

CONCEDED AT LAST.

Dr. Charles Hodge once declared that he never saw a Calvinistic theologian who held the doctrine that only a certain part of those who die in infancy are saved. Dr. Krauth replied that he had seen more than one such; and certain of the species survived down into the beginning of this century, and perhaps still linger about Steubenville. Dr. Krauth unkindly proceeded to give superabounding evidence that it was the general belief of the Reformed Church for a century or two after Calvin, that unbaptized infants are lost.

Prof. George L. Prentiss, of Union Theological Seminary, publishes an able and significant paper in *The Presbyterian Review*, in which he not only admits that the doctrine of general infant salvation has *begun* to prevail only in this century, but gives the credit for its victory in this country to Dr. Lyman Beecher and Dr. Charles Hodge. He proves conclusively from the teachings on the subject of the framers of the Westminster Confession that when it confines salvation to the elect infants, it was understood to hold that there was another class of unsaved, non-elect infants. He reminds us that even gentle Dr. Watts could, at the best, only hope for the *annihilation* of the infants of the heathen, and that Dr. Emmons could find no reason for believing that they would be saved.

But the more interesting feature in this admirable article is not its honest confession of unwelcome historical fact, but the presentation of the theological bearings of the doctrine which have never been fully considered. Read first this pregnant paragraph in reference to the complete overthrow within our own century of the belief held by Augustine and Calvin, and the Westminster divines and Dr. Watts:

"The lesson taught us by such strange facts in the history of religious belief is not self-complacency, but charity and self-distrust. Very likely some of our opinions, which we identify with revealed

truth, will be justly regarded a hundred years hence as wholly contrary alike to reason and to Scripture."

That is very pregnant and very true. It means that theology is a progressive science. It means that discussions of Inspiration, Atonement, and Eschatology are to be not merely tolerated, but welcomed in any church which will not be left far behind the truth a hundred years hence.

But Professor Prentiss proceeds to specify somewhat more carefully some of the theological bearings of the new doctrine of Universal Infant Salvation. It must have serious bearings if it teaches us that God, out of his infinite love, saves the majority, perhaps, of those who are saved, without regard to their original sin or their actual sin (for most of them have committed some actual sins) without probation and without repentance and faith. The doctrine of Universal Infant Salvation abandons the doctrine that renewing grace comes through baptism, or that children are saved through a covenant with their parents. It rests their salvation solely on God's goodness.

The doctrine of universal salvation, says Professor Prentiss, also "involves some very difficult, as well as very interesting questions in eschatology." How, he asks, does grace operate in them? Is it imparted before death, in death, or after death? What is the process, and what is the intermediate state by which the child, born unregenerated and under the curse of native depravity, nay, already beginning its actual sin, becomes fitted for the companionship of the holy? Truly here is a revolutionary element introduced into theology. However true the probation view in the case of adults, as compared with that of gracious election and sanctification, it has no relation to infants. By grace they are saved, without probation or faith.

– *N.Y. Independent.*

Our friends seem to be getting at some of the leading questions even though still so bound by their traditions and "standards" as to be

unable to get at the answers. Cast but a glance at the theories suggested above and in the light of scripture and reason, one or both, they all crumble and fall.

If as Calvinists (embracing all Presbyterians and regular Baptists) once claimed, only elect believers and their baptized (sprinkled) children are "saved," then all others must be considered "lost," by which they give us to understand they mean, sent to a place and condition of endless torture; either physical torture, or as some of them express it, "mental agony which is worse."

But as above shown this barbarous view is giving place to a more enlightened one, by which all infants whether of believers or of unbelievers, washed or unwashed, sprinkled or unsprinkled are transferred at death to heavenly bliss and none to torture. And if this change of theory be considered by our friends to alter the future for the thousands of heathen infants dying to-day, they must, if they would be just, transfer (in theory) from torture to bliss the millions of heathen infants who died before they changed their theory, and thus at one stroke they would transfer probably more than fifty billions of infants from torture to glory. Truly our Calvinistic friends are rapidly turning into Universalists, and if they keep on at this rate another stroke of the pen in their theory could as easily elect everybody.

We say "could as easily," and we add as reasonably could *all* adults be elected, as *all* infants, under this rule. How so, you ask? We answer that if, as is claimed by Calvinists, the electing was done before the foundation of the world, and if *all* so elected are saved, and *only* these, then from the above method of reasoning, it follows that all infants are elected and will all be saved; and since all adults were once infants, it follows that they were elect at that time. And according to Calvinism, once elected, they are always elected, and hence the present theories of Calvinists virtually make of them Universalists.

But while as above shown, Dr. Hodge, Prof. Prentiss and others recognized as representatives and leaders in religious thought from the standpoint of Presbyterianism, have modified their views, and the general views of their church to the extent of recognizing all infants as *elect*, yet they do not accept the *reasonable* deduction of their theory, which we have just presented, viz., universal election; nor do they act upon their theory as it relates to the infants. Their confession of faith still discriminates between the sprinkled children of believers, and the unsprinkled, and children of unbelievers, and they still treat the sprinkling of unbelieving (?) infants as of vital importance.

Furthermore, if they really believe that the heathen dying in infancy, all enter an eternity of bliss, and all heathen adults dying, enter an eternity of woe and torture, why, if this is really their view, do Presbyterian missionaries so valliantly assist in stopping heathen parents from destroying their infant children? Why with such a faith, do they not rather use every means to kill off the children? If their theory be correct, the missionaries would save more by far in this way than by present methods of helping preserve the lives of the children, knowing full well that they do not gain one in a thousand of those who reach mature years?

The reason is, that these advanced thinkers do not believe their own theories; they are in utter confusion on all doctrinal matters; and we fully agree with the quotation above, that some of their doctrines "will be justly regarded a hundred years hence as *wholly contrary* alike to reason and Scripture." Our prayer and labor and hope is that this desirable conclusion may be much sooner realized, in order that the Election which is reasonable and Scriptural and beautiful, may be seen by the thousands now blinded by "Confessions of Faith," traditions, superstitions and errors received from the past.

We will in our next examine the doctrine of Election as taught in the Bible, and would only here say that our friends above quoted while stepping out of the awful and barbarous view which consigned billions

to torture simply because God wanted to have them tortured, and predestinated that such should be their portion, they are stepping out in the wrong direction: in a direction which denies the necessity of faith in the Redeemer, which ignores original sin and the necessity and fact of the ransom therefor. They are stepping out of heathenish error, not into the light of God's revelation, the Bible, but simply into a ray of light from their own intellects.

The fact is, that in this step out, and forward, the Bible is ignored because it is supposed to be in harmony with the original doctrines of Calvinism, and thus in seeking light of human reason separate from the Bible, they are in a fair way to stumble shortly into a denial of original sin, a denial of the ransom (or corresponding price) paid by Jesus, and finally a denial of all which does not suit their un-ruddered and un-anchored reason. **[R831 : page 6]**

Let us use our reasoning powers as God intended, but let us not launch out upon the great sea of thought without a rudder and compass and Pilot. If we have not these, better far that we should stay at anchor and hold to the Word of God with blind faith and never reason at all. But rightly equipped and manned let us go on in grace and knowledge and love unto perfection. Thus all would soon see that in our first trial all were condemned in and through our Father Adam. God had arranged for our redemption, and in due time the ransom was given for all who were condemned in the original sentence. And in due time (the Millennium) all will be brought out of their graves to a knowledge of the Lord: and his plans and laws being then made known to all, their acceptance will be required. Hearty acceptance of God's plan, and obedience to it, will then be rewarded with life, and any other course will be punished with the second **[R831 : page 7]** death [extinction], leaving the culprit in the same state he would have been in had Christ not redeemed him.

Meantime an election progresses and two classes are chosen, one from among those living before God sent his Son, and one since – a

house of servants and a house of sons (Heb. 3:5,6), an earthly and a heavenly "little flock." Yet not an infant in either, they are all "called and chosen and faithful," elected according to the plan which God originally purposed, viz.: "Through sanctification of the spirit [i.e. consecration of their hearts or minds] and belief of the truth, which truth, is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth. 1 Pet. 1:2; 2 Thes. 2:13.

