

have been pained and weeping for you ; I crossed the seas and I scoured the lands ; height I trod, and depth my soul sounded ; thirst overpowered me, hunger weakened me, nakedness made me suffer, heat burned me, cold dried me, so that I might find you ; I did not find quietness up to now."

Mitrodora said to him : " Come, O tree, and see the branches which have been separated from thee ; they have become a staff, and behold, they sustain us."

The old man approached and tenderly kissed his sons, and began to weep upon them as if they were departed people rising from the dead, and said : " Come in peace, O slain ones, who have returned back ! O dead people who have been resuscitated ! Blessed are my eyes, for I have seen you to-day. I glorify God since He gave you to me to sustain my age, to take away my pains, to console my affliction."

And Simon Cephas baptized the old man, their father ; and all, the mother, her children, and their father became pure sanctuaries and dwellings to the Holy Spirit, and they reached a high rank and have been widely renowned in sanctity.

We all, let us glorify God, who comforts distressed people, and takes away the pains of those who trust in His name. Glory be to Him for ever and ever. Amen.

ALPHONSE MINGANA.

STUDIES IN CHRISTIAN ESCHATOLOGY.

VIII. CONDITIONALISM.

THE theory of Conditional Immortality has from early times been recommended to the Church as a *via media* between Universalism and the ecclesiastical doctrine of Eternal Punishment. Briefly, the theory is this. By nature man

is not immortal, but the gift of eternal life is conferred in regeneration; and although the unregenerate may possess a life which does not perish with the body, it has no root in God, and must cease to be, those who impenitently defy the Divine love being destined to final annihilation. It has been stated with great religious power by the late Dr. Dale, who adopted it after long hesitancy. Speaking in his own name and that of others who concurred in his opinion, he said: "We have reached the conclusion that eternal life is the gift of the Lord Jesus Christ, that this life is not given to those who reject the Gospel, but is given in the new birth to those who believe and who are thereby made partakers of the Divine nature. We warn men that while they continue in impenitence, they fail to secure it; and if they continue impenitent to the end, they are destined to indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish. . . . While it is possible to separate a man from his sin, God's love clings to the man, while God's anger lies on the sin; but when this becomes impossible and the man and the sin are *one*, then there is nothing left but for the evil to be consumed by the fires of the Divine wrath. The final expression of God's abhorrence of sin will be the moral flame in which those who cannot be separated from their sin will be consumed."¹ This has been described by an antagonist as "the most wretched and cowardly of all theories"; but even those who reject it will feel that theology at all events ought to be spared language better suited to the violence of political controversy.

When however we turn to Scripture, which defenders of Conditionalism usually claim to have on their side, it becomes plain that the difficulties before them are immense. They are bound to demonstrate a series of positions which taken separately, and still more taken all together, have at least

¹ *Life*, 312, 313.

the look of being nearly hopeless. For it has to be proved that by "life" the Bible means just "existence" and by "death" just "non-existence," or, as it has been expressed, "the breaking-up of the human *monad*." It has to be proved that when Scripture speaks of the wicked as suffering "destruction" or "perdition," these terms ought to be construed with the barest literalism, and that verses in which this is out of the question are negligible exceptions. On the other hand, it has to be shown that Bible expressions affirming the eternity of punishment are *not* to be taken literally, and do not mean what they say. In addition, good reason must be given for holding that the relevant teaching of Scripture was meant to overturn the universal belief in the immortality of all, which undoubtedly prevailed at the time and in the circles in which that teaching was promulgated. All this constitutes an exacting task. Indeed, the conclusion can hardly be avoided that the Biblical part of the Conditionalist argument is by all odds the least impressive, and that that argument would in fact be strengthened if the claim to rest on Scripture were quietly allowed to drop.

Nothing certainly is so evident as that in the Bible "life" means a spiritual state (with its "physical" counterpart of course), marked by intensive quality, and deriving this quality from the relationship in which the living person is conceived as standing to the living God. "Life" is used frequently as the equivalent of "eternal life"; that is, it connotes blessedness, activity and vigour of which the believer is participant in virtue of his unity with God through Christ. This fixes the meaning of its opposite, "death." Death is the absence of what we have just seen forms the specific content of life. It is the withdrawal of everything that imparts value to life for the religious mind. Contact with God is lost, and with it all that is wrapped up

in the word "blessedness." No terms of description are too vivid or powerful to point its misery and ruin. It is destruction, perishing, the last calamity. Naturally, this state can only be indicated by a Christian apostle in words of a predominantly negative cast. He must speak of it as the antithesis of salvation. But the definite loss of conscious being is nowhere associated with it. As Professor A. B. Davidson has said of the Old Testament writers: "For all that appears the idea that any human person should become extinct or be annihilated never occurred to them."¹ For them, to survive apart from God is to abide in death. And since death is "abiding," and not non-existence, New Testament writers can speak of men having passed "from death unto life," and ascribe "tribulation and anguish" to the life of the lost in a world to come. In short, to render life and death by existence and non-existence is to represent the Bible mind as fixing its chief interest not in spiritual realities but in a bare and hard ontology. Death is to be undone, to be in ruin, to miss everything that can be called well-being; but it is not to vanish in extinction. Thus one of the main pleas of Annihilationism, that to call death what is a kind of suffering life is absurd, will not bear scrutiny for a moment in the light of Bible teaching. Even common speech refutes it. We speak of a dead tree, or dead flesh, because these things have parted with all that constituted their value or charm; but they have not ceased to be. What has happened is a rupture of the tie linking them to life.

After all, the New Testament was written by men who had been bred upon the Old; and the Old Testament idea of Sheol, albeit with radical defects, had contained at least the idea of survival. With modifications, it reappears

¹ EXPOSITOR, V. i. p. 332 (quoted by Kennedy, *St. Paul's Conceptions of the Last Things*, 125).

in the parable of Dives and Lazarus. In the New Testament, then, the dead really live; but they live otherwise than on earth. There is no lapse into nothingness.

Conditionalists, as is well known, have sought to meet the force of what seem unequivocal New Testament expressions, predicating death as a state of personal being, by giving them a special turn of meaning. If such texts as these are cited: "Let the dead bury their dead"; "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead"; "When the commandment came, sin revivèd, and I died" (Luke ix. 60; Eph. v. 14; Rom. vii. 9)—expressions that seem to convey the sense of a distinct and fatal break with God—it is replied that here the meaning of death is proleptic. No one will deny that in usage of this sort there is an element of prolepsis. When the woman who lives in pleasure is said to be "dead while she liveth," it is certainly implied anticipatively that if she continues in her ways the end will be an irrevocable passing out of touch with God, through what we call physical death. But this does not permit us either to resolve the whole content of the word "dead" into anticipated experience, or to say that what is anticipated is extinction. For one thing, the godless quality of life which entails impending doom is actual now. It is as real as it will ever be, and is contained within the significance of "death." Further, in St. Paul's deep word: "Sin revivèd, and I died," the aorist (*ἀπέθανον*) clearly points to a past event. An experience recorded in language filled with emotion so intense cannot have been merely one of anticipation. It occurred then and there; its meaning was within itself. It was such as to force the cry: "Who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?" Nothing which is construed purely as a future contingency can stir feeling so keen and actual.

It is perhaps unnecessary to labour the point that various

New Testament phrases, which speak of "eternal punishment" or "an eternal sin," or of a state on which the wrath of God abides not merely do not bear witness to Conditionalism, but are irreconcilably opposed to it.

There is one fact, however, which may, even if it be unconsciously, have aided the rise and progress of Conditionalism. This is the circumstance that in some of his most characteristic forms of statement St. Paul seems to recognise only a resurrection of the just. For him, the Spirit in believers is the earnest of their rising, as it was in virtue of the Spirit of holiness that Christ was installed, by resurrection, as the Son of God with power (Rom. i. 4). "*In Christ shall all be made alive.*" That is to say, the ideas "life" and "salvation" interpret each other. But we have no right to draw the inference that those who do not rise are doomed to annihilation. They abide in death—in that dark condition of ruin which St. Paul names *ἀπωλεία*. No prospect opens to them of resurrection unto life.¹

This is not the place for a discussion of theories belonging to Greek or Indian philosophy, in which the annihilation of the soul after death was taught, irrespectively of its goodness or badness. But within Church history proper there is something like consent that Arnobius, at the outset of the fourth century, was the first to teach Conditionalism

¹ Similarly one strain of teaching in the Fourth Gospel bears that only the righteous shall have part in the resurrection. Thus in v. 25 it is said: "The dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live"; cf. vi. 54: "He that eateth my flesh and drinketh My blood hath eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." On the other hand, certain passages appear to carry on an older and more primitive belief to the effect that resurrection is universal, as when immediately after the first verse just cited it is said: "All that are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth" (v. 29). It has been asserted, but not proved, that this second kind of passage is due to interpolation. But it is only confusion of thought to say that even the first class points to a doctrine of conditional immortality.

on explicitly Christian grounds. In his judgment, the soul was too full of defects to have been created by God, and it is not immortal *per se*; endless being is the exclusive privilege of the followers of Christ, unbelievers and heathen ultimately going out in nothingness. The next important name is later by centuries—Faustus Socinus (1539–1604). In addition to arguments now very familiar, he urged that if Christ and His apostles seem to speak as if the soul were naturally immortal, this is but didactic accommodation to primitive ideas. On the last page of the *Ethics*, Spinoza pretty definitely takes up the annihilationist position. “The ignorant man,” he writes, “is not only distracted in various ways by external causes without ever gaining the true acquiescence of his spirit, but moreover lives as it were unwitting of himself, and of God, and of things, and as soon as he ceases to suffer, ceases also to be. Whereas the wise man, in so far as he is regarded as such, is scarcely at all disturbed in spirit, but, being conscious of himself, and of God, and of things, by a certain eternal necessity never ceases to be.” The voice is the voice of metaphysics, not of faith; but in the nineteenth century Conditionalism came into favour with many Christian writers, and no small impression was made. In England it was earnestly expounded by Mr. Edward White, in his well-known book *Life in Christ* (1875), and among those who shared his views were Archbishop Whately, Prebendary Row, and Mr. J. B. Heard; in France, it gained the support of Petavel-Olliff, Janet, Renouvier, Secrétan, and Bruston; in Germany, of Rothe, Schultz, and several of the more noted recent dogmaticians. Some of these last, unwilling to affirm the theory outright, have pointed to it as an alternative well worth considering: so Ritschl, Wendt, Kirn, and Haering, and in a few passages Troeltsch also has made an approach to it. It has occasionally been argued that

natural immortality, so far from being an original element of the Christian message, was a speculation of Platonism gradually invading the Church.

Conditionalism has undoubtedly gained by its praiseworthy desire to concentrate interest on the positive core of faith. Immortal life, as believers hope for it, is life in Christ. That sufficiently explains the occurrence in the New Testament of phrases like "worthy of the resurrection," "children of the resurrection," "if by any means I might attain to the resurrection of the dead." Apostolic faith, its eye bent on the hope certified by Christ, finds promise of "life" in Him alone. We look for an existence wholly controlled and imbued by Him. To remain for ever what we are would be intolerable; but in our empirical selves there is nothing that could qualify us as participants in the higher order where He reigns; we can reach it only through reception. The specific kind of immortality of which Spirit-possessed life is an earnest—*this* is dependent on a certain attitude to God, and our sense of it wavers with the intensity of our religious life. Hence immortality, *in the characteristically Christian meaning of the word*, may be truly described as conditional. No one can have it who is not united to Jesus by faith.

And this means that Conditionalism has done a service by unrelenting antagonism to the idea of natural immortality in its traditional form. In the career of a being like man nothing can be "natural" in the sense of a nature-process. There can be no part of experience which arrives simply of itself, and colour is lent to that erroneous idea only because we viciously abstract this or that physical event, such as decay or death, from personal life as a whole. Immortality in this automatic sense we should all deny; it could only be asserted, I fancy, by the eminent

philosopher who one day said that he felt now he could prove the immortality of the soul, if only the non-existence of God were granted him. If the soul of man is immortal, as the New Testament writers assumed, it is because of the Divine character, and not because the soul has certain ontological qualities which make persistence a necessity. And those who believe all men shall live for ever really do so, not in view of the empirical constitution of human nature or as a consequence of its evolutionary ascent, but in view of God, to whom man has essential relations.

Further, dislike is now generally felt for one or two arguments with which Conditionalism used to be fought. The theory has been held responsible, for instance, for a decline of missionary zeal in its adherents. As long as people were convinced that the heathen, if unconverted, were doomed to an eternity of woe, so long, it was said, the churches had an overwhelming motive to appeal to. But this motive must be weakened or altogether extinguished if the new doctrine is permitted to mitigate the darkness of the future, and to promise extinction rather than conscious pain. But the point is ill taken. In fact, as every one knows, it was just in the centuries of post-Reformation orthodoxy, when people were surest of the terrible fate awaiting heathendom, that least was done for the missionary cause. Besides, how many of our best missionaries are actually moved by the desire to save men from endless pain? The supreme sanction of missions is the command of Christ, and the passionate desire to tell those who have not heard it that with God there is plenteous redemption. We dare not say that since we have become less sure than formerly that all who die without faith will perish miserably, we no longer feel constrained to obey the will of Christ. Nothing in our view of the world to come could ever modify the duty of imparting to those outside the faith our know-

ledge of the love of God, of striving to lighten their sense of guilt or to solace their sorrow and their fear.

Again, nothing but ignorance of the varied forms assumed by Conditionalism can have prompted the charge, that as a doctrine it abolishes future penalty for sin. Among its advocates, few or none have contended for the annihilation of the wicked at death. Doubtless we may ask: If man is not universally immortal, why should the sinful survive death at all? but this question, however apposite or damaging, leaves unaltered the fact that Conditionalists have almost invariably taught the survival of the wicked, and the imposition of punishment after death.¹ They urge that punishment will take another form than tradition has supposed; but to say that God cannot tolerate to all eternity a dead limb in a redeemed universe is undeniably to assert future punishment of the direst kind. Adherents of Conditionalism, that is, reject the popular view that sin is its own sufficient penalty. They believe that a universe ruled by God must necessarily react upon the sinner, but they see no reason to suppose that this punitive reaction must necessarily take place during earthly life. To some minds, indeed, the charge of eliminating penalty will seem the exact opposite of the truth, since to them the prospect of annihilation, after whatever lapse of time, would seem an even more terrible form of retribution than endless torture.

Nevertheless, the case against Conditionalism is so strong as to veto its acceptance. Whatever may be said of isolated phrases, the general drift of Bible teaching is really such as to leave no option. It is simple historical accuracy to say that the New Testament writers assumed the immortality of the soul; for them the existence of the soul after

¹ Later we shall see that this is rather a weakness than a strength, but at present I am concerned solely with facts.

death, in bliss or woe, was unending. Some of the most recent exponents of Conditionalism virtually grant this by abandoning silently the effort to make out Scripture proof. By doing so they get rid of an embarrassment: on the other hand, it is an immense drawback to a theory to have against it the religious conviction of Scripture as a whole. Apart from inspiration, an idea totally foreign to the mind of the New Testament is much more likely to be wrong than right; just as a proposed new canon of poetic art which could be brought into no intelligible relation to the work of Aeschylus, Virgil or Shakespeare must have against it the secure judgment of mankind.

Again, the Conditionalist argument has appealed, not without success, to an age preoccupied with biology. It goes easily in biological terms and may be justly regarded as carrying out the idea of "the survival of the fittest" into its ultimate form. In the worlds of nature and spirit equally, we are told, many lives come to nothing, and their failure can be traced to a lack of correspondence with environment. God is the environment of the soul, and inability to adjust itself to Him before the great crisis of death means that the soul, by natural law, passes out of being. Christians respond to the conditions of spiritual existence; they develop the faculty of being immortal; the incorrigible show no similar plasticity and duly cease to exist. Immortality, in short, is an acquired characteristic.¹ Now in matters transcendent, or of extreme

¹ Many of the difficulties here rival those of ultra-Calvinism, and are of the same kind. If God foresaw that certain souls would one day be cast forth as refuse, why, it will be asked, were they created? Many advocates of Conditional Immortality have argued, in regard to these human failures, that "their true function is to be found in their ministry to the more advanced." But this simply will not do. If Jesus was right, the principle that persons are to be treated only as ends, never merely as means, is much more than a law of moral conduct; it is a principle on which God deals with His human children.

complexity, a wise man will hold that the facility, completeness and rationality of a solution is a sure sign of its narrowness and shallowness. The argument just outlined will appear impressive only to those who ignore the distinction between things and persons. If man is a person, conscious, moral and reponsible, then his relation to God is essential, not fortuitous, and while that relation may wholly fail to become what it ought to be, it persists with the persistence of man himself. His freedom asks for nothing less than the infinite potentialities of eternity; character, in the worst man alive, has in it a spiritual force for which unending activities are not too great a field. There is no escaping the dilemma—either man is made for immortality: he is moral by constitution, and therefore intrinsically a member, good or bad, of the abiding moral world which has God for its abiding centre. Or he is not made for immortality: change and decay are his native sphere, and apart from Christ he is in point of fact as finite as the beasts. He is an intelligent animal who *may become* a child of God: but taking him as he is, in his unregenerate condition, there is no appreciable sense in which he *is* God's child. The Father's relation to him is accidental, and may lapse.¹

But a view which thrusts the notion of caste into the human family puts the sense of brotherhood in danger. I should imagine that the man who adopts the Conditionalist position with serious conviction, regarding it no longer as a hypothesis but as an indubitable certainty, must find it hard to maintain his sense of the greatness of the soul—not this soul or that, but all souls. He can never be sure

¹ It must be observed that the assertions of Conditionalism are categorical assertions; it is sure that the unregenerate cannot possibly survive. The point is one at which, dissatisfied with agnosticism, it insists on fixing what can and what cannot be. This dogmatism is a grave objection, for no one can *prove* that man may not be immortal in virtue of the relationship to God which constitutes his *manhood*.

whether the individual before him is or is not so great that he will live for ever. Could the truth be known, his importance might suddenly undergo an inglorious diminution, for it might turn out that extinction, not immortality, was his destiny. Belief in annihilation, therefore, can only be tolerable to a lover of his race if the very thought of its particular application is kept away. In evangelism, at all events, we must operate with some other view. We must speak to every man with the eager, glad assumption that he is as immortal as we are, and that even to admit the possibility of a secret difference between him and ourselves would be to give way to unpardonable pride. Nothing else is in line with Christ's estimate of the incalculable worth of each soul.

The distinction between souls mortal and immortal—in mankind, that is, as it actually exists at any given moment—has been buttressed by reference to another distinction, that between types of character. Character in a bad man, it is held, is obviously subject to a process of wasting, and in common speech this is indicated by words like “dissipated” or “dissolute.” The bad man goes to pieces; his moral being is gradually disintegrated; and the ideal limit in such a case is complete extermination. But to this it is surely a valid answer that character and personality or selfhood are not the same. Even in regard to character itself the above-mentioned physical metaphor must be applied with caution. We really mean by it that a man's moral nature is degenerating; we do not mean that he is coming to have no character at all. He has imparted a certain moral quality to the capacities for either good or evil he brought with him into the world, and this quality is increasingly bad. Yet a bad man suffers no reduction of the faculties to think, feel or will. His faculties, it is true, are more and more misdirected; but evil as he is, he may be

clever, passionate and wilful. Selfhood or personality remains. The bad will may, by a violent figure, be said to abrogate or extinguish itself, in the sense that its search for self-satisfaction is inevitably stultified and defeated: but we can set no bounds to the intense persistence of hate or enmity. The opposite can only be maintained on what is really a deistic view of life. God will then be a spectator, looking on impotently or at least inactively, while men at last withdraw themselves, by self-dissolution in nothingness, at once from the reach of His retribution and the appeal of His love.

In addition, it has been felt that Conditionalism gives no help with the problem of half the human race. Men are immortal who have laid hold of Christ; what then of those to whom He is quite unknown? If it be said, they will be judged by their aspirations after good, is not the number of those who lack all aspiration very limited, outside Christendom as within? Does a heathen who is not without virtue lose his immortality simply because he has heard of Christ but at the moment of death has not received Him? How far must contact with the Christian message go to destroy a man's chance of living beyond the grave?

In truth, the effect of Christ's mission, according to this theory, is so strange and full of paradox as to be almost unintelligible. "Had I not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin," says Jesus in the Fourth Gospel; and the suggested principle is apparently of wider sweep than we had known. It cannot be doubted that when the Christian era opened the great majority of men held the immortality of the soul, but, if the Conditionalist view be sound, we shall have to make room for the supposition that one result of the proclamation of the Gospel—and necessarily a designed result—has been to extinguish this belief in many minds; or at least that this *ought to* be the result.

If the Conditionalist theory be accepted by a non-Christian, it convinces him that he at all events will not live for ever. So that, on these terms, one aspect of Christ's work was to bring *mortality* to light. Wherever the theory prevails, the instinctive belief of men in an unending future life for all has been dispelled, and it was part of Jesus' achievement to dispel it. We may reasonably put this aside as too paradoxical for truth.

These difficulties are seriously increased by the further discovery that according to nearly all Conditionalist writers the wicked shall rise from the grave for punishment of an indefinite duration. That is to say, they *are* capable of survival even in the absence of faith. Immortality is no real constituent of their nature, yet, since righteousness demands it, they do live after death. Which means that Conditionalism, as a French writer points out, has all the inconveniences and none of the advantages of a compromise. The logic of the theory—and logic is its strength—insists that unbelievers perish at death, that spiritual coincides with physical extinction; and this, though savouring of materialism, is at least consistent. But the consistency is too much for Christian feeling; hence, while the immortality of all is denied the survival of all is emphatically affirmed. The impenitent do not rise *quâ* men, for man as man is perishable; they do not rise *quâ* believers, for they are not such; they rise, therefore, by the act of Divine omnipotence, in order to receive the just reward of their deeds. This is put forward in the name of justice; but it carries with it the unwished-for result that all who die in sin, be their degree of guilt what it may, are overwhelmed at last in a common and equal doom.

Most people will feel the purely religious objections to be even stronger. This suggestion that men live again, but only for a season; this notion "of a soul immortal

enough to live through death, but not immortal to live on for ever"; this picture of human beings who are temporarily resuscitated in order to endure a penalty which is retributive and no more, and are then dropped back into nullity—surely they are all incongruous with the Fatherhood of God made known in Jesus. Our minds cannot rest in a view that involves, as even the doctrine of eternal punishment does not, a final and complete breaking-off of all moral relations between the soul and God. We need not raise the question of what God can or cannot do. We need not inquire whether it is in His power to destroy souls, in the bare literal sense of that sad word. It is enough that we may not ask men to look forward to an act of Divine despair.

So far one can see with moral clarity; the rest is darkness. On the general question whether the penalty of "sin without excuse and without change" will be unending, we must adopt an attitude of complete agnosticism. We are impelled, on the one hand, to assert the inexorable reality of Divine judgment; by an equal force we are drawn to proclaim the infinitude and eternity of the Divine love. It is well to turn the solemn side of this twofold possibility towards ourselves; not less well to present its aspect of grace and hope to the mourner and the weak-hearted. I do not myself feel that preaching in harmony with the spirit of the New Testament will insist on more than this, that something morally dread and dire, not to be bodied forth in earthly speech, awaits those who deliberately reject the Lord Jesus Christ. If we wish to keep the true perspective of faith, we shall fill our minds, as we gaze onward, not with the lot of the faithless, but with the destiny of all who are Christ's at His coming.

H. R. MACKINTOSH,