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PROBATION.

BY

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INTRODUCTION.

THIS world is full of evidence that it is the workmanship of God, belongs to God, and is rightfully subject to his control. Still, we do not find it in all respects such as, at first view, we might expect, under the government of the Supreme Being. We find earth to be a place of comparative darkness, of temptation, of error, and of wickedness. We find it, too, a place of suffering; and of suffering not following regularly and proportionately in the track of sin, but falling indiscriminately on the good and the bad, the just and the unjust. We find the world filled up with mysteries and changes, and death extending

its ravages over it, laying its cold hand on every thing that hath life, and turning it back to dissolution and emptiness.

This state of things has perplexed the hearts of some good men; from the creation to the present time; and had we no light but that of nature, must be perplexing and inexplicable to all. But the volume of revelation unfolds, in part, the mystery. This sets before us the design, the *end* of the present life, and shows us how all things around us are fitted to answer this important end. We learn from the Bible, that this life was intended to be a state, not of retribution, but of *probation*, of *trial*; and that most of the otherwise inexplicable things which take place in the world are but the prerequisites or appendages to such a state. Thus the strange command given to Abraham to sacrifice his son, was intended for his *trial*. Gen. 22 : 1. Heb. 11 : 17. The afflictions of Job were

permitted for the same purpose. "When he hath *tried* me, I shall come forth as gold." Job 23 : 10. God led the Israelites through their long and perilous journey in the wilderness—fit emblem of the present life—that he "might humble them, and *prove* them, and know what was in their heart." Deut. 8 : 2. And when he had brought them into Canaan, he left a remnant of the idolatrous Canaanites in the land, that through them he might *prove* his people, "whether they would keep the way of the Lord." Judg. 2 : 22. "In the business of the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon," God left Hezekiah, "to *try* him, that he might know all that was in his heart." 2 Chron. 32 : 31. Our Saviour says to the church at Smyrna, "Behold the devil will cast some of you into prison, that he may *try* you." He also predicts "an hour of temptation which shall come upon all the world, to *try* them that dwell upon the earth."

Rev. 2 : 10, 3 : 10. Indeed, God is said in the Scriptures to *try* his intelligent creatures in this world "every moment." He tries them with manifold temptations. James 1 : 12. He tries them with changes and afflictions. Dan. 11 : 35. 1 Pet. 4 : 12. He tries them with deceivers and deceits. Deut. 13 : 3. 1 Cor. 11 : 19. He tries them in the fire, as gold is tried. Zach. 13 : 9. And when the purposes of their trial are accomplished, the period of it is brought at once to a close. The thread of life is severed, and men go to their retribution in another state.

Such being the circumstances of the present life, it is of the greatest importance to every human being to understand the *nature* of that probation on which he is here placed. What is its object? What is implied in it? In what is it distinguished from a state of settled and confirmed character? When is pro-

bation to terminate ? And what are to be its issues hereafter ?

To these and other connected questions I invite the attention of the reader in the following pages. The subject certainly is one of deep, and solemn, and universal interest. Who would not wish to know for what purpose he was sent into the world, and what is the design of those multiform vicissitudes through which he is here called to pass ? Who would not wish to know in what way he may best answer the great end of his being, and prepare to stand accepted before the Son of man ?

The subjects discussed in the form of notes, in the Appendix, are important connected subjects, and yet not so directly connected, as to admit of their being incorporated in the body of the work. These notes are all commended to the consideration of the reader, but more particularly the *last* of them ; as it

treats of a subject to which some recent discussions in the theological world have attached a more than ordinary interest.

The Lord grant that, on all these points, both writer and reader may be guided, *intellectually* and *practically*, in the way of truth; that so the result of their probation on earth may be a confirmed state of holiness and happiness in heaven—an abundant admission into the kingdom and joy of their Lord.

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PROBATION.

CHAPTER I.

THE SUBJECTS OF PROBATION.

THE proper subjects of probation, under the government of God, are his *intelligent creatures: free moral agents*. For that portion of his works which is moved by physical or mechanical agency, no state of trial was deemed necessary. Human architects sometimes try their machines, before presenting them to the public eye, but the great Artificer of the universe had no need of such precautions. When he made the world, he was under no necessity of setting it up, and trying it for a time, to see whether it would move in harmony, and answer the purposes for which it was made. And when he framed the human body, he was under no necessity of making trial of that,

before he breathed into it the breath of life, and man became a living soul. But *free intelligent minds—moral, accountable agents*—are very differently constituted from any thing with which we are acquainted in the natural world. These are not subject, like brute matter, to physical attractions and repulsions. They are not moved by weights and balances, nor are their energies directed by any such means. They have the power of perceiving truth, of estimating consequences, of feeling the force of moral obligation;—the power of thinking and reflecting, of choosing and acting for themselves. They have all the power which dependent beings can have of forming their own characters, of deciding their own destiny, and of preparing for a righteous retribution hereafter; and hence *they* are the proper subjects of a moral probation or trial. God may, if he pleases, place *such beings* for a time on trial, and suspend their final destiny on the results of character to which they come during this period. And we have abundant evidence, from the scriptures, that he has actually done this. He seems to have done it in respect, not only to the human race,

but to all his other intelligent creatures, of which we have any knowledge. Before such creatures are permitted to enter upon their final state, God provides for them generally a very different state. He causes them to pass through a scene of discipline and trial, preparatory to the scenes and retributions of eternity.

CHAPTER II.

THE DESIGN OF PROBATION.

GOD is sometimes represented in the Scriptures as trying his creatures, with a view to his own better knowledge of them. Thus, he is said to have led the children of Israel through the wilderness, to humble them, and prove them, and *know* what was in their heart, whether they would keep his commandments, or no. Deut. 8: 2. He is also said to have left Hezekiah, to try him, that he might *know* all that was in his heart. 2 Chron. 32: 31. But these instances are similar to many others, in which the great God, in speaking to men, condescends to speak after the manner of men. Or the import of the word rendered *know*, may be, to *make known*, to *discover*. Thus God may have left Hezekiah to try him, that he might *discover*—to himself, to others, and to after ages—the real state and temper of his heart. It surely can be no part of the object of the Divine Being, in placing intelli-

gent creatures on probation, to satisfy *himself* as to the state of their hearts, or as to the results of character to which, under different circumstances, they may come; for he knows perfectly the hearts of all his creatures, and foreknows perfectly all their future circumstances, and the influence which these circumstances will have upon their lives.

The idea of probation is necessarily connected with that of the judgment, and of a future state of rewards and punishments. Men are on probation for the judgment, and for the retributions of eternity. It is for their characters while on probation that they will hereafter be called into judgment, and for their deeds while in the body that they will be rewarded or punished beyond the grave. This being the case, the grand design of probation seems to be, to furnish those who are placed upon it such an opportunity for the *formation* and *development* of moral character, as will best prepare them to stand in the judgment, and to meet its everlasting awards.

They must have an opportunity, in the first place, for the *formation* of character; and for its formation in a state not only of moral free-

dom, but of discipline, under a varied and conflicting moral influence. Suppose God were to create moral beings, and place them, from the first, in a confirmed state of sin and suffering—in a state from which all salutary restraints and good influences were withdrawn, and where they were left to sin and suffer forever. Under these circumstances, they might indeed be moral agents, and might deserve to eat of the fruit of their own way; still, it could not be said that they had had life and death placed before them, or that they had had such an opportunity for the formation of character, as rendered it at all proper that they should be called into judgment. Or if God were to create moral beings, and place them, from the first, in a confirmed state of holiness and happiness—in a state where there was no darkness, no change, no inducement or temptation to swerve from the path of duty; under such circumstances, they too might be free agents, and might be continued happy, because they were holy; still, it could not be said of them, more than of the beings last supposed, that they had ever experienced the struggle of conflicting motives and influences,

or been favored with such an opportunity for the formation of character, as fitted them for the great day of account. It would be true of both these classes of creatures, that they had had no trial. Their moral characters had not been proved. Their moral principles had not been subjected to any proper test. Under the influence of opposing, conflicting motives, they had not acquired a strength, a steadfastness of character. They had not become settled and confirmed in their respective courses of feeling and action. It had not been seen what either class would do, or what traits of character they would exhibit, under a change of circumstances and influences. A state of probation would be necessary for both, in order that their characters might be formed and tried, and they be prepared for the judgment and the final state.

A state of probation is also needed, in order to the full *developement* of character—that creatures may have the opportunity to act themselves out, and show what manner of spirit they are of. This was the object which God had in view in the trial of Abraham,—not his own satisfaction, but that of the patri-

arch, and of the church in all succeeding ages. This, too, was his object in the trial of Job,—not his own satisfaction, but that of the tempter, and of all others who should become acquainted with Job's instructive history.

These general objects of probation are nearly connected, and together constitute one of very great importance. Indeed, if there is to be a judgment and a world of retribution, I see not but they constitute one of absolute necessity. For men are to be tried in the judgment, and rewarded or punished beyond the grave, not for character possible, but for character actual; not for what they might have done, had providence furnished the opportunity, but for what they actually have done. It seems necessary, therefore, in order that their characters may be duly formed, and adequately developed, and they be fitted for the awards of the judgment and the retributions of eternity, that they should be placed for a time on trial, and that providence should furnish them with an opportunity of exhibiting, under different circumstances, the spirit and temper of their hearts.

So important is the general object here sta-

ted, at least in the estimation of the Supreme Being, that it may be doubted whether there is now an intelligent creature in the universe, who is not, or has not been at some time, on trial.* When the angels were created, they seem to have been placed for a time on trial, and it was during their term of trial that some of them fell. Jude 6. When our first parents were created, they too were placed for a season on trial. They were placed in a situation where they had every thing to delight the sense, and satisfy the heart, but where they were beset with temptations to draw them away from God. Had they overcome these temptations, and persevered in holiness to the end of their trial, they then would have been confirmed in holiness, and they and their posterity would have been holy forever. But instead of overcoming their temptations, they were overcome by them. They failed on the ground of their original trial, and fell under the power of their spiritual enemies.

* It is not at all likely that any will be *finally lost*, without a trial; and if any are *saved* without a trial, it can only be those who die and go to heaven in the merest infancy. But more of this subject hereafter.

But God, who is rich in mercy, was pleased not to leave them in their state of sin, and treat them according to their deservings. Instead of casting them off utterly, and executing upon them the penalty of the law, he was pleased to provide and open a way in which he could put them and their posterity on a new and better trial, and afford them another opportunity of securing everlasting life. And this is the trial on which the human family are now placed, and on the issues of which is depending the eternal destiny of their souls.

CHAPTER III.

OF PROBATION IN GENERAL, AND THE PROBATION OF MAN UNDER THE GOSPEL.

A STATE of probation differs from one of settled and confirmed character, not in this, that in the former state only, persons are free moral agents; for without doubt, saints in heaven, and sinners in hell, are as really free agents as they ever were. They must be so, or they cannot sustain any moral character at all.* But the difference between the two states lies principally here: a state of probation for holy beings is necessarily one of temptation and change—one of liability and exposure to error and to sin. Such was the state of the angels for a season after their creation; and the state of our first parents before their fall. A state of trial for sinful beings is one of hope, and not of despair; one of restraint, and not of abandonment; one in which trans-

* See Appendix. Note A.

gressors are not left, unchecked, to fill up the measure of their guilt, but have the opportunity, and ability, and all suitable motives, to turn from their sins and live. Such is the state in which the human family are now living, under the dispensation of the gospel.

In some important respects, *our* probation differs from that of our first parents before the fall. It differs as to its *foundation*. They were on trial on the ground of their own merits. They needed no other foundation than this. They had done nothing to forfeit the favor of God; and if they persevered as they then were, they would receive eternal life as the reward of their own deeds. But the ground of our trial is altogether the atonement of the Saviour. We have failed on the ground of our own performances. We have forfeited the favor of God, and exposed ourselves to his just displeasure. And it is only on the ground of the atonement of Christ, that God can so much as favor us with another trial—that he can consistently open to us a way of life, and furnish us with the opportunity and means of securing the salvation of our souls.

Our probation is also of a peculiar charac-

ter, differing from that of our first parents before the fall, and of all other holy beings, as to the nature of the question to be decided. Our first parents were on trial, to see if they would persevere in holiness; but we are on trial, to see if we will turn from our sins. They were on trial, to see if, in a world of temptation, they would hold on their way, maintain their integrity, and secure eternal life as the reward of their deeds; but we are on trial, to see if we will repent, and turn to God, and bring forth fruits meet for repentance, and thus secure forgiveness and salvation on the ground of the atonement. Their trial was adapted to their circumstances, as perfectly holy beings, who had done nothing to forfeit the Divine favor and blessing. Ours is adapted to our circumstances, as entirely depraved and guilty beings, who must be renewed, sanctified, and saved, through the mercy of God in Christ, or who must perish forever.

CHAPTER IV.

THE STATE OF MAN ON EARTH ADAPTED TO BE ONE OF PROBATION.

THE peculiarities of man's probation, as a sinner under a dispensation of grace, were described in the last chapter. It is proposed now to show, that the world in which we live, the influences which here beset us, the changes which pass over us, and the means and privileges which we enjoy, are all adapted to the circumstances of beings on probation, and on just such a probation as has been described.

In showing this, it may be remarked, in the general, that our abode on earth is *short*. We are here but a little while, before the stroke of death arrests us, and we are summoned into the eternal state. In this respect, our condition is fitted to be one of trial. A state of trial is never a permanent state. Nor is it ordinarily one of long continuance. *We* sometimes take things into our possession on

trial ; but we do not retain them, till they are worn out and destroyed. We use them until they have been sufficiently proved, and then either return them, or make them permanently our own.

It is not likely that the angels were long on trial, before a part of them apostatized, and went to their own place ; and the remainder were confirmed in their allegiance forever. And it is certain that our first parents were on their original probation but a little while, before, by an act of transgression, they finished it. So our state on earth is well adapted to be one of trial, in that it is of short continuance. We are here but a few days, or years, before the purposes of our trial are accomplished, and we are hurried away to other scenes.

But while we are here, and our trial is in progress, God is using all suitable means to render it complete and satisfactory.—We need to be tried in respect to our *faith*, and our *conduct* ; and it will appear, on examination, that God is so treating us as in the best manner to try us, in both these points of view.

In the first place, he is so exhibiting his

truth before our minds—exhibiting it in such forms and degrees—as is best calculated to try our *faith*.

God is giving us abundant evidence, for example, of his own *being and perfections*—evidence enough to satisfy every candid mind ; but then he is not furnishing all the evidence on this subject that he could furnish. He might so exhibit himself to the view of his creatures, that they could no more doubt his existence, than they can doubt the testimony of their senses, or the truth of the plainest mathematical demonstration. He might furnish such evidence of his existence, that there could no more be an atheist in this world, than there is in heaven. But then there would be, on *this* subject, no trial, and no room for trial. What trial of faith could there be, as to the Divine existence, when the truth was so exhibited, that it could not possibly be rejected ?—I repeat, God is affording to his creatures in this world all *needful* evidence of his being and perfections—evidence enough to satisfy them, if they will look at it and consider it in a proper manner. But then it is such evidence as they may resist, and as thou-

sands have resisted to their eternal condemnation.

God is affording us also abundant evidence of the *Divine authority and inspiration of the Scriptures*,—such evidence, that no person can contemplate it honestly, in all its bearings, and not be convinced. But then he is not furnishing all the evidence, on this subject, which he could have furnished. He might have made the truth and inspiration of the Scriptures so clear, that they could not possibly be rejected. He might have thrown such a resplendent light around the volume of revelation, that there could never be an infidel upon the earth. As well might there be infidels in the day of judgment. But in that case, what room had there been for the trial of our faith? As we are now on trial, it is, of course, necessary that we should be tried. But what trial could there be, in regard to the Divine authority of our sacred books, if the evidence in their favor were such that no mortal could resist it? God has given all *necessary* evidence, in regard to this important point—evidence enough for the full satisfaction of every diligent and honest inquirer. But then the nature and degree

of this evidence are such, that it *may be resisted*. If men hate the Bible, and are determined not to receive it as the truth of God, they may reject it. It is *possible*, in this world, to be an infidel; and it is necessary that such a thing should be possible, in order that the present life might be, what it was intended to be, a state of trial.

A similar course of remark may be pursued in regard to the *doctrines* of the Bible. The great and essential doctrines of the Bible are plainly enough revealed—so plainly, that no person of common capacity, and of impartial honesty, is in any danger of mistaking them. But then who will say, that God could not have made them, or at least some of them, plainer? Who will say, that he could not have so revealed the proper Divinity of Christ, that not a person on the face of the earth could have doubted it? Christ might so have made his appearance in our world, and walked about here encircled with such a blaze of celestial glory, that all who saw him would instinctively have accorded to him his appropriate honors.

The doctrine of a future life, too, might

have been so revealed, that it could no more be doubted in this world, than it is in the next. The glories of heaven and the flames of hell might have been brought so near, and made so visible, that they would have been objects rather of sense than of faith. But if the doctrines of religion had been revealed after this manner, how would they have been adapted to the situation of beings on trial? What trial could there be in regard to these doctrines, if they were set before us in such a light, that they could not possibly be mistaken or rejected?

The revelations of God, as contained in the Bible, are in general very plain—not so plain as they might be, but plain enough, to answer all the purposes for which they were given. To be sure, the doctrines of Scripture may be wrested and rejected by those who are unwilling to receive them. Those who hate God, and hate his truth, may cover themselves over with refuges of lies, and may profess to found these refuges on the Bible. But then none are under the least necessity of doing this. The truth is plainly revealed, and may be easily discovered; and assuredly will be dis-

covered by those who search for it in a proper manner.

Our Saviour, while on earth, preached plainly enough—so plainly, that all who were willing to do his will might easily know of his doctrine; but then he did not pretend, in all cases, to preach as plainly as he could. So far from this, he assigned it as a reason for speaking to the hardened Jews in parables, that seeing they might see, and *not* perceive; and hearing they might hear, and *not* understand. Mark 4: 12. They might well enough understand him, if they would; but if they would not, he did not mean so to force the truth upon them as to interfere with the purposes of their trial.

Indeed, we may say of religious truth generally, that it is placed before us, in this world, in precisely that manner which is best adapted to the circumstances of beings on trial. It is not so brought before us as to *compel* assent, whether we are disposed to yield it, or not. But it *is* so brought before us, that it may and will be easily apprehended, by those who diligently and honestly seek for it. The wicked will not, of necessity, understand; but the

wise shall understand. Those who do not like to retain God in their knowledge may be atheists, if they will; and those who fear and hate the Bible may be infidels, if they will; and those who hate the doctrines of the Bible may mistake and pervert them, if they will. But none are under the least necessity of doing either of these things; and none, who deal truly and faithfully with themselves, ever will do either of them.*

One of the methods, which God employs in this world for the trial of our faith, arises from the influence of false religious *teachers*. How many persons of this character there are now, and have ever been, who under one name or another, and one pretence or another, are beguiling unstable souls, and leading them downwards to perdition. Now it would be easy for God to stop the mouths of such men, or to deprive them of reason, or to cut short their lives and send them to their own place; but might not this be to take from us one of the necessary modes of trial? While our trial continues, we must be tried; and God

* See Appendix. Note B.

sees that we need just that kind of trial which results from the influence of false and seducing teachers. There were heresies (and of course *heretics*) in the primitive church; and we are expressly informed why they were permitted. It was for the *trial* of the faithful, and that those who were approved might be made manifest. 1 Cor. xi. 19.*

But we are on trial in this world in respect, not only to our faith, but our *conduct*; and we shall find, on examination, that our circumstances are all wisely adapted to this important end.

The world in which we live abounds with mingled *temptations* and *restraints*. There are numerous motives in favor of holiness; but in opposition to these, we are beset by a great variety of seductive and ruinous influences. The riches of the world allure, its pleasures beguile, and its honors dazzle. Sinful companions entice and flatter; the appetites and passions demand indulgence; while the great destroyer watches every opportunity to draw us away from God and duty. The question

* See Appendix. Note C.

has been often asked, Why are these things so? Why are we beset, in our journey through time, with so many and powerful temptations to sin? Without doubt God might have ordered things differently. He might have removed temptations in great measure from us, and led us along, under the influence of better motives, in a much more even and quiet path. But in that case, where would have been our trial? We are on trial now, and of course it is needful that we should be tried. And how are the feelings of our hearts to be tried, and the strength of our moral principle to be tested, but by temptation?—Temptation is not necessarily connected with sin. Temptation yielded to implies sin; but temptation resisted and overcome, so far from leaving any taint of sin, only proves the distance to which we are raised above it. Our blessed Saviour was tempted in all points like as we are, and yet without the least defilement of sin.—The temptations of life are not absolutely overwhelming. In every case, they may be, and ought to be, resisted. We may yield to them; and we may overcome them. In spite of them, we may go right; while, on

account of them, we are in danger of going wrong. And all this is necessary, in order that we may have a fair and sufficient trial. If our trial were closed, and we were already in a state of confirmed holiness and happiness, like that of the saints and angels in heaven; our temptations might properly be removed. But while we are continued in a state of trial, it is necessary that we should be subject to that in which our trial, in no small measure, consists.

Another thing noticeable in our present condition is the frequent and often painful and trying *changes* to which we are here subject. We no sooner enter into life, than we begin to experience these changes. We have sickness, and we have health. We gain friends, and we lose them. We are called, even in childhood, to pass through various changing scenes. And as we advance in life, the same course of things proceeds, and is continued, even to the end of our days. Our circumstances vary, with every changing month and year. Riches come, and go. Honors are conferred, and removed. Pleasures suddenly spring up in our path, and as suddenly

fade away from before our eyes. We have prosperity and adversity ; and each in different forms and degrees. Our prospects are clear, or they are clouded ; comforts are given, or they are taken away, according to the pleasure of the Supreme Disposer.

The providences of God are not only fluctuating, they often are peculiarly *dark* and *mysterious*. We know not, and cannot know, the reasons of those events which occur around us. The righteous, it may be, are afflicted, and the wicked prospered. The virtuous and useful are removed, perhaps, by an early death ; while the vicious and injurious are spared, to curse the world by a length of years and an example of crime.

But why, it may be asked, has such an order of things been established ? Why this continued succession of mysteries and changes ? The proper answer to these questions is, that we are here on trial ; and our frequent changes are among the means by which our trial is to be accomplished. How can our fellow beings know us, or we know ourselves, till we have been tried ; and how can we be satisfactorily tried, without the intervention of trying

changes? Persons often appear very well in one situation, and very badly in another. King Saul sustained the character of an amiable and pious youth, till he was advanced to the throne of Israel; but his high and sudden elevation led him to exhibit himself in a very different light. Simon the sorcerer appeared as well as any of the converts at Samaria, until placed in the peculiar circumstances which drew his character out; but he then quickly discovered himself to be in the gall of bitterness and bonds of iniquity.

Divine judgments sometimes overthrow those who have borne, with seeming humility, the influence of distinguished mercies; while mercies, perhaps more frequently, prove the ruin of those who have sustained unmoved the storm of affliction. We need, therefore, to be placed in a variety of circumstances, in order that we may be fully tried. We need to experience the multiform changes of life—to be rolled over and over—to be turned this way and that—to be placed in various situations, and subjected to the influence of different and often conflicting motives, in order that our characters may be formed and developed,

and we be prepared for what is before us in the coming world.

From the remarks which have been made, it appears that this short life is admirably fitted to answer the end for which it was given. This whole scene of things is wonderfully adapted to the circumstances of beings on trial. God is so exhibiting his truth to the minds of men, during their abode on earth, as to try most satisfactorily their *faith*; and he is so surrounding them with temptations and restraints, and visiting them with changes, and besetting them with new and conflicting motives, as in the best manner to test their characters, and try their hearts, and prepare them for the unalterable decisions of eternity. This life, we have seen, was intended to be our state of trial, and in every view we can take of it, it is admirably adapted to answer the purposes of such a state.

CHAPTER V.

ILLUSTRATIONS AND RESULTS OF PROBATION IN THE PRESENT LIFE.

AFTER what was said in the last chapter on the adaptedness of this world to be a state of probation, it might reasonably be expected that character here would be rapidly formed, and that great and often surprising results would be developed. And this we find to be the case. No sooner do we enter into life, than we begin to feel the influence of the beings by whom we are surrounded, and of the particular circumstances in which we are placed. These go directly to excite feeling and modify opinion; opinions quickly ripen into principles of action; and under the influence of adopted principles, character is soon formed, and the destiny of the soul is settled for eternity.

One man, it may be, begins life under circumstances which go to fill his mind with infi-

del objections, and to excite a prejudice against Christianity. His prejudices, finding a prepared soil in the native corruption of the heart, take root, spring up, and become strong and inveterate, so that by them the man is shielded against all the ordinary saving influences which are operating in the world. God holds out to him the clear light of truth, but he does not see it. He speaks to him from the volumes of nature and revelation, but he cannot hear. He pours into his lap the bounties of his providence, but he feels no gratitude. He does not even recognize the hand which blesses him. God visits him, in turn, with the rebukes of his providence and the corrections of his rod, but he takes not warning, and is as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke. Conscience at times whispers, and the Spirit strives, but the one is silenced, and the other grieved. Thus the result of this man's entire probation is to alienate him the more from God, and harden him in sin; and when patience can forbear—when justice can endure no longer, he is cut off, and goes to the retribution which he has merited.

Another person commences his moral exist-

ence under very different circumstances. His parents, his early associates, the guides and companions of his youth, are devotedly and consistently pious. Of course, he is early taught to know and fear God, to respect the Bible, to keep the Sabbath, and to attend upon the instituted means of grace. Thus the restraints of religion become strong upon him, his conscience is tender, his prepossessions are all in favor of the truth. The common avenues to temptation are in great measure closed to this person, while good influences are opening and pressing upon him on every hand. He is trained up in the way he should go, and when he is old he does not depart from it. By the blessing of God upon the means employed, this individual is early sanctified, and his probation terminates in his complete and final redemption and happiness in heaven.

Such are the ordinary results of probation, in cases like those here supposed,—the former showing how “evil men and seducers wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived;” and the latter illustrating the connexion between early instilled and faithfully nurtured

religious principle, and the salvation of the soul.

But this common course of things is not an invariable one. It is sometimes interrupted, I had almost said inverted. The grace of the gospel, in some instances, triumphs over the most inveterate prejudices and the fiercest opposition, so that he who was before "a persecutor and blasphemer" becomes a humble follower of the Lamb of God; while the amiable and hopeful youth, the child of many prayers and tears, is not unfrequently ensnared with temptation, and becomes an outcast from the Divine favor forever. In illustration of the former of these statements, the Apostle Paul may be cited as an eminent example. In justification of the latter, we might point to many a Christian family made disconsolate and heart-broken, by the defection and ruin of some loved one of their number.*

In the results of probation, as manifest in this life, God illustrates before the eyes of men the attributes of his nature, and the truths of his word. It is here that he displays the

* See Appendix. Note D.

sovereignty of his grace, showing that “he hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.” Rom. 9: 18. At the same time, he exhibits the *manner* in which existing differences in human character are made;—not arbitrarily—not by miracle—but by the influence of circumstances, of *motives* proper or improper, upon the minds of free responsible agents, who choose as they please, and do as they choose, and who may be said, in a sense, to form each his own character, and to fix his own destination forever.

In the results of probation, God illustrates very often the *deceitfulness* and *treachery of the human heart*, showing that “he who trusteth to his own heart is a fool.”—“Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing,” said Hazael to the weeping prophet? 2 Kings 8: 13. And yet, in the progress of his probation, as an old writer quaintly says, *the dog did it*. Under a change of circumstances, Hazael actually committed those very enormities, which the prophet foretold, and in prospect of which, at the time, he was himself so greatly shocked.

“Though I should die with thee, yet will I

not deny thee," was the reply of the self-confident Peter to the faithful warning of his Master. And yet, in an hour of trial—in a scene of temptation, into which he had needlessly thrust himself, Peter could affirm with an oath, that he knew no such man as Jesus of Nazareth. Mark 14 : 71.

The pious in Israel were exceedingly happy under the government of David, and felt perhaps, at times, as though they might safely trust and glory in their king. But their beloved monarch is not yet in a state of confirmed holiness. He is on probation; and in the progress of things a temptation besets him, before which he grievously falls.

After such exhibitions of human weakness and depravity, who will ever again consent either to trust his own heart, or to place his confidence in any arm of flesh ?

In the results of probation, we see continually illustrated, on the one hand, the benefits of *sanctified afflictions*; and on the other, the *inefficacy of mere suffering* to soften and subdue the obdurate soul. Where the mercies of God have not melted, and his truth has been listened to with no good effect, very often the

corrections of his rod, set home by the strivings of his Spirit, become the means of awakening serious thought, exciting feeling, and leading on to the happiest results. While as often, perhaps, we see the sinner tried in the furnace of affliction, till he becomes hardened in the very fire. We see him visited with stroke after stroke, till in desperation and madness he is ready to gnaw his tongue for pain, and still he does not repent of his evil deeds.*

In the progress of probation, we see verified, in numberless instances, the declaration of Solomon, that "one sinner destroyeth much good." Ecc. 9 : 18. Instead of bearing one another's burthens, and helping each other forward in the way to heaven, men become the seducers and tempters one of another. They take the devil's work out of his hands, and accomplish it often more successfully than he could do it himself. Were it proper, I could give the name of an individual, of polished manners, of active habits, of ready wit and fluent tongue—who for the last twenty

* See Appendix. Note E.

years has been doing more to ruin his fellow men, than almost any person of my acquaintance has been doing to save them. I could point to a family of children—the children, too, of pious parents—who, by the influence of an unprincipled associate who had insidiously obtruded himself among them, have been essentially corrupted, and are now apparently on the high road to death.

John Bunyan, by his own account of himself, was in early life such an example of wickedness, that he was told one day by a woman of his acquaintance, that he “was the ungodliest fellow for swearing that she ever heard in her life,” and that he “was enough to *spoil all the youth in the town.*”*

The progress of probation is never more solemnly illustrated than in the case of awakened and convicted sinners, who are often brought to a point in their existence, where, by the most trivial circumstance—a mere breath of influence one way or the other, their condition is settled for eternity. See that interesting young Jewish ruler, careless of the

* *Ivimy's Life of Bunyan*, p. 29.

good opinion of his associates in sin, running forth to meet the Saviour, kneeling before him, and addressing him in the most respectful terms, "Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may inherit eternal life"? Whose heart does not beat high with hope, that this amiable, anxious inquirer is now to become a disciple and follower of Jesus? But he goes away sorrowful, and we hear of him no more.

The younger Lord Littleton was in early life the subject of deep religious impressions, under the influence of which, as he informs us, he retired at a particular time to his chamber to pray, with the intention of committing his soul to God. As he was on the point of kneeling to engage in prayer, he concluded to turn aside and close his window shutter. At the window, he saw a band of musicians parading through the streets. The splendor of their appearance caught his eye; their inspiring notes ravished his ear; he rushed from his apartment to the street, joined in the crowd, banished his seriousness, and felt the strivings of the Spirit no more.

In the progress of probation, the soundness

of religious professions are tested, and the guise of the hypocrite is often torn away. It is solemnly interesting, in this view, to read over the Acts of the Apostles, and the subsequent portions of the New Testament. How many are there named, who were admitted to the Christian community, and seemed to run well for a time, who, in the progress of their trial, showed that they had neither part nor lot in the matter, because their hearts were not right in the sight of God. An interest equally painful is excited, in looking over the churches of our own land, especially those which have been favored with seasons of spiritual refreshing. Revivals multiply hopeful converts, but probation tries them. The process of winnowing naturally follows that of harvest. The hypocrite will not always call upon God. He whose heart is set upon the world may be excited to a temporary zeal in religion; but in the progress of things, his old propensities will predominate, and the secrets of his character will come to light.

But while probation unmasks and detects the hypocrite, it confirms and strengthens the faithful people of God. All things are work-

ing together for their good. Judgments conspire to humble them, and mercies to melt them, and disappointments to wean them from the world. "Tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope." As the winds and storms which beat upon the mountain oak cause it to cast deep its roots, and strengthen its foundation, so do the conflicting influences which beset the children of God in the present life, serve to give strength and consistency to their characters, and thus ripen them for heaven. Their "journey is a thorny maze, but *they march upwards still.*" Their "path is as the rising light, which shines brighter and brighter to the perfect day."

Considered as a scene of probation, our state on earth is not only one of deep and solemn interest, but of rich and varied instruction. It is not only the seed time of our existence, where, "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap," but it is a state of moral training, of discipline, in which the human family are placed for a time, that they may learn the most important things, and prepare for their future and eternal destination. It is

here that the God of heaven makes them acquainted with his character and their own, with his will and their duty. It is here, that he beckons them away from earth, and calls them to the pursuit of glory and virtue; while at the same time he leaves them to be tried with adverse influences, and free to turn to the right hand, or the left. How important that the busy sons of men understand the nature of their present condition, and the object for which they were sent into the world, that while a price is in their hands to get heavenly wisdom, they may not suffer it to pass from them unimproved.

CHAPTER VI.

PROBATION LIMITED TO THE PRESENT LIFE.

THE idea has been cherished at different periods, and is not uncommon in our own times, that probation is not limited to the present life. Those who love their sins, and are resolved to persist in them as long as they live on earth, are very likely to cling to the hope that the other world will be one of probation—a place where the errors of this life may be retrieved, and where lost souls will be converted and saved.

Were there no other objection to such schemes and hopes, it is evident from what we know respecting the future world, that it is not at all *adapted* to be one of probation. The present life, we have seen, is admirably adapted for this purpose. But the future life has no such adaptation. Its *length*, its *duration*, is inconsistent with the idea of trial. An *everlasting* state of trial—a probation of sufficient length to be expressed by the terms *forever and*

ever, is an absurdity, in the very mention of it. Does God need to try a man *forever and ever*, in order to fit him for his final state? And besides, what room for a final state, after a man has been on trial *forever and ever*?

But the future life is unfitted to be one of trial in respect, not only to its duration, but its circumstances. Divine truth will be exhibited in that world, not in a way to try the faith and the characters of men, but rather to confirm them in existing character. In the other world, there will be no atheists, or infidels, or disbelievers of God's essential truth; and no possibility that there should be any. There will be beings there who hate God's truth, but none who intellectually reject it. The very devils *believe* and they tremble.

Nor will the future world be, like the present, one of mingled temptation and restraint, or one of ceaseless fluctuation and change, and adapted in these respects to be one of trial. There will be no changes there to try the feelings and elicit character, but every thing is represented as moving along in one unvarying and unending course. Removed from all temptation, and dwelling in the

unclouded light and blessedness of heaven, the righteous are continually rising from mansion to mansion, and from one degree of glory and felicity to another ; while all good influences and restraints being removed from the wicked, they go down the steeps of misery and ruin, as fast as unbridled passion and the unchecked indulgence of sin can carry them.

In short, all the representations which are given us of the future world forbid the supposition that it is to be one of trial. The scriptures never represent it as a state of trial, and manifestly it has no fitness, no adaptedness, for such a state. On the contrary, the circumstances of that world all go to render it, (what it is described to be) the place of *endless retribution* ;—the place where men are to reap according to that they have sown, and to be rewarded or punished according to the deeds done here in the body.

Although the consideration here urged might be sufficient, of itself, to settle the question, as to the limits of probation, still, as this is a point of great practical importance, and one keenly contested at the present day, it may be proper to adduce additional evidence,

showing that no probation is to be expected beyond the grave.

1. And here I would inquire, in the first place, of the advocates of a future probation, why they are disposed to confine this probation to *one class* only of their fellow men, viz : those who have died in their sins. If the wicked are to be on probation in the other world, why not the righteous ? If it is possible for the former class, after death, to be restored and saved, why not for the latter to fall away and perish ? There is no better foundation, either in scripture or reason, for the one of these suppositions, than for the other. Why then should one of them be adopted, and the other rejected ?

2. The notion of a state of trial after this life is unreasonable, because it is *unnecessary*. Cannot God prolong our probation in this world to any extent he pleases ? and use with us such means, and give them such efficacy, as he pleases ? and convert and save men in this state of probation, as well as in any other ? What need then of a future probation ? What good purpose can it answer ? On this ground, the miseries of the other world would be

indeed a *needless waste*, and far more difficult to be reconciled with the benevolence of God, than the idea of eternal punishment.

3. In opposition to the notion of a state of trial beyond the grave, it may be further observed, that sinners often finish, virtually, their period of trial, long before they leave this world. This is the case with those who have committed the unpardonable sin. This, too, is the case with the more numerous class, who have finally grieved away the Holy Spirit, and are judicially abandoned of God. Such were a majority of the ten tribes of Israel, in the days of the prophet Hosea. They were incurably wedded to their idols, and God said, "*Let them alone.*" Hos. 4: 17. Such were many of the hardened Jews, in the days of our Saviour. "If thou hadst known, in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace; but now *they are hid from thine eyes.*" Luke 19: 42. Such also were some of whom the Apostle speaks, in 2 Thess. 2: 11. "And for this cause, God shall send them strong delusion that they should believe a lie, that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteous-

ness." There have been persons of this description, it may be feared, in all periods of the world. "My Spirit shall not always strive with man." When God's spirit is finally grieved away, and the soul is abandoned, as is often the case with sinners in the present life, their period of probation is virtually ended. It has not ended in form, but it has in fact. And who can believe that such persons will have another probation beyond the grave? They have provoked God to abandon them, even in this life; and who can believe that he will undertake again for them in the life to come?

4. That there is no probation for the wicked beyond the grave is also evident, since in the scriptures we are no where encouraged or authorized to pray for the dead.—It was not till the Jews, in the days of Jeremiah, had become incorrigible, and were abandoned of God, that this holy man was forbidden to pray for them. "Pray not for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to me; for I will not hear thee." Jer. 7 : 16. It is because there is no longer any hope for those who have committed the

sin unto death, that Christians under the gospel are not permitted to pray for them. "There is a sin unto death; I do not say that ye shall pray for it." 1 John 5 : 16. And it can only be because there is no longer any hope for those who have died in sin, that in the Scriptures we are no where encouraged or authorized to pray for them. If they were still on probation, and there was hope in their case, why should they not be subjects of prayer?—Certain it is, that the doctrine of a future probation, and the practice of praying for the dead, are very intimately connected, and have always existed in the church together. We conclude therefore, since this practice is so manifestly unscriptural, that the doctrine from which it originates cannot be true.

5. The doctrine of a future probation involves several other points of doctrine—and so it is considered by its abettors—which are manifestly unscriptural. One of these is, that the sufferings of the wicked in the other world are altogether *disciplinary*. They are designed, not for the public good—not to sustain the authority of law, and deter others from like courses of transgression, but *merely*

for the good of the sufferer. They are the chastisements of a kind father, intended to bring the disobedient child to repentance. But if this is true, then the future punishment of the wicked is a blessing, and not a curse. It is evidence of God's love, and not of his displeasure. "Whom he loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." And to be delivered from this punishment, at least before it has accomplished its end, must be, not a favor, but an injury. I need not stop to show how opposite these conclusions are to the current representations of the Bible on the subject,—in which the inhabitants of hell are spoken of as under the *curse* of God—as the objects of his displeasure, his indignation, his wrath, his vengeance—as *examples* to the universe, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. 2 Thess. 1 : 8. Jude 7.

It is further involved in the idea of a probation beyond the grave, that sinners suffer, before their restoration, *all that they deserve.* They deserve only that degree of suffering, of discipline, which is necessary in order to bring them to repentance ; and consequently, when they are brought to repentance, they are

indebted no more. They have paid now the uttermost farthing. But on this ground, what have they to be forgiven? And for what are they to be indebted to Christ? And what *grace* will there be in their deliverance and salvation? Indeed, of what *salvation* are they the subjects, unless that may be called a salvation which delivers men from suffering wrongfully, cruelly—suffering more than they deserve?—No time need be spent in showing how entirely opposed such a theory is to the spirit and language of the New Testament on this subject, in which all who are saved are represented as saved from a merited destruction by *mere grace*—as forgiven and saved through Christ alone.

It is moreover involved in the idea of a probation in hell, that the *means of grace* and *influences of the spirit* are enjoyed there. The Bible must be read in hell, and the gospel preached, and the Holy Spirit poured out. As much as this is necessarily included in the supposition that that world is, like the present, a place of probation—a place where sinners, in great numbers, are converted, sanctified, and fitted for heaven. But where in the Bible

do we read of such means and influences being enjoyed in hell? Did the rich man know any thing of them in his place of torment? Or do those fallen spirits know any thing of them, who are “reserved in chains, under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day”?

6. If the wicked are to have a probation and consequent restoration in the other world, it may properly be inquired, *when* these things are to be expected. That they cannot take place *before* the day of Judgment is obvious from several considerations: As, first, the Scriptures decide that, between death and the Judgment, there are to be *no changes* in the characters or states of men. “It is appointed unto men once to die, but *after death the Judgment.*” Heb. 9 : 27. Secondly; in the Judgment men are to be tried for their actions *while in the body*; which shows that it was only during their connexion with *the body*, or *while on earth*, that they were on probation. 2 Cor. 5 : 10. But thirdly, in the day of Judgment, the wicked will be still *unreclaimed*. This is evident from a great many passages. “At the end of the world, the angels shall come

forth, and shall *sever the wicked from among the just.*” “When the Son of man shall sit on the throne of his glory, and before him shall be gathered all nations, he shall *separate them one from another*, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats.” Mat. 13 : 49. 25 : 32. From these and the parallel passages it is certain, that if the wicked are to have a season of probation between death and the Judgment, it will not be improved by them—it will do them no good; for in the descriptions of that eventful day, they are represented as guilty, and as destined to go away accursed.

That there will be no probation for the wicked *after* the Judgment is also evident from several considerations. And, first, from the evident *nature* and *bearings* of the subject. As has been stated in a previous chapter, the ideas of probation and the judgment are intimately connected, and so connected, that the former necessarily *precedes* the latter. We are on probation *for* the Judgment. It is for character formed *while on probation*, that we are to be brought into judgment. It follows

therefore, of necessity, that our entire state of probation must precede the judgment.

That there will be no probation *following* the day of judgment is further evident from the fact that *such a day has been appointed*. Why should there be any general judgment, if its decisions are not to be final? Why so much preparation for this grand and decisive scene, if after all it is not to be decisive—if its awards are liable to be rescinded or changed?

It should be considered also, in this connexion, that immediately subsequent to the resurrection and the judgment, Christ resigns his mediatorial office and kingdom. "Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet." 1 Cor. 15 : 24. Subsequently to this delivering up of the mediatorial kingdom to the Father (which follows immediately on the conclusion of the judgment) there will be no further *opportunity* for the return of sinners to God; and for the very good reason, that there

is no longer a Mediator. The whole number of Christ's friends are received up into heaven; his enemies are all put under his feet; his mediatorial work is done; his authority is resigned back to him who gave it, and God is now all in all.—Accordingly, we find it said expressly of those who are unjust, at the close of the judgment, that they shall be *unjust still*; and of those who are filthy, that they shall be *filthy still*; and of those who are holy, that they shall be *holy still*. (Compare Rev. 20 : 11—15 with 22 : 11.)

If there is to be no probation for the wicked, either before the general judgment, or after it, it is incumbent on those who believe in such a probation to inform us distinctly when it will be.

7. In opposition to the notion of a future probation and restoration, I urge again, that *hell is no place for the reformation of offenders, or the conversion of sinners*. It is the prison of evil spirits—the place prepared for the devil and his angels.—Take all the righteous out of the present world, and leave the wicked to revel and riot here alone, and what would the state of society be? What restoring, redeem-

ing influence would remain? What then must be the state of things in hell, where devils and damned spirits are crowded together—where not so much as one holy affection is cherished—where every mouth is filled with blasphemy, and every heart with sin? Of all places in the universe, this surely is the least fitted to bring about the conversion of sinners, and promote their return to God. Accordingly we have no account that so much as one sinner was ever converted in hell, or ever will be. The prison of hell is not represented to us as a penitentiary, a house of correction, but rather as the abode of incorrigible and despairing souls, where those who would not honor the law by obeying it, are made to honor it by enduring its penalty, and are set forth in view of the universe, as examples “suffering the vengeance of eternal fire”.

S. I only add further, that the idea of a probation beyond the grave is contradicted by the general current of Scripture. Much that might be said under this particular has been already anticipated. I only observe, therefore, that the Scriptures every where represent our life on earth as the seed time, and

the only time we shall ever have in which to lay up treasures in heaven. If we here sow to the flesh, we shall of the flesh reap corruption; but if we sow to the Spirit, we shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. Gal. 6 : 7. The rich man and Lazarus, after death, are represented as having their respective states finally and unalterably settled. "Between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that they who would pass from hence to you cannot, neither can they pass to us that would come from thence." Luke 16 : 26. Certainly, no language can be plainer or more decisive than that of our Saviour in this passage. He teaches us here, as in other places, that there can be no change of worlds beyond the grave, but every one must there be rewarded or punished, according to the deeds done here in the body.

Such certainly is the obvious representation of Scripture in regard to this important subject. And so the Bible is understood, not only by Evangelical Christians, but by others of widely different sentiments. Infidels generally, both of ancient and modern times, regard the Bible as teaching the doctrine of endless

punishment, and urge this as among their reasons for rejecting the Bible. The Rationalists of Germany, who do not themselves believe in the eternal punishment of the wicked, admit that *the Bible* teaches this doctrine. And the same is true of many, perhaps most, American Unitarians. They admit that *the Bible* holds out no hope for the dying sinner, though *they* hope that God may have mercies for him which he has not revealed.

CHAPTER VII.

OBJECTIONS CONSIDERED.

It may be objected to the sentiment of the foregoing chapter, that if probation is confined to the present life, great numbers of the human family have really no probation. This is true of all those who die in infancy. They live here, it may be, but a few days or hours, and are in a state of such extreme ignorance and imbecility as forbids utterly the supposition of trial; so that if this portion of our race have no probation beyond the grave, they cannot be said to have any at all.

There are many things pertaining to the spiritual state and prospects of infants which God has not very explicitly revealed; and where we are left in ignorance or uncertainty, it becomes us to speak with modesty and reserve. We will not here agitate the question, whether the little space allotted to many infants in this world can be regarded as a season of probation. Suppose it be not thus

regarded. There is reason to hope, I think, from various intimations in the Scriptures, that those who die in mere infancy are saved. They are sinners, and need *saving*; and my hope is, that, by the washing of regeneration and sprinkling of the blood of Christ, they will be found at last among the saved. And if God is disposed to save them without a proper probation, who has any reason to find fault? If, to illustrate and magnify the riches of his grace, God is disposed to sanctify a portion of his creatures in this world, and receive them home to himself, before the trials of life can be said to have commenced with them, have we not more reason for admiration than complaint? And a measure like this, instead of encouraging the adult sinner to hope for a probation beyond the grave, seems rather to forbid such a hope. For if God prefers rather to save infants without any probation, than provide for them a probation in the future life, he surely cannot be expected to make such a provision for those who, in this life, have had a full probation, and have wasted it—have madly resisted all his offers, and trampled on his grace.

It may be further objected, that in confining probation to the present life, we have not duly considered the situation and prospects of the benighted heathen. On supposition that those who die in a rejection of the gospel do perish without hope, it has been urged by some, that for the poor heathen, who have never heard of a Saviour, there ought to be a probation beyond the tomb. Such ought to have an opportunity, before their final rejection and destruction, of at least hearing of a Saviour's love.—But whose fault is it, I ask, in the first place, that the heathen have not the gospel? Is God to blame in this matter? Or does the blame attach entirely to men?—And living as they do without the gospel, do the heathen improve, in the best manner, the light they have? Or are they not chargeable with most miserably perverting and abusing this light—with extinguishing almost the lamp of reason, and choosing to walk in darkness and sin? “The invisible things of God are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead”; so that the very heathen are without excuse. Rom. 1 : 20. They might know

God, and love and enjoy him, if they would; and it is only because they do not like to retain God in their knowledge, that so many of them perish in darkness. The heathen are on probation to see, not whether they will embrace a Saviour of whom they have no knowledge, but whether they will love and serve God, the evidence of whose existence and perfections shines out before them from the whole face of nature; and if, under these circumstances, they die in ignorance of God, and rebellion against him, and suffer hereafter the due reward of their deeds, there is none in heaven or earth who have any reason to find fault.

Whatever some learned theorists may have dreamed to the contrary, the Scriptures furnish no more evidence in support of a future probation for the dying heathen, than for the dying sinner under the gospel. Indeed, against both, the Scriptures seem to me to close up every door of hope, and to suspend the future condition of all alike, on the characters which they sustain in the present life. The Apostle Paul, speaking of the vicious practices of the *heathen*, affirms, that “the end of these things is *death*”—a death

which he contrasts in the following verses, with *eternal life*, and which, of course, can be no other than *eternal death*. Rom. 6 : 21. Again, speaking of those who live after the manner of the heathen, he says repeatedly and expressly, that such “shall *not inherit the kingdom of God*.” 1 Cor. 6 : 9. Gal. 5 : 21. Eph. 5 : 5. It is represented by the same Apostle, that “as many as have sinned without law, shall also *perish* without law ;” and he addresses those who, in times past, had been heathens, as having then lived “*without hope, and without God, in the world*.” Eph. 2 : 12. Rom. 2 : 12.*

Indeed, I think it reason enough against the supposition of a future probation—for heathens, or infants, or any other of the human race—that we read of but two states beyond the grave, neither of which, as they are described in the Bible, is at all adapted to be one of trial. Heaven, whatever it may once have been, when the angels are supposed to have been on trial, and when some of them fell, is now certainly not at all adapted for such a

* See Appendix. Note F.

purpose. In that region of unsullied and glorious light, where each sees as he is seen, and knows as he is known, there can be but little opportunity for the trial of faith. And removed, as heavenly beings are, from all the changes and temptations of life, there will be as little opportunity to test their characters and try their hearts.—And the world of woe, a place from which all salutary restraint and good influences are withdrawn, will be no better adapted to the purposes of trial, than heaven. This obviously is the place, from the very adaptation of it, where sinners are left to curse their God and look upward—left to fill up unchecked the measure of their sins—where they will bite and gnaw their tongues for pain, and yet not repent of their evil deeds.

If there was to be a probation beyond the grave for any portion of mankind, we might expect that some place would be prepared and fitted, as this world is, for such a purpose. But we hear of no such place, on the other side of the river of death—none, save the resting place of God's people on the one hand, and the prison of despair and abandon-

ment on the other. We are constrained to believe, therefore, that all the probation which any of the children of men will ever enjoy, is confined within the limits of the present life.

It may be objected again to the views which have been advanced, that all good influences do not seem to be withdrawn from the world of woe—that in one instance, at least, the gospel was preached there, and preached by no less a personage than our Lord Jesus Christ. “Christ also hath once suffered for sinners, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit, *by which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison*, which sometime were disobedient, when once the long suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was preparing, wherein few, that is eight souls, were saved by water.” 1 Pet. 3 : 18—20.

This passage has been supposed by some to teach, that Christ, between the period of his death and that of his resurrection, descended into hell, and there preached the gospel to the imprisoned spirits of darkness. But it is evident, on the slightest inspection, that the pas-

sage teaches no such doctrine. It is not said here that Christ ever preached, in *person*, to the spirits in prison. So far from this, it is affirmed expressly that his preaching was accomplished in another way. He preached to them *by his Spirit*. “Being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit, *by which* (the Spirit) he went and preached unto the spirits in prison.”—Nor is it said that Christ preached to the spirits in prison, *at the period intervening between his death and his resurrection*, or at any time *after* their imprisonment. The Apostle refers this preaching to a very different period. It was “*when* once the long suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was preparing.” This was the period when Christ, by his spirit, preached to those hardened antediluvians who, in the days of Peter, were shut up in the prison of hell.*—And if it be asked *how* Christ, by

* That the adverb *when*, in the passage under consideration, denotes the time of Christ's preaching, and not the time during which the spirits in prison were disobedient, is evident, since the latter supposition would imply that these spirits were disobedient only while “the long suffering of God waited in the days

his Spirit, preached to the antediluvians at the time referred to, the answer is easy. By his Spirit, he assisted and inspired holy men to instruct and warn them. Noah, we are expressly told, was a preacher of righteousness. And while Noah preached, by his Spirit Christ was striving with the antediluvian sinners. He was impressing truth upon their hearts, and urging them to repentance and reformation. We know that the Spirit of God strove with men at this early period; for it was of the generation that were swallowed up in the flood that God says in his word, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man." Gen. 6 : 3.

The passage before us thus explained (and this is the only consistent explanation of which it is capable) so far from inculcating a future probation for the wicked, in which the means of grace are to be enjoyed, plainly enough

of Noah, while the ark was preparing"; whereas they actually had been disobedient during the whole period of their existence—while they lived on earth, and when they died, and during all their confinement in the prisons below. For if they had ceased, at any time, to be disobedient, why had they not been released?

teaches the opposite doctrine. It was *while the ark was preparing*, in the days of Noah, that the long-suffering of God waited upon the antediluvians. It was during *this period*, that Christ, by his Spirit and prophet, preached to these hardened men. This whole period was allotted them, as a season of trial, a space for repentance, in which they might turn from their sins and live. But when this period was closed, God would wait no longer. Their state of probation was at an end; the flood came and swallowed them up; and their immortal spirits descended to the prisons of darkness, where they were confined in the days of the Apostle Peter, and where undoubtedly they will remain confined till the day of judgment. This passage, therefore, which has been so often quoted for a different purpose, teaches us that the present life is *the season of probation*, or the period when the long suffering of God *waits* upon sinners to turn and live.

CHAPTER VIII.

A DIFFICULTY PROPOSED AND CONSIDERED.

THEOLOGICAL writers have found much difficulty in reconciling the earnestness of God for the salvation of sinners with the fact that so many of them are not saved.—It results from the moral perfection of God, that he must earnestly desire the salvation of sinners. To suppose the contrary would be to divest him of even common benevolence.

In the Bible, God has *manifested* his earnestness in relation to this matter, in a thousand forms. “As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.” Ezek. 33 : 11. “O that my people had hearkened unto me, and that Israel had walked in my ways”! Ps. 81 : 13. “O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children forever.” Deut.

5 : 29. God has manifested his earnest desire for the salvation of sinners, not only in what he has said, but in what he has done. He has given his Son to die for sinners. He has proposed to them easy terms of salvation. He has urged his proposals upon them with all the eloquence of motive, and waited long for their compliance. He has sent his Holy Spirit to strive with them, and bring them to repentance and the acknowledgment of the truth. Of whatever else we stand in doubt, therefore, we must never doubt the earnestness of God for the salvation of lost men. We must never call in question the sincerity of his benevolent desires, when, with the yearnings of a father, he cries in the ears of his wandering children, "Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die"?

On the other hand, with our eyes open upon the Bible and the world, we cannot reasonably call in question the melancholy fact, that great numbers of the human family have failed of salvation. So it was in the early history of mankind, when the earth became so filled with violence, that almost its entire population was swept away in the deluge. So it was all

along under the former dispensation, when the heathen world lay in gross wickedness, and when the frequent apostasies of God's chosen people called down upon them desolating judgments. So it was in the days of the Saviour, when with deep concern he exhorted the surrounding multitude, "Enter ye in at the strait gate; for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and *many there be which go in thereat*: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and *few there be that find it.*" Mat. 7 : 13. Such, in general, has been the state of the world, from the times of the Saviour to the present. Such it is now. None, who believe that heaven is a holy place, and that without holiness no man shall see the Lord, can resist the conviction, in view of the present moral aspect of the world, that a vast majority of its adult inhabitants are not saved.

We are looking indeed for better days. We are expecting a long season of rest and peace to this agitated world, when its remotest ends shall teem with inhabitants, and when, in the strong language of prophecy, "all shall be righteous." Is. 60 : 21. But we must not

blind ourselves in regard to the existing state of things. We must not indulge hopes relative to the salvation of men, in past ages or at the present time, which are forbidden alike by Scripture, and by plain matters of fact.

But how are we to reconcile the earnestness of God for the salvation of sinners, with the fact that so many are not saved? If he desires their salvation, why does he not save them? If he has no pleasure in the final destruction of the wicked, why does he not rescue them from so dreadful an end?

Shall we reply to these inquiries by saying that God *cannot* save more of the human family than he does, without destroying their free-agency;—which is equivalent to saying that he cannot save them at all? For to convert, sanctify, and save sinners, or rather creatures, *things*, which are not free agents, is a contradiction in terms. Shall we then meet the difficulty in question by affirming that God *cannot* save more of the human family than he does? He desires to save more, but he *cannot* accomplish it. He saves as many as he *possibly can*.—But are such assertions consistent with reason, or with truth? Is not God om-

nipotent? Has he not the hearts of men in his hand, as the rivers of water, to turn them whithersoever he will? Could not the Being who converted Paul have converted Judas? Was not he who converted three thousand on the day of Pentecost *able*—had he put in requisition all his power—to have converted a great many more? And besides, if God is not *able* to do all the good which he, on the whole, desires; if the promptings of his benevolence must be forever restrained through a want of *power*; how can he be happy?—Confident I am, that this mode of relieving the difficulty above suggested cannot be with propriety adopted. We are constrained, therefore, to seek for some other mode; and in this search we are essentially aided by the views which have been exhibited on the general subject of probation. Is God able to do more for the salvation of sinners than he is actually doing—I speak now of sinners under the gospel—*consistently with their being in a state of probation, and with their having a fair and sufficient trial?* That he has *power* to do

* See Appendix. Note G.

more than he does, were not his omnipotence held in check by moral considerations, I have no doubt. But his omnipotence *is* held in check by moral considerations; and among these, may not this be the chief—*the necessity of furnishing to our race, in this world, a season of trial?*

God might bring every child of Adam into the world holy—might sanctify them all from the womb, and place them in a confirmed state of holiness and happiness, like that of the saints and angels in heaven; but then there would be no trial. Or God might make the circumstances of men in this life very different from what they now are, and much more favorable to the general diffusion of holiness; but on this very account, they might not be so well adapted to a state of trial. As has been said in a previous chapter, God might have presented some of the truths of religion in a far more convincing and overpowering light than they are at present,—so much so, that no mortal could mistake or reject them; but in that case there would have been no proper trial of our faith. The temptations of life, too, might have been in great measure

removed, and its changes have been less frequent, exciting, and hazardous. God might as well have cast down the devils into the bottomless pit, and shut them up, and set a seal upon them, that they should not deceive the nations, during the whole period of this world's history, as during the period of Millennial rest; but then, where had been our trial? Trial necessarily implies temptation and change; and temptation implies the existence of a tempter.

In fine, is not the consideration of trial alone sufficient to solve the difficulty proposed in the foregoing pages? That God earnestly desires the salvation of men, there can be no doubt. And that great numbers of our sinful race are not saved, is equally clear. Why? Not because God has not the *ability* to save them, but because, before being fixed in their final state, whether of happiness or woe, they must have *a trial*; and, of course, must be placed in situations, and be surrounded with circumstances, calculated to try them. And while their trial is going on, God cannot with propriety interpose to defeat his own work. He cannot do as much to effect their salvation,

as he might do, and would do, if no trial were necessary.

It will be said that this mode of relieving the difficulty above suggested can have reference only to sinners under the gospel. Certainly God might do more for the heathen than he does, consistently with their being on probation. He might lift the veil at once which excludes them from the light of life. He might send to them the Bible, and the blessings of the gospel.—In replying to these suggestions, I have only to repeat, in part, what has been said in a previous chapter. Is God in fault that the heathen have not the gospel? Or does the blame attach exclusively to men?—Or have the heathen any reason to complain that more light is not granted them, when, instead of improving, they pervert and abuse the light they have?—Or will God be unjust in punishing the idolatrous heathen in the other world, not as though they had enjoyed and rejected the offers of the gospel, but according to their deserts?

These questions admit of an easy answer; and if it be demanded farther, Why has God left the heathen in their present miserable

condition? Although he may in justice punish them, still, his benevolence would prompt him to save them; and why has he not sent to them the gospel? To this I answer, May not God have left the heathen in their present state, as he left the Canaanite in the land of promise, with a view to *try the faith, and exercise and test the obedience, of his professing people?*

At the time of Christ's ascension, he left it in charge to his disciples, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." The manner in which the disciples will regard this solemn parting injunction is now to be proved. Their faith and obedience are to be brought to the test. *Their* trial will not otherwise be complete. But how are they to be tried in relation to this matter, unless the work enjoined upon them is left to be performed by them—unless the heathen are left to be converted through their instrumentality?

Christ might have relieved his disciples of this burthen—if it be right to call it a burthen. He might have preached the gospel to the heathen by the ministry of angels, or have published it far and wide by miraculous agency.

But he saw that the graces of his disciples needed exercise. He saw that their faith and obedience needed a test. And while he does no injustice to the heathen, by leaving them without a miraculous supply of the word of life—while he blesses them, in this world, with a thousand mercies which they neither deserve nor improve, he is subjecting his people to a degree of sacrifice and labor—he is furnishing them with a kind of discipline, a species of trial, which is of the utmost benefit to them. Paul counted it a great favor, that he was permitted to preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and every Christian, who understands the subject, will be ready to adopt the same sentiment.—Instead of yielding to the promptings of a sordid selfishness, and complaining that the gospel has not been sent to the heathen without our instrumentality, we should rather rejoice that we are favored with such an exercise and trial of our faith—that we have this great and good work entrusted to our hands.

CHAPTER IX.

APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION.

No one can seriously contemplate the subject of discussion in the previous chapters, and not be impressed with the thought that, in this life, mankind are most *critically and solemnly situated*. They are here on trial, and on their last trial. And to each of them, the period of trial is one of short and uncertain continuance. In a little time at farthest, and it may be in a very little time, probation is to terminate, and the momentous question will then be decided, what is to be their character and condition forever.

We have spoken already of the results of probation in the present life. But of its changeless, endless results in the life to come, who *can* speak. The glories of that upper world—such in kind and degree as “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath the heart of man conceived,” and eternal in duration—who shall undertake to describe them? And

the horrors of that "lake of fire," that "place of torment," in which all the wicked are to be merged at death, and from which they never shall be released—who can adequately set them forth? On subjects such as these, words are powerless; and after all is said that can be in the language of mortals, we shall see and know, when we wake up in eternity, that *the half had not been told us.*

It adds immensely to the solemnity of our present situation, that the great question before us—that on which is suspended the eternal destiny of our souls, is one to be decided by *ourselves.* No other beings in the universe can decide it for us. We are endowed with all the powers of a free and responsible agency, in the exercise of which, "if we sow to the flesh, we shall of the flesh reap corruption; but if we sow to the Spirit, we shall reap life everlasting." It is a solemn thing to be free agents in a world like this. Our moral freedom is, perhaps, the most fearful attribute of our whole nature. For it is this alone which makes us responsible. It is this which gives to conscience its terrific power. It is this which renders us amenable to the Judgment,

and fit subjects for the retributions of eternity.

But the question of our final destiny we must not only decide for ourselves, we must do it in circumstances of *fearful exposure*;—in circumstances where we may decide right, but where we are in great danger of deciding wrong. We may come to the knowledge of God's truth; and if we seek it diligently and honestly, we shall; but then there are a thousand influences operating to lead us into error, and if we yield to them, we shall assuredly go astray. We may come also to the love and practice of the truth. We have motives pressing upon us on every hand, all calculated to bring us back from our wanderings, and bind us to God and his throne forever. At the same time, there are numberless counter influences at work. There is the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. There is a busy devil, and a changing and ensnaring world.

Thus it is that intelligent, immortal beings are tried, in the present life. Thus God intends that they *shall* be tried, before their final destiny is determined.

And while these things are going on, and the purposes of our trial are being accomplished, the great God himself is standing directly over us. We cannot see him, but he sees us. He is ever watching us. His holy eye is upon us. He sees every thought which is cherished, every emotion which is indulged, every desire and purpose which are formed. And his book is wide open to record every thing as it passes, and to treasure it up for the great Judgment day.

Such is a faint picture of the situation of all men in the present life. Such are the circumstances under which they are now living, and acting, and forming their characters for eternity. O how little do we think of it! And how strange it is that we think so little! All heaven (and hell too) are interested for us,—but we sleep. Our situations individually are so immensely critical—our interests for eternity are so staked on the decisions of a moment—that all invisible beings may be regarded as looking intently on, to see which way we shall turn, and to what end we shall come,—but we move round with little thought or concern, pleasing ourselves with present trifles,

neglecting the future, and flattering ourselves that all will be well. O when will the thoughtless children of men awake to their real situation! When will they begin to think and feel, to live and act, with a wise reference to eternity!

There are solemn *duties* which men owe one to another, while living here in this state of trial. We should not consent to become each other's tempters, though there are thousands and thousands who constantly do this. Instead of being mutual helpers in the way to heaven, they become mutual and effectual hinderers. They stand directly in each other's way, and exert all their influence to lead those around them into error, and embolden them in sin.

The *duties* which we owe to each other, in this state of trial, are very obvious. Not satisfied with securing our own salvation, we should extend our influence to its utmost limit, and do all that we have it in our power to do, to lead our fellow men to the knowledge of the truth. We are surrounded with beings on trial like ourselves—immortal beings, whose eternal destinies hang suspended on the characters which they here form. The God who

made them is most earnestly desirous of their salvation, and has done, and is doing, all that he consistently can do to bring them to heaven. But then their characters must be tried, and of course they must be placed in circumstances of trial. And while their trial is going on, God cannot consistently interpose for them, in a way to defeat his own designs. But his people have no such restrictions on *their* benevolence. It will be not at all inconsistent with the state of trial for them to exert their *whole* influence, to break the force of temptation, and rescue their fellow creatures from the power of sin; and accordingly God requires them to do this, and their own feelings, if they have right feelings at all, impel them to do the same. They will throw themselves at once into the current, and put forth all their energies of body and soul, to stay the desolating progress of sin, and save as many as possible from its curse and its power.

Such effort on the part of Christians, so far from being inconsistent with the state of trial, is in fact involved in it, and should go in a measure to constitute it. A prodigious influence is exerted continually on the other side.

The world is ensnaring, the flesh is beguiling, evil companions are seducing, the devil is tempting, and a thousand weights are hanging upon the poor sinner, to drag him downwards to perdition ; and now, in opposition to this array of bad influence, it is important, in its bearing on the sinner's *probation*, that the people of God should come in, and throw their whole weight on the side of holiness, prepared to spend and be spent, to live and to die, in the great and glorious cause of human salvation.

Here is work for the Christian *parent* to do—a work which he should commence early, and pursue assiduously. His children have entered on their state of trial—the most critical and important period of their whole existence. They have entered on a state, in which they are to be subject to adverse influences, and to encounter strong and besetting temptations ; and now it is for the parent to understand this matter in season, and to throw all his weight and influence on the side of holiness. He may rest assured that they will all be needed. Indeed, he will have abundant cause for thankfulness if, after his utmost

efforts, some of his beloved family are not lost. He can expect nothing less than that the current of temptation will sweep them all away, unless he puts forth his entire energies to resist it. And what parent can consent to be wanting in duties of this nature? Who that has the heart of a parent can stand still, and witness the impending destruction of his children, and make no vigorous efforts to avert it?

Here is work, too, for the *teacher* to perform, and especially the *teacher in the Sabbath school*. The children around him are on trial, and are beginning already, in many instances, to be severely tried. Seductive influences are besetting them, and temptation is beginning to spend its force upon them. Now it is for the Sabbath school teacher to *try*, if possible, to save these children—to make full proof of his power, by instruction, persuasion, and example, to rescue them from the dangers which impend over them, and prepare them for the heavenly kingdom.

Here is work for *companions, neighbors, and friends*, to perform one for another, and for all over whom they may exert an influence. Let those “who fear the Lord speak often one to

another." Let them "exhort one another daily, whilst it is called to-day, lest any be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." Let the high-ways and hedges bear witness to their exertions, to convert the wandering sinner from the error of his way, and to save souls from death.

But especially is here the appropriate work of *ministers of the gospel*. Not only are gospel ministers on trial for themselves, they are surrounded with those who are on trial with them, and whose souls, in an important sense, are committed to their charge. God has done for these souls all that he can do, consistently with their having a full and sufficient trial; and he has left it in charge to his ministers especially, to watch over them, and care for them, and see to it that they are not lost. "These souls," God may be understood as saying to every minister, when he puts him in trust with the gospel,—“these souls are living in a world of trial, where they may go right, but where they are in imminent danger of going wrong;—where they may be redeemed and saved, but where (unless great pains are taken to reclaim them) they will be likely to

persist in sin and perish. And now I commit them to your charge. See to it, that they perish not through your neglect. See to it, that you save, not only yourself, but them that hear you. These souls will be exposed to seducing teachers, and will be in great danger of mistaking and rejecting the truths of the gospel. See to it, that you make the gospel very plain to them—that you open it, prove it, and enforce it, and do all in your power that they may understand and embrace it. These souls, too, are under the influence of strong and varied temptation, and are in great danger of yielding to them, and going down to death. See to it, that you deal plainly and faithfully with them—that you instruct and warn, reprove and exhort, and leave nothing undone which you can do, which will be likely to turn to their salvation”.

Such is the solemn charge which God may be understood as addressing to every minister of the gospel; and such the fearful, responsible work committed to his hands. And surely no minister, who has the least qualification for the office he sustains, can ever trifle with such a work. And surely no wise people will ever

wish that he should. They will cheerfully bear with his fidelity; and not only bear with it, but *rejoice in it*—as the best evidence he can afford them of his love, and the best that can be afforded, that his labor with them will not be in vain in the Lord.

IN conclusion, the writer may be allowed to express the hope, and to breathe forth the prayer, that the great subject of probation, which has been discussed in the foregoing pages, may not prove an unprofitable one, either to himself, or to any of his readers. The consideration that we are living in this world, under the eye of God, and on trial for eternity—that the various temptations which assail us, and the changes which pass over us, are adapted and intended to try our feelings, and form our characters, and prepare us for the Judgment scene—is certainly a very stirring one, and should be to us one of the best practical influence. This consideration should be alone sufficient to render us humble in prosperity, submissive in adversity, patient under the rebukes of providence, and watchful and

prayerful, in all the circumstances of life, lest we enter into and fall under the power of temptation. It should lead us to keep our hearts with all diligence, to guard against the first approaches of sin, and to pass the time of our sojourning here in fear. It should lead to so much circumspection, and to such a humble and consistent walk with God, that the result of our whole trial may be our complete and final victory over our spiritual enemies, and our safe and welcome reception to those mansions of rest which Jesus has gone to prepare for his people.

APPENDIX.

NOTE A.

DR. WHITBY, and other dominican writers, suppose that, while saints and angels in heaven are free only to good, and the lost in hell are free only to do evil, mankind in this life are free to do either good or evil; and that it is this peculiarity of our condition which distinguishes a state of probation from one of settled and confirmed character. (See Whitby on the Five Points, Disc. iv. Chap. i.) But in what sense can it be said of saints and angels in heaven that they are not free to do evil? Have they no natural ability to do evil? Have they not the requisite faculties? Could they not do evil, if they would? Then what virtue in their avoiding evil, and doing well? And besides, what greater natural powers,

what additional faculties, are requisite, to enable a person to do evil, above what are necessary in doing well.

The like inquiries may be urged in regard to those who are in a confirmed state of sin and suffering. In what sense can it be said of them, that they are not free to do good? Have they no faculties—no natural power? The being who has no natural power to do good, has none to do evil; and *vice versa*. And the being who has not natural power to do both good and evil is not a moral agent, and not capable of possessing any moral character.—It follows, then, if saints and angels in heaven, and the lost in hell, are moral agents, and possess a moral character (which no Christian, it is presumed, will deny) that they have natural power, and in this sense are *free*, to do both good and evil.

In confirming the blessed inhabitants of heaven in holiness, God does not take away their natural ability or freedom to do evil, but he so delivers them from temptation, and affords them such measures of Divine grace, that they have not, and never will have, the least disposition to do evil. They are free

agents, and free to sin, while it is morally certain that they never will sin. And so, in confirming the lost in their miserable state, God does not take away their natural ability or their freedom to return to the path of duty, but he so withholds from them spiritual restraints, and so leaves them, in righteous judgment, to their own hearts' lusts, that they never will return to their duty. They ought to return, and might do it if they would; but it is morally certain that they never will.

NOTE B.

It will follow from the principles advanced in the text, that mankind, in this life, are *responsible for their opinions*. This has been often and strenuously denied. It is insisted that the opinions of men are *necessary* to them—that they cannot believe otherwise than they do—and of course that, whatever they may believe or reject, they are not deserving of either praise or blame for their opinions. But it may be shown just as conclusively that men are responsible for their opinions, as that they are responsible for their outward actions.

Without doubt, the views which they take of subjects, and the opinions which they form, depend very materially on the state of their hearts; and so does the course of conduct which they pursue depend as materially on the state of their hearts. And for the particular state of their hearts—for the right or wrong feelings which they indulge—for their holy or sinful affections, desires, and purposes, who is responsible, if they are not? When the hearts of persons are right in the sight of God, they are in little danger of wandering from him, either in their outward characters, or in their opinions; and it is only when their hearts are not right before him, and they are not willing to receive his truth in love, that they are left to embrace delusion and believe a lie. Accordingly, there is hardly any sin more pointedly condemned in the Scriptures, than that of disbelieving and rejecting the essential truths of the gospel.

NOTE C.

According to the view here taken, it need not surprise us, if false and seducing teachers

are permitted to proceed to great lengths,—even to the showing of “*signs and wonders.*” There is a difference between things strictly miraculous, and things strange, mysterious, and to our apprehension supernatural; and whatever may be thought of the former things, there can be no doubt that God has, in some instances, permitted the occurrence of the latter, for the *trial* of his creatures here on earth. For the trial of our first parents, he permitted the serpent to assume new forms of enchantment, and to speak with an audible, human voice. Gen. 3. 1—5. By Moses, God says to the children of Israel, “If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and he giveth thee a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams; for the Lord your God *proveth* you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul.” Deut. 13 : 1—3. Our Saviour says, “There shall arise false Christs, and false prophets,

and shall show *great signs and wonders*, inso-much that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect." Mat. 24 : 24. The Apostle Paul predicts the appearing of one, "whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power, and *signs*, and *lying wonders*." 2 Thess. 2 : 9. The second beast, in the Apocalypse, is represented as doing "*great wonders*, so that he maketh fire to come down from heaven in the sight of men, and deceiveth them that dwell on the earth, by means of those *miracles* which he had power to do in the sight of the (first) beast." Rev. 13 : 13, 14.

These passages of Scripture are well illustrated in a personage who appeared in the first century of the Christian era, and who is thus spoken of by Cudworth, in his *Intellectual System*, Book i. Chap. 4. Sect. 15. "It is a thing highly probable, if not unquestionable, that Apollonius Tyanæus, shortly after the publication of the gospel to the world, was a person made choice of by the policy, and assisted by the powers of the kingdom of darkness, for the doing of some things extraordinary, merely out of design to derogate from the miracles of our Saviour Christ, and

to enable Paganism the better to bear up against the assaults of Christianity. For amongst the many writers of this philosopher's life, some, and particularly Philostratus, seem to have had no other aim in their whole undertaking, than only to dress up Apollonius in such a garb and manner, as might make him best seem to be a fit cor rival with our Saviour Christ, both in respect of sanctity and miracles."

"Now as for the *life* and *morals* of this Apollonius, whosoever is not very dimsighted may easily perceive, that he was so far from having any thing of that Divine Spirit which manifested itself in our Saviour Christ, that he fell far short of the better moralized Pagans, there being a plain appearance of much pride and vain-glory (besides other foolery) discoverable in his words and actions. And this Eusebius undertakes to evince from Philostratus's own history, viz: that Apollonius was so far from deserving to be compared with our Saviour Christ, that he was not fit to be ranked among the moderately and indifferently honest men. Wherefore, as to his reputed miracles, if credit be to be given to those relations, and

such things were really done by him, it must for this reason be concluded that they were done no otherwise than by Magic and Necromancy, and that he was himself but an Archimago, or grand Magician. Neither ought this to be suspected for a mere slander cast upon him by partially affected Christians only; since, during his life-time, he was generally reputed, even amongst the Pagans themselves, as no other than an infamous *inchanter*, and was accused of that very crime before Domitian, the Emperor."

NOTE D.

The following example, most affectingly illustrative of the remarks in the text, is taken from the third of the celebrated "Temperance Tales," entitled "I am afraid there is a God." Absalom Jennings was the child of pious, industrious parents, who watched over his early years with anxious solicitude, and trained him up in all the simplicity and tenderness of Christian love. In the bloom of youth, artless and uncontaminated with the world, he left the parental roof and his native

village, and became under clerk in the store of a brother in law, in the city of Boston. Shortly after this, his brother in law failed in business; but "he, being a young man of good abilities, readily found employment in another establishment." To adopt here the language of his father, "he now frequented the theatre, and other scenes of dissipation, and speedily acquired habits of tippling. In a moment of intoxication, he was persuaded to go to a meeting of infidels. Their doctrines were new to him; and, however monstrous, their very novelty excited an interest in his mind. He went again, and again, and became a convert. He was not in the habit, at this period, of going frequently to his sister's residence; and the mischief was accomplished, before I had any knowledge of his evil courses. At length, I received a letter from Bethiah and her husband, communicating their fears. I repaired to the city, the next day; and, arriving in the evening, I inquired for Absalom, at his lodgings, and was informed, that he might probably be found at the lecture room. I obtained directions, and repaired to the spot without delay. I entered a room, in which was a col-

lection of males and females, of dēcent appearance, and took my seat, in a retired corner.

“After a few minutes, I discovered my misguided son, and endeavored to keep myself concealed from his observation. Presently the lecturer commenced. He was a tall man, with round shoulders, and very gray hair. I should think him over sixty years of age ; his face was florid ; his eyes were contracted, downcast, and expressive of cunning and duplicity. I should not have been willing to trust any man, who had so much the appearance of a knave. But what was my horror, when this gray-headed castaway threw the volume of eternal life across the room, and pronounced God’s holy word no better than a lie ! What were my emotions, when I beheld this poor miserable wretch, tottering, as it were, upon the brink of the grave, abusing the lamp of reason, by employing it to mislead his fellow creatures to destruction ; prostituting the highest gift of God, to prove, that there is no God ! At length this hoary-headed scoundrel exhausted his stock of sacrilege and folly, and resumed his seat. The meeting

broke up ; and, keeping my eye upon my wretched boy, I followed his steps into the street. He turned into a dram-shop, in the neighborhood of the pandemonium from which he had so lately descended. I saw him, while my eyes wept tears of anguish, pour the accursed poison down his throat. I forbore to interrupt his orgies, in their present stage. I determined, agonizing as it might be to a father's heart, to observe his progress. In a short time, he sallied forth, and again I followed his steps.

“ After winding through several streets, he associated himself with an abandoned woman, who was strolling purposely alone ; and they repaired, arm in arm, to another dram shop, of a more genteel description. They passed into a recess, provided with curtains for concealment. I stood, at a little distance from the door, and in a short time, I saw a servant conveying liquors and refreshments to the recess, and closing the curtains, as he retired. Now, thought I, is my time ;—I passed into the shop, and, taking up a light, proceeded to the spot, and drawing back the curtain, held the light before my face.—This child of sin

was perfectly thunderstruck: at first, he attempted to escape; but I held him firmly by the arm. His vile companion, and a brazen-faced Jezebel she was, had already fled. Absalom, said I, as I relinquished my hold, and took my seat before him, do you not believe there is a God? No—was the reply, in a voice of drunken desperation!—Father of mercy, I exclaimed, has it come to this! and looking, for an instant, at his feverish face and bloodshot eye, and contrasting the object before me, with the treasured recollections of my happy boy, I buried my face in my hands, and sobbed aloud. When I raised my head, he had gone. Inquiries were repeatedly made at his boarding-house, but in vain. It was solemnly affirmed, that he had not returned there. I have never seen him from that hour.”

About two years from this time, intelligence reached the connexions of this young man, that, “after a career of infidelity and intemperance, he was upon his death-bed, in the last stages of consumption.” An elder brother repaired immediately to him, and the following is his account of the scene which he wit-

nessed. "I reached the wretched hovel, to which I had been directed, as speedily as possible. I did not disclose my name to the miserable object, who came to the door, but simply inquired, if Absalom Jennings was there, and how he was. The old woman, who let me in, answered, that the doctor, whom the clergyman had sent there, thought he could not live long. She added that the leader of the Free-thinkers had never visited him, during his sickness, which had continued several weeks; but that several of the followers had been there; and that two of them were then up stairs. I passed up a narrow stairway, and arrived at a little apartment, the door of which was partly open. I listened, for a moment, to the closing words of a conversation, between these emissaries of Satan, these devils incarnate upon earth, and my dying brother. "Well, Jennings," said one of them, "out with it; what do you think now; do you believe there is a God?" I heard nothing but a deep groan, which went to my heart.— "Come," said the other, "speak out; if you believe there is a God, we won't come here again." "Johnson," said my poor brother, in

a voice of bitter anguish, and in words, which were uttered, as if they came from the bottom of his soul; and, I am sure, they went to the bottom of mine, "I am afraid there is a God!" These demons in human shape rose to leave the apartment. As they passed near me,— "Never set your cloven feet again," said I in a whisper, "within the chamber of this dying sinner." "Why what business is it of yours?" said one of them. To avoid confusion in such a place, I followed him quietly down stairs, and taking him by the shoulder, "This wretched young man," said I, "is the son of my father and my mother: enter his apartment again, and, if you do not believe in God, I will give you good reason to believe in man, for I will break every bone in your skin."

"They walked off, in evident alarm; and I returned to the apartment. I crept softly to the chamber. I saw, upon a miserable pallet, a pale emaciated man, whose eyes were shut, and whose features I studied attentively, for some time, before I could discover enough to satisfy me, that I beheld the wreck of a ruined brother. Nothing remained of the full features, the smooth forehead, the prominent

black eye, or the ruddy complexion. The features, and especially the nose and cheek bones, were sharpened in a remarkable manner; the forehead was checkered by the signet of premature old age; the face had all the paleness of a corpse; and the eye which was still closed, appeared deeply sunken beneath the projecting eyebrows. I approached closely to the bed. "Absalom," said I;—He opened his eyes, and turned upon me those lights so soon to be extinguished in the grave. "Absalom," I repeated, "do you not know me?" "Oh, David," he exclaimed, "is it you!" and, covering his face with the bed-clothes, he became convulsed with sorrow. "My poor brother!" said I, for my heart yearned towards him, as I sat down beside him, on the pallet of straw, and took his long, lean hand in my own. "Oh David," said he, "can you love me now?" and he drew my hand to his parched lips, and bathed it in tears.

"I sent for the physician, who positively forbade his being moved, as I had wished, into better lodgings. I therefore made the best arrangement, in my power, for his comfort, and prepared to remain with him, during the

night. He appeared to be overwhelmed with a grateful sense of this trifling act of humanity. The strongest wish of his heart, which he frequently repeated, was the desire of seeing his father, and asking his forgiveness. I accordingly despatched a messenger to Parson Cooley, requesting him to open the matter to my father, and come to the city with him, as soon as he conveniently could.

“ They arrived before noon, on the following day. The interview was very distressing. My poor old father no sooner entered the room, than this wretched young man, by an unexpected and extraordinary effort, got out of his bed, and, upon his hands and knees, for he could not walk, crawled to his feet and exclaimed, “ Father, forgive me, before I die.” My father was greatly shocked by his appearance; and the exertion undoubtedly shortened the period of my poor brother’s existence.

“ After taking a little nourishment, he appeared so much better, that I felt almost inclined to think he might recover: but it was only the flashing and flickering of life’s lamp, before it is extinguished forever.

“During this interval, he begged his father and Parson Cooley to sit near him. “Do you not trace all your misery to the use of ardent spirit, Absalom?” said the good minister. “No sir,” he replied, “I never drank any, till about eighteen months ago, but I became extremely fond of wine; and the first time that I went to an Infidel meeting, I was intoxicated with wine, which I drank at the bars of the theatre. When I could no longer obtain wine, as the means of intoxication, I resorted to ardent spirit, because it was cheaper; and finally the fatal relish for ardent spirit destroyed my taste, in a great measure, for milder stimulants. Intoxication drove me to the brothel; and the doctrines, taught at the Infidel meetings, justified my conduct in going there. When I became conscious of an oppressive burthen, in the form of crime, I was delighted to be told, and to be convinced, that such things, as I had thought sinful, were perfectly innocent. The leader of the Infidels tried to produce this conviction on my mind; I was desirous of being convinced;—and, at length, I mistook the desire to be convinced for the conviction itself.”—After a

short pause, he continued as follows: “A man who has committed theft, would be glad to believe, that there was no judge on earth; for then he could not be tried here; and a man, who has committed all sorts of crimes, would be glad to believe, that there is no God in heaven; for then he could not be tried hereafter, and to him the JUDGMENT never cometh. In my hours of intoxication I was more than ever disposed to justify the doctrines of infidelity; and, when listening to lectures upon infidelity, I was the more ready to justify the practice of intoxication, and of all other crimes. I believe the leader, who lectures upon infidelity, to be an unprincipled villain, and that he preaches these doctrines, because they are so much more comforting to a hoary headed impenitent wretch, than the doctrines of the cross. May God of his infinite goodness forgive me my offences, and an abandoned and profligate old man for leading me to destruction.”

“The whole of his physical and intellectual power appeared to be exhausted, by this last effort. He dropped his head on one side, and there followed a slight convulsion. I went

instantly to his bedside ;—his eyes were glazed ; he was fast locked in the arms of death ; the spirit of the penitent infidel had fled.”

The foregoing example has been selected, not because the subject of it is one of singular occurrence, for, alas, it is not so ; but because the story is told, and so well told, ready to our hand. It strikingly illustrates the process of probation. It shows the effect of a change of circumstances, and of new temptations, upon an unpractised mind. It exhibits the snare into which many an incautious youth has fallen, and the melancholy, awful end to which he has come.

NOTE E.

The inefficacy of mere suffering to soften and subdue the heart is well illustrated in the experience of the excellent Dr. Vanderkemp, Missionary to South Africa, as recorded by himself. “To me,” says he, “Christianity once appeared inconsistent with the dictates of reason—the Bible, a collection of incoherent opinions, tales, and prejudices. As to the person of Christ, I looked, at first, upon

him as a man of sense and learning, but who, by his opposition to the established ecclesiastical and political maxims of the Jews, became the object of their hate, and the victim of his own system. I often celebrated the memory of his death, by partaking of the Lord's Supper; but some time after, reflecting that he termed himself the Son of God, and pretended to do miracles, he lost all my former veneration!

“I then prayed that God would prepare me, by punishing my sins, for virtue and happiness, and I thanked him for every misfortune; but the first observation I made was, that though I was oftentimes severely chastised, it did not make me wiser or better. I therefore again prayed to God, that he would shew me, in every instance, the crime for which I was punished, that I might know and avoid it; but finding this vain, I feared that I should never, perhaps, be corrected in this life by punishment; still, I hoped I might be delivered from moral evil after death in some kind of purgatory, by a severer punishment. Yet reflecting that punishment had proved itself utterly ineffectual to produce even the lowest

degree of virtue in my soul, I was constrained to acknowledge that my theory, though it seemed by *a priori* reasoning well grounded, was totally refuted by experience, and I concluded it was entirely out of the reach of my reason to discover the true road to virtue and happiness. I confessed this my impotence and blindness to God, and owned myself, as a blind man, who had lost his way, and waited in hope that some benevolent man would pass by, and lead him into the right way. Thus I waited upon God, that he would take me by the hand, and lead me in the way everlasting.

“I could not, however, entirely get rid of the idea of being corrected by means of punishment, and I still looked on the doctrines of Christ’s deity and atonement, as useless and blasphemous, though I carefully kept this my opinion secret.

“Such was the state of my mind, when on the 27th June, 1791, sailing in a boat, with my wife and daughter, for amusement, suddenly a water-spout overtook us, and turning the boat in an instant upside down, we were sunk before we apprehended any danger. Both my dearest relations were drowned, and

I was carried down by the stream above a mile, and must soon have infallibly been lost also, as from the violence of the storm no person could attempt to approach the wreck, and it was supposed we must all have perished together : but now the Lord stretched forth his hand to deliver me. A stronger vessel lying in the port of Dort, was by the storm rent from its moorings, and blown out of the port towards me, till the men on board thought they discovered a person floating on the side of the wreck, and rescued me from the jaws of death.

“I considered this terrible event as the severest punishment that could be inflicted on me ; and saw the next day as clear as the light, that it had no more power to correct me than all the former providences, and hence concluded my state to be desperate, and that God abandoned me as incurable by correction.”

NOTE F.

“It is well known,” to use the words of another, “that many of the German Divines

of the first character for talents and piety, allow themselves to speculate, with a degree of freedom, which the orthodox in this country neither practice nor approve, in regard to the condition of human souls, in the interval between death and the judgment. There is a disposition among them to regard this period as a sort of second probation. They suppose it possible, that the door of heaven will not be wholly closed, till the trial of the great day; and thus, that some who die without piety will obtain it, ere they pass the final limit, and so be saved. There may be some difference of opinion as to the extent, to which they suppose that mankind will be admitted to this second day of grace; but for the most part, they restrict it to such as have not been favored here with a distinct knowledge of the gospel. "Many of the Germans," says Dr. Kurtz, "believe that the gospel will be preached in its purity to all people, and that none will be consigned to eternal punishment, until they shall have heard it and rejected the plan of salvation, which it proposes. Heathens die without hearing it, and many in Christian lands leave the world without having heard it

proclaimed in its unadulterated simplicity. This is particularly the case in reference to multitudes in Europe. These, say the individuals alluded to, will have an opportunity of salvation hereafter—the gospel will be published to them in a middle state, intervening between death and the resurrection: if they embrace it, they will be saved: if they reject it, their destiny will be unalterably fixed for ever.”

Professor Hahn clearly intimates that there is hope in the other world for those who “lost the great end of their earthly existence, not so much from malice and obstinacy, as from ignorance, fickleness, and precipitancy;”—“more through the fault of others, than of their own.” Manual, pp. 438, 639.

It is to “learned theorists” such as these, that allusion is made in the text. Their theories, I am satisfied, have no foundation, either in reason, or Scripture,—either in the perfections of God, or the decisions of his word. I further object to them, that their *practical tendency* is evil, and only evil. Let the sentiment prevail generally, that for the stupid and careless—those who fail of salvation in this

life through ignorance and negligence, rather than through a wilful rejection of the truth—there is to be a probation, attended with high privileges, in the other world; and you directly encourage stupidity and negligence. You hold out a premium for it. Let the sentiment also prevail, that those who die in heathen lands are to have the gospel preached to them, it may be under the greatest possible advantages, in the intermediate state; and who will trouble himself, or make any considerable sacrifice, to have the gospel preached to the heathen in their present state? I can conceive of no theory more directly calculated to cut the cords and dash all the springs of Missionary effort, than this.—I know that some of the German divines, who hold this theory, express a strong desire that the kingdom of Christ may be promoted in this world, and that the entire earth may be filled with his glory. But were the views which they cherish to become general among Christians, it is not at all likely that this world would ever be evangelized. The moral power of the gospel, at least in the direction of Missionary effort, would be gone.

To prevent misapprehension, it should be added here, that those Evangelical Germans, who dream of a future probation for the heathen, are not, in any sense of the term, (what they have sometimes been reported to be) Universalists. Their speculations go to weaken and embarrass the argument in support of the doctrine of eternal punishment; still they hold, that, for those who understandingly *reject the gospel*, whether in this life or in the intermediate state, and who go to the judgment in their sins, there is no hope. Thus Professor Hahn, in his section on the last Judgment, shows that the Judgment will be, (1) *universal*, embracing both men and angels. (2) It will be *righteous*, according to the powers and means received." "And (3) it will be *decisive* and *final*; for there will be a public and *eternal* separation of the good and the evil, and the fate of those who are sentenced will be *unchangeable*."

The following view of the older theologians of his church, Hahn quotes also with approbation, as being "in accordance with the sense of Scripture." "The wicked and condemned, both men and angels, shall be thrust

into hell ; and being excluded from the vision of God, and the fellowship of Christ and the blessed, in horrid society with the reprobate, shall experience the *eternal torments* of fruitless remorse and despair. The Evangelical church *decidedly rejects the doctrine of the restoration of all things.*" Manual, pp. 659.

Olshausen says that, "on philological grounds, no argument can be brought against the *unceasing duration* of punishment." He also says that, in the "last judgment, the wicked shall be given up to *final condemnation*, which is locally designated by *gehenna*, and the lake of fire." Commentary, Vol. i. pp. 412, 700.

Koppe says, "Damnation is to be considered *eternal*, for the same reason that salvation is ; and Christ, with all his love, did not possess the weak sentimentality of modern times." "That system of faith seems best to have apprehended the sense of Christianity, which lays down an eternal happiness, and an *eternal hell*, as the final state of mortals. Without the eternity of both, the system of rewards would be frivolous, and our earthly life of little importance." Philosophy of Christianity, Vol. ii. pp. 136.

Storr says, "The *final* punishment of the wicked will not begin, until the awful day of Judgment; but their punishment *in general* begins immediately at their departure from this life, and *will never terminate through all eternity.*" Theol. Sect. 58.

Reinhard says, "As far as relates to the sacred Scriptures, these expressly teach that future punishment will be *eternal.*" Epit. Sect. 196.

J. Muller says, "This much may with certainty be affirmed, that in regard to innumerable multitudes, this life *decides forever* their future condition, whether it be happiness or misery; viz: all those to whom the gospel, in its purity, has been proclaimed." "The gospel, whenever it is truly declared, brings a perfect decision, and thereby *excludes any change in a future state.*" Studien und Kritiken for 1835, pp. 760.

NOTE G.

The supposition that God has not *power* to convert and save all men can only be made on the ground of another supposition, viz:

that the salvation of all men is in some sense *impossible*: For God can do all things *possible*, alike in the kingdoms of providence and grace. God cannot, indeed, do that which would be in opposition to his own nature, or which would involve a contradiction, or an absurdity. He cannot do that which is in the nature of things impossible. But his omnipotence knows no other limit. Aside from this, there is demonstrably nothing which does not lie within the compass of his power. The question, therefore, comes to this, *Is it IMPOSSIBLE for God to convert and save all men?*

But in what sense can this be considered as impossible? Is it inconsistent with the nature of the human mind, and with the freedom and accountability of man? Such a supposition is *a priori* incredible; because God made the minds of men, as well as their bodies—made them free, accountable agents—and it is not likely that he would give existence to a being which it was *impossible* for him to control.—Besides, is it not a fact that God *does control* the minds of men, of all men, in perfect consistency with their freedom and accountability? I speak not now of the manner in

which this is done, whether by a direct efficiency in view of motives, or by the mere influence of motives ;—the fact that it *is done* will not be denied, except by those who deny that God executes his purposes and governs the world.—The *Scriptures* too—by necessary implication, by direct assertion, and in almost every form of representation and expression—exhibit the free minds of men as subject to the control of him who ruleth all.

God's control over the free, responsible mind is also exhibited in every instance of conversion. Every conversion which takes place is the work of God's Spirit, accomplished in perfect consistency with the nature of the mind, and without any infringement of human freedom or accountability. But are not all minds constituted essentially alike ? And if it is possible for God to convert one sinner in the manner above described, why not two ? why not as many as he pleases ? why not *all* ? It is difficult to see, therefore, how the conversion of all men (more than of a part, or more than the control which God exercises over men in other things) should be inconsis-

tent with the nature and freedom of the mind, and on this account should be an impossibility.

I would inquire, in the next place, if it is impossible for God to convert and save all men, and if this is the reason why all are not saved, how is it that Christians are exhorted to *pray for the salvation of all*? The Apostle Paul exhorts, “first of all, that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for *all men*: (1 Tim. 2. 1.) and our Saviour directs us to pray that “the kingdom of God may come, and *his will be done on earth as it is in heaven*,’—which is virtually a prayer that all men may be saved.* Indeed, such a

* The duty of Christians to pray for the salvation of all men may be shown in several ways: Thus, if it is right for God to desire the salvation of all men, it is right for his people to desire the same; and if it is right for them to indulge such desires, it is right that they should express them in humble, submissive prayer.—It follows, also, from the duty of loving our fellow men as we love ourselves, that it is as much our duty to pray for our fellow men, to pray for them all, and to pray that God would have mercy upon all, as it is to pray that he would have mercy upon us. And this is not only *our* duty, it has been the duty of our fellow men in all past ages, even from the beginning.

The sense given to the passages of Scripture above

prayer is so in accordance with the best feelings of Christians, that it is doubted whether they ever pray at any considerable length, without offering up what amounts to a petition

quoted is conformable to that of the most respectable Commentators.

BURKITT. "We are to pray in general for all men," "because it is the desire of God that all men should be saved, and because such prayers are good and acceptable in the sight of God." Comment. on 1 Tim. ii. 1.

DODDRIDGE. "I exhort, first of all, that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men—for the *whole human race*, whether Jew or Gentile, Christian or Pagan, friends or enemies."

MACKNIGHT. "I exhort, first of all, that supplications &c. be offered in behalf of *all men*, for heathens as well as Christians, and for enemies as well as friends."

SCOTT. "I exhort, first of all, that supplications &c. be made for *all men*, without distinction of nation, rank, or party, and without exception of enemies and persecutors."

The litany of the Church of England beseeches God "to have mercy upon *all men*."

VITRINGA. "*Let thy kingdom come*" &c. Let the gospel be preached to all, and *be embraced by all*. Let *all* be brought to subscribe to the record God has given

that *all men may be saved*.* But does not such prayer necessarily imply that God is *able* to save all men. What propriety in praying him to do what he has no power to do? And who can believe that God would direct his children to pray him to do that which is in the nature

in his word concerning his Son, and to embrace him as their Saviour and Sovereign."

WHITBY. "We therefore pray in this petition (in the Lord's prayer) that *all men* may become subject to the kingdom of God erected by Christ the minds of *all* being subdued to the obedience of faith."

* The Rev. John Scott, speaking of the ordinary devotions in the family of his father (Rev. Thomas Scott) says, "The prayer was certainly one of the finest specimens of supplication, intercession, and thanksgiving, for those present, and for *all men* that can be conceived." "From those present, and all the branches of the family, with their immediate connexions and friends, he launched forth, to his parishioners and people; to the various divisions of Christ's holy Catholic Church; to all the minister's of God's word, and all seminaries of learning; to his country, and all orders of men in church and state; to the surrounding nations, with a particular reference to passing events; to the state of the Jews, heathens, and Mohammedans; and so for *the whole world of mankind*." Memoirs of Rev. Thomas Scott, p. 56.

of things impossible? To *desire* that God would perform an impossibility must, in every case, be a vain desire. And to *pray* that he would perform what is utterly impossible must be, at best, but a vain and useless prayer. Who can believe that God has directed his people to offer such a prayer? Yet he *has* directed them to pray for the salvation of all men; which shows, as it seems to me *conclusively*, that the salvation of all men is not impossible to God, and that such is not the reason why all are not saved.

The idea that it is impossible in the nature of things for God to convert and save all men can be entertained only by those who suppose that he exercises no *direct* control over the hearts of men, but governs them by mere motives. But this idea may be shown to be absurd, *even on this latter supposition*. The theory in question is briefly this, 'If God should proceed upon the principle of converting and saving all men, and if such were the established and invariable method of his administration; he would soon lose the power of saving any. It would soon come to that,

that *there would not be motives enough within his reach to turn the heart of any sinner?*

It is obviously implied in this theory, that the only motive which can be made to bear *effectually* on the heart of a sinner, to turn him from the error of his way, arises from the prospect and the dread of punishment; so that if this be weakened or removed, it is no longer possible even for God to convert the soul. But is this true? Is there nothing intrinsically odious, ungrateful, detestable in sin, to lead persons to hate it? Is there nothing intrinsically pure and amiable in holiness, to lead them to love it? Is there not something intrinsically excellent in the holy character of God, to draw forth the affections of the heart? something touching, *subduing* in the dying love of Jesus, to melt the soul into gratitude and obedience? something attractive in the prospect of heavenly joy and glory, to win the sinner to the performance of his duty? Is it true, in short, that were the prospect and the dread of punishment taken away, there would not be motives enough left (on supposition that *God operates by mere motives*) to render it possible for him,

with all his power and wisdom and love, to turn the hearts of men to himself?

But the whole influence arising from the consideration of punishment would not be taken away, even were God to convert and save all men. It would still be true, that he had a holy and dreadful law, the penalty of which is eternal death. This declaration would remain good, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die;" and this, "Except ye repent, ye shall all perish." And if sinners needed to look down into the bottomless pit; that world of unquenchable fire—that place prepared for the devil and his angels, would still be open, to show what the wrath of God, the wages of sin, the penalty of the violated law, is. And nearly all the motives, arising from this source, which now press upon the heart of the sinner, might be made to bear upon him with a scarcely diminished power.*

* How often has God manifested that he can change the hearts of men by apparently feeble motives or means. How often has a word, a sentence, a perfectly familiar expression or thought, been set home upon the mind with such new interest and power, that conversion has been the speedy consequence. All such in-

But I proceed to take another view of the subject, which, to my apprehension, is decisive. It is certain that all men are the creatures of God, bound by his law, and under indispensable obligations to love and obey him. They are under *so strong* obligations to do this, and are urged by *so many and powerful motives*, that if they fail, they are justly exposed to eternal death for the transgression. But all who *need conversion* have already transgressed, and are in a fallen, ruined, state. And now I ask, is it possible for persons *to be in this state*—to have sinned against motives and obligations enough to bring them into it—while yet there are not motives enough within the reach of the Almighty, with which to renew them to repentance? By the supposition, there *must be* motives enough, to make the resistance of them expose the soul to a just and endless condemnation; and yet by the supposition, there are *not* motives enough, to render it possible for almighty power and

stances go to show that, in a world like this, God can never want *motives* with which to operate in turning the hearts of sinners to himself.

love to draw the wandering soul back to the performance of its duty! There must be motives and obligations enough resisted, to render the sinner a just outcast from all favor and mercy forever; and yet, for lack of motive, his repentance and return, so far at least as God is concerned, is an utter impossibility!

I know not how this supposition may seem to others, but in my view it involves a gross moral absurdity. It implies, on the one part, a *prodigious amount of motive*; and on the other, a *most enfeebling deficiency of motive*; and is clearly inconsistent with itself. It cannot therefore, be the truth; nor can it be the reason why all men are not saved, that the salvation of all is in the nature of things impossible.

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