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THE

BIBLIOTHECA SACRA.

ARTICLE I.

THE ILLIBERALITY OF THE DOGMA OF PROBATION AFTER DEATH.

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By "Probation after death" we understand a probation which turns upon a definite, formal presentment to the disembodied soul of the historic Christ, and a conscious, deliberate acceptance or rejection of Christ under such presentation.

Other notions, more vague and rationalistic, drifting at large in the popular mind, imagining some limitless amnesty in the future world, have undoubtedly to some extent usurped the name "probation." But even Andover, not always careful enough to discriminate its views from the popular counterfeit, has desired us to set at once aside all such loose travesties upon its position. It is, then, the introduction and accentuation of the factor of the "historic Christ" which alone turns the commonplace, hazy dream of a future probation into anything clear enough to define or weighty enough even to demand a Christian suffrage.

From the standpoint of foreign scholarship especially, this is the only phase of the general notion of probation after

death which emerges into dogmatic distinctness, the only one whose distinct doctrinal weight can be argued from the evangelical position, the only one which invokes or challenges a scriptural exegesis, and the only one which biblical scholars like Dorner in Germany, or Alford in England, avow.

The object of the present paper is to show that this theory, so defined, is yet untenable as a dogma, and so far from being liberal is distinctly, though no doubt unintentionally *illiberal.*

We even propose in regard to this matter of "liberality" to change the animus of the issue. The notion of future probation, not carefully defined under what is really its inseparable dogmatic accompaniment, viz., the presentation of the historic Christ, has easily in the popular mind identified itself with "liberality." It is confused with rationalism, from which the dogma at many points differs, certainly in the sense in which it is held by the German scholars. It is, however, perhaps a question, whether Dorner's doctrine on this subject of future probation has not got into more rationalistic company in crossing the Atlantic. Dorner presents the picture of a man fighting Rationalism, and *so* holding Future Probation; Andover, unfortunately, and perhaps unwittingly, has produced the impression of men dallying with Rationalism, and *so* holding Future Probation. In this way the popular sentiment in this country has identified the new probationary theory with rationalism, from which it should in strictness be discriminated. The dogma of future probation is also confused with Universalism, between which and it a great gulf is logically fixed, certainly in scholarly thought. In these various ways, the doctrine of probation after death has come to be regarded as a phase of the so-called "liberal" faith. On the contrary, we take the ground that this new theory with its "historic" attachment is in fact illiberal. We suspect that it narrows exegesis in the direction of making a virtual plea for a kind of petty, verbal infallibility, by its strained appeal to its few "proof-texts," "preached to the spirits in prison," etc. We suspect that it narrows the om-

nipotence of the divine mercy, by insisting that God's gracious influence upon man shall confine itself to a single psychological path; that it narrows the hope of the salvation of infants, casting a gloom over cradle and casket; that it narrows the efficacy of redemption by its method of identifying redemption itself, subjectively considered, with a definite mental picture of that redemption under its historic forms; that, finally, it even narrows and abridges the broad ethical ground-work upon which natural religion and christology itself must ultimately stand.

We should first, however, studying the utmost justice, define the dogma and discriminate it from other theories. Andover has itself partly to blame if it is misunderstood. What most men most want in connection with this discussion is precisely what they have least had, viz., *definition;* not only definition *inclusive*, but definition *exclusive.* We want to know what the doctrine does *not* mean, as well as what it means. A certain obscurity in this debate has been produced by special causes. It has been partly due, of course, to prejudice, and to that exaggerated and cloudy conception which prejudice always forms of an antagonist's position, but beside prejudice with its distorted perspective, the real question at issue has been confused with other adjacent but really disconnected questions. For instance, the issue presented by the recent "Andover Trial," so called, is not the question of the truth or falsehood of the doctrine of future probation. The question in the Andover trial was the question whether the Andover professors had the right, under the Andover creed, to teach that doctrine. Now this latter is another question, yet the heat, and doubt, and complexity of argument excited by the latter controversy, have been insensibly carried over, like a cloud of irritating dust, into that calm field of scriptural exegesis and philosophic inquiry where the real question of future probation itself is to be settled, and where alone it can be settled. Another of these heated, practical, confusing side controversies is that which has recently agitated the American Board. The question at Springfield was

not that of the truth or falsehood of the doctrine of future probation. It was the question whether men entertaining that doctrine in any degree should be sent as missionaries; a very different question. Nevertheless, the two issues were confused in the popular mind, and the vehement breath of battle, appropriate enough to a question of practical policy, has invaded what it has no right to invade, the discussion on future probation itself.

For we cannot too emphatically say, that this question of probation after death is a question for candid and kindly scriptural inquiry. We must not be too much in a hurry. We must not misstate things, nor misrepresent men. Polemics are an impertinence in the tremendous shadows of eschatology. The painfully flippant tone of the secular press in dealing with this subject is perhaps in part a natural concomitant of the partisan clamor and clash into which we Christians have been betrayed in treating it. Even Augustine himself, pleading, as he did, for the unmodified doctrine of eternal punishment, and devoting the twenty-first chapter of his great book, "The City of God," to the refutation of the "very many," as he calls them, who held the doctrines of restorationism, refers to them with courteous respect as "our party of pity."

We may adopt the following simple division of the subject:—

I. What does the dogma of probation after death really mean, in the minds of those who accept it?

II. What does it not mean?

III. What are the main arguments for it?

IV. Why is the drift of these arguments illiberal?

I. What is the dogma? It is, as has been said, but as must be said with even repeated emphasis, the doctrine of future probation *under the form of a conscious acceptance or rejection of the historic Christ.* Dr. Dorner uses the following language: "The absoluteness of Christianity demands that no one be judged before Christianity has been made accessible and brought near him." Certainly, we answer; but

the context shows Dorner's meaning to be, that Christianity shall be made "accessible and brought near" *in our* way, under our intellectual, concrete, historic forms of apprehension. In this supposition that the "historic" way is the only way, lies the tremendous assumption that vitiates the psychological soundness and the philosophical strength of this "new"[1] doctrine of probation; namely, the assumption that identifies man's probation with the processes of a single mental field,—that limits man's response to the gospel to a conscious intellection of the historic Christ, and limits the gracious and redeeming work of God's Spirit to the creation of the formal antecedents or accompaniments of such intellection.

The theory conceives that all infants and heathen and the imbecile or insane and men of the pre-Christian ages—all souls, in fact, to whom Christ has not been explicitly presented under the forms of the historic incarnation in this life —will have between death and the final judgment the privilege of such presentation. There must ensue in every instance a definite, conscious, formal intellection of the historic Christ, and thus an opportunity of decisive acceptance or rejection of his redemption.

Martensen, the Danish theologian, Bishop of Seeland, while not fully pronounced for this theory, uses the following language: "The kingdom of the dead is a kingdom of calm thought and self-fathoming—a kingdom of *remembrance* in the full sense of the word." "The manifold voices of this worldly life grow dumb, and the holy voices now sound alone no longer deadened by the tumult of the world." "A morning ray first broke into this kingdom of shades through the descent of Christ into Hades." "Conversion then must still be possible for the unconverted in Hades."

II. Such is the doctrine. Now, what is it *not?*

1. It is *not* a "new departure." It is the resuscitation

[1] We use the word "new" simply because it is easier to fall in with a short and intelligible popular phrase, even if inaccurate, than to use a more accurate but more lumbering circumlocution.

of an old theory which has been held by some minds in almost every age of the church since the second century of the Christian era. It is new to New England but not to Christendom. It is a new departure only from a provincial standpoint. The Andover bottle may be new, but the wine in it is old.

2. The "new" theory is *not* the doctrine of purgatory. It is not assumed that any discipline of purifying pain will be applied to the dead heathen, to enforce their decision in favor of Christ. On the contrary, the idea of the present doctrine of future probation seems to be, that substantially the same, and only the same, gracious opportunity as to freedom and motive, shall be given to the heathen after death, as is given to us before death.

3. The doctrine in question does *not*, when strictly and separately considered, amount to rationalism. Here again, however, we must discriminate. The dogma *may* be rationalistic in its genesis, and there is some reason to suppose that in this country a rationalistic coloring has been thrown upon it by the general theological environment under which it has been presented. In enunciating the proposition "Probation after Death through the Historic Christ," German scholars have emphasized the last word, "Christ," and so have repudiated a rationalistic accent upon the dogma. Others, on the contrary, seem to have emphasized the first word, "Probation," and so incurred the suspicion of such rationalistic accent. The dogma of future probation as presented at Andover wears a little the air of having been caught up in the sweep of a general theological *excursus*, in which all fundamental Christian doctrines have been somewhat modified, and a new vague monarch, viz., "Christian consciousness," exalted above Holy Scripture. Under this aspect, the dogma may be considered rationalistic, but as taught by its leading foreign exponents it is not rationalistic, for Dorner, Van Oosterzee, Alford, emphasize the christological element in it. That element is by them made the chief element. It is not "*probation* after death," so much as it is "*Christ* after death,"

which they delineate. Moreover, these foreign scholars are well-known foes of rationalism, and they support this dogma by a most microscopic exegesis and by a pronounced application of the doctrine of infallible inspiration to a very few passages of Scripture. What is rationalism? Rationalism is the interpretation of Scripture according to the requirements of a pre-conceived intellectual philosophy, rejecting this passage as a myth, modifying that passage as an exaggeration, toning up the Bible or toning it down, as the case may be, so as to make its statements fit in with an already prepared intellectual fabric.

Little of this attitude of mind or process of thought characterizes the main European advocates of the doctrine of probation after death. Dorner and Lange of Germany, Martensen of Denmark, Alford of England, are not rationalists. They are perhaps more truly mystics than rationalists. They are careful biblical scholars. They base their doctrine explicitly upon what they declare to be the Scripture teaching of "Christ's descent into Hades," a notion which Rationalism proper rejects as a superstition.

4. The doctrine of probation after death is *not* Unitarianism. On the contrary, it is the very antithesis of Unitarianism. We should do Andover the justice to admit that its position here is unequivocal. Dorner says, "Modern Theology has eagerly welcomed this article, for it witnesses that even those who were not laid hold of by Christ's historic manifestation in their earthly life still must and may be brought into relation to him, in order to be able to accept or to reject him. And thus, the universal relation of Christianity to humanity and the absoluteness of the Christian religion are confirmed." In fact, the whole genius and essence of this theory of probation after death in its purer form is intensely christological. The difficulty is that it is a christology *in the air*, rather than resting, as a realistic and practical christology must rest, on the principles of natural religion, and universal ethics. But at any rate this new theory is at the opposite extreme from Unitarianism.

5. Nor, finally, is the new theory Universalism. One of its American advocates says, "He who would carry hope behind the Judgment, parts company with the historic thought of the church." Dorner says, "Clear is the utterance of the New Testament principle that unbelief is damnation." Dorner rejects restorationism. He rejects also the theory of annihilation, although he seems to favor, as Horace Bushnell did, the notion that the lost soul sinks in the scale of being, until it ceases to be in any full sense of the word, human. The finally lost are "a kind of demented beings," says Dorner, "forever raging in impotent fury." "Spinning along their lengths of mediocrity" is the poetic phrase of Bushnell. But these are anti-Universalist positions. So that while it is undoubtedly true that certain students and theological thinkers of the second and shallower class have used the doctrine of future probation merely as a stepping-stone or half-way house to Universalism, yet it is also true, and very emphatically true, that the great leaders and biblical scholars who have adopted this theory expressly disclaim any such tendency or logical consequence. They say that the final judgment is the beginning of an everlasting retribution. They fully accept the heavily weighted statements of the New Testament as to eternal punishment.

6. But if the doctrine of Probation after Death through the Presentation of the Historic Christ is not purgatory, if it is not rationalism, if it is not Unitarianism, if it is not Universalism, then it is not a cardinal heresy. We associate the charge of heresy with the general notion of a future probation, *i. e.*, an unlimited "chance" in the future. But in proportion as a definite, final presentment of the historic Christ is insisted on, the gravely heretical element in the dogma subsides. In itself considered, and irrespective of its logical consequence, this dogma may be looked upon, from the standpoint of an ecumenical theology, as a minor deflection, not a radical departure, from orthodox standards. It admits to itself a difference from the orthodox teaching mainly in the lesser importance which it gives to the article

of death and to the earthly life, but it claims to make that up in the added importance which it assigns to the intermediate state, to the final judgment, and especially to Christ himself, as having a living relation of grace to the vast kingdom of the dead. What we need, then, is discrimination. To fill the air with outcries against earnest Christian scholars who lean toward this view as being of course essential heretics, is, we submit, illogical and blind. It is the clamor of ignorance. As "conservatives" we shall gain nothing by it, for as soon as the subject is examined, the public will see that we have misrepresented our adversaries, and in our time when the light of public investigation is bright and hot even to fierceness upon all disputed issues, a misrepresentation always reacts against the man or the party that permits it. This much we may concede. At the same time we must insist that certain American advocates of this dogma have laid themselves open to such misunderstanding through their looseness of statement in regard to other and more fundamental articles of Christian doctrine. If the pushing of this particular dogma appears to be a *symptom* of a general lapse from orthodox standards, then the case is changed in a moment, for so a substantial heresy may be *behind* the dogma, though not necessarily in it.

III. So much then for the dogma—what it is, and what it is not. But the visionary character of this new hypothesis, under even its most careful statement, its illegitimacy as a dogma, and especially its *illiberal* drift, become apparent the moment we critically examine the arguments which are adduced to support it. For convenience' sake the discussion of our third and fourth general heads will be conducted together.

1. The Scripture argument. There are three passages of Scripture which are supposed explicitly to favor this view.

(1) The great Delphic passage in 1 Peter iii. 19, where it is said that Christ "preached to the spirits in prison."

(2) Matt. xii. 32, in regard to the "unpardonable sin," where it is argued that the non-forgiveness of this one sin in the other world implies the possible or probable forgiveness

of other sins. This certainly is textual criticism with a vengeance. As well might you conclude, when the governor of New York State declares that he will not pardon a certain notorious criminal in Sing Sing, that he will pardon every other prisoner in the prison. The conclusion is reached only by an arbitrary forcing of language.

(3) The third Scripture passage is 1 Peter iv. 6, where the language is, "For this cause was the gospel preached to them that are dead."[2] The evident answer in this case is that the passage is grammatically equivocal. It may possibly mean "for this cause was the gospel preached [in life] to them who are [now] dead."

And even if it be conceded that the knowledge of the gospel be communicated to the spirits of the departed, this does not prove it to have been graciously pressed upon them, as it is upon men in this life. Such announcement of truth to the dead does not necessarily argue any extension of probation or any practical probability of an ethical change amounting to conversion in Hades. The same line of reply may be adopted with reference to the famous 1 Peter iii. 19, Christ's "descent into Hades," which is regarded on all hands as the exegetical fortress of the theory in question. But it is a fortress whose doors swing either way. For grammatically it may read and mean "preached [in their earthly lifetime] unto the spirits [who are now] in prison," that is to say, Christ, by his invisible Spirit, "preached," or made his truth manifest to the minds of some who lived before the flood, who now are in the waiting-place, or "prison," of Hades. In other words, the meaning of the passage is obscure and doubtful. Even Dorner says rather quaintly, "Dogmatic sobriety enjoins reserve upon this point." But grant that Christ did preach in Hades, there is nothing to show that such preaching was anything more than an announcement to the departed souls of the facts which had taken place, or were to take place in the upper world. There is nothing to show that this preaching was attended with any essential

[2] R. V., "Even to the dead."

moral change in them; nor is any doctrine implied which would contradict the plain teaching of the passage in Corinthians, for example, where it is stated that men shall be judged according to the "deeds done in the body."

IV. These, then, are the common answers to the three scriptural citations. The argument of the present essay, however, goes further than thus simply to recite these familiar replies to the arguments alleged. It goes so far as to charge upon this whole method of exegetical reasoning the complaint of *illiberality*.

The illiberality appears as soon as we reflect upon the dogmatic use made of these passages, and the theory of inspiration which underlies that use. Measure these passages,—only three, and they obscure and equivocal, the two stronger of them occurring in the writings of the same man, St. Peter, and not echoed or hinted at in the writings of St. Paul,—and then measure the illiberality of the exegetical insistence upon these few words as being so infallibly and verbally inspired and decisive as to furnish an adequate scriptural foundation for a great Christian dogma! We claim that this is illiberal rather than liberal. It is the attempt to bind the faith of the church upon a dozen unsupported words of Peter. It is of a piece with the ultramontane insistence upon Matt. xvi. 18, "upon this rock I will build my church," as proving the primacy of the Roman See. The truly liberal evangelical method of interpreting the Bible is different. According to it, inspiration is not sporadic, but organic. True exegesis is not textual so much as documentary. It is the document as a whole, rather than its separate flying buttresses of phraseology, which must be studied. Theology must be biblical, not syllabic. It is the *whole* book, not the turn of a phrase, which is the liberal canon of truth, and nothing is admissible into the austere and regal domain of dogma which does not command the clear comprehensive support of many passages of God's word. Even grant that these three texts of Scripture be allowed their full weight, and not a word be said in rebuttal. Can such slender and sparse exegetical planks

support the tremendous weight of a great Christian dogma? But more than this, if we concede that a dogma can be built on three texts alone, we admit a principle of exegesis which logically amounts to theological suicide. For a hundred fantastic doctrines can collate three scattered texts which read alone will support them. The theory of final restoration of all souls can command many more texts than three. So can the doctrine of a literal communism in property. Even the doctrine of celibacy can summon its proof-texts. The only sound and safe exegesis is one which interprets one text by others, which modifies and supplements the meaning of one passage by the meaning of all passages of Holy Scripture. Rationalism, in one sense of the term (though not the technical sense), viz., the truly rational handling of God's word, lies at the basis of Protestantism, and the difficulty with this special exegesis supporting future probation is, that it is not, in this sense, rationalistic enough. It is not thoroughly Protestant. It is at bottom an intensely Old School exegesis, so old, indeed, that it goes back to the fanciful exploits of the Greek Fathers, Origen and Gregory of Nyssa, and their imaginative exegetical structures, for its prototypes. Western, and especially Protestant, thought has built less in the air and more on the earth, less in the next world and more in this, and in this regard no doubt represents the true development of a cosmopolitan Christianity.

2. A striking illustration of the concealed illiberality of this view of probation after death is seen in its relation to the salvation of infants. The case of infants has been summoned to support the dogma. It is said that the commonly received doctrine of the salvation of infants has no valid basis unless we suppose that after death with an advancing maturity they come under the explicit power of Christ's redemption under historic formulas, and so choose it for themselves. But surely here we meet the hard illiberality of the colossal assumption that the only way by which an infant can come under the power of Christ's redemption is

through historic formulas, mentally discriminated and consciously adopted. On the contrary, for aught we know, infants *may be* under the power of Christ's redemption, without a necessity for the intervention of any intellectual recognition of the historic Christ. A mother cares for her child, and succors it, when the child is very young, before the child knows the mother by any self-conscious discrimination. So Christ may care for the infant spirit, and graciously save it, aside from any self-conscious intellection on the part of the child. "Faith saves;" very true, but there may be an implicit as well as an explicit faith, and faith must not be confined to an adult intellection of the formal and scenic elements of an historic incarnation. So to confine the definition of faith is shallow psychology and illiberal theology. And how darkly illiberal, in contrast with our catholic position, does this theory in its relation to children appear when we follow it out to its practical results! For this doctrine of future probation at once throws uncertainty over the final destiny of infant children. Perhaps we have not thought enough of this. One-half the human race dies in infancy. Aside from all Scripture, which says nothing directly on the subject, the Protestant world rests in the instinctive verdict springing from its knowledge of God and its common human feeling that such a little one is certainly taken at death into the Father's home and bosom, saved through Christ, though not conscious of Christ, and not conscious of sin. I will not attempt to indicate the immeasurable solace which thus abides by the innumerable graves of the children. But admit this theory of a future probation and all is changed. There may be a probability but no certainty of salvation even for the youngest child. Life must go on after death until the soul is mature enough to understand the historic Christ, who will then be presented before it for acceptance or rejection. If you say that such a trial will be made so favorable and Christ presented under terms so constraining as to *insure* acceptance, then where is your probation? In such case it is not *probation* at all; it is certainty. Then beside, the question would

arise, Where is the justice in presenting Christ to adults who live in this world under terms less constraining? No, the moment we whisper the word "probation"—in any vital sense of that term—after death, we logically make our whisper one of amazement and doubt, and terror often, in regard to the ultimate fate of departed children. Is this liberal?

3. Here is the place to mention two other arguments, ordinarily adduced to support this view of future probation, both of which, however, owe their force to what we must again call an illiberal, *i. e.*, a narrow and merely textual, way of handling the Bible. One of these arguments is that the Old Testament favors the doctrine, in its use of the term "Sheol" as a place for the good and bad alike. The Old Testament, it is claimed, does not teach that men are at once ethically separated after death, but that the good and bad together enter the same "Sheol," which is not represented as a place of retributive discrimination. But plainly this is the inference of a narrowly textual exegesis. The larger and liberal exegesis asserts that the Old Testament says next to nothing upon the subject in any way, that what it does say is entirely vague, non-dogmatic, as though the Spirit of revelation had been content to concentrate its light upon the present life and leave the field of the future without explicit statement, a fact which would itself be improbable if the doctrine of a distinct future probation were true. The second of these two arguments is that if death decides destiny, then nothing of importance remains to the final judgment; that, in fact, it is not a judgment at all, but merely a ceremony, *pro forma*, a ratification of a sentence already inflicted. Now we meet this proposition at once, in the first place, by the larger and profounder exegesis, identified with truly liberal thought, which detects in the New Testament literature an expectation of Christ's second coming and the judgment before the expiration of the life of the generation then on the stage. Death was not emphasized because men did not expect to die before Christ came. The judgment was the near, the imminent, and

so the peremptory fact, not death. It is fair, also, to reply to the somewhat formal tone of the reasoning we are opposing, by an argument in kind. We may say, in reference to the future judgment, that such a solemn ratification and public proclamation of judicial sentence and final destiny *is* of importance enough to warrant all the Scripture language concerning it. So far as public interests are concerned, and generally in human jurisprudence, it is not the moment when the criminal commits his crime, nor even the moment when the judge reaches his judgment on the case, but it is the hour of the public proclamation of the judge's decision which is the prime moment of public consequence, with reference to moral administration.

But what we have to emphasize in this connection is much more than this. We have to call attention to that deeper and more ethical notion of "judgment," by which the liberal evangelical faith interprets the *κρίσις* of the New Testament. In the intimate substance of it, *κρίσις* is not limited to any "day." It is, with philosophical accuracy, an *eternal* judgment,—eternal because timeless. It sustains both its individual relations and its race relation. As to the individual it is present; as to the race it is future. In the personal moral nature is the judgment-seat, a kind of outpost of the Great White Throne, compared with whose solemn and incessant verdict physical death is a subordinate incident. This personal adjudication, registered in the present life in a determined ethical character, completes itself, so far as humanity at large is concerned, in a future and final Day of Judgment, in which the race, as a race, shall be fully judged. We emphasize *κρίσις itself*, then, rather than the mere *chronology* of *κρίσις*. To identify the thrilling and instant energy of the New Testament treatment of *κρίσις*, solely with a formal judicial assize, and a definite date, sometime after death, seems mechanical and perfunctory. The really liberal evangelical thought, here as everywhere, disentangles the essence of the truth from its scenic accessories, steers clear of a narrow chronological eschatology, and admits that

judgment is of more importance than death, *because* judgment is *now, as well as at* the "great day,"—*now* for the individual, as leading up to the "great day" for the race. The writer may perhaps be allowed to quote from an unpublished paper of an eminent American scholar and preacher, whose attitude on these subjects is liberal, while evangelical. He says: "Salvation, like sin, has both its individual and its world-wide aspects. The judgment-throne is in the conscience. But the judgment is both individual and universal. It is a *race*-process, of which the last day is the terminus, when the books are closed in the ethical account of humanity. There is, what we call in general terms a 'day of salvation,' not conterminous with any one individual life. There is also a 'day of judgment,' at death for the individual, at the advent of Christ for the race."

4. Another curious argument relied upon by Dorner to prove probation after death, is that it has actually occurred, viz., in the instance of the daughter of Jairus, the widow's son at Nain, and Lazarus at Bethany, all of whom after death came again back into life, and presumably into that freedom of moral choice, balance of motive, and opportunity of grace, which constitute probation. The argument is this, that if these miracles occurred, then there is no necessary connection between death and the end of probation; for, if so, then these persons had two probations. If they were first in probation, then out of it, then in probation again, plainly they had two probations, and according to which of the two, then, would they be judged at last? If then this absurd result, so continues the Dorner argument, leads us to conclude, that in these instances probation continued, then death in these cases did not arrest probation, and if it did not for them, why should it for anybody? The plain reply to this ingenious argument is that the argument itself is casuistry—that it involves the sophistry of arguing from an avowed exception to a general law, and this is always illogical. According to good logic we can never reason from the exception to the rule, much less from *miraculous*

exceptions to customary providential procedures. What God might do with those special cases affords no criterion for what is his ordinary law.

But the matter does not end here. See whither this illiberal and petty casuistry leads. According to the dogma, heathen who "never heard of Christ" are to have a future probation. Who then is such an heathen? Is a native of the Indian hills, for example, who once in his life, when on a visit to Ahmednagar, saw a Bible for sale in a bazaar, or heard a missionary preach,—is he such an heathen or not? How much knowledge of the gospel is necessary to constitute an heathen not an heathen in reference to probation? How about the ignorant populace of our own cities? Will they have their probation in the next life or in this? At what point of fulness in intellectual apprehension of Christianity and the historic Christ does the probationary period suddenly shift from the realms beyond the grave to the life here? Such a point exists. Such a shifting takes place. If the man dies before noon, we will say, he will have his probation after death; if he lives till nightfall, and hears a missionary preach, his probation is before death! Into such intolerable and illiberal pettiness of questioning is Christ's broad gospel logically driven by the attempt to apply practically any definite dogma of probation after death.

5. Finally, the last and greatest argument in favor of the doctrine of probation after death through the presentation of the historic Christ, and the underlying argument of all the other arguments, is the proposition, which, it is claimed, represents the whole trend of the New Testament, that Christianity is absolute and universal, that thus salvation is always connected with conscious, deliberate acceptance of Christ; that condemnation is always in the same way connected with conscious deliberate unbelief and rejection of him; that therefore there must be opportunity for such rejection. Dorner, for example, quotes Mark xvi. 16. It is

not said, "he that *heareth* not shall be condemned," but "he that *believeth* not."

Now as to this great argument, we are prompt to concede the profound christological and evangelical sentiment of it. It is an argument which makes Christ central and supreme. So far well. But more than this, it makes him supreme in such a way as that not only the spiritual truth of Christ is essential to salvation, but a certain concrete, historic, formal presentment of Christ, as if in so many words to the mind, becomes *equally* essential to salvation. In other words, the form of the fact is as important as the fact itself. Now, as Christians, we admire and approve the motive of those who urge this argument, provided they urge it sincerely. It is to honor Christ and his redemption. And yet exactly here we take issue with the argument, and take issue with it on the ground of its *illiberality.* We admit and agree that Christ is central, that his redemption alone saves, but we utterly deny that any formal, historic presentment of Christ is as essential as Christ himself. We believe that Christ, the Saviour of the whole world, can reach and does reach the human mind through other channels than those of historic knowledge. We believe that he may reach men who never knew of him in the way of conscious intellection. We hold that our modern prophets of a specialized extension of probation are really confining and shutting up Christianity, when they thus assume that a man must have a definite, mental conception of an historic incarnation—we might almost say a materialized incarnation—a cross, a youth hanging thereon, a hill of Calvary, the scenery of the first century, in other words, the "historic Christ"—as the only mental channel by which the truth of Christ can touch the man. We believe that this truth carried by Christ's Spirit can reach men through a hundred channels. The deep doctrine of the solidarity of the race, a doctrine scientific as well as Pauline, goes a great way. The influences of the redemption reach the race as a race. The individualized camera of a conscious historic perspective is not a *sine qua*

non. The intellectual apprehension of the historic incarnation as we understand those words, by the penitent thief on the cross was probably exceedingly vague, inadequate, and erroneous. It was a state of penitence and faith, *per se*, which lay back of the intellectual apprehension, to which the welcoming assurance of the dying Saviour's mercy was so promptly given. Patriotism may exist before a man is able to read the constitution of the country he fights for; so substantive Faith, like the Nile, finds its outlet through a mental *Delta*, including an almost infinite variety of subjective intellectual forms. This is the liberal view and it is evangelical also, for Christ is held to be the Power always. The more knowledge of him the better. The broader the intellectual channels can be opened, the better; the more preaching the better; but Christ can find a way to himself for the faith which he sees existing even though the intellect be sealed. The liberal evangelical view is that the truth of Christ, properly and exactly so called, the truth of the divine law and love and sacrifice and forgiveness and redemption, can reach a child, for example, through its knowledge of its mother, or a woman through her affection for her child. We even believe that the influence of the Redeemer, availing itself thus of incalculable agencies, can reach the Indian courier in the jungle of the Ganges, or the African slave girl far up the Nile, along the channels of *their* thought, along such channels of knowledge, imagination, sentiment, as are open to them. And thus to broaden the prerogative of the Redeemer's power is the true evangelical liberality. Can we confine ourselves within the proposition that Christ, the eternal Logos, who made the wonderful world, who was crucified "from the foundation of the world," is fettered to an historic picture of himself? Is Christ's influence tied up within the mechanism of a single concretely working mental process in men? Our objection to this theory of a future probation upon the basis of an intellectual conception of the historic Christ is not that it is too liberal, but that it is not liberal enough. It subjects the Lord of glory to the move-

ments of a single, narrow mental mechanism. A thorough psychology is against it. We are not conscious of the learning of half of what we nevertheless learn. Physiologists tell us, that at least one-half our brain processes, half our functions of sensation and cerebration, are unconscious. We grow partly as trees grow. Half our mental nutriment is absorbed unconsciously. We are partly like unconscious infants all our lives. The processes by which power, knowledge, life, come to the soul are not all numerically tabulated. They are not registered according to some formal scheme, but are varied, multiform, infinite. Now shall we hew our faith down to the assertion that the great God, who made all this structure, and intends to redeem it by a marvellous and miraculous redemption, must be shut up to merely one of its many avenues of approach, namely, that of conscious, concrete, historical picturing, in order to reach it? The idea of such an objective necessity is too narrowly definite for a divine redemption. It implies not only a shallow psychology, but also a theory of individualism which is unscientific. We agree with the good brethren of Andover and elsewhere, and with all devout Bible students, in their insistence upon the universality of the gospel. On their behalf we even make haste to repudiate the injustice of certain ignorant common attacks upon them as being heretics. We do not so regard them. We acknowledge the learning and revere the piety of the few great German scholars who have avowed this special theory of continued probation, but when we see that the theory involves a compression of God's redeeming power within the little single avenue of a formal mental picture of the historic Christ, then we must part company with them, and stand off from the doctrine as being not only unscriptural but artificial and illiberal. We stand off not in the name of "conservatism" but in the name of the liberty of a broader and more catholic faith.

We may wade through many pages of laborious reasoning in which this specialized ground is taken, that somehow, somewhere, after death, the baby's soul, for example, or the

soul of the unbaptized savage, is to be put in the audience-box, and a formal presentment of the earthly incarnation made (for this is what the theory amounts to), upon which presentment that infant or savage soul is to decide, under the forms of such mental conception and moral conclusions as obtain among us civilized, adult Christians; but such reasoning, after all, is as unsubstantial as the palace of Kubla Khan seen by Coleridge in his dream. It is the analysis of fancies, the weighing of shadows. A larger and deeper mental philosophy is against it. A larger and deeper exegesis is against it. The natural, ethical substructure of the Bible is against it. It is a numerical, an artificial substitute for true spirituality. It limits man. It limits God.

In what contrast to these over-refined and specialized notions about disembodied preaching and the historic Christ is the tremendous realism of that shattering sentence of Paul, "For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law." Or that sentence of Peter, thrilling with the new disclosure of a cosmopolitan Christianity, made to him in a vision in the tanner's house in Joppa, by the broad and beckoning sea, "In every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted with him" (Acts x. 35).[8]

[8] Note on Acts x. 35.—We can well enough admit with Neander and Meyer, that the notion of doctrinal indifferentism is not taught here. We may agree with Bengel that "not all religions, but all nations, are here placed on the same level." We heartily agree, that even in the case of such a pagan as Cornelius, one who "feareth God and worketh righteousness," salvation takes place for the sake of, and through the application of, Christ's redemption; but we insist that the natural force of Peter's language and of the situation which the case of Cornelius presents, forbid the narrow theory that the influence of this redemption must come upon all men under identical forms and terms of mental apprehension of the historic Christ. The acute article by Dr. Thomas P. Field, in the *Andover Review* for May, 1887, fails at this essential point, viz., to discriminate between the essential *substance* and quality of the "Faith which saves," and its *form* of subjective mental manifestation. That all are saved through Christ, if saved at all, is true; that faith in him is essential to salvation is also true; but the substantive contents of this faith may exist, with varying forms and degrees of con-

In other words, historic Christianity is not the substructure of religion. Christology, essential as it is, yet rests upon the greater granite of universal ethical and spiritual principles. Christology is the shrine and the spire of divine truth, not the whole of it. We may thank God that we are permitted to approach this open shrine, but the broad pavement of the temple stretches away out and on into the outer court, where the wandering heathen, if penitent, or the helpless infant, may be saved, for the sake of the shrine, but not seeing the shrine.

IV. In this rapid review the positive and overwhelming argument from Scripture against this new theory has hardly been touched. We have attended simply to the argument on the other side. And a careful examination of this argument and the new-old hypothesis which it is brought forward to support, convinces us that both in point of exegesis and of philosophy, its "liberalism" is in appearance only, not in fact. In a word, it makes too little of "natural religion," too little of rational ethics. If erected into a dogma it even impairs the moral dignity of the present life, and it does this by the method of making a particular *phase* of redemption, viz., the concrete, historic phase, the equivalent of redemption itself; and thus to make a part take the place of the whole is essential illiberality. The particular object

scious historic knowledge of the incarnation, or even with none at all. A state of mind exists, which God accepts and approves, and which will instantly precipitate itself into positive dogmatic forms of faith, the moment Christ is historically presented. Admit what is of course true, that to such persons Christ *will* be presented in the future life; that is, admit, as a necessity of spiritual life hereafter, that the knowledge of the historic Christ will come to such persons, and that they will instantly and certainly rejoice in and accept it, yet in such case the real *probation* is within the arena of the earlier period, and the decision *there* to "fear God and work righteousness" which *decides* the subsequent acceptance of Christ after death, is the really *probationary* decision. A subsequent specialized decision in favor of Christ as soon as He is presented is not thus, in strictness, probationary at all, for that decision is already *certain*, and made certain by the state of mind "acceptable with God" *already* attained. This is very far from being a future *probation*.

and scope, then, of the present argument must not be misunderstood. It is not a discussion of the general questions of eschatology. It is an argument levelled against the latent illiberality involved in the recent *dogmatizing* on the subject. The further reach of the argument would be to indicate that, upon the field of eschatology, dogmatism beyond the limits set by distinct revelation is illiberality. In regard to what God has not revealed, we may wonder, we may question, we may trust, but we must not dogmatize.

We know, of course, that the advocates of the dogma disclaim any such illiberal spirit or intention; but, unless they more carefully guard their position than they have done, this is the upshot of it. For to identify probation with the single issue of accepting or rejecting the historic Christ is to make other issues and other sins of little consequence, and so degrade the world as a moral arena. Indeed, the ultimate tendency is to dissolve the ethical ground-work of all religion.

The great ethical principle, wide as the Bible and as old as man, on which the Old Testament and the New alike stand, is that the law of God is revealed in the human conscience; that *there* is the essential probation; that the fundamental question of probation is what a man will do as to the simple issue of right and wrong discriminated by his conscience and disclosed from heaven by the "things that are made."[4] If probation be a supplementary specialty, merely the question of accepting or rejecting the historic Christ, then the heathen have no real probation in this life at all, and to say this discredits all moral distinctions, pours contempt upon that oldest testament, which Paul calls "the witness" of God, which is in men's hearts, and before their eyes in the works

[4] This law of God, in its spiritual depth and breadth, may embrace, for aught we know, such a potential incorporation and intimation of the gracious attitude of God, in relation to repentance, as shall amount to an implicit, though non-differentiated Christianity, even as the Old Testament itself contains the ground-work of such a Christianity, in still more approximate relief. Thus probation, under this law, will not then be a mere hard, legal issue, but may be, in a true sense, a probation under grace, though not under the formal knowledge of an historic incarnation for a redemptive end.

of nature, and in the moral judgments of experience and of history. The New Testament rests on the Old; the gospel on the ten commandments, Sinai is assumed before Calvary appears. Probation is complete, guilt is incurred, ruin affected, condemnation pronounced, the ethical vials filled,—all this takes its solemn place as the occasion, ground, and reason of the coming of Christ and the office of redemption. Justice does not command God to give his Son. The ethical factors are intact, if no Christ appears. This is the tremendous verdict of Natural Religion. This also is the reasoning of Paul. Now, to create another issue than this naked and grand one of conscience and right, viz., a specialized issue concerning an historic Christ, and call this latter alone probation, is to blur in a moment the clear edge of these old moral axioms and cast a slur upon the natural human conscience, upon the field it works in, the law it responds to, and the God who made it. For this reason it is illiberal.

The theory of future probation may perhaps be entertained as a speculation, as an hypothesis, as simply one of the phases of that inevitable outreach of the mind in which we seek to press beyond revelation, and beyond the veil of death, and *guess* as to what God will do with his infant or benighted children in the other life. This theory may be entertained with other theories, in this merely provisional way, without serious harm; but it cannot be made a dogma, nor formulated in scriptural definitions, nor inserted into the fabric of positive faith. Under the instant and imperative accent of gospel appeal with its solemn warnings, we recognize one life, and that is this one; we know one moment, and that is *now*. We have one probation, and all men have it. Death comes, and after death, judgment. Christ is ours if we will have him. He is ours to preach with immediate and insistent passion to every creature. As for what is not distinctly revealed, we must leave it and *trust* it with God. His actual dealing with all men will probably be far more tender, as well as more seriously just, than any explicit dogma of a future probation could even be able to conceive.

The simple, final truth to which this whole current of argument leads us is this, that the ecumenical faith is after all the truly and justly liberal faith. A careful, inductive examination of all heresies or quasi-heresies will lead to this conclusion, which we should also affirm as a fair *a priori* presumption. The ecumenical is the truly liberal. Dogmatism, even when so called "liberal," beyond the limits of clear revelation, involves latent illiberality. What forms of divine mercy may accompany the recoil of actually ignorant wrongdoing, we cannot tell, for we have not been told. We can rest in the Christian axiom, that nothing shall meet with final loss but that which is irreclaimably sinful, and that *must;* but beyond this not enough is disclosed to warrant any dogma of future probation or salvation with reference to classes and conditions not specified in Scripture.

It is not along this road of precise and specific forecasts, that we are to obtain real and rational relief from the burdens that press upon us in connection with the questions of eschatology. It is a mistake to suppose that the doctrine of probation after death under its recent definition, is a relieving doctrine. It is along another road, far more immediate and solid, the road of understanding more of God as he is now, more of man as he is to-day, that we are to find relief. A true theology, a true psychology, these are the parents of any true "larger hope." We need, however, not be alarmed as to the final outcome of the current discussions. The Bible will be better known, the real faith of the church will be better discriminated from its volatile environment of mere opinion, and a clearer urgency will be put upon the motives that commend and carry abroad the gospel, and that confirm men in the love and service of the true God.