

FUTURE PROBATION FOR THE DEAD.

"This is the Second Death, the Lake of Fire."

([Rev. 20:14](#).) To these words the sentence is added, "Whosoever was not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the Lake of Fire."

Though the prospect here looks sad indeed, must Hope be altogether relinquished? "The miserable have no other medicine, but only Hope." True those words may be of *this* life and death, but will hope animate the breasts of those upon whom this awful sentence of the second death is passed, as it did the breasts of our first parents, when incurring the sentence of the first death they rested on the word that "the serpent's head should be bruised?"

That such a sentence may not or will not be the lot of any who have had the opportunity "in due time" of fully knowing the truth by realizing the effect of the *Ransom* that Love gave in their liberation from death's captivity, I do not undertake to say; I can and do most heartily hope it will not be, yet I feel that such prophetic threatenings as abound in the Scriptures, though known at one time only to Jews, and in subsequent times, though very partially, to the nations, yet in a coming period to be clearly and fully known, cannot be meaningless ones.

That character hereafter may be largely affected by the character displayed here on the part of the unconverted is a most likely thing, thus making it a solemn thing to live; because whatever may be the environments of the man in resurrection, however really he may be physically and mentally "made whole or saved," the same man morally, and knowing himself to be such man, is raised from the dead; and false appearances will stand us in no stead hereafter. All deceptions will be removed from man then, and "the mask fall from him." Nero will not rise a John, nor Cleopatra a Mary, nor the Caesar Borgia a Peter, even though he wore the Fisherman's ring. A man, dying out of Christ a wicked man, will not rise "in Christ," as some fancy from a misinterpretation of those words in [1 Cor. 15:22](#). Sodom rises, not a people whose "sin was destroyed" by their destruction, even in type, but the same persons who died, and who, though restored to Adamic life, could not and will not be *ipso facto* restored to innocence and holiness. But as a tree renewed in springtime would be the same tree, yet would require not a cutting off of its old branches, but a grafting of another or a new kind of life into it, in order to bring forth another and a different kind of fruit from that which it had formerly borne, so with Sodom and Samaria and Israel, as [Ezekiel shows, 36:23-27](#), etc. The man "made whole" at Bethesda's Pool received with his healing the solemn warning, "Go and sin no more, lest a worse thing befall thee."

It is this "worse thing," then, that we are now to consider: for as that whole transaction was a "sign," the words carry some deep import. To me they have the import, or are a sign, of the future death; for to him the present [R1449 : page 283] life was dear when possessing it even in its misery; and the first death would inevitably overtake him, however reformed he became; which would not be the "worse thing" set before him, save in type in the sign. It is this subject that the student of the future of man must not leave out of his careful reflections when dealing with the subject of coming judgment, for it occupies much space in the word of Prophecy.

Here again the caution in interpretation is needed, "*Distinguish the periods and the Scriptures will agree;*" for as in other matters confusion has arisen from want of attention to that sound axiom, so the first and second deaths have also been confounded.

The strength of Calvinism lies in its grasp of the Sovereign Power and Grace of God; that of Arminianism in the use God makes of instrumentalities; and the strength of Universalism in the prominence it gives to the fatherly love of God. But each has its weak points (as what has not that man formulates?)--Calvinism, from not taking into full consideration the points of Arminianism and Universalism; and Arminianism, from not understanding how to arrange rightly the truth that the former so sternly and unlovingly upheld. Universalism, by far more true than either to the fatherly conception of Almighty God, has never, to my mind, squared itself fairly with the oft-repeated threatenings of the personal destruction of the wilfully disobedient sinner; nor with the stern decree of the sentence, "the soul that sins shall die."--[Ezek. 18:20](#).

Now whilst allowing all due force to the suggestive thought which Universalists maintain to-day (some in so many words, and, I think, all mainly so in spirit), that "the destruction of the sinner" means the destruction of sin in him, I would ask: Can the thought be honestly maintained according to the natural laws of language, the harmonious interpretation of figures, and the character of judicial threatenings to evil-doers?

As Locke says, in his "Reasonableness of Christianity," with regard to the figurative practices of theologians concerning God's warnings to Adam: "It seems a strange way of understanding a law, which requires the plainest words, that by *death* should be meant everlasting *life* in misery;" so one may say of such modes of interpreting subsequent threats. It is a strange way of understanding God's judicial code of penalties for wilful sin in the future, that such words as "the soul that sinneth, it shall die"--shall incur the indignation of the devouring fire, shall be destroyed--mean destroying the sin, not the person himself.

This is not a matter of our hopes and desires, it is a matter of interpretation, or of understanding what is the judicial penalty for sin threatened in the Word of God when man has arrived at "the full knowledge of the truth," and when sin, being "full grown, bringeth forth death."--[Heb. 10:26](#); [James 1:15](#).

When Paul says, "The end of those [sinful] things is death," as "the end of holiness is eternal life; for the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God eternal life in Christ Jesus" ([Rom. 6](#)), does the death clause here refer to the first death? seeing that the holy and the sinful alike die that death. That it includes the former, it may be; but seeing that the true antithesis to eternal life is eternal death, it would appear that Paul's language extends farther than at first sight it may seem to do. In this respect, to let language have a fair range and potency, it may be well to note a few of the plain words of Scripture, and the figurative ones also, expressing the same thing.

That man is not annihilated at the first death is clear from our Lord's words in [Matt. 10:28](#); but that man can be destroyed should he sin after resurrection is as plainly affirmed in that same sentence. Gehenna was the place of burning outside Jerusalem for corrupt things, offerings, or sacrifices of persons in idolatrous worship ([Jer. 7:31](#); [19:6](#), etc., also [Isa. 30:33](#)); and appears to be used as a type of the real Gehenna, or Lake of Fire, unquenchable till its work is done.

These statements, when connected with evil-doers, are indicative, not of purifying the persons by the destruction of the evil in them, but rather of purifying the world by their own actual destruction, or removal by "the second death."

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I have heard great stress laid on the view that "God wills not the death of a sinner;" and, misplacing the somewhat inaccurate quotation, they attach it to the statements made in [Ezek. 18](#) and [33](#). Now, God does not say He wills it not, but "I have no pleasure in the death of him that dies." The quotation alluded to occurs thus in [2 Pet. 3:9](#): "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, but is long suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

This statement is in harmony with the one given by Paul, that "He wills all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth;" and His will undoubtedly will be accomplished, *otherwise one can be sure of nothing*, and could repose no confidence in His Word; but I do not know that anywhere He implies that He wills not the death of him who dies, *i.e.*, in the coming age, for his own sin, but that He "has no pleasure or delight" in it, which is a very different sentiment; for it is evidently His will that "the soul [or person, so restored in the resurrection time] that sinneth [wilfully] shall die."

Some say the only way that death can be known to have been destroyed or rendered null is by the release or resurrection of every captive. At first sight this appears to be of considerable weight, because as darkness can be destroyed or rendered null only by light, so death must be by life; and in one sense such view is fundamentally correct; because all that have been its captives will, ere the destruction of Death itself, have been released from its grasp. Yet upon looking into it more closely, it does not appear to be a sound argument; for the Power which destroys Death in the Lake of Fire is that which is afterward exercised upon those not written in the Book of Life: thus making the position false which assumes that because destroyed they are therefore still under the dominion of Death rather than the dominion of Death's Destroyer. Such a view therefore **[R1450 : page 284]** demands too much when it maintains that its solution of the question is the only true one.

The warning voice of Jude is not without great significance in regard to this matter. He writes: "I will therefore put you in remembrance, though you once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of Egypt, afterwards (*literally*, the second time, or secondly) destroyed them that believed not." It would seem, therefore, that Israel as a type (see [1 Cor. 10:11](#)) is here presented to view, particularly in that part of their history. In this light they had passed through death and resurrection in the Red Sea when "baptized into Moses" (as that ordinance denotes, according to Paul, death and resurrection--[Rom. 6](#)), and were on their way to the Rest of God; and it was not in their first sad condition of bondage and misery in Egypt that the anger of the Lord was thus manifested, but in their delivered and saved condition out of it.

In summing up, I may say it is clear that the first death terminates the first life [and would, were there no redemption and resurrection, be death in its real import]. Does not all reasoning by analogy therefore require us to believe that the second death ends the second life; and that, if no resurrection therefrom follows, it becomes as absolute a termination to life as the first death would have been under similar circumstances?

We can see how perfectly equitable is the arrangement, that as the first death entered and spread throughout all the race entirely independent of human will or personal act [except Adam's], the recovery by redemption and resurrection extends as far. ([Rom. 5:18](#).) But the second death enters under totally different conditions, and is not independent of each man's will or personal act. ([Jer. 31:29,30](#).) So that a radical difference exists between the two conditions: experience of good and evil, and knowledge of the truth, will take the place of ignorance; and every facility and inducement to resist evil and follow that which is good will be given.

To say the sacrifice of Christ covers also the second death goes beyond Scripture ([Heb. 10:26](#)); and not only so, but such a statement does not appear to be in harmony with reason, in the face of all the advantages accruing under the new order of things following.

As the Lord said by Isaiah concerning Israel: **[R1450 : page 285]** "What could have been done more to My vineyard that I have not done in it?" so likewise concerning that period of "restitution of all things," we may say of man so restored, "What more could have been done?" A full *ransom* freely given for all; a recovery from death extending as far as the sin; a full knowledge of the truth acquired; the whole environment of restored man, without and within, in his favor; and in such a condition a full trial or probation for life evermore!

Should such incur the second death by wilful sin, would not the echo of God's solemn appeal be heard, "What

more could have been done?" Have those solemn words, regarding such as have partaken of "the powers of the age to come" and apostatized, no force? "It is impossible to renew them again unto repentance, seeing they crucified unto themselves the Son of God afresh and put Him to an open shame."

It is a sad picture! this closing scene portrayed in [Rev. 20:15](#)--the second death. Our first parents had the cheering word from Love upon which Faith could fasten and Hope subsist; but in vain we search everywhere for words from God, for Faith and Hope. Adam and Eve went out of Eden, and in due time reached the Valley of the *Shadow of Death*, with the blessed words of resurrection life still sounding in their ears, "The woman's seed shall bruise the serpent's head." I can hear no sound from the depths of the second death; but I hear, as it were, God's appeal to the universe, "What more could have been done?" "Just and true are Thy ways, O King of Ages!" --*W. Brookman*.