

DEAN PLUMPTRE ON A FUTURE STATE*

IT is one of the distinct gains to the prospect of a reasonable and catholic theology, that the reign of mere dogmatism (not dogma) is passing away. The *ipse dixit* of a favorite preacher now happily counts for less than it has done at any time since the Reformation. People are no longer contented to have late traditions proved by merely being asserted either on the side of authority, or on the side of private judgment. We want to be told what the Church has always held, what she has declared authoritatively, what she has refused to pronounce upon, we want to study doctrine as it has appeared in history, under the light of the Scriptures studied by sanctified intelligence.

Few doctrines have suffered more from dogmatic treatment than the doctrine of future punishment, and of the future life generally. It can hardly now be denied that this subject has been presented in many Christian pulpits in a form which was not only repulsive to the conscience, but which actually repelled many thoughtful men from the Gospel. Hence it came to pass that the crude dogmatism of an ill-instructed orthodoxy was followed by the equally baseless dogmatism of universalism. From a denial of the Hell of Dante and Calvin men passed to the assertion that all men shall be saved at the last.

This doctrine, again presented real difficulties to candid students of Scripture and of human nature. Certainly universalism is not the apparent meaning of the warnings as to the consequences of sin in the Gospels and the Epistles. Another theory was then put forward, and has at the present day a good many adherents, the theory of the annihilation of the finally impenitent, or, as it is now commonly called, of conditional immortality. This theory was very little known in ancient times, although there were a good many universalists in the third and fourth centuries.

Those who are contented to hold the doctrine of the Church, that some will be punished everlastingly, without presuming or caring to define more nearly the nature of that punishment, may yet with profit study some of the abundant literature which, in recent times, has sprung from a raised interest in this subject. It is hardly probable that such students will have a more thoughtful or a safer guide in their inquiries than Dr. Plumptre in the volume now before us. The first essay, which gives its name to the volume, is a Sermon preached in St. Pauls, London, as long ago as 1871. The rest of the Essays are further developments of points touched upon in the sermon. The whole subject of the intermediate state, the limits of probation, the nature and extent of future punishment, is here considered in detail, scripturally, rationally, and historically. We are not prepared to say that we accept every state-

*The Spirits in Prison, and other Studies on the Life after Death. By E. H. Plumptre, D.D., Dean of Wales, Islington, 1884.

ment in this volume. Some of the positions are advanced rather as hypotheses than as established theories. Dr. Plumptre would be the last man to wish that his readers should swear to his words, as to those of a master. But it can hardly be doubted that he gives thoughtful and reverent guidance to all who are willing to follow in the same spirit. The writer decides finally against annihilation, and he is almost equally clear against universalism; but he would protest still more vehemently against many popular forms of the doctrine of everlasting punishment. Our readers must be referred, for further information, to the volume itself. In our judgment there is no other volume as yet published, on any side of the controversy, which is so valuable as this. There certainly is none in which the information is conveyed in a manner so attractive.

Dr. Plumptre is a very fine scholar, a man of great learning, and a poet as well. Such a writer could not produce a book that was not worthy of being read.

THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST IN US.

EVERY human spirit on God's earth has spiritual enemies—habits and principles within him—if not other spirits without him, which hinder him, more or less, from being all that God meant him to be. And we must find out those enemies, and measure their strength, not merely by reading of them in books; not merely by fancying them in our own minds; but by the hard blows, and sudden falls, which they too often give us in the actual battle of daily life. How can we find them out? This at least we can do. We can ask ourselves at every turn,—“For what end am I doing this, and this? For what end am I living at all? For myself, or for others? Am I living for ambition? for fame? for show? for money? for pleasure? If so, I have not the mind of Christ. I have not found out the golden secret. I have not seen what true glory is; what the glory of Christ is—to live for the sake of doing my duty—for the sake of doing good. And am I—I surely shall not be if I am living for myself—struggling, envying, casting an evil eye on those more fortunate than myself; perhaps letting loose against them a cruel tongue? If I am doing thus, God forgive me, what have I of the mind of Christ? What likeness between me and Him Who emptied Himself of self, Who humbled Himself, gave Himself up utterly, even to death? Is this the mind of Christ? Is this the spirit whose name is Love? Yet there should be a likeness between Christ and us, a likeness between God and us. For Christ is the likeness of His Father; and not only of His Father, but of our Father—the Father in Heaven. And what should a child be, but like the Father? What should man be but like God? But how shall we get that likeness? How shall we get the mind of Christ which is the Spirit of God? This at least we know, that the Father will surely hear the child, when the child cries to Him. Perhaps will hear him all the more tenderly, the more utterly the child has stray-

ed away. Our highest reason, the instincts of our own hearts, tell us so, Christ Himself has told us so; and said to the Jews of old: “If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?” Shall give? Yes; and has given already. From that Spirit of God have come, and will always come, all our purest, highest, best thoughts and feelings. From Him comes all which raises us above the animals, and makes us really and truly men and women. All sense of duty, obedience, order, justice, law; all tenderness, pity, generosity, honour, modesty; all this, if you will receive it, is that Christ in us of whom St. Paul tells us that He is our hope of glory. Yes, these feelings in us, which, just as far as we obey them, make us respect ourselves, and make us blessings to our fellow men; what are they but the Spirit of Christ, the likeness of Christ, the mind of Christ in us; the hope of our glory; because, if we obey them, we shall attain to something of the glory, the glory with which Christ Himself is glorious. Then let us pray to God to stir up in us that generous spirit; to deepen in us that fair likeness; to fill us with that noble mind. Let us ask God to quench in us all which is selfish, idle, mean; to quicken to life in us all which is Godlike, and from God; that so we may attain, at last, to the true glory, the glory which comes not from selfish ambition; not from selfish pride; not from selfish ease; but from getting rid of selfishness, in all its shapes. The glory which Christ alone has in perfection. The glory before which every knee will one day bow, whether in earth or heaven.—Kingsley.

GENERAL GORDON AND THE WAR.

THE massacre of General Gordon in the City he went to deliver, or protect, has moved to sadness the civilized world, as no event has done since the slaughter of the British Envoy in Cabul, some years ago. Much misapprehension exists as to the mission of this gallant officer, and of the troops now in Egypt for whom our prayers are desired, and for whose safety and success the Church is supplicating.

Many of our readers will be glad to have information as to the object of the departed hero at Khartoum, and as to the claim of England to interfere in the troubles Gordon sought to dissipate. Up to recent years Egypt reached on the South as far as the first Cataract on the Nile, but now includes a vast territory southward including the Soudan, Lower Nubia, Dongola and Khartoum as well as coasts of Red Sea to Massowah. Sir. Samuel Baker extended the control of Egypt to the Equator. Near the city of Khartoum the white and blue Nile unite and thence run as one stream for 500 miles, not even a rivulet adding to its waters. The river, which is about half a mile wide, flows through a valley 7 to 8 miles wide between hills from 300 to 1000 feet high. At this season the river begins to rise at Khartoum and swells out until it reaches about 24 feet