

HEAVEN.

2 CORINTHIANS V. 10.

WHEREVER men have believed in a life to come, they have shewn a constant and incorrigible tendency to peer into the future and to forecast the forms which that life would assume. As the tendency is a natural one, it is not to be sweepingly condemned. Our life on earth is so brief, so unsatisfactory at the best, yet so momentous if we are to live for ever, and moreover it is and must be so largely shaped by our conception of the future state, that it is as reasonable as it is natural that we should endeavour by all possible means to learn what that life is like on which we enter when we die. Some voices indeed, voices of grave authority among them, pronounce the endeavour to be vain, hopeless, and even wrong. But he should be more than man who presumes to censure all generations of men. And how can that be wrong which is as inevitable as it is universal? Nay, how can that be wrong of which we find so many examples in Holy Writ? We may be sure that the endeavour to picture to ourselves the life beyond the grave is not wrong if only we rightly set about it. We may, on the contrary, be quite sure that *any* endeavour to conceive the future life, if only it be thoughtfully and reverently conducted, will put new meaning and worth into the life we now live in the flesh.

But if we would at all rightly or helpfully conceive the future state, we must be on our guard against two common errors. First, we are apt, on I know not what authority, to suppose that death makes a

sudden break in the continuity of our life, and affects a vast, radical, but most unaccountable, change in our character. And, secondly, in our attempts to conceive the future, we are too apt to busy our thoughts with the physical, rather than with the moral, conditions of the life to be. If we are on our own guard against these errors, we shall not go far wrong in our endeavour to conceive what the coming life will be like; or, if we err, our errors will do us but little harm.

The Scripture which most frequently gives shape to our conceptions of the future, and by which, for want of better knowledge, we have been led to dwell more than we should on its physical conditions, is the Book of the Revelation. St. John portrays the future state under the form of a "great city descending out of heaven," with its wall of jasper "great and high," its lofty gates of pearl, its streets of gold, its palaces shining, in a light above that of the sun, "like unto transparent glass;" while "a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal," flows through the midst of the streets, trees of life growing on either side of the river. Such a conception as this may seem to be very unlike aught that we now see around us; and we may therefore have taken it as picturing forth that great and sudden change in the conditions of human life which has just been pronounced erroneous and misleading. But let us consider for a moment how natural and easy such a conception would be to St. John, however remote it may be from our own experience; how entirely it would correspond to facts with which he was his whole life through familiar. For a thousand years before he wrote.

and for more than a thousand years after he wrote, cities played a part in the history of every great nation which in many respects they no longer fill. During that long period the city, with its fortified walls and gates, was the one place in which men felt themselves secure amid well-nigh incessant storms of war and change. Men lived then rather for their city than for themselves, and took a noble pride in lavishing their resources, not only on its stately public structures and works of art, but also in drawing to it whatever of human wisdom or skill would be likely to contribute whether to its power or to its attractiveness. Think what Babylon was, what Athens, what Rome, and above all what Jerusalem was, in ancient time, to their respective citizens; think also what Milan, Venice, Florence, Genoa were to their inhabitants in the Middle Ages; and you will easily perceive how naturally Heaven would shape itself as a city of transcendent beauty to the inhabitants of any of those great and superb cities, whether in the ancient or the modern world. You will also see how natural it would be for St. John to conceive of Heaven as a glorified Ephesus, or, more exactly still, as "a new Jerusalem," the city of the Great King. So that the very conception of the future life which to us may seem most remote from the conditions of our earthly life would really be in the very closest harmony with the conditions by which his life and thoughts were shaped. To him it would involve no great and sudden break in the continuity of human life that a man should pass from the city of Ephesus or Jerusalem to the still more superb City which he had seen in his visions,—a

City in which the marble palaces, and cunningly-wrought gates of bronze, and the fountains and aqueducts of earth were replaced by mansions built of gems, and gates of pearl, and streets paved with gold, and a pure river of living waters.

But, as has already been said, there is a second point at which we need to stand on our guard. It is very natural for us, when we lose those whom we love as we love our own souls, to follow them in thought and try to shape to ourselves the new happy conditions amid which they now live. At such times we cannot but ask ourselves such questions as these : Do the friends whom we have lost, and for whom our love grows keener now that we have lost them, still *live* in any true sense of the word ; or do they lie wrapt in a calm and placid sleep, waiting for the resurrection of the body ? Have they forgotten us now that they have left us, or do we still live in their memories and hearts ? Will they, setting out on a new career of perfection so long before us, advance in it so rapidly as that when we die a hopeless and impassable interval will divide them from us ; or will their growth, being mainly a growth in love, only endear us to them the more closely and prepare them more efficiently to help us ? Do they know what we are doing and enduring now, with what pangs of blended love and grief we think of them, and how bitterly we mourn our offences against them ? Have they any means of influencing us for our good, of helping and comforting us amid our toils and sorrows, as they must surely long to do if they have not altogether ceased to love us ?

It is natural that we should ask such questions as

these, questions prompted far more by affection than by a curious desire to pry within the veil. And yet no specific, no authoritative, answer can be given to them, no answer even that will satisfy our love, save that which we are able to infer from the unbounded goodness and kindness of God. If we *believe* in his love toward us and toward all men, we may be sure that our friends, though dead to us, live unto Him and are growing like Him. Since He does not forget us, we may be sure that they do not forget us. Since his greatness does not put Him beyond our reach, we may be sure that no advance which they make toward Him will divide them from us. Since He spends his time in nothing else but in helping us and in seeking our welfare, we may be very sure that the more like Him they grow the more they will desire and be the better able to minister to our needs. If no more direct answer be given to the questions we commonly ask concerning our dead, that may be because God thought no such answer should be necessary to us; since his love, if only we believe in his love, is a sufficient answer to them all.

But while on all these points we are left to faith and to the deductions which reason infers from the materials of our faith, there is one point on which the Voice of Inspiration speaks in no uncertain tone. Throughout the Scriptures, in the Old Testament and in the New, we everywhere find this law revealed: that in the future life every man will receive "according to his works," "according to his deeds," "after the work of his hands," "according to that he hath done, whether it be good or whether it be bad." In both Testaments this law is again and again

illustrated by one and the same figure, viz., that "whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." Whatever else, therefore, may be uncertain to us, we may be sure of this—that the future life will, in some sense, be a counterpart of the present life, since every man is then to receive according to his deeds, according to *all* his deeds, both good and bad.

Now as no man's life on earth is wholly good and no man's wholly bad; as, moreover, the man good on the whole is to receive according to his bad deeds as well as his good, and the man who is bad on the whole is to receive the due reward of his good deeds as well as of his bad deeds, it follows that the future life will be as complex, as varied, as chequered as is the present life: it follows that there will be no such sudden break in the continuity of human life as we often assume, but that the next stage of it will be very much like, though we may also hope that it will be very much better and happier than, the stage through which we are passing now. If it be a law of the future life, and the law most clearly revealed in the Scriptures, that there every man will reap what he has sown and all that he has sown, it is a clear logical deduction from this law that the fruit we then eat will resemble the seed we are now sowing, the one great difference being that there will be more of it. Or, to put the same thought in other words, if it be the best known law of the future life that it will render to every man the due reward of his deeds, *all* his deeds both good and bad, then it is a clear logical deduction from this law that the future life will be a continuation of the present life, chequered with the same lights and

shadows, though then the lights may grow brighter and the shadows fainter.

But, as if to put the deduction of reason beyond the reach of doubt, the Voice of Inspiration expressly declares the law of the future life to be also the law of the present life. It affirms that now, as then, every man reaps what he sows, and as he sows; that God now "renders to every man according to his works" (Prov. xxiv. 12), "according to his ways" (Job xxxiv. 11). In the Prophets and in the Psalms, no less than in the Law, there is the clear affirmation to which Jeremiah (chap. xvii. ver. 10; chap. xxxii. ver. 19) gives emphatic expression: "I, the Lord, search the heart, I try the reins, *to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings.*" And, on the whole, in the long run, as even Matthew Arnold maintains, human experience confirms the Divine revelation. Whether we regard our personal life, or the life of nations, if only we review it on a large scale, we do find that men reap as they sow, that good comes to the good and evil to the evil.

What, then, we have specially to mark is, (1) that from the Scriptures we learn nothing of the future life more clearly than this—that every man will then receive according to his deeds, good and bad; and (2) that the Scriptures emphatically bind our future and our present lives together by affirming that one and the self-same law governs them both. If we bear these two facts well in mind and let them control, as they have every right to control, our conceptions of the coming life, we may very wholesomely employ our imagination in the endeavour to picture forth

that life in all its variety of detail. Where we commonly err is in making that life as *unlike*, instead of as *like*, this life as we can; and, consequently, in depicting for ourselves scenes of an imaginary perfection and blessedness on which we are so unfit to enter that they would bring us no blessedness. If we avoid this error, we may give a loose rein and the widest scope to our imagination.

But here it may be objected: "What have you left for imagination to do? And, again, if the future life even of the good is to be like this life, ruled by the same law and chequered by the same variety, in what is it better than this?"

The answer is plain. Whether or not the ruling moral bias of any man's life will be changed after death, we cannot tell: on this point we have no clear light. But in so far as the good are concerned, what better prospect can they desire than that, in the future, they should receive the due reward of their deeds, and even of their bad deeds as well as of their good? We know that in this world the painful results of sin are the best correctives of sin; that we are never so utterly redeemed from our bondage to any evil habit as when, by painful experience of its evil consequence, it grows hateful and intolerable to us: *then* we feel that we must not and cannot any longer live in it. Once redeemed from it *thus*, we are redeemed once for all. And how shall we hope to be redeemed in the world to come from every trace of evil except as we are taught more fully than we could be taught here how hateful and abominable it is? It does not follow that we shall there be permitted to *act* on the sinful inclinations which only too

certainly we carry out of this world with us; the clearer vision we shall then gain of the Divine Holiness may of itself suffice to make every kind of sin terrible and repulsive to us: but if there is to be no break in the continuity of our life, if we are not to become other men than the men we know, that vision must grow upon us by a gradual revelation; it may be necessary that we should be trained to receive the unfolding revelation of that Holiness and an increasing participation of it by a discipline exquisitely graduated to our special and varying needs.

Suppose, for example, that on our very entrance into Heaven we are for a while placed under conditions which will remind us of whatever we have done wrongly or defectively on earth, but only remind us of it by giving us opportunities of doing it rightly and in a perfect way. Bad deeds, we teach our children, are not to be mended by good wishes; they are only to be mended by good deeds: and may not our heavenly Father have to teach us the very lesson we teach them, and set us to mend our bad deeds by good ones, to wipe out the memory and the inward effects of our offences by a willing and cheerful obedience to the very laws we had broken? And if this should be one form of our discipline in Heaven, who that honestly desires to have done with evil, or to atone for evil, or to lessen the sum of evil in the universe, would not heartily rejoice in it? What happier reward, what more Divine reward, of our bad deeds could there be than this,—that we should have leave and opportunity for mending them with good deeds?

If, again, we may thus conceive of Heaven, who

does not feel that, besides being the most suitable and therefore the happiest place for him, it would also be a place for which, through the grace of God, he is in some sense already fitted? When we think of Heaven as a place reserved for those who are already perfect and of a spotless holiness, we are very sure that we are not fit for it, nor are likely to be made fit by the momentary act of death. Worse still, we fear that even those whom we have loved and lost, however affectionately we may dwell on their many virtues, must also have been unfit to enter a place so pure, raised so far above all the conditions of the life they knew on earth. But if once we accept the principles laid down in Holy Writ, viz., that the future life is to be a continuation of the present life, and that it is to be a correction of the present life, we may then entertain the most cheerful hopes whether for ourselves or for our departed friends.

Guided by these same principles, we may surely indulge the hope that Heaven will afford us scope and opportunity, not only for mending bad deeds with good ones, but also for repeating our good deeds on a larger scale and in a more perfect way. How often does it happen here that, even when we would do good, and *do* do good, evil is still present with us, so that the service we would render whether to God or to our fellows is marred either by the blended and imperfect motives by which we are actuated, or by the constrained, ungenial, or otherwise imperfect manner in which we discharge it! And, on the other hand, how sweet and bright is the hope that, when we pass into the next world, and

come under its larger happier conditions, we may still move along the same lines of action, and devote ourselves to the very tasks for which we have partly qualified ourselves here, but be actuated in that better service by purer motives and discharge it more genially, more perfectly, and therefore more effectively! Such a conception of our future life and work, while it is more rational and more scientific, is surely instinct also with a diviner hope and joy than the rewards commonly held out before us. Grown men, I fancy, if they also be thoughtful men, are but little attracted by a heaven of "purling streams and pearly gates"—though even these symbols have a valuable teaching for us when they are rightly interpreted; but the more thoughtful men are, the more surely must they rejoice in the hope that in the life to come they will be taught and enabled to undo the evil they have done in the present life, and to do, from perfect motives and in a perfect way, the good they have only attempted here.

Once more: if, as the Bible teaches, the future life is to be both a continuation and a correction of the present life, we may well hope that we shall then become all that we now desire or affect to be. This thought may be applied in many ways to all the details of human life, and the more clear and homely our application of it, the more likely is it to prove helpful to us. Here, for example, is a man who assumes to be very pious, more pious than most of his fellows, but who is at heart at least as devoted to the affairs of business or to social pleasures as he is to the service of God. He is sincere in his goodness so far as it goes, but he contrives to convey the impression

to his neighbours that it goes much further than it does. If this man should die, what better reward can he have for his sincere but imperfect and somewhat ostentatious goodness than that he should be gradually compelled to become all that he has professed, all that in his best moments he has desired to be—as godly, as devout, as liberal, as large-hearted and kind? Here, again, is another man, good at heart and not without power as a preacher of the Word, but comparatively, yet possibly through no fault of his own, uncultured and unlearned. Unhappily, above all for himself, he wishes to pass for a man of learning and erudition. In some of the mysterious ways which must be open to such men he contrives to purchase for himself a good degree, and struts before the world a full-blown Doctor of Divinity. Even after he has obtained his degree he takes no pains to make himself worthy of it, but continues to be an unlettered, though not altogether a simple, man to the end. When he dies, what happier fate can befall him than that he should be sent to school in Heaven, be taught to handle his grammars and lexicons and schemes of Divinity, and so be compelled to become what he professed and aspired to be, and walk the golden streets a perfectly honest man at last.

We may well hope that at least the *initiatory* discipline of Heaven may be one which in various ways will compel us all to become all that we have wished, and tried, and failed to be. Other, larger, and still happier steps of an ascending progress may lie before us; but will it not be much for us if, in the first stage of the future life, we are taught and enabled to be-

come what we have professed and desired to be, so that we have no longer anything to hide, no longer anything to fear from the voices which proclaim in the light whatever has been done in darkness, and publish from the housetop whatever has been done in the chamber? To become honest, true, genuine to the inmost core of our being; to have all the moral and spiritual faculties of which we are dimly conscious here happily unfolded and developed: in our measure to become righteous even as our Father in heaven is righteous, and perfect even as He is perfect,—will not this in very deed be Heaven to us who have so long striven to hide our imperfections behind a veil even as we have walked in the dim and clouded atmosphere of this lower world?

CARPUS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER
OF THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS.

VERSE 5.

THE inspired writer having affirmed, in the fourth verse, that *Jesus has inherited a more excellent name than the angels*, proceeds, as we have seen, in the first part of the fifth, to establish his affirmation. This he does by a singularly apposite quotation from the second Psalm, one of the most remarkable and artistic of the Messianic oracles of the Old Testament. The quotation is decisive. In the ad-
duction of it, the writer's argument stands out unchallengeable and complete. The Messiah is *God's Son* in the strictest highest sense,—a sense entirely inappropriate to any of the angels.

With a quotation so decisively apposite, the logic