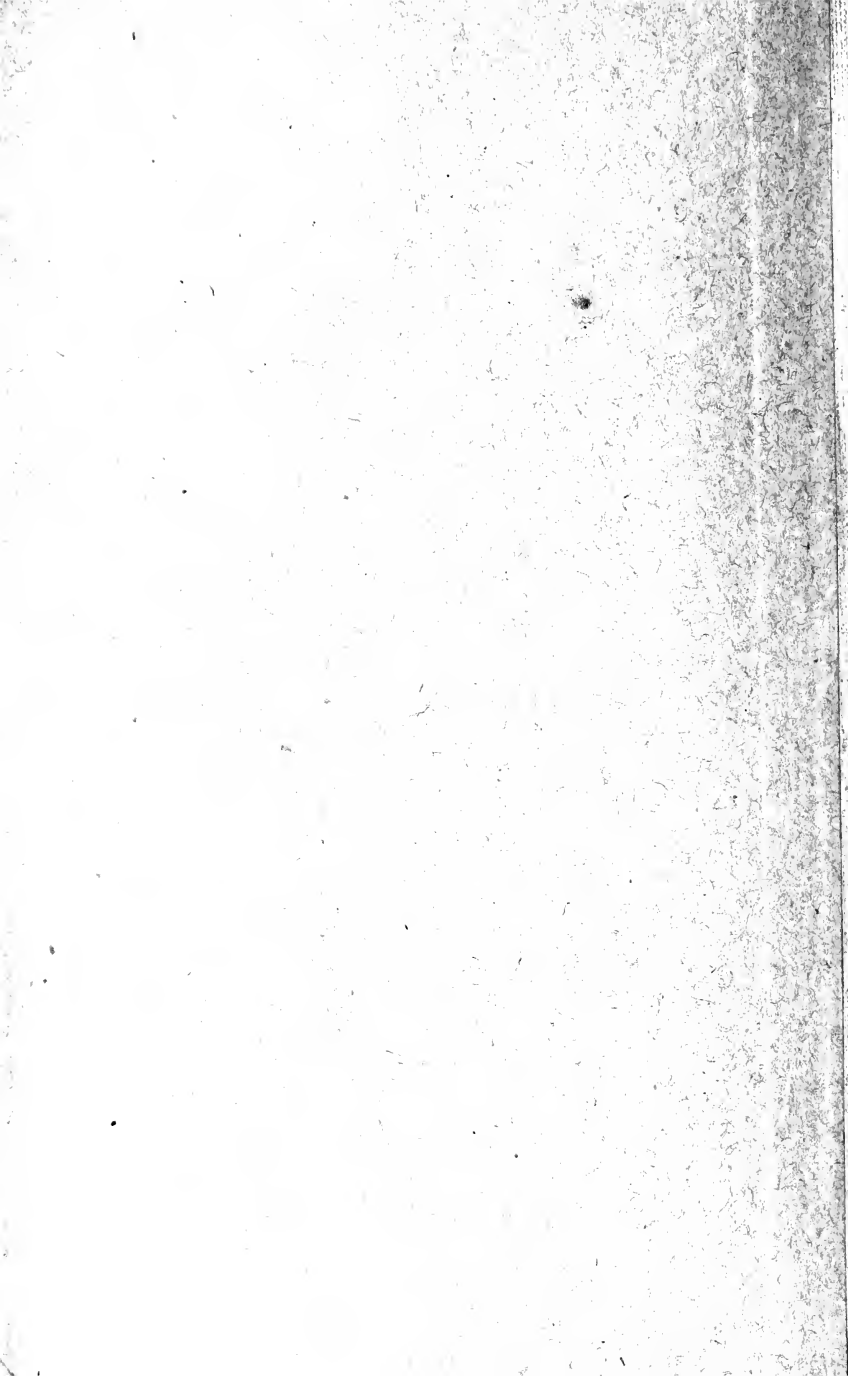


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FOUR GREAT QUESTIONS

REGARDING
THE FUTURE LIFE

JOHN BALCOM SHAW

Future life.

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29 August 1917.

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Four Great Questions


*No moaning of the bar ; sail forth, strong ship,
Into that gloom which has God's face for a far light.
Not a dirge, but a proud farewell from each fond lip,
And praise, abounding praise, and fame's faint star light.*

*Lamping thy tuneful soul to that large noon
Where thou shalt choir with angels. Words of woe
Are for the unfulfilled, not thee, whose moon
Of genius sinks full-orbed, glorious, aglow.*

*No moaning of the bar ; musical drifting
Of Time's waves, turning to the eternal sea,
Death's soft wind all thy gallant canvas lifting,
And Christ thy Pilot to the peace to be.*

—SIR EDWIN ARNOLD, on The Death of Tennyson.

FOUR GREAT QUESTIONS

Regarding *The Future Life*,
by the REV. JOHN BAL-
COM SHAW, D. D., Pastor
of the West End Presbyterian
Church, New York City 



NEW YORK, 1897

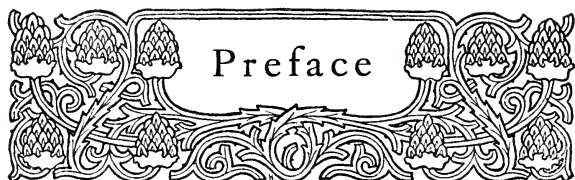
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The publication of these sermons was an afterthought. Prepared originally for the ear, they are lacking in much that the eye demands; but the interest awakened by their delivery was so deep and earnest that, in response to the kindly suggestion of some who heard them, they are now given to a larger circle, in the humble hope that they may help in at least a feeble way to comfort those who mourn, and strengthen such as be of a doubtful mind.

J. B. S.

NEW YORK CITY, *December 1, 1897.*

TO

My Wife and Son

TO WHOM I OWE SO MUCH OF THE JOY
OF THIS LIFE, AND WITH WHOM I HOPE
TO SHARE THE GREATER JOY
OF THE LIFE TO COME

I

Is There Another Life ?

If a man die, shall he live again?—JOB 14 : 14.

THERE is no *if* about death. It is the greatest certainty of time. All men, sooner or later, without exception and without discrimination, must die. Next to the question of our origin, and ranking, perhaps, before it in practical interest, is that other momentous question of destiny : What does death mean, —annihilation or promotion, the rising or the setting of the sun, the end or the beginning of life, the entrance upon an unbroken sleep or the gateway through which we pass into an endless existence? Let us attempt to frame an answer to this question.

A distinguished scholar, writing a little over a year ago in one of our leading monthlies, declared it impossible to give any definite or positive answer to the question.

Man hopes to live again, and he should keep on hoping, said he, for there could be nothing more unfortunate than the shattering of this aspiration; but to justify the longing, much more to assure one's self of its fulfilment, is a logical impossibility. This, in other words, was his statement: Man is only dreaming; and whether his dreams are to come true or not, they are so delightful that it would be a pity to awake him. Let him slumber on till death either throws him into an eternal sleep or awakens him to judgment.

Is this the position we are forced to take? Are we merely surmising, dreaming, guessing, when we believe in another life? and is this the nearest we can get to the truth of things? Are there no proofs of immortality? We must agree upon terms before this question is answerable. What kind of a proof are we looking for? If we seek a mathematical or scientific demonstration, we shall of course be disappointed. No spiritual truth is provable in that way. If we are expecting a sensuous attestation—evidence which shall address our senses—we shall also

fail in our purpose. Or, if we demand a strictly syllogistic argument in which the reasoning is along straight lines, we can scarcely hope for satisfactory results. The nature of the proof upon which we must depend is corroborative. All that we can hope for outside of revelation is the establishment of a probability, the construction of a reasonable basis upon which the Biblical doctrine of immortality can rest. Three inquiries must be answered regarding the belief before it will pass muster with logic ; and if these can be answered affirmatively, the belief will be found to rest upon a foundation which makes it secure and defensible, and to throw the whole burden of proof upon those who deny rather than upon those who affirm it.

Is it possible? is the first of these questions, and we can make short work with it. It is a fact which surely no one will deny, that the act of creation called for greater power than would the act of resuscitation. He who put life into the human body can certainly preserve it after it has left the body. What is there more mysterious than birth?

Is There Another Life ?

If that supernatural event can take place so constantly about us as to cease to awaken wonder, though it be the most wonderful thing in human life, shall we deny the possibility of a rebirth after death, which involves not an act of creation, but merely an act of simple preservation ?

A physician once told me of a unique experience of his. He was performing a simple operation that required the administration of an anæsthetic, but did not seem to him to demand the presence of a second doctor. The operation was well advanced when he discovered symptoms of collapse. He immediately examined the pulse, and found that the heart had stopped. He put his ear upon the patient's chest, and could detect no possible signs of breathing. The man to all appearances was dead ; but, believing there was at least a possibility of recalling life, he instantly brought into service every known means and method of resuscitation, and after the lapse of a half hour had the immense satisfaction of seeing the patient's lips begin slightly to twitch, and

Is There Another Life ?

the heart give evidence of the faintest flutter ; an hour more, and life was fully restored. Now, if life could leave the body for a few minutes, and return, is it inconceivable that the two might be separated for centuries, and then be reunited ? And if a human physician, by the use of material aids and agencies, could resuscitate life, is it difficult to believe that the Great Physician, who has all power in heaven and on earth, can bring life back into the human body at the resurrection ? There can be no question, even in the minds of the most skeptical, as to the possibility of immortality.

But is a belief in immortality reasonable ? Reason is all on its side. The nature of creation makes it reasonable. There must be—there is—a purpose in everything. What purpose would there be in man's creation, if he were made only for this brief span ? The only way in which to reconcile the inequalities and injustices of human life, the reversed conditions, the abnormal relations, that now exist, is to look for another or further life, in which all this shall be

Is There Another Life ?

readjusted or reversed. "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable."

The nature of the soul also justifies the belief. Although the soul is now united to the body, it has a life of its own, and in an important sense is independent of it. It belongs to a wholly different sphere. Is it therefore at all unreasonable to believe that, when that part of our being which is material and belongs exclusively to this material world, dies, the other part, which we call the soul and belongs to a totally different sphere—the sphere of the unseen and immaterial—should seek its native air and still continue to exist? No more unreasonable, no less likely, than that a balloon charged with rarer air should instantly upon being released ascend to a higher altitude.

The nature of life is equally in its favor. Life is the most mysterious and subtle thing in the universe, and its escape from the body at death is quite in keeping with its character. Wherever it is found it shows a tendency to continuity from the seed that

Is There Another Life ?

carefully hides the life-germ away, and carries it over to the succeeding season, to the traits and tendencies which heredity transmits from one generation to another. Indestructibility is no less strikingly a characteristic of life, whether seen in the successful resistance of plant life to the blight of winter or the posthumous influence that emanates from every human life and cannot be obliterated. Science tells us that while force can be diffused, it cannot be destroyed, neither is matter destructible at the hands of man; and we believe both of these statements. Does it not call for far less credulity to believe that so subtle, so mysterious, so divine a thing as life is imperishable? Surely, when all these varied considerations are taken into account, the theory of another life seems eminently reasonable.

Is immortality probable? That which is reasonable is always more or less probable; but add to the arguments from nature, from the character of the soul, and from the genius of life, which we have just cited to establish its reasonableness, the argument from

Is There Another Life ?

instinct, and the probability is as strong as it could be and not become absolute certainty. Immortality is one of the two great instincts of the human heart. All men feel, in different degrees but from a universal intuition, that there is a God and that there is a hereafter. These are not the product of education or tradition, for they may be found where education and tradition have never come ; but they are the innate aspiration of universal humanity.

“ A solemn murmur of the soul
Tells of the world to be,
As travelers hear the billows roll
Before they reach the sea.”

And the existence of this aspiration as fully justifies our belief in that other world as the sensations of hunger and thirst warrant a search for food and water, and make man certain that he will find them.

Now, when a belief is possible, reasonable and probable, does it not come close up to the border of certainty ? So reasoned Socrates and Plato ; so reasoned many of the strongest minds of the race. Need there be

Is There Another Life ?

—ought there to be—any question of certainty with us, then, when a belief so securely founded as this is found to have the unqualified sanction of Jesus Christ? When standing upon this strong foundation, we behold One next to us who saw farther into the heart of things than anyone else the world has seen; whose character is so superior to the character of other men, and whose words were so much wiser than the words of the wisest, that we must believe He came from another sphere, and upon dying went back to it again; who was pre-eminently self-poised and truthful, never having been discovered, even by His severest critics, to have once told a lie,—when we find this Divine Man standing next to us and hear Him say, with a straightforwardness and simplicity that are sublime: “In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you”; “I am the Resurrection and the Life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live, and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die”; “Marvel not at this: for the hour

Is There Another Life ?

is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice and shall come forth ; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life ; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation," does it not give us absolute confidence about the other life ? And when we hear this same Jesus, the soul of sincerity, turn from us to Martha and say, "Thy brother shall rise again," and to the dying thief, "Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise," is it either presumptuous or over-credulous for us to hope—nay, to believe—that if a man die, he shall live again ?

How, then, should we look upon death ? Not with foreboding and terror, but, if we are trusting Him who "brought life and immortality to light," with calm assurance and expectation. It shall then be a messenger of peace from the King ; a chariot let down to take us to glory ; a bridge thrown across the black chasm over which we shall pass in safety and triumph into the blessed life. Death always means a wrench, and therefore its approach gives rise to a physical shudder.

Is There Another Life ?

We cannot help dreading the severing of the spirit from the body—we may even feel a chill when we step down into the river ; but Jesus will be there to meet us, and will take us across the cold and drifting tide.

The other night I was called out to see a man who was dying, and, arriving at the house, I found it was an old pilot who had steered a well-known steamer up and down the Hudson River for years. He was a brave soul, but never did he prove himself braver than when the storm of death was beating down upon him. He was in fearful agony, but, pilot-like, he was perfectly calm and self-possessed. I talked to him of the Saviour's love and power, and he listened to me with intensest interest ; but it was not until I presented Jesus to him as the pilot's Pilot, reminding him that he was now in the fog, beating up against the swift current of death, and that just as his old vessel needed someone with a clear eye and a strong hand to steer it when the tempest was on, so did his soul need a pilot to take him up the stream of death into port, and Jesus was the

Is There Another Life ?

only one who could do that, did his face light up and the shadow of distress that had lain across it disappear. Then I asked him if he would take the Divine Pilot on board, and commit his soul into His keeping, and he uttered a glad and strong "I will" that touched all our hearts, and drew us instinctively closer to his bedside; and while we stood there, brightened and warmed by the sunlight on the old man's brawny face, we sang to the dying pilot that most appropriate hymn:—

“ Jesus, Saviour, pilot me
Over life's tempestuous sea.
Unknown waves before me roll,
Hiding rock and treacherous shoal;
Chart and compass come from Thee;
Jesus, Saviour, pilot me.”

He died shortly after, and the look upon his face as it lay set in death was so peaceful, so trustful, so triumphant, that it seemed to say to all who looked upon it—certainly to us who were present when he took the Saviour aboard his bark—“I met my Pilot, and through His help have made the port!”

Is There Another Life?

My brother, you will need that same Pilot some day. As a wise captain does, take Him on before you get near port. Without Him, what wilt thou do in the swellings of Jordan? If you have been on a bar at night, and felt that everything depended upon the man at the helm, you can appreciate what it would mean to come up to the inlet of death without a pilot, and be driven before its awful tide out upon the dark and trackless waters that lie beyond. God save you and me from such a fate!

“ Sunset and evening star,
And one clear call for me;
And may there be no moaning at the bar
When I put out to sea.
But such a tide as, moving, seems asleep—
Too full for sound or foam—
When that which drew from out the boundless deep
Turns again home.

“ Twilight and evening bell,
And after that the dark;
And may there be no sadness of farewell
When I embark.
For, though from out our bourne of Time and Place
The tide may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crossed the bar.”

Shall We Know Each Other
There?

II

Shall We Know Each Other There?

But then shall I know even as also I am known.—

I. COR. 13 : 12.

IF we thought this was not to be the case, Heaven would lose much of its attractiveness for us. There are times in our lives, particularly after death has come into our homes and ruthlessly seized some loved one, when we almost feel that we would rather be annihilated than to live forever in a state of uncertainty as regards those to whom we have been united on earth. Better no future life, we say, than a life in which recognition is denied. It is the prospect of an unending reunion at death that has held us up through the otherwise overwhelming bereavements of life.

It gives me unspeakable comfort to believe and to say that there is no fact regarding

Shall We Know Each Other There ?

the future life about which we can have greater confidence than concerning recognition in heaven. The idea of immortality, and the idea of recognition after death, are so closely allied, so inseparably related, as to be logically dissociable. If we are to live on in another world, our personality—that which makes us what we are, that which is our very self, and distinguishes us from others—must continue; and if our personality continues, our individuality, and therefore our identity, must abide, else that which contributes most to our essential entity, that which gives us our self-consciousness, perishes. It is a psychological truism to say that, if my ego is to exist hereafter, I shall have a self-consciousness; and if I have a self-consciousness, I shall know myself from others and others from myself.

But not only are these two truths of continuity and recognition correlated, but the arguments which substantiate the one substantiate the other. It is an instinct that leads us to believe in a hereafter; equally is it an instinct which prompts our expectation

Shall We Know Each Other There?

of a reunion there. Go where you may, this hope, this longing, fires the human breast. Plato felt it; Virgil recorded it; the Hindu finds it in the ancient Code of Manu; the Egyptians buried their dead in the hope of it, and the Indian has ever looked forward to it as one of the assured realities of the Happy Hunting Ground. Shall such an instinct—universal, primitive, dominant—count for nothing? If it is valueless here, it is equally valueless as an argument for immortality.

Reason teaches immortality; Reason also teaches recognition. Where were the wisdom of creating these relations, enjoining and encouraging them, building the Christian Church upon them, and giving to them the sanctions of the Church, if they are simply incidental and temporary? Where were the Fatherhood of God—its reality, its sincerity—if ties so sacred and tender could be severed by death? God's relation to His Son, and the Son's relation to His Father, are constant and unfluctuating, and for that reason form an ideal and an inspiration; but of what service

Shall We Know Each Other There ?

would they be to us, of what influence over us, if our Heavenly Father had denied that same constancy to human fatherhood? Where were the significance of the judgment, if a man loses his identity at death? We shall all stand before the throne as the same individuals that we were on earth, and receive our rewards or punishments, not as someone else or for someone else, but as and for the same persons or individuals that we were on earth. Why should we keep our identity up to that point, and then, upon being directed to the right or left, suddenly lose it? Where were the imperishable law of memory, if recognition is impossible? It will be the exercise of the memory that will awaken the praises of Heaven: our delight in meeting Jesus and having communion with the Father will depend largely upon the service of the memory. An immortal soul, with no memory of the past, is a contradiction; and if we can remember one thing, why believe that we shall forget another?

Instinct and Reason, then, are both with us here, and strongly support this universal

Shall We Know Each Other There ?

hope. There are many, however, who, after admitting and feeling the force of both arguments, are more or less influenced contrariwise by certain plausible and much-emphasized objections. Three of these call for attention :—

(1) That if the relationships of earth continue in Heaven, we shall cling to our loved ones with a partiality and tenacity incompatible alike with its happiness and holiness. To this I reply that such partiality God did not account an unholy or unlikely thing when He created the world, for He set the race in families, and commanded man before the fall to cleave unto his wife as unto no other; that Jesus feared no ill effects from such partiality when He selected twelve disciples, and plainly made it appear that He had three favorites among these; and what is still more significant, the blessed Trinity find nothing either inconsistent or unwholesome in entertaining a feeling for each other far closer and dearer than that held for the redeemed. What is not wrong for God or to God, surely need not be for or to us.

Shall We Know Each Other There ?

(2) A second objection frequently heard is, that since we shall not have corporeal senses with which or by means of which we knew each other on earth, recognition will not be possible. It is not by these alone, or even chiefly, that we know each other here, but through the inner nature, the mysterious spiritual converse and communication which one soul has with another. Even if this were not the case, every representation or suggestion which the New Testament makes of the resurrection, leads us to believe that our glorified bodies are to correspond to these which we now have. The redeemed are represented as seeing, speaking, feeling, hearing, singing; just as men and women are on earth.

(3) The strongest objection is, that we could not be happy if we missed loved ones, and knew they must be lost. Doubt and uncertainty are often worse than fact. They would certainly be so here. To know that some were saved, though others were lost, would be better than to be in doubt as to whether any were saved, as we would be if

recognition were impossible. This theory, moreover, is against human and divine experience. Some of our friends are now out of the Kingdom, but it does not make us excruciatingly sad—it would be better for us if it did. God knows all, and yet He is not oppressed by it. What does not destroy our happiness now, with all the fearful consequences of sin lying just ahead of many of our kindred, and what seems never to destroy the Creator's felicity, may not be expected to counteract the joys of the heavenly life. A sense of justice, as well as the spirit of love, will control us; and we shall be so lost in the realization of the righteousness of God—so committed to the Saviour's will, so averse to evil—that the punishment of the wicked will be accepted as a matter of fact, and approve itself to our sense of right.

The papers only the other day reported the case of a man who was drawn upon a jury that was to try his son. At first he hesitated to act, but finally yielded, and allowed the case to proceed. When the

Shall We Know Each Other There?

testimony had all been submitted, he retired with his fellow-jurors, and felt himself compelled in the interests of justice to vote with them for his son's conviction. This may be an unusual instance, but instances where a father's love gives place to his justice in dealing with a wayward son may be met with at every turn. Shall we have less equipoise of nature hereafter than we have here?

Our final authority is the Bible; and when the question of immortality is settled—as it must be before this second question can be approached, much less discussed—it has for us a double trustworthiness. What does the Bible say upon the subject?

It everywhere presupposes recognition after death, and in various ways:—

(1) In applying names to the inhabitants of Heaven. This it does in the case of the three persons of the Trinity, the angels, and many of the worthies who are represented as among the redeemed. Names are also promised to us—and a name implies individuality and identity.

(2) In revealing recognition among the

members of the Trinity. If they know each other, and are known by the inhabitants of Heaven, why should not the redeemed, who are to be like them, have the same means of recognition ?

(3) In recording, and thereby endorsing and justifying, the expectation of recognition. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are all represented as desiring to be gathered to their fathers; and their burial is described as if it marked the fulfilment of that desire. David, upon the death of his cherished son, is quoted as saying : “ I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me ”; and the declaration is allowed to stand unchallenged.

But the Bible does more than presuppose recognition—it actually affirms it. It declares that Saul knew Samuel at a glance, when the latter came back as if to reprove him ; that the three favored disciples were quick to identify Moses and Elijah—from traditional descriptions and intuition, probably ; and Jesus himself pictured Dives and Lazarus as both recognizing Abraham, and knowing each other.

And yet this is not all. The Scriptures,

Shall We Know Each Other There ?

in the words of none other than Jesus, promise heavenly recognition. His assurance to His disciples, that He would come again, and receive them unto Himself, held out to them the prospect of renewing their relations with Him in the other life. His promise to Mary was : "Thy *brother* shall rise again," implying that he was to remain her kindred in the hereafter. His word to the thief, "Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise," plainly presupposed the man's ability to recognize Him there.

The Bible goes even farther than this—it illustrates or exemplifies recognition. It sets before us the person of the resurrected Christ, and bids us behold in Him the first fruits of them that sleep. He was changed after His return from the grave, but His identity was not destroyed. His name, His face, His voice, His hands, to the very wound-prints, were the same. As He arose, so we shall rise also ; changed, and yet unchanged ; glorified, but still recognizable ; knowing even as we are known.

All this should give us perfect certitude.

Shall We Know Each Other There?

Nothing could be more clearly or unalterably established than our belief in future recognition. We may confidently expect to know each other there. Heaven is to be a place of reunion, and death a going home to keep it. The visions which some of our beloved have had just before leaving us, of dear ones waiting yonder to welcome them, were not hallucinations. Ere their spirits had been released, recognition was possible. A friend of mine, upon dying, called his children about him that he might bid them farewell, when, suddenly, and as if they were aware of what was transpiring on earth, the members of the family who had preceded him into the spirit land—the mother, an older son, and two daughters who had died in infancy—seemed to gather around his bed, and were as real to him as the ones who stood before him in the flesh. He knew them; they knew him. Turning from one group to the other in his conversation, and acting as a sort of medium of communication between them, he passed away, with a halo of happiness about his face, amid the salutations of the

Shall We Know Each Other There ?

Heavenly group and the farewells of the group that still remained upon the earth. Was he dreaming? I cannot believe that he was. It was a vision as real as it was glorious. May we all have a like experience when we come to die !



Relationships After Death

III

Relationships After Death

In the resurrection, whose wife shall she be?—

MATTHEW 22 : 28.



THESE questions which we are now considering are all logically connected. When once we become convinced that consciousness survives death, we are eager to know whether or not it will be a self-consciousness, by which we shall be able to recognize ourselves and others from ourselves. And when this inquiry has been answered affirmatively, as we tried to answer it in the previous sermon, we find ourselves face to face with consequences that seem embarrassing and immediately give rise to further questioning. One of these difficulties—the effect which a failure to find some of our dear ones in Heaven would produce—we have already discussed. This, however, is only one of many embarrassments which it is

Relationships After Death

sometimes thought will follow recognition in the other world. Another serious one is here suggested by the Sadducees, and is doubtless a difficulty which has occurred at one time or another to all of us. If we shall know each other there, will not some complications of relationships prove more or less uncomfortable, and to that extent disturb the peace of Heaven? What will the husband do who has had several wives, or the wife who has had several husbands? and how will these several wives and husbands get on together? If the relations of earth are to be perpetuated in Heaven, will not the mother-in-law tradition emerge somehow or somewhere? and may we not expect the step-relationships to bring their complications? And what of the people who are natively uncongenial, if not antagonistic, in this life—men and women, often of the best and purest characters, who are constitutionally at odds? As the constitution is a part of the personality, will not these and many other personal differences continue if the personality remains the same?

Relationships After Death

The Sadducees felt the force of this objection, and thought they were rearing an insuperable barrier to a belief in immortality when they pressed it in upon the attention of Jesus. Many people of our day, who accept what they denied, are disturbed, though at another point and for another reason, by their objection, and are prepared to say what from another cause some were found previously to say—that they do not want to know each other in Heaven, lest such knowledge might undermine, if not destroy, its happiness.

What is our Saviour's answer to this? "In the resurrection they neither marry (males), nor are given in marriage (females); but are as the angels of God" (neither males nor females). How brief and simple! Yet how profound and comprehensive! One single sentence sweeps the objection from the field. It is a reply to the specific objection interposed by the Sadducees, and at the same time an answer to the more general and fundamental question which lies back of it. That reply, in almost so many words,

Relationships After Death

was, that there would be no sexes in Heaven ; which is only another way of saying that the physical, and all that pertains to it or grows out of it, would give place to the spiritual. This does not imply a termination of the tender relations of earth, but their refinement and elevation. We shall continue to love those whom we loved with a pure, true love on earth, but that love will be of a higher and holier type. Precisely the same change will take place in our case, as I understand it, that occurred in the relation of the disciples to Jesus after His resurrection and ascension. They loved Him still ; but it was a love no longer prompted by His physical presence or conditioned by their corporeal relations to Him. It was a purely spiritual affection, which existed and expanded independently of all material aids or accompaniments. After the same manner, the carnal, fleshly side of our earthly relations will disappear at death, and only that which is spiritual and holy remain.

Any other condition but this would be illogical. Sexuality belongs to our animal

Relationships After Death

nature; and when the spiritual becomes separated from the animal and leaves it behind, as we all believe it will do, it must drop absolutely and forever all that is carnal. Our bodies are to be no longer corporeal, but glorified, and everything that is of the earth, earthy, will have no place in Heaven.

We shall not get at the core of Christ's answer till we recall the reason for sexes on earth. Their existence is necessitated by our mortality. Because death is ever depleting the race, birth is needed to preserve it. In an immortal state—a state where no one dies—birth is no longer essential. The angels do not die, and hence they have no need of propagation. As a quaint theologian has stated: "Where the law of death is abolished, the cause of birth is likewise abolished." This will explain the position taken by Jesus. He did not himself marry, because He was immortal and belonged to another sphere; He did not bid men follow His example, because they were yet mortal and could not change their sphere till death had ceased to be.

Relationships After Death

Now, what may we get from this answer? Two specific facts regarding the sequel of the relations formed on earth, and two general facts regarding the distinguishing conditions or characteristics of Heaven. The former first.

If the physical were all there is to the relations of earth, Jesus's words would teach us that these would terminate at death; but the physical ties that bind us to each other, as parents and children, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, are but the outward reflection or expression of an inner spiritual bond, which holds us together as no material relation possibly could. To remove the physical form or manifestation which the relation takes, instead of weakening it, will necessarily strengthen it. With the carnal eliminated, the bond will become purified and sanctified; and our love for our kindred will expand as we grow more like God, until it becomes as holy and spiritual, and therefore as close and tender, as that which binds the Father to the Son or that which binds the Son to the Father. The relations

Relationships After Death

existing between the members of the Trinity are not only warrants for the kindredships among God's creatures, but they are the ideals toward which such kindredships should tend on earth, and to which they must approach in Heaven.

A second fact about the continuance of these relationships is here implied by the words of Jesus: that with the physical element removed—the element which now makes them inferior and sordid—the source of the discomforts and unpleasantnesses which we, with the Sadducees, apprehend, will be removed. It is the corporeal strands running through the cable that make it unequal to the full strain that is sometimes put upon them. All jealousy is carnal in its origin. The misunderstandings and disturbances that here arise among friends and relatives are all due to the conditions which obtain in this life, but are to disappear from the life to come. This is plainly what Jesus was seeking to emphasize. Seven wives of the same man would come face to face with each other after death ;

Relationships After Death

but the provocation for jealousy would be left behind upon the earth, and a higher law would reign, that would not only refine and spiritualize former bonds, but bind all together in ties the most sacred and affectionate. Thus, a revelation of the nature of the life to come, removes this, as it will remove all objections that seem to follow from a belief in heavenly recognition.

“ When the silvery mists have veiled us
From the faces of our own,
Oft we deem their love has failed us,
And we tread our path alone.
We should see them near and truly,
We should trust them day by day—
Neither love nor blame unduly—
If the mists were cleared away.
We shall know as we are known,
Never more to walk alone,
In the dawning of the morning,
When the mists have rolled away.”

But the two general facts here revealed about the heavenly life should interest us most. The first of these is, that it will be an immaterial existence—and the meaning of that we are hardly competent

Relationships After Death

to grasp. It is the material character of this life that puts upon us most of our limitations, and opens the way to most of our troubles and difficulties. Matter hampers the soul, first caging it in and then constantly taunting and torturing it. Were it not for these physical eyes and ears, we should see much farther and hear much better; were it not for these material bodies, we should travel much faster and learn much quicker. It is the earth that holds us down. Most of the sins of this life are traceable to material allurements. Avarice is love for the things of the world; adultery, drunkenness, jealousy, incontinence, are all either physical propensities or due to physical propensities. Our misconceptions of one another, and of God, are all traceable to material causes. This shall pass away with death, says Jesus. Matter shall not invade Paradise. "Flesh and blood can not inherit the kingdom of heaven." We shall be spiritual beings, inhabiting a spiritual world; and therein, largely, shall consist our

Relationships After Death

happiness. Who that takes this in, if only the smallest fraction of it, does not find himself often exclaiming :—

“ For thee, O dear, dear country,
Mine eyes their vigils keep;
For very love, beholding
Thy happy name, they weep.
The mention of thy glory
Is unction to the breast,
And medicine in sickness,
And love, and life, and rest.”

Immortality is the other characteristic of that life which Jesus here points out, and the full significance of this is, also, not ordinarily appreciated. The sense of mortality—liability to die—is ever haunting us. We cannot turn without facing it. We eat, because food is necessary to sustain life; we sleep, because we would prevent the decay of our powers; we clothe ourselves, that our health, which is our life, may be the better protected. Death is always on our track, pursuing us, the business of life being to keep out of his way; and, despite vigilance and resistance the strongest and most continuous, he has but to will, and our

Relationships After Death

dear ones slip away ; he has but to lift his hand, and we fall before him. Think of it, there is not a building in this town that is not an old mortality shop, from yonder hospital, where death is being fought, to one's private residence, reared for shelter ; from the undertaker's shop to the corner grocery, stocked with means of subsistence. There shall be an end of this in Heaven, says Jesus. Death shall have been defeated, and therefore birth shall be superseded. Life—immortal, eternal, perennial—shall reign ; and all the ravages of mortality—pain, disease, hunger, separation, sorrow and crying—shall cease. The tree of life shall be in the midst of the garden, and the leaves of the tree shall be for the healing of the nations.

“ Forever with the Lord !

So, Jesus, let it be.

Life from the dead is in that word,

'T is immortality.

And, when my latest breath

Shall burst these bonds in twain,

By death I shall escape from death,

And life eternal gain.”

Where and What is Heaven?

IV

Where and What is Heaven?

*In my Father's house are many mansions : if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.—*JOHN 14 : 2.



HOW much we would all give if we only knew where Heaven is, and what it is like! And yet definite, detailed knowledge upon this point is altogether unattainable. Revelation has very little to say upon the subject; and that, being couched for the most part in figures, is difficult of interpretation. Even Jesus was reticent regarding it. One thing we may be certain of, however: that it is a place. The Bible everywhere ascribes to it location; and Jesus, who came thence to us, and, presumably, knew more about it than anyone who ever spoke to men of the Heavenly City, referred to it as a place, using a word so to designate it which indicates a particular locality. "I go to prepare

a place for you," are His words, and, to an unquibbling mind, they can have but one meaning. To be sure, it will be a spiritual place—and a spiritual place must needs differ from a temporal locality, but in what respect we cannot know; and since only earthly terms are used to describe it, we are justified in associating with it the general idea which those terms convey.

Where can this place be? There are three great theories regarding it. The popular notion is that it is above us, and its antipodes below us; but these directions, as we realize the instant we recall the shape of the earth, can be only relative. What may be called the Ethical Theory locates it around and about us, and inhabits the very atmosphere that envelopes the earth, as well as the spaces beyond, with the spirits of the departed. Wordsworth voiced this idea in his now memorable words, "Heaven lies about us in our infancy." This theory, it is plain to see, militates against the idea of definite locality. There is a third conjecture, which I venture to call the Astronomical

Where and What is Heaven?

Theory. It has an endorsement no less conspicuous than the support of Sir J. W. Dawson, the author of "Nature and the Bible," and Dr. E. F. Burr, of "Ecce Cœlum." This theory places Heaven at the center of the universe. "This is the one spot," writes one of these authors, "that has no motion, but basks in majesty and perfect repose while beholding the whole ponderous materialism which it ballasts in course of circulation about it." The objection which naturally suggests itself to this theory—that it is too far away to accord with the nearness which the Bible everywhere concedes to it—vanishes when we remember that its inhabitants, being spiritual beings, are practically independent of space, and, at will, can travel as fast as light. However distant in material miles that supernal country is, it would still be true that—

"This life of mortal breath
Is but a suburb of the life elysian."

Heaven was not far away to David, when he said of his son: "I shall go to him, but

he shall not return to me” ; it was not far to Stephen, when he looked up and saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God ; it was not far to Paul, when he was caught up into Paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it was not lawful for him to utter ; it was not far to John, when, on the Isle of Patmos, he beheld the New Jerusalem standing out before him,—but it was spirit, not space, that in any of these cases made it near.

The theory to which an increasingly large number of people seem now to be leaning might be described as the Terrestrial Theory, holding, as it does, that this earth is to be the final seat of Heaven. There are several passages which would have to be reckoned with before we could utterly dismiss this theory. Peter, in his second epistle, records himself as looking, according to promise, for new heavens and a new earth ; and John, in the Apocalypse, reports a vision of a new Heaven and a new earth. This earth is certainly beautiful enough to be the abode of the redeemed, and, if sin

Where and What is Heaven?

were removed from it, it would be holy enough.

This, then, is probably as near as we can come in our theories of Heaven: that it is now located at the center of the universe, where God's throne will always continue to be; but, since no one sphere would be large enough to accommodate "all who tread the globe" and "are but a handful to the tribes that slumber in its bosom," to say nothing of the dwellers on other spheres (if they be inhabited), each sphere, redeemed and re-generated, shall be the heaven of those who formerly lived upon it; and between them and all the other citizens of Heaven, upon whatsoever sphere may be their home, there shall be that free, untrammelled communication which is normal to a spiritual existence. It must be remembered that this theory, or any other, is, at its best, only conjecture; but it fulfils the requirements of reason and the declarations of Scripture in a way which, in the absence of a definite revelation, commends it to our imagination, if not to our faith.

Where and What is Heaven?

What is Heaven? is the second question which we have propounded for ourselves, and, fortunately, we have a stronger foundation upon which to base its answer than that upon which, as we have just found, any reply to our first question must necessarily rest. One's first impulse is to turn to the Revelation for information regarding Heaven, and doubtless there is much of real value which can be learned from it; but the greatest caution must be exercised, or its figurative language will mislead us. I prefer to go back to Jesus, and get my conception of "that sweet and blessed country" from Him.

" From Heaven He came, of Heaven He spoke,
To Heaven He led His followers' way;
Dark clouds of gloomy night He broke,
Unveiling an immortal day."

Jesus had little to say about the other world, but there is one utterance of His which is strikingly fundamental and comprehensive. It is the promise which He gave to His disciples at the last supper, the

night before His passion: "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." Look closely into these words, and four suggestions are prompt to emerge:—

(1) The first of these is, that the final abode of the blessed is an eminently tangible and practical estate. No one can read His reference to it as a place, or a many-mansioned house, without feeling that He was purposely seeking to convey a materialized impression of Heaven; and is it not by some such means alone that we are able to form an adequate conception of that "land of light and love"? I remember what a sensation was produced several years ago by the book entitled "The Gates Ajar," which ingeniously and beautifully elaborated the idea, that what we most enjoyed on earth we would find in Heaven to enjoy, even to playing a piano or pursuing

a course of study. That book changed my whole idea of the other world. To vast numbers of other people, I believe, it was also an epoch-making volume. You may call the picture it painted extravagantly materialistic, but it is only such a picture that can make Heaven an attractive place to most people, just as a human portrait is essential to convey to man any intelligible notion of God. Such pictures Jesus encouraged His disciples to paint, frame and expose to view. The pictures which John hung up before the gaze of the world were of pearly gates, golden streets, crowns of jewels, white robes, palms of victory, and harp accompaniments. These appealed to his times; but they do not appeal to ours. We must, therefore, paint our own pictures of Heaven, and it matters very little what they are, so long as we put into them the best and the highest things in this life; so long as we give them the right coloring and the proper perspective. Jesus is our authority for localizing Heaven and materializing our

Where and What is Heaven ?

conception of it—and we cannot go far wrong when we follow Him.

“ What if earth

Be but the shadow of Heaven ? And things therein
Each to other like, more than on earth is thought ? ”

(2) A second representation, which He gives in this familiar passage, is of Heaven as the Father's home. “ In my Father's house are many mansions ”—all in His Father's dominion, and under His parental roof. To those who have marked Christ's constant and glowing consciousness of God, who have been impressed with His immediate and uninterrupted communion with His Father, it is no surprise to have Him name this as one of the great attractions of Heaven. Heaven was home to Him in a very real and tender sense ; and until it assumes for us this social, domestic aspect, it will never attract us as it should. When the believer comes to look upon the gathering of the redeemed as the great home-coming of the children of God—as a reunion around the hearthstone of a common Father, in whose presence and under whose roof-tree

Where and What is Heaven ?

eternity is to be spent in filial and fraternal association and service,—then life in the world to come is no longer an indefinite or formal thing, a prospect uncertain and unnatural, but an existence so simple, so homely because so homelike, so delightful because so true to the instincts and inclinations of human nature, that the soul, weary with earth's strife and struggle, anticipates its approach with ever-increasing eagerness and joy, and sings while the happy event delays :—

“ What though the tempests rage ?

Heaven is our home ;

Short is our pilgrimage,

Heaven is our home.

And Time's wild, wintry blast

Soon shall be overpast ;

We shall reach home at last—

Heaven is our home.

“ There at our Saviour's side,

Heaven is our home ;

We shall be glorified ;

Heaven is our home.

There are the good and blest,

Those we love most and best ;

Grant us with them to rest—

Heaven is our home.”

(3) Another truly delightful feature of Heaven, which our Lord here names, is the many mansions of which His Father's house consists. This expression has many suggestions to make to us. We associate the idea of spaciousness and sumptuousness with a mansion; and this is plainly one of the thoughts of Heaven which Jesus intended to convey to us. It is to be no mean or ordinary place, but a grand and glorious abode, compared with which the castles and palaces of earth will seem no better than huts or hovels. The original word He used is derived from a verb, signifying to stay or to remain; and by the choice of this word, Jesus meant to emphasize the settled, permanent character of the life of the blessed. Heaven is to be an abiding place; as stated elsewhere in Scripture, "a city that hath foundations." And what a prospect is that to a tenting, metropolitan population; to a people so restless, so bent upon excitement and change, as are the citizens of this country! To move into a house, and that a mansion, and

Where and What is Heaven ?

to stay there through the ages of eternity, never to have to move again, is in itself enough to make the place above all others desirable, and to create within every resident of a city like ours an irresistible desire to inhabit it.

The mention of the number of mansions is likewise significant. Not only will there be room enough for all, but a mansion for each. Most of us will appreciate this feature especially.

But, best of all, our abodes are to be prepared for us—fitted up, arranged, set in order, furnished, equipped—by none other than Jesus, who knows all men, and will adapt the place to our tastes and temperaments, our likes and preferences, our own personal comfort and happiness. Eloquent orators exhaust their powers in an attempt to describe some regal palace of Europe, and to create within their hearers a notion of its glory and a desire to witness it. Could the description of anything be more glowing or more enrapturing than that which Jesus gives of Heaven, when He declares :

Where and What is Heaven?

“In my Father’s house are many mansions”?

(4) But the highest point in this description was not reached until He uttered its concluding word: “I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.” Garfield once said that a log cabin with Mark Hopkins for a teacher, would be a college. What Christian is not prepared to say, that to be anywhere with Jesus in immediate and loving companionship, would be Heaven? But to be in the Father’s house with Him—a member of the same royal family; to see His face and have His mark in our foreheads; to hear the words that pour forth like grace from His lips, and to have Him call us His friends and brothers; to walk along the streams and through the glades of Paradise hand in hand with Him in sweet and holy companionship,—ah! that will be a joy deeper, broader, higher, fuller, than any other conceivable! Ah! that will be the only life “whose throbs are love, whose thrills are song”! And who that realizes what that life is to be, does not rejoice at its rapid

Where and What is Heaven?

approach, and will not welcome the summons that bids him pass the threshold of Heaven and enter it?

Now, hang beside this great picture some of the smaller ones which Jesus painted of Heaven, and what a gallery we have! Jesus told the dying thief that it was Paradise, and the mere word calls up a picture of luxuriance, beauty, fragrance, bloom, and peacefulness, that one could gaze upon for hours and never tire. He gave the disciples the promise that they should sit upon thrones and judge, and, in the Parable of the Talents, He makes His followers rulers over many things—the idea in both cases being that of dominion, which we naturally associate with the inherent regency of goodness. To the Sadducees He declared that the Redeemed neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels, loving with the purest love, and perfect in their holiness. Speaking to His disciples, He compared the citizens of Heaven to little children, thereby calling attention to the simple, sincere, unselfish and kindly life of

Where and What is Heaven?

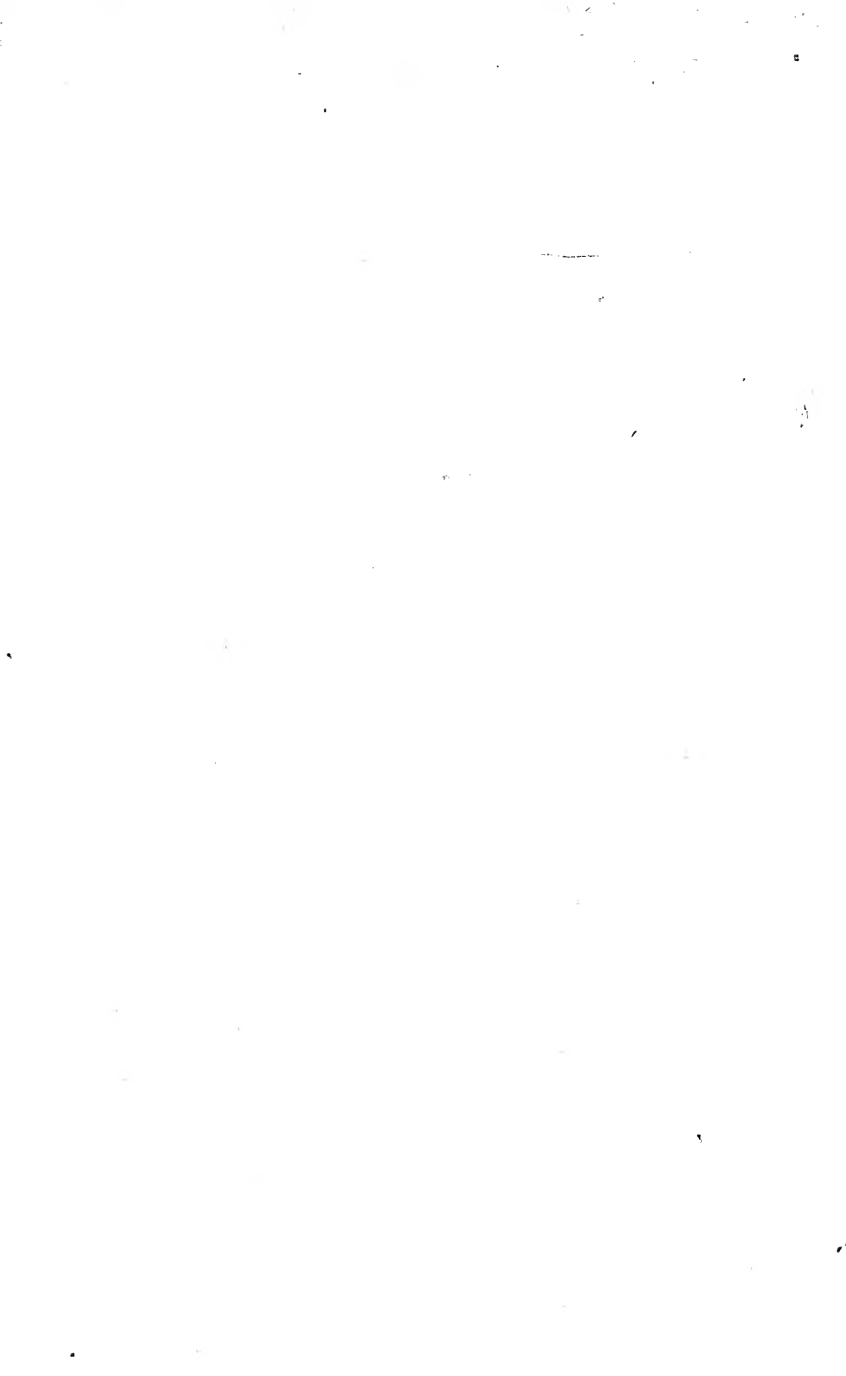
those who inhabit the Kingdom of Heaven. And in the Parable of the Pounds—in which one servant is made ruler over ten cities, and another a ruler over five; as well as in the Parable of the Talents—where one steward has his gifts taken from him and another has his augmented—He clearly teaches that there are degrees of rank and stages of advancement in Heaven, the former to be determined by one's life on earth, the latter by his growth after he reaches the other world.

Who that looks at these pictures, all painted or sketched by Jesus, does not exclaim with Moore—

“ Take all the pleasures of all the spheres,
And multiply each with endless years:
One minute of Heaven is worth them all! ”

and thus exclaiming, does not wonder at, magnify, and accept the love and goodness that opens the door into such a realm to the lowest sinner, making what Lowell has beautifully written forever true:—

“ 'T is Heaven alone that is given away;
'T is only God may be had for the asking.”



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