

Future Probation In Christian Belief

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1975

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Chapter 1 -- "Are There Few That Be Saved?"

"I have eight thousand souls in my parish whom I want to get to heaven. It seems to me at the present time only about two percent will for certain arrive there."

So wrote a Bristol vicar, despondently, in his parish magazine some years ago. One can sympathize with his solicitude for the salvation of those unheeding parishioners. But -- is this the right view of the matter? Is it true that the mass of unbelieving mankind is headed straight for Hell, or whatever the equivalent which modern times have substituted for the old-time fire and brimstone, and only a relatively few pious folk manage to escape to Heaven, as it were by the skin of their teeth? Are we to conclude that Divine wisdom and power is unequal to any more than this scanty fruitage of all that God has said and done since the dawn of history? Is this hopeless creed really what Christianity is all about?

In this skeptical age questions like these demand answers. Of those who do stop to think about the matter at all, a great many just will not accept that if there really is a supreme Deity who created all things, he could possibly be so petty and vengeful as our forefathers believed. If we truly do owe life and being and all that we are and have to an all-wise and all-powerful Creator, such will argue, he must have brought us into existence for a purpose; we must have been created primarily for life and not for death. This is sound argument; there is such purpose, a purpose that will be achieved! So far from only two percent getting past the "pearly gates", it is much more likely by the time the Divine Plan for mankind is fully effected that considerably less than two percent will have failed to respond to the appeal of Christ, in such failure proving themselves unworthy of continuing life. We may be sure of that.

The idea that only a relative few will win Divine approval and eternal life, and the greater part of mankind, at the close of a usually unsatisfactory and generally unhappy earthly experience, be cast off forever, has grown up and become a feature of Christian belief through the centuries, but it was no part of the message of Christ. he came to seek and to save that which was lost, to draw all men to himself, not to condemn the world but to save it. (Luke 19:10; John 12:32; John 3:16-17). One might reasonably expect, surely, that the return upon such an outlay of Divine love and power is going to be a lot more than two percent. The traditional Christian view is well-founded when it lays stress upon the necessity of faith in Christ and loyalty to God as the essential prerequisites for eternal life, but it is unnecessarily pessimistic in its estimate of the effectiveness of God's methods in dealing with the consequences of sin.

It is likely that the present generation is able more readily to accept that man was created and intended for a definite purpose and place in the Divine scheme of things than were those of earlier centuries. People of medieval times thought of the future life mainly in terms of standing around the Heavenly throne playing harps and blowing trumpets to all eternity -- occupations which must surely pall after a while! Our modern wider knowledge of the visible universe, and our deeper conception of the infinite Intelligence and Power that is God, logically leads to the realization that this present earthly life is but a stage -- the first stage, a very important stage -- in a continuing experience which will

progress through constantly expanding spheres of development and achievement in eternity. Whether that destiny involves a future and everlasting life on this material planet, or upon another like it, or in a sphere of life based upon fundamentally different environmental conditions from the one we know, and involving a form of life which may be quite incomprehensible to us in our present state, does not affect that cardinal principle. The Apostle Paul declared that there do exist such different worlds and spheres of life when in the Fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians he spoke of a celestial world and a terrestrial world, celestial beings contrasting with human, a world whose life forms have little or perhaps nothing in common with the atomic structure to which terrestrial creatures owe their organisms and environment. And our Lord is authority for the fact that there is no sin in that other, celestial, world, only goodness, harmony and order. He told us, too, to pray for the day when the same happy state shall subsist upon this earth (Matthew 6:10). St. Paul tells us, further, that in the "fullness of time" God will unite in Christ all things in heaven and earth (Ephesians 1:10). That not only implies the eradication of sin, and of irrecoverable sinners, from Divine creation, but also points to the fundamental truth that only "in Christ", by belief in him and acceptance of him and devotion to him, can any of God's created sentient beings, whether terrestrial or celestial, receive and enjoy continuing, "eternal", life. We are told plainly that Christ is to "fill all things", "far above all heavens" (Ephesians 4:10), that in his Name will every knee bow, upon earth as well as in heaven (Philippians 2:9). Such tremendous words must certainly denote a stupendous Divine purpose within which the human race is assigned a definite place; the conclusion is irresistible that, despite the ignorance and lack of comprehension which is inevitable under the conditions of this present embryo life, that purpose will be accomplished.

Such high destiny demands prior training -- a time of instruction and probation followed by final judgment as to fitness or unfitness, worthiness or unworthiness. That judgment cannot be passed on any man until he first has had full and abundant opportunity to learn of the Divine design, to appreciate its implications, to accept it for himself and by means of the transforming power of God to divest himself of all that is antagonistic to that purpose and so attain the moral stature which enables him to take his rightful place in Divine creation. Not until every man, woman and child of every generation back to the beginning has enjoyed such an opportunity and made his or her eternal decision for good or evil, for Christ or against him, will the great Day of Judgment come to an end and the human race enter its perpetual inheritance. And be it noted that the Last Judgment of Scripture is not confined to a moment, the moment in which sentence is passed; it covers a period, a period which includes the process of investigating and of distinguishing between right and wrong and of separating the two. Furthermore the purport and intent of the Day of Judgment is not for the condemnation and destruction of sinners without opportunity for conversion; it is for the reclamation and reconciliation of as many as can by any means be reclaimed and reconciled and it is only when this endeavor has failed in any particular case that the final condemnatory sentence is passed. Hence the Day of Judgment is depicted in Scripture, not as a time of unrelieved terror and gloom and despair, but one of joy and happiness and hope. The Psalmist in Psalm 96 depicts the Lord coming at this Judgment as at a time of universal rejoicing. "Let the heavens rejoice, and the earth be glad . . . the fields be joyful . . . before the Lord, for he cometh to

judge the earth. He shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth." It is not always realized that the Day of Judgment is in some of its aspects a very joyous occasion, notwithstanding that it is also a time when, to sue the language of Isaiah, justice shall be laid to the line and righteousness to the plummet, the Divine law of retribution will operate and every man "receive the things done in his body". None will escape the implication of the principle so clearly enunciated by St. Paul -- "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7). Yet parallel with this somber but very necessary theme of disciplinary retribution there also runs the brighter one of conversion and restoration, for one very definite factor in the Day of Judgment is the presence of Christ with his Church for the express purpose of saving those of the unregenerate who can be saved. The whole Biblical presentation of the reign of Christ and the Church over the world prior to the culmination of all things in eternity has no meaning -- and no conceivable purpose -- unless that reign is for the conversion of the nations; the Bible is positive that in fact this is so. If the Millennial reign of Christ and the Day of Judgment are regarded as running in parallel, so to speak, over the same period of time, as being to a great extent synonymous terms, then a number of apparently contradictory Scriptural themes and statements are harmonized and a foundation laid for an understanding of the Divine purpose which will satisfy every instinct both of justice and love. It will go far to explaining the apparent enigma of the Divine permission of evil and provide a convincing answer to the question why, two thousand years after Christ appeared as the Light of the world, to seek and to save that which was lost, the greater part of mankind have not yet seen the Light, and the lost, although sought, consistently and persistently, not only by the Lord himself in person, but by his followers in every generation and land, are still not saved.

Be it remembered moreover that no man has life in himself and no man can save himself by his own efforts. The New Testament lays down as an immutable law that there is salvation only in the Name of Christ, that no man can be saved except through the channel of acceptance of Christ and his life given on man's behalf, and unquestioning loyalty and allegiance to him in eternity. Christ is the medium through whom Divine life comes to man, and there is no other way.

This, then, is the task; to discern the Divine purpose for mankind in the light of all that is known about the Creator, his attributes and his works, under the guidance of his revelation in the Scriptures. There must be added, to some small degree, the words and writings of outstanding Christians of the past and present who have had laid on their hearts this concern for the triumph of good over evil, and the reconciliation of such proportion of men to God, and their triumphant entry into eternal life, that it can with conviction be claimed that our Lord Jesus Christ has truly and gloriously become "All in All"! (see Colossians 3:11)

Chapter 2 -- The Light of the World

Belief in Jesus is necessary to eternal life. This is insisted upon by the New Testament and has been the conviction of the Church through the centuries. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved" is a phrase that was coined within a few weeks of the death of Christ and it is still declared at street corners by open-air evangelists and in many a tract and book designed to catch the attention and interest of the unconverted. A few generations ago Salvation Army lasses used to lead the "drunks" out of the beerhouses into the local Citadel and to the penitent form and if these in their semi-maudlin state expressed belief in Jesus a shout of Hallelujahs went up; the man was "saved". In present days attendants at revivalist rallies will answer the appeal to "come forward" and, perhaps somewhat more clear-headedly and intelligently, declare their conversion, and again the Lord is praised aloud for brands snatched from the burning and the counselors get busy to establish the new-found faith of the converts. But always the emphasis is upon the impossibility of salvation without this definite profession of faith.

In modern times this attitude is being questioned, not only by "modernists" who claim, with truth, that "there is good in all religions", but also by some thinking Christians who realize that there have been, and are, some exceedingly good men who nevertheless are not Christians. One might cite the case of the Mahatma Gandhi, who, had he professed the Christian faith, would undoubtedly have been considered a saint. A character manifestly fit for Heaven, yet living and dying in the Hindu faith, is he to be denied entry on that account? It would be easy to quote similar examples and almost everybody could find such among their personal acquaintances in daily life.

Nevertheless, the New Testament is adamant. There is a future never-ending life but no one will attain it without deliberate and intelligent avowal of faith in, and acceptance of, and the linking of life with, the Lord Jesus Christ. "There is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved" insisted Peter in Acts 4:12 -- "Believe in the name of Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved" said Paul to the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:34). "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart . . . thou shalt be saved" (Romans 10:9). There is no escape from this basic principle, so clearly enunciated so many times in Scripture; there is no possibility of eternal life for any man, however moral, noble, and good, unless and until he has consciously and intelligently accepted Christ and begun to conform his life and his being to the will and purpose of God. It is not that God has established an arbitrary dictum which he will modify or dispense with in individual cases when he sees fit; this demand is fundamental to the nature of Divine creation and things cannot be otherwise than they are.

There is a reason for this. We do not understand all the secrets of life and Nature, although researchers have made a lot of progress in recent years, but we do know that God is the source and sustainer of all life and the origin of all power -- energy. Without access to that power and life man would cease to be. "If he set his heart upon man, if he gather unto himself his spirit and his breath, all flesh shall perish together and man shall turn again unto dust:", said Elihu the philosopher. (Job 35:41). We do not understand in

anything like fulness the relationship and unity which exists between the Father and the Son, but we do know that the Son is the manifestation of the Father to man and the channel through which life comes to man. Hence the insistence of Scripture in so many places; "My sheep hear my voice . . . and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish." (John 10:27-28). "The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23). "In him was life, and the life was the light of men" (John 1:4). Now what the Scriptures call eternal life has a quality which does not exist in the measure of animal, physical, life which we possess at present. This is a life which must inevitably be terminated by death; that is a life which is infinitely continuous, never-ending. This life is one which, resulting from the original implanting of life in our first parents at the beginning, has been cut off from its sustaining source in God by sin, and is thereby defective and cannot endure. That is life continuing in full union with God through Christ, and being thus continuously derived from the immortal source of life will never end. But an essential factor in this union with the source of life is belief in, and acceptance of, and union with, the channel through which it comes and that is why the New Testament writers were so adamant that conscious and deliberate acceptance of Christ as Lord and acknowledgment of belief in him as Savior and medium of union with God is essential to salvation.

This is what is meant by being "born again", to use a very familiar expression, although a more accurate rendering of the Greek is "begotten again". The next step after conversion and acceptance of Christ as Lord is the unreserved and unconditional dedication of life, abilities and possessions to him for his service and the conscious deliberate resolve to live for him and in union with him, for the remainder of life and for all time. The Apostle Paul says that one who has reached this point has become a "new creation", that old things have passed away and all things have become new (2 Corinthians 5:17). This is the point at which the inner being is quickened by the power of the Holy Spirit in the beginning of a new and eternal life which comes to the believer through Christ; this is the baptism of the Holy Spirit. "God has given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (1 John 5:11). And this means something much more than mere mental belief in the reality and the saving power of Christ or an outward verbal profession of faith in him; it means a vital linking of life with Christ and willing association with him in all for which he stands, even unto death. "We are buried with him by baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection." (Romans 5:4-5). There is purpose in all this, for those who thus give themselves in complete consecration to the end of life become thereby members of the Church which is his Body, associated with Christ in all that he does in all the coming ages of eternity. These are they who are said to "reign with him" when he comes to rule the world in the day of his power; these are they who are gathered to him at his promised Second Coming when the "dead in Christ" are raised to life and the "living that remain" changed" to spiritual life to see him as he is and to be like him. (Revelation 20:4; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17; 1 Corinthians 15:5-53; 1 John 3:2).

This, then, is the path to the eternal state for all who, in this present Age, hear the invitation of God in Christ, and hearing, heed, and convert, and accept, and follow in the footsteps of the Redeemer, trusting in the efficacy and the power of his death on their behalf, until at the end of earthly life they find themselves at the beginning of a new and more abundant life in a sphere where sin and evil, frustration and imperfection, disease and death, are no more, and where Christ is All in All (see Colossians 3:11). From then on, life is without flaw, one of continuing progress and development and achievement in the ever-present radiance of the glory of God.

But what of those who have never heard, or whose capacity for hearing is so impaired that they cannot respond to the Divine invitation, and so, unwittingly and through no fault of their own, live life through and pass into death without even hearing, or at least without having ability to understand, the significance of the only Name given under heaven whereby men can be saved. What has God provided for them?

Chapter 3 -- Day of Grace

That it is the intention of God to ensure that every man and woman of the human race attains that state of knowledge and has that power and opportunity which enables him or her intelligently to accept or reject Christ with full appreciation of the consequences is implicit in Scripture. The gift of God is eternal life and God calls all who will to receive of his gift and attain the destiny he purposes. But it ought to be clear that no intelligent creature can hope to find place in this exalted fellowship without having first pledged loyalty and allegiance to the One who is the Head and Center of all creation, and equally clear too that such loyalty and allegiance must be based upon prior knowledge and be the result of a positive choice in the light of that knowledge. "I have set before you this day life and good, and death and evil . . . therefore choose life" were the words of the Lord to Israel (Deuteronomy 30:15-20) when he entered into covenant relationship with them; that was only a figurative arrangement intended to illustrate the principles of his purpose with man but because it did illustrate those principles it must be taken as a sure guide. In the outworking of his Plan, God will be seen eventually to have set before every man these alternative ways. It is laid down in the Gospels that Jesus Christ is the "true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world" (John 1:9). Unless every man who comes into the world is at some time brought face to face with the radiance of Christ that text has no meaning, John the Baptist was wrongly informed, and Scripture is unreliable. Upon one occasion Jesus said he came to seek and save that which was lost and upon another that he had come that men might have life, superabundant life. (Luke 19:10; John 10:10). In his parables of the lost sheep and the lost piece of silver he shows how intense is his endeavor to seek the lost among mankind and give life to those who will to have it and this in turn demands that he leaves no stone unturned, as it were, to achieve his object. There is no warrant for exceptions; in some way or another every human being ever born must at some time in his experience have that enlightenment. In the final stage of mankind's probationary experience before the ages of eternity begin, there comes a broadcast invitation "the Spirit and the Bride say 'Come . . . and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely'" (Revelation 22:17). That expression "whosoever will" is a travesty if it does not imply that every man has by that time attained sufficient knowledge and opportunity to realize what the invitation involves and is sufficiently free from the external power and influence of evil and of the Devil to have ability to accept it. If it is indeed the Divine will, as St. Paul in 2 Timothy 2:4 says it is, to "have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth", then quite obviously God has provided at least for all men to come to that knowledge even although conceivably some may in the outcome refuse to be saved.

If all this be true, it involves the obvious difficulty that many -- the greater proportion -- of men have lived their lives, and died, without having so much as heard of the Name in which alone they may find life. Even among those nations to which Christ has been preached, there are the mentally sick, those who have died before reaching years of discretion, and too, so many to whom Christ has been presented in so miserably distorted a fashion that by no stretch of the imagination could it be said that they have heard the Gospel. Despite all the efforts of all the missionaries and evangelists and Christian workers for two thousand years past, the fact must be accepted that the majority of men

pass into death without in any sense of the word coming into vital contact with Divine truth or knowing anything of the issues which are eventually to determine their destiny. Of this second half of the twentieth century in which we live, there are teeming millions of China, over a quarter of the entire world population, practically entirely without knowledge of the Name; India, Russia, Africa, the Arab world, the greater part of whose peoples know nothing of the Name; in this materialistic irreligious Western world of ours how many of the contemporary generations have ever heard of Christ except perhaps as a character in some film or musical feature in which none of the vital attributes of the real Christ are displayed. One recent estimate is that three-fifths of the living population of the earth have not heard, and on their dying day will not hear, anything at all about Christ, that he came to earth that "whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life". And this is one generation only, the generation which by reason of the tremendous increase in travel and diffusion of knowledge characteristic of our day might be expected, of all generations, to have the best opportunity at least to hear of his Name. Of the remaining two-fifths, by far the greater proportion have not had the claims and the call of Christ presented to them in anything like a sufficiently adequate fashion to give them a true impression of what it is all about. Of three and a half thousand millions now living, over two thousand millions will never hear the Name in this life, and will inevitably die without having made that decision and profession which is the essential condition for entry into eternal life. What is the Divine purpose for these, and others like them of past generations, all creatures of God's hands, to whom he has given life and endowed with such marvelous potentialities?

Medieval theology had a simple answer. These are the non-elect, born outside the purpose of God and destined to be cast away as the wastage of his Creation. Later thought rejected this callous dismissal of the problem and a number of hypotheses have been suggested through the years and found acceptance in many quarters although they are hypotheses only without Scriptural foundation and in some cases are directly at variance with the basic principles of Scripture.

The greatest problem is concerned with those who never knew, the "unsaved heathen", those who never had Christ preached to them, which includes not only so many in all Christian ages but also the whole of the ancient world before Christ came. His Name obviously could not have been preached to these latter. All these, it is so often suggested, will be saved in their ignorance provided they have lived good lives according to their own light and understanding. Strangely, however, if at some time in their experience they should have Christ preached to them, and, in the exercise of that same understanding, fail to be convinced and so do not believe, they are lost forever, having rejected the opportunity. That is the orthodox Christian theology and constitutes much of the driving force behind missionary endeavor and evangelistic revival efforts. One might be pardoned for suggesting that if this be indeed the case and all that is necessary to salvation is a good and honest life, with or without Christ, it were better that the Christian evangel be not preached to the ignorant, for without it they would certainly be saved whereas with it the issue could be in doubt!

As illustrating the abysmal ignorance of Christianity Characteristic of the modern western world, Rowntree, some twenty-five years ago, in "English Life and Leisure",⁽¹⁾ cites the case of one observer who overheard a snatch of conversation between a young couple looking into a shop window in which a crucifix was displayed. "Look at that little figure of a man on a cross" exclaimed the girl; "I've seen them before. There must be a story behind it. I wonder what it is!" "Something to do with the Bible, I believe" her companion answered vaguely, and the pair moved off. An ordinary young couple, probably looking forward to all that life had to offer them, but a life in which Christ would have no place because they had never heard of him. Not good enough for heaven, certainly on that account; but, do they really deserve the alternative, without first having a chance?

A somewhat related case is that of babies and children dying young before they could be capable of understanding the Gospel, and of mentally deficient individuals who are incapable of understanding it anyway. Are these also to be accounted failures of the Divine creative Spirit, waste material not coming up to standard and so discarded? Not so, say the hearts of Christian thinkers; despite the conditions laid down by the Scriptures, these must be accorded entry into the future felicity where they will no longer be immature or irresponsible. Because of their innocence, or because of their deficiency, they must be excused the necessity of believing into Christ and will thus be saved nevertheless. Some old-time ministers used to enthuse over the early demise of some sweet child on the ground that it had not lived long enough to sin and therefore had ensured its eternal salvation. Here again it would logically follow that the surest aid to the attainment of heaven is inability to understand or fulfill the conditions laid down for entry!

Closely allied to all these are the peoples to whom Christ has been presented in terms so alien to his character and teaching that they have heard of the Name, not with appreciation and gladness, but with revulsion and horror. The conduct of the soldiers and priests of Spain during their conquest of Central and South America in the Sixteenth Century is a marked example. The people of those lands, civilized after their own fashion, found themselves assailed by a horde of blood thirsty ruffians who pillaged, ravished and murdered without restraint, compelling their unfortunate victims to abandon their own religion and submit to baptism into the name of Christ. Many who refused were burnt at the stake. They died, having had Christ preached to them by merciless tyrants, and they refused to accept him, and who could blame them? Are they eternally lost therefore? Can we say that God endorsed the deeds of those buccaneering conquerors, and these who turned shudderingly away from the religion and the God they proclaimed thereby condemned themselves in his pure sight? There is an old Irish tradition associated with the name of St. Patrick, recounted by Squire in "Celtic Myth and Legend".⁽²⁾ It seems that three centuries before the saint's lifetime one Ossian, of the Irish kingly line, was out hunting and encountered a fair maiden who turned out to be Niamh, daughter of the British sea-god Mahannan. Ossian married her and they lived happily beneath the sea for three hundred years. Desiring then to re-visit Erin to look up his old friends, he was provided by Niamh with a winged horse and warned not to let his feet touch Irish soil, for if he did so, he would never return to her. Unfortunately, finding two men struggling with a heavy stone, he jumped off his horse to help them, and immediately his

eternal youth left him and he found himself on the ground, a blind, grey-haired and withered old man. In this condition he was taken to St. Patrick, who told him that the old pagan days were ended and Christ was now preached; if he would repent, the joys of heaven would be his but if not, then the terrors of hell, where all his old comrades of three centuries earlier were now lying in anguish. Ossian was prepared to repent and be converted, but he could not believe that St. Patrick's God would close heaven to his old friends who had never had his chance. The stern old saint insisted that they were eternally lost, and nothing could be done for them. Then if that be so, said Ossian, and if that be your God, then I go with my old comrades, whether they be at the feast or in the fire. So he died unregenerate. The story is only a legend; it may be founded upon some actual incident in the Life of St. Patrick, but theologically it points to a grave defect in a system of Christian belief which has changed but little since St. Patrick's day. And although many other instances of the preaching of a miserably distorted caricature of Christ in both past and present could be adduced, they would do little more than confirm this salient fact, that a great many of earth's peoples have had Christ preached to them in so misleading a fashion that no fair-minded person would blame them for rejecting him. All such are in no better position than the millions who have never heard of him at all. Like them, they have not yet had brought to them the gladsome news of the only name given under heaven whereby men can be saved.

A factor which is often slurred over is the position of intelligent professors of other religious faiths -- the Jew, the Moslem, the Buddhist, and so on. None of these faiths give Christ his rightful place even although the Jew and the Moslem worship the same God as does the Christian. When one considers the outstanding witness and faithfulness to God and his righteousness manifested by so many sons of Israel in ancient times and the continuing witness preserved by at least a remnant among them during this present Christian Age it would seem illogical to deny such a place of some kind in the future Divine purpose; and yet, these same stalwarts either never accepted Christ because they lived before his Advent or, in the case of many who lived in later times, definitely opposed and repudiated him. This, too, despite their loyalty to the God of Israel who is also the God of the Christian. The dilemma here is, are they admitted to eternal felicity because of their faithfulness to God despite their denial of Christ, or are they doomed forever because of their denial of Christ despite their faithfulness to God?

Something of the same kind applies to the sincere Moslem. It is sometimes forgotten in Christian circles that the lifework of Mahomet was to replace idol and Nature worship among the Arabs by the worship and service of the One true God, and to Mahomet that God was the One also revered by the Jews. The excesses committed by his followers have diverted attention from the higher aspects of the Moslem faith and many do not stop to consider that so-called Christians were doing much the same kind of things to fellow-Christians or to Jews at much the same time in history. It remains that through the ages there have been many high-minded men among the followers of the Arabian prophet who have manifested a valid understanding of the ways of God and a sterling faith in him. The Moslem differs from the orthodox Jew in that he holds Jesus of Nazareth to have been a prophet sent from God although only ranking with Moses and Elijah and Mahomet. The lives of many such men compare equally with those of many sincere Christians and the

only fundamental difference is their refusal to accept the Divinity of Christ and to place their trust in him as Savior and Lord. They are sincere in their allegiance to God, but they will not accept his Son. The same dilemma presents itself as with the Jew.

Consider also adherents to the faith preached by Gautama Buddha. Buddhism is a newer faith than is Christianity, only some thirteen centuries old, but even so has spread through most Eastern lands and to a great extent supplanted Christianity in those lands. Even Western countries are being penetrated nowadays and a European Buddhist is no longer a rarity. It is a gentle religion and many who espouse it are good people, but they have no place in their philosophy for the redeeming work of Christ. In the countries where it is the faith of the masses it has become institutionalized and debased just as has Christianity under similar circumstances, but the fact remains that a substantial proportion of mankind -- some two hundred millions of the present generation alone -- are living and dying in the Buddhist faith and without Christ. Yet in their lives and actions and characters they are, many of them, amenable to the principles which Jesus proclaimed when he was upon earth; they live his kind of life and practice his precepts without knowing or acknowledging him. Like the Lawyer of Jesus' day who "answered discreetly", they are "not far from the Kingdom of God"; but, will they ever get in?

Faced with this imposing array of candidates for eternal life or the reverse, reluctant to endorse the old medieval certainty that they are all irrevocably lost souls, and yet conscious of the New Testament insistence that without complete profession of faith in Christ and the merit of his death on man's behalf, and dedication of life to him, there can be no salvation, the problem is usually tacitly shelved. It is very customary to meet with the suggestion that God has not revealed his Will in these matters, that the "Judge of all the earth" will assuredly "do right" and that we are best advised to leave the matter with him. Now with all possible respect for the sincerity of the of-times eminent leaders of thought, and others, who speak thus, this is simply not good enough! The whole basis of the Christian mission is involved. The followers of Christ are commissioned -- nay, commanded -- to preach the gospel in all the world "for a witness" until the end of the Age has come. The kernel and core of that witness is, "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved". It is vital that the evangelist is not only informed, but positively confident, of the implications both for those whom he does succeed in reaching and those whom he fails to reach. The Christian worker or missionary who is admittedly uncertain or ignorant as to the conditions upon which entry into the life of the future can be had is not likely to be a very efficient representative of the Lord Christ. In practice the trumpet gives an uncertain sound; the traditional evangelist proclaims faith in and acceptance of Christ as essential whilst the modern theologian increasingly holds that the ignorant, the immature, the incapable, the honest devotee of a non-Christian faith, will be saved at the end by the grace of God, and the merit of Christ's death, even though he has not intelligently taken that to himself.

The logical inference from this increasingly generally held position would be that the population of the future eternal realm when God has finished his work with mankind will consist for the most part -- by far the most part -- of people who know nothing of the offering for sin made on their behalf by the Lord Jesus Christ, nothing of his saving

power, nothing of the Father-Creator and his love for man, little or nothing of the standards of right-doing which are the laws of creation and by which their lives must henceforward be governed. They will find themselves in a world they never expected to see and for which they are totally unprepared, one in which the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of Glory, is supreme and thus acknowledged by those who did know him in the former life. They will be quite unable to join in that acknowledgment and allegiance and worship because they do not know him. This new world into which they have entered will be strange and alien and one for which they are completely unprepared and unfitted. And there is no guarantee that they, or at any rate some of them, are going to be willing to conform to its standards. Unless the man is truly converted and from his heart desires and accepts the ways of God, eternal life in the heavenly world could easily become an intolerable burden.

Faced with this situation in the celestial realm one would expect the company of the redeemed, the community of convinced and faithful Christians who have already attained eternal life, to set out straight away on a massive campaign of evangelizing and conversion with the object of enlightening these who had thus been admitted to Heaven on account of ignorance, immaturity or incapacity, without having accepted Christ, that they might eventually yield themselves in intelligent and willing allegiance to him. In fact, if such a company of the unconverted is to be admitted to the heavenly life it cannot be conceived that their unconverted state would be tolerated to all eternity. It surely must be obvious that if for any reason any did attain the future life without Christ they would not long be permitted to remain without him; it has to be remembered that in the consummation every knee will bow to Christ and every tongue confess him as Lord, to the glory God the Father. Christ will be All in All, and will fill all things. That demands that the unconverted and the unregenerate will either become converted and regenerate, or they will not remain there. So if it is indeed that God relaxes the conditions to allow the ignorant and so on into the heavenly land it is only because he purposes immediately thereafter to set about their instruction and conversion.

That is hardly the orthodox idea of Heaven. And yet -- is it possible that the instinct of so many good Christian people and serious Christian thinkers is rightly founded, that the all-wise and all-loving Father of all has provided for the ignorant, the immature, the incapable, whose disabilities are inevitable in the world as it now exists and has been so made by the shortcomings of man, so that even their untimely deaths do not debar them from all hope? Is it possible that the Scriptures do justify the expectation of some such condition of things as has just been described, reconciling Divine insistence that eternal life is only through knowledge and acceptance of Christ with the apparent enigma that God has not ensured that all men are given that knowledge and consequent opportunity in this present life? Is it possible that the Day of Grace in which repentance and conversion and reconciliation with God is possible, ends, not at the close of the individual's life on earth, but at the bar of the final Day of Judgment, by which time the individual will have had a further span of experience under conditions which ensure that he receives the knowledge and opportunity which he only partially had, or perhaps never had, during his first earthly life? It has been pointed out by many soundly-informed preachers and writers that the eternal destiny of the individual is determined, not at death, but at the Day of

Judgment; this involves an intermediate period during which repentance and conversion must still be possible. On such basis the problem of who shall be saved ceases to be a problem; the New Testament insistence that salvation is only through acceptance of Christ is upheld and there will not be one of all earth's millions who will not eventually attain to the full knowledge of Christ and make his decision accordingly. If any man fails to enter in at the last, it will not be because of his ignorance or his incapacity to understand, but because after being brought to a full knowledge of the Truth and understanding clearly the issues involved, he deliberately and consciously chooses evil rather than good, and reaps the consequences accordingly.

There is the story often recounted in evangelical sermons about the reprobate seaman on one of the old-time sailing ships who was working aloft at the mast head when he missed his footing and came crashing down to the deck. Picked up dying, his mates were just able to hear his whisper as he expired "Thank God I accepted the Savior between the rigging and the deck". The intended moral, of course, is to stress that no matter how late in life repentance comes, God will accept it, even though it be the last minute of the eleventh hour, and salvation is assured. This is of course good Christian theology and none would dispute it. But suppose -- just suppose -- that the sailor had repented, not in the five conscious seconds before death, but during the five conscious seconds after death! Can it be conceived that God would refuse to accept the repentant one on the ground of that ten seconds delay? Is it reasonable to think that if the All-Highest is prepared to overlook forty, fifty, sixty years of refusal he is unduly concerned about a few more seconds or even that it has taken the experience of death to change the man's mind. In this connection a leading modern Anglican theologian, R. H. Charles, has said ("Critical History of the Doctrine of a Future Life"), "The idea that forgiveness is impossible in the next life has only to be stated in order to be rejected, for till absolute fixity of character is reached, repentance and forgiveness, being moral acts, must be possible under a perfectly moral Being".(3) This is an important principle; until a man has deliberately rendered himself incapable of repentance -- and this condition will be alluded to more fully hereafter -- there must always remain the possibility, whether death has intervened or not. The love of God and the appeal of the Gospel transcends the grave. It is necessary therefore to distinguish between the position before God of the individual at death and at the final judgment of mankind at the end. This was stressed more than a century ago by the celebrated Methodist theologian Dr. W. B. Pope, who said "the fixed and unalterable state of man is always associated with the Day of Judgment and its issues, and not with the day of death. We must not antedate these issues or interfere with the full work of probation".

When therefore Jesus spoke of the men of Jonah's Nineveh finding things in the Day of Judgment "more tolerable" than the unrepentant generation of his own day; when Paul told the men of Athens that God had "looked beyond" the "times of ignorance" and appointed a Day in the which he would judge the world in righteousness; when Peter talked about the coming again of Jesus Christ to institute "times of restitution of all things promised by all the prophets since the world began", and James at the first Apostolic Conference foresaw the time then the "residue of men, all the nations" would "call upon the name of the Lord", there was being laid the foundations of an understanding of the

Divine purpose which envisaged a universal opportunity, for the living and the dead, to hear of the grace of God in Christ. The scriptural basis upon which such an expectation is built must form the subject of another chapter.

Chapter 4 -- "To Seek and to Save"

A vital principle of the Divine purpose for humankind is enshrined in the well-known saying of Jesus "the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). God desires to win men back to himself; it is not a question of offering a rather grudging opportunity of avoiding the "wrath to come" by a profession of faith and allegiance, and the firm closing of the door against all who are not quick to avail themselves of the offer at first hearing. Here is a position in which all men are lost, being alienated from God and unable to help themselves, To use the human language adopted by Luke in his Gospel, God sends his Son, to seek the lost wherever they may be and, by any means if it be possible, save them from their ruined condition and bring them into the safety and splendor of the Father's house. As if to stress the intensity of that determination and that search Jesus gave three parables -- word pictures -- the theme of which is Heaven's incessant quest for the lost, the erring and the wandering, and the joy that is in Heaven when the object of that quest is achieved.

These parables speak of that which is lost; the lost sheep, the lost piece of silver, the lost son. One sheep out of a hundred was lost, one piece of silver out of ten was lost, one son out of two was lost. The first two lay the principal stress on Heaven's initiative in prosecuting the search diligently until success is achieved; the third speaks of man's initiative and the part he must play in order to be restored. The entire thesis is presented in Luke 15; the woman searched the house diligently until the missing piece was recovered; the shepherd searched the wilderness and barren mountains until he found the wandering sheep and brought it home in triumph. In both cases an important element is declared; "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth" (Luke 15:10). The story of the lost prodigal son is well known. The son took his share of his father's estate, went into a far country and wasted it all in riotous living. Only then, in his extremity, did he come to his senses and decide to throw himself upon his father's mercy. The father did not wait and he did not reproach. He went out to meet the son and brought him home in triumph. He had repented, and that was all the father asked. "This my son was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found" (Luke 15:32). This then is the basic principle, that God actively seeks the salvation of all men, and even though it cannot be that any man will receive salvation without consciously and voluntarily accepting the conditions of citizenship in Divine creation, involving loyalty and obedience to God in Christ, it remains true that God will leave no stone unturned to rescue the wandering one from the error of his way. Like the earthly father in the story, the heavenly father goes out to meet the wanderer half-way and bring him safely home.

Jesus is said in 1 Timothy 2:6 to have given himself "a ransom for all". Without entering upon a discussion on the philosophy of the Atonement, this text does demand that whatever it was that the death of Jesus on the Cross achieved, it was for all men and not just a few. One of the deepest themes -- perhaps the deepest -- in the Scriptures is that of the redemptive power of suffering. We may not know just how it is that suffering borne on behalf of others creates a power that saves, but the Bible is clear that it is so. The 53rd chapter of Isaiah is positive on this as regards the sufferings of our Lord in the time of his humanity. "Despised and rejected of men . . . wounded for our transgressions . . .

poured out his life unto death . . . bare the sin of many." But even so, it remains that "being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him." (Hebrews 5:9). The ransom is for all; Christ died for all; nevertheless that fact of itself does not usher all men automatically into the heavenly kingdom. It is still required that men "obey him" by means of the pathway of repentance and conversion and reconciliation, becoming fitted to live the eternal life of the just. Hence there has to be pictured a process whereby all men without exception receive benefit from the ransom-offering of the life of Christ on their behalf which puts them in a position intelligently to understand and accept, or in the contrary case equally intelligently reject, the opportunity of eternal life in Christ. This is what is meant by the words of a preceding verse in this passage (1 Timothy 2:4), that God "will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth". This is the God who pleaded with his errant children of ancient time "cast away from you all your transgressions, and make you a new heart and a new spirit; for why will ye die? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth -- wherefore turn yourselves and live ye" (Ezekiel 18:32).

Turn, and live -- that is the constant refrain in the story of our Lord's coming to seek and save the lost ones. Nowhere is this purpose and intention more plainly shown than in his words to the disciples concerning "the regeneration, when the Son of Man shall sit on the throne of his glory" (Matthew 19:28). The time indicated is that when his Church is reigning over the nations with him, the time of the Messianic Kingdom on earth. The word "regeneration" means, literally, the giving of new life. That coming Age of Divine rule upon earth is to be a time of giving new life, a restoration, to the dying human race, of the enduring life possessed at the first before sin entered the world, life that will never end because it is in tune with Divinity. Peter alluded to this restoration when, in one of the earliest Christian sermons ever preached, he exhorted his hearers "repent therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; and he shall send Jesus Christ . . . whom the heavens must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began" (Acts 3:19-21). "Times of restitution" -- literally "restoration" -- associated with the coming to earth of Jesus Christ from heaven; times of refreshing from the presence of God. This surely speaks of some notable operation in the Divine purpose at a predetermined time as a consequence of which new and eternal life will be conferred upon many on the basis of the ransom which was once given for all.

To this Paul gave witness upon the notable occasion when he addressed the learned philosophers and sages of Athens (Acts 17). "God" he said "hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained." Here is introduced the connection between the coming of Christ for human salvation and the onset of what in ordinary theology is called the Day of Judgment. All too often that Day is thought of only in terms of judicial sentence; the dead are raised to be immediately assigned either to heaven, if virtuous, or the opposite, if wicked. This is an unfortunate survival of the mediaeval idea of a twenty-four hour day in the which all things terrestrial are to be wound up and the earth itself destroyed. In the Scriptures the Day of Judgment is a period of time devoted not only to the final judicial decree but also to the bringing of

the subject of judgment into a condition in which the decree may be pronounced with justice. In short, the Day of Judgment involves a process as well as a passing of sentence, and this is thoroughly borne out by the many Scriptural allusions which picture it, not as a time of unavailing sorrow when "trembling sinners meet their doom", but one of joy and happiness under the beneficent leadership of the returned Christ who still comes to seek and save the lost. Thus we have the inspired words of Isaiah, looking forward to that day "the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together he shall feed this flock like a shepherd" (Isaiah 40); "A king shall reign in righteousness and the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever" (Isaiah 32); "it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God, and he will save us. We will be glad and rejoice in his salvation" (Isaiah 25). Just as definitely comes the word of the Lord by Zephaniah "then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent" (Ezekiel 36:16-18). Perhaps the most vivid impression of the essentially benign nature of the Day of Judgment is afforded by the 98th Psalm. The earth is pictured as breaking out into a rhapsody of praise and thanksgiving "before the Lord, for he cometh to judge the world and the people with equity". This intervention of benevolent Deity into human affairs for the purpose of human blessing is characteristic of the Hebrew prophets and there is a wealth of Scripture passages in this strain.

The first assembly of Christian converts in Jerusalem during the early years seems to have achieved a relatively clear understanding of this subject; the Fifteenth chapter of Acts contains an account of the proceedings at what must have been the first theological conference in Christian history. The point at issue was the scope of the Divine purpose; is it confined to the salvation of the Jewish people, the chosen nation of old time, alone, or is there provision made for all men everywhere? The unanimous conclusion was in favor of the alternative. James, leader of the church at the time, voiced this conclusion. God, he said, is first of all taking out of the nations a people for his Name; by this expression he meant the Christian Church of this Age, drawn from among all people and all generations over the span of two thousand years. After this, he said, -- and here he quoted the Old Testament as support for his statement -- God will return to the nation of Israel and restore it to its own land and former position as a dedicated nation; "I will build again the dwelling place of David, which is fallen down" and this for a final purpose "that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, all the nations, saith the Lord." Since it is a fixed principle of Scripture doctrine that the restoration of Israel is synonymous in time with the Second Advent and the beginning of the Messianic Age, it follows that the Messianic Age is the period during which the "residue of men" are to have the opportunity of "calling upon the name of the Lord". The judgment of that "Day of Judgment" is to include the opportunity of repentance and conversion as well as the final separation into what Malachi, the last of the prophets, speaking of this same time, defines as "discerning between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not" (Malachi 3:18).

Apart from the Church of this Age, believers in Christ who have "made their calling and election sure", to use St. Peter's phrase, and who by that time will have been united with their Lord in heaven, all who are in their graves must experience a resurrection from the

dead to renewed human life in order that they might participate in this final stage of the Divine Day of Grace. That fact explains what are otherwise some quite perplexing statements of our Lord. He said that it would be "more tolerable" for the sinful cities of Tyre, Sidon, Sodom and Gomorrah in the Day of Judgment than for the unbelieving people of his own day. (Matthew 11:21-24; 10:15; Mark 6:11). He regarded the unbelief of those ancient cities as less reprehensible than that of his own generation; it is clear from his words that there will be, in the Day of Judgment, degrees of guilt for which retribution will be exacted. Some will find the going harder than others and this is in accord with St. Paul's maxim that "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7). The moral corruption of the Cities of the Plain was admittedly greater than that of First Advent Jewry, but the degree of light given to the latter was greater and Jesus assessed their culpability accordingly. In fact, said he, if the mighty works done in their sight had been done in Sodom and Gomorrah those cities would have repented. From this it is clear that the Day of Judgment includes provision for retributive disciplines graded in degree according to the character formed, or misformed, in past life, and all with a view to the ultimate reformation of the guilty one, no matter how degraded. In fact the words of Jesus are rather startlingly corroborated in the Old Testament when to Ezekiel the Lord declared his intention of restoring both guilty Jerusalem and guilty Sodom (Ezekiel 16:49-55). This, obviously, can only be in the future Messianic Age and this promised restoration can only be so that both Jerusalem and Sodom, with all of like pattern, may have the opportunity of profiting by the even greater light of that blessed Age, and if they will, repent, and convert, and be healed.

This is what Paul had in mind when, in his defense before Felix, he alluded to the fact that according to the Scriptures "there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust" (Acts 24:15). These, good and bad alike, are to be the subjects of that Messianic Kingdom whose administration is to be in the hands of Christ and his Church, ruling from the heavens, and this is why Paul, again, declares that "the saints shall judge the world" (1 Corinthians 6:2). Writing to the Romans he reminds them that "the earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God" (Romans 8:19), which demonstrates that in his view the Day of Judgment, when this manifestation takes place, is not something to be dreaded by men, even godless men, but to be ardently anticipated -- even though men in general as yet know it not. Small wonder that in the closing chapters of the Bible one has the magnificent vision of Christians of this Age, having overcome the Devil and all evil, seated upon thrones and reigning with Christ the thousand years of mankind's judgment, and that judgment pictured in terms of a river of life, and trees of life, set there "for the healing of the nations", and no more the curse of sin (Revelation 21:4-7; 22:17).

The opportunity will be there for all, but each man must individually accept. "I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely . . . and I will be his God, and he shall be my son." But the unclean and unregenerate will never enter the holy city. So the appeal goes out, in that day, from the Lord the Spirit and his Church the Bride -- "The Spirit and the Bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

Chapter 5 -- GALLERY OF WITNESSES

That probation after death is provided for in the Divine purpose has been and is asserted by a goodly number of ministers and theologians both in sermon and in book. The basic principle is perhaps nowhere better stated than by Archdeacon R. H. Charles already partially quoted. "The idea that forgiveness is impossible in the next life has only to be stated in order to be rejected; for till absolute fixity of character is reached, repentance and forgiveness, being moral acts, must be possible under a perfectly moral Being. . . . thus this conception" (that men after death are incapable of further ethical progress) "is mechanical and unethical if judged in the light of Christian theism. It precludes moral change in beings who are under the rule of a perfectly moral Being, who wills not that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance"[note 3] "The theology of the New Testament with its doctrine of the Fatherhood of God" he says, in "Religious Development between the Old and New Testaments", "demands some form of future probation"; there are those who "simply cannot relegate it to the region of Gods uncovenanted mercies, seeing that it affects so deeply the character of God himself"[note 4].

At the opposite extreme from the calm logic of Dr. Charles stands the warm-hearted spiritual insight of Dr. Paterson Smyth, one-time Professor of Theology at the University of Dublin and Rector of St. Georges, Montreal. "Our goal is to grow into the likeness of God... how many of us are even in sight of that goal when we die? If there be no growth or purification in the waiting life, what hope is there ever for any one of us of fitness for the presence of the all-holy God? Think that the great majority of those who die, even though penitent and striving after right, have much of evil clinging to them -- that many, after a whole life of ingraining their characters with evil, have brought sorrowfully to Christ at last their poor defiled souls -- that even the best is not without many faults and stains. If nothing that defileth shall enter Heaven, if growth is a law of life as far as we know it, are we not practically compelled to believe that the growth and purification needed to fit us for Gods presence shall take place in the great waiting Life? We are bound to believe that in that judgment no man will be lost till the Father has, as it were, put his arms around him and looked him in the eyes with his unutterable love and been finally rejected"[note 5].

Something of this principle, that growth and development must continue in the future life, was obviously in the mind of Dr. Samuel Cox, c. 1870-1890, Baptist Minister and onetime Editor of the "Expositor", when he wrote "It is not reasonable to expect that, while we are in this chrysalis and initial stage of our being, we should be able to comprehend what the final stage of our career will be like, if indeed there can be a final condition to finite creatures who are to live, and to grow, for ever, and who must therefore, one should think, be ever reaching forth to that which is before and above them"[note 6]. From this reflection Dr. Cox goes on to consider the unsatisfactory state of mans experience in this life, with no guarantee, in so many cases, of any real opportunity to know the gospel. "It seems hard and unjust" he says "that a mans salvation, a mans life, should hang on the age into which he is born; that the sinners of Sodom, for example, should have had a worse chance than the greater sinners of Capernaum. There are

thousands and tens of thousands in this Christian land today, who have never had a fair chance of being quickened into life. Conceived in sin and shapen in iniquity, inheriting defects of will and taints of blood, cradled in ignorance and vice, they have hardly heard the name of Christ save as a word to curse by. And there are thousands more to whom the faith of Christ has been presented in forms so meager and narrow, or in forms so fictitious and theatrical, that the only wonder is that so many of them care to worship him at all. . . . What shall we say then? For myself I can only say that I see no way out of the difficulty, no single loophole of escape, so long as we assume what the Bible does not teach, that there is no probation beyond the grave, that no moral change is possible in that world towards which all the children of time are traveling.... In an immense variety of ways the New Testament teaches us to believe that men who die in their sins will be adjudged to a state in which for an age, or for ages if need be, they will be exposed to a corrective discipline far more searching and severe than that to which they are now exposed, and by which we may hope they will be recovered to righteousness and life". So he sums up with "For the great mass of our fellow men, we may hope and believe that those who have had no chance of salvation here will have one there; that those who have had a poor chance will get a better one; that those who have had a good chance and lost it will get a new but a severer chance, and even as they suffer the inevitable results of their folly and sin will feel the hands that reach through darkness, molding men."[note 6]

By far the most notable protagonist for this conviction at the turn of the century was Charles T. Russell, of New York City Temple and founder of the Bible Student movement. Of Congregational origin but strongly imbued with Adventist expectations it was inevitable that he should bring the then current Congregational leaning towards future probation into focus with Adventist views regarding the nature and purpose of the Second Advent and in consequence he was one of the first, with his Anglican contemporary, Dr. C. A. Row, of St. Pauls Cathedral, to perceive clearly that the Messianic reign of Christ over the earth commencing with the Second Advent is in fact the era of future probation for the entire race of mankind. C. T. Russell, like others of his time, already perceived the essential difference between celestial and terrestrial natures and that the Church of this Age is called to celestial salvation, to be the evangelists and tutors of the remainder of mankind in the final time of probation, the Messianic Age. Similar views in a less matured form had been advanced previously by others, but it was Russell who saw clearly and laid down the fundamental principle that although the death of Christ on the cross is adequate for the salvation of every man, without exception, no man can attain that salvation without deliberate and intelligent repentance and acceptance of Christ and consequent reconciliation with God; hence it must logically follow that in some way and at some time before the final judgment every man must have a full and complete opportunity to learn, understand and accept the offer of salvation in Christ. "There is," he said in "The Divine Plan of the Ages" "an immense aggregate who went down into death without faith and hope in the only name given in heaven or among men whereby we must be saved. The vast majority of these never knew or heard of Jesus, and could not believe in him of whom they had not heard. What was to become of this vast multitude, of which figures give a wholly inadequate idea? What is, and is to be, their condition? Did God make no provision for these, whose condition and circumstances He must have foreseen? Or did He, from the foundation of the world, make a wretched and

merciless provision for their hopeless, eternal torment, as many claim? Or has He yet in store for them, in the heights and depths and lengths and breadths of his Plan, an opportunity for all to come to the knowledge of that only Name, and by becoming obedient to the conditions, enjoy everlasting life?

"To the view that God excuses many of them on account of ignorance the majority of Christians of all denominations assent, from a feeling that any other view would be irreconcilable with justice on Gods part. But do the Scriptures support this view? Do they teach that ignorance is a ground of salvation? No; the only ground of salvation mentioned in the Scriptures is faith in Christ as our Redeemer and Lord. Justification by faith is the underlying principle of the whole system of Christianity. When asked 'What must I do to be saved?' the apostles answered 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. There is none other name given under heaven whereby we must be saved.

"The Bible, which is full of the missionary spirit, does not teach that there are several ways of salvation -- one way by faith, another by works, and another by ignorance. While it shows every other door of hope closed against the race, it throws wide open the one, only door, and proclaims that whoever will may enter into life, and it shows that all who do not now see or appreciate the blessed privilege of entering shall in due time be brought to a full knowledge and appreciation. The only way by which any and all of the condemned race may come to God is not by meritorious works, neither by ignorance, but by faith in the blood of Christ which taketh away the sin of the world (1 Peter 1:19; John 1:29). This is the Gospel, the good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

"The thought that so many of our fellow-creatures should at any time be lost from lack of having had the knowledge which is necessary to salvation would be sad indeed to all who have a spark of love or pity. In the light of the past and present as the only opportunities, laying aside all hope through restitution in the coming age, how shall we understand the statement 'God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish (John 3:16)? Would it not seem that if God loved the world so much He might have made provision, not only that believers might be saved, but also that all might hear in order to believe? The key is found in the text 'Who gave himself a Ransom for all, to be testified in due time (1 Timothy 2:5-6). God has a due time for everything. The prevailing opinion is that death ends all probation, but there is no Scripture which so teaches; and the above, and many more Scriptures, would be meaningless or worse if death ends all hope for the ignorant masses of the world".[note 7]

Dr. C. A. Row, Prebendary of St. Pauls Cathedral circa. 1870-1900, raised the same question in his book "Future Retribution". "How then stands the case with the overwhelming majority of mankind, who have lived and died in the condition in which they were born and educated, and who never heard of Jesus Christ, his Gospel, or his Father as revealed in him? The same question may with equal justice be asked with respect to those vast multitudes in nominally Christian countries, in which the gospel which has been proclaimed has failed to set forth Jesus Christ in the loveliness of his Divinely attractive character, or the character of God as a God who is holy, loving, just and true. The former have never once had the opportunity of catching a glimpse of the

rays of him who is the sun of the spiritual and moral world, and of receiving those vivifying influences which flow from the steady beholding and contemplation of him. Can the latter be said to have rejected him, when perhaps what they have rejected has been some miserable caricature of his Divinely attractive Person? For according to his own declaration, it is only to those who have been guilty of rejecting him that the following utterance (John 12:48) is applicable What then will be their fate? One thing is certain. The righteous Judge of all the earth will condemn no man for not having accepted a gospel of which he has either never heard, or of which he has heard only an imperfect version. Will then this overwhelming majority of mankind be simply annihilated? It is difficult to believe that they will be so in face of the reiterated declarations both of the Gospel and the Epistle that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world, and of our Lords declaration 'I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me. But it is certain that an overwhelming majority of the human race have lived and died in a state of spiritual and moral degradation, and therefore that they have not possessed the life spoken of in the utterances which we have been considering. What then awaits them? I can only conceive. . . . a condition of things beyond the grave in which they will enter upon a more favorable state of probation than has been vouchsafed them here; for the wrath of God can only abide on those whose sinful condition is the result of their own voluntary act. St. Paul assures us that Christs Messianic reign will continue until He has put all enemies under his feet, and that he will not resign the kingdom to the Father until all things have been subdued unto him; and He elsewhere tells us that God has highly exalted him 'that in the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, of things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. What then, I ask, is there in Scripture which implies that for the persons above referred to probation will not be continued during the whole period of Christs Messianic reign?'.[note 8]

Dr. F. W. Farrar, chaplain to Queen Victoria, and Dean of Canterbury, held the same belief. Whilst declaring his inability to accept the Universalist position, his heart was large enough to wish that all men might ultimately be saved, but his understanding of Scripture told him that salvation depends upon conversion and faith, as witness this quotation from "Mercy and Judgment"; "I cannot but fear, from one or two passages of Scripture, and from the general teaching of the Church, and from certain facts of human experience, that some souls may be ultimately lost; that they will not be admitted into the vision and Sabbath of God. I trust that by Gods mercy, and through Christs redemption, the majority of mankind will ultimately be saved. Yet, since they die unfit for heaven -- since they die in a state of imperfect grace -- I believe that in some way or other, before the final judgment, Gods mercy may reach them, and the benefit of Christs atonement be extended to them, beyond the grave"⁹ Dean Farrars personal convictions are well revealed in two short passages from "Eternal Hope", a record of five sermons on the subject of future probation preached in Westminster Abbey during 1877; "Is it not almost blasphemous to suppose that He who made a human being with such rich capacities will in one moment throw it from him into everlasting darkness?" and again "While admitting the immense importance attributed by all Scripture to life as a period of probation, and the certainty that future retribution will be proportionate to the willingness and heinousness of our earthly sins, neither Scripture, nor the Church, nor anything that we

can learn from any source within or without us respecting God, in any way sanctions the popular dogma of an irreversible doom at the moment of death"[note 10].

Farrar's early mentor was Rev. Prof. E. H. Plumptre, Dean of Wells and Professor of New Testament Exegesis at Kings College, London. Plumptre, in his studies of life after death, was more cautious than Farrar, but that his thinking ran along similar lines is evidenced by his comment on Matthew 12:32 in Ellicotts Commentary. "Our Lords words, it may he noted, clearly imply that some sins wait for their full forgiveness, the entire canceling of the past, till the time of that 'age to come which shall witness the great and final Advent. Does this imply that repentance, and therefore pardon, may come in the state that follows death? We know not, and ask questions that we cannot answer, but the words at least check the harsh dogmatic answer in the negative. If one sin only is thus excluded from forgiveness in that coming age, other sins cannot stand on the same level, and the darkness behind the veil is lit up with at least a gleam of hope"[note 11].

Prof. J. Alexander Findlay of Didsbury College, Manchester, a few years ago, on the question of "fixity after death", asked the question "Can Christ reach men from the other side?" (of death). "Easter Sunday" he said "says 'yes. Surely it is a minimizing of the Cross to suggest that it only concerns men in this life; it must have a meaning for all men and personal spirits in all worlds where they can be found " Commenting on Pauls action in 1 Corinthians 5:5, he writes "Paul says he intends to 'hand over a Church member guilty of persistent and flagrant immorality 'to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. It is impossible, I think, to make sense of this strange sentence unless it means that the man would die, that he would have a better chance away from Corinth.... the best thing for that man would be for the knot to be cut by his death. . . . Our Lord has the 'keys of death and the unseen world, for the Atonement, the 'ransom for many, covers all generations of men in its scope.

The 'outer darkness is not the final stage, for even that darkness can be penetrated by the eternal light. As long as Dives can still. . . . think of his five brothers as well as himself there is still hope for him."[note 12]

One of the most cogent and thought provoking presentations of the case on record is that which formed the subject of a sermon by Dr. Samuel Vranken Holmes, Minister of Westminster Presbyterian Church, Buffalo, N.Y., U.S.A., in March 1907 -- Dr. Holmes words were so well chosen and expressive that the full account, as published in the "Buffalo Express" of March 15th, 1907, is reproduced here.

"In concluding our course of studies in Lifes Last Realities we come to a problem which, difficult as it is, must not be shirked. It is a problem to which allusion has heretofore been made, but which I have purposely postponed for discussion until the end -- What is to be the final destiny of those who die in their sins?

"You will remember that, in our study of judgment after death, we reached the two-fold conviction that retribution in the life to come is inevitable because grounded in a general moral necessity, and that such retribution must necessarily entail moral separation from

goodness and from God. Now, in the face of these facts, is there any hope of better things for sinful men hereafter? Or are we shut up to the belief that such men must spend an eternity in pain and punishment and without hope of moral and spiritual recovery? And this problem has an importance and interest far greater than any general speculative concern as to human destiny. I told you the other afternoon, in our discussion of heaven, that one of its most blessed realities would be the reunion with those whom we have loved and lost. And I am sure that, in almost every heart, there is love and longing for some one who has passed out of this life, caring little or nothing for Christ or the things of the Spirit, and whose last days, it may be, were clouded by sin and shame. What, then, of such? Must we give up all hope of seeing them again, of meeting them by and by, knowing, as we do, that inevitable desolation separates the good and the evil when the secrets of all hearts are disclosed?

"Of course, you know what the teaching of the Church on this question has been for centuries, and what it continues to be in certain quarters today. But one must be blind indeed to movements in the modern religious world who is not aware that a great change has come over the minds of thinking people in regard to this matter. For a mighty and ever growing doubt has arisen within a generation as to the irrevocability of destiny at death. The conviction has come to be very common today among educated men that there is every possibility of moral change for a human soul in the future life; and this conviction, too, is based, not on mere human speculation, but on the unmistakable implications of the Masters own teachings.

"Personally, I do not believe that Jesus taught the doctrine that human destiny is fixed at death, that after the dissolution of the body the chance of moral change is withheld from men, and that those who die in their sins are condemned to everlasting torment. I believed it once, but I thank God I believe it no longer; and the implied threat in that doctrine is no more to multitudes of men today than the 'rattling of a medicine mans gourd. Instead, the world of thought is rapidly coming to believe that for every man who survives the death of the body, there is an opportunity given to be united to God in Christ, and for so long as there is the slightest survival of individual spiritual life. Moreover, this belief rests upon solid foundations.

"In the first place, it is a purely arbitrary assumption to affirm that moral finality is reached at death. Such a doctrine is not taught explicitly anywhere in the Scriptures, and the several passages sometimes cited in its support are capable of very different interpretations -- interpretations more completely in harmony with Jesus teachings elsewhere. No more is there anything in the nature of death itself to put an end to the possibility of change. Apart from the awe and mystery attaching to death, there is no reason for assuming that at its crisis mans destiny is irrevocably fixed. The entire position of the Augustinian theology at this point is pure and gratuitous assumption.

"On the other hand, a wider observation of this life and a deeper knowledge of men have conspired to reveal the incomplete and undeveloped state in which a vast majority of souls leave the world at death. They do not make sufficient moral progress here to settle the moral issues involved for all time. Most of those who die have by no means reached

the stage of character where moral change is impossible. They are only on the threshold of development. They have just begun to recognize the importance of moral choices. And, as one of our modern theologians has well put it, 'It would be very strange if so solemn an experience as death were withdrawn from among the experiences that might influence the final decision of the soul.

"Moreover, as I tried to point out in a previous address in this series, no conceivable life in the future can possibly deprive men of moral and spiritual accountability. The doctrine that 'moral strain is only for this life, that in heaven man is free from moral activity and that in hell his moral responsibility is ended and he is compelled to suffer only for the sins committed in the flesh -- this doctrine is intolerable and impossible. The moment a man ceases to be an active moral agent, he becomes less than a man, he sinks to the level of an automaton. And if, as is clear, the future life is as morally active and responsible and as full of solemn ethical meaning as the present, then a free moral agent will be capable of choosing good even if he is in hell. Wherever living spirits are, the law of growth and progress, with all the corresponding possibilities of degeneration and death, must be carried with them and must hold for eternity.

"Now, if all that has thus far been said is true, if the final destiny of man is not fixed at death, and if moral and spiritual choices are open to him in the future life, then is it conceivable that God can fail of winning gracious victories of love over countless souls whom the world has reckoned lost! Over against the dogma of a hard and unrelenting theology at this point, I prefer to place the teaching of my Master in the parable of the lost sheep, wherein he tells us that the Good Shepherd will not cease to search for the one that is strayed and is lost 'until he find it. For God will surely never falter in his quest for the sinning and unrepentant so long as opportunity is left to recover them. Just because God is good and loving and sovereign, just because of that wondrous Divine compassion which we witness on Calvary, we may have confidence that multitudes of souls without number shall finally be restored to holiness and happiness and heaven.

"Only let it be remembered that such a restoration will come about, not through any forensic process or legal fiction, but through the only salvation that can ever really avail here or hereafter -- the salvation wherein God helps man to make an end of sin in his own soul, and wherein he imparts to him the life of the Spirit. No man will ever be saved hereafter in any way other than that in which he is saved here. No redemption is ever possible that does not involve a departure from sin and a humble, resolute quest after holiness. Therefore, let no man think that this is an easy doctrine, that he can keep on sinning and living in selfishness until by and by an indulgent God will rescue him from punishment by judicial fiat. This universe of ours is a universe of inexorable moral laws, and the hope of a final restoration does not mean that a single one of those laws will ever be broken. So long as men continue in willful sin, no salvation could possibly be accomplished. Moreover, delay only renders redemption the more difficult. Hence it is well that here and now we turn to the Christ, and begin to find life in him, and through him likewise to know God; for the Master has told us that this is life eternal, to know God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent.

"And now a single and solemn question remains to be answered. What if there be any who shall persistently refuse to be recovered, who, in a future life as in this, shall spurn the love Divine and sink deeper and deeper in selfishness and sin? What is to be said of their final destiny? It is certain, as has been seen, that persistence in sin makes heaven impossible, so long as that persistence endures. But, on the other hand, to posit an endless hell for wickedness is to posit an endless dualism, continuing through the endless reign of sin in certain hearts. Such dualism would spell defeat for a sovereign God.

"There is, however, a simple alternative, and one that I believe is implicit in the teaching of both Jesus and Paul~ -- that when a soul, through its persistence in sin, comes to the point where it is morally irrecoverable, it comes also to its final death. Paul distinctly tells us that immortality is an achievement and the inference is plain that some souls may finally fail of immortality. Moreover, throughout the New Testament, immortality is correlated with goodness, 'possible where goodness is, impossible where goodness is not. With Jesus the issues of the future are presented, not in terms of pleasure and pain, but in terms of life and death. 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have aionian life. 'For what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his physical life? These and other utterances of Jesus seem to indicate that eternal life is a possibility only, and is the alternative of death and extinction. The only really indestructible elements of personality seem to be the moral and the spiritual. In the processes of organic evolution, 'the living creature at any stage remains alive so long, and only so long, as it conforms to the conditions of living. Shall we think otherwise of the human soul? When a soul has reached the stage of moral and spiritual development which Paul describes in the phrase 'being in Christ Jesus, it is the possessor of eternal life. But when a man has continued in sin, has gone on dwarfing his moral and spiritual nature until every appeal to God is in vain, is it not in accordance with the analogies of life that extinction is the certain outcome?'"[note 13]

These are the testimonies of men who have thought and pondered deeply and earnestly over the mysteries of life and death. These are the conclusions to which they have come, not lightly or hastily, but with a sober consciousness of the issues involved, Farrars closing words in "Mercy and Judgment", carefully and seriously set down, represent very fairly the expressed thoughts of so many Christian ministers and pastors who realize that only in this way can apparently discordant elements in the revealed purposes of God be satisfactorily resolved in a manner which does equal honor to his justice and his love, and ensures that not one of his children will be eternally lost who can possibly be saved.

"I believe that mans destiny stops not at the grave, and that many who knew not Christ here will know him there. I believe that in the depths of the Divine compassion there may be opportunity to win faith in the future state. I believe that hereafter -- whether by means of the 'almost sacrament of death or in other ways unknown to us, -- Gods mercy may reach many who, to all earthly appearance, might seem to us to die in a lost and unregenerate state. I believe that without holiness no man can see the Lord and that no sinner can be pardoned or accepted until he has repented, and till his free will is in unison

with the Will of God; and I cannot tell whether some souls may not resist God for ever, and therefore may not for ever be shut out from his presence.

"For, according to the Scripture, though I know not what its nature will be or how it will be effected, I believe in the restitution of all things, and I believe in the coming of that time when -- though in what sense I cannot pretend to explain or to fathom -- GOD WILL BE ALL IN ALL."[note 9]

Chapter 6 -- DESTINY OF THE UNREPENTANT

Now if indeed the Divine purpose does include this extended opportunity to hear the evangel and accept Christ before the Last Judgment, the question naturally arises as to the position of those, if such there be, whose hearts are so fully set in them to do evil that even then they fail to respond. What is the fate of the finally impenitent? That there is at least the possibility of there being such is inherent in the fact of human free-will; since no man is to be forced into acceptance of Christ, and the appeal of the Gospel, in the next life as in this, is for voluntary and sincere yielding of oneself to Christ or not at all, it may be at the end that some will be found to have lost eternal life just because they will not have it on the terms offered. To quote Petaval in "The Problem of Immortality", "God will not force an unending life upon beings who reject the normal conditions of existence".¹⁴ It must always be remembered that we have been created and given life for a purpose; we owe our existence and life to God and we have a place and function in his creation which we must willingly and loyally fill if that creation is to continue in its destined course. But some men may refuse to take this, their ordained place, and so they become a discordant and disruptive element in creation. "What we dread" says Dr. Paterson Smyth "is that the man may not want, and so may have rendered himself incapable of turning to God. We dread, not Gods Will, but the mans own will. Character tends to permanence. Free-will is a glorious but a dangerous prerogative. All experience leads towards the belief that a human will may so distort itself as to grow incapable of good".[note 5]

Thus the consequence of sin in the face of full light and full opportunity is incurred by the individuals own choice. It is a sobering thought that deliberate continuance in evil-doing can destroy a mans capacity for repentance and conversion to the good life. And the result of that is death, the cessation of life, for the man who cuts himself off from God cuts himself off from the only source of life. Some years ago Prof. J. Alexander Findlay, writing in the "British Weekly," said "If a life depends upon fellowship with God, the possibility must remain that the time may come when a man, no longer being capable of fellowship with God, shall die and become extinct, simply because there is no life left in him, because his soul is dead". Now this is exactly what the Scripture says. Jesus told his listeners that God is able to destroy, not only the body, but also the soul (Matthew 10:28). Some of the most apt and cogent expressions of this principle are to be found, of all places, in the Book of Proverbs; the fact does at least show that this truth was grasped even in those faraway days. "As righteousness tendeth to life, so he that pursueth evil pursueth it to his own death". "But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul; all they that hate me love death" (Proverbs 11:19; 12:28). There is constant insistence in Scripture upon the hardening and blinding effect of human resistance to the drawing power of God and the cumulative influence of wrong-doing upon the character. Says Farrar in "Eternal Hope" "It is impossible for us to estimate the hardening effect of obstinate persistence in evil, and the power of the human will to resist the law and reject the love of God. . . . if a man will not see God because clouds and darkness are round about him, although righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his seat, then we

can do no more. He must believe or not believe -- he must bear or must forbear, as seems him best. We cannot argue about colour to the blind. We cannot prove the glory of music to the deaf. If a man shuts his eyes hard, we cannot make him see the sun "[note 10]. This is the cause and the only cause of that which comes at last upon the man who will not have God. He quite literally dies by his own hand.

The disease of moral evil" says Row "willfully persisted in, for aught we know to the contrary, may be capable of destroying man as a personal conscious being. No being that has been brought into existence by the will of another can have endless existence inherent in itself. Inasmuch therefore as man is destitute of self-existence, the period during which he will continue to exist must be dependent on the good pleasure of him who by his all-powerful energy maintains him in being (God) has so constituted the moral universe that, under his providential government, the disease of evil will ultimately destroy mans spiritual and moral being, just as incurable physical disease destroys his bodily life."[note 8]

Dr. Lyman Abbott, a well-known Congregational minister of Brooklyn, N.Y. at the turn of the century, editor of "Christian Union" and writer of many books, well expressed the basic principle in a Conference address in 1900:

I know that I can choose the good and therefore I can choose the evil. What I find true in myself I believe to be true in every other man; he can choose the good and therefore he can choose the evil, And while I wistfully desire -- yea, and sometimes devoutly hope -- that when the great drama of life here and hereafter is ended, all Gods creatures will have chosen the good, I do not know. If I believed that God could make all men righteous, I should be sure that he would make all men righteous; otherwise He would not be a righteous God. But I start from the other pole, I begin with my own absolute freedom. I recognize as a fact, in my life, in my philosophy and in my preaching, that, in the last analysis, the destiny of every man is in his own hands. Father may persuade, mother may entice, influences may environ, God himself may surround with all possible persuasions, but in the last analysis the destiny of every man is in his own hands. And what he will do with it I do not know.

Why, if God be good, has He made a world in which there is sin? Why has He not made a world sinless? Could He not? Certainly; He not only could, He has. The birds are sinless. But He could not make a world in which are free moral agents able to choose the good without giving them at the same time power to choose the evil. Power to choose the one is power to choose the other; and a world in which there are some men who choose shame, dishonour, sin and death is a better world, I dare to say, than a world made of machines that could choose neither the good nor the evil".[note 15]

There is, then, a stark reality enshrined in statements such as those of Ezekiel 18:4 "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" and Jeremiah 31:30 "Every one shall die for his own iniquity". Says the Psalmist "The face of the Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth" (Psalm 34:14). "They that plow iniquity and sow wickedness" adds Job in Job 4:8-9 "reap the same. By the blast of God they perish,

and by the breath of his nostrils are they consumed". "Whosoever hath sinned against me" God told Moses "him will I blot out of my book" (Exodus 32:33). Adding to this the vivid allusions of, for example, Peter to the "day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men" (2 Peter 3:7) and Paul to those who suffer "everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord" (2 Thessalonians 1:7-10) and the fate of the finally impenitent is plain. "The wages of sin is death" says Paul (Romans 6:23) just so surely as the gift of God, accepted by the one who believes, is life -- eternal life. These two stand as opposites; death is the antithesis of life, a condition of no-life, of non-existence. Thus Charles "The Pauline eschatology points obviously, in its ultimate issues, either to the final redemption of all created personal beings, or -- and this seems the true alternative -- to the destruction of the finally impenitent. But this destruction would not be of the nature of an external punishment, but subjective and self-inflicted".[note 3]

Strong protest is sometimes raised against what is called by the protestors the "doctrine of annihilation", but when all is said and done this is the only possible end for the sinner who elects to remain in his sin. Evil is inherently unstable and must one day come to an end. A time must come when the Lord Jesus Christ is universally acclaimed as Lord without a dissentient voice -- "at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow. . . . and every tongue confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:10-11). Speaking to Moses (Numbers 14:21), the Lord said "As truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord". Many Scripture passages tell in no uncertain tones of the final triumph of Gods creative work in respect to this earth when all that partakes of or is contaminated with evil and sin is no more, and the entire earthly creation is unanimous in loyal and whole-hearted service to, and union with, God.

There is no better comment on this aspect of Gods purpose, and no better definition of the underlying principle, than that voiced by David (Psalm 37:19); "For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be; yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be".

Chapter 7 -- THE MESSIANIC KINGDOM

"Thy Kingdom come; thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). That heart-felt expression of an age-old hope was first spoken by Jesus when He laid down the principles of devotional and supplicatory prayer for all time. Every generation since then has reiterated this plea for the coming of the Divine Kingdom upon earth when evil will be eliminated from the hearts of men, and all, to use the language of the old prophets, will know God, from the least to the greatest. That a time is to come in history when the kingdoms of this world give place to the kingdom of God, and the nations of earth walk and live their lives in the light of that kingdom (Revelation 11:15; 21:24), is implicit in New Testament theology and in the Christian faith, although in modern times the spiritualizing and rationalizing tendencies of current thought increasingly interpret the golden vision in terms of the power and ethics of Christs teaching influencing and reigning in the hearts of Christian believers. The early Church knew no such limitation; to them the Judaistic idea of the Last Day, when Messiah appears in power and glory, raises the dead, rewards all true believers and condemns the unrighteous, blossomed into full development in the conception of an all-powerful and all-righteous Messianic reign over the peoples of earth, dead and living, throughout the duration of an Age in which the eternal issues of life and death will be placed before them for final decision. Those early Christians, and their fellows of generations following, faithful to their calling in the hope of attaining the spiritual conditions of the celestial world to "be with Christ", understood clearly that by virtue of their experience and training they were to be leaders and teachers of all men in this new Age, to bring men to ultimate reconciliation with God. So they interpreted our Lords assurances and the visions of the Revelator concerning the reign of the saints as depicting such a season of service and labour in the proclamation of the Gospel and encouragement to conversion and reformation.

That this is to be the privilege and duty of the Church during that momentous period has been stressed repeatedly by reflective thinkers. Said Dr. Cox, in "Salvator Mundi" "When the Gospel is preached again, it may be that Christ will not be the preacher, or not the only preacher... . If we are of those who have been chosen and redeemed, it may be that we shall be the happy messengers of Gods love and mercy to those who are still being purged from their sins . . . thus entering at once into the eternal passion of God and into the redeeming work of Christ; being afflicted, like the Father, in all the sins and afflictions of the unrighteous . . . if by any means we may save some. It may be through our ministry that the purpose of God will be accomplished, that all Israel will be saved and the fullness of the Gentiles be brought in. God grant that it may be so; for that surely would be an infinitely diviner service and reward than to sit, clothed in white raiment, striking harps of gold".[note 6]

Another well-known and well-loved minister, Dr. F. B. Meyer, (1847-1929) once wrote "We are to be priests and kings. There are vast spaces in the universe that may have to be evangelized or ruled or influenced for righteousness. It may be that important spheres of ministry are needing those to fill them who have learned the secret of victory over materialism on the one hand, and over the power of Satan on the other Therefore earth may be the school, the training ground, the testing place for the servants and soldiers of

the hereafter. This thought need not be in conflict with the ideals of rest and worship which we are wont to associate with the future life. Eternity will give opportunities for all. But, if it became him of whom and through whom are all things to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through the suffering of temptation, it stands to reason that his comrades and soldiers must pass through the same, that they may become more than conquerors, and having overcome, may sit with him on his Throne, as he overcame and is set down with his Father on His Throne".[note 16]

The Messianic Age is known also as the Millennium, a word meaning a thousand years, from its use in the Book of Revelation where the equivalent Greek word "chilia" is employed. Apart from this passage in the Book of Revelation there is no real authority for the Age to be literally a thousand years in duration -- Jewish thought from a few centuries before the birth of Jesus postulated various periods from four hundred years upward. The nature of the work to be accomplished during that Age does, from the standpoint of human reasoning, demand a long period of time for its accomplishment. The banishment of sin from the hearts of all who can be persuaded to eschew unrighteousness, the process of evangelization and conversion which is an essential preliminary, the very drastic and complete re-orientation of human thinking and reasoning in almost every sphere of life, coupled with the cleansing and renovation of the earth itself and its physical transformation into a fitting and adequate home for the restored human race, is a task of such colossal proportions that one might be forgiven for questioning whether even a thousand years is adequate for its performance. Since, however, this figure is the only one of the possible alternatives that possesses the admittedly limited endorsement of Scripture it is perhaps the one best accepted as representing the position. In our thinking we do well to retain this mental conception of the Millennium as the thousand-year reign of Christ over the earth.

The Millennium is synonymous with the theological Day of Judgment. There is no doubt about this. Both periods, or events, commence with the return of Christ to earth at his Second Advent, and with the resurrection of the dead. Both witness a process of trial and judgment, a determination of the fitness or otherwise of every human soul for everlasting life. Both conclude with the elimination from Gods creation of evil and incorrigible evil-doers, and usher the approved of God into an eternal state in which sin, evil and death are no more and Christ is all in all.

That is what St. Paul had in mind when he told the philosophers of Athens that God "hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained" (Acts 17:31) and Jesus, to his disciples "in the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." (Matthew 19:28). However the disciples, in their then immaturity, interpreted those words, later and more mature Christian thought relates them to Christs own insistence in Luke 22:24-30 that the reigning from thrones which is the future duty of the Church is not a dictatorial rulership like that of earthly potentates but a state of service, of being servants of all, in the discharge of a ministry bringing to all men the blessings and advantages of Messiahs kingdom.

Although thus the Day of Judgment, the Millennium is also in a very real sense part of the Day of Grace. Opportunity for repentance and conversion is not ended, nor indeed could be while any human soul lacks full enlightenment on the issues of right and wrong or knowledge of Christ and the life that can come only through him, or is capable of benefiting by the lessons and experiences of past life, or by the evangel of Christ which will then be so vigorously and powerfully proclaimed. It might almost be said that there is a vital association between the two terms, that Grace and Judgment go ahead in hand together. From Pentecost to the end of the Millennium there has been and will be opportunity to repent and convert and be accepted into Gods family. From Pentecost to the end of the Millennium Judgment has been and will be in operation, every deliberately and knowingly good or evil deed shaping and forming the character in the direction either of the good or the bad, in so doing rendering attainment of the Divine ideal a little easier or a little more difficult in the future. The man who returns from the dead at the commencement of the Millennium after a woefully misspent life will find that he has a lot of leeway to make up; even although repentance and conversion and acceptance of Christ as Lord will win him the condition of reconciliation with God he still has to attain Godlikeness in his character and that can only be reached by development. The revealing angel, talking of that day to the prophet Daniel 12:2 spoke of some who awake to enduring life and others to shame and enduring contempt. The Millennium therefore is a time of mixed dark and light, but nevertheless a time in which the darkness is being progressively swallowed up by the light, so that, to quote Zechariah, "at evening time it shall be light". At the end of this great Day of Grace and Judgment the dark shadow of evil will have flown, never to return.

The contemporary view of the Millennial reign of Christ, in those quarters in which his pre-millennial Advent is accepted and expected, all too often falls short by picturing it as an extension of the present world order even though under Divine sovereignty. Thus, it is thought, life and death will go on much as now except that the normal human lifespan will be considerably increased; evil and the practice of evil will be progressively eliminated and generation will follow generation, each born into a world which is becoming steadily more godlike until at the end will come the Day of Judgment when the dead will be raised and all earthly affairs wound up. But there is much more to the Millennium than this. In the first place, and as a matter of basic principle, this coming Age of righteousness is not an extension of the present world-order at all; it is a completely new start. Peter terms it a "heavens and earth wherein dwelleth righteousness" (2 Peter 3:13) in contrast to the "present evil world" which is to pass away. The existing world order, with all its powers, authorities, standards, and practices which support and further the domination of evil over mankind, is to be brought to an end and a new and Divinely-sustained system take its place under which the reconciling work of Christ and his Church will proceed. Because it is the final and most momentous phase of the Day of Grace, in the which the issue as to worthiness or otherwise of eternal life for every individual is to be decided, the resurrection of the dead takes place, not at the end, but during the opening stages, of the period, so that all men of all generations back to the begin-fling may have a full and free opportunity to learn fully of the grace of God in Christ and make their eternal decision. Thus what might be termed "Adamic death", the death that normally comes upon all men born in Adam (Romans 5:12-19), will end with

the inception of that Age and men will live in a time of new life, which is the literal implication of Jesus reference in Matthew 19:28 to "the regeneration" when He assumes rulership of the world. Men will not die as they die today; if they are already Christs, or if they at that time do yield themselves unreservedly to him, they go on into everlasting life and the destiny God has appointed for them. If they have become so wedded to evil that there is no capacity left to repent and they are impervious to the appeal of the Savior then there remains nothing hut the loss of the life that is in them, for there can be no continuing life without God. So Jesus said on one memorable occasion "the hour is coming in the which all that are in their graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth, they that have done admirable things to a resurrection of life and they that have done worthless things to a resurrection of judgment" (John 5:28-29). This is where the Divine law of retribution comes into full effect; "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7). Every man awakens to a resurrection "according to his works" -- a phrase which occurs seven or eight times in the Scriptures in this connection. There will be abundant opportunity and every encouragement for repentance and conversion and cleansing from the effects of the past, but even so every man is awakened with the character and disposition which was his when he died, and the vicious, the immoral, the depraved, will find themselves saddled with a task of reformation and rehabilitation if they would attain to life which will be no less a "resurrection of judgment" for the fact that they will not be finally condemned without first having the opportunity of reformation. A profound thinker long ago laid down the maxim "God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil" (Eccl. 12:14). Many have deluded themselves into thinking that they have escaped the force of that law but in the coming Age they will find it is not so; the deeds of the past accuse them and from the effects of those deeds they must find release. The way back may be painful and arduous, the more so since their oft-times secret sins and unpublished wrongful actions will be open to the day. That is why the revealing angel, speaking to Daniel of this same time and this same thing, used an almost identical phrase to that of Jesus; "many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to enduring life, and some to shame and enduring contempt" (Daniel 12:2). It was in this same connection that Jesus spoke of the relative positions before God of the unbelieving people of his own day and the men of Sodom and Gomorrah and Nineveh of ancient times who were destroyed because of their depravity. If the mighty works which He performed in the towns of Galilee had been done in Sodom and Gomorrah and Tyre and Sidon, they "would have repented" and would "have remained to this day", He told them. Therefore, He went on, it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah, for Tyre and Sidon, in the day of judgment, than for them (Matthew 11:20-24; Mark 6:11; Luke 10:12-14). In Jesus view the abhorred inhabitants of the Cities of the Plain were not so culpable as the unbelieving Jews to whom He came; in the Millennial judgment they will not find the going so hard as will those Jews. Depraved as they were -- a depravity largely the fruit of ignorance -- their characters were not so resolutely set against righteousness as the later unbelievers, and they will therefore find it that much easier to respond to the appeal of the Gospel when it is presented to them. Jesus said they would have repented had his message been preached to them -- a remark which leads inevitably to the question; if the sinners of Sodom and Gomorrah would have repented had the Gospel been preached to them, why was it not so preached? The only answer consistent with any real belief in

both the love and justice of God is that the Gospel is to be preached to them before opportunity is ended. The fact that it comes after the catastrophic happening which ended their first earthly life is irrelevant. They will return, and under the beneficent and righteous rule of Christ will hear the message they had not heard and face up to the issue which in those far-off days had not even been placed before them.

Whilst on this aspect of the subject it is recognized that a great deal of Christian thinking on the Millennium presupposes that although the Church is "changed" to heavenly conditions to be with Christ at the beginning, at his Advent, the general resurrection of the world does not take place until its end. This quite common impression is based upon one single text in Scripture, the remark in Revelation 20:5 "but the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished". This sentence is agreed by scholars to be an interpolation of probably about the Fifth Century and to form no part of the original Book of Revelation. Of manuscripts and versions later than the Fifth Century the passage tends to be missing in those originating in the East -- Greece and Syria -- and tends to appear in those originating in the west -- Latin. The earliest written reference to this idea of the end-of-Millennium resurrection seems to be in the writings of Lactantius, early Fourth Century, and the most likely supposition is that the interpolation was derived from the old Judaistic idea of the resurrection and destruction of the wicked at the Last Day and devised to support the Augustinian theology which viewed the Millennium as the time of the Church's reign over the nations from the First Advent until the Second Advent to which latter time the general resurrection would naturally have to be deferred. When it is realized that the very purpose of the Millennium is for the conversion and entry into eternal life of "whosoever will" from among all generations, dead or living, the incongruity of the interpolation is evident.

There is, therefore, a First and a Second Resurrection. The First Resurrection is that of the Church (Revelation 20:4-6) who are raised to life in the celestial world and association with their Lord in his coming work for mankind. We have therefore to postulate the members of the resurrected Church administering the affairs of the kingdom upon earth whilst their own home is in the heavenly sphere. The Second Resurrection is that of the remainder of mankind, restored to life upon earth in newly-created human bodies, taking up the thread of existence where it had been dropped in death, and responding, or not, as the case may be, to the opportunity for life which will then be extended. It has to be accepted that the majority of these resurrected ones will have never heard of Christ in the former life, or at any rate only have received a grossly distorted conception of his Person and message and of the purposes of God. Hence the inception of the Millennium and the, probably, progressive, appearance upon earth of generation after generation from the past, will involve a colossal work of evangelism such as the world has never before seen.

One major handicap will be eliminated. There is to be a great restraint upon the outward practice of evil. Whilst it will be just as impossible then as it is now to make men good by Act of Parliament, it is quite possible and perfectly proper for Divine power so to be operative that men will not be able to injure or wrong their fellow-men or hinder them in their endeavor to follow righteousness. The man whose heart is fully set in him to oppose

the drawing power of God and to abide in unrighteousness for love of the same will in the exercise of his own free will be left to that condition but he will be quite powerless to project his evil desires into actions that would harm others or wreak injury to the new creation which is in process of being built up on earth. The Book of Revelation speaks of the Devil, Satan, being bound "that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled" (Revelation 20:2-3); remembering the Scriptural insistence that a great part of the evil and sin that reigns in the hearts of men is due to the work of that evil genius it is easy to picture a state of society in which no man need live in fear or apprehension of malevolent external forces or influences. In such confidence he can continue in the progressive rehabilitation of his own deficiencies in the direction of that full conformity to the image of Christ which is the object of this Millennial experience. It was with this idea in mind that the Old Testament prophet spoke of the peace and assurance of this glad day; "they shall not hurt nor destroy. . . . for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:9); the lion shall lie down with the lamb, men will reap the fruit of their own work and not be robbed of it by others (Isaiah 65:21-22) and in all possible ways "the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever" (Isaiah 32:17).

Concurrently with this reformation of the human spirit throughout all human society proceeds the renovation of the earth itself. The promise that "the desert shall blossom as the rose" (Isaiah 35:1) has become a modern cliché applied to every major achievement in improving the environment, but it will be no cliché when it has its intended fulfillment in the Age to come. Freed from the twin curses of commercial exploitation for private profit and the unreasoning wastage of natural resources for immediate indulgence, the planet itself will be transformed into the beautiful and productive home for mankind for which it was originally created. At last, Eden shall bloom again! Not, this time, by direct preparation through an act of Divine power, but by the labors of the creatures that dwell therein. Humanity at large will fulfill the commission embodied in the story of creation as recorded in Genesis, in which man co-operates with Nature in bringing forth from the earth all that is needed for the life and happiness of men, and exercises an orderly dominion for the benefit of all living creatures. Even in this there is an element of retribution involved, for the earth today is in a sorry state on account of human mismanagement; the word "pollution" is on almost everyone's lips -- there will be considerable research and much hard work involved before men can reverse the present trend and put the earth on the way to its primal fertility and beauty. All this is part of the Divine educational program whereby men will learn, by experience, the inevitably destructive results of selfishness and sin, and, by contrast, the creative power inherent in righteousness.

Some may say, hastily, that this roseate picture of the future may be very appealing and desirable but is quite impracticable on account of the alleged impossibility of accommodating upon the earth all the millions of past generations. The simple faith of our forefathers in mediaeval times rose above all this. The Scriptures told them -- as they tell us -- that at the Day of Judgment all the dead would rise in their bodies and stand before the Judge, and they believed that. Whilst not interpreting some of those rather

lurid symbols so literally as did they, it is still true that the doctrine of the Millennial reign of Christ upon earth does demand that the whole of past mankind do occupy this planet together for, at any rate, the thousand years of their period of grace, even though the further increase of the race may cease to be a feature of normal human relationships. And it would be a most inexplicable circumstance if God, in making this arrangement, had overlooked the accommodation factor.

We may have confidence that He has made full provision. In fact, this kind of objection is usually raised with the present extensive world population in mind, three thousand millions or more, and the frequent allegations that the world is facing starvation through inability to feed them all. Under the present commercial system in which food is grown for money and they who cannot pay cannot eat, and food that cannot be grown for profit is not grown at all, that may well be so, but under the Millennial administration matters will be very different. "The earth shall yield its increase" says the prophet, and with at least the majority of men enthusiastically co-operating with the advice and instructions of their heavenly counselors, and with the advantage of the discoveries that unhindered research is bound to bring forth for the general benefit, there is no doubt whatever that the earth which God designed to support the lives of all the creatures to which He has given existence will in fact do so. Although from the nature of the case it is not possible to say with any certainty how many humans have lived since the beginning, it is certain that only during the past two centuries have the numbers been at all considerable compared with the farther past. A competent authority (Putnam) has made estimates -- not from the Biblical standpoint and with no doctrine or theory to support -- of the probable world population in past ages, from such data as is available.¹⁷ Three centuries ago world population was five hundred millions -- one seventh of the present. In the time of Christ it was about two hundred millions and in that of Abraham, two thousand years earlier, something like fifty millions. It would not be difficult to analyse such estimates in detail and show that the Most High is bringing earthly affairs to a head in time to avoid over-crowding mans home.

With the ending of the Messianic Age comes the end of the Day of Grace. Every possible aid to the enlightenment of all men in the basic principles of truth and goodness will have been given. Christ will have been preached and no one will be able to claim ignorance. The lives of men will be passed in an environment that is completely conducive to right doing. None can plead the force of unfavorable circumstances as justification for failure to accept the Savior. The offer of life will be extended with every possible encouragement to accept. God will in very truth bend down from Heaven to save all who can possibly be saved. In the inspired imagery of the Book of Revelation "the dwelling-place of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away" (Revelation 21:3-4).

Of the many pen-pictures of that coming Age which have been drawn perhaps none is so appealing and eloquent as a passage in C. T. Russells "Divine Plan of the Ages". Written in the late nineteenth century, its structure might be considered a little "flowery" by this

present more matter-of-fact generation, but a few minutes spent in accustoming ones self to its atmosphere may well result in imparting some small share of the peace and content which will undoubtedly fill every human mind in that blessed day.

"It is this portion that God has elected to give to the human race. And what a glorious portion! Close your eyes for a moment to the scenes of misery and woe, degradation and sorrow, that yet prevail on account of sin, and picture before your mental vision the glory of the perfect earth. Not a stain of sin mars the harmony and peace of a perfect society; not a bitter thought, not an unkind look or word; love, welling up from every heart, meets a kindred response in every other heart, and benevolence marks every act. There sickness shall be no more; not an ache nor a pain, nor any evidence of decay -- not even the fear of such things. Think of all the pictures of comparative health and beauty of human form and feature that you have ever seen, and know that perfect humanity will be of still surpassing loveliness. The inward purity and mental and moral perfection will stamp and glorify every radiant countenance. Such will earths society be, and weeping bereaved ones will have their tears all wiped away, when thus they realize the resurrection work complete.

"And this is the change in human society only. We call to mind also that the earth, which was 'made to be inhabited by such a race of beings, is to be a fit and pleasing abode for them. Paradise shall be restored. The earth shall no more bring forth thorns and briers, and require the sweat of mans face to yield his bread, but 'the earth shall yield her increase. 'The desert shall blossom as the rose. Nature with all its pleasing variety will call to man from every direction to seek and know the glory and power and love of God; and mind and heart will rejoice in him."[note 7]

Of the everlasting years that lie beyond the end of the Messianic Age the Scriptures say little or nothing. That they are years of continuing activity and increasing achievement in the interests of Gods creation there can be no doubt. Nothing is static in Gods universe, and although it is true that at that point in time the human race will have attained perfection and complete unity with God, and all evil and evil doers will have vanished for ever, it must be that glories as yet unimagined await men in the great beyond. Of the triumphs of that progress into the infinite it is not possible to speak, only to say that they are the destined inheritance of every man who, whether now or in the future Age, has unreservedly and completely given himself to the Lord Jesus Christ and obtained life through him. And for all the untold masses of mankind who must await the onset of the coming Age to receive that knowledge which alone will enable them to make the crucial decision, will come the blessed invitation of Revelation 22:17; "the Spirit and the Bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

APPENDIX

Some notes on the history of the doctrine of Future Probation

Following the completion of the New Testament, the deaths of the Apostles and the passing of the first few generations of the Church, accepted belief in future probation began to be formalized into doctrine first by Clement of Alexandria about A.D. 200 and his successor Origen in 220, followed by Diodorus of Tarsus in 380 -- Under the influence of Origen, one of the most celebrated of early theologians, the doctrine as handed down from the Apostolic Church was developed into Universalism, i.e. the belief that all men, without exception, will ultimately be saved after undergoing appropriate remedial processes which lead them finally to conversion. This belief was based on the theory that Divine love and mercy cannot be satisfied with the recovery from sin and death of less than the total of all created beings, and that since God has permitted the entry of sin amongst mankind He is morally bound to deliver all men eventually from the effects of that sin. Now whilst this is fundamentally far removed from the Scriptural insistence that man as a free-will agent may in fact exercise that freewill to refuse the place in creation for which God has made him, to elect for evil rather than good, to destroy his own capacity for repentance, and so go into oblivion, which is the antithesis of life in Christ, the standing which Origen enjoyed placed Universalism on a foundation which has supported the thesis to the present day. Farrar has said of him "It has been granted to few men -- perhaps scarcely even to the far less learned and far less profound Augustine -- to mold so decisively on a multitude of subjects the opinions of the Church of God"⁹ -- Other celebrated theologians of the period who advocated future probation were Justin Martyr and Irenaeus (2nd century), Gregory of Nyssa, Theodore of Mopsuetia and Ambrose of Milan (4th century). After that the new conception of the Millennium and reign of the Church advanced by St. Augustine tended to discredit belief in future probation, with its companion thesis of the pre-millennial Second Advent, and not until the 16th century did it re-emerge.

The first impulse towards the general re-establishment of the doctrine was probably inherent in the work of Fausto Sozzini (1539-1604) who revived the associated thesis of "conditional immortality" as it is now termed, viz, the doctrine that man is not inherently immortal and can only attain immortality by virtue of union with Christ, and that failure to achieve this end will result, not in everlasting life in conditions of separation from God, but in total loss of conscious life. Whilst Sozzini did not himself advocate future probation his contribution was an essential factor in the renaissance of the belief. A little while earlier than this Archbishop Cranmer had prepared the first draft of the Articles of Faith of the Church of England (the "39 Articles"; Cranmers work consisted of 42 Articles which became official in 1552 during the reign of Edward VI). The 42nd Article was directed against those who believed in the possibility of repentance and conversion, and therefore of salvation, after death and was aimed at the increasing number who were feeling their way to this truth. This Article read "They also are worthy of condemnation who endeavor at this time to restore the dangerous opinion that all men, be they never so ungodly, shall at length be saved, when they have suffered pain for their sins a certain time appointed by Gods justice". Ten years later, (1562), during the reign of Elizabeth,

this 42nd Article was excluded (together with the 41st, which condemned believers in the Millennium as heretics) and has not since been reinstated. The striking out of these Articles was with the consent of all bishops and clergy of both Houses of Convocation, indicating the unanimity of their view that belief in the possibility of probation and conversion after death, and in the Millennial reign on earth of our Lord Jesus Christ, is at least consistent with Christian orthodoxy.

Contemporary with Sozzini was Michael Servetus, martyred by John Calvin for heresy; Servetus believed and advocated the pre-millennial Advent and probation for men following the Advent. Then in 1712 a blow for the general re-establishment of the doctrine was struck by Dr. Jeremiah White, Chaplain to Oliver Cromwell, in his book "The Restitution of All Things". At much the same time (1750) Universalism was revived in England by John Kelly, followed twenty years later by John Murray who introduced it to America. By the dawn of the 19th century the labors of Hosea Ballou Senior and Junior, the leading theologians of modern Universalism, resulted in a definite and sizeable body of people espousing that belief. At the same time the German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher was also advocating future probation.

Following the expunging of the 42nd Article in 1562 no further pronouncement on this subject was made by the Church of England during the ensuing three centuries but the old prejudices died hard and in practice belief in future probation was still considered in many quarters unorthodox. Although endorsed by many prominent ministers and writers in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, it remained in the main the belief of individuals rather than that of communities. The nineteenth century brought it more into public view. In 1831 a number of Scottish ministers were deposed from office and excluded from the Kirk for promulgating the general view from their pulpits, their judges earning a scathing denunciation from Rev. F. D. Maurice, the celebrated Christian Socialist and philosopher. "Within the last ten years" he said "the Scottish Church has excluded from its bosom some of the most devout, laborious and able of its preachers.... that which was put forward as the reason for their expulsion was their belief in the universal redemption of mankind by Jesus Christ and their repeated declarations in their sermons that all whom they addressed were the objects of Gods love"[note 18].

Exactly three hundred years after the 42nd Article was expunged, the action of the then Convocation was challenged. The case selected was that of one Rev. H. B. Wilson who had, in a published essay two years earlier, expressed the hope that there would be provision after death for "those who shall be infants, not as to years of terrestrial life, but as to spiritual development nurseries, as it were, where the undeveloped may grow up under new conditions, and the perverted be restored."¹⁹ The case dragged on for two years and ended in 1864 before the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, which included the Archbishops of Canterbury and York and the Bishop of London. After referring to the withdrawal of the 42nd Article, the judgment said, in part, " we do not find in the formularies to which this Article refers any such distinct declaration of our Church upon the subject as to require us to condemn as penal the expression of hope by a clergyman that even the ultimate pardon of the wicked, who are condemned in the Day of Judgment, may be consistent with the will of Almighty God."[note 1]

This was not a vindication of future probation. The judgment contented itself with re-affirming the expunging of the 42nd Article and that Article was aimed principally at the Universalist view that all men without exception must eventually be reached by the saving power of God and ultimately be saved; although this must necessarily involve conversion at the last and therefore a period of probation in the after life, the idea inevitably became confused in the popular mind with the pardon and salvation of the grossest sinners despite their continued sin, which is a very different thing. But it did at least reiterate the theological orthodoxy of the basic principle, that there is an opportunity for repentance and conversion in the life after death and before the final judgment. Although a great many Christians, both ministers and laymen, are still not prepared to accept this position -- as indeed many did not in 1864; a veritable movement of protest at the Privy Councils judgment was mounted at the time -- it can be argued that the doctrine is, at the least, a permissible belief of orthodox theology. That will come as news to many, but it is a fact.

During the next few years the focus shifted to America, where belief in future probation became an issue in the Congregational and Presbyterian Churches. A considerable number of well-known ministers had become convinced of its Scriptural soundness and the doctrine formed the subject of a good many sermons. Between 1880 and the end of the century a number of leading men at Andover Theological Seminary became its advocates, from which the doctrine and its surrounding arguments became known as the "Andover thesis". A consequent Church trial for heresy on the one hand, and a bitter controversy in the missionary world on the other, brought the relevant circumstances into public view.

At the Annual Conference of the American Board of Foreign Missions, held at Des Moines, Iowa, in October 1886, the controversy, which had been continuing for some years past, came to a head over the refusal of the Board to commission for overseas missionary service two candidates who believed in future probation. These were apparently not the first who had been thus refused for this reason, but this Conference was especially momentous since the National Council of Congregational Churches was due to convene in Chicago a week later and opinion in that Council was opposed to the Board on this subject and in fact some Churches had intimated the withdrawal of their missionary contributions until the matter was agreed. In the end the Board gave way and all would-be missionaries were assured of freedom of thought in this respect, in the same way as Congregational ministers generally [note 20].

It may be worthy of note in this connection that a few years later at the World Parliament of Religions held in 1893 in Chicago, a Japanese delegate, Mr. Harmchi Kozaki, President of Doshisha University, Japan, speaking on "Christianity in Japan, its present condition and future prospects", intimated that belief in future probation was widespread among Japanese Christians, often to the surprise of visiting Western dignitaries.[note 21]

The debates at Andover Theological Seminary centered principally around the person of Egbert Coffin Smyth, Professor of Ecclesiastical History, President of the Faculty, and

Editor of the Andover Review over the period 1863-1904 -- With him in this was associated Rev. Chas. A. Briggs, D.D. a notable Semitic scholar, Professor of Theology and Hebrew at Union Theological Seminary, New York City, 1874-1892, founder and American Editor of the International Theological Library and the International Critical Commentary. The third member of a rather significant trio was Dr. Patton, at the time Professor of Ethics and later, in 1891, President, of Princeton Theological Seminary. Smyth and Briggs were original and progressive thinkers and some of their conclusions on Biblical matters would not be endorsed even today by evangelical Christians who believe the Bible to be factually true and the revealed word of God. On the subject of future probation, however, they were adamant, avowing it to be the teaching of the Scriptures and demanded by a logical and reasonable view of the character and purpose of God. The controversy which had been agitating the churches in America for ten years past now began to revolve around these three.

Proceedings were first taken against Smyth in 1887 by various interested parties for hearing before the authorities at Andover. He was charged with holding beliefs, teaching doctrines and theories, and doing other things, antagonistic to the Constitution and Statutes of the Seminary, and therefore was not a man of sound and orthodox principles in Divinity. A number of alleged heresies were included in the charge, of which the only material ones in the present connection were that (a) no man has power or capacity to repent without knowledge of Christ, (b) that mankind, save as they have received a knowledge of the historic Christ, are not sinners, or if they are, not of such sinfulness as to be in danger of being lost, (c) that no man can be lost without having had knowledge of Christ, (d) that there is, and will be, probation after death for all men who do not decisively reject Christ during the earthly life; and that this should be emphasized, made influential, and even centered, in systematic theology, (e) that Christian missions are not to be supported and conducted on the ground that men who know not Christ are in danger of perishing forever, and must perish forever, unless saved in this life[[note 22](#)].

The case dragged on before various august bodies, with argument and counter-argument, for fourteen years. In 1901, Smyth was finally acquitted of the charges. This did not necessarily imply a triumph for truth; it did however rule that belief in future probation should not be used to sustain a charge of unorthodoxy.

Dr. Briggs was arraigned before the New York Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in 1892 on a charge of heresy arising out of statements made in his inaugural address as Professor of Bible Theology at Union Seminary on January 20th 1891 -- "Redemption is not limited to this world" he had said "but continues during the vast periods of time which have elapsed for most men in the middle state between death and resurrection. This middle state must not be shortened by human limitation". He was convicted of heresy by 44 votes against 31, and suspended from office.

Dr. Patton came into the limelight when invited to address the Philadelphia Society of Princeton College on the subject of future probation at the time the Smyth controversy was at its height. A large audience gathered on 31st March 1887 to hear the views of a scholar who was widely known and respected for his learning and loyalty to the Faith. At

this time and onwards he came out as a champion of the doctrine although opposed to the modernistic tendencies of Dr. Briggs. "We continually see men going into the other world imperfect" he said on this occasion; "they must be imperfect when they reach there, and need some time for restoration or change. I am sure that there is no doctrine that is put in jeopardy by the affirmation of belief in future probation".

The somewhat academic nature of this Smyth-Briggs-Patton controversy during the closing years of the nineteenth century was translated into vigorous action by the dynamic personality of Charles Russell (1852-1916) already quoted, Pastor of New York City Temple, who made this thesis the inspiration of a world-wide evangelical work. Building upon a somewhat different basis, the Divine promise to Abraham that in his seed should all the nations of the earth be blessed, Pastor Russell insisted, with all exponents of future probation, that no man can be condemned without full enlightenment and an opportunity intelligently to accept Christ, and that the period in the Divine Plan set apart for this process is the final age of world history, the Messianic reign of Christ, the Millennium, which he with many others equated with the Day of Judgment. The impetus of his work carried on well into the present century under the auspices of the movement he founded for the purpose, and although the present body deriving from the original movement appears, since his death, to have departed very considerably from his views and measurably limited the scope of his "Abrahamic promise", his general thesis is still preserved by a number of Christian groups owing their inspiration in whole or in part to his work.

Parallel with the early stages of this movement in point of time were the Restorationists, who separated from the Universalists in 1830 on the issue of retribution in the Messianic Age.[notes 23-24] They saw and held, as did C. 1 -- Russell, that since "what a man soweth, that shall he reap", the period of probation which is the purpose of the coming Millennial Age must include, not only the full opportunity for repentance and reformation unhindered by Satanic influence which will then be the rule, but also natural and equitable retribution for the deeds of evil done in this life. Because character is formed by deeds, the transforming of bad or partially bad character in that day must involve stress and hardship, and men who are truly repentant will realize the inevitability as well as the justice of what in one place the Scripture calls "stripes" as an element in their progress towards sinless perfection.²⁴ This group continued at least until the early years of the present century, but does not seem to have produced any outstanding figure whose name has survived.

Contemporary with these activities in America there was an impressive gallery of eminent British ministers and theologians making known their convictions. These were mainly churchmen; quite understandably therefore they referred the time and place of the probationary process, not to the Messianic Age following the pre-millennial Advent, which was not a church doctrine, but to the "intermediate state", the place of departed souls between death and the last Judgment. The fundamental principle was preserved; probation persists after death and until the judgment; whether that period be one of life in an "intermediate state" or life in the Messianic Age makes no difference to that. Of a considerable number of names some that stand out are Dr. F. W. Farrar of Westminster

Abbey (1878) Prebendary C. A. Row of St. Pauls (1880) Dr. R. P. Downes, Methodist theologian (1907) Dr. Paterson Smyth, Dublin (1914) and Dr. R. H. Charles, Westminster Abbey (1920).

This is at best but a very fragmentary historical sketch. It can hardly be otherwise, for notwithstanding the not inconsiderable number of comparatively well-known men whose writings and books on the subject survive and can be consulted, most of these works were written to define the authors personal outlook and views; the histories of movements which, as movements, were devoted to this thesis are buried for the most part in their own archives and are not easy to recover. The fact that does stand out prominently is that despite the quasi-unorthodox position of the doctrine of future probation in the minds of the majority of Christians, it has been and is still accepted and believed by a substantial proportion throughout the world, and at all times during the past few centuries has had the support of men whose position in established church systems or in the Christian world vouches for their authority and whose convictions are entitled, not only to respect, but to serious consideration.

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