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ARTICLE V.

SIN IN THIS AND OTHER WORLDS.

BY THE REV. A. EUGENE THOMSON, YANKTON, SOUTH DAKOTA.

I. THERE are reasons, not lightly to be rejected, for believing that other worlds than our own are inhabited. Indeed it is very difficult not to suppose it. There does not seem a sufficient reason for the creation of so many and such mighty balls as now stud the heavens, if this world alone carries human freight. The minute pencil of light that, after some thousands of years of travel, reaches a human eye, multiplied by all the eyes that have been or will be thus lighted, does not appear to warrant the existence of such forces as combine to send that feeble ray on its long journey, while almost an infinity of light and heat is wasted in the empty realms of the skies.

The lessons these far-off globes teach of the majesty of God are of vastly more value than the light they give us, and yet without them the exhibition that we have of "his everlasting power and divinity" is far beyond our comprehension. According to all our knowledge, they must have existed countless millions of years before there was a human being on this planet to observe them; and now that they are the objects of attentive study, they give us no geological records by which we may read their past, and the knowledge that we have any prospect of acquiring concerning them is as meagre as the dim radiance that greets the eye.

The nebular hypothesis has to such a degree solved the problems of the heavens and the earth, that we have a right to regard it as in the main correct. But, if true, it must be

true for the rest of the stellar universe outside our little system. In that case it is reasonable to assume that, swinging about the blazing orbs in the heavens, there are countless non-luminous bodies, many of which have reached, while many will in the future reach, the condition of temperature which our earth possesses. Yet it will be of importance in this discussion to bear in mind that the possible denizens of other worlds are not to be assumed necessarily to require such conditions of existence as we demand. We may, however, assume that some at least of these globes, if populated at all, are peopled with creatures possessing intelligence and moral agency. Such only, so far as we know, have great value in themselves. It is evident that the power of moral discrimination and choice forms the larger part of our possibility of worth; and we can but conclude that it is true in all parts of the universe, because we are ourselves made in the image of the Creator.

II. Then, if the inhabitants of other worlds have the power of moral choice, they have the power of sinning, and the question must arise, Are they not as likely to sin as are we? From what we know of the tendency of finite beings to sin, may we not expect that to be the case? If they do not sin, there must be some sufficient reason. That reason can hardly lie in the simple, universal choice of righteousness. Although the will of man is a sufficient cause of evil, yet we would not be justified in thinking that, with conditions on other worlds similar to those on our own, sin is a sporadic growth, belonging to this world, and this only, and that elsewhere finite wills have unanimously rejected sin. A single will may be a law to itself in any decision; but unanimity of choice in exactly opposite directions on the part of vast multitudes, in different locations, demands an examination of circumstances.

There is a reason which can be given for the freedom of other worlds from sin, if that be the fact, though we may not

be able confidently to state that reason. Moreover, we are told, and human experience corroborates it, that on this planet man is helped to sin. The attractiveness of forbidden things is overstated to him by one who is plotting his ruin. But, so far as we have yet discovered, there is just as much reason to expect that moral beings elsewhere will be tempted by forces outside of themselves, and the scale weighted, as here. The telescope has not revealed any wall capable of fencing Satan in and confining him to this world.

III. If the dwellers on other globes have sinned, we are assured, from the character of God and the nature of the kingdom of heaven, that they must all be lost, or else an atonement must be made by the Son of God. This lies in the nature of sin. They cannot atone for themselves or each other, nor can any being except the Son of God provide that sin may be forgiven, and the government of God kept free from danger.

IV. To this point people come. Then the question arises, Why may not Jesus have died many times before the tragedy on Calvary, and have in the future many such sacrifices awaiting him? He is distinctly said to be the "only-begotten Son" of God. Hence there is no other who can make an atonement for sin. This sometimes comes to thoughtful people as a perplexing problem. We turn to the Scriptures,¹ for theories are of little value here.

Rom. vi. 9: ". . . knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death no more hath dominion over him. For the death that he died, he died unto sin once: but the life that he liveth, he liveth unto God." It may be said that these expressions are meant to apply only to this world, and can have no bearing on the question of atoning work elsewhere. But the fact of Christ's dying but once is here used to show how a Christian ought once for all to die to sin. It is the very basis of the illustration. Note, also, that his living

¹ Scriptural quotations are from the Revised Version.

unto God would seem to make him as little likely to die again as God is to die at all.

Heb. x. 12: “. . . but he, when he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God; from henceforth expecting till his enemies be made the footstool of his feet.” The whole trend of thought in this passage is toward a single act of atonement in all eternity. To say that its meaning may be limited to this world is to affirm what cannot find proof in the Scriptures, and is to put a supposition against what seems plain teaching.

Heb. ii. 10: “For it became him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the author of their salvation perfect through sufferings.” Having been perfected, there could not be in any other world for him the same experience as here; and if not the same experience, then not the same work of encouragement for tempted mortals, since a large part of the helpfulness which he brings to us is the record of his being “tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin.”

The lesson of 1 Cor. xv. 20-28 is that he is reigning, and shall reign until the last enemy shall have been destroyed; and then, the entire victory gained, shall lay down all authority with himself at the Father's feet, and thenceforth God shall be all in all. There seems to be no room left for any need of a redemptive work after that triumph, for there shall be no rebellion.

Heb. vii. 25: “Wherefore also he is able to save to the uttermost them that draw near unto God through him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.” There can at least be no more death for him till the last soul who needs his intercession has passed from this earth.

We notice lastly Rev. i. 18: “Fear not: I am the first and the last, and the Living one: and I was dead, and behold I am alive forevermore.” The meaning of these words cannot be mistaken. The biblical argument might be carried

much further; but probably few will question that there is to be no other death of Christ, and if no other, then no other atonement in this world or elsewhere.

V. Therefore, if each peopled world would have the same likelihood of sinning that has marked this one, God must either cease creating moral beings, or must in some way make the atonement of Christ in this world to be sufficient for the pardon of penitent sinners in other parts of the universe. But the first supposition is hardly in accordance with the infinity of God, to which a throng that passes an archangel's comprehension is no more of an approach than is a dozen. We are distinctly assured that a time is to come when every foe is to be subdued; when in all the vast realms of space there shall no more rebellion be found. But endless eternities will follow that time. Shall God be restrained from creating other worlds, and peopling them with beings to receive and return his love? That is inconceivable. He may not create; but we cannot suppose that he will be fettered by circumstances, and so prevented from creating. And the second supposition is not satisfactory; because, while an atonement worked out on another sphere might accomplish purposes of warning to beings who had not sinned, it would hardly have the effect of recalling from sin those whose eyes were dimmed, and whose hearts were hardened by iniquity. Christ would, so far as we can see, hardly draw all men unto himself, if only lifted up on some distant world.

VI. What solution can be found for the problem?

I. It is well to note the difficulty of explaining the fact of sin in this world. How often it leads to doubt of God's love and providence! The question comes, Is sin necessary for the best development in virtue? That is a monstrous thought. Adam and Eve were not improved by sinning, nor were their opportunities for moral or intellectual growth increased. They fell downward, not upward. The subsequent

development of the race is not because of sin, but an illustration of what divine grace can do in spite of sin and under adverse conditions. Disobedience in the home does not tend to the best character. It is not necessary for the youth to be impure, in order to learn purity. Sin is not needed for training in virtue, and there is no demand in the nature of things for it, or in the constitution of man; though, since sin has come, there is a need of its hateful character being shown. It is evil, and only evil, and when God uses it as an instrument, he has a poorer tool than righteousness would be.

2. Yet to coerce men to virtue is to change the definition of that quality, and to despoil it of its value. Man must be led to choose by seeing the superior worth of virtue. Superior to what? some may ask. Superior to sin; yet an exhibition of sin in the concrete is not, in the nature of things, necessary, for that would make God necessitate the coming of sin into the universe. A rational being who has never sinned, can have the results of disobedience so stated to him as to make it evidently wise to obey. Our first parents must have known that their wisest course was to keep within the prescribed bounds. Finite beings, by sinning, have now made a different course from the originally best one to be necessary.

3. We have a hint of the coming of sin into heaven.¹

¹ Some fail to satisfy themselves from the Bible that sin ever entered heaven, regarding such statements as Rev. xii. 7 as merely figurative, or perhaps prophetic, instead of a record. We may, however, note that the existence of a personal devil is distinctly taught, and that he is possessed of superhuman power, and that our first parents received their first suggestion of evil from outside themselves. There was therefore sin in the universe before the creation of man on this earth. But there must have been a time when the first sin in the universe was committed, unless we are ready to resort to Manicheism. That first sin must have been committed by a finite will that had previously been sinless! There we have the entire problem, to be solved by God's loving wisdom. Sin has begun.

A question rises here. God foreknew what angels would sin, and who would not. Why could he not have created only those who he foreknew would not sin? The difficulty seems a real one; but it involves an absurdity, requir-

How it came, who began it, is not revealed. But it could have been no surprise to God. He knew it would come when he created the first finite moral being, and "before the foundation of the world" provided the remedial plan. We can see some light on this coming of sin. As finite beings were created in greater numbers, their attention would be increasingly attracted to their multitude, and to their power, and so, in some instances, away from God. In full view of God's majesty here, and of death, men think to effect combinations which will justify them in ignoring the law of God, and in expecting success on unrighteous lines. So it might be with the great angels in heaven. The finite cannot comprehend infinity, and Gabriel is no more of an approach to the greatness of God than are we. God sees with infinite clearness the woe of sin and the value of righteousness. Finite beings do not. Satan cannot understand eternity. Finite creatures know enough to condemn them if they sin. Knowledge of duty is enough, no matter what the consequences. Yet we can see that, as the throng of created beings became as great as would fill the comprehension of a created mind, some one might, blinded at once by the cherishing of such a thought, imagine it possible to head a successful rebellion against God.

Since sin has come into the universe; or rather, taking our stand back before the first creation, seeing that it will come, God sees that a presentation of three facts in the sight of the universe is necessary.

(1) *The Effect of Sin.*—How shall an exhibition of the ing God to deal with uncreated beings as though they were actually existent. The only possibility akin to that suggested would be for God to give to each soul such a bias toward obedience as would necessitate conformity to the law, and that would be not merely foreknowledge but foreordination of the extreme type, and would abolish free agency and true virtue. It is, however, not the province of this article to explain the origin of sin. Sin is not to be explained on any grounds of reason. It is the one thing in the universe utterly unreasonable. What is desired now is to show what seems to the writer the method by which God is dealing with the whole problem of sin,—a method which is eminently wise and hopeful.

baneful effects of sin be so made that the universe shall see and be impressed by it? If an exhibition is to be made, it should show sin full-grown, and with a sufficiently large opportunity of making its destructive results manifest. It should also be quarantined. Spectators should not be imperilled by it.

This world is taken. The human race starts its course in purity and with every necessary aid to righteousness. Man is most happily situated. God is his companion. But Satan is let loose to do his worst. He deludes and tempts man, who has, however, been sufficiently warned. The whole race, with few exceptions, becomes awfully depraved. One presentation has been given, and man has evidently become too vile to be tolerated. He is justly swept off the earth. But some might say that man had not had a fair treatment, in that he had had no previous experience in sin, and took the first long step down as the result of ignorance. Another trial is given; and this time those are chosen who have looked upon the deadly results of sin, and have seen the summary retribution with which incorrigible sinners were visited. Surely men will now be obedient. But the venom of sin is too powerful. Sodom and Gomorrah, the Canaanites, debauched Israel, the abominations of Greece and Rome, the bestiality of savage tribes in every age, the loathsomeness of the modern metropolis, prove that the life of the race has become corrupt. The manner in which men will use God's best gifts, and yet rebel against him, is one of the clearest proofs that sin is no ordinary malady. The disobedience of the moralist, as well as the brutality of the savage, has its place in the picture, and to the eyes of angels must give more striking evidence of the hardening of the heart. God takes a special nation, gives it laws, deliverances, unprecedented tokens of his presence and power. They are little better than, often as wicked as, the nations around. He sends them into captivity; they learn monotheism, but not holiness.

The work of sin is such that the man, originally made in

the image of God, ready for companionship with him, must be born again before he can associate with holy beings. The very life germ of spirituality has been killed by sin. Yet the demonstration is not complete. It is one thing for man to ruin himself, to destroy his brother; but then he might change his course if an illustration of what he was intended to be were set before him. The view of what he has lost will perhaps lead him to choose obedience. The Son of God comes to earth. He is at once a representation of the beauty of holiness, and of what it is man's privilege to be if in harmony with God. He comes not only to show a contrast, but to call men to return, and receive forgiveness. Sin thereupon shows its true character as never before. It is not only selfishness, a desire to please the lower man, but such a determination to do so as leads to intense hostility toward whatever condemns it. In nothing could the character of sin be made more apparent than by the fact that it made this world absolutely untenable for a perfectly holy being, unless protected by infinite might. The Son of God, illustration of the life of heaven, cannot live on this planet. The work of Christ was not only to seek and save the lost of this world, but to present to the universe the climax of sin's deadly work, and this has surely been done. Man is blind; but let some heavenly minister show these things, present and urge the work of Christ, and call attention to eternal rewards and penalties in addition to the temporal ones that had been chiefly used in the past, and will he not repent? This the Holy Spirit does, actually convincing men, but vast multitudes remain unmoved.¹

It may be asked, Why would not the fate of the fallen angels be a sufficient deterrent? As it was necessary to show sin in the ripened fruit, so perhaps it was needful to show it

¹ It may be that the predicted loosing of Satan after the millennium (Rev. xx. 3) is to show how entirely untrustworthy is the human heart under temptation, and how deadly is the slightest bias toward evil, though weakened by godly living of the race for an indefinite period.

in the bud. So far as we know, Satan headed an armed rebellion against Jehovah. Lesser beings, shrinking from that, might still yield to self-indulgence in forbidden things that seemed unimportant. It was needful to show that from the smallest wilful breach of a perfect law an evil could grow that would wreck a world. The taking of the apple was the first step toward the crucifixion of the Son of God.¹

(2) *The Difficulty of its Cure.*—Yet the finite mind cannot fully appreciate the effect of sin, the ruined possibilities of a single soul, or the insult to the Son of God. It cannot comprehend the worth of one human being through eternity, or value aright the majesty of God. An additional and very effective illustration will be given if the difficulty of cure be shown. Leprosy is an awful disease, but it is vastly more awful when we know that there is no human remedy for it. If we can see tremendous but unsuccessful attempts, we shall be prepared to appreciate the successful one; because, if the latter involve great suffering and untold expense, we shall know that there has been no waste, and that nothing less would have accomplished the task.

So God let man try it with, in large measure, human resources, for thousands of years. He gave aid, writing the law on the conscience, and giving it from Sinai; but he did not

¹ The question, How could God know that man would sin, and so further the plan of cure, without constraining him in that direction, and so becoming the direct author of iniquity? requires more extended treatment than is possible here. This, however, may be suggested, that it is possible so to surround man with circumstances as to make it morally certain that he will choose a certain course, while he is perfectly free and able to reject that course. Some will revolt from the possibility of such a work, because it seems to present God in an unloving light. Let it be noted that no more sin is really added in the universe, because, should other finite beings be created, they would be at least as likely to sin as the angels who fell, but, as will appear in the development of the theme, the result will be to ultimately entirely stop the progress of sin. This scheme assumes God doing on a vast scale somewhat as we do on a smaller when we send hundreds of thousands of men South to die, that millions may be saved. "Nor do ye take account that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not" (John xi. 50).

give the uplifted Christ, nor the outpouring of the Spirit as to-day. It was necessary fully to demonstrate, that, even when God sent his divinely inspired messengers, man alone would not, as a race or in any large numbers, repent and turn to righteousness. Time was, of necessity, an important element in this demonstration. It must be no hasty trial. There must be time for experimenting in different ages, under varying conditions, in widely different lands.

The failure of Egypt's moral rules, of the ethical teachings of Socrates and Aristotle, of Seneca and Epictetus and Confucius, was needed, and even that of the chosen people, who possessed the law. They could have obeyed, but so deeply rooted does sin become, that they would not. The fulness of time for the coming of Christ was not merely when the world was ready for that appearing, but when the universe was ready, that is, when the necessary exhibition had been given of the hopelessness of human effort. At last, by the life and death of the Son of God, and by the mighty operation of the Holy Spirit, the cure is being effected, and the slow progress of the work, even with these divine agencies, is proof of how deadly has been the working of sin. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and it is desperately sick" (Jer. xvii. 9).

(3) *The Impotence of the Sinner.*—It is very necessary that a complete demonstration should be made of the utter inability of a sinner, or any number of sinners, to cope with God. This appears but dimly to the rebellious soul, because of the blindness which sin has caused, and that fact must have a very salutary effect upon those who, looking on, are as yet sinless. The fact that man is wholly unable to continue his life in this world, which has been the arena of his sin, is divine irony. If God may at any time transfer the soul to another field, the perfect helplessness of the sinner has been by that fact clearly shown. Yet it is but the beginning of God's might. Sinners are unable to keep his saving gospel down, even

though a large part of the world join in that endeavor. God lets the candle be almost snuffed out at times, and then flames it out with a brilliancy that dazzles the world. He works often with the greatest deliberation, showing to all the universe that he fears the united force of earth and hell not one whit. Again, he pours out his Spirit, and nations are born into the kingdom in a day, while the ungodly are compelled to tremble with the realization that they are resisting an irresistible God. He gives Satan all the odds; lets him get his Son upon the cross, into the grave, and then quietly crushes the devil on his chosen battle-ground, lifting his Son above the adversary's head, "far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named" (Eph. i. 21). There is need that this exhibition be made on a vast scale; and in this day, when civilization has become widely extended, and powers undreamed of a century ago are put into the hands of men, the kingdom of God on earth has a vigor and a spirit of victory never known before. The twentieth century will perhaps reach the acme of demonstration.

Thus the baneful effects of sin, the difficulty of its cure, and the impotence of the sinner are made clear.

VII. This earth has therefore a vicarious work to do: it suffers for the universe. No wrong is done to any human being; for none are constrained to sin, and from the beginning it has been that "in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is acceptable to him" (Acts x. 35). And when the problem of sin is settled here, the last rebel sent to punishment or reclaimed, there shall forever in all God's universe, except in hell, be no more refusal to do his perfect will. There may be countless worlds, peopled with unnumbered millions of happy souls, and none shall choose sin, because the exhibition of sin's effects, the difficulty of its cure, and the sinner's impotence shall be universally known.

Is it asked, How? We know not: yet surely that problem would not be difficult to God. It is not necessary to

suppose that the denizens of other worlds carry flesh and blood as do we. That may be part of the necessary machinery for the work this world has to do, giving our adversary an additional advantage, and making the victory of Christ more glorious. It may easily be the duty and privilege of the heavenly host, who certainly are not idle, to publish the progress of this drama in other worlds, so warning their inhabitants to be obedient to God. It need by no means be supposed, that, because Satan is permitted (for merely permitted he certainly is) to work woe in this world, he is therefore allowed an opportunity upon any other in all the realms of space. Therefore angelic heralding of the woful results of sin here would probably be sufficient to deter sinless beings, who have no outside tempter, from yielding to any suggestions of disobedience that might arise in their own hearts. It is said in 1 Peter i. 12: "which things angels desire to look into"; and I find no intimation that the privilege is denied them. They may well desire this knowledge, for some of their number have fallen, and the exhibition may be for their warning as well as for that of others. It will be through all eternity a preventive of sin. There will surely be records in heaven. The science of history will be in its perfection there. If earth can learn how accurately to describe events, how to photograph the actors and even preserve the tones which they use, then through all eternity the tragic drama of sin on earth, the fall and the redemption, will be common knowledge. We shall hear our Saviour's words in the upper chamber, see the look that melted Peter, and behold the death on the cross. We shall see the work and cure of sin as we cannot here. We shall get behind the scenes, and look upon the "principalities, the powers, the world-rulers of this darkness, the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places," that we have contended with here, and this history, this spectacle, will be open to all. Forever each created moral being will be taught the awful results of sin with a minuteness of circumstance that will be a moral

education in itself. The downfall of Rome, American slavery, London's "submerged tenth," and the liquor traffic of the nineteenth century will be an endless object-lesson.

Light is by this view thrown on some important and interesting questions.

(1) The sorrow over lost souls which we now experience is not excessive, for each one means a lost eternity. Yet the proportion between lost and saved will not be the same as if restricted to this world. Out of the woe and ruin here shall come, not only a great throng of the redeemed, but a presentation of moral issues that will forever prevent a repetition of the fact of sin, keeping all coming ages through the endless future free, and in all probability saving countless myriads in other worlds from throwing away their souls. Thus the contrast will be not between the saved and lost of this world, but between the lost of this world and the saved of the universe.

(2) This will give a more uniform position to all finite moral beings. Angels and archangels, as well as denizens of this and other worlds, will have a personal interest in the work of Jesus Christ; not in his atonement, as a means of saving souls already lost, but in his entire work, as part of the universal lesson on sin and its effects. Where to us it is restorative, to them it is preventive.

(3) Perhaps, too, we may view the death of infants in a different light.

It is said that at least one-third, perhaps a majority, of the race die before reaching moral accountability. This can but be regarded one of the loving provisions of God, since the evil which destroys souls serves to remove, by the diseases which it entails, so large a number from its own curse and penalty. And we may readily conclude that the presentation of the drama of sin does not require the service of so many actors as are born into this world. Some of us are taking the place of peril, and millions are exempt, God being unwilling

to expose any unnecessarily to such awful danger. We who survive are therefore not the favored ones, but suffer vicariously, taking the place of the more fortunate babes, for whom, with the angels and other-world dwellers, the tragedy enacted on earth will be warning enough. As sin slowly disappears from earth, and life here becomes less perilous, more are permitted to remain.

(4) Light will be thrown on the position of sin in the universe.

It is not a permanent fact, but a temporary one. Though this process by which it is being rooted out and prevented from returning should last a million millenniums, yet that is but a moment to eternity, and the day will come when, not the earth only, but the universe as well, "shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God as the waters cover the sea" (Hab. ii. 14), and there will be eternity still before us.

Nor is sin at all a universal or even a wide-spread fact in the universe to-day. By all the probability which this view has, we are justified in believing that the field in which Satan has any power at all is restricted to this world.

(5) Finally, we are given a position of great responsibility and importance. This little world is at present in a very important sense the pivot of the universe. Our position is one that is held but once in all the endless sweep of the eternities. We are helping solve the universal problem. The entire throng of created moral beings might say, with Tennyson, "Through the shadow of a globe we sweep into a younger day," while we with larger view of its possible meaning repeat the exhortation of the apostle to the Hebrews: "Therefore let us also, seeing that we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us" (Heb. xii. 1).