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ARTICLE VII.

DR. GEORGE A. GORDON'S RECONSTRUCTION OF
CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY.

BY THE REV. ALBERT H. PLUMB, D.D.

THE recent Anniversary Sermon before the American Board of Foreign Missions by the able and esteemed pastor of the Old South Church of Boston is entitled "The Gospel for Humanity." The author's idea of the gospel, and in what sense he regards it as for humanity, can be further learned from his volume on "The Witness to Immortality," published in 1893, and his work "The Christ of To-Day," issued in 1895.¹

In these writings the author appears to hold the Trinitarian view of the person of Christ, the Unitarian view of the work of Christ, and the Universalist view of the consequences of Christ's work.

The cardinal principle in this scheme of thought is a pure assumption, and consists in the supreme authority of an idea which is styled the consciousness of Christ, but which is really the author's subjective sense or opinion of what Christ is now, by his Spirit, leading his disciples to think; an opinion which is rigidly maintained as infallible, in face of explicit teachings of our Lord to the contrary; these teachings of Christ, through his apostles and by his own lips, being waved aside as untrustworthy, because, to the author's sense, they appear incompatible with the character of God.

The author's confidence in his own ideas of the true meaning of the Scriptures is so genuine and prevailing that it saves him from all suspicion of the least taint of intentional fault

¹ Both published by Houghton, Mifflin & Co.

in his peculiar use of certain terms, such as Mediator and Sacrifice. For though it would seem he might have foreseen that they would usually be understood as carrying their commonly accepted meaning, a meaning which he studiously ignores or distinctly rejects, yet his conviction is manifestly so strong that he is using them in their only true sense, that we seem to see in him a laudable desire to correct, by his use of those terms, what he deems an unfounded and harmful conception of their significance. Indeed one of the crowning excellences of these writings throughout is their deep moral earnestness and high spiritual purpose. No one can fail to see in them the workings of a powerful and cultivated mind, with a passionate zeal for righteousness, profoundly interested in the great problems of religious thought, and sincerely desirous of contributing to their just solution. In this endeavor the author moves onward with all the energy and momentum of strong conviction. His course of thought is often impetuous and fervid, and sometimes of overwhelming argumentative force. He is aided by the charm of a poetic imagination, and he has a power of expression marked by much originality, and generally by much directness and skill, yet sometimes leaving his thought lamentably obscure.

The spirit which glows in these pages is one of broad sympathy with the interests of humanity always and everywhere, humane and generous, tenderly appreciative of the sanctities of the family, hopeful in regard to the prospects of social reform, and in every way admirable, save in the one particular already intimated,—its dogmatism, its lack of deference to the teachings of Christ. And certainly this is a very serious fault; for, according to the just canon laid down by the author's predecessor in his pastorate, the clear-seeing and sainted Manning, in so far as any person does not recognize the authority of Christ as final on all questions of religious faith, he is, in the judgment of the largest charity, to that degree lacking in the true Christian spirit, and in that respect is not

entitled even to wear the Christian name. Therein he is a rationalist rather than a Christian, because he puts the conclusions of his own reason above the words of Christ.¹

In reviewing the gospel for humanity which these writings present, it will be convenient, first, to consider its contents, and, secondly, its relations.

I. CONTENTS OF THE SYSTEM.

1. In these writings their author aims to set forth the Trinitarian view of the person of Christ. It is often done in unfamiliar terms, and at times by such metaphysical and philosophical arguments as may seem of questionable validity to some. But if there is false logic here, there is also sound reasoning in favor of the deity of our Lord. And certainly it is an effort deserving of praise thus to ply the soul with new methods of displaying the infinite majesty of Christ, and in current forms of speech to portray his unapproachable glory. "Into the dialect of present thought," the author well says, "the meaning of the Divine Wonder must be put. There are thousands in our midst who long to hear the wonderful words of God in their own tongue."² Evidently these books have been written in an ardent hope that they may be helpful in unveiling our Divine Lord to eyes that have been holden hitherto. If the hope shall be realized, it seems likely that therein the chief usefulness of these volumes will be found. There is indeed much extravagant praise of the benefits Unitarians are thought to have imparted to the Christian conception of life and doctrine. Very faulty representations, too, are here found of the spirit and teachings of the church which, the author thinks, required such aid. Abundant refutation of such misstatements can be found in the earlier orthodox writers. Still, it is of far more consequence that the great facts of the incarnation and the resurrection

¹ Half Truths and the Truth, p. 4.

² The Christ of To-Day, p. 35.

should be made clear, and it is to be hoped that good will result from the novelty of method and winning force of statement with which the author seeks to present the divinity of our Lord.

The stout assertions of various critics, that "The Christ of To-Day" fails to give the orthodox view of the person of Christ, have for their basis the false philosophy and loose statements in the book, which, as already intimated, only prove the author inconsistent and halting in his sincere purpose to present that doctrine.

Thus it is simple negligence which permits him to misrepresent himself in saying, "The Master and his disciples upon Tabor are not to each other as the divine and the human, but as the perfect and imperfect." If the expression had been "They are to each other not merely as the divine and the human, but also, in respect to moral excellence, as the perfect and the imperfect," the words would have fulfilled their writer's intention. In spite of, or because of, much obscurity of language, some acute critics contend that it is only a modal or a pantheistic trinity which the philosophy of the book allows. Thus the author speaks of "modes" in respect to the trinity (p. 106), such as "being and knowledge and love" (p. 101). He is understood by some to take pantheistic ground in the view that there is really but one personality in the universe (p. 110), and in affirming the identity of the divine and the human consciousness, making them differ in limit or magnitude alone. This appears too in the frequent use of the phrase "the consubstantiation of man with God" (p. 120), to which the scholarly pastor of the Roxbury Swedenborgian Church, in the *New-Church Review*, takes just exception.

Such expressions seem in sharp conflict with the better portions of the author's argument, and at least give occasion for much misconception. There is needed here a little of the common-sense philosophy of the Scotch school—a little of

the clear thought and just expression, for instance, of Professor Andrew Seth, as he argues against the notion that in the universe "there is room only for one self-consciousness." Thus he says:—

"I have a center of my own—a will of my own—which no one shares with me, or can share; a center which I maintain even in my dealings with God himself. The religious consciousness lends no countenance whatever to the representation of the human soul as a mere mode or efflux of the divine. On the contrary only in a person, in a relatively independent or self-centered being, is religious approach to God possible. Religion is the self-surrender of the human will to the divine. 'Our wills are ours to make them thine.' But this is a self-surrender—a surrender which only self—only will can make. . . . The attempt of the Hegelian and Neo-Hegelian schools to unify the divine and human subject is ultimately destructive of both."¹

Very significant certainly is the judgment of some of the most learned and philosophical of the Unitarian clergy, to the effect that the author of "The Christ of To-Day" is too much of an Hegelian to hold the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity, and not sufficiently master of the Hegelian literature to know always what he is about, on account of which his book is both inconsistent and fragmentary. The author, however, styles himself a tenacious Trinitarian; he assents to Dr. Horace Bushnell's argument in his celebrated chapter, "The Character of Jesus forbids his possible Classification with Man." He speaks of "the omnipresent Christ," of "the risen, reigning, infinite Lord." He urges us not "to miss the fact that Christ's nature is rooted in the Deity, and is part of the nature of God." His expression is, "The difference in Christ to humanity is the difference of the very God" (p. 119). And he asks, "What is this Eternal Pattern . . . but the Only-begotten of the Fourth Gospel, . . . the God of God, Light of Light, begotten, not made, of the Nicene Creed, who for us men and our salvation came down, was made flesh, and became man?" (P. 115.)

In one passage, with a singularly felicitous touch of his

¹ Hegelianism and Personality, p. 8.

poetic fancy, he paints for us, with a memorable beauty of imagery, the entire course of Christ on earth. He says: "Like an inverted rainbow is the life of Christ from advent to ascension, coming out of heaven and returning to heaven, and revealing in its whole sacred curve the unutterable and adorable loveliness of the Divine Being."¹

2. These writings present the Unitarian view of the work of Christ. The work of Christ for our salvation is purely educational, not at all redemptive. In this contention the writer goes far beyond Dr. Horace Bushnell. For it is well known that this candid and able writer in one of his later volumes set forth "a revision of his former treatise," no longer being willing to limit Christ's work to its moral influence upon man, but ascribing to it also an influence upon God, and giving his view of the work of Christ as "a doctrine that comprises both the reconciliation of men to God and of God to men."² Not a syllable ever escapes our author, conceding any such office to Christ. Even the great prototype of American Unitarianism does not go nearly so far as our author in utterly ignoring the redemptive and expiatory work of our Lord. Thus Dr. Channing, after setting forth "the great object which Jesus came to accomplish," and "the variety of methods by which he accomplishes this sublime purpose," and after using in this portrayal a number of descriptive phrases which are singularly in accord with those employed in the volumes under review, and which include the moral influence of Christ's literal resurrection, the acknowledgment of his power to raise the dead and to judge the world, and also the exercise continually of his intercessory priesthood in our behalf, a function of which we have no hint in these books, adds this significant concession: "Many of us are dissatisfied with this explanation, and think that the Scriptures ascribe the remission of sins to Christ's death with an emphasis so peculiar,

¹ *The Witness to Immortality*, p. 231.

² *Forgiveness and Law*, p. 33.

that we ought to consider this event as having a special influence in removing punishment, as a condition without which repentance would not avail us, at least to the extent which is now promised by the gospel."¹ Probably few Unitarian ministers now would share in the feelings which the saintly Channing here expresses. Indeed many at that time contended that to ground forgiveness in any degree on the merits of another than the repenting sinner is unethical, essentially immoral. This is believed to be uniformly now the Unitarian doctrine. Occasionally, indeed, a Trinitarian Congregationalist, Baptist, Methodist, or Episcopal divine occupies the same ground, but in opposition to the doctrinal standards of their respective denominations. Thus Rev. George Harris, D.D., Professor of Theology in Andover Theological Seminary, in his recent volume on "Moral Evolution," in describing the office of Christ in securing our salvation, refers to the doctrine, that "It would be impossible for God to forgive outright, even on genuine repentance, but becomes possible by reason of the sufferings and death of Christ" (p. 407), and denounces the doctrine as immoral, and in the effort to prove it such, uses the same arguments employed by the old Unitarians in the great controversy early in the century. It would perhaps be considered as inconclusive to quote against such views the articles of faith of particular churches, even of the Old South Church, to show the want of harmony between those views and the doctrines commonly held by our churches; but, inasmuch as the Creed of 1883, so called, is quite generally conceded to indicate the low-water mark of doctrinal inculcation and belief in our denomination, it seems proper to point out that, even in that declaration of faith, the work of Christ is affirmed to be quite other than that which is exhibited in the volumes before us. Article VI. says:—

"We believe that the love of God to sinful men has found its highest

¹ Sermon, Ordination of Rev. Jared Sparks, p. 33.

expression in the redemptive work of his Son; who became man, uniting his divine nature with our human nature in one person; who was tempted like other men, yet without sin; who, by his humiliation, his holy obedience, his sufferings, his death on the cross, and his resurrection, became a perfect Redeemer; whose sacrifice of himself for the sins of the world declares the righteousness of God, and *is the sole and sufficient ground of forgiveness and of reconciliation with him.*"

In the next article it is said:—

"We believe that those who through renewing grace turn to righteousness, and trust in Jesus Christ as their Redeemer, *receive for his sake the forgiveness of their sins*, and are made the children of God."

It has been already intimated that in these writings under review there is a free use of terms which the author has carefully emptied of their commonly accepted meaning; not to mislead, of course, but because he sincerely believes the usual meaning is incorrect. He strives to use all these terms, "Christ crucified," "the cross," "the sacrifice of Christ," "the redemptive scheme of Christ," "Christ the Mediator," in a sense which shall in no instance or in any degree allow the idea that Christ's work is anything but educational, and this because the idea that Christ's work is properly redemptive or expiatory he does not find in those terms. But, for all that, the ordinary reader or hearer is misled. In the sermon before us the preacher thus gives the meaning of the text "I am determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified":—

"Paul's message was the eternal sacrifice in the heart of God mediated by the personal sacrifice of Christ"—the pure idea of self-sacrifice embodied with transcendent fidelity in the career of Jesus Christ. "His doctrine was of God as eternal personal love, and Christ and his cross was the utterance both of the personality of God and his infinite regard for men" (p. 5). "There is one God, and one world-mediator between God and man. Christ's divine personality becomes the one great world-mediator of the Personality that is ultimate and transcendent" (p. 6). "It is this doctrine of the living, loving God, mediated and brought to bear upon the souls of men by the living, loving Christ, that we are to send to all lands" (p. 7). "Our salvation comes from God, and Christ is Master of the world because he is God's supreme representative. Christianity is first of all a doctrine of God, and then of God mediated by the Son of

God" (p 8). Has the missionary a message? "Is it that the heart of the universe is Personal Sacrifice, and that revealed and verified by the personal sacrifice of the Lord?" (P. 10.)

Now while some of these phrasings are somewhat unfamiliar, which is quite proper, and perhaps advantageous, the real reason for the joy of the ordinary Christian mind in view of them is that, aside from the glowing exaltation of the divine supremacy of our Lord, in which all Christians rejoice, the listeners hear in all these expressions that which the preacher's thought is careful to keep out; the sacrifice of Christ here exalted they suppose is that sacrifice of himself by which he obtained eternal redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins. To Christians generally this is the very heart of the gospel. The Mediator here praised they understand to be their Advocate with the Father, their prevailing and ever-living Intercessor. The mere mention of his mediatorial power strikes such a chord on the listener's heart-strings, that the soul with joy begins to sing within its secret chambers,—

"Before the throne my Surety stands,
My name is written on his hands;
Five bleeding wounds he bears,
Received on Calvary.
They pour effectual prayers,
They strongly plead for me."

The sweet word "salvation," as it falls on the ears, tells of salvation from the guilt as well as the power of sin, and peace fills the heart, the peace of a pardoned sinner accepted in the Beloved.

But what now is meant in these writings by these terms? What is a mediator? Simply a medium of instruction, nothing more. The mediating office here is the office of a medium through which one Being acts on another. That, it is true, is one of the offices which Christ holds. He is the Word; he reveals to us the Father, and it is a blessed office. And all the functions of Immanuel are so glorious, that any one seg-

ment of his entire work, set forth by a heart aglow with love to him, may seem to fill the vision, so that one is tempted to take that half-truth and declare it to be the whole truth. Hence we hear men affirming Christ came not to atone for sin, but to induce men to cease from sin, when they should say, Christ came not merely to atone for sin, though that was chief and fundamental to all other offices, but also to help men to abandon sin.

Mark now the carefully restricted sense in which the word mediator is used in these writings. "The living God, whose nature is eternal sacrifice, has found a perfect mediator in the Christ. The unseen and infinite Personality has thus found a transcendent instrument through which he can operate upon the hearts of mankind in the gracious and majestic personality of Jesus. This idea of the living and loving God, uttered in time and brought to bear upon the human soul, is the essential thing in Christianity."¹ But the essential thing in Christianity is not, as here taught, simply giving man a clearer idea of God, but, according to the Scriptures, providing a way of pardon; for we read, "The Son of man came to give his life a ransom for many"; "God sent forth his Son to redeem them that were under the law." This was the chief thing predicted of the coming Messiah by the prophets and prefigured by the sacrifices instituted by God. It is the burden of the heavenly song of the redeemed, who praise the Lamb that was slain, who redeemed them to God by his blood.

Again, our author tells us, "Great men are the mediators of the intellectual and moral power of God" (p. 28); that is, evidently, they are the media by which that power is made known and brought into exercise. "Only personality can mediate personality. . . . We reach the living God only as we find him mediated by the sons of God. . . . This universe is centered in an Infinite Person, and that only as mediated

¹ Sermon, p. 6.

by persons can we experience the fullness of his wisdom and pity. . . . Only soul can mediate soul. . . . Philosophy proves that the moral power of God can be mediated only through the living personality of man" (pp. 307-321). Thus in these volumes we see Christ's work described as identical with that of good men, differing only in degree. The sole office is educational. As the author says: "There is none other name given among men under heaven whereby the educational power of the Infinite is brought, in boundless measure and resistless form, to bear upon the whole human character" (p. 322). Again, "Our Lord died for the world, and in his great name and following in his footsteps, a multitude that no man can number, of every people and among every people under heaven, have died for it." And there is nothing in these writings to show that the death of Christ has any different efficacy from that of any good man. Each and all are merely a more or less powerful means of instruction. Furthermore, in the use of the word sacrifice the author makes Christ's work to differ only in degree, and not in kind, from the sacrifices men make. Nor does he represent Christ's function in securing our salvation by his sacrifice as at all unique in reference to the office of God the Father in providing our salvation.

The Scriptures are very explicit and positive in showing the contrary. While it was at infinite cost to the Father that he sent forth his Son to suffer as a ransom for our sins, the burden was borne by the Son. He was "made a curse for us." He endured an awful infliction at the hands of his loving Father, he suffered the hidings of his Father's face. "It pleased the Lord to bruise him," "his soul was made an offering for sin." Moreover in representing, as the author does, the sufferings and death of Christ simply as an instructive example of self-denial, merely a conspicuous exhibition of that self-sacrifice which he would have us understand is continually from all eternity being exercised by God, he is only re-

peating some of the well-worn arguments of the old Unitarian controversy. Occasionally, indeed, these views have been advocated by an erratic Trinitarian, as in an eloquent volume by Dr. John Young, who honorably withdrew from his position among the Scotch Presbyterians because of this wide departure from the faith he had promised to uphold. For he stoutly contended, as Professor Harris of Andover we have seen now does, that expiation is essentially unethical; and, with much more fullness than our author, he elaborated the idea that Christ saves us merely through the teaching influence of his example of self-denial. Dr. Young refers to various instances of self-sacrifice for the good of others furnished by human experience, as aiding us to conceive the higher divine mystery;—a mother dying from the infection from her sick child, a physician fatally stricken in his successful efforts to furnish warning instruction concerning a strange disease. These are appealed to as “known examples of vicarious suffering, glaring flashes of love from heaven in a dark and cold world,” and as indicating that “there must be an Eternal Sun of love, out from which they are scattered and imperfect radiations.”¹ But, as Professor Crawford of Edinburgh conclusively rejoins, these instances of self-denial were an exhibition of great love because they were adapted to secure the rescue of imperiled life, or at least were incidental to securing that end. And mere self-sacrifice, irrespective of any good or sufficiently worthy end to be secured by it, is not to be regarded as a good; it is never required by God, nor can the spectacle of such unnecessary self-denial be a strong educational force. And the immense moral power of the sufferings of Christ, their influence in subduing our hearts, is almost wholly dependent on our knowledge of the fact that their motive was the vast value to be secured by those sufferings, viz., the opening of a way of life for a repenting sinner, the removal of the obstacles in the way of pardon.

¹ *Life and Light of Men*, p. 310.

Moreover, the Scriptures teach that no soul would ever repent without the gracious influences of the Holy Spirit, and also they distinctly declare that the great favor of these undeserved and indispensable influences of the Holy Spirit is a part of that grace which the death of Christ obtained for us. Thus, as Professor Crawford remarks, "the Saviour's mediation was intended not merely to manifest to sinners the love of God, but at the same time to procure from God for behoof of sinners that grace without which no display of divine love would produce any salutary and sanctifying impression upon them."¹

Furthermore, the Scriptures call Christ "the Saviour of the world"; they say that "He is the propitiation, not for our sins only, but also for the whole world"; that "He is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe." But if the position taken in these writings is true, and the efficacy of Christ's death is solely that of a revelation of God's love calculated to move men to begin a righteous life, the vast number of Old Testament saints, who went to heaven before Christ died, and with no knowledge of his coming death, did not owe their salvation to Christ. Instruction, example, reach forward not backward, not an hour. They affect the future, not the past. It is common for those writers who, like our author, are enamored of the shadow of a tree they wish to cut down, and think to enjoy the moral influence of a sacrifice after they shall have taken away its main purpose and chief value, to speak as if they were merely casting aside human theories, or unimportant attempts at explanation of a revealed fact which they still hold. But exactly the opposite is true, as is well shown by the late Professor H. B. Smith of the Union Theological Seminary, New York. He says:—

"When we say that the death of Christ was instead of our punishment, and that it made expiation for our sins, we are not stating theories, but revealed facts. We suppose that in this fact is contained an answer to

¹ Scriptural Doctrine of the Atonement, p. 367.

the question, How can a sinner be pardoned? and that answer is, By faith in Christ as the sacrifice for our sins, by a belief in his sufferings and death, instead of ours. . . . The very nature and essence of the sufferings and death of Christ is that they are an expiation for sin. This is the very idea of sacrifice. It is its exhaustive definition; it is the thing itself, and not a deduction or inference from it. This *is* the fact, and not a theory about it. If one does not believe in the expiation he does not believe in the sacrifice. We have the shell and not the kernel, we have death and sufferings and not life and peace. The expiation cannot be separated from the death without destroying the life that is in the death. . . . Theories of the atonement have for their object to show how this fact, viz. that the expiatory death of Christ is the means of pardon to the guilty, is to be understood in its entire relation to what we know from other sources about the attributes and moral government of God, and the wants and needs of man. . . . But the very essence of the thing about which we are to form our theory is that it was an expiation for sin. . . . To require us to believe in the necessity of the death of an incarnate God for our redemption, without making that death to be a propitiation for our sins, is to require us to believe in the most startling of facts, and to close our eyes to any reason or availability for it, is not only to demand an historical faith, but a faith for which no sufficient reason can be assigned,—in a fact at once monstrous and enigmatical. . . . The great fact of objective Christianity is Incarnation in order to Atonement; the great fact of subjective Christianity is Union with Christ whereby we receive the Atonement.”¹

It may be added that the fact of expiation by Christ's death our Lord himself has enshrined in the ordinance of the Eucharist. This fact is embalmed, too, in his own words explaining the significance of the Supper. That it is the very heart of the gospel appears also from the hymnology of the church through the ages and at the present hour. It is in reference to the opposite, the Unitarian, view of the work of Christ, which our author presents, and in reference also to the Unitarian view of the person of Christ, which our author disclaims, that Mr. Gladstone has remarked: “Since the time of the two Socini a different conception of the Deity and of redemption, which has counted among its adherents men remarkable for ability and character, has just been able to maintain a fluctuating and generally rather feeble existence;

¹ Christian Theology.

its note of dissonance has been slightly audible in the great and solemn concert of the ancient belief."¹

3. The writings under review set forth the Universalist view of the results of Christ's work. Indeed, Universalism is the proper name for this entire scheme of thought. That all men will be saved is graven on its corner-stone, and inscribed on the banner which floats from its loftiest towers. That every individual of the human race will be saved, we are taught is "the first great conception that the consciousness of Christ yields." "God is not for a portion of mankind and against the rest." All souls are forever indispensable to the universe, and somewhere, sometime, Christ, by his redemptive scheme, will bring them back to God. This the author thinks is involved in the fatherhood of God, in God's absolute goodness, or else it is not true that "God is light and in him is no darkness at all." Everything in theology and the Bible must be made to conform to this "inclusive decree." That stands, whatever else falls. Thus our author says:—

"In the case of one who believes that the consciousness of Christ is the creative and regulative source of all theology, this partialistic scheme must be forever abandoned. . . . If the decree of the Infinite is to be inferred from Christ, it must be an inclusive decree. Some will be first and some last, one will be elected to lead and another to follow; but all will be chosen for service, all for the beatific vision. . . . If Christ's mind is authoritative and final, if his mission is to the world, if Christianity is the absolute religion, the purpose of God must include humanity. This, then, is the first great conception that the consciousness of Christ yields. God is for humanity."² "The Christian thinker of to-day has won his freedom to regard God as the Father of all men, to conceive of him as eternally interested in the whole race; and to remove all limits of place and time from the redemptive scheme of Christ. He has the right to affirm, if he solemnly believes it, that, on this side of death or on that, God and Christ and the moral universe are unchangeably the same; that all the Divine punishments are chastisements; that God's final purpose in scourging his children is to bring them back to himself; and that even in hell the worm must gnaw and the fire burn in the service of the Eternal Grace."³

¹ Gleanings, Vol. iii. sect. 4.

² The Christ of To-Day, pp. 186, 187.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 203.

In the treatise on Immortality, the author quotes with commendation Lotze's saying, "That will last forever which on account of its excellence and spirit must be an abiding part of the universe; what lacks that preserving worth will perish" (p. 139). But Lotze's limiting statement, that we are not the final judges of the worth to the universe of our lives, the author sets aside by the doubtful affirmation that it may still be possible for us to reach or anticipate the judgment of the Highest. This our author then proceeds to do, and the process shows how the doctrine of universal salvation is evolved out of one's own consciousness. Here is the argument:—

"If the universe in its inmost character is just, the inequalities of this life will be rectified in another, when the disciplinary value of them has been utilized. If the universe violates no promise, men will survive death, according to their inspired hope; if it is of sovereign goodness, it will not arrest the moral growth of mankind, will not leave it incomplete and just begun, but will provide a new field and force for its fairer and vaster evolution. If the universe is utterly kind, no human soul can be indifferent to it, and no human sorrow. . . . The Eternal Excellence at the heart of the universe is the Eternal Christ there. The lost world was essential to him. If, then, the universe be of Christ's excellence and spirit, we need not fear to affirm that the human soul, in its sin, ignorance, aspiration, and struggle, is forever dear and indispensable to it."¹

Reasoning from the conceded facts, that there is progress in the revelation God makes of himself, that some of the earlier revelations were less full than the later, that some of the inspired writers presented an inadequate, that is, an incomplete view of the divine character, and that history and providence are confessedly adding continually to our knowledge of God, the author assumes the prerogative of weighing all former revelations God has made, through prophet, apostle, or our Lord himself, in the light of a man's own present moral convictions, and of rejecting any and all which seem to him erroneous and false, thus establishing his own opinion on the throne of judgment, and calling it the Christ consciousness, the Christ of to-day. He is very insistent continually in affirming

¹ The Witness to Immortality, p. 142.

the supreme authority of the Christ consciousness. But where does that consciousness utter itself? In the recorded words of Christ? No. But in our thought,—in the thought of fallible, sinful men. Here is where he leaves us always, however at first he may seem to be leading us to Christ. Take the following noble passage from “The Christ of To-day,” and interpret it by those which come after it, and mark how your hope is deceived, and when you thought you were to be led to your adorable Lord, you find you are only brought back to yourself—a weak, sin-blinded mortal:—

“Christ’s thought after two thousand years needs no revision. His conceptions of God, of man, and human society are ultimate conceptions; intellectual power cannot go beyond them, can never even master their entire content. His spirit has upon it the mark of finality, his character is the full impression upon humanity of the moral perfection of the Deity. The ultimateness of Christ’s thought and the finality of his spirit differentiate his transcendence from that of the greatest and best of mankind, and ground his being in the Godhead in a way solitary and supreme” (p. 128).

Mark now the interpretation.

“‘The heart makes the theologian,’ that is, the moral consciousness at its highest is the source of the material out of which the speculative faculty is to rear its edifice” (p. 176). “This truth [of the Divine Fatherhood] is now seen to be fundamental; and the high source of it is the consciousness of Christ. It is when this Supreme Consciousness in time is pressed that there is obtained the final characterization of the Supreme Consciousness above time; and all texts of Scripture and facts of human history that seem to rise in contradiction of the absolute goodness of God must be considered with the mood of true science, but with entire emancipation from old notions and fears” (p. 178).

“The consciousness of Christ as the authentic revelation of the character of the Infinite is the great beginning of theology. The present imperative call is for the fearless logical use of this fundamental idea. Whatever revisions it may require in Old Testament teaching, or if need be in apostolic deduction; above all, whatever surrenders are necessary in the traditional theology,—should be cheerfully made. The supremacy of Christ is at stake, and nothing must be allowed to stand in the way of that. Nothing short of a scheme that holds God for humanity can answer to the present and logical call. Out of our creative principle, if it is to be accepted as trustworthy, must come a new working philosophy” (p. 182).

“That many passages may be quoted from the Old Testament against

this inclusive election need trouble no one; for one has only to remember that the deepest of all Israel's sins was her failure to understand the Divine election. . . . Many texts may be adduced from the New Testament against the idea of a Divine choice inclusive of humanity, but these isolated passages must be read in the light of the great declaration of John: "And this is the message which we have heard from him, and announce unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all" (p. 186).

Is there here a concession that the teaching of the Bible would "trouble" Universalists if they respected its authority? The advocates of the new theology seem to say, "If we are pestered by texts," to use the expression of one to the most distinguished of their number, we will belittle those texts by calling them "isolated passages," by keeping them out of sight, and by talking of the general thought of the Scriptures. "I do not believe in the doctrine of decrees," said one. But what do you do with such and such passages in the Bible? inquired his friend. "Why, Mr. A., I never read such passages," he replied. So, too, in a recent volume it is said, "Some of the leading dogmas, as, for instance, those regarding election and future endless punishment, have for their whole foundation a strained construction of less than half a dozen verses of the whole Bible."¹ Men claim that they truly represent the general thought of Christ while freely denying his explicit declarations. But his general thought is to be learned by studying those explicit declarations, not by ignoring or denying them. Where in these volumes are the texts conflicting with Universalism studiously examined and reverently considered? They are all summarily dismissed together, simply because the author's inner sense deems them unworthy of trust.

Why does he urge us not to be "troubled" because "many passages can be quoted from the Old Testament against this inclusive decree"? Simply because he would have us trust his opinion that those writers in the Bible who thus pronounced against his Universalism were mistaken and untrust-

¹ God's Image in Man, p. 93.

worthy men; for in this implication lies all the force of his doubtful and irrelevant assertion, that "the deepest of all Israel's sins was her failure to understand the Divine election." Should we not rather trust the inspired declaration of the Apostle Peter concerning those writers, who said they were "holy men who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost"? Ought we not also to believe our Lord, who spoke of the Old Testament as "the Word of God"—"the Scripture that cannot be broken"? "Many texts may be adduced from the New Testament against the idea of a Divine choice inclusive of humanity," and these embrace some of the most solemn and explicit declarations of our Lord. That does not seem to "trouble" the author. He calls them "isolated passages," and intimates that in his judgment they give a dark character to God.

What does it avail that we find scattered through these volumes lavish and eloquent compliments to the Bible, and high encomiums on the words of Christ, when the moment those teachings cross the dicta of the author they are trampled under foot?

Theodore Parker and Renan praise the words of Jesus in general, and reject them in detail. They also concede, with our author, that "many texts may be adduced from the New Testament against the idea of a Divine choice inclusive of humanity," but, like him, they hold to that idea nevertheless. Renan thus describes the teaching of Jesus: "This new order of things will be eternal Paradise, and Gehenna shall have no end."¹ Theodore Parker says, concerning the doctrine of endless punishment, "I believe that Jesus Christ taught it. I do not accept it on his authority." The American Unitarian Association in a memorable declaration on this subject in 1853 is by no means so positive as our author.

Its members say it is their "firm conviction that the final restoration of all is not revealed in the Scriptures." They

¹ Life of Jesus, p. 243.

add, therefore, that they "cannot emphasize it in the foreground of their preaching as a sure part of Christianity, but only elevate it in the background of their system, as a glorious hope which seems to them a warranted inference from the cardinal principles of Christianity, as well as from the great verities of moral science." But in these volumes that "God is for humanity is the first great conception that the consciousness of Christ yields." That is to say, if I, a poor, weak, sinful creature, soon to appear before God's judgment seat, imagine that the solemn words of Christ concerning those who will then be on his left hand, "these shall go away into everlasting punishment," would seem to cast a shadow on the character of God, then the impression of the culprit at the bar must outweigh the declaration of the Judge on the throne.

In his work on Immortality the author argues against the annihilation of the wicked, and says, "The scene of final judgment is a complete refutation of the opinion, since the righteous go away into eternal life, and the wicked into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels, against whose annihilation there would seem to be no end of evidence." "It is incredible that the parable of Dives and Lazarus should have been spoken by a believer in restricted immortality." The volume teaches that all will live forever, but all men have such capacity of improvement that they will ultimately be restored and taken across the impassable gulf into heaven. Thus, two pages previous to this citation of the teachings of Christ, the author interposes more of those canons of judgment which man evolves from his inner consciousness, and exalts above those teachings. Thus he says:—

"The characteristic of mankind is an illimitable capacity for improvement, together with an indefinite possibility of reformation in the case of those whose existence has been a progressive deterioration; and herein is the essential truth in the idea of worth as the basis of belief in human immortality. To sacrifice this sublime capacity in man, whenever at death it has failed to attain voluntary and conscious realization, would be an impeachment of the supreme wisdom, and furthermore would contradict

the very contention of the believer in restricted immortality; for the Being who should disregard a utility so vast could not be trusted to respect values of any kind."¹

Concerning the author's affirmation here that "an indefinite possibility of reformation in the case of those whose existence has been a progressive deterioration is a characteristic of mankind," several obvious remarks may be made. (1) If it is true, by parity of reasoning it should not be limited to mankind, but may be as well affirmed of devils and of the archfiend himself. (2) If it is true, it can be known only by revelation. No man is competent to prove it by any evidence within his reach. (3) It is not true if the facts within range of our observation are to be trusted. This has been forcibly set forth, both in regard to the present life and the foreshadowings of the future, in Dr. Horace Bushnell's powerful sermon on "The Capacity for Religion Extirpated by Disuse." (4) It is not true according to Christ, and therefore no Christian has a right to say it is true. But it were vain to expect any adequate view of the difficulty of recovering man from sin in writings which are everywhere pervaded by confusion of thought concerning the nature of sin. Indeed, the lack here discerned of the biblical idea of sin, as the rebellion of the creature against the Creator, frequently reminds the reader of Mr. Gladstone's recent ominous remark: "This sense of sin, which lies like a black pall over the entire face of humanity, has been all along the point of departure for every preacher, writer, and thinker within the Hebrew or the Christian fold; and it is the gradual and palpable decline of it, in the literature and society of to-day, that is the darkest among all the signs now overshadowing what is, in some respects, the bright and hopeful promise of the future."² Witness the following passage from our author by which one is reminded of the noted but misleading sermons of a great Uni-

¹ *The Witness to Immortality*, p. 302.

² *Impregnable Rock*, p. 105.

tarian divine, whose silver-tongued eloquence some of us used to love to hear in his venerated sanctuary on Church Green; long since supplanted by the stately warehouses of Summer Street. But far beyond the reverent words of Dr. Orville Dewey, however, is this utterance, in the astonishing freedom with which it presumes to treat the scenes of the last judgment, if not in the audacity with which it contradicts the Master in regard to the broad line of demarcation which separates regenerate from unregenerate character:—

“There is a soul of good in persons otherwise evil, and there is in the best a residue of the animal. The distinctions between the children of light and the children of darkness, the church and the world, are indeed of supreme importance, but they are far enough from being absolute. They are in fact ideal rather than actual. The characters of men pass into one another by insensible gradations, and omniscience itself would find the task hopeless to discover in one class of persons a ground for continued existence, and in another a reason for annihilation. Some one has put the rather irreverent question as to the difference, wherein it may be supposed to lie, between the last sheep and the first goat in the scene of final judgment. In the case of the Master's sublime parable it is answered by the imagery employed; since the supposition is that before that tribunal shall take place, character will have put on the decisive form of humanity and inhumanity. But in this world there are no such decided contrasts. The best sheep have considerable of the goat in them, and the worst goats are never absolutely destitute of the characteristics of their gentler brethren; so that the difference between the last saint and the first sinner, between the lowest successful candidate for future existence and the highest non-successful one, would puzzle even the mind that could with Hudibras, —

‘. . . . Sever and divide
A hair 'twixt north and northwest side.’¹

Our author labors to carry his readers with him in his supreme conviction that universal salvation is a necessary corollary from the divine goodness, by repeatedly characterizing the commonly received idea of the teaching of the Scriptures on this subject as “frightful,” “horrible,” “incredible”; and he seeks to heighten this impression by dwelling upon the small opportunities for attaining a virtuous character which

¹ The Witness to Immortality, p. 306.

many have, and by pointing out the large numbers who must have lived and died in the more than one hundred thousand years in which, he says it is now conceded, the world has been inhabited.

There are several reasonable suppositions which it is possible to make, which should prevent us from assuming to judge that the issues of the final judgment as presented by our Lord are inconsistent with the goodness of God. If a soul persists in sinning forever, which is conceivable, it is inconceivable that that soul should ever be received into the divine favor. Perhaps, too, divine omniscience may see, in the case of every person who dies in his sins, under whatever low conditions of moral influence, that his decisive choice has already been made, and that no continuance of his probation, no improvement in his opportunities, no possible pressure of motive, would ever, in any world, lead him to cease from sin. Moreover, the divine government of this world is linked in with the interests of other races unknown to us, and in a manner which takes the problem of human destiny entirely out of the province of our judgment. We are assured that we are a spectacle to angels. The wonderful affirmation is made,—and the mere announcement is like lifting for a moment the veil that hides the many mansions where higher races dwell, that God “created all things by Jesus Christ, to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places, might be known, by the church, the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.” The manifestation of God’s grace in redemption is carried on here, with the purpose, as Paul says, “that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness towards us through Christ Jesus.” The author objects to the orthodox faith now because it seems to him unsuitable to a world so populous as this, and now because he thinks it fails of proper adjustment with the immensities of the universe outside of

this atom of a world. The suitable attitude in such a dilemma would seem to be that of a humble recipient of whatever dim foreshadowings it has pleased God to reveal to us concerning those awful mysteries, especially in the solemn words of Him who is the Truth, and who is "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever."

A number of years ago a stately volume was issued in New York which was heralded as "virtually an expurgated edition of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures." The radical Unitarian clergyman who compiled it stated at length, and with great seriousness, why he might be supposed to have attained the true mind of Christ, and to represent the unadulterated consciousness of Christ. He told by what studious and devout labors for many years he had toiled in the task, so that his superlatively educated spiritual sense was quite competent to be trusted to do this great service for mankind; to rid the New Testament of all those things which Jesus never could have said; to clear the record of all those things which Jesus never could have done, and to present the true Christ at last to the world. And this he felt moved to do because, forsooth, otherwise, the reputed record of Jesus' words and deeds, this gentleman was fully persuaded, would cast a shadow on the character of God, and had not an apostle said, "God is light and in him is no darkness at all"?

In contrast with all such endeavors, let us notice the modest and humble attitude in which one of the greatest and most devout, albeit one of the most erratic, of New England divines, was wont to sit at Jesus' feet and hear his words. The absolute reverence with which Horace Bushnell bowed before God's Word as the final and authoritative rule of faith and practice is worthy of imitation now. In speaking of those who, as he says, "are boldest in their judgments against God," he exclaims,—

"Oh, if we could see our own limitations, and how little it is possible for us to know of matters infinite, how much less, clouded by the neces-

sary blindness of a mind disordered by evil, we should then be in a way to learn. All our disputings and hard speeches are but the frothing of our ignorance maddened by pride. . . . When our sin is completely taken away, as we know it will be in the final day, all our guilty blindness will go with it, and that of itself will prepare a glorious unveiling of God and a vision of his beauty as it is. . . . Every perplexity must now be cleared, and the whole moral administration of God as related to the soul must be sufficiently explained. Sin, the fall, the pains and penalties and disabilities consequent, redemption, grace, the discipline of the righteous, the abandonment of the incorrigibly wicked, all these must now be understood. God has light enough to shed on all these things, and will not conceal it. He will shine forth in glorious and transcendent brightness, unmasked by cloud, and all created minds, but the incorrigible outcasts and enemies of his government, will respond 'Alleluia: salvation, and glory, and honor, and power be unto the Lord our God; for just and true are his judgments.'"¹

The gospel for humanity set forth in these writings thus appears to be an eviscerated and enervated gospel, bereft of its heart and shorn of its power; a gospel whose creative principle confessedly is Universalism, and whose only message is the educational power of a divine Christ, a Christ who is a teaching prophet and a reigning king, but not an atoning priest; a gospel which is founded on the assumption that my personal opinion on moral and religious questions I have a right to install in the seat of supreme authority as the consciousness of Christ—the Christ of to-day, and by it to override and set aside the explicit declarations of the Christ of the New Testament, deciding by my inner sense what "portions of the Bible" are "truly the revelation of God" (p. 161).

It remains to consider the author's faulty conception of the relation of this gospel for humanity (1) to the missionary work, (2) to the ethnic religions, and (3) to the progress of doctrine.

II. PRACTICAL BEARINGS OF THE SYSTEM.

1. *In Relation to Missionary Work.*—In the Brooklyn sermon the preacher urged a certain "principle of exclusion as of the

¹ Sermons, The Light on the Cloud.

first importance in our great foreign missionary enterprise at the present time." That exclusion related to the message to be sent, and to the men who should bear it. The statement of that principle of exclusion was understood at the time it was made, not probably by the preacher's auditors generally, but by those who could interpret it by their previous acquaintance with his writings, and as it can be understood now by all who read those writings, to exclude from appointment as missionaries of the American Board, (1) all who are not Universalists, i. e., all who hold, with the Creed of 1883, that there is "a final judgment, the issues of which are everlasting punishment and everlasting life"; (2) all who do not reject the fundamental declaration of the Creed of 1883, that our Redeemer's "sacrifice of himself for the sins of the world is the sole and sufficient ground of forgiveness"; and (3) all who do not also repudiate the further declaration of that Creed, that "the Scriptures constitute the authoritative standard by which religious teaching and human conduct is to be regulated and judged." Here is the author's statement of the principle of exclusion:—

"We must turn to the Christian youth of the land in a magnificent confidence and put the burden of expanding this [missionary] work upon their intelligence and love. . . . We shall find those among them who are characterized by power, those who are representative of the new time upon which we are entering, at variance with the fathers upon many of the details and upon some of the fundamentals of theology. . . . It must never be forgotten, therefore, that the foreign missionary has but one imperative. He is bound to preach one thing only, the righteous love of God as that stands revealed in the historic Christ. If he is great at this central point, he should be allowed unimpeded freedom of exclusion. We must go further: we must put the missionary under bonds to use this principle of exclusion against all that is mere tradition in our churches, and against all that is mere innovation. . . . In order that we may enlist in this service our best students, the young men of genius and prophetic power, and in order that the great-hearted among all who gather in the house of God from Sunday to Sunday may feel that they have part in this world enterprise, we must insist upon the apostolic principle of exclusion. . . . Paul threw away everything but the essential and supreme truth of Christianity. He knew that with the pure idea of sacrifice embodied in Jesus Christ with

divine fullness and grace, he could conquer the heart of the world. . . . He wanted no division of honors between the gospel and something else. He reduced his creed to invincibility, and the first incentive from Paul's great determination is the call upon us to go and do likewise."¹

Now all this is eloquent, and, aside from the baseless and discourteous claim that genius and power and great-heartedness and the best scholarship are found *only* in those who reject "some of the fundamentals of theology," the passage is in the main admirable and true, if we are allowed to understand it in the way in which, as I have already said, the great mass of hearers would naturally understand it; if we are permitted to put into these expressions of Paul the meaning which he put into them, as we know from the context and his declarations elsewhere; if the preacher would suffer us to understand the sacrifice of Christ, to which he refers, as our churches generally understand it, and as the Creed of 1883 states it when it says, "The Redeemer's sacrifice of himself for the sins of the world is the sole and sufficient ground of forgiveness and of reconciliation with God." But we are estopped by the author from putting any such meaning into his phrases; for, as we have seen, that is precisely what he laboriously strives to keep out of all these scriptural phrases; *that* he teaches us is the "*mere tradition* against which we must put the missionary under bonds to use the principle of exclusion." Christ is a Mediator, these writings say, only as a medium of instruction, or, as already quoted, "There is none other name given among men under heaven whereby the educational power of the Infinite is brought in boundless measure and resistless form to bear upon the whole human character" (p. 322).

But if we are thus debarred from understanding the author's description of the chief contents of the gospel as embodying the expiatory work of Christ, what may we understand him to embody in that description? When the author says "the foreign missionary has but one imperative. He is bound to

¹ Sermon, pp. 10-11.

preach one thing only, the righteous love of God as that stands revealed in the historic Christ," he means to say that Universalism, the final salvation of all men, is the first and the great thing in the message of Christ which the missionary is to proclaim; for he declares, as previously quoted, "This, then, is the first great conception that the consciousness of Christ yields. God is for humanity; . . . all will be chosen for the beatific vision." Moreover, the missionary is to be put under bonds, not only to proclaim universal salvation as "the first great conception that the consciousness of Christ yields," but in doing this he is also to be put under bonds to use this principle of exclusion against that which the author teaches us is "mere tradition," but which the Creed of 1883 states in these words, "The Scriptures constitute the *authoritative* standard by which religious teaching and human conduct is to be regulated and judged." For the missionary is informed that his own judgment, and not the Scriptures, constitutes the authoritative standard by which religious teaching is to be regulated and judged.

Here is the warrant the author gives the missionary for this proceeding: "The man who is full of the mind of Christ is dependent on no authority to declare to him the portions of his Bible that are truly the revelation of God; he has an unction from the Holy One, and understands for himself" (p. 161).

The principle of exclusion on which appointments have always been made by the American Board is, that only those who hold the doctrines commonly held by the contributing churches should be sent. Since there have always been as many of these as the funds contributed could support, there seemed to be no need of keeping them at home, in order to send out men of erratic views, against whom many donors object. But the "principle of exclusion" here proposed is, that only those be sent who hold doctrines *not* commonly held by the churches, only those who reject at least three of those

leading doctrines,—the authority of the Scriptures, the expiatory work of Christ, and the eternity of final awards.

However, the casual expression of the opinion of a single individual, who is for the time being addressing the Board, is not a declaration of the policy of the Board. That policy has been settled by the votes of the Board, especially by those repeated reaffirmations of the policy announced in the letter of acceptance of President Storrs. What he said in that letter of the theory of probation after death, with more emphasis could be said of the doctrine of universal salvation, "It is not a constituent part of the gospel of Christ," "it forms no part of that divine message which came to our fathers, and has come to us from the bleeding and kingly hands of Christ."

2. *In Relation to the Ethnic Religions.*—On this the teaching here is partly true and partly false. Very clear and very generous is the recognition of the excellences of other religions; very confused and very undiscerning is the exhibition of the true superiority of the Christian religion.

Scattered through these volumes, and specially prominent in the sermon, is a most just and appreciative acknowledgment of the religious movement of aspiring man in all lands and all times, of the Greek mind in its science and philosophy, and in the spiritual thought of the higher souls in India, Persia, Egypt, China, and Japan. The message of the Christian preacher everywhere, the author justly declares, must include the higher elements in the ethnic religions. In all this he is in accord with Paul at Athens. He reëchoes the saying of Peter, "In every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted of him." This has been the common view on which the work of evangelizing the nations has proceeded. Witness Bushnell's tribute to the pagan sages—great and mighty souls, prying at the gates of light to force them open a little before the time, that through the chinks a little light might stream in upon their night of gloom.¹ Witness

¹ Nature and the Supernatural, p 246.

the praying Indian found by David Brainerd, dwelling apart from his wicked kindred and communing with the Great Spirit he heard in the wind.¹ Witness the confession of Max Müller concerning the result of his long-continued comparative study of religions: "We learn that there is hardly one religion which does not contain some truth, some important truth, truth sufficient to enable those who seek the Lord and feel after him to find him in their hour of need."²

But when our author seeks to show the difference between Christianity and other religions he utterly fails. He puts them all on the same plane in respect to their nature; they differ only in degree, not in kind. And this mistake is a necessity with him because of his underlying misconception of the condition of man, and the work for him which a religion is required to perform. Our Lord says, "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost"; "Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." It is the teaching of the Bible that all men are "dead in trespasses and in sins," are under the just condemnation of God, and that no person will ever revive and live in the exercise of holy love to God unless created anew by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit given through the intercession of Christ, for whose sake also his sin is forgiven; that character resides not in the natural instincts or constitutional impulses, however generous and noble these may be, but alone in the supreme choice which governs the life; that before regeneration men are absolutely destitute of that holy love of which, after regeneration, they have a little, and will continue to have more; that thus men are divided into two, and only two classes, of opposite purposes and destinies; that the new birth, however early and unobserved it may be, is yet in its nature and results the greatest change possible to man, is absolutely indispensable in order to salvation, and is truly

¹ Edwards' Life of Brainerd, chap. vii.

² Lecture on the Vedas.

characterized in the Bible as the passage from death to life

Diametrically opposite to this view is that of these writings, as has been shown. Thus we are told, "The distinctions between the children of light and the children of darkness, the church and the world, are indeed of supreme importance, but they are far enough from being absolute. They are in fact ideal rather than actual." The author in arguing against annihilation, and the same reasoning would hold against eternal punishment, claims that men are not divided, and never can be, into two opposite classes, deserving of different destinies. Thus he says: "The characters of men pass into one another by insensible gradations, and omniscience itself would find the task hopeless to discover in one class of persons a ground for continued existence and in another a reason for annihilation." Naturally, therefore, these writings have little to say of conversion, of pardon, of the peace which comes to the guilty and repentant sinner when he is justified by faith. A large section of the hymns of the church, as well as innumerable devout expressions of the inspired writers, would seem to be little in demand, if one were consistently to adhere to the underlying philosophy of the office of religion here set forth, if there is no radical difference between the character of the regenerate and the unregenerate; if development, evolution, education, rather than redemption, regeneration, justification, are the terms which best describe God's way of saving men. The mistake of our author in his comparative judgment of different systems of religion is a very common one in certain circles. One of the most conspicuous instances of it recently seen was in the address of the distinguished United States Senator who presided at the Unitarian Convention at Saratoga in 1894. Mr. Hoar was speaking indeed of different bodies of Christians,—of those who bear the evangelical name and those who do not,—but the standard of comparison he adopted is capable of a broader application. Thus he said:—

"Although the great body of Christian believers do not call themselves by our name, the great body of Christian believers believe what we believe, think what we think, love what we love, seek what we seek. In the main the things in which they differ from us are the non-essential, temporary, changeful, doubtful, and speculative. In general the less said about them the better. . . . When we go to church we want to hear not of the things in which we differ from other Christians, but of the things in which we agree with other Christians. . . . The Sermon on the Mount, the two sublime commandments on which hang all the law and the prophets, the entire precept and example of Jesus Christ, constitute to our minds the chief portion and essence of Unitarianism."¹

And he believes they constitute the chief and essential part of the religion of other denominations. Evidently the reference is rather to the practical precepts of Jesus than to his doctrinal teaching concerning his divine nature and atoning work, for on these, evangelical Christians strongly differ from others. But; as all are agreed that we ought to obey the two great commandments, to love God and to love our fellow-men, the implication seems to be that essentially the forms of religion named are all one, since all seek to promote love to God and man, and the most practical usefulness, we are to infer, comes from pressing that one great aim. The less said about other things in which Christians differ the better. In a subsequent published deliverance this eminent Christian philanthropist modestly expressed his satisfaction in having received from prominent men in various denominations, Catholics and Protestants, letters approving his position, one saying, "If that is Unitarianism, I'm afraid I am a Unitarian."² The Senator might easily have gone further and secured similar approval from devout Jews, from some of Mr. Hopkinson Smith's amiable and worthy Turks, for there are such here and there, as our missionaries testify, kind and godly Moslems. They tell us too of one of the sects in Japan whose religion has some peculiar resemblance to Christianity. These might readily have joined the chorus of assent. Certainly

¹ Christian Register, Oct. 4, 1894.

² *Ibid.*, Aug. 15, 1895.

Protap Chunder Mozoomdar, of the Brahmo Somaj, and quite a company of those whose stately turbans and flowing vestments gave picturesque color to the scene of their gathering at the World's Parliament of Religions, would have said, "We too, Senator, promote love to God and to our fellow-men." But what of that? All this does not avail a particle to verify the Senator's position, which is the exact opposite of the truth. For it is precisely the differences between different religions which it is important, and even indispensable, to bring sharply into sight continually, if we would bring this world back to God.

And the confusion of thought into which the eminent publicist and our accomplished author alike have fallen, results from their failure to see that the true criterion by which to judge of the value of a religion is not its aim, but (1) the *method* and (2) the *power* by which it seeks that aim. All religions, weak and worthless as many of them are, may be called true religions in a sense, for almost every one of them has enough of important truth to lead an earnest inquirer to God; i. e., they may nearly all be regarded as true in the sense that they will truly guide the humble seeker to perform aright the *conditions* of salvation. But in respect to the greatest, the most difficult, the *primal* function of a religion, there is only one true religion, all others are false. There is only one religion which furnishes a reasonable *ground* for the forgiveness of sin, for the restoration of a penitent sinner to the favor of God. "Other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." "Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." "We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste death *for every man*." "No man cometh unto the Father but by me." Whatever religion at any time anywhere avails to lead a man to perform the

conditions of salvation aright, to repent and be forgiven, the Christian religion alone furnishes the ground on which that man is forgiven; it alone provides the fundamental reason why he can be forgiven and saved. Ignorant as pagan sage or heathen philosopher may be of Him who was wounded for his transgression, yet is he saved only because he has an advocate with the Father, even Jesus Christ the righteous; only because "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin." To the divine ear, every prayer of every penitent, anywhere, at any time, is in effect always a prayer to Christ, crying,—

"Be of sin the double cure,
Cleanse from guilt, and make me pure."

Cleanse from guilt. For this first and greatest need of man, for this first and greatest function of religion, we are absolutely shut up to Him who "now once in the end of the world hath appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." Furthermore, it is precisely because of this transcendent peculiarity of the evangelical religion, because of this unique office which it alone, of all the religions of earth, is able to fulfill, that it becomes a religion of incomparable and victorious power. Just there is the hiding of its power. That, and that alone, explains the regal air with which it meets all other religions, cordially welcoming all their aid in their own field, positively refusing them the least standing in its peculiar field. Gladly admitting that they can aid in bringing man to God, sternly denying that they are of the least use in bringing God to man, freely using them all, but inevitably supplanting every one, and supplanting them because different and superior in kind and not merely in degree, because absolutely unique in its main office, *that* is the true relation of the real gospel for humanity to all the ethnic religions on the globe.

3. *In Relation to the Progress of Doctrine.*—The progress of doctrine our author sets forth most felicitously and impressively under an imagery at once so beautiful and so just,

and in so many features so exactly fitted to his purpose, that it deserves to become a standard illustration in every one's mind. Imagine a vast cathedral, fair and grand, its deep foundations laid many generations ago, its solid walls and buttresses hoary with the marks of many centuries, its lofty towers piercing the skies, its proportions so immense that at no one point can its entire form be seen, and though, by coursing through its long-drawn aisles and transepts and chapels and cloisters, its original plan can be discerned in all its extent and grandeur, the various portions of the structure, which have been one after another completed, bear the marks of the peculiar architecture of the age in which each was built, while here and there the still unfinished parts of the great whole are even yet in the process of construction, so that from the first there has never been a time when all the scaffolding has been taken down, nor can any one tell when all the enrichments that were included in the design will at last be finished, and the result be crowned a completed work. Even thus in the mind of our author is the temple of spiritual truth. Only, with strange disregard for the necessary continuity of religious thought, he seems to represent the young ministers of our time as moving into a cathedral which they have just now built out of hand, and because they did not like the old mediæval castle in which he intimates the Church has been housed hitherto. Now a cathedral is not built in a day, and a castle is not a cathedral. If the Church is in a cathedral now, it has been there for a long time. If it has lived hitherto in a mediæval castle, it is there still, and will there abide. The Church of God does not change its habitation in this off-hand way. Yet all through these writings is this utter disregard of the historic law of development in the progress of doctrine. It is not the gradual completion of the original plan of the edifice, be it castle or cathedral, but a total destruction of the past, an entire reconstruction for the future. Thus we read, "there is in progress a movement vastly more

important than that which is the special concern of the higher criticism, and that is the total reconstruction of theological theory in fearless logical accord with the truth of the Incarnation." ¹

And then, changing the figure, it is said, "One need not fear a resurrection of the old finished theological system. For that there can be no resurrection." It were easy to multiply such quotations indefinitely. Some of them indeed are coupled with the affirmation that all which is highest and best in the old, and now to be discarded, systems, is to be preserved in the new. This is a form of declaration with which we have grown familiar. Its vagueness has secured it immunity from attack. Men have been wont to say, We reject the old doctrines, but still we hold all that is truest and best in them. When called on to state their new belief, however, they have replied, It is too early to say what form the new belief will take. Thus a man was free to deny everything and bound to defend nothing. Our author has grown bolder. While declaring that the old theology can have no resurrection, his claim that everything good in it is preserved in his new scheme is capable of being tested by fact, for he proceeds frankly, and to the great advantage of clear thought, to say what his new system is. We have seen what it is, with Universalism as its foundation, the Scriptures subordinated to individual opinion, and the chief function of religion, the expiatory work of Christ, ignored or denied. And we are perfectly competent to see, and to say, that this does not preserve the essentials of the previously accepted Christian faith. Indeed the author himself repeatedly concedes, and is even forward to declare, that his system of thought is radically different from that which has prevailed until now. Thus he says:—

"The tumult of the time has a fundamental philosophical meaning. . . . The extreme conservatives apprehend a theological revolution; they are appalled at the prospect of a philosophy of Christianity that shall be rad-

¹ *The Christ of To-Day*, p. 167.

ically at war with that which they believe to be the truth. Their suspicion is well founded. . . . The question goes to the fountain head of life and faith; it asks for a statement of the relation of God to our race: it receives two answers, and one of these is the historic declaration that the Eternal is for a portion of mankind and against the rest. Now in the case of one who believes that the consciousness of Christ is the creative and regulative source of all theology this partialistic scheme must be forever abandoned."¹

So then it appears that the avowed relation of this "gospel for humanity" to the progress of doctrine is that of revolution; and in making that claim, of course, it announces its own doom. In proclaiming the radical nature of the change which it demands, the falsity of its expectation is made manifest. For the progress of doctrine is not by revolution, tearing down its house every now and then to get materials to build a new one. It is rather according to the law of natural growth; it is the gradual unfolding and development, the fuller manifestation and attainment, of the original and hitherto dominant plan. The changes supplement, they do not supplant, the leading ideas regnant in all the past. This law of the Spirit's guidance is everywhere manifest. It marks the progress in revelation before and after Christ.

"Novum testamentum in vetere latet,
Vetus testamentum in novo patet."

It is evident in the advance made over Christ's earlier and simpler teachings, by the pregnant sentences uttered near the close of his ministry, and by their fuller development through his mouthpiece Paul, to whom the risen Lord said, "I have appeared unto thee for this purpose to make thee a minister and a witness both of the things wherein thou has seen me, and of the things wherein I will appear unto thee"; and also by the apostles generally, to whom he had promised the Holy Spirit to enable them to amplify his teachings concerning his office as Redeemer. Thus at first Christ says, "Forgive and ye shall be forgiven," stating one of the conditions

¹ The Christ of To-Day, p. 185.

on which sin will be forgiven. Later he says his blood is shed to provide a way for the remission of sins. And through the apostles he fully explains that it is in view of that sacrifice that God does forgive sin. "God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." So, too, we are at first bidden simply to pray to God as a loving Father, later to pray in Christ's name, and then we are instructed that answers to prayer are absolutely dependent on the office of our Advocate, "who ever liveth to make intercession for us."¹ So under the Spirit's teaching from age to age the church reaches a clearer apprehension of the truth revealed in the Bible, now in respect to soteriology, then anthropology, and lately sociology. But the growth is by fuller comprehension and application of the great revealed facts which no advanced thought ever supersedes, though men's theories in respect to those facts undergo change. There are indeed periods of "doubt and even sometimes convulsion," but "Christianity sheds off from itself every conception irreconcilably hostile to its own essence," and is "handed on continuously in uniformity of life." It is remarkable with what confidence the claim has often been made that the old order of religious thought has definitely passed away, and a new and larger and better faith is now to reign. As already intimated, these boastings often save themselves from assault because they are so vague and shadowy that it is useless to plant any batteries against them. This theology in a formative state is a floating, impalpable mist. As fleeting clouds before the gales of the Spirit, these "great movements" one after another are swept away.

Meanwhile the evangelical churches keep on growing in power and number; the Methodist churches alone at the rate of two or three a day now for some years. The churches of the so-called liberal denominations, with some of whose leading peculiarities we have seen this "gospel for humanity" is allied, it was thought early in the century, would

¹ Bernard, *Progress of Doctrine*, Lecture 3.

soon become dominant in the land, such was their prestige, and so confident were their claims. They have now less than fifteen hundred parishes, and there are over one hundred and fifty thousand evangelical churches, which are adding over a third of a million communicants every year; their annual additions outnumbering the entire liberal bodies after nearly a century of strenuous endeavor. Yet our author with fatuitous persistence ignores the sublime achievements of the Christian church through the ages and at the present hour, and claims that nearly the entire evangelical world is effete, and must abandon its leading conceptions of Christian truth, if it would show any vigorous life. There are three faces of a tower clock, he tells us, on one of which the hands do not move, on another they are behind time, the third, on which he claims to be looking, alone keeps along with the sun.¹ Of this he says:—

“There is a side of life that looks heavenward, and that orders thought and conduct with supreme reference to that; there is a region of our Christendom that waits upon the Lord, and that reports his ongoings; there is a dial upon the heart of the disciple of Jesus that watches the Son of God, that repeats by silent indicators and in tones that beat into the souls of men the progress of the eternal purpose, and as face answers to face in water, so does this dial upon the devout and strenuous spirit answer to the movement of the Infinite Christ.”

Those who see the second dial he thus describes:—

“There is a side of life in the movement of the Spirit, but so far behind that whoever consults it alone will have for the working forces of to-day, the ideals, the anticipations, the outlooks, the beliefs, and the superstitions of an outgrown age. Nowhere will he be up to date. In his case the dial and the sun are in hopeless discord. And this discordance will affect not only belief, but also the entire practical attitude toward foreign missions. The forms of faith, the interpretations of the divine message, the presentations of the truth, will be sadly antiquated; and the contributions will be behind, the missionary ideals decades in arrears, the moral judgment entirely misled and out of keeping with the sublime fact, and the whole magnificent enterprise will languish because of the intellectual and spiritual confusion of those who are carrying it forward.”

The author is here addressing the members of a great re-

¹ Sermon, pp. 3, 4.

ligious body whose glorious work for eighty-five years, girdling the globe with light, has all been done under the impulse of these great religious ideas which he here repudiates as outgrown. He had indeed the grace to concede that their life has been "in the movement of the Spirit," but he feels called upon also to tell them, for the fathers and brethren before him are all members of churches in whose confessions of faith the doctrines he rejects have a leading place, that because of their "intellectual and spiritual confusion" their work is so "sadly antiquated" that it is doomed henceforth to "languish." Much more severe, however, is his denunciation of the prevailing conception of Christianity when he is not in the presence of those who hold it. Thus he says, "There are but two contrasted constructions of the fundamental relation of mankind to the Infinite."¹ The one is that which he is reading off from a dial whose hands were set by various Universalist, Unitarian, and Manichæan thinkers, long years gone by. It is his Universalism, in which "the first great conception" to be announced by minister and missionary is that "God is for humanity," i. e., that no soul of man was ever in danger of being eternally lost; such an event being impossible, for, he tells us, "the human soul is forever indispensable to Christ."²

The other is "the partialistic scheme," which, he says, "must be forever abandoned." He describes it as having "occupied the field for fifteen centuries. It is, amid all its variations, a partialistic scheme. . . . The gospel is not a gospel for mankind. . . . This is the ultimate blasphemy of thought in which our Western civilization has been, for the most part, living these fifteen hundred years."³

Meanwhile the world has been revolutionized by this same Christianity. Nations have been exalted, customs and laws

¹ The Christ of To-Day, p. 183.

² The Witness to Immortality, p. 142.

³ The Christ of To-Day pp. 183, 184.

improved, innumerable souls saved, and, as we mark whither the eyes of the nations are turning in hope to-day, we find it is just where Christ is thus being lifted up and is proving his power to draw all men unto him. "Ye shall know them by their fruits."

Whenever and wherever the Greek ideas of religion, of which our author seems so passionately enamored, have dominated life, in so far life has soon become enfeebled. For even every wholesome effort to make a social heaven here on earth dies out, unless the impulse is maintained by those great ideas which the author rejects, but which, he concedes, have ruled the brightest ages of the world's history.

When the new "gospel for humanity" has attested its superior power by its larger results, it will be time to demand, in its behalf, the exercise of "an exclusive principle" to shut out the old gospel, which has carried peace and joy and purity and power to pardoned sinners, and consequently freedom and progress to society, wherever it has gone.

Moreover, not only are the evangelical churches not being superseded by those of looser doctrinal views, they are not being modified to any large extent by the more liberal faith. That faith crops out here and there, now and then, where certain local influences specially abound, and where "a momentary fashion" prevails, but even there it abides in position mainly because not clearly discerned, and because its paralyzing effect on evangelical life has not been distinctly traced. Let the new creed be written out in plain terms that common people can readily understand, with universal salvation as "its first great conception," followed by the statement that Christ is our Saviour only as an instructor and an example of self-denial, and adding the affirmation that every man is to make his own Bible, by picking out "the portions of the Bible that are truly the revelation of God," and then let there be an effort to form new churches on such a basis. Very soon the heart of Christendom would

show that it does not care for a religious progress that begins by openly overturning the foundations of Christian faith, by foolishly casting away the very truths to which its previous triumphs have been chiefly due.

Christendom wants progress, and will have it, but in a salutary way, not by a work of general demolition at the start. It is by clear thought and plain statement in friendly discussion, pointing out the law of natural growth, that true progress comes. Such religious discussion may bring a strain on the religious feelings, but Christian men should be able to stand the strain. If controversy is thought to imperil the practical work of the church, the blame of course must rest on those who begin it by controverting the principles on which that work is proceeding, thus virtually accusing the leaders of Christian work of incompetency, though, as those leaders are not named, the respondent, who must name the accuser, is apt to receive all the odium the strife occasions; as if the right of free speech means freedom always to attack, but never to defend, accepted truth. However the old-time words abide, "We can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth;" "The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord. Is not my word like as a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" The truth on this subject of progress in religious thought has been well presented in a memorable passage by Mr. Gladstone—a passage which I desire to quote in full because its statements apply to both classes whom I have named as proclaiming a coming theological revolution; those whom I first mentioned, who refuse to define the new scheme, and also those like our author, who are bold enough and frank enough to give us the plan of the new cathedral which they propose to build. Certainly the author is not one of those whom the English statesman

describes "who seek to attenuate the labor of thought and evade the responsibility of definite decision."

"The human mind," says Mr. Gladstone, "is accustomed to play tricks with itself in every form, and one of the forms in which it most frequently resorts to this operation is when it attenuates the labor of thought and evades the responsibility of definite decision by the adoption of a general word that we purposely keep undefined to our own consciousness. So men admire the British Constitution, without knowing or inquiring what it is, and profess Christianity, but decline to say or think what it means. In such cases the general word instead of indicating, like the title of an author's works, a multitude of particulars, becomes a blind, which on the one hand excludes knowledge and on the other, leaves us imbued with the notion that we possess it."

He then proceeds to state some of the vital elements of the Christian religion. He says: "There is a universality of Christian testimony in favor of the use of certain rites called Sacraments as essentially belonging to, and marking out to view the Christian scheme," outward and visible signs of an inward and spiritual grace. Again the entire breadth of the Christian consent sustains a system of morality distinctive of the gospel, and this in its main features he convincingly portrays, and then says:—

"When we speak of Christianity as having received the favorable verdict of the portion of mankind alone or best qualified to judge in such a matter, we do not mean the mere acknowledgment of a name, but we mean, along with other things, the acceptance of a body of truths which have for their center the person and work of Christ. And my contention is that, whatever be the momentary fashion of the day in which we live, that same tradition and testimony of the ages which commends Christianity to us, has not been a chimera or a chameleon, but has had from the first, up to a certain point of development, one substantially definite meaning for the word, a meaning of mental as well as moral significance, and has, as a matter of history, expressed this meaning in the creeds. Thus Christianity has shed off from it on this side and on that, after debate and scrutiny, and furthermore after doubt and even sometimes convulsion, all the conceptions irreconcilably hostile to its own essence, by a standing provision as normal as are the reparatory processes of material nature, and has been handed on continuously in uniformity of life, though not it may be, in uniformity of health. So that reason requires us, when we speak of Christianity, to expound the phrase agreeably to history, if we mean to claim on its behalf the authority of civilized man,

since it is to the expounded phrase and not to the bare shell that that authority attaches. It is in this sense, what the visible church also claims to be, a city set on a hill; not indeed a city within walls that can neither grow nor dwindle, but yet a city widely spread, with a fixed heart and center, if with a fluctuating outline, a mass alike unchangeable, perceptible, and also determinate, not absolutely or mathematically, but in a degree sufficient for its providential purpose in the education of mankind. Of this mass, compounded of tenets, moral laws and institutions the core, so far as tenets are concerned, is exhibited in the creeds."¹

Those tenets, as we have seen, have for their center the person and work of Christ, and those tenets will never undergo any radical change.

Whoever may arise in the future, as men one after another have arisen in the past, exalting their subjective ideas above the revealed Word of God, above the words of Christ, and pointing to each such scheme of thought as the real Jesus, the Christian consciousness, the consciousness of Christ, saying "Lo! here is Christ, or Lo! he is there"—of one thing we may be sure, the church of God will still obey the Saviour's warning command: "Go not forth, believe it not."

For the church has never lost sight of its Lord. He said, Lo, I am with you alway, and he has never been hidden from their eyes. Indeed, he took good care that down through the ages there should always be at least one place where he would evermore stand forth visibly, in his true character unveiled. And so he takes his stand by every table spread with the emblems of his dying love, and, holding out to his disciples the cup in his hand, exclaims, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is shed for you for the remission of sins."

That cup in Christ's hand, has it not always been to Christian eyes like that strange instrument or receptacle which electrical photography has just now devised, from which all obscuring substances have been carefully expelled, and through which freely pass those mysterious cathodic rays which the electric fluid imparts, rays which do not pos-

¹ Gleanings, Vol. iii. sect 4.

sess much power of general illumination to gratify curiosity by lighting up everything all around, but which have an amazing penetrative force, piercing through whatever obscuring or even metallic armor within which we hide the object on which they are turned, and laying bare the secrets of its innermost recesses, until the sensitized photographic surface provided has fixed those secrets in indelible lines which all may see?

Cathodic rays; *kata odos*, a path down into the heart of things, these rays find.

And along such a path travels the vision of Christians, as they look on that cup in Christ's hand, until, in adoring wonder, they behold the very heart of their Lord, and, as they look thereon, there is imprinted forever on their sensitive souls the innermost purpose of the Redeemer of mankind.