

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php

ARTICLE II.

QUERIES ABOUT FUTURE PROBATION.

BY I. E. DWINELL, D.D., PROFESSOR IN PACIFIC THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY,
OAKLAND, CAL.

IT IS held by those who make the hypothesis of probation beyond this life, that the essential elements of a moral trial, in a redeemed world, cannot exist unless the historical Christ is distinctly presented to the soul. It is not enough that Christ has died for all, made an atonement for all, changed the standing of all before God in respect to the possibility of salvation, given the means of repentance and spiritual knowledge to all in the teachings of nature and conscience and in the drawings of the Divine Spirit; and that the providence and love and grace of God invest all, to win them to welcome the light offered. Something more is needed. The historical Christ must be brought consciously before the mind and heart in the supreme form of moral appeal. Without this, they affirm, Christian consciousness is not satisfied; and if such a trial as this is not enjoyed during life, it demands that the opportunity should be presented in the world to come.

This is not regarded as another probation, but a part of the one begun on a lower plane here, carried up to its higher, decisive stage. It is hoped, and sometimes intimated, that this future presentation of the historical Christ, amid the changed scenes and new and transcendent motives of the eternal world, will be effective in the salvation of almost all.

This hypothesis suggests many grave queries, some of which we wish to call attention to in this article.

1. The first relates to the supposed *necessity* of a hypothesis to satisfy Christian consciousness on this subject.

Is this a proper subject to come into the field of Christian consciousness at all?

It relates to the administration of the government of God, and to a section of that administration—the completeness and finality of a moral trial—of which we have no experience and no observation. It can only be brought within the range of Christian consciousness through the ethical principles involved. And, in fact, this is the way in which it is done. The subject is viewed simply in an ethical light. Newman Smyth says of Dorner: “His system might almost be said to have its being in pure Christian ethics” (Int. Dorner on “The Future State,” p. 9). Specially are ethical considerations made the basis of Dorner’s suggestions about future probation, and this is true also of his followers. The “New Theology” assumes that we must have a theory on probation that satisfies the ethical sense, and that we cannot rest in any dogmatic proposition on this subject based on authority, unless it harmonizes also with our moral convictions.

But why should we have a theory on probation that is levelled to our ethical approval, more than one, of this kind, on other portions of the administration of the government of God? There are many things in the divine government, in its current movements, that must ever defy our ethical solution. There are inequalities of lot under divine providence that stagger us,—multitudes born to wretchedness, degradation, vice; sufferings of the good; prosperity of the wicked; the death of those whose life seems essential to the comfort and welfare of those dependent on them; and the continued life of those whose existence is a curse and a sorrow to others. If, then, we can have no belief about the present government of God over such dark facts,—no belief based on Scripture, no belief but what resolves itself into our ethical insight,—we must either drive divine providence off from a large part of the field of life,—and the most important part, as it regards our comfort and peace,—or we must break down

the ethical difference in human lives and deny the reality of moral distinctions.

The natural tendency of the "New Theology," if it succeeds in eschatology, will be to apply the same method to the present divine government. If we can believe nothing but what has our ethical sanction in reference to the future world, we shall not be slow to regulate our belief about God's connection with this world in the same way. If our interpretation of the ethical demand presides over probation, it will be quick to prescribe the methods of Providence on earth also, even if it is obliged to take us into deism, or materialism, or pantheism, in order to do it.

The trouble is in assuming that we must have a theory on this subject that is limited to our ethical approval. Christians do not hesitate to admit facts, which they cannot ethically resolve and explain, into their belief of the present government of God—that portion of the divine government which they are most familiar with and actually witness. Why should they expect to be able to settle ethically the dark questions of its supreme application and final results, of which they have witnessed and know nothing?

2. Another grave inquiry relates to the *method* of maintaining this hypothesis. It is largely the subjective method.

Maurice somewhere contrasts the characteristic spirit of German theologians and philosophers with that of the English. He says the English base their theories on authority outside of themselves; the Germans deduce theirs from within; and hence that there is no common ground for a mutual understanding between the two parties. The "New Theologians" seem to have this spirit of the Germans. Scripture, indeed, plays a prominent part in their theories; but it is Scripture subjectively interpreted.

By some mysterious process they are carried along the hints of Scripture to a conception of God as revealed in Christ, or absolute Christianity, ethically conceived and

defined. This they consider the supreme factor of faith and its regulative principle. Having gained this idea, and resolved and sanctioned it ethically, they take this, in turn, as the interpreting light with which to go back to Scripture and decide in detail what its passages mean, and to what use to put them. The method is largely the circle. They go, under the guidance of the internal ethical light, often trippingly through Scripture, taking their selected passages, up to absolute Christianity; and then, taking this, they go laboriously down to exegetics, and bring other passages into accord. Newman Smyth says: "Since in Christianity there is realized a supreme ethical idea of God, which faith may apprehend, for which, indeed, faith is the spiritual eye, it follows—so Dorner would assume—that we must determine what is Scripture, and interpret God's word, and also construct Christian theology, in harmony with, and under the supreme influence of, this real, absolute Christianity, or God manifest in Christ. Christianity can be read scientifically only in its own pure light" (Int. to Dorner on "The Future State," p. 11). Dorner himself says, as quoted by Smyth: for dogmatic and propositional theology, "the subject is faith with its contents appropriated from the sacred Scripture, by which it has continually to show itself Christian. The supreme fact in this (*sic*) contents of faith is the Christian idea of God. From it, as the highest unity and truth, are all statements of faith, and all Christian truth, immediately or mediately derived" (*idem*, p. 9).

In perfect consistency with this subjective method, Dorner uses these significant words: "That some are damned rests on *preponderant* exegetical grounds (but that gives no dogmatic proposition, because this must be derived also from the principle of faith)" ("The Future State," p. 127).

Thus the exegetical method of the "New Theologians" on this subject amounts to this: They take their ethical generalization, or—which means about the same thing—

their ethical postulates,—often mistaking for these their ethical sentiments, and often mistaking for these mere ethical sentimentality,—and therewith form a scourge with which to drive from the witness-stand all passages of Scripture that imply that probation is confined to this life, and all antagonistic demands of conscience or reason, and then frame a verdict on the testimony that is left. It virtually becomes a process of chasing off sacred testimony with personal ethics. The whole system bears the personal color, and unconsciously blushes with the real wrong.

Having gone through the Word in this way, and brought its teachings into harmony with their hypothesis, having themselves a system that does not need to have a revelation, they very naturally speak disparagingly and superciliously of a text-theology, and especially of a doctrine of probation that is unfortunate enough to lean on inspiration, and is not able to go alone. Yet, if they chance to find a text, like that in Peter, which they can interpret so as to have it favor their view, there are none others who make a more vigorous use of a slender staff.

We do not deny that it is proper for theologians to make use of a general deduction from Scripture to assist them in interpreting difficult passages. By a full and fair study of revelation they may form a conception of the system taught in it; and then it is right for them to use this system in considering the obscure parts. This principle is well understood and admitted. It is the old truth of the influence of the analogy of faith in interpretation. Nor is it denied that in forming the general conception the individuality of the theologian will have great influence; and that it will play an active part in every system of theology and interpretation. But great care must be taken to keep it subordinate, and to have the general conception, when reached, the ideal of revelation, and not merely the ideal of the theologian. The objection to the course of the "New Divines" is, that they recognize the

subjective element as having a *right* to act a prominent part in deciding what the absolute Christianity, the ideal of revelation, is. The internal factor becomes, from the start, an authorized master-power. It calls up "the spirits from the vasty deep," and sets them over the Word. Instead of being kept in the background and regarded as an unavoidable blemish of human work, it is clothed with authority and put on the throne as joint ruler with Scripture—and practically not second. Professor Harris says: "The Christian consciousness does not create Christianity, but it is capable of distinguishing that which is not and that which is Christianity. It therefore has a kind of authority. Its authority is co-ordinate, but not the less real. Its function, then, may be considered both the development and the testing of progressive theology" (*Andover Review*, Oct. 1884, p. 345).

Now, as we see the eagerness, of which we have spoken, to abate, by an ethical process, the opposition of revelation to a future probation, the question arises: How did the apostles and other sacred writers give the dogmatic evidence which we find in their teachings, on the side of a greater limitation of probation? Did they utter such sentiments from a clear insight of their truth, out of their own spiritual consciousness, or on a basis of revelation and divine authority? If they were not merely speculating and conjecturing; if they stated what they knew, either of their own knowledge or from inspiration, in the intimations which they give of their dogmatic belief on this subject; is not this, in either case, sufficient ground for us to stand on for holding the same dogmatic belief?

If their deeper insight enabled them to see the ethical necessity and reality of an earth-limited trial, or a trial within the bounds of life somewhere, and if we believe they had this insight and uttered it, this certainly justifies us for occupying the same dogmatic position. It, in fact, compels us to do it, or we impeach the integrity and unity of our mental operations. On the other hand, if we be-

lieve they uttered these dogmatic sentiments on divine authority, receiving them and resting in them on the basis of revelation, we cannot hesitate to accept them in the same way on authority, without impeaching the sacred writers for doing it, and arrogating to ourselves superior insight or inspiration. If they did not wait to have the doctrine of the last things resolved to their ethical or Christian consciousness, before they accepted it, made it a working-basis of their faith, and proclaimed it, and wrote it down in Evangel and Epistle for all future ages, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, there is no justifiable reason why we should hold it in suspense till we can resolve it into our ethical consciousness, or why we should modify and transform it to make it suit our ethical approval.

In either case, the method of the "New Theology," as applied to this subject, throws discredit on Scripture. It impeaches the method of the sacred writers. It puts psychology in the place of inspiration. It substitutes philosophy for divine authority. It gives us subjective convictions instead of exegesis. It builds up a human system in the place of the biblical doctrine.

3. Another query relates to the *persons* who shall have the advantage of the future probation. Shall a few only have it—those who have had next to no light and opportunity in this world? Shall all who die unsaved have it?

If we start on the probationary extension at the demand of ethical convictions, where shall we stop to satisfy them? Putting Scripture aside, looking at the subject purely in the light of ethics, the interpreting principle of the "New Theology," we may ask: Is not the whole future existence of all souls probationary? Can we conceive, on the basis of ethical thought alone, of a free finite spirit, human or angelic, in this world or the next, that is not, in a sense, on trial? Must it not have the metaphysical power both of sinning and of right-willing throughout eternity? not the moral power, but the metaphysical power,—and, in this sense, be on trial? The conception of the arrest of

probation carries us beyond our ethical experience and insight into a realm of which we have in ourselves no measuring lines and no tests. Yet Scripture so plainly and emphatically teaches that probation has limits, that the advocates of its extension do not presume to say that it is universal and unlimited. They do not follow the native ethical light absolutely, nor the scriptural light absolutely, but make a compromise between the two. Dorner, enlarging on the scriptural intimations and retrenching on the ethical, finds the limit in the absolute choice of evil by the rejection of Christ,—that is, in the sin against the Holy Ghost. Newman Smyth, representing his view, says: "No man will be finally judged until he shall have definitely rejected the manifestation of God's love in the offer of Christ, or, in other words, shall have committed the sin against the Holy Ghost" ("The Future State," p. 14). But Dorner refuses to recognize the liberty which the soul has when it has made sin its final choice as a human freedom. He says: "Some may be eternally damned, so far as the abuse of freedom continues eternally: but without the possibility of the restoration of freedom, man has passed into another class of beings, and, regarded from the stand-point of the idea of man, is a mere ruin" (*idem*, p. 135). As if a degradation in classification were any relief!

Dr. Munger also argues for a probation that is boundless, and unlimited by any thing short of fixedness of character. He says: "It is simpler and more scientific to say that man has but one probation; but, by its nature, it cannot have any bounds in time, whether of worldly life or of world-age. It may, indeed, synchronize with world-age, but only because that goal of time is postponed till the problem of existence has been solved by every human being. But probation will not be determined by the world-age, but by its own laws. It ends whenever character is fixed,—if, indeed, we have any right to use a word so out of keeping with moral freedom,—and it is not pos-

sible to attach any other bound or limit to it. And character is fixed in evil when all the possibilities of the universe are exhausted that would alter the character" ("The Freedom of Faith," pp. 42, 43).

Thus the more pronounced theorists do not venture on an absolute denial of a limit, while the more moderate ones restrict the limits within much narrower compass, but without any common restricting principle.

Ethically, they find great practical difficulty in telling what the limits shall be. The tendency is to open the doors ever more widely, and enlarge the area of probation. The theory generally begins with the ethical demand that the doors shall be open so that those who die without ever having heard of Christ shall enter; and then enlarges itself thus: and if these may enter, then those who have merely heard his name; and if these, then those who have heard much about him, but with minds clouded with invincible prejudice or ignorance; and if these, then those who have heard and been convinced, but have deferred accepting him till overtaken with death; and if these, then those who have resisted the Spirit and rejected Christ, but without intending it to be a final and absolute rejection; and if these, then why not open the doors for all who, in the weakness and ignorance of an earthly decision, die with a rejected Saviour on their hands, unless, perchance, all the persuasions of the universe have been previously exhausted on them, and they have committed the sin against the Holy Ghost, and have thereby dropped down into another rank of beings?

The consequence is, the advocates of this hypothesis hold the doors of future probation ajar at every possible angle. There is no unity in the doctrine. There is no common standard of probationary appeal or thought in the system. The moment they undertake to settle the question of the persons to have the advantage of the hereafter of trial, infinite diversity reigns. No two have the same theory. Each lets in those whom it suits him to let in.

It will not do to seek relief from this human confusion by resorting to the omniscience and wisdom of God, and remanding the perplexity of deciding on the persons to him. For the whole hypothesis is the creature of subjective ethics; and this ethical demand, having discovered the necessity of the theory, having asserted what is necessary in order to meet that want, and having taken the whole problem into its hands, cannot now, just as it gets into perplexity, abandon its own internal light and call on God for help. If the subject is one that clearly comes within the range of ethical insight, ethical insight must declare the principles on which the thing is to be carried out, and it will have no occasion to avoid its difficulties by taking refuge suddenly in supernatural insight.

4. A fourth query is whether such an opening of the doors does not *disparage* the earthly probation.

So far as we know, comparatively few persons consciously encounter the historical Christ on earth and come to an absolute decision in reference to him. The great proportion of mankind, up to the present age of the world, have not heard of him. Very few of those who have heard of him have met the tests of a full opportunity laid down by the theorists we are considering. Does not this practically quite shift the principal theatre of probation from this world to the next? As the bulk of mankind — all the pagan world, all the unevangelized masses in Christian lands, all the human beings in conditions in which the apprehension of the historical Christ is impossible — pass over into the future world to have the decisive trial there, few are left to have it here. Such a meagre number out of the whole is hardly enough to make an exception, or to give a color to the system. Of the two ends of the trial period that balances across death, that which reaches over into the future world is so much more heavily weighted with human beings than that which runs back into this world, that it goes quickly down, and throws this up in the air as if there were nothing on it. If we accept the

theory, either we must be indifferent to the arithmetic of the subject and to the relative moral gravity of the consequences of the two periods, or we shall totally reverse the estimate of Scripture, and, instead of regarding the present as the period of supreme importance, we shall look to the future as the one around which every thing decisive and final centres. We shall feel that the sacred writers were quite mistaken in the emphasis, the tragical and supreme concern, with which they looked upon the present unapplied, undeveloped, insignificant probationary span,—a mere prophecy, in the case of here and there a person, of the abounding rich probation that is waiting to overtake the race in the world to come. This bright prospect banishes the words of warning and entreaty of Christ and the apostles, and makes one rest confidently in the promise of the future opportunity.

5. But a fifth inquiry arises: What right have the advocates of this theory to *assume* that probation cannot end with the godless till they have had the highest light and the fullest persuasions possible for man? How do they know that the resources of the universe must be exhausted on them, the historical Christ be presented to them, and they commit the sin against the Holy Ghost, before they can have settled the question of their standing at the judgment? This is a great assumption. It is a remarkable assumption. Is it an ethical intuition? Is it a fact of Christian consciousness? Is it derived from the principle of faith? Where does it come from?

We see many persons in this life with whom the question of probation is apparently settled on a much lower basis. There are those who change their course of life radically at the utterance of a sentence, on finding a fragment of Scripture, upon the recollection of a scene of childhood. There are those who grow up into Christian character without remembering that they ever made a definitive choice to that effect. On the other hand, there are multitudes who seem to be settled in sinful character

who give no evidence of having ever consciously made a definitive choice in that direction, with Christ present to their thought at the time, and under his supreme persuasions. They deny that they ever passed through such a crisis. They have simply lived on in sin, adding sin to sin, and neglected the offered Christ. Nothing now moves them from their sinful drift. No persuasions are effective. There is no weakening in their chosen way. They seem imbedded in sinful character. And they die, to all appearance, in this state. We do not know, indeed, as this is so. We do not know their hearts, nor what their experiences have been. That does not matter. That is not the point. But can we assume that all such persons, who *seem* to have fixed characters when they die, have either had all the persuasions of the gospel exhausted on them and have committed the sin against the Holy Ghost, or that they have not had a full and sufficient trial? Can we assume that probation, to be complete, must have, in addition to the moral elements of the trial investing them here, certain other definite external factors? How do we know what facts, or truths, or light, must be present to the soul, to enable it to define its position spiritually? How do we know it cannot do it, unless the decision turn on the historical Christ presented in a supreme appeal? How do we know the soul may not as well define itself spiritually by its decisions on questions of duty and truth and spiritual light, as by the attitude it takes towards an historical person? The soul is spiritual; and it is quite as much in accordance with its nature that it should define its character by its choices in reference to spiritual realities, as by its attitude towards a definite concrete reality or an historical person.

The "New Theologians" are near giving us a probation which turns on external and arbitrary factors, according to which all the soul's relations to the spiritual influences about it, all its tendencies to fixedness of character in those relations, all its choices and seeming finalities of choice in them, go for naught in determining the bounds of its trial; but it

must have, in addition to all this spiritual regimen, a new and supreme object of choice, the historical Christ, before the question of its destiny can be settled. And this is urged in the interest of an ethical system!

But it overlooks the spiritual nature of the soul, and the fact that it is inevitably defining its place in the spiritual world from the start, without waiting for contingent or particular external conditions. The spiritual nature of man, the will, till imbedded in character by its own choice, is the most sensitive and susceptible power imaginable. A breath may furnish the occasion on which it settles its destiny for life, and decides the angle at which it goes out of this world into the next. It does not wait for the historical Christ or any other definite historical factor before, so far as we can see, it closes in with the finalities of character and is held in the meshes which it has woven about itself. All this the "New Theologians" ignore, and make the stupendous assumption that the presentation of the historical Christ is the indispensable condition of a full probation and of ripeness for the judgment. They give up what we see and know about the swift tendency to fixedness of character here, and resort to the arbitrary supposition that the soul must define itself in the moral world, not morally and spiritually only, but in reference to an historical person, with all the glow of supreme demonstration, before its moral destiny can be fixed. Can all this be assumed?

6. Another inquiry is, whether there is any real *unity* or *continuity* between the two proposed probationary eras. Can they, in any proper sense, be said to be parts of the same system, and be employed, indifferently, in the training of the race under the same method of salvation?

It is said that, during the one era or the other, the historical Christ must be presented with all possible persuasive powers of the Spirit and the love of God, so that there shall be nothing standing in the way of salvation but the soul's own supreme choice, before it can be ripe for

the judgment. And it is claimed that the future probationary era is but a part and continuation of the probationary process, or state, begun here,—so that the question whether there is one probation or more is an impertinence.

Let us look at this. It is clear that there are some very marked differences in the elements entering into the two processes.

There is good reason to believe that the good and the bad are separated in the intermediate state. The fact that Judas “went to his own place;” that the penitent thief was to be with Christ in Paradise on the day of the crucifixion, while our Lord said to the unbelieving Jews, “I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and die in your sins: whither I go ye cannot come;” and that an impassable gulf is represented as existing between the rich man and Lazarus in Hades,—is conclusive biblical evidence on this point. This, however, is conceded. Dorner, speaking of those in the intermediate state, remarks: “They are not all in the same state or realm—a view which must follow from the theory of a sleep of the soul. As for the pious, intercourse with the ungodly, to which they were subject on earth, ceases after death; they suffer nothing from them, not even temptation” (“The Future State,” p. 106). Equally removed, of course, are the ungodly from the approaches of the pious.

There must also be a great difference between the two states by the absence of the body, or, what Dorner calls the “relatively bodiless state, the soul having neither the earthly body nor the resurrection body.” In this state, Dorner thinks, “a still life begins, a sinking of the soul within itself and into the ground of its life—what Steffens calls Involution, and Martensen, Self-brooding” (*idem*, p. 107). In this state, he thinks,—as on earth the realities of the sensuous world are objects of sight, and the spiritual world the object of faith, these poles will be reversed to the disembodied spirits; and that to them the realities of the spiritual world will appear to be the real

existences resting on immediate evidence (*idem*, p. 107).

Furthermore, the historical Christ is in our world presented in connection with an historical process, out of the midst of the actual earthly unfoldings of his kingdom. As the good and the evil are in the same community, the appeal is made to the individual,—the Christ comes to him, veiled and hidden,—out of the midst of the complex concrete relations of life, making a moral choice possible, and furnishing the conditions necessary for moral training. In the intermediate state, on the contrary, Christ cannot come forth to the individual out of the midst of the historical process. The appeal is not made from the ongoings of the mingled and uncertain influences which mark the earthly development of the kingdom. Christ does not come “as a root out of a dry ground,” having no form nor comeliness, and no beauty that we should desire him. He does not appear as a king in disguise, *wooing* his bride, but as a king coming in his majesty, the disguise thrown off, in the midst of his regal glory and power. It is not the strange dawning of the historical Christ, changing for those welcoming him a night of blackness into serene and beautiful day, but the irruption and glare of the celestial Christ, leaving no room for moral election. He comes down upon the scene with a supernal atmosphere about him. He does not come up out of the earthly kingdom of God trailing its atmosphere. And though he may show the print of the nails in his hands and feet and the scar in his side, and may recite the incidents of Gethsemane and Calvary, it is rather as a theophany that he comes, as the victorious Lord, as the glorified Son of God, than as the historical Son of Man.

Now, can these two methods of probation touch each other and be continuous parts of one system? Is there a real unity between them?

In the first place, the absence, in the future state, of the body, the organ of action on material things,—to which reference has been made,—the absence of its appetites,

passions, sufferings, limitations, occupations,—this alone, with the consequent unloosening of the internal factors of thought, and the rioting of the hitherto restrained soul-forces in guilty natures, is enough to constitute a new kind of probationary action and life. This takes us into a realm and method of trial that is unthinkable to us. We have nothing in our experience or observation that can interpret it or give it reality.

Secondly, the different social influences investing the soul in the intermediate state,—the absolute separation of the good and the bad, and the consequent complete putting apart of the blended moral forces working in society and playing around individuals in this life, leaving the unbelieving with only their kind, save as Christ may come in upon them with a heavenly retinue from afar, or as he may devise for them some other new and special angelic or celestial ministry,—this is a method of trial of which we have no analogy and no suggestion on earth.

Then the third fact, which we have mentioned, that the probationary appeal, if there be one in the other world, can not be along the historical line, out of the midst of the complex concrete forces of earthly history, but must be a new and independent approach from another quarter and with other agencies, shows that we are altogether out of the probationary system revealed by Christ and described by the sacred writers as within the scope of the redemptive plan.

It is probable, indeed, that the advocates of this hypothesis secretly rejoice in the difference between the future probation and that here, because they hope the difference will greatly enlarge the area of salvation, and be the means of bringing next to all to the acceptance of Christ. It is only when they are defending the theory or making it plausible that they say they do not speak of another probation, or two probations, but only of one full probation. But the fact is, the two eras, or states, or systems, —by whatever term they are known,—have no points of

identity in common but the name. The advocates retain the name *probation*, but they spirit away the distinctive elements of probation, as we know any thing about them, and substitute others different in kind. The probationary subject, in his bodiless, brooding, soul-quickenened condition, is different. The probationary circumstances, with the total separation of the godly and the wicked, and of good and bad influences in the same social atmosphere, are different. The object of the probationary appeal, the glorified Christ, not the historical Christ historically presented, is different. And the probationary method, not the historical process, but some new process, of which we know nothing, applied by baffled and despairing love on the other side, is different.

Thus the two systems do not touch each other so as to be continuous parts of one system. They are no more alike than we might suppose a training *regime* designed for the inhabitants of Mars might be like the one God has given to those on the earth.

If the hypothesis were true, we should have this strange condition of things: a method of trial, of one kind, for a part of the race, and a radically different one for another part. Those whose trial is here have the evidence come to them through an historical process, in a way that does not compel conviction of its truth, but admits of it, and appeals to the moral sympathies, and harmonizes with a moral system. Those whose trial is there, if they have, as is imagined, the insight of spiritual beings in a bodiless world, and the undisguised play of their faculties, and if the divine Christ with his transcendent evidences and glory is presented to them, will show no option and no virtue in being convinced and accepting the evidence, and nothing can keep them from yielding but their own absolute choice of sin under circumstances when such choice would be morally impossible. It is unthinkable that such different systems can be adopted by God in the salvation of the same race, under one common redemp-

tion, bound to the same judgment, and with one heaven for the saved.

The different methods of approach to individuals in this world,—as under the Old Testament economy and under the New, in Christian lands and in heathen lands, in pious homes and in ungodly homes, in the case of the intelligent and of the ignorant, of the strong-minded and the weak-minded, of the old and the young,—all these diversities of the probationary appeal, issuing from an historical process, as they do, in the midst of commingling diverse moral influences, leaving the question of destiny to be settled by each one, under the brooding and drawing power of the law and Spirit of God and the agencies of redemption, which slumber nowhere on the earth, by his own chosen moral relation to what has been pregnantly and expressively called “the essential Christ,”—*these* diversities are only different forms of the same probationary system, compared with the total disconnection and violent antagonism between the earthly probation and a probation in the intermediate state.

If, however, the advocates of future probation, wishing to retain the theory, should attempt to minimize these differences, the question would then arise, What would be the advantage of such a probation? If the glorified celestial Christ is not to come down with overwhelming conviction upon the intermediate soul, and if the evidence is to come in a way to make it a test of moral sympathy and a means of moral training,—if, in other words, the trial is to have a genuine ethical character, connecting it in kind with that here, of what use practically would such a trial be?

Certain things are to be remembered about those in the intermediate state, which cannot be set aside by this minimizing process. The separations, social and moral, must still exist. The appeal out of the midst of the historical earthly process cannot be introduced. The historical Christ cannot be there in the outgoings of his earthly his-

torical kingdom. But the soul is there with its own psychological and moral laws and tendencies; and one of these evidently is the strong drift towards fixedness of character, together with spiritual blindness, the spirit of self-justification, a supreme interest in its sinful occupations, however spiritual they may be. If we reason ethically, from what we know of ethical laws, the soul, going on in sin through life, and going out into the other world in sin, must in a short time, if left to itself, be so immovably fixed in its own chosen way that no dubious word appeal would be effective. For Christ to come to it so as to make the choice of him ethical would be useless. The identity of the system there with the one here, even at a single point, that of a truly moral appeal, deprives it of saving power. Its advocates must regard it as a radically different probation, or they must make it a mockery to human hopes. They stand between the two horns of the dilemma: a new, unique, un-moral probation, or one that is worthless for salvation.

Practically, then, the value of the hypothesis to satisfy the longings of the human heart, or the ethical demand, or, if you choose so to call it, Christian consciousness, consists in supposing that there will be an opportunity of salvation in the other world that is altogether unique in kind, not joining on to the present probation in quality at all, only connecting with it endwise, so to speak,—not taking up the principles and methods which this leaves off, but going by a bound into a new system with unknown and unimaginable methods and possibilities. And this is, doubtless, what is secretly hoped. This is what is to remove the dark cloud hanging over the earthly history of the race. This is what is to clear up the question of theodicy. This is what is to sustain the law and goodness of God in full-orbed glory.

But the question yet remains, whether we have a right to construct a new and unique probation and connect it with the redemptive scheme of this life, in order to escape

our ethical difficulties. Can we suppose Christ thus doubles on his methods? On earth, however diversified the conditions of men,—whether before the coming of Christ or after it, whether in Christian countries or outside of them, whether having a full presentation of Christ or the most obscure and rudimentary knowledge of him, —with all there is comparatively the same method of moral appeal. With all the same willing and trustful spirit is the condition of salvation. With all there is the same mingling of good and bad influences in society. With all there is a commingling of proofs and difficulties in the evidence, causing it to turn largely on the moral sympathies and personal choice of the individual. Will Christ dispense with this method at death, and adopt a totally different one, when he has given no intimation of it, when holy Scripture does not suggest it, when the whole urgency and trend of the words of Christ and inspired men imply the opposite?

After all, some of the "New Divines" seem to have misgivings. The aim with them is to placate the higher ethics, to have a system that satisfies the Christian consciousness, a theodicy that harmonizes with faith. They elaborate a system that shall agree with the internal light as purified by Christian experience,—that shall answer, as an echo, to the profoundest human cry. But something is wrong. It is not satisfactory to them when produced. It comes out a speculation, not a child of insight. It does not throb with ethical and spiritual life, able to make its own way, not only in their convictions, but through the world. It is cold and intellectual. Its friends, while not giving up the supposition and the hope of a future probation, accept the prepared theory coldly and tentatively, unless driven into love of it by the peculiar blinding influence of defending and nursing it. They hold to the notion, and take the theory provisionally. Thus Newman Smyth, speaking of Dorner's attempt, naïvely confesses: "Important, however, as many may

deem this subject, I am free to acknowledge, even in the act of giving Dorner's fresh discussion of it to the press, that it does not seem to me to belong to the essence of faith, and is chiefly of interest to my own mind as it bears upon the more general and primary questions of our theodicy—of our whole endeavor, in the midst of modern unbelief, to make sure of the facts of a divine education and redemption of the world, and of a supreme revelation of God in the Word made flesh ("The Future State," p. 38).

So at last the system, as a system, topples, in the judgment of some of its warmest advocates and friends.

Since the foregoing was written, an editorial has appeared in the *Andover Review* for August, on eschatology, in which the writer argues for a future probation. The idea runs through the article that the saving power of Christ is dependent on a knowledge of Christ. This crops out in many places and in some curious forms. In speaking of the doctrine that saving influences may reach those in pagan lands who have not heard of Christ, through channels and agencies which have been called "essential Christianity," he says: "We consider it unevangelical and rationalistic, for it disparages the importance and denies the necessity of historical Christianity. It is perilously akin, in its postulates, to the Deism of the last century, which maintained that the knowledge of reason and the commands of conscience are sufficient, and which held Christianity to be not a supernatural redemption, but only a superior system of moral teaching" (p. 153). But *does* the doctrine criticised disparage the importance and deny the necessity of historical Christianity? At most it could only be said, from the stand-point of the critic, to undervalue the necessity of the *knowledge* of historical Christianity. The advocates of "essential Christianity," hold that historical Christianity and supernatural redemption, are absolutely essential, back of it or under it, as its ground. The difference between this system and Deism is radical and world-wide, except on a most superficial view, involving

great confusion of ideas, this being a doctrine of thorough supernaturalism, while Deism is a naturalistic religion.

Again he says: "This dangerous theory puts the gospel on a level with other religions, and gives it a precarious position. Reduced to a syllogism, the theory may be summarized thus: Men cannot be saved except through Christ and his gospel; men can be saved who never heard of Christ and his gospel; therefore, the knowledge men have by nature is really the gospel of which they never heard. But the proposition which has been slipped in under the guise of a minor premise is really a flat contradiction of the major, while the conclusion is far out on the road in company with forms of unbelief which were long ago driven out in defeat and shame" (p. 154). We agree with the critic that the conclusion which he *has drawn* expresses a form of unbelief long since "driven out in defeat and shame." But what is the conclusion drawn from? Not, logically, from the premises stated, nor from any summary of the belief criticised. It can only be drawn from the premises by foisting into the major, in the interpretation of it, a clause that is not there, changing it from "Men cannot be saved except through *Christ and his gospel*" to "Men cannot be saved except through the *knowledge* of Christ and his gospel," which is a radically different proposition, and begs the question at issue. It is this unwitting change of the major premise that makes "the flat contradiction." The only logical inference from the premises, as originally stated—which fairly enough, perhaps, summarizes, in this particular, the views of those who believe in the possibility of the salvation of persons outside the proclamation of the gospel—is this: "Therefore, men may be saved through Christ and his gospel who never heard of Christ and his gospel"—an inference which yet remains to be demolished, and which involves a gospel, still supernatural and divine, and that is in no danger of losing itself among other religions or sinking to the level of Deism.

This confounding the range of the saving power of

Christ with that of the saving power of the *knowledge* of Christ is a great impeachment of Christ's grace and of the largeness and efficacy of the powers of the gospel. It leads the writer of the article to hesitate and demur, and almost question the rounded and perfect salvation of the Old Testament saints in this life, regarding them, concessively, as "recipients of that which was preparatory to the gospel and directly predictive of it. . . . For the completeness of their redemption, they had clearer knowledge, after death, of God's love revealed in Christ" (p. 151). Was this for the *completeness of their redemption*? It leads him to hold, also, the virtuous heathen as "only receptive of salvation but not actually regenerate." It causes him to undervalue the spiritual evidences of regeneration in the character, by the side of the intellectual one, of having a certain kind of historical knowledge. It exalts a specific knowledge—helpful as that knowledge confessedly is, and at the head of all kinds of mere knowledge—above its strict ethical value, as is shown in every revival of religion by actual spiritual results, which in many cases seem quite independent of the amount of the true knowledge of the historical Christ possessed by the converts. It delays salvation, when the penitent soul, ignorant of the gospel, is, according to its knowledge, ripe for it, till the lacking intellectual element is supplied. It arrests the saving power of Christ when both he and the needy one are ready, till the slower agencies of an historical process can come and open the way for Him to do the work. It restricts the freedom and the flow of divine grace, designed to reach the ends of the earth by the coming of Christ, till man, or angel, or glorified Christ, can come, in this world or the next, and explain the central chapter of the world's history to those who have not heard it or understood it.

All this is done to maintain the theory of future probation. Yet the writer seems to look on the hypothesis, after all, as practically almost a barren and unprofitable one, even if true. He well says: "There is much reason

to believe that this present life is the most favorable opportunity for moral renewal in Christ. The gospel is an earthly, historical religion, wrought out in the deeds and sacrifices of the man Christ Jesus, who lived under the conditions of a human, earthly life, who dwelt in the cities and villages of Judea, who walked in the valleys and on the mountains of Galilee, and who died on a hill-side of this earth. Our bodily life is the acceptable time to be saved by Him who in the days of his flesh offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears" (p. 147). Again, he well says: "Those who have the gospel while they are in the body are in the decisive period. Neither Scripture, nor the observed tendency of character to become permanently fixed, especially under the gospel, afford any reason to hope that a more favorable, or, indeed, any opportunity will be given after death." To this he adds: "But for those who do not know God in Christ during the earthly life, it seems to us probable that the knowledge they need will be given after death" (p. 160).

Thus the writer concedes that this life is the best time for moral renewal, and doubts whether any who have the knowledge of Christ in this life will have any other opportunity. Yet he knows that multitudes who have a knowledge of the historical Christ here die, giving no evidence of having accepted him as their Saviour. Of what value, then, can a future probation be to those who have not heard of him, unless he comes in altogether another and a new way? Does not this show that the theorist himself holds his hypothesis from sentimental reasons, while regarding it as of little practical worth? For such reasons, is it worth while for robust, self-centred natures to accept an hypothesis for which diligent search does not discover a particle of proof in the Scriptures, which is contrary to the traditions and faith of our churches, which is revolutionary in theology, which by swift logical and natural tendencies hastens to a Niagara plunge into Universalism, and for which that and other errors stand with outstretched arms beckoning it on?