

THE HOMILETIC REVIEW.

VOL. XII.—SEPTEMBER, 1886.—No. 3.

REVIEW SECTION.

I.—PROBATION AFTER DEATH.

IS THERE ANY FOUNDATION FOR THE DOGMA IN REASON OR REVELATION ?

NO. III.

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THE doctrine on this subject, received and affirmed by the churches commonly called evangelical, may for substance be briefly stated as follows :

(1.) So far as those who live in Christian lands, and who have had opportunity to learn of Christ and His salvation, are concerned, it is held that this Gospel as a salvatory scheme is limited in its scope to the present life,—that its offers, instrumentalities, administrations, in the case of all such persons, terminate decisively at death,—and that for those who in whatever way reject its gracious provisions while they live on the earth, there remains no further opportunity or privilege, but only a righteous condemnation, based generically on their sinfulness of nature and life, but specifically on their neglect or rejection of the Gospel salvation. It is not implied that all persons of this class, with their varied ranges of opportunity and of capability, are to be judged alike, or awarded precisely the same condemnation ; but rather that the degree of guilty willfulness, as well as the measure of outward call and privilege, will be justly taken into account, and that the decision in each case will be in harmony with the righteous judgment thus framed. Nor is the attempt made to determine precisely what constitutes sufficient knowledge and a sufficient call in each case, or to indicate the exact point where moral responsibility begins, and the soul becomes guilty before the tribunal of the Gospel. What is affirmed is simply that, wherever Christ is made known and is rejected when known, and wherever such rejection becomes the fixed purpose of the soul and is persisted in until death, the question of character and of desert is in the mind of God settled once for all, and His condemnation of the sinner is immediate, positive, irreversible.

(2.) So far as those are concerned who lived before the Christian dispensation, but who enjoyed the dawning light of the patriarchal or of the Mosaic economy, and thus had the opportunity of exercising faith in a redemption to come, the orthodox doctrine teaches that their specific probation consisted in their personal use or misuse of the means of salvation divinely afforded them,—that the promises of grace furnished substantially the same test of character, and consequently of desert, which is presented in the historic Christ,—and that all those who believed in Him, so far as He was known to them, are saved through Him as really as those who trusted in Him as their incarnate God, while those who refused thus to believe are condemned on the ground of such unbelief. Here, again, wide differences in knowledge, in opportunity and privilege, in responsibility and guiltiness, must be recognized. The antediluvians, the patriarchs and their descendants, the Hebrews of the earlier and of the later ages in that introductory dispensation, are variously tested, and must be variously judged. But the main elements in the case remain the same : probation is in substance one, under both dispensations.

(3.) So far as the heathen, and also all who, though dwelling in Christian lands, have never truly heard the Gospel, are concerned, the evangelical doctrine affirms simply their guiltiness under the light of nature and of conscience : it holds that, living without the law and the Gospel, they are judged without law and apart from the Gospel, under the moral administration of a just and holy as well as a benevolent God : it maintains that their condition beyond the grave is therefore one of real, though mitigated, condemnation, and that, so far as the Scripture sheds any light on the question, this condemnation must be viewed as everlasting : it believes that the Gospel plan of restoration, being limited in its range to the present life, can be of no avail hereafter, either in removing such condemnation or in bringing them into a condition of holiness, or of blessedness such as holiness carries in its train. It is true that most of the creeds of the Reformation, for reasons which are obvious to the historical student, refer but incidentally, if at all, to the case of the heathen and of others who have never known the Gospel. It is true that, among evangelical believers of later times, large varieties of judgment appear as to the measure of culpability attaching to such persons, to the principles involved in the divine judgment respecting them, and to the real nature of the eternal state on which they enter at death,—whether it be one of positive punishment, or simply one of relative privation and inferiority, such as their defective spiritual condition might require as its proper counterpart. What is affirmed universally, and on strictly Scriptural grounds, is their guiltiness in view of opportunities given, their just condemnation on the ground of such guiltiness, and their judicial assignment to such a sphere of existence, such a future estate

of retributive discipline, as their career in this life seems in the eye of God to deserve and need as its just correlative.

(4.) So far as infants, including all who die before they have entered upon moral consciousness and life, are concerned [and so far, also, as imbeciles and others who are incapable of hearing the outward call of the Gospel are to be taken into the account], the evangelical doctrine maintains that, through the mediatorial work of Christ made available in their behalf, and through the accompanying influences of the Spirit in the regeneration and sanctifying of their nature, such infants and other like persons, whether born of Christian or of unbelieving or even pagan parentage, are graciously delivered at death from all corruption of heart or nature, are biassed toward holiness as our first parents originally were, and are led forth into the immortal life as sanctified souls, to be divinely trained by processes unknown to us into perfection of character like that of Christ Himself. Injustice is done at this point to the earlier Protestant creeds—eminently to the Confession of Westminster. That careful, poised, profound, spiritual symbol really affirms nothing as to infants in general; it is wisely silent respecting their condition, for the reason that its compilers were not prepared, with unanimity, to make any comprehensive or inclusive affirmation. But respecting elect infants, whether these might be limited strictly to the offspring of elect parents, or might include others chosen and set apart by the gracious wisdom of God, they were prepared to hold and teach that all such, however few or many, dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ, through the Spirit who worketh when and where and how He pleaseth. That many Calvinistic divines of that period, and of the century following, went farther than this, and affirmed the damnation of infants not elect, must of course be admitted. But here, as at many other points, the Confession, and those who hold to it, are not to be judged by the affirmations of every one who professes to receive it. And it is further to be said that whatever of silence or of ambiguity attaches to the language of the symbol—whatever of doubt or of diversity of opinion existed among the venerated men who framed it—Calvinists of this age hold as heartily as any other class of evangelical believers to the gracious salvation of all who die in infancy. By this teaching it is not implied that such infants pass through a distinct probation after they have entered upon a conscious life in eternity: such a conception hardly seems intelligible, in view of what is declared respecting the work of Christ for them, and of the Spirit within them, in the hour and article of death. The fact rather is that these redeemed and sanctified souls, entering into their first conscious moral existence under such conditions and in such a sphere as heaven, have no need of such further discipline as the term, probation, implies. By a process deeper than conscious volition, and antecedent to all moral

choices, their state has been already divinely determined : they are saved before responsible action commences, and their new life is from the first, not one of testing with a possible fall or failure, but one of holiness instant and above all change.

The writer has deemed it important thus to state the evangelical doctrine for substance before considering the alternative view presented in the question under discussion. It may be that such a statement will help to free the doctrine on one side from some of the misconceptions which have attached themselves to it, and on the other to bring out more fully the contrasts, wide and deep, between the doctrine and this alternative *dogma*—as the question describes it. There are, in fact, three of these alternative views—the Romish, the Unitarian or Liberal, and that which has been so ably advocated in the pages of this REVIEW. With the Romish and the Liberal dogma, we have here no present concern. The papal notion that the characters and conditions of some are modified or improved through certain disciplinary or retributive processes divinely instituted for this purpose, and the liberalistic notion that such modification or improvement may and does occur through restorative forces still resident in the sinful soul itself, are alike without foundation—to use the language of the question before us—in either reason or revelation. This question involves rather the antithetic hypothesis, that something higher than the remaining capabilities of the sinning soul, and higher than purgatorial discipline in whatever form, comes in to effect the favorable changes contemplated,—in other words, that what we term the Gospel is to be brought into play in the future as in the present life, and that through the forces embodied in that Gospel sinners are to be convicted, persuaded, made penitent and believing, transformed into saints and sanctified for heaven, in the next life substantially as in this. It is this hypothesis, standing in clear contrast with the current orthodox belief, yet claiming for itself, if not explicit divine teaching, a general warrant from the Bible and from the nature of Christianity, that we are to consider :

(1.) It should be noted just here, that the advocates of this dogma are very far from being agreed among themselves as to the classes of persons whom they regard as having, in the divine economy of grace, such a probation after death. As to all who die in infancy, the issue between them and the current evangelical belief is a verbal one mainly : it is a technical question as to the term, probation : it is a matter of method or process rather than of result. Certainly, it is not necessary to regard each dying infant as waking at once into full moral consciousness in the heavenly state, and there deliberately choosing Christ as its Redeemer, in order to hold that such an infant is saved through Him.—As to the pagan world, solemn and pathetic as the question is, it is no injustice to say that the dogma under discussion

does not derive its chief interest, in the eyes of those who advocate it, from its supposed solution of that question. Solicitude respecting the condition of the heathen, proper as such solicitude is, neither originated the dogma, nor in any large degree sustains it. Nor can more be said as to the case of the antediluvian world, or of those who enjoyed only the preliminary teaching of the Mosaic economy. These classes, like the other two just mentioned, may be introduced to give breadth or dignity to the discussion, or, possibly, in the hands of some advocates, to conceal somewhat the real point where the dogma is supposed by all to be of special value.

That point is seen in its application to those who have actually heard the Gospel, and have actually rejected the Gospel in this life,—dying in more or less conscious, positive, willful unbelief. It is here, as the vast bulk of the literature in favor of this dogma clearly indicates, that the chief spring of interest is found. Infants, the heathen, antediluvians, the Hebrew race before Christ, all retire relatively from the centre of vision whenever the question is discussed. But it should also be noted how wide is the diversity of view as to the number of this special class for whom the hypothesis of a post-mortem probation is devised. Who are included in this further opportunity and privilege? Who are excluded from it? Is this future probation only for those who have had but small chance, if any, to be saved in this life? Are the infidel, the openly and persistently vicious, the liar and drunkard, the thief and murderer, to be shut out from these gracious provisions? Are these provisions general, as the plan of grace is in this life,—or special, elective, applicable in here and there a case, or to some particular class? The obvious want of anything approaching agreement at this vital point is certainly suggestive.

(2.) Equally suggestive is the fact of like disagreement respecting the actual results of this future probation. While some would make it applicable to all, in Christian as well as in pagan lands, under the Gospel as in the Mosaic dispensation, and affirm that sooner or later it becomes effectual in every member of the human race, others exclude the incorrigibly wicked and unbelieving, claim for the rest only an offer and a possibility, and admit that in eternity as here the offer may end in failure. And between these extreme positions one may discover very wide varieties of teaching as to the actual outcome of this scheme of redemption in a future life,—with an obvious trend on the part of those holding the more restricted view toward the sweeping universalism affirmed by others. May it not justly be insisted that entire frankness is indispensable here? Why should our eyes be turned toward dying infants or toward the heathen, when the main claim urged contemplates rather those who have heard the Gospel and have rejected it in this life? And why should our range of vision be limited to some sections of the latter class, when the position taken is

one which calls for an offer of salvation irrespectively to all who have failed to embrace it in this world? And why are we left in doubt as to the efficacy of such offer in the world to come,—since the strength of the dogma, as a truth of practical moment, rests on the question whether there is any practical outcome in eternity from that offer; whether there be few or many that are saved there as here, or whether every soul will sooner or later accept Christ, and enjoy the everlasting benefits of His mediation?

The Biblical argument for this dogma, as gathered from the writings of its advocates, may be summed up as follows:

(1) Universalistic passages, such as 1 Cor. xv: 22–28, supposed to imply that God will finally have mercy upon all men, and that all will at least have the offer, if indeed all do not attain the actual experience, of salvation. (2) Passages, such as Matt. xii: 32, implying that for all sinfulness, excepting the sin against the Holy Ghost, forgiveness is possible in the future as in the present life. (3) Passages in which the terms, eternal and eternity, are employed in the restricted sense of age or period; and in which the limitation or the absolute ending of future retribution is suggested. (4) Passages, such as Rom. xiv: 9, Rev. i: 18, which specially set Christ forth as Lord of the dead as well as the living, and as having the keys of death and of Hades: being thus empowered to carry His grace beyond the grave, and make it effectual even among those who had rejected it here. (5) Passages, such as 1 Peter, iii: 19–20, iv: 6, which are supposed to teach that, in the execution of this gracious mission, our Lord actually visited the world of the dead, to proclaim again His Gospel, and to institute there, as in this life, a scheme of redemption. (6) General passages, bearing upon the character and purposes of God and of Christ as Mediator, upon the nature and scope of the Gospel, and upon the worth of salvation and the awfulness of an eternal condemnation. Under these heads nearly all of the Scriptural evidence in the case may be conveniently grouped, and on this evidence it is claimed that, while the dogmas under review is not an explicit divine teaching, it still is in harmony with the teachings of Scripture, is justly deducible from the nature of Christianity, and falls on Biblical authority within the acknowledged limits of the Christian faith.

It is impracticable, in this place, to traverse this remarkable claim in detail. The general offset to it may be seen, (1) in the obvious fact that the Gospel is invariably presented to men as a divine scheme of salvation, to be accepted by them, not in some future æon, but in the present life: in the fact, (2) that men are constantly warned against all rejection and all delay in such acceptation, even in this life, on the explicit ground that delays are always perilous, and that persistent rejection is ruin to the soul: in the further fact, (3) that the gracious ministries of the Spirit, and all other helpful divine in-

fluences, are nowhere promised to men after death, but are invariably represented as having their sphere of activity within the present dispensation of grace : (4) in the kindred fact that the Church, the Sacraments, Christian fellowship and influence, and the other administrative forces incorporated with the Gospel, are never represented as being utilized or available beyond the grave, but always as belonging to an earthly and temporary economy of salvation : (5) in the Biblical offer of forgiveness, which, with the possible exception of Matt. xii: 32—an exception which is possible only, and which, on closer scrutiny, turns out to be in harmony with the uniform teaching elsewhere—is always limited to the present life, and is in no case promised after death : (6) in the obvious and invariable teaching of the Bible that our present life is in every case a solemn, responsible stewardship, for whose administration every soul is summoned at death to a strict, impartial, and decisive account : and (7) in the kindred teaching, scattered everywhere through the Scripture, but specially concentrated in the utterances of our Lord Himself, that both reward and retribution immediately follow in each instance upon the use or the misuse of such earthly stewardship, and that such reward and retribution are alike unchangeable and without end.

(1.) Two points in this Biblical response to the dogma in question deserve especial notice. The first relates to the amazing series of inferences derived from the obscure, perplexing passage in I. Peter, respecting the preaching to the spirits in prison. It is needless to refer to the various interpretations of this text; whether it describes a personal ministration or a ministry through Noah; whether it is a ministry in incarnate form or in spirit; whether it contemplated simply the antediluvian world, or included all who died prior to the Advent, or comprehended the entire multitude of the dead; whether it was a ministry of grace or a proclamation of triumph—a revelation of glory. In the presence of these and other like perplexities as yet unsolved by the most careful exegesis, and perhaps insoluble with such light as is now obtainable, is it not an astounding evolution which derives from this obscure text, and its possible corollary in 1 Peter iv: 6, the notion that our Lord, during the few hours between His death and His resurrection, went into the world of the dead, and there set up an economy of grace which was a duplicate, substantially, of that instituted by Him during His incarnate life on the earth—an economy which has continued down to the present time, with essentially the same truths, appeals, incentives, warnings, that characterize the Gospel among men; and which may continue for long periods until every soul among the dead has heard of Christ and had full opportunity to receive Him, and possibly until all the dead have actually received Him, and have been converted and saved through Him? The astounding quality of this hypothesis grows upon us, & we strive

to contemplate all that is involved in such a stupendous process—the proclamation and exposition of the Gospel in such ways as to convince even those who have rejected it here—the ministrations of Providence and of the Holy Spirit in such measure as shall overcome the willful hindrances that have resisted them in this life—the presence of a Church, of sacraments and ordinances, of a living and continuous ministry, and of other administrative agencies analogous to those which in this world are brought, and often vainly brought, to bear upon the ignorance, the willfulness, the wickedness of men. To assume all this, and much more, on the basis of a single text, with but two or three possibly corroborating passages, and in the presence of the studied silence of the remaining Scriptures respecting a fact of such immense moment, and in the presence also of innumerable passages teaching us that now is the accepted time, and our brief earthly day the appointed day of salvation, is certainly a process without parallel in the history of human theologizing.

(2.) The other special point relates to the suggested absoluteness and universality of Christianity. What is intended by this phrase, one finds it difficult to say. To quote in its explanation the declaration of our Lord that, when lifted up from the earth, He would draw all men unto Him, or the triumphal affirmation of Paul respecting the coming of a day when every knee should bow to Christ, not only on earth, but through all the moral universe, serves but slightly to explain the phrase itself. That Christianity is in some sense a divine embodiment of religion in the absolute, and that for this reason Christianity is in some degree to be viewed as universal—universal in its adaptations to man as man, and universal in its prospective growth and power—we all cordially believe. These propositions are plainly Biblical in origin and in authority. But do they justify the specific inference of a probation after death,—of such a probation as including not merely pagans and infants, but most, if not all, of those who have rejected this universal and absolute faith in this life,—of a probation which carries the Gospel forward into eternity, and involves a system of grace, there analogous to the economy of grace enjoyed in this world,—of such a probation as belonging in equity to every human being, as having its justification in the justice rather than the mercy of God, and as indispensable to the proper triumph of Christ and His redemption? And is it not certain that, if such a prolific conception of Christianity be true, some clear, definite warrant for it would be found in the Bible? The more carefully this conception is analyzed, with all the sweeping inferences derived from it, the less will any loyal student of the Scriptures be inclined to entertain it; it is an ideal of the imagination rather than a truth of revelation.

Passing from the Biblical question, to inquire briefly whether the dogma of probation after death has any foundation in reason, we are

confronted by a bewildering variety of suggestions. Some writers dwell largely upon the moral elements remaining in man after the experience of death, the inextinguishable capability of good, the effect of calm remembrance or of conscientious convictions, and the like : and on such rational grounds infer that the spiritual restoration of man, even of all men, is intrinsically possible. Others dwell rather upon the inexhaustible potencies of the Gospel, upon its possible application successfully to the souls of the dead as well as the living, and even to those souls that have resisted it here, and upon the mediatorial mission of Christ as available in other worlds as in this, and possibly necessary wherever sin is, or even wherever moral beings exist. Still others emphasize the nature, character, administration of God, and especially His justice and His mercy, as furnishing rational basis for the inference that there is a probation after death as before, and a probation which will sooner or later be granted to every man. These are the three main sources from which the material for this inference is derived,—the nature of the soul, the nature of the Gospel, the nature of God. And it must, in justice, be admitted, that the material of this class is apparently abundant,—an abundance which stands out in decided contrast with the relative scantiness of the Scriptural testimony in the case. Nor would one hesitate to acknowledge the reasonings weighty, if they were not so often in conflict with each other,—if, in fact, they were not so frequently, as they are found on thoughtful examination to be, mutually irreconcilable and even subversive.

(1.) Over against the rational argument from the nature of man, might be placed an extensive series of considerations leading to an opposite result. If there is in men an inextinguishable capability of good, is it not also true that there is in them what seems like an inextinguishable, and certainly is in this life a dominating, capability of evil? If this capability of evil remains in the soul until death, why may it not survive in eternity—and if it successfully resists the Gospel in this life, why may it not resist the Gospel forever? If it be granted that moral elements remain in man through all the future, does this justify the conclusion that the reason he has rebelled against here, the conscience whose warnings he has refused to heed, will gain and hold control over his life hereafter? Even if he has never heard of Christ in this life, but has died in the darkness of paganism, on what ground can we safely infer that, should he hear of Christ in eternity, he would at once embrace Him and welcome the salvation He is supposed to offer? On the other hand, when one studies the principle of development in sin, the thousand signs of its tendency to become permanent and dominant in the soul, the evidences of decline in the power of reason and conscience to control men spiritually even in this world, the influences and results of retribution, even in the milder

form of chastisement, and other like elements proper to be considered in such a problem, is there not serious reason for saying that the nature of man furnishes in fact but little foundation for hope as to his spiritual restoration in a future state,—that the overwhelming preponderances of evidence in the case, viewed from this point solely, must rather be that, dying in sin, man will remain a sinner, and therefore a condemned sinner, even forever?

(2.) The argument derived from the nature of the Gospel is obviously of loose construction, and of doubtful effectiveness. It is true that Christianity seems not only unexhausted but inexhaustible,—that as a saving scheme it would need neither addition nor change were the whole race, instead of a portion, to be saved through it. It may be true, though it has not been proved, that this blessed Faith is capable of presentation and of application among the dead; and that, if such were the divine choice, sinners might, perchance, be rescued from sin and guilt through it, in that new and, to human view, mysterious state. But if all men are not, under that divine choice, permitted to learn of this faith in this life, how can we infer that all men will be permitted to do this in some future form of existence? And if, among those who do hear of Christ in this world, there are many who resolutely reject Him, and die in unbelief, how can we infer that most, or all, of these will pursue a different course in another world, under the action of the same class of influences? In fact, are not these reasonings from the universality and the absoluteness of Christianity, not only as uncertain and fragile on natural grounds as they are without distinct warrant in Scripture, but also in large degree illusive and dangerous both in what they assert and what they imply? It is not safe to assert for Christianity, viewed as a form of religion, anything more than the Bible asserts for it; it is not wise to claim for it an extent of scope or of application beyond that which its Founder has clearly defined.

(3.) Arguments from the nature of God also need to be carefully scrutinized, and very thoughtfully applied—especially at points where, as is admitted, we have no explicit divine teaching to guide us. God is His own interpreter, and the Bible is His interpretation, alike of His character and of His administration. That He will deal justly with all men—with dying infants, with the heathen, with such as perished in the Deluge, as with us—we may be fully assured. That He will inflict punishment wherever He sees it to be deserved, and especially wherever men revolt against His grace; and that punishment will continue as long as sin lasts, though it be forever, we are also fully assured. That God is merciful as well as just, and will deal in tenderness with all, even with the incorrigibly wicked, we are confident; and that such manifestations of mercy will always be harmonized with the demands of equity, and will go no farther than righteousness

permits, we are no less confident. The largest hope which our sense of His love suggests, may be cherished just so far as His Word furnishes a warrant for it, and so far as His own perfect nature as seen in His Word and His works sustains it. But here we must pause. Reasonings which carry us outward to the very verge of the Christian Faith, and then seduce us beyond the acknowledged limits of that Faith, are of doubtful validity and of questionable value. Arguments drawn from what we may imagine God to be, or to be under obligation to do, and handled by us without any explicit divine teaching to hold them up, are not only doubtful, but may become dangerous. And the dogma of Probation after Death, so far as it rests on such reasonings and arguments—so far as it seeks to maintain itself, before the mind of the Church, by speculative considerations drawn from whatever source, while confessing itself unable to justify itself by the positive teaching of Scripture—can never become a Doctrine: it must remain a dogma forever.

II.—SYMPOSIUM ON THE MINISTRY.

NO. V.

BY PRESIDENT E. G. ROBINSON, D.D., BROWN UNIVERSITY.

A CHRISTIAN minister is efficient and useful in proportion as he is enabled to win others to the service of Christ and to compliance with the requirements of all Christian truth. His means and methods must depend partly on the nature of Christianity itself, and partly on the peculiarities of the age in which he lives. The facts and principles of Christianity are, of course, the same for all times; but the popular apprehension of these varies among different peoples and at different periods. Without regard for the knowledge and mental habits and tastes of a people, the most diligent labor may be fruitless. The Apostle Paul would never have preached the same sermon at Athens that he had preached in Jerusalem; and Jonathan Edwards would hardly have ventured to preach at Enfield, in 1886, the sermon he preached there in 1741. St. Francis of Assisi would to-day be laughed at and mobbed in Chicago; and the Mr. Moody of 1886 would have been hooted and stoned at Assisi in 1215. Every man is first the creature of his own time, and then in turn helps to change his time into another that is to follow.

If the work of the minister is to win to completeness of service of Christ, then his chief function must be to create and to deepen Christian conviction. The more effectually he does this, the more effective and useful is he. And there are various means by which he may do it. Preaching is one means, but certainly not the only one, and in this age not even the most efficient. The number of actual conversions traceable to ordinary pulpit ministrations is but a fraction of