time. Among his voluminous works in Latin, there is one called *Trialogus*, or a discussion between three parties, whom he calls Truth, Liar, and Prudence. This contains a dissertation on the distinction between eternity, eons, and time, ex-

tending to over a thousand words. He says, "It is one matter for a thing to exist always, and another for a thing to be eternal; the world exists always, because at every time, and yet it is not eternal, because it is created, for the moment of creation must have a beginning, as the world had". Between God and the world he draws a sharp distinction as regards their mode of existence. God alone can be eternal, without change or mutation, without fore and after. The world, on the other hand, has a mutable existence, including a fore and an after. The world experiences the continual succession of time. Yet for the saints, and spiritual beings, such as angels, he perceived a third form of existence, the *aevum* life, which we should term eonian life. He supposed that in this life there would be no succession of time. Neither would it be the brief fleeting life of this world, nor would it be eternal. It would be something in between these. Doubtless Wiclif did not have full light regarding the eons to come, yet it seems extraordinary that he could have seen so much as he did, when we consider that he had to depend altogether on the blurred light and inconsistent evidence of the Latin Vulgate. Many there are today, who, with all the clear evidence of the Greek Scriptures set out before them, deliberately reject the terms which God has seen fit to use, and fall back on expressions which are certainly *not* found in the Scriptures. They imagine that the teaching regarding the eons is a modern invention. One such, an educated man, who passes for a scholar, and has written a book dealing with the Greek language, recently made the charge regarding the term *eonian* in the CONCORDANT VERSION that it is a word "which looks as if it had been coined for the purpose"! It required to be pointed out to him that this was exactly the expression used by God frequently in the Scriptures, and that the terms he preferred, such as "eternal" and "everlasting", had really no authority in revelation.

One fine old book, published in 1761 and entitled "Universal Restitution", consists of well over four hundred pages showing forth proofs that "eonian" is the proper scriptural term to use. We shall close our review by giving a few extracts. "Christ is the very God of the aeons, and may be called the aeonian God and King, not on account of his eternal nature, but because he shall reign aeonianly, as universal king; and because he is most strictly speaking the God of the aeonian life.... and also because the ages or aeons are all under his government and direction." "In this view of things death, and hell, and pain, and sorrow, appear to be (not as usually looked upon, accidental creatures that stole into existence by a sort of chance, or some kind of inadvertency in God, but) the provisionary creatures of God's wisdom, and goodness; preordained, by reason of a fitness in their nature, to produce, in the contingent casualties fore-seen, the great events of his benevolence, and communicative inclinations; which, when they shall have fully served (being creatures of a temporary, and aeonian consistence) they must vanish and be no more."

Thus briefly would we summarize the conclusions we have arrived at. The facts of revelation regarding the eons having been early obscured and lost, and the Greek Church having declined, the Latin Church, with its own version, rose into prominence. The Latin version was only a translation, and was therefore not inspired. It changed the import of certain very important inspired time-words as found in the Greek, and gave them a different shade of meaning. The effect was sufficient to produce an utterly distorted outlook on the entire future, and to make God appear to be at one and the same time both a loving Father and a cruel and capricious monster—in fact, no God at all. The Reformation, which was a reformation along certain lines only, instead of undoing and reversing this grievous error of the Latin Church, actually confirmed it and established it.

Concordant Publishing Concern

P.O. Box 449

Almont, Michigan 48003
