

WHAT WE KNOW OF LIFE IN THE HEREAFTER

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"We have one life to live on earth. With God is the rest." Yes, what we have to do is to live worthily here and now. But we believe that beyond this life's utmost bound, our souls are still to possess a life unmeasured by the flight of years. Therefore, to know so much as we can know of life in the Hereafter should help us to live better while we tabernacle in mortal bodies.

Analogies, probabilities, logical reasoning, our aspirations, have a certain value in revealing to us what that life is. The wisest philosophers of Greece, Plato especially, gained and recorded visions of the life beyond death very surprising, considering the age in which they lived. The efforts of certain modern psychologists to lift the veil from the life of those who have passed beyond our sight have as yet yielded very meager results.

Our *knowledge* of life in the Hereafter is derived alone from Revelation and from faith vision. This vision, based on the words of Revelation, is *knowledge*, which in the realm of spirit is supreme and unchallengeable. Note a few of the very many words of Revelation on which that knowledge and that vision are based. "I know that my Redeemer [my Sponsor, my Defender] liveth, and at last he will stand up upon the earth: and after my skin, even this body, is destroyed, then without my flesh shall I see God" (Job xix. 25, 26); "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake . . . and they that are wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament" (Dan. xii. 2, 3; see also, for vision of God, Job xlii. 5, 6, and Isa. vi. 1-5).

From words of Revelation in the New Testament we learn more specifically that:—

1. Life in the Hereafter is Permanent and Timeless.

To apply our arithmetical measures to that life or dwell upon its endlessness is less important than to think of its quality. When our Lord declares (John xvii. 3) that to know God and Jesus Christ is life eternal, it is manifest that the word "eternal" denotes quality, not duration. Indeed, both the Greek and Hebrew terms for "eternal" point to what is permanent, rather than endless. In Arabic, Moslems the world over say, when a friend dies, "He has removed to the door of permanency."

2. Continuity of personality will be a fact of the immortal life. This is opposed to both Pantheism and Buddhism, even at their best. It includes full recognition of persons by each other, for the soul is to possess some form, a "spiritual body," and the recognition will doubtless be freer and more perfect than it is or can be here.

The appearance of Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. xvii. 3), and Jesus' promise to the penitent thief (Luke xxiii. 43), are clear instances of continuity of personality after death. "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living" (Luke xx. 38); "In my Father's house are many mansions, . . . I go to prepare a place for you" (John xiv. 2); "There is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body" (1 Cor. xv. 44).

The continuity of personality excludes all notions of some great change at death, as though there were then to be a sudden leap forward in knowledge and character. No! What we are when the door of death opens before us, that we shall be when that door closes behind us. We shall then simply enter the path of unhindered and unlimited progress in knowledge, love, and life.

3. A third fact of the Life of the Hereafter is final triumph of mind over matter, of the spirit over the lower nature, and the satisfaction and joy of this victory. Here is the great contrast between Christianity and Mohammedanism. Mohammed by precept and example made sensual pleasure the chief attraction of Paradise. Christians look forward with exultation to a life where the soul is regnant, and the "beauty of holiness" is fully realized in

a society where sin and the sorrow which is its offspring are aliens and are forever excluded. "They that are accounted worthy to attain to that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: for neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection" (Luke xx. 35, 36).

4. Life in the Hereafter is a life of unimpeded and god-like service to other souls. "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall dwell with them, and they shall be his peoples, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. . . . And his servants shall serve him; . . . and his name shall be on their foreheads" (Rev. xxi. 3-xxii. 3, 4); "And I heard a voice from heaven saying, Write, Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors [their earthly toil]; for their works follow with them"; that is, as testimony to their fidelity in service here, or a certificate of their fitness for promotion to higher service there. That service will ever begin in worship to God and the Lamb, in songs of celestial harmony, with no "glittering" crowns on our brows. No refined selfishness will be there. We may wish to make the personal acquaintance of Saint Paul or of Isaiah or of Bernard or of Wesley or of Livingstone; but what vast numbers may wish the same! Personal wishes will count little there. The call to some service of love, near or far away, may prevent our dear ones' welcoming us at the pearly gate at the moment of our arrival. For *service* will be the joy, the glory, the beauty, of the heavenly life. Jesus, "for the joy set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame." What joy? That of sitting down again at his Father's right hand? No. The joy of saving human souls. In the heavenly life we shall know something of the meaning of God's paternal suffering with his human children, and understand a little of the nature of *sympathy* in the heart of the Eternal.

I dare not say that we can here *know* more of life in

the Hereafter than is implied in the four specifications given. Concerning the place of our future abode, the language we are to use there, the relation of things of beauty in our life here to the rarer beauty and glory of the perfect life, we may give wings to a chaste imagination, but for the clear, unveiled, enraptured vision, let us patiently await the full disclosure of the eternal day.

There are three questions that press for an answer, concerning which some words may be guardedly ventured:—

1. What of those who die in infancy? Of these there are countless myriads. They enter the life of the Hereafter tiny buds of individual soul life. In that pure air they will open into beautiful flowers. Teachers of experience are needed for their training. What scope for service by God's saints!

2. What of that vast multitude of our human race that have never heard of Jesus Christ and have groped blindly after God? There is no problem here of "second probation," but what a service opens to those who have known and loved Jesus in leading those wanderers to know and love him too!

3. What of the incorrigibly wicked, those who have deliberately chosen and persisted in their choice of evil, such as are described in Rom. i. 21-32? We do not know. But may it not be that sin loved and willfully cherished becomes a gangrene in the soul which at last results in the extinction of that soul? See Rev. xx. 6-14. The "second death," the punishment of a disembodied spirit, will be soul suffering, not material pain. Can we conceive of the life of a finite soul as indefinitely prolonged in complete alienation from all good, in utter banishment from God?

It is no wonder that in the contemplation of the stupendous results of the work that brought the Son of God into our world, in view of the mighty harvest of human souls garnered and yet to be gathered in, the saints of God in all ages have broken out in love-longing for "Jerusalem

the Golden," for its "bliss beyond compare," and have yearned for a share in the worship and the service offered them in the city and realm whose temple and whose light are God and the Lamb.

The Apostle Paul closes his great discourse on the resurrection and the future life with these words, a wonderful corollary to that discussion: "*Wherefore*, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."