

VIEW FROM THE TOWER.

As a striking indication of progress in religious thought, notice the fact that the influential class of religious people known as Congregationalists is about to split upon the question, Is there, or is there not, *probation after death*? The question has been under discussion at two general meetings recently, and is thus stated by the *Pittsburgh Dispatch*:

IS THERE MERCY FOR MAN AFTER DEATH?

Des Moines, Ia., Oct. 3.--Members of the American Board of Foreign Missions are arriving here for their annual convention, which begins to-morrow. There is going to be a great controversy, the preparations for which have agitated Congregationalism during the past three months. The question at issue is whether or not sinners are irrevocably condemned at death to eternal punishment, or are subject to a period of probation and possible salvation beyond the grave. This issue is known to theologians as the Andover question. It is raised in the present instance by the Missionary Board's rejection of those candidates for mission work who cannot declare an utter unbelief in the possibility of repentance after death. So heated has the feeling become that several churches, to resent the repulse of men put forward by them for foreign missionary service, have declined to take up the usual mission collections until after the Des Moines meeting. Further importance attaches to this convention because the National Council of Congregational Churches will meet in Chicago on the week following, and the result at Des Moines will be looked for anxiously as in a great measure a test of the strength of the two parties to the dispute. In a general way the issue may be stated as drawn between old-school believers in endless damnation and those who have been affected by the tendency of the times toward a liberal interpretation of the Scriptures. The National Council will probably have to amend the creed or reaffirm the one now in use, for the trouble in the American Board of Foreign Missions seems to hang upon a doubt as to the true and only genuine doctrine of Congregationalism. The matter has been the subject of clerical discussion for years, and the way the Board of Missions became involved may be told briefly.

In 1880 the National Council met at St. Louis. The debates on the doctrine of punishment and probation had become so hot, that many of the more conservative members feared that the foundations of the Church were being undermined. As a preventive to such a calamity they prevailed upon the Council to consent to a revision of the creed. They wanted the questions at issue so definitely settled and expressed in words used according to their modern meaning, that there could no longer be a doubt as to what was the true belief of Congregationalists. So, by a complicated process, a committee of twenty-five was chosen to take charge, with final power, not even the National Council having the right to revise, inspect or amend the report. After three years this committee completed its task and reported the creed directly to the churches through the press. Two members of the committee withheld their names from the document because they felt that certain articles bearing upon probation, which they had submitted, should have been incorporated in the creed. As a rule the creed met with glad acceptance, not the less joyful, perhaps, because it was silent on the points that had raised all the hue that had led to the revision. The theory upon which these points were omitted from the new creed was that the Scriptures were not so explicit upon them as to warrant dogmatizing one way or another. The revision of the creed failed to act as its advocates had hoped, for it not only did not check the discussion of doctrines of probation and punishment, but soon a new cause of discord was thrown into the camp through the Mission Board.

The present difficulty grows out of the fact that Dr. Alden, of the Mission Board, who is a firm believer that there is no probation after death, refused to send to the mission field candidates for the mission work who believed the contrary. In this matter it is claimed that Dr. Alden has used his official position to impose on

candidates articles of a creed that have been rejected, and that by doing this he has greatly hampered church work. This has called forth opinions pro and con in letters in church publications, and in some cases contributions have been withdrawn until the Board settles the matter.

The same question is brewing in all denominations, and must sooner or later develop a split between those who can reason and those who will not think or cannot reason. The question strikes Congregationalism sooner than some other denominations, because it represents religious democracy, is less under clerical jurisdiction, and is largely composed of independent, intelligent, thinking people.

The question at issue has for some time been stealing quietly, almost unperceived, upon thinking Christian people. The time was, when the doctrine of the eternal torture of all but the few saints was generally preached and generally accepted, one church edifice in this city gaining the distinguished title of "Brimstone Corner." But this is so no longer: "eternal torture" is seldom preached before a cultured audience now, for very shame. And though the people still subscribe to the doctrine in accepting the creed and joining any of the various Christian denominations, yet, thank God, they are coming to see better and accept those creeds with *mental reservations*. It is a pity and strange that they do not see this to be wrong--that they are acting a lie, when they outwardly profess a faith which they do not inwardly hold.

No longer do our Presbyterian and Baptist friends preach about "infants in hell," nor confine all hope of salvation to "the elect *children of believers*" in their preaching, though the written creeds stand just as they were. The growing intelligence of the people cannot long be fettered by the creeds made a century or two ago by fallible men, who, however well meaning, were wrong in attempting to put "iron shoes" upon all the intellects of those coming after them. Unintentionally they were in this the tools of the Prince of darkness, opposing the unfolding of God's Word which as the shining light was to shine *more and more* until the perfect day.

The nominal church, cold and selfish was spurred into charity in mission work by pity for the heathen millions, whose everlasting destiny they were led to believe depended upon their liberality and effort. Doubtless this false idea has prompted a larger work of "witnessing" to the cross in all the world, than would have been accomplished otherwise: and yet fewer missionaries inspired by the truth, and the love of it would doubtless have done more good and have thrown much more light upon the real value of the cross.

Even heathen minds can see that there is something wrong with the doctrines of so called Orthodoxy; for missionaries declare that if they preach in full the creeds of the denominations they represent, they would make *no converts*. The heathen do not consider it "good news" nor will they accept, the teaching that a just God, worthy of their worship has sent all of their forefathers to eternal torment *because* they had not believed on Jesus, of whom they had never heard.

The rupture between creeds and thinking people is coming surely and steadily, and at it all might well rejoice, were it not for one very sad feature connected with it. The unfavorable feature is this: Many have come to regard their creeds and especially the everlasting torment dogma and the limit of probation to the present life and age, as the *teaching of the Bible*; and hence in breaking from and discrediting their old creeds (not *very* old either,) they are at the same time leaving the Bible, the appointed "lamp," to follow their own imperfect *reason*; which though better than their old creed is useless on religious subjects if unguided by the Divine Revelation.

Thus it is with our Congregational friends in the question above noticed, which instead of being called "Probation *after* death," should be called Probation *in* death; for the views above referred to are, that when a man is dead, in some place, they know not where, he has a further chance to come to a knowledge and obedience of the truth and to secure everlasting life. In this we see the bad result of such a tearing apart of reason and creeds and neglect of the sword of the spirit, the word of God, which could have *cut* the two apart

perfectly. In tearing them apart some of the errors of the creed still adhere to their reasonings, and some truth adheres to the creed which they are casting away.

In this case the creed claims that eternal torment is the penalty of sin. If so, reason says then Jesus Christ did not give a ransom (a corresponding price); for he did not suffer eternal torment. Thus the foundation of true faith is cast away, or rather in most cases they slip [R889 : page 2] their building off it, onto the sands of conjecture and human assumption. Next they reason, If eternal torment is the penalty, surely there must be a *future* hope despite our creed. So they reject the part of their creed which limits probation, but hold to that part of it which declares eternal torment to be the wages [R890 : page 2] of sin. In it all, the Scriptures are neglected, and not called upon as the final arbiter between old creeds and reason; hence though accepting of future probation they do not get it as the Bible teaches it, but oppositely. They expect or hope for a probation *in* death, while the Bible teaches that "in death there is no remembrance" of God ([Psa. 6:5](#); [115:17](#); [Eccl. 9:5](#)) and points us to a *resurrection* of the dead as the great means to the end, for bringing all to a full *knowledge* of the truth, which God has declared to be his will. ([1 Tim. 2:4](#).) In this we see the evil result of an endeavor to limit truth and knowledge by fixed creeds. It is subversive of truth, and misleading to all in any degree bound thus.

Dear Brethren and Sisters, hold up the Royal banner upon which is inscribed "Restitution"--"Good Tidings of great joy which shall be unto all people" and hold up with it as a torch, in the light of which alone the inscription may be clearly read--the RANSOM. Tell it to all, "The man Christ Jesus, gave himself a *ransom for all*, to be testified in DUE TIME."--[1 Tim. 2:6](#).

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