

PRAYERS FOR THE DEAD

Church Association Tract 214

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BAMPTON LECTURER (1878), DONNELLAN LECTURER (DUBLIN, 1880), GRINFIELD LECTURER ON THE LXX,
IN THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD, AND EXAMINER IN HEBREW, &C., IN THE UNIVERSITY OF LONDON.

The subject of Prayers for the Dead is of considerable importance. The practice has, unfortunately, now become common, and threatens to become still more so. Many things combine to invest that practice with special interest at the present day. Persons are always wont to take a deep interest in departed friends; and when someone has suddenly been removed by death from the midst of our circle, the thought naturally arises in every mind, where is the departed one? The thought, too, in the case of those known to have not been religious, is often accompanied by an intense wish to do something for the benefit of the departed. Those accustomed to pray by name for beloved friends have usually felt for a time a longing desire to continue their petitions for them at the throne of grace. We do not deny that prayers for the dead are natural to those who believe on the one hand in the efficacy of prayer for others, and on the other hand in the dead being in a state of conscious existence. It is quite another question, however, whether the practice is warranted by the teaching of Scripture, or authorised by the Church of England.

Moreover, in the present day, with the spirit of latitudinarianism in our midst, there is a wide-spread desire to get rid of the notion of any final place of punishment. Many are disposed to look with sympathy upon the idea that there is some place like purgatory, in which souls may be punished for some definite period, and then released from suffering. The narrowness of Protestant theology is often condemned, and the liberality of Roman Catholic theology lauded, by persons unaware of the dogmatic teachings of the Church of Rome on the question of purgatory. Rome teaches that only the members of the true Church will be permitted to enter purgatory. The heretics who have been cut off from the Church's communion on earth will have no chance of being able to atone for their heresy in purgatorial flames. And, even in the case of those who have been members of the true Church, the gate of purgatory is, according to Romish teaching, inexorably closed against all who may have died in mortal sin, or, having committed such sin, have not obtained remission when on earth. Such remission may be obtained according to the dogmas of Rome by a perfect repentance, which, however, according to her teaching, is a grace belonging only to saints of the first order. The faithful of a lower stamp obtain remission of sins by recourse to the "tribunal of penance," that is, by means of auricular confession and sacerdotal absolution, and through the intercession of the Saints, &c. Consequently, the idea of a place of purgation and education after death, dreamed of by the liberal divines of our day, has little in common with the dogma of Purgatory, as expounded by Romish theologians. The doctrine taught, however, by some of our Broad Church divines has induced some who have no sympathy with the Romish revival, to look with favour upon the practice of praying for the dead.

Furthermore, all those who, under the delusion or pretence of a "Catholic revival," are engaged in the work of bringing back Roman Catholic practices and doctrines into the Church of England, find it necessary to revive this practice also, in order that the power of the priest may be placed once more upon the basis on which it stood in the middle ages. A revival of prayer for the dead is certain to increase the revenues of the priest. Those taught to kneel before the priest as Christ's representative on earth will be certain to seek his intervention in rescuing departed friends from imaginary torments in the world beyond the grave.

I. *The Teaching of the Church of England.*

The best popular summary, perhaps, of the arguments in favour of the practice is to be found in Dr. R. F. Littledale's tract. The arguments there set forth have been re-stated and enlarged in Dean Luckock's work, *After Death* (first published by Rivingtons, 1879; ninth edition, 1892), and in an Appendix to Canon MacColl's volume of Sermons, entitled: *Life Here and Hereafter*, reviewed in the *Spectator* of December 8th, 1894. The writer of the article in the *Spectator*, led astray by Canon MacColl's statements, asserts that "the English Church has never condemned prayers for the dead."

The latter statement is, however, utterly erroneous; and Mr. Sergeant in his essay on "Catholic Worship and the Book of Common Prayer," contributed to the series of essays edited by Dr. Linklater under the title of *The Lord's Day and the Holy Eucharist* (London: Longmans, 1892), in enumerating various defects in the Book of Common Prayer, says:—"An equally serious defect of a different kind is the omission of all direct prayer for the dead."

The Homily on Prayer (third part) states:—"The Scripture doth acknowledge but two places after this life, the one proper to the elect and blessed of God, the other to the reprobate and damned souls; as may well be gathered by the parable of Lazarus and the rich man. Which place St. Augustine [Lib. ii., *Evang. Quæst.*, cap. 38] expounding, saith in this wise: 'That which Abraham speaketh unto the rich man in Luke's Gospel, namely, that the just cannot go into those places where the wicked are tormented, what other things doth it signify but only this, that the just, by reason of God's judgment, which may not be revoked, can shew no deed of mercy in helping them which after this life are cast into prison, *until thy pay the uttermost farthing?*' These words, as they confound the opinion of helping the dead by prayer, so they do clean confute and take away the vain error of purgatory, &c."

After commenting further on that passage, and on Eccl. xi. 3, John iii. 36, together with Augustine Lib. v., *Hypognost.*, Chrysost. in *Heb. ii.*, *Hom. iv.*, Cyprian, *contra Demetrianum*, the Homily proceeds:—"Let these and such other places be sufficient to take away the gross error of purgatory out of our heads; neither let us dream any more that the souls of the dead are anything at all holpen by our prayers; but, as the Scripture teacheth us, let us think that the soul of man, passing out of the body goeth straightways either to heaven or else to hell, whereof the one needeth no prayer, and the other is without redemption. (See Supplementary Note at end of tract).

"The only purgatory wherein we must trust to be saved is the death and blood of Christ; which, if we apprehend with, a true and steadfast faith, it purgeth and cleanseth us from all our sins. . . . If this kind of purgation will not serve them, let them never hope to be released by other men's prayers. . ." And the next paragraph commences with, "Let us not, therefore, dream *either* of purgatory, *or* of prayer for the souls of them that be dead."

Thus distinctly does the English Church in her Homilies, authorised by Article XXXV. as expositions of her doctrines, reject not only purgatory, but also prayers for the dead. We have here to deal not with some casual *obiter dictum*, nor with some chance exposition of a particular text, but with a formal statement of doctrine, shewing what the Church intended to be understood by the references to Romish prayers on behalf of the dead in Article XXII. and in Article XXXI.

The teaching of Becon (chaplain to Archbishop Cranmer) is identical with the above. (See his remarks on the *Articles of the Christian Religion*, in his *Prayers, &c.*, published by the Parker Society, p. 461; and in his *Catechism, &c.*, p. 394.) Similar is the teaching of Bishop Jewel in the second portion of his *Works*, p. 743. (Parker Society's edition.) Those theologians took part in the drawing up of the Church's formularies; and Jewel's *Apology of the Church of England* is acknowledged by Canon XXX. (which canon is referred to in the last Rubric of the Order for Public Baptism of Infants), to be an authoritative statement of the Church's teaching.

Such references could be indefinitely multiplied. It is absurd for Dr. Littledale and others to maintain that in the prayer for the Church militant when we say, "We also bless thy Holy Name for all thy servants departed this life in thy faith and fear; beseeching Thee to *give us grace so to follow* their good examples, that with them *we* may be partakers of thy heavenly kingdom," we pray for the departed dead as well as for ourselves. The very thought of prayer for the dead is excluded by the words in the beginning of that prayer, "Let us pray for the whole state of Christ's Church *militant here on earth.*" It is a desperate case, indeed, that seeks to distort simple phrases in such a manner. "The Bidding Prayer of the Canons of 1603" and the form used "in the commemoration of Benefactors of the Universities," are equally free from any charge of praying for the dead. Prayers for the dead can be just as easily extracted from the phraseology of the Lord's Prayer; and some have even ventured to go so far. There is, however, a limit at which we may fairly leave such arguments to their own self-refutation. The argument from Jewish usage is, however, more specious, and requires to be dealt with at greater length.

II. *Argument from Jewish Usage—2 Maccabees.*

The Second Book of Maccabees is an epitome of the history of Jason of Cyrene, and may have been compiled as late as the Christian era. 2 Mace. xii. speaks of the victories obtained by Judas Maccabeus over Timotheus and Gorgias, and then relates as follows:—

Returning to the field of battle on the next day, Judas and his men collected the bodies of the Jews who had fallen,—

"to bury them with their kinsmen in their fathers' graves. Now under the coats of everyone that was slain they found things consecrated to the idols of the Jamnites, which is forbidden the Jews by the Law. Then every man saw that this was the cause wherefore they were slain. All men, therefore, praising the Lord, the righteous Judge, who had opened the things that were hid, betook themselves unto prayer, and besought him that the sin committed might wholly be put out of remembrance. Besides that noble Judas exhorted the people to keep themselves from sin forasmuch as they saw before their eyes the things which came to pass for the sins of those that were slain. And when he had made a gathering throughout the company to the sum of one thousand drachms of silver, he sent it to Jerusalem to offer a sin offering [the Greek is *προσαγαγειν περι αμαρτιας θνσιαν*. The Vulgate erroneously translates 'to offer a sacrifice for the sins of the dead,' although that is a natural *interpretation* of the phrase from a Roman Catholic standpoint], doing therein very well and honestly, in that he was mindful of the resurrection: for if he had not hoped that they that were slain should have risen again, it had been superfluous and vain to pray [The Syriac version adds: 'and offer sacrifices'] for the dead. And also in that he perceived that there was great favour laid up for those that died godly [The Syr. vers. adds: 'and a reward and hope and rest prepared for them'], it was a holy and a good thought [The Latin Vulgate adds: 'to pray for the dead']. Wherefore he made a reconciliation for the dead [This clause is omitted in the Vulgate], that they might be delivered from sin."

The importance attached in comparatively early times to this passage, and the attempt to add something by way of "improvement" to it, may be seen from the interpolations given in our notes within the square brackets.

Care should be taken to distinguish between the facts recorded by the writer of 2 Macc., and the reflections thereon. The Maccabees by no means rigidly adhered to the teaching of the Law and the Prophets. It is highly questionable whether they had any real claim to the high-priesthood; and their combination of the priestly and the kingly dignity in one person, resorted to from political reasons, was a violation of the Scriptures, and gave just offence to the pious Israelites of that day. Hence the later Pharisees did not look with favour upon the Maccabæan heroes, while the Talmud and other Jewish writings rarely allude to them, and when they do, commend chiefly their father Mattathias. (See the able paper of Dr. M. Gaster on *The Scroll of the Hasmonæans* in the *Transactions of the Ninth International Congress of Orientalists*, 1892, vol. ii).

It is plain that Judas Maccabeus looked upon the death of those who fell in battle as a judgment inflicted because of the sin of wearing idolatrous emblems or charms. That sin polluted the army of Israel in the same manner as the sin of Achan in the days of Joshua (Josh. vii.). Hence Judas was justly afraid of similar evil consequences, and sent to Jerusalem to offer a sin-offering on behalf of his army. But if it be maintained the sin-offering in question was offered as an atonement for the dead, it was offered without any authority derived from the Law of Moses, and was a novelty introduced for that special occasion. This would account for the anxiety of the writer to justify the act, which justification he bases on the broadest and most general grounds.

There is another important point, which cannot here be discussed. Whatever may be the date of the prophecy contained in Dan. xi. and xii., it speaks certainly of Maccabæan times. But at the close of that prophecy mention was made of the resurrection; and it has been suggested that Judas Maccabeus had expectations of that resurrection actually occurring in his own day.

There is not, as Grimm has pointed out, the slightest trace of any purgatory (like that which the Romish Church dreams of) to be discovered in the Jewish teachings of that era. The writer of 2 Macc. may, perhaps, have imagined that it was possible to rescue from the flames of Gehenna the transgressors who had died for their country, although those "sinners against their own souls" bore on their persons the proofs of their idolatrous practices. It has been suggested that the offering of Judas was an accommodation to Greek practices (Grimm refers to Bötticher, *Tektonik der Hellenen*, ii. 169). But whatever interpretation may be put upon his act, that action was unique and is not paralleled by any other incident of Jewish history. The writer of 2 Macc. also in his own comments contradicts the facts he records. All the men slain on that occasion were slain because of their idolatry and yet he writes about their resurrection to blessing, and of the "great favour laid up for those who died godly!"

In face of the strong evidence to the contrary which will presently be alluded to, we cannot then consider the reflections made by the writer of 2 Macc. on the act of Judas Maccabeus as any satisfactory proof of the practice of prayers for the dead among the Jews of the Maccabæan era. The fact recorded, apart from the comments made upon it, would, as we have shewn, be most naturally explained as having a very different signification. And if Judas Maccabeus offered up such prayers, that innovation, though approved of by the compiler of 2 Macc., was not followed by the nation.

III. *Jewish Practice in Christian Times—Prayers and Inscriptions.*

We now turn to examine the evidence adduced by Dean Luckock in favour of the JEWISH PRACTICE OF PRAYERS FOR THE DEAD AT THE TIME OF OUR LORD, which, in his view, satisfactorily accounts for our Lord's silence on that subject.

(1) His first argument is based upon the Jewish prayer known as the Kaddish. The Dean rapidly glides over this as one would over treacherous ice. The prayer, which is in Aramaic, is no doubt of considerable antiquity, and a portion of it may be pre-Christian, although the latter point is by no means certain. As it lies before us in the original, the Kaddish "contains," as Dean Luckock confesses, "no direct prayers for the dead," or even *allusion to the dead*, unless they are supposed to be included under "all Israel." Dean Luckock adds, however, that "indirect reference to their use is traceable in several portions of it." The ingenuity which can wring out prayers for the dead from passages in the Book of Common Prayer, which nobody for centuries ever interpreted in that light (the practice being condemned by the authorized Homilies read publicly in hundreds of churches), may be able to see "indirect references" anywhere.

It is perfectly true, as Dr. Alexander McCaul has pointed out in his *Old Paths* (English edition, p. 149), that later Jews have employed that ancient prayer as a prayer for a deceased parent, in the same manner as superstitious Christians have used the *Ave Maria* as a prayer for the dead, although the latter, as given in Luke i., is no prayer at all. The Jewish custom is thus referred to in *Joreh Deah* 376, cited by McCaul:—

“Therefore the custom is for twelve months to repeat the prayer called Kaddish, and also to read the lesson in the prophets, and to pray the evening prayer at the going out of the Sabbath, for that is the hour when the souls return to hell [to Gehenna, for they imagined that the lost souls got a relaxation from punishment on the Sabbath]; but when the son prays and sanctifies in public, he redeems his father and mother from hell.”

The Jews in the middle ages were constantly adding, in a manner similar to the Christians, to their superstitious beliefs, misunderstanding allegories for facts, constructing thus “lying legends,” and continually enlarging and embellishing their extensive Liturgies. We decline to accept citations from such medieval works as any proof of “practices in the days of our Lord.”

Dr. Luckock seems to have been led astray by that strange though unquestionably learned phenomenon, the late Dr. S. M. Schiller-Szinessy, Reader in Talmudic Literature in the University of Cambridge. It is Dr. Schiller-Szinessy’s *Addresses* which have provided Dr. Luckock with the material used for his argument, and he appears to have relied too implicitly upon the “conversations” with that learned Rabbi, alluded to in the preface to *After Death*. Most scholars who have come in contact with Dr. Schiller-Szinessy have been obliged carefully to discriminate between his facts and his fancies. Some amusing illustrations of this were told me by my friend and revered teacher, the late Dr. William Wright, Professor of Arabic at Cambridge, and formerly Professor in the University of Dublin.

(2) There is not the slightest authority for the statement that the prayer for the dead, cited on p. 58 of Dr. Luckock’s book from the *Haskarath Neshamoth*, and used on the Day of Atonement, could have been in our Lord’s mind when uttering “that part of His Sermon on the Mount which touches upon the subject of charity and almsgiving.” The prayer in question does not go back even to the fifth century *after* Christ.

(3) Dr. Luckock quotes in favour of his contention a number of old Jewish inscriptions, all centuries later than the Christian era, which, of course, need not be referred to here. He makes an astounding blunder in reference to the Aden inscription now in the British Museum which he assigns to B.C. 282, but which unquestionably is an inscription of the year A.D. 718. An error of one thousand years is rather a serious fault to make in such an argument. The error appears in the first edition of Dr. Luckock’s work, dated 1879, and keeps its place in the ninth edition dated 1892. In both these editions (and of course in all the intervening ones) the following note is added:—“For a full description of the epitaph by Dr. Schiller-Szinessy, see Plate xxiv. of Facsimiles of Ancient MSS., Oriental Series of the Palæographic Society, part ii.” This series of *Facsimiles* was edited by Professor Dr. W. Wright, and under the plate itself are the words “Hebrew Inscription, A.D. 718, British Museum.” On the top of the page of explanation there stands the same statement, “British Museum, A.D. 718.” At the bottom of that page is a note within square brackets as follows:—“[In describing this plate and plate xxx. the Committee have received much assistance from the Rev. Dr. Schiller-Szinessy of Cambridge.]” Every scholar knows that to ascribe the inscription to B.C. 282 is a simple absurdity. Levy, so far back as 1867, in an article in the *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenl. Gesellschaft* gives in full the reasons for assigning it to A.D. 718. Several eminent scholars, including Professor Euting of Strassburg, assign the inscription to A.D. 818, or even to A.D. 918. Professor Wm. Wright states in his “additions and corrections” to the volume, that “any later date seems to be out of the question.” The date assigned by Dean Luckock is absurdly wrong.

This is a sample of “the evidence” which has persuaded men of scholarship, like Dr. Littledale, that our Lord by attending the synagogues of Galilee and Judea gave His sanction to the practice of “prayers for the dead!”

IV. *Jewish Practice in Christian Times—Talmud, Midrash, &c.*

As Dr. Luckock and others have appealed to the usage of the Jews in or about the time of our Lord, it is important to adduce passages from the Talmud and Midrash to show the doctrine prevalent among the Jews of the early post-Christian period on the subject of the state of the dead.

(1) Dr. Luckock, aided no doubt by Dr. Schiller-Szinessy, whose *Addresses* he quotes in defence of his fantastical explanations of passages in our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, maintains that much light is thrown by the *Siphre* upon the meaning of the prayer offered up in case of a murder committed by unknown persons, by the elders of the city nearest to the scene of the outrage. The prayer is as follows:—“Be merciful, O LORD, unto Thy people Israel, whom thou hast redeemed, and lay not innocent blood unto Thy people of Israel’s charge. And the blood shall be forgiven them” (Deut. xxi.-8). The *Siphre* or Midrash on the fourth and fifth books of Moses, probably as old as A.D. 180-220, gives the following quoted and expanded by Dr. Luckock (p. 60):—“*Forgive Thy people*, that is, the living; *whom Thou hast redeemed*, that is, the dead, which shews that the dead also want an atonement.”

Such is the great proof passage for the general belief in the efficacy of prayers for the dead in our Lord’s time! M. Israel Levi, in his article in the *Revue des Etudes Juives* (Juillet-Septembre, 1894), on *La Commémoration des âmes dans le Judaïsme*, points out that the doctors of the Talmud understood that expiatory ceremony as intended to free the generation then present, not only from their own actual guilt, but from the guilt of former generations which lay on them from the day that Israel departed out of Egypt. It was a ceremony not for the dead, but only for the living.

(2) Turning to the Talmud itself, we find the following account of the death of Rabban Johanan ben Zakkai who died shortly after the destruction of the Temple by Titus, but not before he had re-organised the whole Jewish ecclesiastical arrangements, and considerably modified the practices of the Law of Moses to adapt them to the supposed necessities of those times. There was at that time no Temple, and no place of sacrifice. The Romans had put the priests to the sword. Ben Zakkai was the founder of the new religion in which prayers and alms and study of the Law were substituted for the old ordinances, and in which the Rabbi, to some extent, took the place of the priest. Hence Ben Zakkai has been well designated by Graetz, “the founder of Talmudic Judaism,” and his sentiments are of peculiar value upon the question before us. The incident is taken from *Berachoth*, 28b.

When on his death-bed Rabban Johanan was visited by his scholars. He said to them, “If they were about to bring me before a king of flesh and blood, who to-day is, and to-morrow will be in his grave, even then I might weep. If he were angry with me, his anger is not eternal; and if he were to cast me into chains, his chains are not eternal; and if he were to put me to death, his death would not be eternal; I might appease him with words, or bribe him with riches. But now they are about to lead me before the King of Kings, the Holy One, blessed be He! who liveth and abideth for everlasting; and if He casts me into chains, His chains are eternal chains; and if He kills me, it is everlasting death; and I cannot appease Him with words, nor bribe Him with Mammon. Nor is that all: there are before Him two ways; one leads to the Garden of Eden, and one to Gehenna, and I know not which way they will conduct me to; and shall I not weep?”

It is not necessary, with the object at present in view, to quote the conclusion of the story. But it is perfectly clear from what has been cited that R. Johanan regarded the judgment at death as final, and that there was no atonement to be looked for ‘beyond the grave. He had no idea that he could be assisted in another world by the prayers of his scholars or friends whom he left behind on earth. No Puritan of the seventeenth century could have expressed himself in clearer language than did

the great “founder of Talmudic Judaism,” who lived and taught contemporaneously with the great Apostle of the Gentiles.

(3) The same teaching is set forth in the *Pirke Aboth*, the golden book of ancient Judaism. We shall quote from the excellent English translation of Dr. Charles Taylor, Master of St. John’s, Cambridge. In ch. iv.-23 we read, “R. Jacob said, This world is like a vestibule before the world to come; prepare thyself at the vestibule that thou mayest be admitted into the hall. He used to say, Better is one hour of repentance and good works in this world than all the life of the world to come; better is one hour of refreshment of spirit in the world to come than all the life of this world.” *Aboth*, iv.-24. The passage is also quoted in several other tracts of the Talmud.

The Rabbi Jacob here mentioned was one of the early Jewish Fathers, and entered into controversy with some of the great pupils of Rabbi Akiba. The latter was the great Rabbi who was the life and soul of that great upheaval against the Roman tyranny, of which the military genius was Bar Cochba.

The doctrine underlying these sayings is identical, so far as it goes, with the teachings of the Puritan theology. It lays down as self-evident the axiom that man must prepare in this world for the world to come, and rejects the idea that a partial repentance can be completed in the world beyond the grave.

In the numerous sayings attributed to R. Akiba, there is not one which gives us a hint of the practice of prayers for the dead. A good summary of his teaching is given in *Aboth*, iii.-25. “He used to say, Everything is given on pledge; and the net [that is, of death (Eccl. ix.-12)] is cast over all the living. The office is open; and the broker [the Lord of the world] gives credit [allows men freely to borrow, but records what they have borrowed]; and the ledger is open; and the hand writes; and whosoever will borrow comes and borrows; and the bailiffs go round continually every day [the angels of death, who summon men to their doom], and exact from a man whether he wills or not: and they have whereon to lean [knowledge of the actions of each, and God’s law defining good and evil]; and the judgment is a judgment of truth. And everything is prepared for the banquet,” that is, the great feast provided for the just in the world to come.

The teaching here again is substantially that set forth in the despised Puritan theology. The present time is the day of opportunity, but if the opportunity be lost it cannot be recalled. The punishments of the future world cannot be mitigated or evaded by the instrumentality of prayers offered up by friends on earth; the enjoyments of the blessed are secure to them whether their names be remembered or forgotten on this earth below.

We have only given a sample of the teaching prevalent in the days close to the time of our Lord’s life on earth. The idea of prayers for the dead, and of an atonement for transgressors cut off in sin (if the idea existed at all), cannot have entered deeply into the popular theology when such were the sentiments of the leaders of thought in that day.

(4) We shall now give a more extended passage from the Midrash Rabba which sets forth the doctrine of a later age, but of an age still in harmony with the doctrine taught in the past. We give a free paraphrase of the comment on Eccl. i.-15. “That which is crooked cannot be made straight; and that which is wanting cannot be numbered.” The Midrash, speaking on this, says there are unrighteous men in this world who have been companions together; one of them, however, repents before his death, and the other does not. The former stands then on the side of the company of the righteous, but the latter on the side of the company of the ungodly. The ungodly man, seeing his former comrade among the righteous, exclaims, Is there then partiality shown in this world beyond the grave, for this man was my comrade? We have stolen together, we have together committed robbery, and done all that was bad while in the world; and why does he stand in the congregation of the righteous, and I stand in the congregation of the wicked? Then says one to him, Thou fool,

thy comrade saw thy shameful conduct and its bitter results, and sought to change his own conduct while in life, and therefore he has been granted the honour of forming part of the congregation of the righteous. Thou also hadst the chance given to thee, and hadst thou made use of it, thou also wouldst have been placed in the congregation of the righteous. Let me then, says he to the angels, now go and do repentance. Thou fool, they answer him, knowest thou not that the world beyond the grave is like the Sabbath, but the world from whence thou comest like the evening before the Sabbath; and the man that has not made preparation, how can he feast on the Sabbath? The world from whence thou comest is like the land, and this world like the sea; the man who, while yet on land does not prepare the things necessary for his voyage, how can he partake of them when on the sea? The world beyond the grave is like a wilderness, the world from which you have come like an inhabited country; he that makes no preparation when in the inhabited country will not have the means of feeding when in the wilderness. He gnashes with his teeth and tears his flesh, and says, Let me not see in my punishment the reward of my comrade. Thou fool! they reply to him, these are the arrangements of the Almighty that the righteous shall not come near the unrighteous, or the unrighteous near to the righteous. He then rends his clothes and tears his hair in despair.

We adduce this passage to shew that the popular Jewish theology did not widely differ from the picture drawn in *Baxter's Saints' Rest* of the horrible state of the wicked. It is clear, if such were the prevalent views, that the Jewish theology of our Lord's day was not that "Broad Church" theology which some have described. The idea that pardon may be granted in another world, and that prayers ought be offered up for the dead on earth, were both foreign to the Synagogue teaching of our Lord's day.

(5) In "Notes" which appeared in the *Guardian*, November 14th, 1894, a learned correspondent remarks:—

"In an able essay, which will appear shortly in the *Revue des Etudes Juives*, by M. Israël Lévi, with the title of *La Commemoration des âmes dans le Judaïsme*, this Rabbi shows that the passages in the Talmud and the Midrash quoted to the effect that the dead also want an atonement have been misunderstood by modern commentators. One even quoted a Midrash which is, at present, lost. The Jewish funeral rite is very simple; it consists chiefly in giving alms and in saying prayers, of which the one called the Kaddish (*sanctificat*, &c.), as well as the commemoration of the soul. If the former may be traced to the third century A.D., the latter cannot be found earlier than the twelfth century A.D., chiefly in the Prayer Books of the German rite. M. Lévi is of opinion that it was instituted after the great massacre by the Crusaders, and that it was *simply an imitation of the Catholic Church* [the Italics are our own]. He rightly observes that the ceremony of the commemoration of the souls which is performed in the synagogues on feast days, and more especially on the Day of Atonement, was introduced into the Western synagogues, and there is no trace of it amongst the Jews who dwelt in the countries which were under the rule of Islam. The prayer for the repose of the soul introduced in the Spanish rite is of later date than the commemoration."

The article referred to appeared in the number of the *Revue* for Juillet-Septembre, 1894, though the number had not come to hand when the "Notes" quoted above were written for the *Guardian*. Proceeding from a distinctly Jewish source, and from a specialist of the first rank, the article of M. Lévi ought to put an end to all appeal to the Jewish practice of prayers for the dead in the time of our Lord.

(6) We doubt altogether the assertion that such complimentary wishes as "peace be upon so and so," constantly met with in medieval Jewish and Mohammedan writings, were really regarded as "prayers." Every Old Testament saint, together with the Prophet of Islam himself and the Mohammedan saints, is honoured with such exclamations; but there is not the slightest notion that such "prayers" produce for them an increase of bliss or an escape from pain. Canon MacColl has

in alluding to such honorific exclamations ludicrously exaggerated the “chain of evidence” as “demonstration.” But the “evidence” so cried up is utterly unworthy of the name.

The evidence now adduced will show how unfounded is Dr. Littledale’s assertion that “our Lord Jesus Christ as a Jew must have frequently joined in the rite of Prayer for the Dead, and had it been in any way blameworthy, no doubt He or His apostles would have censured and forbidden it. There is no trace of such prohibition.”

There was indeed no need for any prohibition at all. For, except in the *private opinion* of the compiler of 2 Maccabees, there is not a trace of such prayers until centuries after Christ.

We might here comment on the difference between the earlier catacomb inscriptions of the Christians and the later—but we forbear. The earlier always speak confidently of peace and victory achieved in Christ. This dies off afterwards into the language of pious wishing for peace, and then, —after a long interval,—prayers for the dead become fully developed. The “apostasy” was growing, the leaven of “the mystery of iniquity” working in the Church of Christ.

V. *Biblical Arguments adduced for Prayers for the Dead.*

We have now to survey the Biblical arguments adduced in support of the practice. There is no example of such prayers having been offered up by any one of the saints of the Old Testament, or by any one of the Apostles or accredited teachers mentioned in the New Testament.

(1) The first passage which Dean Luckock adduces is Matt. xii.-31, 32, in which our Lord asserts that sin against the Holy Ghost “shall not be forgiven neither in this world nor in that which is to come.” The Pharisees being unable to deny, as a matter of fact, the power of our Lord to cast out devils, ventured to ascribe the performance of those miracles to the power of Beelzebub. It was then our Lord uttered the solemn warning that blasphemy against the Son of Man would be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Holy Ghost was unpardonable. In other words, when men before whose eyes “the powers of the world to come” (Heb. vi.-5) had been vividly displayed, dared to ascribe to Satan that which their hearts knew came from God, they were dangerously nigh committing a sin which was unpardonable.

Dean Luckock unwarrantably asserts that the “natural conclusion” to be drawn from our Lord’s words is that “while some sins are forgiven in the lifetime of the sinner, there are others which admit of forgiveness after his death.” From the latter category, sins against the Holy Ghost are of course excluded. Such might be a “natural conclusion” if there had been any general belief among the Jews that sins might be pardoned after death. But we have shewn that the very opposite was the current belief among the Jews. It has been repeatedly proved by numerous citations made by Lightfoot in his *Horæ Hebraicæ* (which citations have been added to by Schöttgen, and in our days by Wünsche), that the expression “this world” in the popular phraseology of that day meant “the times prior to Messiah’s coming;” and that by “the world to come” was meant “the times of the Messiah,” who, it was believed, would introduce “the time of reformation” (Heb. ix.-10). Dean Luckock gives this interpretation in a note, and has the candour there to observe that “in this sense the Apostle seems to speak, Heb. ii.-5 and vi.-5,”—passages which we commend to the careful consideration of our readers. For as a matter of fact the Apostle is speaking of the Messianic times in both of those passages, and of no other. But Dr. Luckock puts the point into his footnote on p. 68, while in the text he cites the exposition of Maimonides (born A.D. 1135, died 1204), remarking that “we are contented to shelter ourselves in this matter at least under his interpretation.” On some points Maimonides’ authority may be conclusive, but on the question of phraseology used centuries before his day, in face of the array of passages which can be cited on the other side, his authority is of no weight whatever.

(2) The next passage is the difficult text 1 Cor. xv.-29, concerning those who were “baptized for the dead.” But if we granted the existence of a practice of “vicarious baptism for the dead” in the Corinthian Church—which was not continued in the ages succeeding, and which St. Paul only refers to as an *argumentum ad hominem*, without any endorsement or approval of the practice how can such a reference be construed into an argument in favour of prayers for the dead? Verily “drowning men catch at straws.”

(3) The next text adduced is St. Paul’s prayer for Onesiphorus, 2 Tim. i. 16-18, “The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus; for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain: But, when he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently, and found me. The Lord grant unto him, that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day: and in how many things he ministered unto me at Ephesus, thou knowest very well.” To which must be added that, among the salutations at the close of the same Epistle (2 Tim. iv.-19), is “Salute Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus.”

The whole argument here depends upon whether Onesiphorus was dead or alive when Paul wrote those words. That he was alive is the judgment passed by such “tradition” as is extant. St. Chrysostom states that Onesiphorus was at the time at Rome. Fabricius cites a tradition that, years afterwards, Onesiphorus was a bishop of Corone, in Messenia.

The context, however, throws a different light upon the matter; St. Paul exhorts Timothy to firmness and fidelity, and reminds him that he knew that “all they which are in Asia be turned away from me, of whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes “ (ver. 15). He then refers to Onesiphorus and his house in the verses quoted, and resumes, “thou, therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.”

The most natural conclusion to put upon the passage is that Onesiphorus himself was, at the time the Apostle wrote, among those who had “forsaken him,” like Demas, under the influence of some misunderstanding, by reason of some sin, or, perhaps, beguiled by false teaching. St. Paul, however, could not forget the noble works which Onesiphorus had performed in days gone by, and while he gently hints at the grief caused by the desertion of one once so valiant and devoted in his cause, prays that he may obtain mercy of the Lord in the great day.

That the family of Onesiphorus were not involved in the defection of their chief member is probable from the salutation sent at the close of the epistle. But it should be noted the mention of “the house of Onesiphorus” there, without special mention of Onesiphorus himself, is no certain indication that Onesiphorus was excluded from the greeting. For there is a parallel (and the only parallel) in the mention made of “the household of Stephanas” (τὸν Στεφανάου οἶκον, 1 Cor. 1.-16, corresponding with τῷ Ὀνησιφόρου οἴκῳ of 2 Tim. i.-16 and iv.-19), which is mentioned under an equivalent expression (τὴν οἰκίαν Στεφάνου) in 1 Cor. xvi.-15. Stephanas himself was certainly included in his “house” or “household” mentioned in those passages, and is mentioned in 1 Cor. xvi.-17 as alive and with St. Paul. The utmost, therefore, that can be said with regard to Onesiphorus is that he may have been absent from his family at the time when St. Paul sent the greeting at the close of his 2nd Epistle to Timothy.

There is not a particle of proof that the prayer for Onesiphorus was a prayer for a dead man; and the entire castle of cards erected on this solitary text comes toppling to the ground.

(4) Dr. Luckock makes a desperate effort to prop up this card castle by the bold assertion on p. 79: “The slightest acquaintance with the forms of prayer for the dead in the Primitive Liturgies will be enough to identify it [the prayer of the Apostle] with the expressions in common use; this petition for mercy, and rest through mercy, being one of most frequent recurrence.”

These so-called “Primitive Liturgies” play a great part in the revived Romanistic theology of the English Church. Whatever proofs are lacking from an examination of the writings, of the New Testament, or the writings of the Apostolic Fathers, or of those immediately following them, are conveniently supplied from those precious (we speak ironically) Liturgies. Dean Luckock has however to confess that the Liturgies are grossly interlarded with interpolations of a much later date. Their names, “St. James” and “St. Mark,” are misnomers so far as authorship is concerned; the one indicating only that it was the liturgy current in Palestine, the latter that current in Egypt. The shape in which they have come down to us was originally imprinted on them in the end of the fourth century. They certainly contain a considerable amount of scriptural phraseology, though worked up into most unscriptural forms, as well as of other matter, partly ancient, partly modern. They were cast into their present shape by men of a strongly developed Ritualistic type in an age darkened with the smoke of the prevailing apostasy from Biblical simplicity; and it would require the divining rod of a prophet to mark out the true from the false. And yet because the phraseology of St. Paul is adopted in prayers for the dead—concerning which prayers not a word is to be found in all the writings of the Apostolic Fathers, or in Justin Martyr, or until we descend to a considerably later date—such quotations are adduced as evidence of the existence of the practice centuries before, and as authoritative expositions of Apostolic language!

(5) Such are Dr. Luckock’s Scripture proofs. Canon MacColl does not, in his work *Here and Hereafter*, enter upon the task of Scripture proof. But Dr. R. F. Littledale, in his small four-page tract, cites a number of passages. The majority of them are sadly inappropriate. It is indefensible to write as follows: “We are also taught that death does not stop the work of God in the soul, but that it continues. So in Ps. lxxxiv. we read, ‘They will go from strength to strength, and unto the God of gods appeareth every one of them in Zion.’ And ‘the path of the just is as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day’ (Prov. iv. 18). This agrees with St. Paul’s words . . . [then follow the citations of Phil. i. 6, Phil. i. 10, 1 Thess. v. 23, the paragraph closing with the remark] If St. Paul had held the modern notions on the subject, he would have prayed merely that his converts might persevere till the day of their death.”

But Ps. lxxxiv. only speaks of pilgrim bands going up to the actual city of Jerusalem, and nothing more. Prov. iv.-18, has no reference to life after death. In the three N. T. passages cited, St. Paul refers to the life on this side the grave. He lived in constant anticipation (as every man “filled with the Spirit” ought to do) of the second coming of the Master, although conscious, by the teaching imparted to him from above, that the coming of the Lord Jesus would be preceded by an apostasy within the Church, of which he saw the first shadows on the wall.

Almost all Dr. Littledale’s proof-texts are of a similar character. It is only necessary here to notice his mistaken interpretation of Rev. vi. 10. On it, and on Heb. xi. 40, he has the following paragraph:—

“ Even those who are happy are only imperfectly so. The souls of the martyrs under the Heavenly Altar complain of delay, and are bidden to be patient (Rev. vi.-10), and the Saints of the Old Testament cannot be made perfect till we join them (Heb. xi-40).”

(6) The passage in Rev. vi.-10 is, however, figurative, and not literal. It would be strange if the New Testament martyrs were continually praying for vengeance, and longing for the day of the punishment of their adversaries! How different from the spirit exhibited by Christ, and by His first martyr Stephen! No! such is not the meaning of the passage. Under the Old Testament arrangements, the blood of the victims that was shed was poured round about the altar at its base; and hence the Jewish idea that the blood of the prophets, and of sufferers for God, was lying under the altar, which was considered to be, in some aspects, God’s throne. Abel’s blood that was shed is represented in Gen. iv. as crying unto God from the ground. The thought is taken up by the Lord Jesus, when he speaks of the blood of the prophets being required of the Jewish nation. His own blood, shed for sin, and to take away sin, “speaketh better things than that of Abel “ (Heb. xii.-24),

for it cries out for mercy and not for vengeance. But the righteous blood shed on earth is in the Revelation repeatedly said to cry out for vengeance; and therefore the martyrs' blood has a voice—a voice which nothing can still—it cries for vengeance; and the prayer of Rev. vi.-10 is represented in Rev. vi.-12-17 as answered in the horrors which attend the opening of the sixth seal, and precede the glory and salvation displayed when the seventh seal is broken, and the silence in heaven (Rev. viii.-1) takes place, while the Lamb that was slain begins to read the book He has opened—the beginning, as Victorinus beautifully describes it, of the blessed eternity. On Heb. xi.-40 we shall speak presently.

(7) Dr. Littledale has too much sense to quote, as is often done, the celebrated passage in 1 Peter iii.-18-20, as a proof text. But as it is constantly quoted, we cite a portion of what we have written elsewhere on that text:—

That passage is supposed by many to refer to a preaching of Christ in the invisible world previous to His resurrection. But the supposition is quite unnecessary. St. Peter plainly refers in that passage to a *fact well-known*, and not to a *new fact* then for the first time revealed by him to the Church of God. No preaching of Christ in the unseen world is anywhere else referred to in Scripture. By the *spirit*, in 1 Peter iii.-18, the Spirit of Christ is meant. The simple meaning of 1 Peter iii.-18-20, seems to be that Christ in His Spirit, *i.e.* the pre-incarnate Word—whose “eternal spirit” is spoken of in Heb. ix.-14¹ and often appeared in human form to the Patriarchs—went (comp. the expression ‘came down’ in Genesis xi. 5-7) and preached to the sinners before the flood, who are now in prison (the prison of Gehenna, Isaiah xxiv. 21-23), because of their disobedience in the days of Noah, which brought the flood on the world. “The spirits in prison” can as well mean “the spirits now in prison” (Rev. xx. 1-3, 7; Matt. v. 25; 2 Peter ii. 4; Jude 6) as “the spirits who were in prison,” at the supposed time of Christ’s preaching. The dead to whom the Gospel had been preached in 1 Peter iv. 6, were believers who, like their Lord, suffered death for His sake, and were judged according to men “in the flesh.” They were thus made “partakers of the sufferings of Christ” (1 Peter iv. 13) in order that they might be made alive “according to God,” like Christ, “in the spirit.”²

(8) Very little information is afforded in Scripture concerning the state of departed spirits. That they are in a conscious state seems to be taught by our Lord’s parable of the rich man and Lazarus, and other passages; that the righteous are in peace and “present with the Lord” is the teaching of St. Paul. Dr. Littledale is wholly mistaken in his quotation of Heb. xi.-40. That verse teaches that the saints who lived before Christ came were not “made perfect,” though “in peace” (Isa. lvii.-2). But when Christ had opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers, they who “without us”—“apart from us” as the R. V. preferably renders it—could “not be made perfect,” are then spoken of as “just men made perfect.” Heb. xii.-23 supplements, in a most important manner, Heb. xi.-40.

VI. Conclusion.

The unrighteous are to be judged for “the deeds done in the body, according to what they have done, whether it be good or bad.” The Day of the Lord is the day in which His righteous judgment will be openly pronounced; but men will then, as far as we know, be condemned or acquitted for the deeds done on earth. There is not a verse which suggests that the wicked may pass “from death unto life” in the interval between death and resurrection. Our Lord’s parable would lead us to believe that the wicked are now in punishment, and cannot pass from the place of punishment to a place of greater ease. The writers of the Old Testament had views of Sheol (*i.e.* “*the under-world*”), or of Hades (*i.e.* “*the unseen*”), which have been partially corrected by the clearer light of the New Testament. It may be that even that revelation is only partial, and that more mercy than is generally anticipated may be exhibited in the day of the Lord Jesus. While we protest against mediaeval crudities respecting the state after death (as wild as their false views concerning the resurrection, which 1 Cor. xv. ought to have guarded the Church against) we must protest also against the

milder theories of a Broad Church School, who seem to have forgotten that they also are in possession of no map of Hades, any more than their mediaeval precursors. Let us “be still” where Scripture is silent. We are but in a state of probation, and God will not permit us to lift the veil which He has drawn over the state beyond the grave. That Christ has “brought immortality to light through the Gospel” is most true; and we have a trust that will not fail us if we rely on His work and atonement. We may have hopes for others; but all our hopes as regards the majority of mankind are mere speculations on subjects concerning which we have no information. Whatever may be the feelings of “nature,” neither in the Old nor in the New Testament is there the slightest warrant for prayers for the dead. If such prayers were acceptable in God’s sight, if they could have benefitted those gone before, the voice of God-inspired men for milleniums would not have preserved an absolute silence on the subject.

SUPPLEMENTARY NOTE.

It has been affirmed by recent writers that the teaching of the Homily on Prayer, quoted on p. 3, viz. that souls who depart this life go either to heaven or hell is a serious theological error. The popular language used in the Homily was, of course, adopted as a protest against the Romish doctrine concerning Purgatory which was popularly designated “the third place.” That accommodation, however, to popular modes of expression was not intended to deny the Scriptural teaching that the place occupied now by the Blessed Dead is not the final resting-place referred to by our Lord in His description of the Judgment in Matt. xxv. 34, as “the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world,” nor the “new heavens and the new earth” depicted in the visions of Rev. xxi. and xxii. *Sheol* (“the under-world”) or *Hades* (“the unseen”) is, properly speaking, the place for disembodied souls; and it is divided into two receptacles—*Paradise*, or “Abraham’s bosom” (Luke xvi. 21), the place of the blessed dead (Luke xxiii. 43); and *Gehenna* (Mark ix. 43, 45, or *the Gehenna of fire*, Mark ix. 47), the receptacle of the lost, spoken of also as *Tartarus* in the original of 2 Pet. ii. 4.

But the popular Protestant phraseology may be defended as substantially correct by a reference to 2 Cor. xii. 2. St. Paul there speaks of “*the third heaven*” which is perhaps identical with “*Paradise*” (2 Cor. xii. 4). The object gained in speaking of the place of the blessed dead as “heaven” is to emphasize the doctrine taught in Pre-Christian times (in Wisdom iii. 1) that “the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and there shall no torment touch them”; or, taught earlier still, in Isaiah lvii. 2, “he entereth into peace,” the righteous, “who are taken away from the evil to come.” This is set forth more plainly in the Apostle’s words, “absent from the body and present with the Lord” (2 Cor. v. 8, 9), inasmuch as “there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. viii. 1). Consequently, the blessed dead need no prayers to be offered up for their repose by those who still belong to “the Church militant here on earth.” It is too sadly apparent that those who talk of “recovering the doctrine of Paradise,” “lost at the Reformation,” use such language simply as a cloak under which to introduce again something akin to the doctrine of Purgatory, and which is certain to harden at last into the teaching of Rome pure and simple.

Endnotes:

1) Bp. Westcott in his commentary on Hebrews well remarks:—“In men the ‘spirit’, is, as has been said, that by which they are capable of connexion with God. But in Christ, who did not cease to be the Son of God by becoming man, the ‘spirit’ is to be regarded as the seat of His Personality in His human Nature. So far the πνεῦμα αἰωνιον [the ‘eternal spirit’] included the limited πνεῦμα [‘spirit’] of the Lord’s humanity. This πνεῦμα, having its own proper existence, was in perfect harmony with the πνεῦμα αἰωνιον)

2) In my volume of Biblical Essays, published by T. and T. Clark in 1886, a full examination is given of the passage, with a discussion of the passages in Hermas, Clement of Alexandria, and other patristic writers. The fourth essay was written in reply to Dean Plumptre's book on the *Spirits in Prison*.