

XII. The Consummation.

We believe that the resurrection and exaltation of Christ, following on His crucifixion, gives assurance that the long struggle between sin and grace will have an end, the Kingdom be revealed in its fullness, and God's eternal purpose accomplished.

We believe that God will judge all men by Jesus Christ, the Son of Man.

We believe that, while salvation is offered to all, God does not take away or override the freedom with which He has endowed men. If they stubbornly refuse His mercy and prefer sinful ways, they shut themselves out from the light and joy of salvation and fall under the righteous judgment of God.

We believe that those who accept the offer of salvation and persevere in the Christian way do after death enter into the joy of their Lord, a blessedness beyond our power to conceive. They see God face to face, and in the communion of saints are partakers with the Church on earth of its labours and prayers.

So we acknowledge the righteous and merciful judgment of God and we wait for the coming of the Kingdom which shall have no end.

CHAPTER XII. THE CONSUMMATION

Hazard and Hope, two cruel gods are they
Who equally on all mankind do prey.

So writes the Greek poet Theognis, and so writing he reminds us that to the thought of his countrymen hope was a delusive thing. In the myth of Pandora, the first mortal woman of Greek legend, we are told that the supreme god, Zeus, wished to punish Prometheus for giving to men the gift of fire, and so he sent him a wife, Pandora, endowed with all the graces. To Pandora Zeus gave a beautiful box which when opened released upon the world all the evils except hope, which remained alone at the bottom of the box. Hope thus was generally regarded not as man's one remaining consolation, but as an evil: it is pictured as "blind," "airy," "easily led astray," that "on which exiles feed," just as it is to the poet Cowper, who describes it as the delusion that

Sets the stamp of vanity on all
That men have deemed substantial since the Fall.

It was only in later times that with the development of personal religion hope became almost a technical term for the assurance of a blessed immortality which was promised to the initiates in the mystery religions. Professor Burnet regarded it as the equivalent of faith to the Orphics.

The Bible, however, regards hope as an unquestionable good. To Paul the supreme misfortune of the Gentiles was that they were without hope and without God in the world (Eph. 2: 12). To him God was the author and giver of hope (Rom. 15: 13), and it would seem that in that word he saw summed up the uniqueness of the religion of his fathers, the promise that had been fulfilled in Jesus Christ: "for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain" (Acts 28: 20; 26: 6). The long expectation of the people of Israel, the Messianic yearnings that had been cherished by prophet and Psalmist, that golden strand of promise that since the days of Abraham had been woven into the history of the faithful, had reached reality in the coming of Jesus Christ. Because a righteous God and faithful Creator had been the inspirer

of that hope, it had been no delusion, but a glorious certainty. With Jesus the ages had reached their climax in the advent of the Kingdom, and to the individual in particular that brought the gift of eternal life. This was the grand theme of all the sacred writings: "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15: 4). This then was the deepest note, the abiding message, of the Old Testament—that Hebrew history was not an endless up and down of frustration and tantalizing disappointment, but a mysterious movement towards a goal, the consummation of the Kingdom of God.

The Resurrection Gives Assurance. 1 Pet. 1: 3-12.

What that Christian hope really means comes to clear expression in the First Epistle of Peter (1: 3ff.), written to Christians suffering persecution. It is an inheritance beyond the reach of corruption, taint, or decay, reserved in heaven and thus under the sure protection of Almighty God. And most suggestively it is described as a hope that is *living*, and living *through the resurrection of Jesus Christ*. Peter may well call it a living hope; for he himself had been in dead despair until the presence of the Risen Christ was first made known to him (1 Cor. 15: 5). That is the element in the Christian situation of the first days that makes real this seemingly fantastic dream of some companies of humble folk, many of them mean slaves, scattered throughout a hostile and scornful world. Apparently defenceless and pitiable exiles in a society to which they do not belong, they are yet guarded by faith for a new life, the guarantee and sign manual of which a never-failing God has already provided by a unique demonstration of His power over this passing universe in the fact that He has raised from the clutches of death His son Jesus Christ. The implication is that He who has overcome man's last dread enemy of death can surely deliver to His waiting people the consummation on which they have set their hopes, the Kingdom of God with its gift of life on a new plane. It is the same radiant certainty that flashes out from Paul's great glimpse into the future in Romans 8. He sees men predestined to share the likeness of the Son of Man, called, justified, and glorified; and surely the God who did not spare His own son will unflinchingly give us everything besides.

Nothing in earth or heaven, in the present or the future, can come between us and the splendour of God's love in Christ Jesus our Lord.

When Paul preached on Mars Hill to the people of Athens it was the Resurrection that was the stumbling-block. They laughed off the idea: they would wait and hear again of this matter. The Greeks, we must realize, did believe in the immortality of the *soul*. But to them it was unthinkable that a man in the *totality* of his personality—corruptible flesh as well as ethereal spirit—should rise again. Our notions of immortality are apt to be like the Greek conception; hence it is important to appreciate exactly what is involved here. Writing to Greeks and aware what hope meant in their thought, Paul exclaims to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 15: 12ff.): If in this life we merely had arrived at hope in Christ (and stayed there at mere hope, the verb implies), then of all men we are to be pitied most. But that is not our Christian position, he says. Christ actually has been, and remains, raised from the dead. That fact, he implies, makes hope into certainty. God to Hebrew thought was not, as to the Greeks, aloof from the course of human affairs. He came right into the stream of history and gave it direction and purpose. To the Greek, history was a constant alternation of ages, an endless cycle of recurrence, the idyllic era giving place to evil days, ever degenerating and running on into catastrophe, and then out of chaos a new golden age arising, and so on. Collisions of atoms brought the world together and in due time it would break up again. It was a whirligig of fate, the steersman now relaxing now resuming control. From such a materialistic swirl it was well that the divine in man, the soul, should escape.

The Struggle will have an End. Luke 12: 32-40; Rev. 20.

The Hebrew insisted that God's care was never removed from the world He had made. He was often hidden in mystery; but as a God of will and purpose He would break in upon the process of time and work His sovereign design. That holy intent of His was to establish His Kingdom, to make His will prevail in the course of human affairs. But men were often puzzled by the setbacks of history, and craved an assurance that He had not left His workshop of a world unattended. To the Christian believers,

that proof was given in the coming of Jesus Christ; and, when dismay descended on them with the apparent desertion of the Crucifixion, irrefragable proof of the steadfast purpose of God was reasserted by the Resurrection. The God who had plucked Jesus from the jaws of death and balked the evil powers of their prey would surely go farther and establish His reign with sovereign power over all the forces of darkness. Jesus made men conscious in an unprecedented degree that the God above was a Father with goodwill towards men, with a love that would pass through any ordeal and persist over any human obduracy; and, when to that was added the testimony of the Resurrection that to fatherliness He had added almightiness with the mind to assert Himself here and now, there was nothing lacking to give complete and final assurance of victory to the Christian hope.

Jesus taught us to pray, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in *earth*," and He was ever active in the healing and the spiritual liberation of men and women in His day. Therefore it is incumbent on us also to labour and to strive to break every evil yoke that is laid here and now upon mankind. To make a pious gesture heavenwards and to leave it all to divine Providence is to sleep at the post of duty. It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom, He said—but at the same time He sent out disciples to make haste on the King's business; and all through the centuries His spirit has been driving to service Pauls and Peters, Wilberforces and Shaftesburys, Lincolns and Schweitzers, with the great multitude of common devoted men and women. It may not be in man to build the Kingdom, but there are countless folk who can be reclaimed from evil and built into the living temple here on earth, and there are tyrannies and cruelties aplenty that must be broken to emancipate human personalities for the freer life and service our Master wills for His own.

In blazing words Professor John Line has laid this obligation to social action on the conscience of the Church. Describing the Incarnation as God's self-involvement in man's life, he sees a mandate thereby placed over us:

"For if God is self-involved with men, then where are we? We cannot call common what God has cleansed; we cannot be indifferent to what God has been at such pains to claim as His. Had God been indifferent to human need and despair, no

Incarnation would have occurred. It is God's concern for the world, in the opposite scale to indifference, that has given us the Christian Gospel; and His grace toward us constrains us to share this concern; to self-involvement with men in their uttermost need after the manner of God.

"Nor is this to be construed as just 'spiritual'; the spiritual is a false concept if emptied of the forces and tensions of man's actual life. It is pseudo-Christianity to be absorbed in the deification of our own souls, leaving the world and its ways to God. We ought to know by now that when we do this we don't leave the world to God; we leave it to the devil. Or we leave the human travail to others; for we may be sure that if Christians will not re-fashion human society, others will. The world won't stay as it is; and it will be our apostasy if the great things needed to re-stabilize human existence are done by Communists and Fascists, Christians being engrossed in trivialities. If others get deeper than Christians into humanity's struggle, it will be our betrayal of Christ. For He is at the heart of this struggle. This is the Incarnation again; therein God entered man's struggle with evil; or as before, the Incarnation is God's self-involvement, but not merely with man—with the very evil that would destroy man, that instead the evil itself might be destroyed."

The Kingdom in its Fullness. Mark 12: 18-27; Rom. 8: 18-39; 1 Cor. 15: 3-57; 2 Cor. 4: 16—5: 10; 1 John 3: 1-3; Rev. 21-22.

Humanity, however, dare not ever settle on its lees and accept contentment within the limitations of this earthly home. With long periods of peace and social betterment it is fatally easy to resurrect the misleading doctrine of unending progress and set up as gods Parks, Plumbing, and Public Utilities. We need to remind ourselves that civilizations grow fat, corrupt, and sick with the seeds of death. We have all history against the notion that mankind can be organized and mechanized into a state of perfection. We have the fact of human nature to warn us that in the idyllic garden the serpent lurks: sin is not a negligible appendix to human life; Christ did not die to free us from an

¹ John Line, *Hope in God* (17th Annual Report of Board of Evangelism and Social Service), 1941, p. 47f.

evil that modern psycho-analysts can wheedle out by scientific practice. Nor have we any encouragement to believe that this solid earth can defy the sinister forces of the universe and continue its rotations without threat of death or change. What if some whirling comet strike this moving mass in shattering collision, or a dying sun leave us to perish in the freezing temperature of an ice age? Can science that knows so much provide another home, another scene for our passing habitation? It is well to hearken to the ancient admonition that here we have no continuing city: kingdoms on earth can not be everlasting kingdoms. Yet our Creator and Father has set eternity in our hearts.

Thus we are thrust back where later Jewish thought had come to rest—to the idea that earth cannot be the scene of the final consummation of God. Some indeed visualize an earth transfigured and glorified, while others transfer the scene to the heavenly sphere: the earth would pass away, and the righteous waking from their sleep would rise into the heavens as beings transfigured and radiant as the angels of God.

In the New Testament writers we find thought still taking shape within the inherited Jewish framework. The author of the Apocalypse pictures a climax for the earthly scene as well as a final consummation: he foresees a Millennium on earth before the curtain rises on the last scenes. As the patriotic Israelites had always yearned for a national kingdom eclipsing the grandeur even of Solomon's spreading domain, so the Apocalypse forecasts the binding of Satan and the reign of Christ on this earth, a first resurrection enjoyed only by the martyr saints, the rest of the dead remaining in the cheerless shadowland of Hades. But the perfected order of things cannot be contained within the limits of earth. Thus a further stage opens. At the close of the Millennium Satan is released and leads the forces of evil in a final assault on the Holy City and the saints, only to meet final defeat. Those evils that have always menaced human life, Death and Hades, are at last thrown to destruction in the lake of fire along with all those whose names are not written in the Book of Life. Only then comes the consummation in a blending of the earthly and the heavenly: the first heaven and the first earth and the fearsome sea have all passed away, and the New Jerusalem, the dream city that Jewish eyes have longed for but that human

hand could never rear, comes down from God out of heaven (Rev. 20, 21). Finally there is realized the perfect bliss—God Himself dwelling amongst His people.

Thus the seer of Patmos is setting forth in picture form his great certainties. (1) The tangled history of earth, scene of defeat, disaster, and frustration, must have its culminating justification in the grand era of the Millennium. (2) The saints and martyrs have their reward in sharing that triumphant time with their Lord. The Jew had always valued this warm human earth and the body that God had given us to enjoy it. He could not conceive of a disembodied spirit, of an existence that was not clothed with an earthly tabernacle. "The body was no prison-house of clay which cribbed and confined man's spirit, it was the means through which the soul functioned. Body and soul were almost inseparable concomitants. What, then, the body made possible for the soul, the sweet intercourse of men, their mutual helpfulness, their kindly courtesies, all the relations which make courage and patience and gentleness and helpfulness realities instead of empty phrases, were assured for continuance in an earthly kingdom."¹ (3) But life in the full splendour in which God has conceived it transcends this common earth. He must dwell in the midst of His redeemed, and that calls for a new and more glorious firmament. The joy of living with Jesus had so caught the imagination of the Christian that nothing now could satisfy but the enjoyment of the Hallowed Presence.

Paul shares with his readers glimpses of expectation like those of John of Patmos. In his earlier letters he looks forward to conflict and crisis on the grand scale. The man of sin, incarnation of evil, now mysteriously restrained by the power of Rome, would yet break forth and bring an epic struggle to a crisis, and then would be the reign of the Christ in His Kingdom (2 Thess. 2: 1ff.). "For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death" (1 Cor. 15: 25-26; Rom. 5: 17; 1 Cor. 4: 8; 6: 3). But the significant note in even these earlier visions of the end is the passionate anxiety to share life with his Lord. When the dead rise, it is to be with the Lord for ever (1 Thess. 4: 17). In the later letters he has little to say of these cataclysmic events, but his longing is enhanced

¹ Adam C. Welch, *Visions of the End*, p. 242f.

to be with Christ, which is far better than life itself (Phil. 1: 23). In a sense that richer existence has begun already: our life "is hid with Christ in God" (Col. 3: 3); the Father through the work of Christ has already made us "partakers in the inheritance of the saints in light": He has already "delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his beloved Son" (Col. 1: 12, 13). The work of Christ upon the Cross was a defeat of the evil powers and a foretaste of the final victory (Col. 2: 15). Even now beneath the suffering of the present time, another age is dawning with a glory beyond our conceiving. For this consummation with its unveiling of the sons of God all creation now stands on tiptoe. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God: this mortal must put on immortality. We shall all be changed and share the likeness of His Son in a life of glorious freedom. No powers of the present or future, of the height or of the depth, will be able to cut us off from God's gift of love in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8: 18ff., 1 Cor. 15: 35ff.).

The Fourth Gospel carries into even richer expression these Pauline thoughts. In the death of Christ there has occurred a world crisis: the forces of evil have had their hour, but now judgment has come and the prince of this world is cast out (John 12: 31). Eternal life is a life of higher quality that begins here and now for every believer (3: 36; 5: 24; 17: 3; 1 John 3: 14), and yet there is a final consummation when the good shall rise to share in the resurrection of life and the evil to the resurrection of judgment (John 5: 26-29). The acceptance of the law of love is our passport to a new world: "we know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren" (1 John 3: 14). Even now we are sons of God, but "it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (3: 2).

When we ask what guidance Jesus has given us in the Synoptic records, we are surprised in the first place by His reticence about the detail of the last things. Asked whether few would be saved, He does not satisfy that curiosity, but bids men set their thoughts on striving (Luke 13: 23-24) to enter, for "strait is the gate, and narrow is the way" (Matt. 7: 14). As to the character of the after life He gives scant indication of His thought. Almost His last statement is that made at the Last

Supper to the effect that in the consummated Kingdom they would drink wine that was new, *i.e.* new in kind. We dare not press the symbolism of the Messianic Feast: it may be taken as but a picture of the abundant joyousness that will mark the life of communion in the higher sphere. More definite is the statement made in answer to the query of the Sadducees (as to whose wife a woman would be in the resurrection who had married seven brothers in succession according to the Levirate law): "Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the scriptures, neither the power of God? For when they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels which are in heaven" (Mark 12: 24-25).

How are we to reconcile these two aspects of the Kingdom—a kingdom on earth to be the theme of our prayers and striving, and a kingdom under conditions of transfigured life beyond all our power to conceive? Jesus Himself was absorbed in the seeking of both without any suggestion of an inner contradiction. He set forth in the Beatitudes and His ethical teaching generally a way of life that was not only to be practised in the interval before the Kingdom dawns, but that defines the character of life within the consummated Kingdom. The law of love and sacrifice is our mandate if we seek the Kingdom here and now, but that must continue to be the standard of existence in the realm of a God who is love. In the fairer world beyond there must be depths of fellowship, riches of friendship, in those we know that will be explored only when we inherit a sensitivity and devotion beyond our present range of being. Sacrifice and vicarious suffering have an obvious function in our interdependent life here below; but they express so much our character and temper that we can hardly contemplate a perfect social whole of the unselfish where there can be no place for those qualities in us. There is a mystery here that the human mind cannot fathom. There must continue to be what theologians call a tension between the claims of the two kingdoms—that on earth here and that larger life we are to inherit. We know among us now those rare souls who soar far beyond us into the realm of higher reality and yet—indeed by reason of that vision of otherworldliness—they are immersed in every activity of citizenship and human welfare. The Kingdom beyond, so far from cancelling out our interest in the Kingdom here on

earth, should set the imagination aflame and kindle to higher intensity our passion for nobler issues below.

A man's reach should exceed his grasp,
Or what's a heaven for?

Is this not the wisest provision of an over-ruling Providence, that we can be citizens of two worlds—that the foretaste of that which is above should stimulate and reinforce our devotion to the well-being of the other that is below? The visionaries, the dreamers, the music-makers—have they not throughout the Christian ages proved a living Jacob's ladder keeping open the paths that lead upwards from the sorrow-laden earth and mediating to the practical realm the light and glory of the higher regions? By divine grace it can be given to us to be

True to the kindred points of Heaven and Home.

Let a modern convert to orthodoxy from socialism give his testimony. In the course of a moving chapter entitled "The Valley of Achor," D. R. Davies offers his confession that a man can work with zest for the transformation of the social order "*if History is a preparation for a sphere, for an order of being beyond itself.*"

"History is the realm of the relative and the imperfect. It makes promises which it never fulfils and cannot fulfil. It promises to society perfect justice and peace and order. To the individual it promises perfect happiness and unalloyed joy. It promises tortured Humanity the ecstasy and bliss of perfect and permanent creation. None of these promises can it keep. But what if there is a super-History, in which the dreams and hopes and promises of History shall be fulfilled? What if the failures and evils of time are a testing, a training and a discipline for an order of existence beyond time and the world?

If that is true, then History acquires a new meaning, and it becomes abundantly possible to labour for the Kingdom of God, whose content and essence are too vast and profound to be expressed in time. . . .

If, finally, then, our dream of the perfect life shall be realized beyond time, it becomes possible to work with joy for a better social order."

* D. R. Davies, *On to Orthodoxy*, p. 114-115.

May it not be the plan of an all-wise Providence that man should project his dream castles, strive for their realization, taste failure and defeat, and so learn to probe deeper into the fact of his own nature and the profounder needs of human kind? Chastened and humbled, he will begin to look up for aid, and then God comes with His gracious gift of life within the Kingdom. "History, then, is the providential preparation in time of what is only possible in eternity."

God will judge all by Jesus Christ. Matt. 7: 21-27; 16: 27; 25: 31-46; Luke 13: 2-9; John 5: 22-29; 2 Cor. 5: 10.

Dominating all other aspects of the Kingdom to the mind of Jesus is the fact that it confronts each single soul with the issue of his personal destiny. The approach of the Kingdom sets all men in the Valley of Decision. In Christ God visits men with the offer of redemption, and the gravest of all choices is before us. Is it to be for us "Well done, thou good and faithful servant" or a sad "Woe unto thee because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation"?

This concern for the personal is manifest even in the name Jesus chose for Himself: "Son of Man." That name carries the mind back to the vision in Dan. 7, where we see portrayed the destruction of the world empires and the giving to the Son of Man of the everlasting kingdom. It is a kingdom of people—of the saints—a transfigured commonwealth—and this realm is to be signalized by the qualities of the humane as opposed to the bestiality of the dispossessed world powers. It is to this glorious hope of the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven that Jesus lifts His eyes from the threat of earthly power and the shadow of the approaching Cross (Mark 14: 62). The first thought that strikes us here is that Jesus sees Himself as the inaugurator and Lord of the coming Kingdom. He is to be the Judge: all power is given to Him on earth and in heaven. Judgment is not assigned to a law or a process, but to a Person—to one who is bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, to one who has tasted the cup of human life, shared in our temptations and our sorrows. Judgment is at the hands of one who has made Himself known as Love and Mercy. This note appears in the

* *Ib.* p. 116.

great judgment scene of Matt. 25: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." It is the kind of test in which all men and women can impartially share—the test of brotherliness, sisterliness, tenderness, pity, care, and love. The Judge on the bench identifies Himself with the hungry and the naked and the prisoner. It is a penetrating judgment; for the Judge has no need of alien witnesses: He has been there on the human scene as a spectator and participator who knows us and knows those whom we have helped or failed to help. The Judge incarnates in Himself a unique understanding of the weakness and the strength of the human personality He judges. Was there ever an earthly court so tender, considerate, and yet so searching, so probing?

Again we observe that predominantly the judgment is not in the mass, but person by person. In Jewish pictures of the last great Assize judgment is by nations and classes—especially of the enemies and tormentors of Israel, the despots and their mighty armies that had harried the sacred soil of Palestine: "there are no portraits of separate faces" (Leckie). But it is precisely this new note that marks the Apocalypse as Jesus has transformed it: the judgment comes upon men one by one. How often in the parables the figures are individual—just as in each day's journeying so much of the interest of the Master was given to a daughter of Jairus or a woman with an issue of blood. It is the way of love so to single men out whether to aid them or to try them.

God does not override Freedom. Mark 4: 9; John 8: 32; 12: 44-50; James 1: 13-15, 25; Gal. 5: 1, 13; Rev. 2: 7.

"Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting⁸ fire, prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25: 41). These words coming from one who judges on the basis of humanity strike a chill and forbidding note, and many would ascribe them, not to Jesus, but to a later scribe's edition of the words of Jesus into which the unforgiving heart of man has poured some of its own bitterness. That may be; but we cannot neglect the cumulative testimony of other passages. "Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer

⁸Literally "fire of the age," wrongly translated "everlasting." This conventional imagery is not to be taken literally. The idea is that all evil things of the material world unworthy to pass into the new age are to be destroyed or cleansed as by fire.

darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 25: 30). "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! . . . It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you" (Matt. 11: 21-24). There is a similar word of doom on the city that rejects the messengers of the Kingdom (Matt. 10: 15). There is the grim rebuff that befalls the foolish virgins: "And the door was shut . . . Verily I say unto you, I know you not" (Matt. 25: 10-13). The curtain rings down on the interview with non-committal Nicodemus: "He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3: 36). We cannot build dogma on picturesque phrases, especially where these are part of the scenery of the parables. Yet it is impossible to miss this insistent note that before man there is a choice and the choice counts momentarily. "Inasmuch as ye did it not . . ." (Matt. 25: 45); "How often would I have gathered thy children together . . . and ye *would not!* . . ." (Matt. 23: 37); "Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, . . . Thou oughtest therefore . . ." (Matt. 25: 26-27); "If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth" (John 9: 41). Men have their freedom: they have knowledge and insight. So they must accept responsibility. It is they who make these solemn decisions: in the face of their open folly doors must shut, and instead of the joy of the marriage feast there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. There is almost a relentless lack of pity for the unjust steward, for the neglectful Dives, for an Ananias or a Judas. There is no encouragement given to the idea that God will forgive because it is His business. The contrary is true: the reverse side of love is a face set implacably against all heedless and heartless inhumanity, against all callous and frivolous disregard of the divine direct appeal. There is here no mawkish nineteenth-century paternalism in the Judge that Scripture has portrayed. There is no spineless, slithering over evil, but rather a solemn affirmation of an irreparable past, an irretrievable future, where with open eyes and warnings all unheeded man has refused the better part. There is sin that is unforgivable. Where light has been given to walk by, where the ancient landmarks have been deliberately ignored, where our priceless liberty has been abused and the moral challenge has been

flouted, there is a price to pay, and a burst of tears will not serve for redeeming. It is a terrible thing to have offended one of the little ones for whom Christ died.

When we examine the teaching of Paul and the Johannine writings, we are confronted with the same kind of evidence. Paul links death to sin. "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6: 23). Death here is not that lesser evil, the perishing of the natural body of a man, but rather that deeper death in which the individual loses the full richness of existence by falling out of touch with the life-giving Spirit of God. Biblical thought does not share the Greek idea that the soul is immortal by its own nature. Immortality in Scripture is the pure gift of God: "the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6: 23). Beneath the attractive luring colours that sin often presents to the human eye is this fatal sting of death: it breaks our contact with the finer realities of the higher world; it destroys within the soul the higher capacity for truth, beauty, and goodness (1 Cor. 15: 55-56).

So John sees confronting us a universe of decisive contrasts, light or darkness, life or death. "Whosoever liveth, and believeth in me, shall never die" (11: 26). "He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (5: 24). "He that believeth not is condemned already . . . And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (3: 18-19). Evidently there can be in man an unresponsiveness, a hard-hearted callousness to the divine word of appeal, that must end in exclusion from the Kingdom of the saints.

There is little or no basis in Scripture for any lurid portrayal of everlasting punishment—a doctrine called by Lord Morley "perhaps the most frightful idea that has ever corroded human character." It cannot be denied that in days of persecution even Christian hearts were overwhelmed by a hot passion of hate and thirst for vengeance, and thus the gloating over the merited sufferings of the damned in some Jewish writings tended to reappear in Christian imagination. Tertullian is roused to exultation as he sees famous kings groaning in deepest darkness and persecuting governors set in flames more fierce than those with which they raged against the followers of Christ. Even Augustine

taught in terms gross and materialistic. But the Biblical emphasis is on exclusion from the Divine Presence. Eternal life is a gift that God alone can give, and those on whom His favour does not fall cannot pass into life: thus they cease to be. In Matt. 25 the point of the parable is the placing, the sheep on the right, the place of honour, the goats on the left. "Come, ye blessed," the stress being on "Come," contrasts with "Depart from me" in the counter picture. To depart to æonian fire means simply to pass to extinction with the evil material world to which they chose to belong, or it may be pass to a purifying. Fire to the Hebrews was not a means of torment, but the agent of destruction or cleansing. The scenery of a single parable cannot be used to support a dogma. So also it is overstraining to build on the phrase "delivered him to the tormentors" (Matt. 18: 34), or on "many stripes" (Luke 12: 47).

"If we seriously believe in the fundamental Christian conception of God as being, before everything else, Love, can we suppose the 'many stripes' to mean unending and inexpressible tortures? Can a God of love have designed oubliettes for even the worst among His creatures?" The severest possible punishment for a spiritual being is to find at the end of life that he has lost the power to continue in the Divine fellowship. Again, it is to be noted that the responsibility for ultimate tragedy rests with man who has loved freedom too well. "God does not cast into Hell as an Eastern sultan might cast a wretch, who had provoked his anger, to the lions; it is the persistently rebellious sinner who casts himself into the darkness by his very impenitence, just as it is I myself who dash myself in pieces if I insist in walking over a precipice. The 'second death' is a suicide's death."

If they stubbornly refuse. Matt. 11: 20-30; 12: 31-37; John 3: 35-36; Rom. 1: 18—2: 11; John 14.

What then is the final issue of the striving of the Spirit of God with men? Does Love at last prevail over every evil and save all men, or can it be that many rebellious men ultimately stray beyond the reach of grace?

A. There are some who hold to *Conditional Immortality*. Man

* A. E. Taylor, *The Christian Hope of Immortality*, p. 114.

† A. E. Taylor, p. 123.

is free, they argue, and, as many persist in evil, they reach a stage where there can be no redemption. Like Esau, we sell our birthright, and there is no place for repentance though we seek it carefully with tears. That note sounds in the Epistle to the Hebrews. "For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment . . ." "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10: 26-31). "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matt. 7: 13-14; cf. Luke 13: 24ff.; Matt. 26: 28, Luke 10: 15).

Is this our verdict: as man had been created in Christ and redeemed by Him, he had no life save in Him, and it was not worthy either of the justice or mercy of God to tolerate to all eternity a dead universe, or a dead limb in a universe, which He had expressly redeemed from death?

1. It is a view that is true to Scripture in that it takes sin seriously (Rom. 1: 18ff., etc.). Surely there must be retribution upon the soul that refuses the light and clings to deeds of darkness. Our experience can point to the deliberate flouting of the good with an open-eyed blasphemous gloating in naughtiness that corrupts the springs of thought and action. Is it only in the spiritual sphere that the unfit are to survive?

2. Is it not only the life that is hid with Christ in God that can have any permanent worth? If existence is persisted in on the bestial level, should it not perish as the cattle perish? If a soul has never developed any sensitiveness to the lovelier things of the universe, how can it ever be at home in the garden of God? Is it not better, even kinder, that the gross and sensual should cease to be with the wasting of the material body?

3. Is God's consummated Kingdom not the realm of the pure in heart? The end of history is the city of the New Jerusalem: "without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie" (Rev. 22: 15). Does it not defeat the plan of redemption if evil can live on unrepentant? Is there not a point where the corrupt must cease to offend the presence of the living God?

Yet there are difficulties in this position.

* R. W. Dale, *Biography*, quoted by Leckie, *The World to come and Final Destiny*, p. 242.

1. It tends to suggest that it is by man's effort that immortality is won, whereas the whole testimony of the Bible is that eternal life is by God's free grace. If some perish by lack of virtue, then the saved are spared because they have listened to the voice of God, put their trust in Him, persevered in the way: they are spared through their own efforts in a measure. Is this not venturing to suggest that some deserve to be saved?

2. Is there not a self-righteous superiority in the idea that saints are so vastly better than sinners? We have all fallen short of the glory of God: we are involved in the social network of the world's sin, and who shall say that he has no responsibility for those who fall? Is our guilt measurable by sharply contrasting black and white or by shades of grey? Once we make allowance for all life's handicaps and inequalities, can we still confidently separate the sheep from the goats?

3. If God's image is in every man, can it be worn away from any? Is that not to say that evil is more powerful than good? If any single soul perish, has the great Father not fallen short of His perfect household since some are unreclaimed? Is not the All-righteous the All-loving too? Is His arm shortened that it cannot save?

B. There are those who put complete faith in the unlimited generosity of God and believe that somehow salvation will extend to all. "It is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish" (Matt. 18: 14). There was in the last generation in particular a widespread reliance on the divine love: there will be *universal restoration* for all sinners. Was that just a reflection of the indulgence of a luxurious and prosperous century—or is it a true appreciation of the great heart of the Eternal? "God hath shut up all unto disobedience, that he might have mercy upon all" (Rom. 11: 32). "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor. 15: 22). "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" (John 12: 32). Are these words of Scripture large generalizations, a statement of the divine willingness to save all rather than a cold statement of doctrine?

1. This view takes account of the pitifulness and weakness of all men. It looks frankly at a cross-section of city life, and confesses that between the defiant woman in the dock and the

stern judge on the bench there may not be so much a difference of heart as a difference of temperament and opportunity. There are injustices in environment and in inheritance: life deals out to this one so much domestic bliss and to that one blow upon blow; and blood runs so hot in this woman's veins and so cold in that staid Portia; and the meshes of life are so tangled and intricate that to know all may be to forgive all. From the exalted viewpoint of the Almighty Mercy can there be any finely-drawn distinction? Is it not rather a case for pity for all: "Only the infinite pity is sufficient for the infinite pathos of life"?

2. Again this view takes the Gospel seriously. It believes that God is set upon a purpose of redemption and that no evil can finally defeat His will to redeem. He has permitted man to face life with a spacious freedom, recognizing that sin and suffering must corrode and chasten and defeat. But may not He will to make an end of the destroying forces and have pity on the work of His hands? Can He ultimately let sin claim its thousands? Must He not rather with a Father's heart reach out to rescue the last one of His children?

There are hesitations that rise in the mind as we contemplate this solution.

1. Does this view take sin seriously? Does it not undermine the whole moral struggle? What boots it to strive to keep the narrow way if in the end the broad way leads to the same heaven? Is there justice in the God who thus bundles together the serious seeker and the frivolous worldling? Is this not looking at an evil world through rose-coloured spectacles? Are Caiaphas and Judas to have the same discharge as the martyred Peter and Paul?

2. Does this view take man seriously? To what end were we all set down free in an evil world? Why give us the mockery of free choice when in the end we were all to be saved willy-nilly? If we were all to have the prize, why set the field for a contest? That travail of the spirit striving against the flesh, that struggle against tyranny and cruelty, that courage and sacrifice and unselfishness—was it all not a delusion if the frankly sensual and the pitiless despot and the cowardly self-seeker are objects in the end of the same generosity? Yet the parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard (Matt. 20) and Paul's grand conclusion in Rom. 8 give us pause.

After Death, Luke 16: 19-31; 1 Thess. 4: 13-18; 1 Pet. 3: 18-20; Rev. 6: 9-11.

To some minds the problem of the end is simplified by the conception of an interim period between this life and the next. Is there some cleansing experience that men unready at death can undergo before they pass to the eternal presence? Is there a purifying purgatory, as the Eastern and Roman Churches teach and as many Protestant thinkers have maintained?

In a parable like Dives and Lazarus we see the typical Hebrew belief in Sheol (or Hades, as the Greeks called it), a place of waiting where the dead had their abode in a cheerless, voiceless, shadowed underworld, and which later thought tended to conceive as a place of probation. In 1 Peter there is an allusion to an idea which must have circulated in the early Church that in the interval between His being laid in the grave and His rising again Jesus went into that realm of darkness and preached the good news to those who had not the chance to hear in their lifetime. The Fourth Gospel teaches us that we are being judged here and now according as we accept or reject Christ. But there is a sense in which no judgment can be complete until all those with whom we have been bound together in the bundle of life have also been judged. We must tarry till the final consummation. Scripture speaks of the dead as those that sleep. As we awake from a dreamless sleep all unconscious of the hours that have passed since we lost consciousness, so may not the blessed dead awake with no sense of long waiting to share the Resurrection morn? The believers of the early Church were concerned about the unbaptized infants and the spiritually immature and those who had passed away in pagan darkness. In Jewish thought there was faith in the efficacy of intercessory prayer, and such prayer might avail for the blessed dead, and some who passed into the Christian Church might bring this expectation with them. In the Christian society which has built up a firm and enduring family affection there must always be an eager concern for the souls of our beloved, and in spite of the discouragement of theologians many will continue to obey the instinct to pray for those who have passed beyond. Here too in this conception puzzled thinkers have seen compensation for the ragged edges of our human existence. Have the unheeding in this life a second chance in the waiting

period before the end? Are the last moment penitents then brought under a rigorous discipline that breaks the stubbornness of the human heart and opens at last the windows of the soul?

Protestant opinion has often turned away from even the slightest consideration of this hope because of the tragic misuse that the Roman Church made of masses for the dead. Pious rites cannot buy a way into Paradise even when love drives. The eternal love, we say, needs no importuning from us. But neither does the gracious God need such urging in this life, and yet Jesus has taught us importunity (Luke 18: 1ff.).

Beyond our Power to Conceive. John 19: 24; 2 Cor. 3: 18; Phil. 3: 20-21; Rev. 7: 9-17; Rev. 21-22.

These are matters where our probing seems impertinent and dogmatism ill becomes us. Let us recall the reticence of the Master Himself, and be content to leave the issues in the Father's all-gracious hand. His love has thrown its mantle over those we love. What baffles our human minds is clear to His wisdom.

What lies behind the veil we cannot imagine or define. Heaven has been freely pictured as the place of reward and rest,

the bliss of languorous hours,
A glory of calm measured range.

But our modern industrial age has cherished rather a craving for activity, as in the words of Paul Hamilton Hayne:

A heaven of action freed from strife
With ampler ether for the scope
Of an unmeasurable life
And an unbaffled human hope.

A heaven wherein all discords cease,
Self-torment, doubt, distress, turmoil,
The care of whose majestic peace
Is *god-like power of endless toil.*

May it not be rather a larger magnitude of experience in which the virtues of activity and rest are inextricably intertwined? There is such a joy as the creative artist knows when after long questing and restless inner urgings there pours forth in a living glow of peace a masterpiece of the imagination in art or music.

There is that active yet restful interflow of mind and heart that comes to the sensitive soul when after long frustration and disenchantment he encounters love at last and opens out his nature in the atmosphere of understanding friendship. Professor John Baillie has set down this felicitous illustration:

A night at an inn is one thing and the journey accomplished is quite another. In the inn we sleep, but when the journey is accomplished, we are in a sense more active than ever. We are now actively enjoying something that is worth having for its own sake, whereas the journey was undertaken only for the sake of this to which it has led. It may be we are only talking with the friend to whose house we have travelled, and that only for love's sake; yet it cannot be denied that our souls are now much more active than when we were jogging along in the saddle, or being jolted in the train or sitting behind the steering-wheel. *Fruition*, then, is essentially an activity—a higher activity than the activity of becoming or of unfulfilled quest.*

Here is a region where it is better that we should walk by faith and not by sight. To know what lies behind the veil would be to discourage all wondering and seeking and to miss the joy of finding. How many of the richest treasures of life are delightful because there are ever new surprises? The sunrise morning by morning, sunset evening by evening, has the charm of unveiling its own particular freshness: it is always a discovery. Love is an adventure: to know all the lovelinesses of personality beforehand would be to tarnish it. And it is better that the bourne is that which eye hath not seen nor ear heard. It is enough to reach out in the dark and to touch a pierced hand and thus to know that a Friend who has proved His love has gathered us each one into His keeping.

"We know Whom we have believed, and are persuaded
that

He is able to keep that which we have committed to
Him."

"To the only wise God our Saviour be glory and
majesty, dominion and power, both now and
ever."

* *And the Life Everlasting*, p. 278.