

STUDIES IN CHRISTIAN ESCHATOLOGY.

VI. FUTURE JUDGMENT.

THE belief in Divine judgment on human life is present at every stage of Bible religion. It is present not by accident, or simply as a bare item of information, but in virtue of what God is, and because the revelation of such a God must always come with the twofold aspect of mercy and severity. Thus in Amos and Hosea, the earliest writing prophets, judgment stands in the forefront of the new message, as a result and outgrowth of new vision gained into the character of Jehovah. The true prophet will not utter merely smooth things; even Hosea, ambassador of an unwearied love, declares to Israel how penitence alone can decide whether the future is to be for them a future of blessing or cursing. Farther stages in the development of thought are the new individualism of Ezekiel, and the great forecast of the Book of Daniel according to which judgment as ushering in the final Kingdom begins definitely to be anticipated as a judgment upon all—a world-embracing fact. Thenceforward the advent of the Kingdom is uniformly preceded, in pictures of what is to be, by the judicial, sifting act of God. This is a note struck decisively by the Baptist. In later Judaism, the influence of Persia bore strongly on this general eschatological idea. But after all Parsism supplied no more than hues and figures for the apocalyptic representation; the moral grandeur and solemnity of the thought is an old prophetic legacy.

It is clear that such an expectation, once firmly lodged in the religious mind, could not ever again be lost. At bottom it is a moral certainty, and the religion which has ever been suffused by a passionate moral interest must retain it or perish. To men who have begun to look for a great final

inquisition, with some real appreciation of its certainty, its inevitableness, its sure and steady approach, life cannot again be quite the same. It is not merely that such a prospect deepens the gravity of living : for pre-Christian minds its effect was, at least in part, to dispel the shadows cast upon the Divine righteousness by the prosperity of wicked men and the afflictions of the good ; also to persuade those who took it seriously that happiness upon earth is not the chief end of man. This service, by some reckoned elementary, it did then for devout hearts, and it is a service believing men will always need to have done for them anew.

Yet it is to Jesus that we owe the idea of judgment in its profoundest and most spiritual form. That is in itself significant. Not infrequently a vehement protest has been raised that on this point, as on so many others, the Church has misconceived her Lord. The unclouded prospect to which Jesus pointed, we are told, was later darkened cruelly by predictions of a wrath to come. But the real facts are otherwise. It was not apostles, but their Master, who spoke the words we know concerning outer darkness, the worm that dies not and the fire that is not quenched ; who said that for the betrayer it were better if he had never been born. Whatever our prudent allowances for the figurative terms of description accepted by Jesus from His time and nation—still, figures have a meaning, and here it is a meaning that shakes the heart. We are compelled to realise, in His teaching, as it has been put, “ how large a proportion the language of rebuke and warning bears to the language of consolation and promise ; the one is as grave, as anxious, as alarming, as the other is gracious beyond all our hopes.”¹ His purpose cannot have been only to scare the mind. He looked on rather to a great fact, none the less sure that it is

¹ Church, *Human Life and its Conditions*.

unspeakable, the appointed ordeal of "sin without excuse and without change."

It is unnecessary to labour the point that the same conviction is presented everywhere in the Epistles of the New Testament. The writers knew they were to stand before the Son of Man. Part of their common faith is that "it is appointed unto all men once to die, and after that the judgment." What is more, judgment is never alluded to as a discovery of their own, or as impending merely over the hostile world; it is something in which their own interest is vital and the reality of which has imposed itself on their minds in irresistible spiritual ways. They were as sure of it as of the forgiveness of sins. In both cases, belief was generated by contact with Jesus. He had left an impression of God which showed Him as Judge in virtue of His very Saviourhood.

I believe that all this finds an echo in the conscience of those who have any sense of God as a Power, not ourselves, making for righteousness.¹ No man can feel that God is, and is the moral law alive, and not feel that in due time He must express His whole mind regarding the ways and conduct of men. At all events, when future judgment is rejected by a moral theist as intrinsically unmeaning, the grounds of rejection must either lie in a special philosophy of experience or in a confusion of traditional thought about the thing with the very thing itself.

Thus it has been felt as a difficulty that the New Testament should represent final judgment as being committed to, or presided over by, Jesus Christ. How is it credible

¹ There are few points in the organism of Christian truth at which it becomes clearer that since Jesus, and for His followers, the distinction of religion and morality is obsolete. All true arguments for judgment are the arguments at once of faith and conscience. Both demand that the failure and vanity of sin shall be exhibited plainly at last for all to see; both insist that faith shall be vindicated as the one right attitude of the soul to God.

that before Him will one day be gathered not His followers merely, but all the nations of the world, or that it will then be His part to pronounce, with perfect insight, justice and power the lot of each human soul? Doubtless there are forms in which this may be made very unintelligible. Our fathers felt it to be sublime, yet nothing really is sublime which does not evoke a spontaneous assent to elemental truth. But surely here truth of just that kind is given. If Christ is central as Redeemer; if in history as proceeding now He has certified Himself to faith as One on whose person everything turns in the relation of God to man—and the Church has no other message—He will be central also at the end, and no human life can be conceived as closing out of relation to Him as the all-determining reality. He is the Revealer of the Father, and from the revelation present in Him something definite and universal, something laden with the last issues, must eventually come, for moral reasons, to each individual life. If any decisive close be in store for human life, then unless it were indissolubly bound up with the personality of Christ, we should feel the consummating climax of God's dealings with men to be strangely out of line and keeping with all the rest. There would be, as the only alternative, an abrupt and inconsequent change to a new disparate moral order, with caprice and incoherence fixing the quality of the whole. This principle—the principle of the moral continuity of life here and hereafter—is equivalent to the truth that the mediation of redemption is one with the mediation of judgment.

Some will deem this too speculative for a beginning; let us then make a new start, from a new point. It is not simply that death will place us before God, defining our attitude to Him unerringly; we are before Him now, and in the Gospel He is judging us as we live. Jesus tries a man by being what He is; the perfect Son, doing the Father's per-

fect will in life and thought and standing forth thereby as the great representative of our nature, its end and law. Here is a standard the quality of which is absolute. He was all this while He lived, but in addition there is to be considered His moral influence upon history. In point of fact, He has been judging men from the first century till now, in amazingly effective ways. The impact of His moral power on the world, for condemnation or approval, has been unceasing. Since Calvary, the world has had a new consciousness of evil. The fact that, as the Church soon perceived, He had died for slave, for woman, for barbarian, at once began to pour an uninterrupted flow of moral criticism on human life and conduct, and increasingly it meant at once protection for the weak and the inspiration of the good. And this has come from the personal knowledge of Christians that at each point in life they are being tried by their attitude to Jesus ; that His manhood is the criterion of ours, and that from its purity there is no appeal. Men have always felt that a present experience of this kind gives reason to believe in a future ordeal in which Christ will still be Judge.

Precisely here, however, is the crucial point which makes the thought of final judgment, even for some Christian minds, not so much difficult as rather superfluous and futile. To be frank, ought not this eschatological notion of a judgment to come, often mythically conceived as catastrophic, to be displaced once for all by the idea of the moral order of the world ? There is a judgment, but it is entirely immanent ; it fulfils itself to the last fraction in history. The best minds now think of moral life as an internally controlled self-regulating sphere within which certain relations operate unchangeably in accordance with laws of their own, so that any final scrutiny or verdict could only be an external and needless footnote to a complete text. At any given moment,

therefore too at the end, character fixes our place. Virtue is its own reward, and the vicious man is punished by being what he is.

No one, I imagine, will deny that behind this widely held theory we may discern great and arresting truths. The faith that the constitution of the world is against evil, that the mills of God are grinding all the time and with inescapable power, is a form of the fundamental moral conviction that there exists an objective norm of truth—the theist would say, a Divine mind of righteousness, whose view of the good or evil in human action is final and absolute, and in this sense abrogative of the diverse and fallible verdicts of men. But it is misleading to represent this true conviction as inconsistent with the idea of judgment to come. For one thing, that future judgment does not create facts; what it does is to recognise them as facts. As it has been put, they are not determined, but declared. Moreover, it is surely an important aspect of the case that the course of the world is after all a process, with all the partialness and inconclusiveness found in process everywhere. The good must reign, but to say that its triumph will ever be seen *in the present order*, in such wise as to convince all human minds, is to say something for which neither reason nor faith will care to be held responsible. The results of a temporal process, in their permanent and final form, can be fixed only beyond the process itself.¹

¹ Troeltsch, in his brief note on "Gericht Gottes" in *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, suggests that when Dogmatic lays aside the mythic forms of thought characteristic of Christian thought in the past it will find Divine judgment solely in the course of evolution. It is difficult to tell what is his criterion of freedom from mythic elements. But at all events the purely immanent interpretation of judgment to which he leans is little in favour with many writers on Dogmatic who are usually classed as modern or critical—as for example, Nietzsche, Reischle, Kirn, Kaftan, Wendt. What is true in Troeltsch's remark is that no attempt to paint the last assize dramatically, or in detail, has any higher claim on assent than what we call "myths."

Not only so, but the theory that spiritual laws are self-acting, that in history as it stands the moral ordinances avenge themselves to the last jot and tittle, exacting here and now the precise penalty merited by human conduct—this theory is hard to reconcile with the facts of life. Too many of the Psalms are sad complaints of the prosperity of the wicked for it to be supposed that the writers held to any such purely immanent construction ; and the effect of revelation, as it grew and brightened, was not to teach them that the world's history is all the judgment it needs ; it was to cast them on God, who at last will vindicate all who trust Him. It is vain to brush aside difficulties due to the moral confusion of history by the plea that virtue and vice are their own recompense ; that goodness, even when crushed by violence, is spiritually the conqueror ; that evil, even when triumphant, is cursed by inward rottenness. Such a view has a noble sound, but it may represent a spiritualism of the most unwholesome type, in which the good man is bidden or encouraged to withdraw into the inward recesses of his own conscience and abandon the world to the rule of injustice and misery. What alone will satisfy the soul is not merely that goodness should win ideally, but that it should prevail in outward fact. Not only its authority but its power must be vindicated ; and the assertion of future judgment is a vital aspect of the faith that vindication will be complete at last. But the chief fault of the "self-acting" theory is that it is at bottom irreligious. Appeals to the Bible are in vain. To describe God as but "an otiose Spectator of the moral universe, having no other function in relation to moral government than to watch and to approve the perfect manner in which rewards and punishments are distributed by self-acting spiritual laws," is a travesty of faith in the Bible sense from the prophets on-

wards.¹ To be even plausible,² as we have seen, this hypothesis must confine its view of vindication to the inner life of man; but in no Bible writer is man's inner life ever considered by itself. There soul and body are a living whole, and in this whole of experience the mind of God regarding man is conceived as being registered finally. It is not registered with perfect fulness in this world. "We see not yet all things put under Him." Hence to say that "God has no unsettled accounts, no outstanding claims" is really, and from the point of view of religion, no more respectable as a dictum than the better known "Whatever is, is right."

How firmly the religious consciousness clings to the expectation of a last judgment may be gathered from one of Ritschl's more peculiar views. His interpretation of the wrath of God is to deny its reality as a present fact, with the reservation that one day it will operate actively and finally. He had no love for conceptions of cataclysm, yet he held that there will in the end be a decisive and annihilating reaction of God against those who obstinately spurn His love. We need not ask now whether Ritschl's denial of the present wrath is in harmony with Jesus' mind or with the spiritual experience of the Church; what concerns us is his affirmation as to the future, and it offers a new proof that when the moral character of Christianity is faced, the thought of judgment, as a moral certainty, is unavoidable. View our religion in a purely intellectual or aesthetic light, and it is easy to get rid of final decision; take it as morally qualified from end to end, and inexorably the prospect of trial comes in.

¹ Cf. R. W. Dale, *Atonement*, 326.

² It is not even that; for as Charles well points out, the theory that a man is requited here by his present experiences is overthrown by the obvious facts that the better a man is, the less he enjoys the satisfactions of conscience, the worse he is, the more he becomes immune from its reproaches. (*Drew Lecture*, 28-30.)

Much of the resistance to a doctrine of future judgment is due probably to the belief that such a notion is incurably magical or external. It supervenes upon normal experience, apparently, by way of bare addition to what is already a quite intelligible whole. I have already spoken of this argument in its wider, and what may be described as its cosmic, relations ; but it is now worth pointing out that any force it may have is at once destroyed when the question is taken, as all questions of religious truth must be, to the forum of personal Christian feeling. Let us take it there. Each one of us may say : I feel that judgment is a present fact ; I judge myself constantly, and the ideal I see in better men judges me too. Further, I am always in God's presence, and when I sin the powers of His retributive yet loving will visit and chasten me, in outer or inner ways. Is all this, then, inconsistent with a final and conclusive judgment ? Surely not, and that for at least two reasons. First, the mind of God upon our life has not yet been expressed fully, and there is no reason to suppose it will have been expressed fully by the time we die. Even at the hour of death it will be partial, as it is partial now. But if God is omniscient, and if my life here is over, why should it be impossible for Him to pronounce upon its value as a completed whole ? Why should He not then reveal to me what I have made of myself ? If He does so, what is this but final judgment ?

Secondly, it may be argued, as before, but now in the case of the individual, that judgment follows at each moment, automatically as it were, by the very structure of the spiritual world, apart from any " dramatic " pronouncement by a Divine Judge. Personally I regard all these suggestions of an automatic working of spiritual reality as thoroughly unsound, for which Bible minds, who knew what religion is, would have had no use at all ; but, waiving this, surely the argument has no force except as it assumes that we shall

never be consciously nearer God than we are now. Does the Christian consciousness—as it is, say, in high moments of prayer—confirm this? I think not: we feel that we may yet enter His very presence, and bear on our naked spirit “that uncreated Beam.” Death, if it has any spiritual significance, may place us there. But if so, then the piercing realisation of God appointed for us is an impending fact—one day to be as real as what is happening now—and to realise Him in this fashion, His holiness and His love, will be to gain a sight of our own self which we shall feel to be His Divine estimate of all we are. And because it is the judgment of God, in whom knowledge is one with power, it will entail for each life an adjustment, wholly just and gracious, of destiny and environment.

The moral reading of Christian life, then, is bound up with the expectation of a Divine judgment. We can escape from it only by holding that nothing decisive can ever happen anywhere. That is a view with many intellectual attractions, but it has no point of contact with the moral sense, and whether it clothes itself in the doctrine of the eternal recurrence, according to which the wheel of change repeats its meaningless revolution for ever, or takes the less distinctive form of belief in an eternal homogeneous advance no part of which is different from any other part, in both cases its purely unethical character is too plain for comment. If goodness and right are more than words, our attitude to them, our acts regarding them, though now lost and forgotten here will revive and be found in a coming experience of trial. In the last manifestation of His grace—for judgment too serves grace—God will treat each of us as bearer of a personal life, who by his exercise of will has formed a basis for his eternal relationship to God. The future cannot be the same for all; and whatever be the differences, they will flow from no external or accidental cause, but the

righteous will of God. Each moment in which we set ourselves by conscious act before Him, seeing our sin, at least in effort, as He sees it, and speaking over it words of penitence and condemnation, is a foretaste and premonition of that last unveiling. As the pages of the New Testament show, this thought, that all is moving up to one great decision, imparts to what we are doing here the force and greatness of an eternal meaning. It is in this solemn light that all St. Paul's work is done. The certainty of judgment not only intensified his self-discipline ; by its ennobling power it quickened his zeal, gave inspiration to his energies, and set the figure of the coming Lord at the centre of all thought and feeling.

It is striking to observe how clear was the apostle's anticipation that *he* would stand before the bar of God. When we talk of future judgment, it is too often as something ordained for other people ;¹ but in reading St. Paul's words we are admonished to conceive it rather as what we personally must undergo. We cannot be certain about the responsibilities of others, about ourselves we do know something ; and in our best moments we are unable to find fault with the prospect of being tried by God at last. At the same time, this brings up a problem of some gravity. The New Testament has a great deal to say regarding the judgment of believers, but what can this mean ? It seems to bear that a man's destiny, of life or death, is unfixed till then ; yet

¹ In certain minds, doubtless, reluctance to assert the fact of judgment is traceable to a natural and indeed right feeling that we dare not anticipate the Divine judgment on a fellow-creature, even in thought. When we attempt to take to ourselves the functions of the Eternal, to assign merit and demerit, good and evil, we are beset with difficulties which are, fortunately, quite insuperable ; and as we grow older, this impression deepens. More and more we perceive the wisdom of our Lord's prohibition of the practice of referring individual suffering to individual sin. But we are bidden not to judge, regarding earthly trial or future destiny, not because judgment is unreal, but because in its august reality it pertains to God alone.

on the other hand this cannot be if there is any substance in the promise of the Gospel. "He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life," and it would not be glorifying to the omnipotence of God but derogatory to His faithfulness if any faintest doubt were cast upon the trustworthiness of that great word by postponing to the final scene the real decision on the lot of the saints. It would actually introduce a strain of unmoral caprice; for the whole question being whether men are or are not in fellowship with God, and in that fellowship have already the earnest of the future, it is inept to suppose that the reality of such communion could hang upon anything which transpired after death. Whatever judgment means for the Christian, it is not anything which can separate him from the love of God. But this does not alter the fact that in the New Testament believers are depicted as having in front of them a judgment in which they will be tried by works, not faith.¹ It will be a scrutiny of the entire outcome of life. And it is precisely this which makes the idea difficult. It has a look of incongruity with the truth of justification by faith—a truth which, in spite of some modern writers to whom the conception of free grace means moral anarchy, is the cardinal point in apostolic religion. How can it then be true that those who now have peace with God shall yet give an account of deeds done in the body? Is not this to lapse from grace to law? Is not the offer of grace a Divine proclamation, as it were, that judgment is out of the question as meaning, in a world of sin, universal condemnation? Moreover, we cannot receive the grace thus offered except as we own our unworthiness, as we declare that in the judgment of a holy God we have no hope to stand. It is a problem to give us something to think of.

We may find the answer, or a great part of it, in the fact

¹ Cf. Stange, *Moderne Probleme des christlichen Glaubens*, 188 ff.

that even in present experience God's love and wrath are consistent with each other. We know this in every hour of penitence; we know it, if possible more clearly, when we look to the Cross of Jesus. There the Father's condemnation of our sin is as real as His pardon; it is indeed something without which His pardon would have no sense. In the very article of forgiveness He reacts against evil, and by self-identification with Him through whom the mind of God is mediated we are enabled to react against it ourselves. But there is no reason why we should suppose this condemnation of sin to be excluded from His attitude to believers at the last. No more than than now will love make Him blind. No more than than now can He speak to us of what we are, and have done, except as good and evil in our life stand out for His reprobation or approval, in perfect openness.

But the point is that this judgment, real as it is, is the means of love, and serves love's purpose. It is by passing through it that believing men are finally delivered from the effects of their sinful history. Once for all, and for the first time, all things will have been laid open between the Father and His children. The peril of guilty secrets kept from Him will be gone for ever; the misgiving, too, lest He should have against us what we may suspect but do not clearly see. To stand thus before God, His searching eye upon us—knowing the heart and thoughts, and telling us all things that ever we did—this is a precondition of perfect and unclouded fellowship. It leads into this fellowship, and it secures it. To be tried at last, in Christ's presence, may be truly designated as the last means of grace for the redeemed. There will be pain in it, doubtless, beyond our imagining—the purifying shame of those who bend under the condemnation of perfect love, well assured that for all their guilt they will not be cast out. But our sin will then be shown us, not to

torture us, but in order that more and more we may understand the length and breadth and greatness of His mercy who knows what is in man.

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NOTES ON THE FOURTH GOSPEL.

XIV. THE RAISING OF LAZARUS AND ITS RESULT

(John xi.).

(1) THE raising of Lazarus from the dead raises the problem of miracle in a very acute form. For the naturalistic explanation of the acts of healing as *moral therapeutics* it must appear as an absolute impossibility, and so the record must be rejected as entirely unhistorical. Whether a rationalistic explanation as restoration from a prolonged trance has any probability from the standpoint of modern medical science is a question the writer claims no competence to decide.

(i) This is not the only instance of the raising of the dead by Jesus. The case of the daughter of Jairus is recorded by the three Synoptists (Matt. ix. 18-26; Mark v. 35-43; Luke viii. 49-56). The words of Jesus, "She is not dead, but sleepeth," are interpreted in two ways. "Either Jesus, confident of His power to recall from death, speaks of death as a sleep from which He will awaken (cf. John xi. 11), or He declares that the girl is not dead, but in a trance. Wonderful insight, if the latter is the case, takes the place of wonderful power, if the former. The words are ambiguous, but the evangelists convey the impression that they are recording a restoration to life, not a recovery from a trance" (*St. Luke*, in *Westminster New Testament*, p. 169). The case of the widow's son of Nain is recorded by Luke alone (vii. 11-17); and in this record there is no ambiguity of language. Although the circumstances do not exclude the possibility