

CHAPTER XX

ARTICLE XIX.—*Of the Resurrection, the Last Judgment and the Future Life.*—We believe that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and of the unjust, through the power of the Son of God, who shall come to judge the living and the dead; that the finally impenitent shall go away into eternal punishment and the righteous into life eternal.

Of the solemn subjects named in the title to this article, there has been much discussion; and a vast literature has grown up dealing with the exegetical and theological problems involved. The Creeds of the Church, both ancient, and reformation or post reformation have, on the whole, observed a wise restraint in speaking of these awful themes. The article merely names the position taken by theologians of the Reformation period, who were moved chiefly by their opposition to the Roman doctrine of purgatory, with all that it involves. Putting the matter more broadly, we may ask—what has a Christian, who in Christ is forgiven and is a child of God, to look forward to, as he draws near the close of his earthly pilgrimage, and lifts his thoughts beyond the grave?

1. The experience of dying. Faith does not ignore the physical and spiritual conditions, which render the prospect solemn beyond words. But the believer, while subdued and humbled, need not be terrified, as though he were to be alone amid

unimagined terrors. He walks through a valley of death-shade; but One is with him, who passed that way before, and made death not a fate, but an opportunity and a transition from less to greater appropriation of our inheritance.

2. Resurrection. The Christian doctrine is not the Greek speculation as to the immortality of the Soul. It keeps close to the conception of full personal life, which it inherited from the religion of Israel. Not a place among bodiless shades, but the consummation of human nature, with perfected powers under perfect conditions, is the Christian's anticipation of the new life that awaits him. We cannot be wrong to include in this expectation the thought of the fellowship, which death will not scatter nor dissolve, but restores to us in depth and tenderness and comprehension beyond all things.

3. Judgment. It is true that for him who is in Christ, there is therefore no condemnation, and at the judgment there will be no reversal of the believer's acceptance. But enough remains of sin and shortcoming to make his appearance before the judgment seat of Christ, a thought to shake his soul to its depths, and to send him to his knees in humble surrender, and to send him forth to greater carefulness and a more complete consecration. This judgment, when and amid what scenery it will take place, is not for us to imagine or dogmatize about. But one condition we are sure of, namely, the coming of Christ. He died under the ban of human

judgment. Now the position is reversed. He is judging all men everywhere. His presence as the living Lord is a continual judgment of men's sin. But time is not forever. Its dispensation culminates, and closes, when the once crucified, but now crowned, Lord, shall be manifested, and the living and the dead have their destiny decreed for the age that is to be.

4. Life eternal. It is not possible to refrain from dwelling on the blessedness of heaven, its sight of Christ, the likeness to him which that sight brings with it, the joys and employments of those who belong to the great multitude that no man can number. But reserve is best. They are alive with fulness of life, a life that can never end. Richard Baxter's words close the matter—

“My knowledge of that life is small
The eye of faith is dim
But 'tis enough that Christ knows all
And I shall be with Him.”

There is one sad and awestricken reflection which arises in our minds. If these are the experiences to which a Christian may look forward with mingled fear and hope, what is to be said of the soul, to whom an adequate presentation of the Gospel has been made, who has been confronted by the Christ in all His saving power, on whose heart the influence of the Holy Spirit has been exerted, persuading and enabling him to believe, if he would, who, spite of all

this, has refused the Gospel offer, has definitely refused to yield himself to his Redeemer, and has hardened himself against the power and love of God in the Spirit? On this awful subject, whatever we are bound to say must be said with utmost awestricken reserve. This does not mean, however, that there is no difference, as respects the future, between those who are “in Christ” and those who are separate from Him, or that the preacher ought not to make that difference the theme of earnest appeal and solemn warning. All that awaits those who have received Christ, awaits those who have rejected Him—*with Christ missed out*. (a) A Christless death, (b) a resurrection, that has no Christ to greet the newcomer on the other shore, (c) a Judgment, without the all-availing name of Christ as plea and ground. (d) And, beyond the judgment, not life but death. This is not “eternal punishment” after the analogy of a criminal court. It is simply the rejection of Christ, working out its issues. Are there to be, in the hereafter, souls, who, while it was possible to receive Christ, have definitely refused Him? God alone knows. If there are, what will become of them? Will the issues of unbelief indeed stretch through eternity? It is not for us to pronounce. The words of Dr. Orr, a noted “fundamentalist,” are wise and weighty, “God is judge. Enough for us, while seeing to it that we do not fail to enter into the rest of God through unbelief, to be assured, that whatever love

can do and righteousness permits, with the infinite grace that streams from Christ's Cross behind, will not be left undone." So humble and believing an attitude of mind is better than any pitiless dogma, any unwarranted theory of universalism, or any precarious speculation, regarding "second probation" or "conditional immortality."