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THE CHURCHMAN

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Reviews.

The Spirits in Prison, and other Studies on the Life after Death. By E. H. PLUMPTRE, D.D., Dean of Wells. Isbister. 1884.

THE Dean of Wells is widely known as an enthusiastic student of Scripture, and as an acute though somewhat speculative investigator of abstruse points of Biblical study. He is thoroughly clear and outspoken; and if he handles Scripture critically, he never does so irreverently. His classical lore and his patristic studies add much to the weight of his words; moreover, he is thoroughly fair, and never overstates his own case or understates the position and arguments of those from whom he feels compelled to disagree.

The book now under review runs to 416 pages, of which the first 30 contain the sermon on "the spirits in prison;" the rest of the book is made up of critical and doctrinal papers on "Life after Death," "The Descent into Hell," "The Salvation of the Heathen," "Prayers for the Dead," "Purgatory," and "Conditional Immortality." There is a great deal of repetition in these studies, and long letters and articles are inserted which do not appear to add force to the Dean's position; in fact, the book might have been considerably reduced and condensed with advantage. Taking the work, however, as it stands, it will be read with deep interest by those who have made eschatology a special study, whether they agree with the author or not.

Dealing in the first place with the subject of our Lord's preaching to the spirits in prison, the Dean follows on the line of Bishop Horsley, whose sermon seems unanswerable. It is strange that any other view can have obtained currency in the Church; strange to imagine that our Lord's entrance into the world of the departed should have produced no effect on its inhabitants. The Dean does not seem to know of Mr. Stratten's paper on this subject; nor does he refer to the view of Owen, whose work on the Hebrews is cited by Mr. Stratten; nor does he fully grasp the reason why the Apostle Peter specially refers to those who were disobedient in the days of Noah, though that reason is not hard to specify. The Dean sometimes neglects the use of the LXX. as a connecting link between the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New; it is through this apparent negligence that he has missed the true interpretation of the word translated "quickened" in 1 Pet. iii. 18. The Dean rightly refers to the first issue of the Articles as containing the view of the Reformed Church on our Lord's visit to the nether world; but why does he give these Articles the date 1542? (p. 6, note). Probably this is a misprint. The book, it may be said in passing, is generally printed with great care, always excepting the Hebrew, which the Dean might as well have left out.

The author refers to 1 Pet. iv. 6 as bearing out the true interpretation of 1 Pet. iii. 18; but it is not easy to follow him here. Neither text nor context seem to be fully grappled with. Other subjects which he touches lightly in the sermon are discussed at greater length in the "Studies;" and to these the reader's attention is now invited.

Prayers for the dead, we are told, were at the time of our Lord's ministry offered in every synagogue (p. 65). For proof of this assertion the Dean refers to his "Study" on the subject. Those who have any acquaintance with the Jewish Prayer Book, will turn with interest to the "Study;" but what will be their disappointment at finding only this addi-

tional information : " There can scarcely be a shadow of doubt that such prayers were offered in every synagogue, or repeated by mourning kinsmen to whom the duty of right belonged, during the whole period covered by the Gospels and the Acts " ! This is indeed a feeble proof of the Dean's assertion.

The Dean seems to have mixed up three things : Wishes for the Dead, Remembrance of the Dead, Prayers for the Dead : moreover, in giving the authority of the early Liturgies, he has not sufficiently considered the fact that these Liturgies have probably not come down to us in their original condition. Scanning the New Testament, we find at most but one wish for a dead person. If prayers for the dead ought to be offered by the living, would the writings of the Apostles have been so barren on the subject ? It would be easy to put one's finger on certain passages where such prayers would be referred to ; but they are conspicuous by their absence.

The discussion on the Lord's descent into Hades will be read with profit. In dealing with the apocryphal correspondence between Abgarus and Christ, the Dean does not refer to the lately discovered Syriac MSS., which push back the correspondence to an early date, though it is of course apocryphal ; nor does he deal with the Hebrew original of Psalm xvi. which St. Peter quoted on the day of Pentecost.

One of Dr. Plumptre's essays is on " The Wider Hope "—that is, the prospect of those who have not yielded to the Gospel in this world through ignorance or indifference rather than through active opposition. The Dean passes under review various doctrines and theories, ancient and modern, including the speculations of Mr. Birks, whose views were not passed over quite so lightly as the writer supposes. It is surprising that no reference is made by the Dean to the interesting and elaborate book by E. W. Grinfield, entitled " The Nature and Extent of the Christian Dispensation with reference to the Salvability of the Heathen," published in 1827, and dedicated to the S.P.G. The Dean does not appear to have established his view of this subject on a sufficient induction of the facts and truths bearing on it, especially as regards the constitution of human nature ; so at least it seems to one who has thought and written on the question for the last twenty years.¹

In dealing with the word " eternal," though the Dean has not gone fully into the Old Testament usage, he is eminently fair, distinguishing the various senses of the word, and while recognising the impossibility of knowing what *time* will be (or what mode of consciousness will be substituted for it) in the next world, yet endorsing the *prima facie* interpretation of the term " eternal " as applied to existence after death.

The doctrine of " annihilation " is passed under review by Dr. Plumptre and dismissed as untenable, the writer forcibly urging that " destruction " according to Scriptural usage means " ruin," and that " death " when applied to the human being signifies a very different thing from " death " when it is used of a plant or an animal.

The Dean next discusses the doctrine of " Conditional Immortality " as put forth by Mr. White. This he rejects on the same grounds as lead him to dismiss " annihilation."

With regard to our choice of terminology when speaking of the punishment of the wicked in hell, the Dean is faithful and careful. " It must be admitted," he says (p. 59), " that the teaching of the Gospel sanctions the appeal to the fear of hell, even in the form from which we often shrink as too strong and coarse for the refinements of a later age. It was

¹ See " *Dies Iræ* " (Hatchards) and " *Synonyms of the Old Testament, their bearing on Christian Doctrine and Practices* " (Longmans).

true then, as it has been since, that that fear might be the first step to eternal life. The preaching of mendicant friars, of Jesuit missionaries, of Anglican revivalists, of Wesley and Whitfield, of the Salvation Army, so far as it is addressed to those who are in the same spiritual state as those who listened to our Lord, may legitimately appeal to the sanction of His authority. They cannot be altogether wrong if they speak now as He spake of old."

It would have been well if the Dean had gone a little deeper into the grounds of the "Great Decision," and had pointed out wherein man's responsibility and sin lies, especially in view of the proclamation of the Gospel. The mass of people in our country have feeble views on sin, partly because they have so little knowledge of the nature and claim of God, and partly because they have such a low idea of the position and possibilities of human nature. Alas! in many cases it is not to be wondered at.

Passing over some minor points, such as the confusion between the words *paideia* and *kolasis* (p. 61) and the reference to what the Dean calls the term "restitution of all things," without limiting it by its context, it remains that some notice should be taken of what seems to be the main doctrine of the book, viz., that men will have an opportunity for repentance after death.

The Dean is very guarded on the subject; and no one who carefully reads what he has written would go away with the idea that we might as well live in sin in this world as we shall all have another chance afterwards. It is not plain that the Dean thinks that *all* will have another chance; but he opens a wide door of opportunity. In his correspondence with a Roman Catholic the point at issue is this: Is there *probation* in the next world? Here the Dean seems to be worsted; but he candidly prints the letters, that everyone may judge. The Roman Catholic holds, what most of us hold, that *probation* is over in this life, whilst acknowledging that *enlightenment* may take place in another. The Dean holds that increase of light involves extension of probation. The point under discussion may be illumined, if not determined, by our Lord's remarkable words in Matthew xi. and xii.—see especially Matthew xi. 20-24. Our Lord does not say that Tyre and Sidon and Sodom will have further probation, but that if they had enjoyed the advantages which Capernaum had received they would have repented long ago. Not they *might* have repented, but they *would* have repented; not a new chance would have been offered to them, but the new enlightenment would have been welcomed by them.

Supposing, then, that the Dean has failed to convince us as to the doctrine of a further probation, it yet remains to inquire, first, how far the enlightenment hinted at in Scripture as the divine bestowal on the nether world will tend to *purify*; and secondly, what classes of persons it will reach. The Dean touches on both these subjects, and what he says is instructive, but he will not satisfy the mind of the thoughtful inquirer. How can anyone do so? The subject is really beyond our reach.

Dr. Plumptre rightly holds the continuity of character after death; but he does not go thoroughly into the springs of character, or deal with that text which Mr. Drummond makes so much of in his book on "Natural Law," viz., "He that hath the Son hath life; he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." Until we recognise the full force of this passage, we cannot tell how much of what we call "character" will be thrown off with the flesh, and how far in the article of death we shall burst our bonds and enter into the full realization of the goodness and faithfulness of Him Who is "the Lord of the dead." Take the case of the penitent thief, for an example, or the case of some dull cottager who

could not write out the Apostles' Creed to save his life, but who is resting on Christ in his simple way. One feels how impossible it is to say what "the day after death" is to such an one. Nor is it needful. Instead of speculating on such cases, it seems wiser to search into what is told us of the character and proceedings of Him Who will pass under review the circumstances and history of every soul. We know more, in a certain sense, about the Judge than about the judged. We cannot decide the destiny of a single soul, not even of our own soul; and this is well. The work of judgment is to be carried on by One Who combines the real spirit of humanity with the attributes of Deity; Who will penetrate all disguises and admit of no subterfuges; Who will not break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax; and Who can detect the undeveloped germ of faith or loyalty beneath the hard thick husk of ignorance and dulness. The Heart-searcher will be the Administrator, and under His control each man will find his future decided for him by a law as unerring as the law of gravitation. As there is every variety of character and circumstance here, so there will be every variety of position hereafter, whilst yet there will be a dividing line drawn without fault or flinching by the hand of One Who cannot make a mistake. We think of the myriads of dull, ignorant souls who dwell under the shadow of our churches; we think of the infants who have died before they could tell their right hand from their left; of those who have been bereft of reason; of those whose existence has been wrong and wretched from the time they drew their first breath; and we say, How will it be with them hereafter? The answer lies in the name and character and dealings and words of Christ, as reported in the Gospels and as illustrated by the Epistles. We leave these difficult cases with Him in thorough confidence. We do not forget His tears over Jerusalem, the "*ye would not*" which put a bar in the way of "*how often would I.*" We do not forget how Paul warned every man night and day with tears, as if he recognised the peril of those who heard the glad tidings and put it from them. If he had thought that all his hearers would have another chance after death, would he have been so urgent? If the truth was not revealed to him, has it been revealed to anyone else? Can it be inferred from a fair induction of Scripture? Dr. Plumptre, with all his acumen, has failed to find "a second probation" in Scripture, either for the believing or for the unbelieving. The words of Justin Martyr (quoted by the Dean) seem to be a safer guide and resting-place for the mind, when he says, "*The righteous die no more; the wicked are punished so long as God wills both their being and their punishment.*" We know nothing of the physical constitution of the lost in the age to come, nor do we know for what period their existence is decreed, nor do we know what relationship there is between time and eternity in a state of being where perhaps there is no succession of events. Thus we come back, as Dr. Plumptre does, again and again to this: we are ignorant. But we come back at the same time to another thing: Those of us who are ministers are to preach and teach God's Word as it is plainly written, neither adding to the promises, nor taking from the threats, nor disregarding the conditions, nor shutting our eyes to the revealed attributes of Him Who has given us the Scripture.

It would be easy to select many interesting passages from the Dean's book. Enough, however, has been said to indicate its excellences; and if in this brief review an attempt has been made to indicate what seemed to be its defects, it is done in the consciousness that the critic is dealing with one whose writing it is a pleasure to read, and whose spirit every Biblical student would do well to emulate.

R. B. GIRDLESTONE.

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Songs in Many Keys. By the Rev. CHARLES D. BELL, D.D. James Nisbet : London.

The title of Canon Bell's new volume of verse gives a just description of its contents. This fresh collection of his graceful compositions is an evidence of the great variety and versatility of his poetical gift. We have here narrative poems, such as the touching "Story of the Crimean War," which opens the volume, and the "Wigton Martyrs," condemned to be drowned in the rising waters of the remorseless tide ; Scripture studies in thoughtful blank verse, such as "Christ before Pilate" and "Judas ;" patriotic poems, like the "Night Charge at Kassassin" and "Tel el Kebir ;" a number of lyrical pieces full of the sweetness of Nature or the tenderness of religious feeling.

Canon Bell's mastery of melodious language may be seen in "Sea Voices":

Nature has many voices for the ear,
Of accents diverse, yet melodious all :
Some soft as lute, and some as clarion clear,
Others as thrilling as the trumpet's call.

The winds make music as they wildly sweep
In fitful gusts across the stormy sky ;
So doth the thunder when white lightnings leap
In blinding flashes 'thwart the dazzled eye.

Waters make cadenced music as they run :
Rush of the river, ripple of the brook,
Brawl of the stream, in shadow or in sun ;
The song of tinkling rill in leafy nook.

In truth, this happy earth is never mute :
The hum of bees is heard in honeyed flowers,
And mating birds amid the branches flute
And warble love-songs thro' the enchanted hours.

How sweet the bleating of the flocks in June,
The far-off lowing of the pastured herd,
And hum of insects in the sultry noon,
When in the woods no sleeping leaf is stirr'd !

But Nature has no music for my ear,
Whether low murmuring winds, or rush of streams,
Or song of birds in spring-time of the year,
Or crash of thunder when the lightning gleams—

Sweet as the anthem of the sounding sea,
The plaintive plash of waves against the strand,
Or dash of waters as in sportive glee
They break in silver ripples on the sand.

How grand the diapason of its storms,
When the great deep resounds from shore to shore,
And the white billows raise their threatening forms,
And then plunge back with long tumultuous roar.

I love the very sea-song in the shell
Which holds a strange sweet music for the ear ;
Deep in its chambers ocean murmurs dwell,
And chimes of surging waters, faint but clear.

A constant joy thou art, majestic sea !
Girt with thy guardian cliffs or ring'd with sand ;
A fresh delight I ever find in thee,
Whether by tempests stirr'd or breezes fann'd.

And when, dear friends, there comes that hour to me,
When voices of the earth shall all be o'er,
Place me, I pray, near the sonorous sea,
Where I can catch the rapture of its roar ;

And hear it sweetly blending with the notes
 Of harpers harping on the sea of glass ;
 That as the music downward to me floats,
 My soul upon the stream to heaven may pass.

There is a soothing poem in the same measure on "Ambleside Churchyard at Eastertide," which ends with these beautiful verses—alluding to the daffodils planted on the graves :

Fair daffodils ! whose pensive petals hold
 The shimmering dew and drops of tender rain,
 Within your deep-fring'd chalices of gold,
 To shed sweet tears upon the earth again ;
 Ye tell of love that stronger is than death,
 Of faith that soars triumphant o'er the tomb ;
 And hopes ye give, the buried seed beneath
 Shall break and bud into immortal bloom.
 O Christ, Who lovest well each living thing,
 Glory of flower and joyous grace of bird,
 Let the world's winter melt into a spring,
 Which shall eternal blossom at Thy word !
 In pity look upon this weeping earth,
 Grave-covered, wet with many a mourner's tears ;
 Long has she travailed. Why delay the birth ?
 Give full fruition to the hopes of years !

Perhaps not the least striking feature of Dr. Bell's "Songs in Many Keys" is the group of twenty-seven Rondeaux, which occupy the centre of the volume. He has taken up this new form of verse, and shown himself able to cope with and overcome its difficulties, and has once more proved that this measure, formerly dedicated to light French strains, is capable of being applied with great effect and sometimes pathetic force to solemn and devout subjects. We close our notice with one specimen :

Clear-sighted Faith ! how all things lie
 Changed and transfigured 'neath her eye :
 A rainbow on each cloud appears,
 A glory shines through mists of tears,
 And cloudless blue through clouded sky.
 When winds blow fierce and waves are high,
 Through spray and foam she can descry
His hand Who safe the vessel steers,
 Clear-sighted Faith !
 Content to live—content to die,
 Calmly for her the days go by,
 And, dwelling in the upper spheres,
 Above the reach of cares or fears,
 She sees more cause to sing than sigh—
 Clear-sighted Faith !

Short Notices.

Drifting Away. A few Remarks on Professor Drummond's Search for "Natural Law in the Spiritual World." By the Hon. PHILIP CARTERET HILL, D.C.L. London : Bemrose and Sons, 23, Old Bailey ; and Derby.

This pamphlet will be read by many with lively interest. We may quote a specimen passage. The author refers to moderate, religious, half-way evolutionists ; and he proceeds thus :