

We have lingered long over these epistles, and have emphasized—perhaps to weariness—the various indications of genuineness which they supply. Apart altogether from the question of authorship, they are a most precious guide to holy living and active ministerial service. They paint a period in the history of Christianity with delicacy and sharpness of touch and extraordinary brilliancy. They involve every great principle of New Testament revelation. They record, in burning words and “faithful sayings,” a portion of the common experience of the early Church, an experience of unexampled and unique value; they pulsate throughout with righteousness and purity, and reveal a lively sense of the greatness, freeness, and abundance of Divine Love. We find blended everywhere otherworldliness with practical duty, sensitiveness to pain with triumph over it, the sense of sin with that of pardon, tears with triumph, imminent death with life eternal.

The criticism is vexatious, the reasons are frivolous, and the evidence is *nil*, yet by its aid many distinguished scholars have burned the body, scattered the ashes, and sung the requiem of the Pastoral Epistles. We venture to think that they will survive the process.

H. R. REYNOLDS.

THE SHEEP OF DEATH.

PSALM XLIX.

THE hope of a life after death was not the common heritage of man till Jesus Christ brought life and immortality to light. Even the Jews, though taught from above, did not grasp this animating hope for many

centuries. Their very Scriptures, although given by inspiration of God, touch this string of the many-chorded Harp but rarely, and even then touch it so faintly that it yields but an uncertain sound. To the very end, down to the moment when the long-predicted Messiah came to incarnate the Prophetic Ideal, the light of this great hope burned so intermittingly and obscurely that the most accomplished class among them—the Sadducees—could not so much as see it, and denied that it burned at all.

And yet it did burn. From the first the greatest minds among them—Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah—had seen this great light rising in the darkness of death, and had cherished the hope that they “should not all die.” They had even uttered the hope, and striven to make their fellows share it. But if we study their clearest utterances, we shall not greatly wonder that they failed to convey to others, or at least to the popular mind, which can only be impressed by clear, decisive, and repeated strokes, the hope they cherished for themselves. It may be doubted whether there is any Scripture in the Old Testament in which the truth of a life beyond the grave is more clearly announced than it is in this Psalm; I doubt whether there is any in which it is so clearly announced: and yet it is not hither that even scholars and commentators commonly resort for their proof-texts; while, owing partly no doubt to our imperfect translation of the Psalm, not one ordinary reader of the Bible in a thousand finds that truth here. We need not wonder, therefore, that, as a rule, the Jews failed to discover it.

And yet it certainly is not for any want of emphasis on the part of this unknown Psalmist that the secret

which he "opened" has remained a secret to so many, and for so long. He commences the Psalm with a formal and solemn summons to the whole world (Verses 1, 2), calling "high and low, rich and poor" to listen to a secret which concerns them all, to a truth which they are too apt to overlook. In Verses 3 and 4 he claims to have received this truth by the immediate inspiration of the Most High, by inclining his ear to hear what the Lord God would say before he opened his mouth to speak; and he professes his intention both *to open*, to make clear and manifest the "dark saying," the hidden truth, he has received from above, and to set it to music, to "open it *on the harp*," *i.e.*, to make it still more clear and impressive, by casting it into an attractive and memorable form, by clothing it with poetic force and grace. Such a prelude might well awake attention to the strain which it introduced.

In the Verses which follow he tells us along what course of meditation he had been led to the brink of his great discovery. It is the old story—the story familiar to all the higher minds of Jewish song and prophecy. Like his brethren, he had seen men growing rich and increasing the glory of their house (Verse 16). He had seen them corrupted from their simplicity by their wealth, led to trust in it and to make their riches their boast (Verse 6). He had seen them carry themselves as though they should live for ever; and then, conscious that they too must die, fighting against time and death, striving to perpetuate their memory and influence by erecting stately mansions and calling their lands after their names, by founding families and acquiring estates (Verse 11). He had heard them praised by men because they had done well by them-

selves (Verse 18), because, at the sacrifice of all the higher aims of life, they had reached the poor low aims they had set before them and made themselves a name and a power in the earth. And, on the other hand, he had seen the righteous, men such as himself, who put their trust in the living God, and not in Mammon; who made it their first aim, not to grow rich, but to do the will of God, neglected, despised, forgotten, although the inspiration of the Almighty had made them wise, and they could set the golden secrets of truth to a living and immortal music (Verses 15, 4). And as his thoughts circled round this strange contrast, like all the great poets and prophets of the world, he cried: "Is *this* the end? Is this *the end*?" To him it was incredible that, under the rule of the wise and righteous God, the wisdom that seeks the highest ends should be overcrowded by the folly that seeks the poorest and basest ends: it was incredible that the unrighteous should finally triumph over the righteous and good be overcome of evil. And hence he bade himself, and as many as were likeminded with himself, not be afraid when they saw the prosperity of men who proved themselves to be unrighteous by making wealth their supreme aim (Verse 16). However large their possessions, they could carry away absolutely nothing with them when they died (Verse 17). However great their wealth, they were none of them rich enough to buy exemption from death, to bribe him to let them live on for ever (Verses 7-9); nor could they hope to pass through the darkness of death into a land of light for which they had done nothing to prepare themselves.

On the other hand, the righteous might be sure that,

however poor and despised they were because they had not done well for themselves in the judgment of the world, God would redeem them from the power of Death and Hades (Verse 15).¹ Even wise men must die, indeed ; but they need not "perish" like the rich fools who had lived as the brutes live and would die as the brutes die (Verse 10).² God would find a ransom, a redemption for them. In the emphatic phrase of Verse 15—which is the key and crown of the Psalm—God would "*take*" them, take them to Himself, as He took Enoch, Moses, Elijah, not necessarily by a miraculous rapture and transfiguration, but by a miracle of mercy and lovingkindness, which should redeem them out of the hand of Hades and quicken them to an immortal life. And then, in that bright "morning" which would surely dawn upon them after the night of death, the instinctive craving of the human heart for the triumph of the wise over the foolish, of the righteous over the unrighteous, should be fulfilled. The wicked would sink into the darkness of Hades, in which all their "beauty" and "glory" must suffer disastrous eclipse ; while the upright, redeemed from Hades, would have "dominion" over them in the morning of a new and better life (Verse 14).

All this is in the Psalm, and may be found in it by a careful reader who will be at the pains of tracing and accentuating its leading thoughts. But, it must be admitted, that these thoughts need to be traced and accentuated, that they do not leap up to strike the casual and indifferent reader ; that it is no great

¹ Verse 15 : "*But God will redeem my soul from the power of Hades ; for He will take me.*"

² Verse 10 : "*He must see it. Even wise men must die. The fool and the brutish person shall perish together, and leave their wealth to others.*"

marvel if, as a rule, the Jews did not find in the Psalm a clear and manifest assurance of a life to come; and that, after all, it is a little doubtful whether *we* should have found so much in it if we had not first studied in the school of Christ.

But there is one lesson in it which even the most cursory reader need not miss; viz., the vanity of mere wealth—a lesson which, to their credit be it said, the Jews of many generations did learn from this and other Scriptures, although of all races they seem to have most completely forgotten it now. For something like a thousand years—say, from about B.C. 500 to A.D. 500—the Jews did value a good man, a man who kept the Law, far above a rich man; and a man whom they held to be wise as well as good, a man who could teach the Law, far above the kings and princes of the earth—venerating their rabbis, however poor they might be, and they were often very poor, as the greatest and best and happiest of men.

The whole Psalm pours contempt on wealth, pursues it with the most incisive and biting irony. Its pictures of the man who devotes his whole life to amassing a treasure of which, when he takes the inevitable journey of death, he cannot carry so much as a single shekel with him; of the man who calls his lands after his own name, as if to cheat death itself and to secure a bastard immortality, perpetuating his name on earth while he himself perishes in Hades; and of the man who thinks it possible to bribe Death, and buy the power “to live on for ever,” are quick with a scorn beyond that of satire. They tremble with a fervid moral indignation and contempt for the folly which can mistake wealth for man’s chief good. Wealth is

not man's chief good : it is wrong and wicked, it is a profound and fatal violation of the Divine law and order, to make it the governing and supreme aim of life. For all who do that, even though they violate no human law, and even though they acquire but little of the wealth they seek, the Psalmist cherishes a pure unutterable scorn. To him they are losing the very form and status of men. They are flinging away their Divine birthright for a mess of pottage. They are sinking to the level of "the beasts that perish" (Verses 10, 12, 14, 20, by their repetitions, shew how strongly this thought had seized the Poet's mind); *i. e.* they are living as if they had no life but this, as if death were not, as if there were no land of light beyond the grave.

But there is one picture of them, still hidden from us by a thin veil of words, in which his scorn for these brutish persons culminates in a figure as terrible, perhaps, as any in the whole range of Scripture. In Verse 14 he depicts them as "*the sheep of death.*" The opening clauses of the Verse, rightly translated, run: "*Like sheep they are gathered to Hades; Death is their Shepherd*" (he who feeds or finds pasture for them; not he who "feeds on them"). What the Psalmist means is, that men who make wealth their ruling aim are not simply like the beasts that perish, but are in very deed the Sheep of Death; that it is Death whom they have chosen for their Shepherd, instead of God, the Author and Source of life; that it is Death who finds pasture for them while they live, and who, when they die, drives them to his fold in the unseen world. Think of it! *The Sheep of Death*—men following that grim Shadow to the darkness in

which it dwells ! and these the men who " bless their souls " (Verse 18), whom the world praises because they have done good to themselves, whose " sayings " the world quotes and approves after they have gone to their long dark home !

Was there ever a more grisly and dreadful metaphor ? And yet is it one whit too dreadful ? Is it not true that every man who trusts in riches, or longs for them, as his chief good, is pursuing death, not life, has taken for his shepherd " the dark Shadow feared of man," although he knows it not ? Can we not see in that very trust or longing the very brand of Death, the private and distinctive mark of that grim Shepherd ?

Man was not made to find the chief good and market of his time in gain, in growing rich, in founding families and calling lands after his own name. And any man who puts that first which God did not mean to be first, so far forfeits his life, so far comes under the dominion of death : for what is death save the subversion of the true order of life ? We truly live only as we fulfil the law of our being, as we live *for what* God meant us to live, and *as* He meant us to live. So far as we fall short of that, God ceases to be our Shepherd ; and of our own will and choice we become the Sheep of Death.

Or take the same thought in another form. Whatever is perishable falls under the power, stands within the province, of Death. Before it perishes, and so long as we have regard to its true uses, we may make it serve us in many ways, as the living tree draws nourishment from the fading leaf. But if we plunge our very souls into it, if we love it supremely, and pursue it more eagerly than aught beside ; if, in a

word, we *live* in the perishable, what are we to do when it perishes? We have lost our chief good, our chief aim; we have lost our very life. And if a living immortal man *will* set his affections, attach his best and highest interests, to that which he cannot take with him for more than a single brief stage of his long journey, what should brand him as a sheep of death if not that he has deliberately attached himself to the perishable and transient elements of a transient and perishable world, and made no provision for the world beyond the grave? When Death comes to *him*, he comes to his own. When Death drives him out of the world, where should he drive him save to his own fold?

The Sheep of Death! Who could not resent the name if it were applied to *him*? Go to any rich man rejoicing in his gains; tell him that on his stately mansion, his broad fields, his prosperous speculations, his accumulated treasures, there is hidden the fatal mark which proves him to be of the flock of Death; and, however wholly he may be living to himself, however little he may be doing for others, and though in comparison with wealth he despise wisdom, genius, righteousness, and would part with them all, if he had them, rather than lose his chief treasure, yet would he not be sincerely shocked, would he not indignantly resent the imputation, if at least he did not account you to be "the fool" which the Psalmist calls him? And yet, after all, *what* has he acquired, what is he living for, that will outlast death? what that he can carry beyond "the bourn"? To live in and for the perishable, is not that to perish?

Little or much, what does it matter? If a man could inherit or acquire the whole realm of nature, or

if he be content with a few houses and fields, or a few hundreds a year and what these will bring him, so long as he can be content to move within the limits of time and sense, and makes no provision for the spirit that is in him, or the eternity through which that spirit must endure, he is equally the bond-slave of Death. So long as he sows to the flesh, whether on a larger or a smaller scale, he can only reap the inevitable harvest of corruption. He is of those of whom it is written, "Like sheep they are gathered into Hades; for Death is their Shepherd."

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BRIEF NOTICE.

It is well known among Hebrew scholars that for many years—years amounting to an ordinary lifetime—*Dr. Franz Delitzsch*, to whom we owe some of our best commentaries on Old Testament Scriptures, has been engaged on a translation of *the New Testament into the Hebrew language*. It is not so well known as it should be that this his cherished task is now all but completed, and has already taken visible form. A volume containing the whole New Testament, rendered into choice Hebrew, lies before us. Nor is even this the first edition of his work. In the first he took the *Codex Sinaiticus* for his text, altering and correcting it from the other most ancient and authoritative MSS. His translation from this text he offered to the British and Foreign Bible Society, which has long desired a good modern rendering of the New Testament Scriptures for distribution among Hebrew-reading Jews. But the Society, not very wisely, clings tenaciously to the *Textus Receptus*. Hence it declined a translation made from a better and more ancient text, although the excellence of the translation and the necessity for it were demonstrated by the fact that in three months a large first edition was sold out. Bent on achieving his purpose, resolved on getting a good translation of the New Testament widely distributed among the seed of Abraham, *Dr. Delitzsch* accommodated himself to the self-defeating prejudice of the Bible Society, and based his second edition on the *Textus Receptus*, correcting it, however, between brackets, by the