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I.

CONVERSIONS TO ROMANISM.

THE remarkable swerve of Anglican Protestantism toward religious beliefs which it dismissed as superstitious in the sixteenth century, is one of the great intellectual paradoxes of our day. It seems hard to understand that it should have taken place in a nation which is still the most Protestant in the world, as judged by the census of its population, which has no toleration in its highest literature for papal modes of thought, which refuses to return a single Roman Catholic to Parliament out of its four hundred and eighty-four English constituencies, and which uses its diplomacy to weaken the influence of the papacy in all the Roman Catholic countries of Europe. It is still more remarkable that the religious reaction of the last forty years has occurred in a nation not given to speculative excesses, not characteristically logical in its methods of inquiry, rather bounded, indeed, in all directions by the limitations of tradition and practical need. It is still more strange that Englishmen should be led to seek shelter from their intellectual difficulties in the bosom of a church which, in spite of its immense pretensions, has become dead and inept as a power of thought, and has long since lost all intellectual hold over the Catholic nations of the world.

The facts are not at all what we should have expected. Conservative instinct, reinforced by the strength of existing relations, was altogether against change. It is hard to tear up the fibres of custom, to snap asunder the bonds of hereditary faith and domestic attachments, and to surrender, perhaps, the fairest prospects in life. There must have been a long agony of doubt and reluctance, a dividing asunder of soul and spirit, as well as a hard struggle with social interests, before men of acute and practiced intellects—some of them of rare speculative intellect, distracted, perhaps, by the very activity

II.

FUTURE PROBATION.

“**F**UTURE probation” is the phrase which is commonly used to denote the doctrine that after this life is ended, men will still have opportunity for faith and repentance. It may not be amiss to remark, that this doctrine has no necessary logical connection with a belief in the final restoration of all rational creatures to the favor of God. While it is plain, in view of the manifest fact that a large part of the human race die in sin, that one who believes in final universal salvation, must either believe in a regeneration and sanctification accomplished in the article of death, or else, with the great majority of restorationists, in a faith and repentance in the life to come; yet, on the other hand, it is no less clear that a man may believe that the offer of salvation will not be restricted to this life, while yet sincerely accepting the Scripture testimony that many will be lost forever.

Again, it is of consequence to observe, that the doctrine of the continuance of the Gospel offer after death is held in various forms. Those who maintain this differ among themselves, (1) as to the *duration* of future probation, and (2) as to its *extent*. There are those who hold that to all eternity it will be possible, upon the condition of repenting of sin, and believing upon Christ as Saviour, for any soul to be saved from sin and woe. Others, again, maintain that, although the possibility of salvation does not end with death, yet there is a time for every one, if not here, then hereafter, after which it will be forever too late to be saved. The most of those who hold this view, as many evangelical theologians of Europe, maintain that this point is or will be reached for each person, whensoever and wheresoever Christ shall be definitely and intelligibly offered, and consciously and deliberately rejected. It seems to be the common opinion with such, however, that before the final judgment, Christ will have been thus offered to every human being who has ever lived, either before death or after. Thus we may distinguish, in a general way, different views regarding the duration of future probation, as the belief in an everlasting probation, and the belief in a probation terminated, at the furthest, by the day of judgment.

We have also to distinguish two opinions as to the extent of the future offer of salvation. There are those who believe that all who die impenitent, will still, for a time, limited or unlimited, after death, have the opportunity of salvation; a larger number restrict this privilege to those who, like the most of men in heathen lands, and not a few in so-called Christian countries, have not had in their lifetime any opportunity of hearing about Christ in any intelligible way, and so have never intelligently rejected him.

It is not easy to exaggerate the practical importance of this question. If the offer of salvation will be continued after death to some or to all who die impenitent, then it should be most clearly shown. We need the consolation which the knowledge of this would give, so often are our hearts overburdened with the inscrutable mystery of permitted sin. But if, on the other hand, the almost universal belief of the Church in all ages to the contrary, be indeed founded on the teachings of God's word, then do we need to know this with assurance. Life is serious enough, in any view of the case; but what shall be said of the awful solemnity of living, if, on the decisions of three-score years and ten, really turns the question whether we shall be holy and happy, or sinful and miserable forever and ever? or what, again, shall be said of the responsibility which rests upon the Church of Christ, if, although the offer of salvation be for this life only, she is anything less than most intensely earnest in carrying the tidings of the great salvation to those who are sitting in darkness?

As to how our hearts would have this question answered, with the light we have, there can be no doubt. From many a soul would a heavy burden be lifted, could the assurance be given from God's word, that for all or any who had died impenitent, there was still room for hope. Especially is this the case with regard to the heathen world. We do not greatly wonder that so many believe in a future preaching of the Gospel, to these at least, if to no others. And while we would be far from calling in question the sincerity and piety of many who confidently hold to the extension of the Gospel offer after death, we cannot resist the conviction forced upon us by many of the arguments one hears, that with very many such these inward desires and longings of the heart, as well as the intellectual difficulties which render so inscrutable the permission of sin by God, and the apparent inequality of his dealings, have often had—no doubt unconsciously to the individual—a decisive influence on the interpretation of God's word. We are told, it is true, that great weight should be given in this matter, to the dictates of the "Christian consciousness." But to this we reply, in the first place, that the

Scriptures claim to be above the consciousness even of the holiest men. The Bible, judged by its own claims, is the judge of this "Christian consciousness," and not the reverse. Then, again, we cannot forget that the time has been when other questions might have been raised, when, as we cannot doubt, the Christian consciousness of us all, could it have been consulted, would have agreed in giving an answer which the event has proved would have been wrong. Suppose, for instance, the question had once been asked, whether it were conceivable that God, being such as he was and is, would ever create a world if he foresaw that to such a creation there would supervene ages of sin and misery. Is there a Christian in the world who, if the question, prior to the event, could have been submitted to him, would not have answered that the supposition was utterly incredible? And yet, sin is here, and pain, and death! For this reason, the natural inclination which, perhaps, almost every Christian at some time feels, to believe, that there must be a future offer of salvation made to some, at least, who die impenitent, becomes a fact of far less significance in argument than many imagine. And must we not remember, too, in this connection, that the views of the evil and the ill-desert of sin which even the holiest men have, fall immeasurably below the Divine judgment? Inadequate conceptions of the evil of sin, we greatly fear, quite as much as a special regard for the vindication of the divine justice, have often had decisive influence in determining the answer to this question as to a probation after death.

Considering this doctrine now under each of the forms under which it is presented, we ask, first, whether there is reason to believe that the offer of salvation will *always* stand open, so that it will never be too late for any one to be saved? The theory which maintains this, as commonly held, seems to us to rest upon an erroneous view as to the nature of free agency. It is conceived that in order to free agency, man must ever have plenary power to choose for God. Hence is inferred an eternal possibility of repentance. It is apart from the scope of this argument to go into a full discussion of this question. We can only say that the theory of freedom to which we refer, seems to us to stand in direct contradiction to undisputed facts of experience. If any man has doubt on this subject, and thinks that because he is free, he can by a volition reverse at pleasure the current of his love or hate, let him at once, by all means, try the experiment, and so test his theory. Let the man who is conscious of hating his enemy, will to begin to love him heartily and sincerely from a certain definite hour!

Moreover, it must not be overlooked that if this argument be assumed to prove the continuance of the possibility of salvation forever, by logical necessity this involves also the perpetual possibility of apostasy from God among the saved,—a doctrine which finds few advocates! On the other hand, if the certainty that a man will never sin,—a certainty which we all believe will be attained by the saved hereafter,—is compatible with freedom, then plainly a certainty that a man will never stop sinning may be no less compatible with freedom.

But even if this conception of the nature of free agency were not false, still the conclusion would not follow that there could never be a time too late to be delivered from the punishment of sin. For mere repentance and forsaking of sin does not of itself bring deliverance from penal evil. That it does this, in the case of the Christian, is due, not to anything in the nature of faith and repentance, but solely to the grace of God, through the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ. In order, therefore, to prove that there can never be a time when salvation shall not be attainable, it must be shown, not only that an irreversible fixedness of character is impossible, but also that there never will be a time when God, who is now ready to save from the penal consequences of sin, on condition of faith and repentance, will be willing no longer. It must be shown from the Scriptures,—the only possible source of knowledge on such a subject,—that it is not possible for a sinner to exhaust the patience and long-suffering of God. It should be clear that we cannot settle a question like this upon *a priori* principles. In quite too many ways, already, do we see that the word of the Lord by the prophet is true, “My thoughts are not your thoughts.”* The only solid foundation for a doctrine of future probation would be a plain “Thus saith the Lord.” There are many passages in the Scriptures which, taken in their most obvious meaning, clearly teach that there is such a thing as an everlasting too late. Will those who maintain the contrary, produce one equally clear declaration on their side of the question?

Again, this theory of an eternal possibility of salvation overlooks patent facts of observation and experience. For is it not plain that the will ever tends to set itself, to all appearance changelessly, with the most astonishing rapidity, especially in evil? Is it not the fact that very rarely do we see a man turn to God who is past fifty? Are there many who turn even at forty? Is it not clear that moral character, instead of never becoming unchangeably fixed in evil, in multitudes of cases appears to be already settled here in this life, far

* Is. lv. 8.

this side of death? And if practically this fixity of character is often reached here on the earth within so short a time as fifty years, what is the probability that a man who has successfully resisted the Gospel for centuries,—supposing it to be offered for so long,—will yet accept it,—say, after a thousand years?

But others, assuming now a different view of human freedom, argue that there is hope yet even in such a case from the almighty power of God. To this we answer that the question is not as to what God can do, but as to what he has revealed that he has determined to do. What the answer to that question must be, does not, with regard to this life, admit of dispute. Although it is true that God is almighty, and although, as we believe, regeneration is an act of his almighty power, yet it is evident that he gives this grace, as a general rule, not without regard to the laws of habit. It is a fact that God very rarely renews any who are past middle life. This is a most significant fact in its bearing on the present controversy. The will rapidly tends to set and harden, as the result of repeated acts of choice, and, so far as all appearances go, with multitudes has already taken an irreversible set against God and holiness, even before life is half gone. It is a fact that God, in the bestowal of his regenerating grace, commonly regards this law. This does not look like an everlasting possibility of salvation.

Finally, against this theory of a probation without limit stand all the representations of the Scriptures as to the issues of the day of judgment. In every instance they represent those issues as final and irreversible. It was the Lord Jesus who declared that to many he would yet speak those awful words, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels"!* As to rejoinders based upon other interpretations of the word *αιωνιος*, it may, we think, be fairly said that the New Testament usage of that term has been finally settled by the highest lexical authority, as denoting endless duration.†

Whatever opinion, then, any may hold as to the precise time when for each one probation ends, if anything is plain from the Scriptures it is this, that it will not continue forever. It will certainly not last beyond the day of judgment. The issues of that day are final. The great burden of all the Divine expostulations is ever just this,—the coming of a time when it shall be forever too late. Thus, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, we read, "To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the days of the temptation in the

* Matt. xxv. 41.

† *Vid.* Cremer: *Lexicon of N. T. Greek.* 2d ed. *sub voc.*

wilderness. . . . To whom I swear in my wrath, they shall not enter into my rest." Of what force such words as these, if there shall never be a time when it shall be too late to repent?

But this is so clear that the most of those who deny a universal restoration, and yet affirm a doctrine of future probation, are careful to say that this probation will yet have a limit. We are told that in no case will it last beyond the intermediate state; while for many, through their free self-decision against Christ, or the sin against the Holy Ghost, it may end much sooner, even in this life. Among those who hold that in the intermediate state, salvation will still be offered, we may, however, distinguish, as above remarked, two classes. There are those who hold that this side of the day of judgment the offer of salvation will be absolutely closed for none, except for those who have been guilty of the sin against the Holy Spirit; while others, probably a much larger number, think that the future offer of salvation will be restricted to those who had not in this life the opportunity of deciding for or against Christ. We have first to consider the view of the former class.

As to these, in the first place, no one pretends to have discovered a single formal statement in the Scriptures teaching that those who reject Christ when offered to them here, will have the opportunity to reverse their decision hereafter. If this be not decisive against the supposed doctrine, yet the absence of such statement is certainly of ominous significance.

In the second place, against this theory stands the fact already noted, that the Scriptures attach such transcendent importance to this earthly life. If all, with the exception of the one small class already noted, shall have the opportunity to believe on Christ hereafter, how explain the burning urgency of the apostle Paul, for example,—his more than willingness, his intense eagerness to become anything, or do anything, so that he "might by all means save some"?* How shall we explain those texts which, like that already cited from the Epistle to the Hebrews, warn so solemnly against even deferring acceptance of the Gospel offer, saying, "*To-day*, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts"?† What is the force on this theory, of 2 Cor. vi. 1,—“We beseech you that ye receive not the grace of God in vain; for he saith: I have heard thee *in an acceptable time*, and in a day of salvation have I succored thee. Behold *now* is the accepted time, behold *now* is the day of salvation.” What is the natural inference from such words but that the apostle Paul under-

* 1 Cor. ix. 22.

† Heb. iii. 7, 8.

stood that the present life settled the question of salvation for eternity with no second chance, for all those who heard from him the Gospel? To the same effect is the natural implication of such passages as the following: "It is appointed unto man once to die, and after that, judgment."* And again, of the effect of the deliberate rejection of Christ: "If we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries."† How can such words as these be made to harmonize with a doctrine which teaches that "if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth still time after death to obtain the benefit of the atoning sacrifice"?

Yet more decisive are the representations of the final judgment in their bearing on the answer to this question. For that which determines the final award of that day, wherever mentioned, is always said to be our conduct in this life. Thus in Matt. xxv. 41-46, the deeds—or rather, the *not* doing—on which the final condemnation of the wicked is made to rest, is expressly said to be an omission of a service to have been done on earth: "I was a stranger and ye took me not in; naked and ye clothed me not; sick and in prison and ye visited me not." And if it be said, as it often is, and as may perhaps be true, that we have in this passage only a representation of those who shall be found living at the Lord's second coming, still there remains the clear and all-inclusive passage in 2 Cor. v. 10, "We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in the body [*lit.* 'the things done through the body'], according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." Not to multiply illustrations, how improbable it is that if some who reject Christ here only first repent and believe on him after death, there should yet be no hint of this in a single statement of the ground on which the final sentence shall be pronounced! That this should be so, if death did not end probation, is to our mind incredible.

Yet, plain as even these considerations seem to make the matter, the Scriptures are yet more explicit. In Luke's Gospel, xvi. 19-31, we have the familiar story of the rich man and Lazarus, the poor rich man and the rich poor man.‡ That the account relates not to the

* Heb. ix. 27.

† Heb. x. 26, 27.

‡ Is this rightly called, as it often is, a parable? We greatly doubt it. It is not called a parable in the Gospel. May not he who said that he testified what he had *seen* with his Father, have spoken here of an actual experience of two men whose case in the other world had specially come under his observation?

state of things after the resurrection and judgment, but to the intermediate state, is expressly stated. The experience of the rich man is said to have been "in Hades," after he was "buried." His brothers had not yet died, for he wishes that word of his evil case may be sent them ere they die, that "they come not also unto this place of torment." It is no less plain that he is taken as a representative of those to whom the Lord addressed the warning—the covetous Pharisees—men to whom saving grace was offered in this life and was rejected. That such persons, when they die, wake up in "torment," is in this narrative, not merely suggested, but directly affirmed by the Lord Jesus himself. Just as clear and unambiguous are the words which follow as to the utter hopelessness of the rich man's condition. Abraham is represented as saying to him, "Between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us which would come from thence." How could language be made to teach more plainly, that for those who have here the opportunity of salvation, and yet live for this world and neglect salvation, the intermediate state is not one of continued opportunity of grace, but of utter hopelessness, the beginning of a "torment," of which there is no end, and from which there is no escape. For the words of Abraham are singularly emphatic. He does not merely say that a passing does not take place, from the one place to the other, that it is not permitted; but that it *cannot* be. "They cannot pass to us who would come from thence." Between Abraham and Lazarus on the one side, and the poor rich man on the other, "a gulf" is fixed, so great as to be impassable. And the hopelessness of the case appears in yet the stronger light, that to pass from "torment" to "Abraham's bosom," is represented as an impossibility of the same order and determined by the same cause as that of passing from "Abraham's bosom" into the place of torment.

The evasion of the plain meaning of these awful words by some, as, *e. g.*, Mr. Jukes, in his *Restitution of All Things*, deserves mention only to show the strait which compels men at once so able, so deeply read in the Scriptures, and so devout as this author, to attempt to save a theory by a resort to such argument. For we are only told in reply to all this, that it does not follow, that because Lazarus could not cross that gulf, therefore Christ could not. The gulf which is impassable to human mercy, may not be to the Divine!* Very true! But that is only half of what the words say. We are told not

* *Vid. op. cit.*, pp. 137, 138.

merely that Lazarus cannot go to the rich man, but also that the rich man cannot go where Lazarus is. Besides, if there was still a hope that Christ would cross the gulf to take the rich man out of torment, then why did not Abraham in mercy comfort the sufferer with that hope? Can we imagine that he should not have told him, if by repentance he might yet escape from woe?

However painful the conclusion and however dark the mystery which veils the judgment of God, the more that we study the Scriptures, the more are we constrained to hold with steadfastness to the teaching of the church catholic upon this subject, that if the Scriptures are to be allowed to decide the question, then we must believe that for all at least who hear the Gospel and reject it, the opportunity of salvation ends with death. For all such we feel compelled to believe that if there be any meaning in words, then the intermediate state is not a state of continued probation, but the beginning of a woe which is endless.

But is it also this for all? This brings us to the consideration of the other form in which a doctrine of probation between death and judgment is maintained. Granting that for all who here have the opportunity of accepting Christ as Saviour and reject him, the intermediate state will offer no chance to reverse their decision, and retrieve their error, may we not, with many, suppose that for those who, through no fault of their own, have never heard of Christ on earth, the opportunity to know his gospel and accept it will be given after death, so that at last to every human being, either in this life or in the next, before the final day of judgment, Christ will have been clearly offered, to be accepted or rejected? This question must not be confounded, as it sometimes is, with the perfectly distinct question, whether it be permitted to suppose that possibly the Spirit of God may, in exceptional cases here in this world, renew the hearts of men who have never heard of a Christ, thus leading them to true repentance and holy living without the knowledge of a Saviour. Whether this be true, indeed, we greatly doubt; never among the heathen have we ever met or heard of one meeting any person who gave evidence of being born again, before that they had heard the Gospel. But whether true or not, this is not the question now before us. What it really is, may be stated again in the words of Prof. Dorner, who advocates this view.

He says: "The absoluteness of Christianity demands that no one be judged before Christianity has been made acceptable and brought near to him. But that is not the case in this life with millions of human beings. Nay, even within the Church there are periods and

circles where the Gospel does not really approach men as that which it is. Moreover, those dying in childhood have not been able to decide personally for Christianity." * To the same effect argues Prof. Van Oosterzee,† as also many other evangelical theologians upon the continent of Europe and elsewhere.

In regard to this question we have to remark, first, as to infants: their case does not oblige us to suppose that because they have not yet been able to believe, therefore they must enter on the intermediate state with their spiritual condition undecided. For as many as believe in the possibility and the fact of infant regeneration, it should be plain that it is quite possible for God, by his almighty power, without interfering with human freedom, by his regenerating grace to make the future free decisions of all such absolutely certain before they leave this world. For infants, therefore, while we must, as Prof. Dorner suggests, admit that their first conscious personal choice of Christ as Lord and Saviour must be made in the future life, yet it by no means follows, as he and others have assumed, that for this reason their regeneration must also take place in the intermediate state. In such a first free choice of Christ we need only see the assured result of a regenerating change which passed upon them while yet in this present life. Where God, however, has revealed so little, we shall do well that our words be few.

The chief interest of the question before us centres in the case of the heathen. Does the word of God warrant the belief that to all those to whom, through no fault of their own, the Gospel has not in their lifetime been preached, it will be preached, bringing them the offer of salvation, in the world of the dead? Gladly, indeed, would one welcome such a doctrine. We do not wonder that so many have eagerly caught at such a hope. Such a truth, *if* a truth, would lift from the heart of many a thoughtful Christian a very heavy burden. Nevertheless we are compelled to say that for our part we are able to find in the word of God no warrant for such a cheering hope, but on the contrary much that seems to be very clear against it.

In the first place, the Scriptures uniformly assume that what is done for the salvation of the heathen must be done in this life. This seems to be suggested, for example, if not distinctly implied, in the account which they give of the missionary labors of the apostle Paul.

* *The Future State*, a translation of the section of Prof. Dorner's *System of Christian Doctrine*, comprising the Doctrine of the Last Things. With an Introduction and Notes by Newman Smyth. p. 101. The passage cited will be found in Sec. 153 of Dorner's above-named work, as also, with one exception noted below, all other citations from Prof. Dorner in the present article.

† *Christian Dogmatics*. Translated from the Dutch by J. W. Watson, B.A., and M. J. Evans, B.A. p. 781.

Again and again we read of his consuming zeal at whatsoever cost of hardship, danger, and severest self-denial, to preach Christ in the regions beyond, where he had not been named.* This certainly sounds as if he believed that the salvation of those to whom Christ had not been named depended upon their hearing of Christ *here*, in this world, from the living preacher. In this respect the spirit and manifest implication of the facts is in accord with the whole tone of Scripture, which has in all ages been understood by the great majority of the Church to imply that whatsoever offer of Christ be made to any, it must be made in this life or never.

Again, in Rom. x. 9-17, Paul first lays down the necessity of faith,—of calling on the name of the Lord—in order to salvation. To this necessity he makes no exceptions, suggests no qualifications whatever. But then he reminds us that men cannot “call upon him of whom they have not heard”; that “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”; and argues that, again, it is impossible for men to hear without preaching, and for any to preach, “except they be sent.”

From these words, as from the apostle’s own actions, the natural inference is that he believed that if the heathen are to be saved, they must hear of Christ from the living preacher. Will any one venture to say that Paul in this language had in mind also a preaching of the Gospel to the dead? Surely his words must refer to the sending of the Gospel by the living Church to unevangelized lands—as to Africa, China, and India—and not to missionary work in Hades!

Most explicit of all, however, are the words of the same apostle in Rom. ii. 12, where we read, “As many as have sinned without law”—what? shall have a chance to hear the law in the next life, and so to repent and be saved? That is far enough from being what he says, for the words are, “As many as have sinned without law, *shall also perish* without law.” The significance of these words becomes the more evident when we observe how the apostle varies the phraseology in the latter half of the verse, when he speaks of those who sin under the light of God’s revealed will. For of them he does not say, “As many as have sinned in the law, shall perish by the law.” He could not indeed say this. He knew that of such very many, although sinners condemned by the law they had knowingly broken, would yet be saved through the Gospel of Christ. Hence, he very significantly varies from the previous phrase, and simply says of such that they “shall be *judged* by the law.” What shall be the issue of

* See Rom. xv. 20-24.

the judgment he does not say, for the reason that in different cases the issue would be different. That issue would depend, one way or the other, upon their reception of the Gospel. How could words teach more plainly, that those who have not had in this life the knowledge of the revealed will of God will "*perish*"? No words could be more categorical or all-inclusive in their scope. "*As many as have sinned without law, shall also perish without law*"! This single passage seems to us to stand like a wall, forbidding to all who acknowledge the inspired authority of the apostle any further speculation on the matter. And yet, strange to say, Prof. Dorner, in his argument upon the other side of this question, wholly ignores this text.

To these strictly Scriptural arguments we do not feel that it should be necessary to add anything else. Where the Holy Spirit has spoken, it befits us to be silent. Yet there are two considerations which tend to confirm this understanding of the word of God, and so tell against "the larger hope."

In the first place, one of the most marked characteristics of the Biblical teaching is the emphasis which it everywhere lays upon the wickedness of sin. Never do we find a single word to minify its guilt or qualify the impression which the Scriptures ever seek to give of its exceeding ill-desert. But this doctrine of a continuance of the Gospel offer after death in the case of the heathen tends distinctly in the opposite direction. It tends most naturally to minify, as the contrasted view tends to magnify, the evil of sin. Thus it stands opposed both to the spirit and the letter of the Bible-teaching as to sin, even as the Church doctrine is in full accord with it. Sin is bad enough at best; but if there be no offer of salvation after death to any human being, then its evil appears in all the darker color. For men constantly argue that if the heathen have not the Gospel here, then there must be an offer of God's grace made hereafter, because otherwise God would be partial. But this argument assumes that man has at least so much claim as this on the mercy of God, that he may in righteousness demand that if God offer salvation to any, he shall offer it to all; if not here, then hereafter. But this assertion of a claim of the sinner upon God, implies that his sin is not altogether a matter of blame, but in part a misfortune, because of which he has at least a partial claim upon the mercy of God. But with the denial of an offer of the Gospel after death, all ground for such a claim is denied *in toto*; and thus, in full accord with the constant teachings of the Scriptures, the intrinsic ill-desert of sin is brought out in the most vivid manner. The sinner is thus brought in as utterly "without excuse," and therefore without a claim on God of any kind. To

prove this latter point, Paul even argues throughout nearly three chapters of the Epistle to the Romans. How then can a view of Scripture be correct which assumes the contrary, and implies that the sinner, under certain conditions, can justly enter a claim that God shall offer him forgiveness?

In the second place, it is against the doctrine of a future *post-mortem* offer of the Gospel to the heathen, that the tendency of this doctrine where believed, has ever been to make the individual or the Church so believing comparatively indifferent to the great work of carrying the Gospel to the heathen, according to the Lord's commandment. It is a matter of history, familiar to every one, that the great missionary organizations which have done, and still are doing, so much to this end, owed their existence in the first instance to the profound conviction on the part of those who established them, that the heathen were lost, and that their only chance of salvation was in hearing the Gospel in this present life. And to this day, if we inquire who they are that support the work of missions to the heathen with the largest consecration of means and personal service, we shall find that in the great majority of cases they are men and women who, despite the tendencies of the times, hold fast the ancient belief of the Church that for all alike, in heathen as well as in Christian lands, the opportunity of salvation ends with death. On the other hand, if we look about us upon the few bodies of professed Christians who as such hold a doctrine of probation after death, it is the indisputable fact that they have never yet shown any such large-hearted devotion to evangelistic work as those who hold to the general faith of the Church on this subject. A doctrine which naturally and historically tends to make Christians careless about obeying Christ, is not likely to be the truth of God.

But it is right that we should hear what is argued on the other side of this question.

In the first place, then, from the dogmatic point of view, the doctrine of a future probation for at least the heathen, is argued from the nature of God as infinitely good and just. For if we are to believe that God has provided a salvation sufficient for all, and that yet multitudes, through no fault of their own, are in the providence of God precluded from any chance of hearing of Christ in this life, and because of this are helplessly lost, and that forever, then, it is said, it is quite impossible to vindicate the goodness and justice of God.

That, assuming this to be the real state of the case, we find ourselves confronting a dark and most painful mystery, no one will deny. And yet a very little reflection should make it clear to any one that

arguments such as this, from the justice and goodness of God, to what God will do or will not do, cannot be always pressed with much confidence, plausible as they seem at first hearing. For, as already remarked, it will not do to ignore the fact that although God is infinite in justice, goodness, and mercy, yet sin and pain are here. And where is there anything in this common argument from the goodness and justice of God as demanding a future probation for the heathen, which would not have applied, *a fortiori*, against the permission of sin and misery at all? It is here that the real mystery lies; and not in fixing a certain limit to probation, or in denying the offer of pardon to many of the sinful sons of men. Surely the fact that sin is here, notwithstanding the moral perfection of God, should make us more cautious and less confident than some are in the inference that the nature of God ensures to any or all among the heathen an offer of salvation after death.

In the second place, we may well add, with Prof. Wright,* that now sin has mysteriously come into the world, it is at least quite conceivable that the universal limitation of the offer of salvation to the present life may be just the best way that infinite wisdom could devise for restraining the evils of sin within the narrowest possible limits. Certain it is that no man living knows enough of the divine government to be able to show that this may not indeed be so.

Again, the argument assumes a low and false estimate of the moral intelligence and consequent guilt of the heathen. When it is asked whether the heathen can justly be punished for their sin, the answer turns upon the question whether they have any valid excuse for their sin. If they neither know, nor by any possible effort could know, what the holy God requires of man, then indeed we must confess that to punish them would be unjust, and that a future revelation would be necessary before they could be justly condemned. But we must insist that the moral ignorance of the heathen, by thinkers of this class is very often grossly exaggerated. The plain teaching of the Holy Scriptures is that while the heathen have not from the light of nature light enough to save them, they do have enough to condemn them. As regards the revelation of God in external nature, we read that "the invisible things of God from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made,—so that they are without excuse, because that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful." † In like manner as regards the revelation of God's will in the heart,—the law

* *The Relation of Death to Probation*, p. 40.

† Rom. i. 20, 21.

which is written on the natural conscience,—we read again, that these which have not the law, are yet “a law unto themselves, which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing, or else excusing one another.”* That the heathen are so totally and helplessly ignorant that they could not be justly punished for their sin, is in these passages formally denied.

And the argument of the apostle is confirmed by the testimony of the heathen themselves in numberless instances. Evil as their life is, they know, or, at least, if they but stop and think, they may know that it is evil. This is shown, for example, by the fact that among idolatrous peoples, again and again, have thoughtful individuals seen the folly and the sin of idol worship, and, led by the light of nature only, have condemned and forsaken it. And the stern charge of God’s Word is the more acknowledged in the multitude of testimonies which we have from heathen in every age and in every part of the world—testimonies at once to their knowledge of the right and the wrong, and their consciousness of guilt and ill-desert.

But it is rejoined that still, although the heathen may for their sins deserve to be punished, as indeed do we all; yet, since God has offered salvation to many, he must therefore in justice offer it to all, and at least give all an equal chance to accept or reject the salvation, else he were become partial and unjust. Hence it is inferred with great confidence, that since, beyond doubt, the Gospel is not offered to all in this life, it will certainly be offered after death, before the final judgment, to all who could not hear the Gospel while in this present life. To this argument one might answer that it is contradicted even by the voice of human reason as expressed in human government. For, in the case of a revolt among men, who would venture to maintain that in the event of an amnesty being offered to some, the Government could not do less in justice than offer amnesty to all whose guilt was similar? Can any one deny that in such a case a human government may reserve, and righteously reserve, its rights of sovereignty? Where in the history of our race was the theory ever propounded or acted on, that in such cases amnesty must be offered to all under the same circumstances, if offered to any?

But this argument derives its whole force from the tacit assumption already mentioned, that man has some claim on God for saving mercy. For if he has not, what basis then for the assumption that

* Rom. ii. 15.

those to whom the Gospel is not offered in this life, *must* have it offered after death? But to assume such a claim of man on God is to assume what is contradicted by the plainest declarations of the Scriptures. Everywhere and always they insist that man's salvation is "*all of grace*"; whereas this argument assumes that the heathen somehow have a claim in righteousness on God for the offer of the Gospel, so that the Gospel is therefore not *all* of grace, but in part, at least, of debt!

Last of all, whether any man like it or not, the fact remains and cannot be explained away, that God actually claims and uses this absolute sovereignty in the dispensations of his mercy. Are all men treated alike in the general providential government of God? Neither, according to the Scripture, will they be in his redemptive administrations. For it is written, "He saith, I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy." *

What then? Must we conclude that, as far as man can see, there must be injustice with God, if the heathen, many of them, have not here or hereafter the offer of salvation? How shall this be? Injustice to whom? Not surely to those who hear the Gospel, believe, and are saved; they are saved righteously by the expiating blood. Not surely to those who hear the Gospel in this life, and reject it; they have acted freely in rejecting Christ and suffer justly, and cannot complain or justly demand a second probation. Is there then injustice toward the heathen who never hear the Gospel, and so perish in their sins? Neither can this be. For in the first place, they did not deserve to be saved any more than others; in the second place, because they will not be punished for not believing on him of whom they never heard nor could hear, but only for not living up to the light that they either had or could have had; and lastly, because God, as he tells us, will in the final judgment take full account of all the disadvantages under which any have lived. "He that knew his Master's will and did it not, shall be beaten with many stripes, and he that knew not his Master's will and did it not, shall be beaten with few stripes."

It is plausibly argued, again, by Prof. Dorner† and others, that except we suppose a continuance of probation for many in the intermediate state, then, all being settled and decided for every individual with death, there remains no apparent occasion for that day of judgment which the Scriptures reveal. That final judgment thus appears to be a superfluity for which there is no sufficient moral reason.

* Rom. ix. 15.

† *The Future State. Ed. cit.*, p. 100.

To this we answer, that even if we could think of no adequate moral reason under these conditions for the future day of judgment, still we know too little to affirm that therefore there could be no adequate reason, and then venture to make that affirmation the basis of an argument in such a momentous matter as this.

And yet it does not seem difficult to see how, although the eternal moral state be unalterably fixed at death, there may still be good and sufficient reasons why a final general judgment should take place at the end of the present age. It may, for example, still be necessary in order to a full vindication of the ways of God in the sight of all his creatures, in regard to the mystery of permitted sin and of redemption. And since, again, the influence for good or evil which any one exerts in no case ceases at his death, but continues, often in a very manifest way, for centuries, and that with a constantly increasing volume and force, it is not difficult to see that in this fact also there may be another good reason why the final apportionment of reward and retribution should be deferred until, human history under sin being at last ended, the total ultimate result and moral significance of each and every life, in good or evil, shall be fully manifest.

It is argued again that if we deny a probation after death for many of the human family, then there is no room left for a progress of the soul after death.* The denial of the one, we are told, involves the denial of the other also. But the two cases of the dead in Christ and the impenitent dead, differ so essentially that we cannot thus argue from the one to the other. In the case of the progress of the believer after death, we have to do with a character which before death had been already formed after Christ. So with those who die in sin. The type of character—in this case evil—is already formed. But when we speak of a supposed future probation, the question is not one of progress in either good or evil, but of a radical transformation of the *type* of character. Growth of character after death, as here, is not only possible, but necessary. That the soul must grow in good or evil, is a law of its existence. But a radical transformation of character is admitted in the case of the saved to be impossible. In this, those who use this argument are not commonly consistent with themselves. They all admit that for those who believe on Christ a life is reached after death, in which a radical change of character from good to evil, is for whatsoever reason now no longer possible. But if the impossibility of such a radical change of character in the direction of

* Dorner: *The Future State. Ed. cit.*, p. 100.

evil is not incompatible with the possibility of spiritual progress after death, why should a final impossibility of change in the opposite direction be any more so? The two cases are analogous. Consistency would therefore demand that those who use this argument to show that a man may turn from sin to God after death, should also maintain on the same ground that the saved might in the intermediate state turn away from God to serve the devil. But such a possibility no one cares to affirm.

Again, we are told—to use the words of Prof. Dorner—that the Old Testament “does not teach that all men immediately after death enter into blessedness or damnation.” They rather enter “Sheol,” which is described as “an abode of the departed who are without power and true life. The pious and godless are not thought of as separated therein.”* In proof of this assertion he refers to ten passages of the Old Testament,† wherein, sometimes the righteous, sometimes the wicked, are said to go down into Sheol when they die; and where, in one instance, Sheol is described as “the dark,” the “land of forgetfulness,” a place where God will not declare his wonders or his loving-kindness.

In reply to this, we have to say that while it is true that the passages to which Prof. Dorner refers, the righteous and the wicked are both represented as going down into Sheol, yet there is not a word in any of them which by any implication teaches that the godly and the ungodly are still mingled together after death as in this visible world. The truth is that in all these Old Testament representations, Sheol seems to be simply a generic term for the world of the dead, the unseen world of “shades” or spirits. To assume, on the ground of the Old Testament usage of Sheol, that the Old Testament teaches or may give fair ground for inferring that as yet in the intermediate state there is no separation between the righteous and the wicked, is not to get theology out of the Bible, but to put a theology into it. Of the passages to which Prof. Dorner refers, that in Ps. lxxxviii. might with much more reason be understood to teach that in the intermediate state there will be *no* display of saving mercy. For we read, verses 11, 12, “Shall thy loving-kindness be declared in the grave (Sheol), or thy faithfulness in destruction? Shall thy wonders be known in the dark, and thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?” This does not sound like a declaration of God’s saving mercy to the impenitent dead! Alas for the man who in his death has no other ground of hope than can be found in these words!

* *The Future State. Ed. cit.*, p. 101.

† These are Job xxxviii. 17. Gen. xxxvii. 35; xiii. 38; xlv. 29, 31. Num. xvi. 30-33. Ps. xvi. 9, 10; xviii. 5; xlix. 14 ff.; lxxxviii. 11; lxxxix. 48.

But emphasis is laid upon the circumstance that in the great commission and elsewhere it is not said, "He that *heareth* not," but "He that *believeth* not, shall be damned."* But the commission states what is to be the message of the preacher to those who hear the Gospel—not to those who hear it not. To introduce the supposed phrase into a brief summation of what the ambassador of Christ was to preach, would have been in the last degree irrelevant. To infer from this that he that heareth not shall or may be saved, and therefore must have the Gospel preached to him in Hades, is to infer a momentous conclusion from an omission which, when the object of the passage is considered, appears to have not the slightest significance. Nothing in the phraseology of the great commission can be justly held of weight against the categorical statement of the apostle Paul, already noticed, that "as many as have sinned without law, shall also perish without law." What can be plainer than these words? To seek to break their force by insisting on the omission in Mark xvi. of a phraseology which would have been wholly irrelevant to the object of the command, seems to us as perilous as it is vain and useless.

We also meet in behalf of the doctrine of an offer of salvation after death, an argument which may be briefly stated thus: Christ came to seek the lost; but there are lost in the world of the dead; therefore, we may infer that Christ may seek them there as here. To this we answer: If the Scriptures were silent as to the condition of those who have died impenitent, and as to any limitation in time to the offer of God's saving mercy, then, no doubt, from the statement that the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost, we might fairly infer that wherever the lost are to be found, here or in the other world of the dead, there he would seek them. But then they are not silent as to such limitation. Surely the words of Christ about his seeking the lost cannot be held to neutralize his other words about the impassable gulf between the rich man and Lazarus. Besides, it should be noticed that if it be granted that this argument proves anything for a continuance of probation after death, it proves much more than Prof. Dorner at least claims. If the word about the Son of man seeking the lost give us warrant to infer that the Gospel will be preached after death to those of the lost who did *not* hear it in this life, then it proves no less that it will also be preached in Hades to those who *did* have the Gospel offer here; seeing that they are no less truly "lost" than the heathen. It

* Dorner: *The Future State*, p. 102.

will prove, moreover, that there is *no* limit to probation; for we are clearly taught that after the last judgment there will still be "lost" men. But so much as this we do not understand Prof. Dorner to be prepared to affirm; others in this have gone beyond him.

The words of our Lord concerning Tyre and Sidon are also referred to as teaching that the Gospel will be preached at least to the heathen in the state after death. Concerning the inhabitants of those cities, our Lord said unto the people of Bethsaida, "If the mighty works which have been done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes." From these words Prof. Dorner infers that for the people of ancient Tyre and Sidon, death did not end probation; for—to use his words—"if the term of grace expired for them with death, then they would be damned, because through no fault of their own they had not known and experienced Christ."* But if probation did not end with death for them, then we may justly infer that it will not end with death for other peoples in like case.

On this argument it is to be remarked first, that as thus stated in Prof. Dorner's words, it seems to misrepresent, however unintentionally, the views of those who deny a continuance of the offer of salvation after death. For no one maintains, as might be inferred from the above words, that the non-acceptance of Christ will be the ground of the condemnation of the heathen. It is clearly laid down in Romans i. and ii., as elsewhere in the New Testament, that in the last day men will be judged according to the will of God as it was made known to them or might have been known by them, and not as it could not be known by them. It is not, therefore, correct to say that if probation cease with death, then the inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon—and, by parity of reasoning, other heathen—will be damned "because, through no fault of their own, they had not known and experienced Christ." No one who believes that the Scriptures teach the limitation of the Gospel offer to this present life, would accept such a statement of the ground of the condemnation of the heathen.

A further answer to this argument is found in the very significant fact that our Lord, who made the declaration from which Prof. Dorner argues, did not draw from it the inference which he draws, but quite another one, which, by fair interpretation, contradicts his inference. For the words of Christ which immediately follow are not

* *The Future State*, pp. 102, 103.

that therefore Tyre and Sidon before the day of judgment shall have another trial—that his salvation shall yet be preached to them in Hades—but that “it shall be *more tolerable* for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment” than for those who had heard him preach and seen his mighty works, and yet rejected him. These words surely assume that the Tyrians and Sidonians will be punished in the day of judgment; and teach that in proportion to the lesser light against which they sinned, shall their punishment be less severe than that of those who reject an offered Gospel. And this only falls in with his words already cited, that the servant who knew not his master’s will and did it not, shall—not escape—but “be beaten with few stripes.” Thus once and again is the case of those outside the Gospel light brought up in the New Testament, but never is it intimated that such shall yet, on account of their ignorance of the Gospel when here, have yet another opportunity to repent in the life after death. These passages are more than sufficient to nullify the force of the argument to the contrary from the words concerning Tyre and Sidon.

Some have even cited as in favor of the probationary character of the intermediate state, passages which speak of the Lord as keeping that which we commit to his trust “against that day,” etc. From this it is inferred that, as the period of time from the believer’s committal of himself to Christ includes between that and the judgment, both this life and the intermediate state; therefore, the intermediate state must be, like the present life, a condition wherein there is the possibility of temptation and sin; and, by a still more remote inference, a possibility of falling,—of Christ being offered and rejected. But how any one, from the hope of the apostle or his prayer, that God would keep those already chosen in Christ unto life eternal, whether in life or death, can derive a hope of salvation for those who have never believed on Christ, is beyond our power to comprehend.

More plausible is the argument which is based upon the words of Christ concerning the sin against the Holy Ghost, viz., “Whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world nor in that which is to come.” This has been answered by saying that this argument “is turning rhetoric into logic,”* and we will not say that the reply is inadmissible. It is certainly quite conceivable, according to the ordinary usage of language, that our Lord might use the phraseology in question merely as an emphasized negative, without intending to imply that any other sin might be forgiven in “the world to come.” But in our judgment

* Rev. T. W. Chambers, D.D., in Appendix to translation of Godet’s *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 521. Funk & Wagnalls, New York, 1883.

there is an answer better than this, and more precisely pertinent to the present issue. For, let it be remembered, that these words are cited to prove a possibility of the forgiveness of sin *in the intermediate and disembodied state* of souls between death and the resurrection. We reply, then, to those who cite this passage for this purpose, that the phrase "the world," or "age to come," never anywhere, according to the uniform usage of the Jews, denotes the state, or "world"—if we choose so to call it—into which we enter at death. According to the usage of the Jews, to whom our Lord addressed the words, the phrase was understood to denote a period of time, or order of things,—not in the unseen world of spirits,—but *here*, in the body, on the earth. Instead of its including or having any reference to the disembodied state before the resurrection, the Jews believed that the world, or age to come, would be introduced by the appearing of Messiah, and the resurrection of the just. As long, therefore, as the disembodied state continues, "the world,—or age to come," is not yet in existence. This meaning of the phrase was clearly recognized and adopted by our Lord, in his answer to the objection of the Sadducees to the doctrine of the resurrection,* when he told them that "those who shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world—(or 'age'),—and the resurrection from the dead, . . . cannot die any more, being children of the resurrection." As, then, the phrase, "the world to come," never refers to an order of things or state of existence in the invisible world of disembodied spirits, *prior* to the resurrection, but always to an order of things yet future,—to be *introduced* by the resurrection of the righteous,—an order of things here on the earth, to be experienced in the body,—the words cannot have the slightest relevancy as proof of the possible forgiveness of sins in the disembodied state after death and before resurrection.

Prof. Van Oosterzee argues that the words which Christ is represented as using at the judgment, in Matt. xxv. 34-46, imply that all then judged must by that time have heard of Christ; and that, except this were the case, Christ could not be the Judge of all, as therein and elsewhere represented.† But the phraseology which is employed in that description of the judgment, if its meaning is to be determined by usage, shows that our Lord did not, on that occasion, intend to set forth the judgment of all, both the living and the dead, but only that part of his judgment-work which concerns those who shall be found living at the time of his second coming. For, instead of reading, as in Rev. xx., that "all the dead, small and great,

* Luke xx. ² 45.

† *Christian Dogmatics. Ed. cit., p. 781.*

stand before God," we are told that when the Son of man shall come in his glory, then shall be gathered before him "*all the nations.*" But this word ἔθνος, according to common usage, especially in Matthew's gospel, refers not to the dead, but to bodies of men in the flesh, in their organized capacity,—in a word, to *nations*, and more particularly in this gospel, to the Gentiles, as contrasted with the Jews. If this be the true reference, and this be not intended as more than a representation of a single scene of the great judgment day, then Prof. Van Oosterzee's argument falls to the ground. For we are then able to grant his premise that the Gospel has been evidently preached to all those whose judgment is there set forth; since it is expressly said that before the Lord shall have come again the Gospel *will* have been preached among all nations; while yet it will not follow that from this passage, which has nothing to say of the judgment of the dead, we can rightly infer that by that time the Gospel will have been preached to all the dead as well as all then living.

Another argument has been urged by Prof. Dorner, Smyth, and others, from the cases of resurrection mentioned in the gospels, *viz.*, that of the girl mentioned in Mark v. 41, of the son of the widow of Nain, and of Lazarus. Prof. Dorner states the argument from these cases thus: "A proof that the time of grace does not by a universal law expire with death, is found in Christ's raisings of the dead, *e. g.*, the youth at Nain received, by being raised from the dead, a prolonged term of grace, through which Christ's love became first known to him."* The argument is further developed by Dr. Smyth, as follows: "If it is a law of God's government that judgment follows death, then, in the case of Lazarus, after which death, the first or the second, was the judgment appointed for him? If the law hold good immediately after he died the first time, then his intermediate life between his two deaths must have escaped judgment altogether for the deeds done in the body. . . . Let us examine the other side of the alternative. The probation of Lazarus, we will suppose, was not closed under a divine law by death, but continued until he died the second time. In this case his judgment after his second death must either be an instance of the general law of the last judgment, . . . or else it must have been a miraculous exception. But if an exception, it would be an exception . . . to a moral law. . . . But to suppose a miracle within the sphere of moral law, would be in the last degree confusing and destructive of all faith. An ethical miracle is ethically inconceivable, for it is not only contrary to experience, but contrary to conscience." †

* *The Future State. Ed. cit.*, p. 102.

† *Ib.* Foot-note, pp. 102, 103.

In answer to this reasoning we have to say, first, that it is a pure assumption, the proof of which is not now even possible, that the decision for Christ in any of the recorded cases of resurrection was not made until after the first death and resurrection. Indeed, in the case of Lazarus, we have good reason to believe the contrary. Mary and Martha and Lazarus all appear, from their first mention in the Gospel story, as the devoted disciples of Christ. There was therefore no new opportunity given Lazarus for repentance and faith; seeing that he appears to have already believed on Christ before his death, and so did not need a second probation. What was the case as regards the two others who are said to have been raised from the dead by Christ, we are not told. But so much we can say with all assurance, that when Prof. Dorner tells us that the son of the widow of Nain received through his being raised from the dead "a prolonged term of grace, through which Christ's love first became known to him," he asserts something of which there is not a hint in the Gospel narrative, and of which he offers no proof of any kind whatever. Indeed, if Prof. Smyth is right in insisting that the law with regard to the termination of probation with death, if a law, can have no exceptions, then where is the difficulty of supposing, with the statement of Luke xvi. 26 before us, that our Lord confined his miracles of resurrection to such as had already before their death turned unto God? We certainly have quite as much right to assume this as Prof. Dorner has to assume the opposite.

But in the second place, if still, however evidence be lacking, it be urged that in all or most of such cases the decision for Christ was not made till after the first death and resurrection, yet the conclusion will not follow which Prof. Smyth would draw from such a fact. For even though we should grant that these were not saved till after their first death and resurrection, so that in this renewed opportunity for repentance there was an exception to the general law that the offer of salvation closes with death, still we see nothing in this "confusing and destructive of all faith" as Prof. Smyth would have it. He seems here to have forgotten, as he has certainly ignored, the well-known distinction between "natural" and "positive" moral law. As regards natural moral law, we fully agree with him, that a miracle in this sphere is "ethically inconceivable." We cannot imagine, for example, that by an exception, God should ordain that in a particular case a man should hate his neighbor instead of loving him, or love himself more than God. That would indeed be "confusing and destructive of all faith." But the moral law includes also what we are wont to call *positive* precepts and regulations, the reason of which is

found, not in the nature, but in the free determination of God. Of these a familiar example will occur to every one in the fourth commandment of the decalogue, which, by common consent, is recognized as not a natural, but a positive law. Now, in the case of all positive precepts and ordinances, in contrast with the other class, an exception is *not* ethically inconceivable. We have no moral difficulty, for example, in imagining that God might modify the fourth commandment so that the observance of every fifth or every tenth day should be made obligatory instead of the seventh.

Precisely such is the case before us. The law of the divine government,—as we believe it to be,—by which the offer of salvation is restricted to this life, belongs plainly to the class, not of natural, but of positive moral laws. We may say with confidence that the fixing of this limit, or of any other, to the time during which the salvation of Christ shall be made available to sinners, is due to nothing in the *nature* of God, but is determined wholly by the divine *sovereignty*, in accord with the highest ends of his moral government. Therefore, if ever a conjuncture of events occur when these high moral and spiritual ends of the government of God can be served by the suspension in a particular case of the positive law which fixes the limit of probation at death, better than by its maintenance in that case, then where is the difficulty in supposing that God should make such an exception? The real moral “confusion” would only arise if we felt that we could *not* suppose that it would be made. Now, when we apply this principle to the cases of resurrection mentioned in the gospels, which are so sophistically urged against the limitation of probation to the present life, we find that these resurrections did occur at just such a supreme juncture in the moral government of God as we have supposed, even the redemptive work of his Son upon the earth. Let it be then granted, what cannot be proved, that there was in each of these cases a suspension of the law limiting probation by death, still such exceptions, made at such a crisis and for such transcendent moral reasons, are thereby abundantly justified, even to our human apprehension, and can by no necessity generate a moral “confusion.”

Last of all, we come to the famous passage in 1 Pet. iii. 18–20. Those verses read, in the revised version, as follows: “Christ also suffered for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God; being put to death in the flesh, but quickened in the spirit; in which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison, which aforetime were disobedient, when the long-suffering God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing.”

Of these words Prof. Dorner says, that what is here said of our

Lord is "to be regarded as the application of the benefit of his atonement, as seems to be intimated by the *κηρύττειν* among the departed." * The same conclusion from the words is also drawn by Dean Alford,† and by many others. Prof. Dorner adds that this descent of Christ into Hades "expresses the universality of Christ's significance, also for former generations and for the entire kingdom of the dead. The distinction between earlier and later generations, between the time of ignorance and the time of knowledge of himself, is done away by Christ. . . . The future world, like the present, is the scene of his activity." ‡

All this is exceedingly plausible, but still we cannot see that these words really prove a possible offer of Christ to the departed heathen or to any others. Many, as is well known, have doubted whether these words really refer to any descent of Christ into Hades, and not rather to a work done by Christ by his Spirit in the days of Noah. With such we do not agree, but only remark in passing that if these interpreters after all should be right, then plainly this passage drops from the list of those which can by any possibility be referred to the case before us. We assume, however, that these words do really describe a work of Christ during the three days of his existence after his crucifixion in the intermediate state, as the majority of modern evangelical exegetes maintain. But that the conclusion which is drawn therefrom in favor of the doctrine of a future offer of Christ to those who have died in sin, follows from this interpretation—this we must certainly deny, and that on the following grounds.

In the first place, it must be observed that at present we have to do with those who refer us to this passage in proof that the Gospel will be preached to all the heathen who have never heard of Christ in this life, while they yet profess to believe that it will not be thus offered hereafter to those who have had the offer of salvation in the present life. As thus applied, we answer that this passage cannot be thus restricted in its application. If it teach an offer of salvation to any, it must teach it for *all* the impenitent. For those who are particularly mentioned as the objects of this *keruxis* of Christ, are *not* those who had not had the offer of salvation in this life. They are explicitly said to be those "who were aforetime disobedient in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing." They were persons, therefore, to whom Noah, the preacher of righteousness, had already in their lifetime faithfully made known the saving truth of God, and

* *The Future State. Ed. cit.*, p. 150. *System of the Doctrine of Christian Faith*, Sec. 124.

† *Commentary on the New Testament, loc. cit.*

‡ *The Future State, Ed. cit.*, pp. 153, 154. *System of the Doctrine of Christian Faith*, Sec. 124.

who had rejected it. The obvious conclusion from this, according to the principles of Prof. Dorner and others, is not merely that the Gospel will be preached after death to men who did not in this life hear the Gospel, but that it will be preached also to those who did here have the Gospel offered and rejected it. But this interpretation would bring the passage into direct contradiction with the words in Luke xvi. 26, which so plainly tell us that those who, like the rich man, have in this life the revelation of God, and reject it to live a worldly life, are at their death separated from those who are saved, by a gulf so deep and broad that no one can cross it. If, then, the words of Peter cannot be taken to teach a possibility of salvation after death, for those who in this life have the Gospel and reject it, what right has any one to make it teach this for the other class who had not the Gospel, to whom there is no allusion in these verses?

In the second place, it is assumed by Prof. Dorner and others, that the word *κηρύττειν*, "to proclaim," which is here employed, must refer to a proclamation of the *Gospel*. This meaning of the word is essential to their argument. If *κηρύττειν*, thus standing by itself, cannot be proved to mean the preaching of the Gospel, then future probation cannot be proved from these verses. But for this assumption neither the context nor the usage of this verb in the New Testament affords any warrant. The passage simply states that there was a proclamation made by Christ to the persons named; that it was a proclamation of mercy, offered for the salvation of those who heard it, is not so much as hinted in the text. Nor does the word *κηρύττειν* in the New Testament, when standing by itself, as here, ever denote the preaching of the Gospel, but only proclamation in general. The only exceptions are in those cases where the Gospel, as the subject of the proclamation, can be supplied from the context. This can be seen by any one in a Concordance. To assume, then, that this word here, without anything in the context which should supply the idea of the Gospel, should yet by itself denote the preaching of the Gospel, is in contradiction to the usage of the word. The issue is quite too serious to base an argument upon an unproved exception to general usage.

Yet again, even if we waive this argument also, and admit that as a solitary exception to the ordinary usage of *κηρύττειν*, this verb here denotes a proclamation of the Gospel, still the doctrine of a possible salvation of any after death will not yet be established. For though we should grant that the proclamation made to those antediluvian sinners was a proclamation of our Lord's redemptive work, yet it would not follow that such proclamation *must* have been made with a view to their salvation. This is not true of all preaching of

the Gospel, even in this present life. We are told in so many words, for example, that this was not the purpose of the preaching of the Word of God by Ezekiel. For it is written that the Lord said unto him, "Go, get thee unto the house of Israel, and speak with my words unto them; . . . but they will not hearken unto thee; for they will not hearken unto me."* If a proclamation of the great work of redemption was really made by our Lord between his death and resurrection in the world of lost spirits, God may easily have had therein good and sufficient reasons other than the salvation of those who when living had chosen to please themselves rather than to please him. What they may have been, it does not befit us curiously to inquire, but it surely were the last degree of presumption to argue that because *we* cannot imagine what such reasons may have been, therefore there can have been no other reason for such a proclamation than the salvation of those who heard it.

But it is argued that the words in the sixth verse of the next chapter teach that the preaching was in order to the salvation of those who heard it. That verse reads, in the revised version, "For unto this end was the Gospel preached even† to the dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit." In this verse, we are told, the reference is still to the antediluvian sinners, mentioned in the previous chapter; and that as *εὐηγγελισθη* is used here instead of *ἐκηρύχθη*, therefore the *keruxis* or proclamation of the previous chapter is here more precisely defined as a proclamation of the Gospel; and that this preaching of the Gospel, moreover, is here plainly said to be "that they might live according to God in the spirit." Whence, it is argued, this makes it perfectly clear that the Gospel was preached by our Lord after he was put to death in the flesh and quickened in the spirit in the world of the dead, to the antediluvian sinners, and that this was done for their salvation; whence, again, it is inferred that this life does not end the opportunity of salvation.

In considering this verse it is of importance to observe that it is not said in this passage nor in the context that the dead of this verse are the dead antediluvians spoken of in chap. iii. This is merely an inference of expositors. That such a reference is in itself possible, need not be denied, but it will not do to assume it without proof. When we look for proof of this it is not easy to find. On the contrary, there is much that points to an entirely different reference of

* Ezekiel iii. 4, 7.

† We should translate "also" instead of "even," however, as in the old version, for reasons apparent below.

the words. The very terms of the passage seem to forbid us to apply them to the dead of the days of Noah. For it will not do to take only the last half of the final clause,—“that they might live according to God in the spirit,”—and ignore the former part of the sentence,—“that they might be judged according to men in the flesh.” This last-mentioned clause is in the same grammatical construction with the latter clause of the verse. It states no less than that clause, a part of the purpose of the preaching here mentioned. The Gospel, we are herein told, was preached to the dead, *not only* in order that they might live according to God in the spirit, *but also* that they might be judged according to men in the flesh,—for the latter purpose, as much as for the former. But what possible meaning can we attach to the former half of the final clause, if we apply it to the case of those who were destroyed in the time of Noah? If the “judgment according to men” be assumed, as it commonly is, to be the fleshly judgment of the deluge, then what is meant by calling that judgment a judgment “according to men”? And, again, assuming that that is the meaning, then what can be meant by saying, as this makes the passage say, that Christ in his three days in the world of the dead preached the Gospel to those dead antediluvians in order “that they might be destroyed in the deluge,” which deluge or “judgment according to men” occurred more than two thousand years before the preaching which is supposed to be the subject of discourse?

Last of all, if we assume this interpretation, what bearing can it be shown to have on the argument of the context in which the verse occurs? The purport of that argument is to encourage the Christians of that time to arm themselves with the martyr spirit, in view of “the fiery trial which was to try some of them,” wherein they would be called upon to suffer for Christ’s sake. What could a preaching of the Gospel to the dead antediluvians have to do with that?

For these reasons, even though we should grant that the passage in chapter iii. refers to a proclamation of the Gospel made by Christ to those who perished in the deluge, we should still be compelled to deny that these words in chapter iv. could refer to the same event. Let the adjective *νεκροίς* (dead) be referred to those who had already suffered martyrdom for Christ’s sake, and all these difficulties disappear. In the first place, as we have seen, the preaching must have preceded in time the judgment according to men in the flesh, because it is said to have been *in order to* that judgment in the flesh. It must therefore have been a preaching to persons who were dead in

deed at the time Peter was writing, but who at the time of the preaching here mentioned were alive. For how could they have been judged in the flesh after they were dead? The passage thus states, as we understand it, that the Gospel was preached to certain persons who had already suffered martyrdom for Christ's sake and were now numbered with the dead, in order that they might by a human judgment be condemned, and thus by suffering glorify their Master, in thus becoming conformed to him in suffering and death. But to continue the paraphrase—God had yet another purpose in causing his Gospel to be preached to these persons; it was no less in order that they might also live according to God in the spirit; that is, that their death might be followed by the same glorious result as the death upon the cross of the Lord Jesus,—a making alive in the spirit, and that unto glory everlasting. Thus interpreted, the words form an argument of the greatest pertinence to the object that the apostle has before him in the context. For what greater encouragement to them to suffer with joyful faith and courage a martyr's death, than to remind them of those who had already fallen in like manner, and who, although thus judged and condemned in the flesh by a human judgment, had entered into a higher life according to God in the spirit, therein in death and life becoming most closely conformed to the Lord Jesus.

Finally, while to our own mind these considerations seem quite decisive against the interpretation which makes Peter teach that the Gospel was preached on the occasion mentioned to the dead for their salvation; yet even if all thus far said be set aside as inconclusive, still the inference of a future offer of salvation to the heathen or to all will not yet be justified. For even though we should admit what the text does not say, that the Gospel was preached by Christ during his three days in Hades to the antediluvian sinners, and that some or all were saved by it, which also the text does not say; still this would not give us any adequate warrant for the inference that the Gospel will be preached in the intermediate state to any others, or at any other time. It has indeed been urged that there is no mention of this work of preaching to the dead having ceased, and therefore we may rightly infer that it has not ceased. But surely it were much more reasonable to argue that as there is no indication that this proclamation, whatever it was, continued for a longer time than the three days that our Lord remained in the disembodied state, therefore we have no right to assume that it continued longer. For the conditions under which the Gospel was offered to those souls at that time—assuming, contrary to fact, as we believe, that it was offered—were

absolutely unique. Never had there been an occasion like that of the descent of the disembodied soul of the incarnate Son of God into Hades, and, in the nature of the case, there never will be such an occasion again. How then can we infer, with any show of reason, that what took place then, must needs take place now and always? As has been well remarked by one commenting on this passage, "It does not follow that because the conduits run wine instead of water on the coronation of the king, therefore they must afterward run wine always."

Such, then, are the chief arguments which have been adduced by the ablest theologians in behalf of the doctrine of a continuance of the Gospel offer to some or to all of the impenitent after the present life. To us the ability of many of those who have advocated the doctrine only renders the weakness of their cause the more manifest. When such a theologian as Prof. Dorner, for example, can bring forth no stronger arguments than those which we have reviewed, what shall we conclude as to the strength of the case?

And looking at the practical aspect of the question, must we not say, with abundant reason, that, in the face of such clear words as those of Christ concerning that impassable gulf between the righteous and the wicked in the other world, the man who on any such considerations as we have reviewed, neglects to make sure of his salvation in this present life, is what the Bible so often calls the sinner, a "fool"? Again, what must we say to those who on the ground of any such arguments, venture to hold forth to sinners the hope of a second chance after death to repent and accept Christ? And what, of any who for like reasons excuse themselves from the most earnest efforts to carry or send the Gospel to the unevangelized? Is there not great reason to fear that such will find themselves in the last day with the blood of souls upon their skirts?

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