

ARTICLE II.

PROBATION—ITS CONDITIONS AND LIMITATIONS.

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THE idea of probation as pertaining to human life involves two distinct elements: the first, and perhaps the most prominent, thought is that of trial—a testing of fitness or qualification for some contemplated privilege or responsibility. Thus a pupil is admitted to a school on probation, or a young man is received to a business establishment as a candidate for some permanent position, the result to depend upon the manifestation of character or abilities already in possession. In this view a probation is, what the word most distinctly suggests, a trial.

A second element of probation—rather implied than expressed, is an opportunity to attain a character and qualifications which shall fit the possessor for some contemplated or proposed condition, or career, or responsibility, for which the probationer is not qualified at the outset. Thus a young man is taken into a telegraph office to qualify himself for a responsible position as an operator, or enters upon a course of education for the ministry. The leading idea here is that of training or preparation for the contemplated position. But the idea of test, or trial, is still present, because in the result it may appear that the youth does not attain the character, or other qualification, for which the position calls, and thus the candidate must at length be rejected. Probably in all forms of probation which fall to human experience both these conditions appear in ever varying proportions. Where the element of trial is predominant, the term *probation* is natural and appropriate; where training or preparation stands foremost, some other term might be better. Of the young

man passing his first six months in college before matriculation, we naturally say, He is on probation; of the young man aiming at a profession through years of study, we do not so naturally use the word; yet the probation is there.

In the case of a human soul looking forward to an endless life, the conditions of which are to be determined by the fidelity with which he shall employ his opportunities and meet his duties during the earlier years of that life, the trial and the training are almost equally prominent. The fact that a certain character is required as a preparation for that future, and that character is a growth dependent both on external conditions and on the man's voluntary, responsible adjustment to those conditions,—this fact makes opening life a period of culture or training for the life that is to follow. Every finite moral being must become by his own voluntary activity, under the conditions in which he is placed, what he needs to be, in order to a blessed future. Destiny comes primarily from character, and character is the outcome of the man's free action. He comes into being with the possibility of character, with the powers of a moral agent, and the opportunity, the necessity even, for their exercise. These capacities and this opportunity are from the hand of God. They come to him without any responsibility of his own. These are factors in his destiny, but the determining factor is in the voluntary attitude he shall take and maintain, the use he shall make of his powers and his opportunities. No divine intervention, no exercise of power or providence on God's part can save him from this responsibility. We sometimes, in view of the risks and failures in human life, blindly wish that men had come from the hand of God with the moral character which they need to have in order to blessedness, forgetting that personal character can come only with the exercise of the personal will, and that we can be spared this necessity only by foregoing our moral nature and accepting the lot of the brutes that perish. It does not seem to be a decree of God's sover-

eignty merely that the moral being must have the responsibility of his own character. The necessity lies in the very nature of a moral being; and, to set aside the necessity, the moral being must cease to be. To create, or not to create a moral being, belongs to God's sovereign pleasure, but that when created he must have the responsibility of forming the character on which his destiny turns,—this comes with his existence as a moral being. Thus probation, as implying the responsibility of forming his own character, comes by the necessity of the case to every moral creature. There can be no other method of providing for the attainment of his destiny. If God had created the race in heaven, instead of on the earth, the same problem of their moral character would have remained. He did place them in paradise, but even there they could not be saved from this responsibility. Thus opening life, from the necessity of the case, must be to every human being a season of training in moral character.

But since there is liability of failure in this forming of character, and thus of failure in destiny, this same period of training is a trial in reference to the future; and in our use of the term *probation* as applying to human existence we must include both these facts. That mankind in their earthly life are passing through such a probation is implied in all that is said in the Scriptures of human action and its outcome, and is manifest in the facts of human life as they pass before our eyes.

Theological speculation has sometimes, under the pressure of a theory, ruled out this idea of probation, yet the practical fact has never been lost from the convictions and consciousness of the Christian church, and upon this fact all efforts for the salvation of men have depended. There have been speculations in reference to the fall and its bearing upon human nature denying the fact of a present probation. The doctrine has been somewhat prevalent in the church that the race had its probation in Adam, that, by reason of the fall or failure of Adam, all men come

into the world under condemnation, and that no man has a probation for himself, or will ever have. Sovereign grace elects the subjects of salvation, and transforms them into a fitness for heaven, apart from any responsibility of their own. Such views as these have corrupted the doctrinal teaching of the church, until the idea of probation has been left in the background, and at times almost lost sight of; but practically the gospel has been presented to men with the distinct apprehension that the question of salvation must turn upon their acceptance or rejection of the offer.

To this condition of probation some things are essential and others incidental,—some dominant and controlling, others subordinate. The one element essential to a probation is a sense of obligation,—a knowledge of somewhat which one ought to do or to be. To this duty the reason or conscience of the man bears witness, and to this duty his moral nature, with more or less intensity, urges him. But by the side of this same sense of duty there is in the man the pressure of desire, or impulse, or passion, tempting to self-indulgence, and the neglect of duty. This prompting of the sensibility, the impulse to do what one wishes instead of what he ought to do, is an essential part of the constitution of a moral agent. It belongs to the moral being, in every stage of development or advancement, in every degree of darkness or of light. Between these two forces, the pressure of obligation and the impulse to self-indulgence, the moral being stands in his freedom of choice involving the power of determining which of these forces, whether of duty or impulse, shall control his actions and his life. This is the prerogative of personality, the responsibility which rests upon every moral being,—upon every man by virtue of his moral nature. In this determination he takes upon himself a moral character—righteous if he yields to the claims of duty, sinful if he surrenders to impulse or desire; and to the one or the other of these he must surrender. His freedom involves the privilege of

choosing to which of these forces he will surrender, but not the privilege of withstanding both. "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" (Rom. vi. 16.)

The conditions of this conflict exist in the constitution of every moral being, and under such a pressure all moral character is formed. The simple fact that moral character must be formed, even in this lowest condition in which a moral being can be conceived as existing, shows that *probation*, in this lowest form, must begin with the beginning of moral agency, and must continue until some natural or providential limit is reached. It is not necessary to inquire whether the being has any adequate conception of the facts of the spiritual world. As a moral being he must know duty, and thus the conflict, or the probation, begins. The fact of his probation may not be known to him, or even the fact of a future life for which this life is a preparation. He knows duty, and stands face to face with its claims, and thus must take his position and establish a moral character. The child, preparing for the responsibilities and honors of manhood, knows little of what is before him, and of the dependence of the future upon the present; yet the duty of the hour is before him, and in this duty lie his opportunity and his test. When manhood comes it finds him prepared or unprepared, and his probation is past before he recognizes the fact that it is present. He knew his duty and made his choice between fidelity to duty and a life of self-indulgence. In that choice was his probation. He knew his duty, and he did it, or did it not.

Under these simplest conceivable conditions every man has not only a probation—he has a *fair* probation; that is, there is nothing in his situation of which he can reasonably complain. The duty that claims his regard is a reasonable duty, and in conduct nothing can be reasonable but to accept that duty. If he fails, he has failed to meet the

requirements of his own highest intelligence—has incurred his own disapprobation. He may not apprehend that back of this duty there is a Law-giver and Ruler who will bring him into judgment. It would help him to know this, but not knowing it, he is still under obligation. As a moral being he is a law unto himself, and the duty to which he is held is that which his own reason imposes. Nothing unreasonable to him, can be duty to him, and the demand made upon him is nothing of which he can complain. It might help him to know that all his future is dependent upon the present, but ignorance of that fact can never stand as an excuse for neglected duty. The duty was plain although some of the consequences of not doing it were unknown.

We are not to accept the idea that a moral being slips into a sinful character and a sinful life by any accident. Sin is not a mistake or an accident. A man does not find himself a sinner, confirmed in sinful character, without essential knowledge of what is going on in himself. Before the sin, came perception of duty, and every duty and every sin had its note of admonition and warning. Every man confirmed in sin has passed through this experience of conflict in his own moral nature. He has consciously made his choice between duty and inclination; and if there is any unfairness in the result it is because he has dealt unfairly with himself. An *unfair* probation in the establishment of moral character would seem to be, in the nature of the case, impossible. A youth entering a school or a mercantile establishment, on probation, may be hardly dealt with. Too heavy burdens may be laid upon him, and unreasonable taskmasters may set down against him his unwilling failures, or at the last he may find himself rejected on the ground of incapacity, without any consciousness of unfaithfulness; but in the formation of moral character, the man is his own taskmaster, and the judge of his own shortcomings. The duty is self-imposed, and the condemnation is meted out by his own reason. It

is a reasonable probation and therefore a fair probation, and there can be no other in the sphere of moral character.

But other factors besides the simple, original elements of a moral nature enter into this probation. A *fair* probation is not necessarily the most *favorable*, or the most *desirable* probation. Human beings at the beginning of their moral agency, standing between duty and inclination, find themselves under the operation of other forces, aside from those which belong to their own moral nature. These are not dominant or controlling forces. The control is and must be with the man himself by virtue of his moral agency. But these forces gather about him in the form of motives addressing him through his intelligence or his feelings, and prompting to the performance of duty on the one side, or to self-indulgence and the neglect of duty on the other. These motives come from all the sources through which human beings can be moved to action. Truth and light urged upon the soul by the spirit of God and by his faithful servants, would move to righteousness on the one side, and the world, the flesh, and the devil present temptations to sin on the other. Thus the conflict is broadened, but not essentially changed. The man still stands, in the exercise of his free-will, master of the situation, arbiter of his own destiny. He can ally himself with any of these forces, on the one side or on the other, and the duty he meets is still only what is reasonable tested by his own intelligence. "It is required" of him "according to that he hath, and not according to that he hath not." It is still a fair probation. Even in the most unfavorable conditions, "God's commandments are not grievous."

But the probation will be more or less *favorable* or *desirable* according as the motives which act upon the soul, on the side of righteousness, are abundant and persuasive. Observe, I do not say, according as these motives *preponderate*. The motives to righteousness always preponderate, in the case of every moral agent, provided the motives be estimated by the reason or the understanding,—and to

our rational thought there is no other test. Other motives may excite the impulses, or passions, and thus induce action; but the man always knows that action thus determined is unreasonable and wrong, harmful to himself and to others, and that the true reasons for action lie on the other side. Yet there is a general expectation that the soul beset with constant temptation to evil, will form a sinful character, and fail in his destiny, and that under abundant and persistent influences to righteousness, a righteous character will be formed; and this expectation is the result of experience and observation. The probation is not set aside in either case; but in the one case it is a favorable, and in the other an unfavorable, probation. There are dark regions of the earth where we do not expect to find a righteous man—that is, a man who walks according to the light he has, and makes it his aim to do the duties he knows. There are conditions in the most favored Christian community from which we expect nothing better; the influences are too unfavorable. Yet the righteous man may be found in Sodom, and the sinner among the Saviour's chosen twelve. The question of character is determined, not by any outward conditions, but by the responsible action of the man himself.

The conditions however, which surround the man are so important that we are called upon to make every effort to improve them. We set ourselves against the forces of evil, and do what we can to re-enforce the good, that we may help men in the conflict of life, and secure to them a desirable probation. Under the best conditions ever attained in this world, the risks are so great that all the good look on with anxiety, and "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." Beyond all question the motives derived from the knowledge of God, his interest in his creatures, his infinite attributes, and his perfect goodness are the most effective and helpful in the moral conflict which the soul encounters; and these great truths find their highest expression "in the cross of our

Lord Jesus Christ," through which the world is crucified to the believer, and the believer to the world. Thus gospel light and Christian civilization afford the most desirable conditions of human probation, and under these conditions the best results in character are obtained. The man is favored to whom these glad tidings have come, and for this reason we are commanded to "go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." When we have brought this gospel to men we have done the best we can do to help them in their probation.

But even the gospel does not save men from the necessity of forming character for themselves, nor from the risks and dangers involved in probation. Men failed in the very presence of Christ, with the crucifixion and the resurrection before their eyes. Under the preaching even of Paul the cross proved "unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness,"—to some "the savor of death unto death," to others "the savor of life unto life." If there be in the universe any form of gracious influence which can be brought to bear upon human souls so effectively as to set aside all danger in probation, it has not yet been revealed to men. The rich man in his torment, yearning over his brethren, imagined that if one went unto them from the dead they would repent. The Saviour speaking as Abraham replied: "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead." The gospel is the fulness of Moses and the prophets; but even this great salvation may be neglected. The risks of failure and loss remain after the gospel has been preached to men "with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven." The most favorable probation which God has been able to give to men leaves essentially the same conflict to the human soul. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all," cannot be supposed to have in reserve some more precious gift which he grudges to bestow. Abraham, at the beginning of the gospel revelation, had his probation when he was called

of God to leave his home and go out into a strange country, and by faith he obeyed. Moses too met the test when called to choose between the reproach of Christ and the treasures of Egypt, and "he endured as seeing him who is invisible." Thus all the good men of old endured, "not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off."

In all the varying light of the progress of revelation, men were called upon to take their portion with God or with the world, and they made their choice; and this was true not only of the few conspicuous examples appearing in the sacred record, but of the undistinguished multitudes that were gathered about them. The evidence seems to be that all the generations past have had their probation, and that the same work is going forward over the face of the earth to-day, wherever human beings exist. Men wherever found have moral character, and are establishing themselves in their own chosen course of righteousness or sin. That under certain conditions of life the result seems to be uniform, so that no one breaks away from the prevailing drift of moral depravity and rises above the dead level of degradation, does not set aside the fact that each one has chosen for himself, and thus furnished the determining factor of his own destiny. The fact that they have a settled moral character is unquestionable. That they have formed this character for themselves, is undeniable; there can be no other source of moral character. That on that character their destiny must turn, seems to be a natural necessity as well as a divine appointment. In the facts as they stand before us, and in the general testimony of the Scriptures on the subject, we find no sure ground for a different conclusion.

Every effort on the part of Christian men to escape this conclusion has been based upon the general fact of the goodness of God, involving the assumption that nothing can be admitted in the appointments of God to men which is not in harmony with perfect goodness, directed by

infinite wisdom. In the light of this principle, which must be granted as unquestioned and unquestionable, some have ventured to hope and believe that the opportunities of probation are not limited to this world, that the ways of God cannot be justified to men without assuming a further trial hereafter for those who have been least favored here, and especially that there must be further probation for those who have not been blest with the knowledge of Christ, the Saviour of men.

There is only one difficulty in this effort to add to the light which revelation affords on this question—the obvious difficulty of testing the ways of God, in the details of his providence, by the human understanding. God has made us the judges of his ways, in reference to the great purpose that controls him, and the grand outcome of his administration. The goodness of God must be a simple and transparent principle that a child can understand, but the wisdom of angels becomes foolishness in the attempt to forecast the *methods* of his goodness. We may hope to understand them when fully disclosed. If we should encounter any clear injustice, any unreasonable dealing with men, we should have a right to say with Abraham, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” But in a question of ways and means we must cry out with Paul, “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” The fact that the world as we find it is not what we should have anticipated, as the work of an infinite and perfect creator, should check our speculations as to what must be in the world unseen. Yet it may not be out of place to consider some of the difficulties of the situation which it is supposed a future probation might relieve.

One of the most obvious of these difficulties is the inequality of the advantages granted to men in reference to the attainment of the true end of life. There is an unequal distribution of the gifts of God’s grace. But we are to

remember that an unequal distribution is not an unjust distribution, provided there are good reasons for the inequality. The diverse conditions of men on the face of the earth are not determined simply by the sovereign act of God. He never made a heathen nation or a Christian nation, by any mere exercise of his power. Each is the result of the moral forces generated among men, limited, and restrained or guided, by God's overruling providence—that providence itself more or less shaped by the exigencies arising from the character and conduct of men. Thus the foreseen character of Abraham is represented as determining in a degree the divine action in his case: "Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do, seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him" (Gen. xviii. 17-19). This was the planting and growth of a favored people. Paul tells us, in the first chapter of Romans, how heathenism grows: "Because that, when they knew God, they glorified *him* not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves: who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator." The heathen nations of our day have not arisen by God's direct purpose and power. Human intervention and responsibility have come in at every step, and the present darkness and degradation, so pitiful and hopeless, are the outcome of apostasy and

rejection of the light, in generations past. God "visits the sins of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of them that hate him." Or, to listen again to Paul: "Even as they did not like to retain God in *their* knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient." Thus heathenism is the natural growth of human sinfulness, left of God to yield its natural and necessary fruit.

Passing from these broader national or racial facts to those that pertain to the family and the individual, we shall find that their favorable or unfavorable conditions, embracing even tendencies to evil communicated by heredity, are almost wholly the result of personal activity and responsibility more or less remote; so that whatever there is in the conditions of human probation less favorable than those of our first parents in the garden, has been brought in by the activity of men, in the free exercise of their moral agency.

We must remember, however, that these unfavorable conditions do not imply an unfair probation in the case of any mortal. They imply inequality, but not injustice. Are we warranted, by any rational principle, in the demand that men should have equal opportunity and equal inducement to "make their calling and election sure"? and does the inequality which we observe in the present life afford any ground for the expectation that the probation of the less favored will be continued in another life? This would imply a divine overruling and counteraction of all the mischief of sin, so far as it affects others than the sinner himself; and thus all the motives drawn from our responsibility for the character and destiny of others must be set aside by a special divine arrangement. The unfaithful parent would no longer apprehend that his unfaithfulness may ruin his children. They are not to suffer a disadvantage from his sin. They must have opportunities equal to those of the most favored. Those who make a spoil of the bodies and the souls of men can

comfort themselves with the thought that their victims are soon to die, and will awake to opportunities such as this world could not afford them. A worldly and self-indulgent church might say, The heathen need the gospel light, but if we neglect them they will soon pass out of this darkness into the life beyond, where some angel shall be commissioned to preach to them the everlasting gospel. It would be selfish and sinful so to reason and to act, but it is not difficult to see that, on the scheme proposed, all the high motives drawn from the sense of responsibility for others must lose their grip upon the human conscience; and if human speculation can be trusted upon a theme so complex and profound as God's administration of the moral world, we must decide that he cannot afford to guarantee to all his creatures equal opportunities in advance of the final judgment. Such an arrangement would essentially set aside all the moral relations existing among men,—would morally isolate the individual, making each man responsible for his own soul, and in no practical sense his brother's keeper. It would set aside the great facts of the world as they pass before us, and destroy the chief significance of life. In considering the problem of probation in reference to particular cases, therefore, we may dismiss, as utterly groundless, the claim for equal opportunities. Every man must have a *fair* probation—not necessarily as desirable as the most favored have. It is safe to say that each must have the best opportunity that God, in his infinite wisdom and goodness, can give.

The three classes of persons, in reference to whom more or less difficulty or perplexity is felt, in connection with the generally accepted facts of probation, are infants, the young, or those called away in the midst of life, and the unenlightened peoples, commonly called the heathen; and the question in reference to these is essentially the same,—is this life all the opportunity afforded them? It is natural to suggest that it would be wisdom for us to

leave them in the hands of God, to whom all the souls that he has made are precious, confident that, in the end, he will justify his own ways. Where the Scriptures have withheld light, it would seem appropriate to accept their silence as proof that light would not be useful. But men are given to speculation, and it is not necessarily presumptuous for us to bring our thought to bear even upon questions pertaining to the ways of God. Abraham, as he went up Mount Moriah to the sacrifice, was permitted to comfort himself with the thought that God might fulfil his promise by raising Isaac from the dead. God's method was simpler than that, but there was no harm in his speculations. Ours may be as wide of the mark, but if we hold them in the same spirit of faith and submission, we shall be walking in his footsteps.

In reference to infants there is not a word of revelation. We repeat to ourselves the Saviour's words, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven," and dismiss all anxiety. The Roman Catholic would make his assurance more sure by baptism—the strict Calvinist, by election, and thus Dr. Alexander Hodge, in the *Century* magazine for the month of March, represents the church universal as embracing all mankind, of all centuries, dying in infancy. The prevailing Christian thought unquestionably is that the infant dying before the opening of his moral agency, is saved from all the hardships and risks of probation, and this result we may accept without misgiving. But there seems no reason for supposing that infants, taken into another life, will escape the law of growth and development, and the establishment of moral character, which applies to all moral beings. They are probably not to exist in a state of perpetual infancy. They must at length awake to the fact of obligation, and must adjust themselves to that obligation, and thus the test of character must come to them. Will their situation be better than that of our first parents in the earthly paradise? How absolutely without knowledge we are on this subject, and how vain our con-

jectures! Their mode of existence as mere spirits, without the body, would seem a favorable condition. But that this would relieve them from all temptation we do not know. The Scriptures hint of "angels who kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation—reserved in darkness to the judgment." Whence came their temptations? But there is relief in the thought that these infants will be received into the great family of redeemed human souls, those who have had experience of sin and of salvation,—guardian spirits who will guide their steps, and shelter their inexperience, and lead them on, in ways of obedience, to established character, without risk of failure. Such service as this, in the heavenly paradise, would be worthy of the great family of departed saints, the spirits of the just made perfect—apostles and prophets and mothers in Israel; and thus, perhaps, a second fall, like that of Eden, may be avoided. All this is mere conjecture, but it is a great possibility, perhaps even a probability, and we are warranted in dismissing all anxiety in reference to these early-gathered infant souls.

The case of those dying in early years, after the obligations of life have been apprehended, and before settled and established character has been reached, presents occasion for anxiety and perplexity. The goodness of God is still our refuge; but God's infinite goodness cannot secure the moral world from all trial, disappointment, and loss. The thought that oppresses is that the soul cut off by an early death, unrepentant, unforgiven, might have attained eternal life if a few more years had been granted him. If the question comes, Has he suffered injustice at the hand of God? we must answer, No. He has had an opportunity and a probation in the measure of life allotted him,—a fair probation, because in the sphere of morality and character there can be no other. The duty laid upon him was reasonable and just, by his own standard of reason; the failure was inexcusable and unreasonable. If he challenges the goodness of God in the case, it must be on the

ground that God could have wisely afforded him a more extended opportunity. No wisdom less than divine can decide that point. We have no Scripture that bears upon it. There are rational considerations that may give us some light. There is a *natural* limit to probation, involved in our conception of a probation complete and full. When the character has become fixed, so that motives on the one side or on the other are powerless to induce a change, further trial is useless and out of place. The man has taken his position, and his destiny is determined. Continued probation, in this world or another, is of no avail. A *second* probation is essentially a contradiction. It involves a breaking down of the moral constitution, setting aside all the results of past activity, and starting the man anew—not the same man, but another. There is no second probation.

Of course no mortal eye can trace the line which marks the natural limit of probation. That there is such a limit we must infer from the tendency to a fixedness of character which is clearly indicated in human experience. The rapidity of movement toward it must vary with the varying pressure of motives acting upon the soul, and which are accepted or resisted. That it may be reached within the period of ordinary human life, is by no means incredible. The shortness of this period, as compared with the everlasting existence that is to follow, can afford no reason for doubt. Even a thousand years would be equally insignificant compared with that endless life. The tendency must be regarded as establishing the fact, and the fact is generally recognized and accepted.

In the case of early death, the man has not reached the natural limit of probation; shall his probation be continued? God alone can tell. It may be necessary for the moral universe that there should be a *providential* limit of probation, as there is of human life. There is a natural limit of human life. It may be at the age of three-score and ten; but how small a portion of the race

attain that limit! The great majority drop off in the progress from infancy to maturity; and a few pass on beyond the natural limit of life. No thoughtful man can question the fact that this uncertainty of life, secured by causes that no human foresight can evade, is most wholesome. No one of us, in entering upon life, could be trusted with the knowledge that he shall live to threescore and ten. Such knowledge would insure the wasting of our lives. For the same reason no human soul can be trusted with the assurance that he should be allowed to reach the natural limit of probation, either here or hereafter. It would be the surest means to make probation a failure. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the hearts of the sons of men are fully set in them to do evil." A providential termination of probation should not be understood as a suppression of moral agency. There seems to be no evidence that such an act of sovereign power is to be exercised. It is probable that the moral nature will survive the appointments of the judgment, in the case even of the lost soul. But it is entirely conceivable that all helpful and favoring influences may be withdrawn, and the soul left to its own chosen way and to its inherent tendencies to evil,—“cast out into outer darkness,” “having no hope and without God.” That such a necessity for terminating probation in advance of the natural limit may exist in the kingdom of God seems altogether probable, and that God, in his unerring wisdom and goodness, should so adjust the forces on which life depends as to meet this necessity, may be a part of the administration of his kingdom.

In the case of the unenlightened nations of the world, we are not left to mere human speculation. No one, probably, ever faced the problem more distinctly than Paul, or had better opportunity, as a man, to understand it; and he has left on record his testimony as an apostle, so definite and conclusive as to leave little room for doubt. Of the idolatrous nations to whom he proclaimed the

gospel he says (Romans i. 18): "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold [hinder] the truth in unrighteousness." And he tells us how they know the truth (v. 19): "Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath showed *it* unto them," not by special revelation, but by the light of nature (v. 20), "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse." Then follows the record of their apostasy from this knowledge of God, the terrible setting forth of their moral degradation—their shameful vices, exhibited not as stupidities or blunders, but as loathsome crimes, brought home to their own consciences in the closing verse of the chapter: "Who, knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them." In the following chapter Paul speaks of the judgment of God which must overtake these wilful sinners—the doom that awaits them "in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ:" (vs. 3-15) "And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God? Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing [not recognizing] that the goodness of God leadeth thee [invites thee] to repentance? But, after thy hardness and impenitent heart, treasurest up unto thyself wrath, against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; who will render to every man according to his deeds. . . . For there is no respect of persons with God. For as many as have sinned without law [shall have further probation? No,], shall also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law, shall be judged by the law. For not the hearers of the law *are* just before God, but the doers of the law shall be

justified. For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and *their* thoughts the meanwhile accusing, or else excusing, one another."

The reasoning, therefore, as well as the authority of Paul seem to sustain the doctrine that the heathen have their probation in this life, and until some better reasonings and higher authority shall reach us, we do well to stand by the doctrine.

ARTICLE III.

THE BY-WAYS OF INFIDELITY.

BY JOHN T. PERRY, ESQ., OF EXETER, N. H.

As the manifestations of certain bodily diseases vary with the constitution and surroundings of the patient, so the symptoms of the great spiritual malady of indwelling sin are perplexing in their diversity. We read in the Gospel of Mark that many bore false witness against Christ and that "their witness agreed not together." Yet every one of these slanderers and perjurers was actuated by the same malignant disposition. He was bound to secure a conviction at all hazards.

An interesting volume might be written on the variations of unbelievers, and, if properly arranged, would be far more effective than Bossuet's arraignment of the diversities of Protestants. We should find atheism defended both as the foundation and the logical outcome of a rejection of the Scriptures, and again theism maintained as an intuition of the human intellect, thus making revelation superfluous. We should be urged to believe that our Lord,