

# THE PRESBYTERIAN AND REFORMED REVIEW

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## I.

### ON THE ESCHATOLOGY OF OUR SYMBOLS.

ONE cannot well appreciate at its full value the Eschatology of the Confession and Catechisms of Westminster, unless he is familiar in some degree with the teaching of the Protestant creeds in general, and also with the prevalent theology of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in this department. It is clear that the Westminster divines inherited a definite scheme of doctrine on the topics embraced in this department, to some extent from the Church antecedent to the Reformation, but still more decisively from the professed faith of the various Churches which bore the Protestant name. The Augsburg Confession, for example, teaches (Art. xvii) that in the consummation of the world (*am jüngsten Tag*) Christ shall appear to judge, and shall raise up all the dead, and shall give unto the godly and elect eternal life and everlasting joys; but ungodly men and the devils shall He condemn unto endless torments (*sine fine crucientur*). It also enters a solemn protest against those who imagine that there shall be an end of such torments, and formally condemns those who scatter abroad Jewish notions (*Judaicas opiniones*) to the effect that before the resurrection of the dead, the godly or the saints shall, for a time, occupy the kingdom of this world—shall set up and enjoy an earthly kingdom—the wicked being everywhere suppressed or exterminated (*alle Gottlosen vertilgen werden*). With these comprehensive declarations it may safely be said that all of the subsequent creeds of the sixteenth century, British as well as Continental, so far as they contained eschatological matter, were in substantial agreement.

Following chronologically this prolonged series of creeds, yet still within the range of their immediate influence, the Westminster symbols incorporated afresh their almost unanimous teaching on these grave topics, but with a degree of distinctness and emphasis before unattained. They agree entirely with these preceding confessions, not only in rejecting the papal heresy of purgatory, with its natural corollaries in priestly intercession for the dead and in materialistic conceptions of the heavenly state, but also in condemning other false or imperfect views on specific points in eschatology which had found some degree of currency in Protestant circles. Their very form indicates not only the historic sources from which they sprang, but also the matured condition of the Protestant mind in Great Britain as well as on the Continent, with respect to the solemn topics presented. Simple and direct in diction, comprehensive and unequivocal in their statements, incorporating with happy skill the clearest utterances of the inspired Word, they may be said to present in one view the best thoughts of Protestantism on these topics from the time of Luther, Melancthon and Calvin, down to the middle of the seventeenth century. And is it not a remarkable testimony to the intellectual wisdom and spiritual insight of their framers, that these old symbols contain for the most part not only the best doctrine, but also the best antidote to heresy in this later age when unhistoric speculation is so rife and the minds of many are so much confused or misled as to the real truth of God?

It is the purpose of the present paper to set forth in connected form and as succinctly as possible the doctrine of these symbols in regard to the article of death viewed in its theological relations; to the fact of immortality as a gift bestowed on all men; to the intermediate state in its nature and its experiences; to the problem of a particular judgment at death and of probation after death; to the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment, the rewards of the righteous, the punishment of the wicked, and the ultimate consummation of the kingdom of God in the eternal state. Concerning the interesting questions respecting the future of humanity on earth, the final triumph of the gospel throughout the world, the ascendancy of the kingdom of Christ over the human race, and His second coming as the Judge of all men, nothing can be said in the brief space here at command. It should, however, be remarked in passing, that our symbols distinctly affirm, and in clear and strong language, what has already been mentioned as the doctrine of the Confession of Augsburg and of the Protestant creeds generally on these important topics. They contain no trace of sympathy with the materialistic notions which that primitive confession condemned in such vigorous terms

(*Damnant et alios, qui nunc spargunt Judaicas opiniones*) respecting a coming of Christ upon earth before the resurrection, and His residence among men for a prolonged period, in order to establish a temporal kingdom marked by displays of imperial splendor and by supernatural exhibitions of energy, before which His enemies whom the gospel cannot reach, are to be prostrated and utterly overthrown. Of such a millennium as this—a millennium of power rather than of grace—we find hardly a hint. Nor do they ever suggest some prolonged era of judgment, or a special resurrection of some specific portion of mankind, or any other of the illusive hypotheses now current in premillenarian circles. They affirm rather that the present kingdom of Christ among men, the kingdom of grace, is to be developed more and more until it shall become a spiritual millennium; and that the dominion of Christ over humanity is to be a growing dominion of truth and love and holiness in the souls of men and in the heart of human society, until at last the whole earth shall become submissive to His spiritual sway. They teach that the power of Satan over mankind, the domination of evil in organized and malevolent form in the world, is but temporary, and is in the coming ages to be overthrown in the only way possible—the implantation of Christianity and the cosmic development of the Christian Church, not merely in grace and experience, but also in influence and control. In a word, this doctrine throughout is that which we are taught in the Larger Catechism (191), in respect to the full meaning of the second petition in the prayer which our Lord has taught us:

“We pray that the kingdom of sin and Satan may be destroyed, the gospel propagated throughout the world, the Jews called, the fullness of the Gentiles brought in, the Church furnished with all gospel officers and ordinances, purged from corruption, countenanced and maintained by the civil magistrate: that the ordinances of Christ may be purely dispensed, and made effectual to the converting of those that are yet in their sins, and the confirming, comforting and building up of those that are already converted: that Christ would rule in our hearts here, and hasten the time of His second coming, and our reigning with Him forever: and that He would be pleased so to exercise the kingdom of His power in all the world as may best conduce to these ends.”\*

\* Many other illustrations of their belief on these points might be gathered up from the Confession and the two Catechisms, and from the Directory for Worship (see Conf., chap. viii, *passim*; L. C., 53-56, and Direct., chap. v, “Of Public Prayer”). It is proper to mention also the two new chapters proposed for introduction into the Confession, each of which embodies the general doctrine here stated as to the means by which the kingdom of Christ is to be established among men, and to the glorious result that must ultimately follow

I. Turning, however, from this interesting branch of eschatological doctrine to the main subject proposed, we may note, first, the teaching of the Westminster divines respecting the article of *Death, viewed in its theological aspects and relations*. The term, death, is often used in the symbols as in the Scriptures to describe deadness in sin, that corruption of the spiritual nature which is said to be conveyed through Adam to all his posterity, and which has its counterpart in the intense phrase, "defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body." But we contemplate here only physical death, which is represented as coming into the world as a direct punitive result of human sin. Man is made subject to death in this physical sense (chap. vi. 6) in consequence, first, of this original sin, with its corruption of the moral nature, and then of that actual transgression which specially binds him over to the curse of the law and the wrath of God. Physical death is directly enumerated (L. C., 28, 84; S. C., 19) among the punishments of sin in this world, and as the appointed wages or outcome of personal transgression. The symbols make no reference to the fact that the vegetable and animal worlds, so far as they existed prior to the creation of man, were subject to a law of material decay analogous to physical death in him. The more natural interpretation of their teachings is that man, had he remained sinless, would have been lifted above the range of this general law of decay, and so would have

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the labors of believers and of the Church (see chap. ix. 5 and chap. xi. 4). So far as the language of reports adopted by the General Assembly may be quoted as authoritative illustrations of the accredited faith of the living Church, the following quotation from the report of the Committee on Foreign Missions to the Assembly of 1878 (*Minutes*, p. 115) furnishes an interesting confirmation of the view here presented :

"The Presbyterian Church in this country has planted itself from the beginning on the clear and broad doctrine of Scripture, that this world is yet to be converted to Christ, and that the forces already brought into requisition in the divine economy are all that are needful to the securing of that grand result. The Presbyterian Church believes, that in His Written Word God has revealed all the truth that is essential to the enlightenment and salvation of our humanity. The Presbyterian Church believes that the Spirit of God is potent enough and gracious enough to justify the largest anticipations in respect to the regeneration of mankind. The Presbyterian Church believes that the living Church, as established by Christ, contains within itself, under the divine guidance and quickening, all the agencies and resources requisite to the evangelization of the whole earth. And on these cardinal verities of the Scripture the Presbyterian Church, discouraged by no outward obstacles, daunted by no burdens, now and always plants itself in this great missionary work ; by these it justifies the offering up of its means and the sacrifice of its beloved sons and daughters on this altar. In them it hopes and acts and prays, and in them it will ever hope and act and pray, for the coming of a kingdom that shall be righteousness and joy and peace in the Holy Ghost, and that shall increase and extend until it has filled the earth."



existed on the earth from age to age without any wasting of his native powers, and without the dark experience of death. Perhaps it is not inconsistent with their teaching to hold that, though death would have come in the course of time upon his bodily organism, as upon all other material organisms, such death would have been only a serene and happy translation, void of all painful elements, from these earthly to some celestial scenes.

Certainly death as we now behold it, with all the elements and concomitants that make it so solemn and so dreadful an event, has been utilized by God as the sign and emblem of His feelings towards sin, and of His purpose to punish the sinner. As such it has come upon the entire race, and remains as an inexorable decree through all the generations. Even infants and imbecile persons who have never sinned personally are represented as amenable to this dread law, passing under the universal condemnation in consequence of their sharing in the Adamic taint, and therefore (chap. x. 3) capable of being saved through Christ only, and by the gracious ministrations of the Holy Spirit alone. Though the symbols say but little about the heathen world, yet their clear implication is that the heathen, old and young, die because they also are sinful in the sight of God, and are included by Him in His comprehensive judgment upon the race. So far as His solemn mandate as to death is concerned, no distinction is found to exist between Jew and gentile, between the Christian and the pagan. God does not save even the saint from the action of this universal law, or even from as severe and dreadful pangs in death as befall the greatest unbeliever. But we are taught that He does so far change the nature of death in the case of the righteous, that they are (L. C., 85) delivered from the sting and curse of it, and that, though they must die as men, the event has its source and explanation, not in the wrath of God, but in His love, to free them perfectly and forever from sin and misery, and to make them capable of further and better communion with Christ in glory. To the saint, therefore, the event becomes not a curse, but rather a precious, crowning benediction—a divine decree, having in it the twofold object just stated, and being therefore a final seal of the blessed covenant into which he has, through Christ, been permitted to enter with God.

The doctrine of our Confession and Catechisms at this point is the universal doctrine of the Protestant creeds, and the universal belief of evangelical Protestantism in our time. We cannot rest in the rationalistic conception that physical death in man is nothing more or less than the application to him of a law which is stamped upon the system of nature everywhere, and from which it is, therefore, as impossible for him to escape as it would be to raise himself

by mere volition, or by physical endeavor, above the atmosphere that surrounds the earth. Nor can we accept the cold dogma of speculative science, which excludes God and His will from this dark experience of man, and refers the experience to the mere action of impersonal and inexorable forces. Neither can we shut out the doctrine of an individualizing or particularistic action of Providence in determining for every human being the time, the manner, the condition of his transition through this narrow gateway into the life beyond. Nor can we consent to dissociate death and sin, or to deny that the latter is, in some true and deep sense, the cause of the former: death having passed upon all men, as we are assured, for that all have sinned. Evangelical Protestants can hold no other belief than that, at least in its present painful form, death is the divinely ordained outgrowth of transgression—an outgrowth so broad and so effectual that not adult transgressors in Christian lands alone, but even the heathen in their low blindness and corruption cannot escape it; an outgrowth that reaches even infants, including nearly half of the human race in its wide sweep, and from which even the holiest disciple is not exempt, since he also is of mortal parentage, though for him the nature of death is graciously changed, and its gateway becomes to him the wide door to a purity that is complete, and a blessedness that is everlasting.

II. Associated with this thoroughly Biblical view of death stands the confessional doctrine of *Immortality* as an original endowment of the soul in man. The gift of endless existence is clearly implied in the description (chap. iii. 2) of the nature of man at his creation, as a being made in the image of God. It is directly taught elsewhere, as in the phrase, having an immortal subsistence (chap. xxxii. 1), and in the associated declaration as to the resurrection of the body and its subsequent union with the soul forever. It is also taught in the statement (chap. xxxiii. 2) concerning the issues of the final judgment: the righteous, it is said, going into an everlasting life, and there receiving the fullness of joy and refreshing that shall come from the presence of the Lord for evermore; while the wicked who know not God, and obey not the gospel, are said to be cast into eternal torments, and to be punished with an everlasting destruction (see L. C., 89, 90; S. C., 19). Such passages show beyond question that the writers of the symbols regarded man as *having an immortal subsistence*, not as a gift of grace, but as a constitutional endowment distinguishing him from all other earthly creatures, and allaying him in nature and essence with God forever. They do not, indeed, suggest any of those interesting considerations (such as the uncompounded essence of the soul, the law or principle of continuity enstamped upon it, the survival of its mental and

moral powers in death, its instinctive yearnings and anticipations) by which men have endeavored to prove the fact of human immortality from the light and teachings of nature. But their appeal to the Word of God is very distinct and conclusive, and the fact that they rather assume the doctrine than undertake to set it forth in logical form, is itself a strong evidence as to their belief.

This doctrine of immortality as an original endowment of the soul is indeed one of the fundamental elements of Christianity. It is based immediately on the teachings of Scripture and especially of the New Testament, and centrally on the words of Him whose mission it was to bring life and immortality to light. Whatever may be said respecting the inevitable incompleteness of the great argument from nature, there can be no question concerning the truth in the minds of any who have once recognized and received Jesus Christ as their Teacher concerning eternal things. On these Biblical grounds, the doctrine was incorporated in the first of the Christian creeds in the concluding phrase, the Life Everlasting. We see it also in the *vitam venturi seculi* of the Nicene, and the *vitam æternam* and *ignem æternum* of the Athanasian symbol. The confessions of the Reformation may be said universally to set it forth, though for the most part in the form of general allusion rather than direct statement (see the Augsburg Conf., Art xvii; First Helvetic, vii; Belgic, xxxvii, and others).\* Even the Latin or Roman and the Greek creeds also teach the doctrine, at least by implication, as in their injunctions respecting the offering of prayers and the giving of alms for the benefit of the dead.

It will be obvious at a glance that the heresy of *annihilationism* in whatever form is positively excluded by the Westminster symbols. This heresy affirms in general that immortality, or endlessness of existence, is the peculiar heritage of the righteous, communicated by the Holy Spirit through grace, as the final reward of their faith and obedience, and that the souls of the unholy perish as their bodies perish, either at death, or after some assigned period of penalty, or at the last judgment. The doctrine that endless existence is an original endowment of the soul is thus set aside, and

\* The terse and strong answers of the Heidelberg Catechism may be quoted here as illustrative of the universal Protestant belief:

“6. God created man good, and after his own image—that is, in righteousness and true holiness: that he might rightly know God his Creator, heartily love him, and live with him in eternal blessedness—in *ewiger Seligkeit*—to praise and glorify him.”

“11. God is indeed merciful, but he is likewise just: wherefore his justice requires that sin, which is committed against the most high majesty of God, be also punished with extreme, that is, with everlasting punishment—*der ewigen Strafe*—both of body and soul.”

immortality is made a conditional and also a gracious experience. The arguments urged in favor of this belief are derived from various sources, natural and Biblical. It is claimed in general that the strong language of the Bible respecting the destruction of the wicked, their being swept away before the whirlwind of divine vengeance, their being cast off into outer darkness and there lost forever, justifies this conclusion. And further, that on many grounds it is more in consonance with what we know of the character of God and of His administration over men, and with the essential equities of the case, to believe that He will finally annihilate the wicked rather than preserve them in an unending estate of misery.

That our symbols, following the general trend of the Protestant Confessions, exclude this error in whatever form, cannot be doubted, though the exclusion be implied rather than formal. Their Biblical references are decisive on this point. The assertion that *απολλυμί* and other kindred terms in the New Testament always imply extinction of being, is one which cannot be sustained on either Biblical or confessional grounds. These terms are often used in Scripture to describe varieties of loss, failure, destruction, both temporal and spiritual, which are not in their nature irremediable, and which fall in many instances very far short of utter annihilation. The term death, as applied in the Bible to the present condition of the sinful soul, by no means implies that the soul has perished or is to perish and be blotted out eternally, even though that condition should become characteristic of it forever. And the manner in which the Westminster divines employ such terms, shows beyond question that this mischievous theory had no place whatever in their convictions; shows rather that they regarded all men as alike inherently immortal, and believed in an eternity of being for the sinful, as truly as for those who have received salvation through Christ. The fact that they sometimes used the term immortality, as the Bible itself does (Rom. ii. 7), in a special sense to describe not merely endlessness of being, but also an endless and ineffable felicity of being in the immediate presence of God, does not in any way affect their general doctrine.

III. The third topic to be considered in this cursory survey is the *nature and general characteristics of the Intermediate State*. The question here is whether the soul during the period of its separation from the body onward to the resurrection remains in a state of quiescence or torpor, or is conscious and active, having true and proper exercise of its rational and spiritual powers. The symbols say nothing that would favor the notion of quiescence or slumber during this long interval. They directly declare (xxxii. 1) that the souls of



all men neither die nor sleep after death, but do immediately return as in true consciousness to Him who gave them. They also describe in explicit terms the two estates into which these souls pass at death, and their description invariably implies a conscious and active existence, whether it be one of felicity in the immediate presence of God, or of absence from Him and of retributive torment. The righteous soul is said (L. C., 86) to be received at once into the highest heavens, there to behold the face of God in light and glory, and there to wait for the redemption of its body, and for the wonderful union that shall follow. Like affirmations, though less full, are made respecting the soul that has passed under the experience of death while in a state of wickedness and unbelief. And it is added, that besides these two places or conditions, both of which are seen to involve consciousness and activity, the Scripture acknowledgeth none.

These declarations are better understood, if we call to mind the antecedent symbolism at this point. It is well known that the dogma that the soul sleeps in entire unconsciousness during the period intermediate between death and the resurrection, found some degree of currency in Protestant circles, especially among the Anabaptists, at the very outset of the Reformation. There are expressions in the writings of Luther which would seem to imply that he at one time favored it. The first theological treatise of Calvin, *De Psychopannychia*, was written to confute it. The Reformation creeds, without exception, imply the contrary, though the dogma is not formally stigmatized in them as heretical. The Thirty-nine Articles and the Irish Articles are more explicit, opposition to the heresy evidently having grown, especially in Great Britain, during the period immediately following the Reformation. The most distinct and positive declaration is that of the First Scotch Confession (Art. xvii), which doubtless furnishes the key to the interpretation of the language of Westminster.\* As a whole, Protestant symbolism may be said to condemn Psychopannychism as distinctly, though not quite so formally, as the kindred dogma of

\* The language of the Scotch Confession is so strong and so quaint that it deserves quotation here :

“The Elect departed are in peace, and rest fra their labours: Not that they sleep, and come to a certaine oblivion, as some Phantastickes do affirm: bot that they are delivered fra all feare and torment, and all temptatioun, to quihilk we and all Goddis Eleet are subject in this life. . . . As contrariwise, the reprobate and unfaithfull departed haue anguish, torment and paine, that cannot be expressed. So that nouter are the ane nor the uther in sik sleep that they feel not joy or torment, as the Parable of *Christ Jesus* in the 16th of Luke. his words to the thiefe, and thir wordes of the soules crying under the Altar, *O Lord, thou that art righteous and just, How long sall thou not revenge our blude upon thir that dwellis in the Eird?* dois testifie.”

purgatory with its un-Scriptural concomitants, as affirmed by the Church of Rome.

In view of certain tendencies of our time, chiefly European, it is important to emphasize this doctrine of our symbols. The ingenious argument of Whateley, from passages which speak of death as a sleep, and of the resurrection as an awakening from sleep, and also from his conception of the final judgment as being the first divine adjudication upon the character and deserts of the soul, does not satisfy his own mind, and is practically set aside in the very volume that presents it. Isaac Taylor, in his *Physical Theory of the Future Life*, urges a similar argument, wholly speculative, based on the notion that corporeity and locality are essential to conscious activity on the part of the human soul. But the fact that God exists above locality and corporeity, and that angels, so far as we know, are as conscious and active, though disembodied, as we are in the present life, seems a sufficient answer to this argument. It is well to note just here that neither Whateley nor Taylor urged these views in the interest of that warfare against the doctrine of future punishment which in one form and another so many Continental theologians are so zealously waging in our time. The still life, of Dorner; the calm thought, of Martensen; the relative annihilation, of Nitsch; are illustrations of this dangerous tendency. Evidences are not lacking in other quarters to show that the theory of unconsciousness after death may yet be brought in as an antithesis to the Scriptural doctrine of a judgment occurring to each soul at its departure from time to eternity. Hence the importance of insisting tenaciously upon the Westminster teaching at this point, whatever the Phantastickes (as the old Scotch Confession calls them) may desire to substitute for it. If the Biblical doctrine of a real and positive consciousness at death be granted, we are brought at once to the direct alternative of a final settlement of the moral condition and deserts of the soul when death occurs, or of another period of probationary experience not unlike that of the present life, with the implied possibility of a changed condition and of changed deserts somewhere in eternity. And to that alternative there can be but one Scriptural answer—the answer given so distinctly in our symbols.

IV. Our study thus brings us immediately at this point to the current question respecting a *Probation* or a *Salvation after Death*. We are becoming familiar with this question in a wide variety of forms. What has already been said justifies the statement that the Westminster divines knew nothing of a restoration of the soul to holiness after the present life, through any innate experiences or powers—a restoration whereby the sinner not only remembers and

confesses his sins to himself, but by an interior energy still resident within him, and under the new conditions entered upon in the future life, comes back, as of himself, to duty and to God. Their strong doctrine (chap. ix. 3) respecting the depravity and helplessness of the sinner in this life, his loss of all ability of will towards spiritual good, and his entire dependence on divine grace for recovery from this condition, is utterly inconsistent with the theory that at some time hereafter he will of himself, and without any gracious aid, rectify his corrupted moral nature and become a fit companion for saints and angels before the throne of God. But will such grace be extended to sinners after death, and will all the remedial agencies incorporated in the gospel be utilized to induce conversion, restoration and ultimate salvation in the world to come? Will any who have passed into that world without being saved through Christ, be saved through Him there?

This is alleged in various ways; sometimes as possible and sometimes as actual; sometimes as actual in some individuals or some classes, such as infants or the heathen, or the unevangelized masses in Christian lands; and sometimes as eventuating ultimately in the redemption of every sinner, and the blotting out of sin and its consequences from the entire moral universe. We are familiar with the speculative considerations by which such opinions are supported. They need no special notice in this connection. We are familiar, also, with the particular passages of Scripture which are quoted in support of these positions and with the general arguments from the character of God, from the redemptive energy of Christ, from the large capabilities of the gospel, and the like, which are adduced for the same purpose. It is needless to enter upon an examination of these considerations in detail, or to discuss here the question whether there is any adequate Biblical warrant for this dogma. The palpable fact is, that after the most ingenious effort by German scholars like Dorner, by English scholars like Farrar, and by their disciples of various classes in America, the Scriptural evidence in the case is found to be wholly inconclusive, the Bible resolutely refusing to endorse the theory in whatever form presented. For the present we are concerned only with the inquiry whether there is any such warrant in those symbols to which we, as Presbyterians, have given our voluntary allegiance, and by which as Presbyterians we are justly bound.

The general answer to this inquiry may readily be given: These symbols are as silent as the Bible itself respecting any transplantation of the gospel with its peculiar agencies and instrumentalities; any ministrations of the Spirit; any gracious work or kingdom of Christ, in the intermediate state. There is not a single sentence or

phrase or casual word or hint in Confession or Catechisms on which such a claim could by any ingenuity of reasoning be based. Their invariable teaching is that death terminates the present estate of probation, and brings in the consequent estate of reward and retribution. They invariably represent the gospel with its various elements and factors as a matter of earth and time. Their account of the operations of the Holy Spirit (chap. x) limits these operations entirely to this world. Their doctrine of the Covenants (chap. vii) suggests no other fellowship with God than that into which the sinner may through grace enter while his earthly day of opportunity is passing. Their vivid descriptions (chaps. ix-xviii) of the free will in man, and of his effectual calling through grace, of justification and adoption and sanctification, of saving faith and repentance and good works, and of the perseverance of saints and their assurance of salvation, are based entirely on the assumption that this life is the period in which such experiences are to be realized. What they affirm on all these points is absolutely exclusive of any other view than that salvation through Christ is a consummation to be attained or lost before death.

It is especially to be noticed that the symbols allow no distinction to be made at this point in favor of infants or imbecile persons, or even the pagan world, so far as that world came within their range of vision. Elect infants and, according to current belief, all infants, being thus elect, are redeemed by Christ, not hereafter, but in this world, and are regenerated and saved through the operations of the Holy Spirit, not in the future state, but before or at their death. The declaration that the Spirit (chap. x. 3) worketh when and where and how He pleaseth, was never intended to include His gracious working in some coming life, but only within the range of earth and time. Imbecile persons who are unable to heed the outward calls of grace, are said in like manner to be graciously cared for, not after death but before death. In the condemnation which is pronounced upon the heathen world, not for the rejection of a gospel which that world has never heard, but for its neglect of the law of God written on the heart, for its refusal to follow the revealing and guiding light of nature (L. C.; 60), nothing is said about any solution of the great problem of character after this life is over. It is the sin of the pagan races that they are now rejecting the tender call of God to repentance and submission to Him, now following rather the devices of their own heart, without regard to what God commands: and it is this sin which, under the divine government, constitutes the ground of their condemnation as they pass from this world into another. The solemn chapter on the law of God (xix) must make it abundantly clear to every candid reader



that the symbols are consistent with themselves and are unequivocal in their teachings here, and that whatever pious hope may be indulged by any at this point must find its support and justification elsewhere.\*

V. This will be the more apparent if we consider the associated doctrine of the Westminster divines as to the *Particular Judgment* occurring at death. Their generic proposition is that man, having sinned and come short of the glory of God, is (chap. iii. 7) in a state of condemnation judicially even in this life; that there is no sin of man so small (chap. xv. 4) but it deserves such condemnation; that there is no way of escape from this condemnation except (chap. x. 4) through coming unto Christ under an existing covenant of grace; and that for those who refuse the offer of salvation as presented in this life, there remaineth (chap. vii. 3) no more sacrifice for sin, but only retributive judgment as the proper outcome of their earthly unbelief. Both Catechisms, and especially the Larger, confirm this teaching in the strong declaration (L. C., 25-27) that men by nature are the children of wrath, slaves to Satan, under the divine displeasure, and justly liable to divine punishment. They also teach that redemption from this condition occurs in time (L. C., 59, 60), and that those who do not receive that redemption in time cannot be saved, but are under the wrath of God forever. It is on this ground that we are forbidden (L. C., 183) to pray for the dead, their term of probation having ended and an eternity of either reward or retribution having begun.

From all this it is a natural and necessary consequence that a separation of souls into two great classes, on the basis of character, must occur, not at some remote period in the future life, but at the time of death. Such a separation is, in the nature of things, inevitable: it is the only possible outcome of the present state and experience of probation. It is desirable also, at least on the part of

\* The notion of a probation after death, whether for infants or imbecile adults, for certain classes in gospel lands, or for the heathen world, is one which finds no support in Protestant symbolism. One searches in vain for it in the confessional books of Lutheranism, or in the creeds of the Reformed Churches on the Continent, or in those of the British Isles. One searches for it in vain in the doctrinal declarations of the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries, or in the professed faith of any evangelical body of our own time. The omission of Art. xlii in the reconstruction of the Thirty-nine Articles under Elizabeth has sometimes been referred to as justifying Universalism in the Established Church of England, but that omission is easily explained on better grounds. Certainly it affords no countenance to the recent Restorationism of Stanley and Farrar and other leaders in the Broad-Church party. One is justified in view of such facts, in applying to this opinion the vivid declaration of the same venerable symbol (Art. xxii) respecting the Roman Catholic dogma of Purgatory :

“*A fond thing, vainly invented, and grounded upon no warranty of Scripture, but rather repugnant to the Word of God.*”

the righteous: a continuous commingling of the holy and the wicked, substantially such as occurs in this life, and that for an indefinite period, and possibly even till the final judgment at the end of the world, would be an experience to be dreaded rather than desired. And such a separation can be grounded on nothing but some essential difference in character; it must be based in the last resort on the final relation of the soul to an accepted or rejected Christ. And this final relation, with all its solemn outcome, must be fixed at the hour of death: it cannot be postponed to some remote era in the eternal state. Such is the clear witness of Scripture. The promise of our Lord to the dying thief (Luke xxiii. 43); the vision of the expiring Stephen (Acts vii. 55-60); the ecstatic declarations of Paul (2 Cor. v. 1-10; Phil. i. 22, 23; 2 Tim. iv. 6-8); the triumphal song of Peter in his first epistle (i. 3-6), and other Biblical illustrations, show abundantly that death for the righteous is the gateway, not to such a mixed condition as the present life presents, but to a condition separate, special, everlasting, such as holy character alone can determine (see also Rom. ii. 5-10; Gal. vi. 7, 8; Eph. v. 5, 6; 2 Peter ii. 4-9; 2 Tim. iv. 18; Rev. xxi. 24-27).

It is on the basis of such inspired teaching that the Westminster symbols justify their strong declarations in favor of the doctrine of a particular judgment at death. They affirm (L. C., 85) that the righteous even in death are delivered from all remaining sting and curse of sin, and that they enter at once upon the blessed estate of communion with Christ, for which they have been preparing in the present life. They assure us that this communion is enjoyed immediately after death, on the ground that the righteous are then at once perfected in holiness, and so made meet for such celestial fellowship. As to the wicked, they in like manner assure us (L. C., 86) that death judicially determines their eternal condition, and their description of the punishments of sin in the world to come (L. C., 29) leaves upon the mind no other impression than that such punishment begins at once when the present probationary experience is ended. The impressive declaration of the Confession already quoted (chap. xxxii. 1) that the souls of men at death immediately return to God who gave them, and are at once separated by Him into two great classes on the basis of character as determined during this life, seems to put the question entirely at rest for all who acknowledge its authority. Nothing can be more emphatic than the decisive statement at the close of this section: Between these two places for souls separated from their bodies, the Scripture acknowledgeth none.

That this separation is judicial becomes apparent at a glance. It is not merely the result of certain natural laws or tendencies

whereby men of themselves seek their own companionship, whether it be good or evil. Nor is it an historic process, simply carried on through ages, and finally reaching its culmination in hell or heaven. It occurs in the immediate presence of Christ as Judge; it involves a conviction of sin and guilt in view of the law and the gospel of God; it necessitates a decision on His part at the very threshold of eternity. There is, indeed, a sense in which the wicked are condemned already, even before that solemn hour of adjudication dawns upon them, but all antecedent condemnation must become secondary in the presence of such an hour and such a judgment. The supposition that Christ begins to exercise His judicial functions only at the end of the world, is obviously at variance with many declarations of Scripture, especially John v. 22–27, viii. 16; 2 Cor. v. 10; Acts x. 42; Rom. xiv. 10; Heb. ix. 27. To question whether the estate of the righteous is judicially settled at their death is impossible, in the presence of such declarations as Heb. xii. 22–24; Rev. xiv. 1–4; the vision of Stephen (Acts vii); the parable of Lazarus (Luke xvi); and the affirmation of our Lord respecting the gathering of the saints (Matt. viii. 11). Corresponding declarations respecting the wicked as now undergoing judicial punishment (1 Peter iii. 19; 2 Peter ii. 9), in prison and in torment (Luke xvi. 23; Matt. vii. 26, 27 and a multitude of others), are equally decisive.

The importance as well as Scripturalness of this doctrine is manifest, especially just at this juncture when the entire teaching of the inspired Word concerning the intermediate state seems to be so often challenged. Such importance was apparent to the men who framed the creeds of Protestantism from the beginning. It is true that the general judgment at the end of the world was more conspicuous in their thought, as appears in the Book of Concord, the Heidelberg Catechism and elsewhere. Yet their invariable doctrine is that death terminates the stage of probation, settles the question of character, and determines the eternal destiny by a judicial process. Thus the Irish Articles (1615) declare in explicit terms, that after this life is ended the souls of God's children shall be presently received into heaven, there to enjoy unspeakable comforts, and the souls of the wicked are cast into hell, there to endure endless torments; and such a separation must, from the nature of the case, assume the character of a judgment pronounced by Christ presently, or as soon as the soul shall have closed its earthly existence. How it is possible for any one, in view of such teaching, both Biblical and Confessional, to affirm that the conception of such a judgment has no proper place in the Christian scheme, but is merely a crude importation from ethnic sources, without any right

to claim our acceptance, it is difficult to explain. It would be as easy to claim that the idea of God, or of the incarnation, or the conception of a supernatural revelation, or the belief in a personal immortality, had flowed from such foreign sources into Christianity, because traces of these fundamental truths are found in crude forms in certain natural religions, or in the speculations of certain heathen sages.\*

VI. The Westminster descriptions of the *Permanent Estate* into which the righteous and the wicked are thus respectively assigned by Christ as their Judge, are both positive and impressive in the highest degree. Appropriating the awful language of the Bible itself, they affirm (chap. xxxii. 1) that the souls of the wicked are cast into hell, where they remain in torments and utter darkness, reserved to the judgment of the great day. This fate is declared (chap. vi. 6) to be an inevitable consequence of sin, whereby the sinner is bound over to the wrath of God, and made subject not only to death, but to unspeakable miseries, spiritual, temporal and eternal. The same solemn truth is emphasized in the chapter (xix) on the law of God as a rule of life. In the Larger Catechism, it is said (Ans. 29, 86) that sin is punished in the world to come by everlasting separation from the comfortable presence of God, and by the judicial imposition of grievous torments in soul and body, and that without intermission. Terrible as such language seems, the symbols simply repeat here the utterances of Scripture, and especially of the Saviour Himself, from whose faithful lips these declarations have fallen as a solemn warning against all sin. And when they add that such punishment is without end, and so pronounce the estate of the wicked a fixed and changeless estate, they are only repeating again the teaching of Him who said: Their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched.

Concerning the righteous the symbols in graphic and glowing language declare that the condition into which they are judicially introduced at death, is one of corresponding felicity, instant, complete, eternal. They tell us (L. C., 86) in words already quoted, that this condition is one of communion with Christ in glory; that the righteous enter on the enjoyment of such communion immediately

\*For a fuller statement of the doctrine of a particular judgment at death, see SHEDD, *Theol.*, ii, 660, 694: "The private judgment at death and the public judgment at the last day coincide, because in the intermediate state there is no alteration of moral character, and consequently no alteration of *the sentence passed at death.*" SMITH, H. B., *System of Christ. Theol.*, p. 613: "This judgment (the last) is not the first passing of judgment, but the final manifestation of it. The position that at the judgment the first passing of judgment will occur, uproots the Scriptural doctrine of sin, and of *the penalty of death which has already begun to be inflicted upon men.*"



after death ; that their souls are at once made perfect in holiness, and are received into the highest heavens, and that they are permitted there to behold the face of God in light and glory, while they wait for the full redemption of their bodies at the resurrection. The same terms are employed in the Confession (chap. xxxii. 1) with an additional emphasis upon the immediateness of this wonderful transition. While it is intimated (chap. xxxiii. 2) that after the resurrection and the final judgment there will come to the righteous a certain fullness of joy and refreshing from the presence of the Lord, not before attainable even in heaven, it is declared that true perfection in holiness is attained when death relieves the soul from the last taint and trace of evil. In this life the will even of the saint is said (chap. ix. 4, 5) to act but imperfectly, but in that estate of glory that will is said to be made at once perfectly and immutably free to good—as immutably and perfectly free as it can be after the resurrection and the final judgment.

In what sense is it possible to affirm progress in those who have been ushered at death into such a blessed condition? Certainly not in the sense that they carry with them into that condition any remaining elements of sinfulness or any tendencies towards sin which are to be eliminated there. In other words, they are not to be developed into holiness through prolonged periods of spiritual experience or spiritual cultivation, analogous to that progress or growth in sanctification which (chap. xiii. 3) they have experienced in the present life. They are indeed to grow in knowledge, in capacity for service, in such spiritual attainments as the school of heaven may provide ; and such growth is even to be conceived of as continuous—as unending. But so far as their sanctification, their true and complete holiness is concerned, the saints are as perfect at death as they ever will be. There will be no form or taint of evil which death will not remove entirely and altogether ; there will be nothing lacking in quality, though there may be in volume, to their intrinsic holiness and perfection. Such at least is the teaching of our symbols, and no less obviously the teaching of Protestant symbolism generally. Neither Luther nor Calvin nor any other leading Reformer taught anything of a progressive sanctification in the intermediate state, in any intelligible sense of such a phrase. Nor is there a single sentence in any evangelical creed, earlier or later, which contravenes the doctrine of Westminster on this point.\*

\* DORNER, who is recognized as one of the leading advocates of the notion of progressive sanctification after death, practically admits this fact : “ The assumption that the termination of the earthly life is, in every case, the termination of the Day of Grace, has been pretty generally given up ”—*in Germany, of course*—“ on account of non-Christians who, never having heard of the gospel, cannot be ripe for judgment. This has been a step towards *naturalizing an alteration in*

VII. The remaining topics in Christian Eschatology may be considered somewhat more briefly. What has been said already respecting a premillennial coming of Christ at a period far anterior to the resurrection and final judgment renders any further reference needless—except, perhaps, in the way of caution as to the interpretation to be placed upon the closing sentence of the Confession. That sentence was designed simply to confirm our faith in the certainty of a day of judgment, and to urge us to thoughtfulness and fidelity in view of the fact that to any one of us judgment may come at any hour. It is by no means to be regarded as teaching dogmatically that the final coming of Christ to be the Judge of mankind is imminent, and is therefore to be constantly watched and waited for. It is rather a personal exhortation furnishing a fitting close to the entire creed, than a doctrinal affirmation framed to sustain some type of millenarian belief. This is abundantly evidenced by the fact that in both the Confession and the Catechisms the final coming of our Lord is invariably associated with the general resurrection, the final judgment and the end of the world.

Respecting the *Resurrection*, the language of the symbols is explicit. Following the three ancient creeds, and many preceding confessions of Protestantism (Augsburg Conf., xvii; Second Helvetic, xxvi; Heidelberg Cat., '45; Belgic Conf., xxxvii; Scotch Conf., x, xvii; Thirty-nine Articles, iv), they affirm one general and final anastasis preparatory to the closing consummation. They certainly give no countenance to the theory of two resurrections, separated by a long interval of time and having widely different designs. The texts on which this theory is chiefly based (Rev. xx. 6; Luke xiv. 14; 1 Thess. iv. 16) are not quoted among the proofs of the doctrine as here set forth. The time of this general resurrection is specified (chap. xxxii. 2; L. C., 87) as the last day; and then not any special class but all the dead, it is said, shall be raised up together. This time is further fixed by the declaration (L. C., 88) that immediately after the resurrection shall follow the general and final judgment of angels and men.

The full identity or oneness of the resurrection body with the present body is strongly affirmed, though no explanation of the nature of that oneness is attempted; they are to be the self-same body and none other. It is beautifully said that the earthly bodies of the saints are even in death somehow united to Christ, and that

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*the Reformation doctrine concerning the intermediate state—an alteration which teaches that even in the other world a spiritual development, nay, probably a process of conversion, is conceivable" (Hist. of Prot. Theol., ii, 462). The same suggestion in more distinct and positive form appears in his Syst. of Christ. Doct., iii, 71; iv, 167, 404, and elsewhere.*

they rest in their graves *as in their beds* (L. C., 86) till at the last day they shall be raised up again and united to their souls by His mighty power and by virtue of His resurrection as their Head. It is also said, with an impressive antithesis, that the bodies of the wicked are kept in their graves *as in their prisons* until the resurrection and judgment of the last great day. In the same connection it is intimated that the bodies of the just (L. C., 87), being raised by the Spirit of Christ, shall be endued with new qualities, raised in power and beauty and made spiritual and incorruptible like the glorious body of the Saviour Himself, while those of the wicked are raised up in dishonor, as by the authority of an offended judge who summons them into his presence for final condemnation. For the just that will be a day of welcome deliverance, and of consummated glory; to the wicked it must be a day of wrath and of unspeakable torment.

As has already appeared, the doctrine of a *General Judgment* is explicitly taught in the symbols, in conjunction with the revealed fact of a universal resurrection. The notion of two judgments separated by the millennium, and the kindred notion of a prolonged judgment beginning with the millennial period and running on through it, are directly excluded by their formal statements respecting the nature and purpose of this general judgment. The incidents of that solemn event are (chap. xxxiii) vividly depicted. Christ is there to appear in the full and final exercise of His delegated authority as Judge. Apostate angels are then to be judged. All persons that have ever lived on the earth are to present themselves before the great tribunal. All are to give account before the Judge of their thoughts, deeds and words. All are to hear the final decision, and to receive according to what they have done in the body, whether good or evil: the earthly life—not any experience in the intermediate state—determining their character and their destiny. The righteous are said (L. C., 90) to be caught up to Christ in the clouds; to be set on His right hand; to be openly acknowledged and acquitted; and finally to be joined with Him in the judgment of reprobate men and angels. On the other hand, the wicked (L. C., 89) are said upon clear evidence, and with full conviction of their own consciences, to be justly convicted and sentenced, and cast out forever from the favorable presence of God and the glorious fellowship of Christ and His saints. And the end of this solemn procedure is said to be the full manifestation of the glory of the divine mercy in the salvation of the righteous, and the anti-thetic manifestation of the divine justice in the condemnation of them that obey not God.

The descriptions of *Hell* and *Heaven* in the symbols are remarka-

ble on one side for their strict Scripturalness in form, and on the other for their earnest emphasizing of unholiness and of holiness as constituting the basis of all the misery and all the felicity of the lost and the saved respectively. While the strong physical or material imagery of the Bible is retained in both directions, the element of character as evil or good, undeserving or worthy, is made the central element in their vivid delineations. The ground of all that is affirmed respecting the awful estate of the wicked is said to lie in the fact that they know not God, that they obey not the gospel, that they are reprobate towards both love and grace; their sin, in a word, is their ruin, not only during the intermediate state, but in the final judgment and forever. So the felicity of the righteous is said to lie not merely in their being received into the highest heavens, but in their completed sanctification and perfection, and in their being permitted like the angels that have never sinned to behold the face of God in light and glory. The language is transcendently beautiful. The redeemed are (L. C., 90) fully and forever freed from all sin and misery; they are filled with inconceivable joys; they are made perfectly holy and happy both in soul and body, in the company of innumerable saints and angels, but especially in the immediate vision and fruition of God the Father, of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, to all eternity. The conception of character runs through the entire representation. The saints in glory are happy in this ineffable degree because they are holy. Character rather than condition is primal, and their condition is what it is because they are what they are. This fact is worthy of just recognition, especially by those who incline to criticise the awful severities of speech sometimes manifest in the symbols, when they describe the torments of the lost. Like Christ Himself, these symbols rest every affirmation on the basis of character as tested at the tribunal of the judgment.

It remains only to note in a word their unequivocal declaration that the condition into which the wicked and the righteous are respectively brought at the last judgment is endless. The symbols of Westminster know nothing of the fancy that such words as *eternal* and *everlasting* are words of condition rather than of time, or that they signify æonic periods that may come to an end somewhere in the boundless eternity to come. Their decisive answer to all such fancies lies in the irrefutable position, that whatever these words mean in the case of the righteous, they mean also in the case of the wicked; and that therefore we cannot recognize the possibility of a termination to the miseries of the latter class, without recognizing the possibility of a like termination to the happy experience of the former. Heaven and hell rest on the same foundation in the



Word of God, and whatever shakes the one, shakes the other also; the eternity of the lost must be as limitless as the eternity of the redeemed. The Bible gives us the vision of a time beyond the judgment, and far beyond all things earthly, when Christ shall have delivered the kingdom to the Father, and when God shall be all in all. But it furnishes no hint of a time, even after that great consummation, when heaven shall come to an end, or when there shall cease to be a hell. And on this Biblical teaching the symbols of Westminster, and with them the creeds of the Reformation generally, and evangelical Protestantism everywhere, reverently and faithfully stand; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.

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