

## THE SADDUCEES AND IMMORTALITY.

MARK XII. 18-27.

THE Sadducees are briefly described in this passage as persons who say that there is no resurrection. When a creed is characterized by its negations, we do not look for much originality or enthusiasm in its adherents, and the main interest we can have in it is to understand the moral temper to which its peculiar negations are congenial; in the present case, to understand the leaven of the Sadducees. It is not too misleading to speak of them as the rationalistic party among the Jews. They affected Greek culture, and emancipation from the bigotry and prejudices of their countrymen. They were friendly enough to religion as an institution, but did not understand it as a spirit and a life. Hence they maintained the law, but undervalued the prophets, and distrusted the larger faith and larger hopes which the progress of revelation had brought to Israel. They filled the high priesthood, and most of the dignified places in the Temple service, but were jealous of what they would have called superstition and fanaticism, of what others would call religious faith and earnestness. They had the political concerns of the people to manage, and this helped to foster a worldly, accommodating temper. On the whole they took life in a positivist spirit. "It is what we see," they seem to have said, "and we see it all. We will take it for all it is worth, but indulge no illusions about anything beyond." It is not surprising that such men came less in contact with Jesus than the Pharisees, nor can we wonder that when they did assail Him in the last days

of His life it was with an insolent mockery which showed how secure they were in their unbelief. He was no Sadducee. He believed in heaven, in the angels, in a blessed immortality, and they thought they could discomfit Him before the people.

They came and told the story of the seven brothers who had all in succession, in obedience to the Mosaic law, married the same woman, and they asked: In the resurrection, whose wife shall she be? The question is assumed to be unanswerable; and the argument implied is, that no doctrine can be believed which confronts us with such impossible situations. At first one is tempted not to take it seriously. We see that the difficulty is an artificial one; although the Sadducees in Matthew say, "There were *with us* seven brethren," we do not believe them. No doubt also it was a familiar one, and had been brought to its present perfection of difficulty and absurdity by constant improvement. Plainly, too, the Pharisees had found it an insoluble one, which had left the laugh in many a dispute on the Sadducean side. But the laugh is not much to have on your side, and in such a case only a Sadducee will want it. Where such great interests are involved as the character of God, and the nature and destiny of man, to appeal to ridicule is to show an utter incapacity for understanding. They are not things to be amused about.

Jesus, for His part, answers quite seriously. Do ye not therefore err? He says. The meaning of "therefore" (*διὰ τοῦτο*) has been disputed. It is often read in an anticipative sense, as if Jesus meant: Are you not misled for this reason, that you are ignorant of the Scriptures and of the power of God? Weiss says this has no analogy in the New Testament. However this may be, it is certainly more natural, and yields a deeper and more apposite meaning, to make the words retrospective. The very question of the Sadducees—the very fact that they have stated such a monstrous

case—shows, not that the life of the world to come is totally incredible, but that they have totally misconceived it. They have assumed that it must simply reproduce this life, and renew all its relations; whereas, according to Jesus, it is so constituted (ver. 25) that questions involving these relations, in certain aspects, can never arise there at all. Marriage has its roots in nature, has reference to the succession of generations on earth, is what it is, so far, because of man's mortality; but where there is no death, there is no marrying nor giving in marriage, and therefore the question is inept.

This, of course, is not to be misunderstood, as if in the life to come there would be no relation, or no peculiar relation, between those who have been intimately connected here. All it denies is that there will be any natural relation out of which the difficulty of the Sadducees could arise. But what of that? Even on earth, that which is merely natural ought to pass, and in every true marriage actually passes, into something spiritual. Husband and wife not only become one flesh, but one mind, one soul, one spirit. This relation, which has grown out of the other, or into which the other has been raised and transfigured, does not perish with it; on the contrary, it is capable of immortality and destined for it. The man and the woman who, to borrow St. Paul's words, "are not without each other in the Lord" here, will not be without each other in the Lord there. They will owe the completeness of their Christian life to each other even in the resurrection world. This truth, which cannot be touched by the vulgar puzzle of the Sadducees, ought to be noted in all its generality. A natural relation, whatever it may be—of husband and wife, of parent and child, of brothers and sisters in the same family—has no necessary permanence. All experience shows this. Such relations either lapse into nothingness,—a shocking phenomenon, but by no means rare,—or by God's blessing

are elevated into spiritual ones, which have the capacity and the promise of immortality in them. One of the best blessings which the faith in immortality brings is its hallowing influence on the natural affections. It begins at the very beginning that transformation of them which secures to us their joy for ever.

But Jesus not only declares, he explains the error of the Sadducees. They were the enlightened people of their day, and despised the believers as fanatics and obscurantists, but it was on their own side that the darkness lay. Doubt should be humble, and there is a severe reproof in the words of our Lord: Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God.

Here our Saviour clearly teaches that the Scriptures, meaning of course the Old Testament, contain a revelation of immortality. It may not lie on the surface, nor be visible to a careless or Sadducean reader, but it is there. If Jesus saw it, as He did, it is idle for verbal interpreters to say that they cannot find it in so many words. The very scripture that Jesus quotes has been the subject of pedantic comment. "Have ye not read in the book of Moses, at the bush, how God said to him, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not the God of the dead, but of the living." What kind of logic, it is said, have we here? Plainly the words mean, "I am He who *was* the God of Abraham," and then the argument for immortality is gone. To lay stress on the present tense (I *am* the God) is inadmissible, if for no other reason than that the verb is not expressed either in Greek or Hebrew idiom. But this line of objection is beside the mark. Jesus does not argue from the tenses, like a grammarian, but from the spiritual relations involved in the case; the revelation of immortality is made in this, that God has pledged Himself to man to be his God. The goodness and faithfulness of our Creator, and the value of our

human life to Him : it is there that the promise lies. Faith in immortality is an immediate inference from faith in God. Once we know what He is to man, and what man is to Him, eternal hope is born. Because He lives, they who are His shall live also. Can we exhaust the friendship of God in seventy years? Or, on the other hand, can we believe that He really loves us, takes pains to guide us, to teach us, to discipline our character, to raise us from natural into spiritual life, to make us His children, only that at the end of so short a time he may let souls so dear to Him, that have so loved Him and been so loved, that have cost so much, go out into the dark, and never miss them? No, God is not so loveless, and cannot be so bereaved. Neither death nor life will pluck His children out of His hand.

This is the spirit in which Jesus reads the Scriptures, and finds in them a revelation of immortality. And it is remarkable that wherever the great hope comes clearly to the surface in the Old Testament, it is in this spiritual connection. "Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him." When a man has walked with God, this is the only possible issue of his life. *God* takes him; not nature, not disease, not an accident, not death, but He whose friendship gave life the promise of eternity. And so repeatedly in the Psalms. "I am continually with Thee; Thou hast holden my right hand." Here is the experience of God's friendship, close, uninterrupted, and faithful, which works the supreme hope, and the hope shines out in what immediately follows. "Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory." The writer of these words argues precisely as Jesus does in the passage before us; he feels that what God is to man—God who is from everlasting to everlasting—is so great, so tender, so divine a thing, that even death cannot touch it. In the last darkness he can say, "I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me." We find, too, the same interpretation of the same sub-

ject in that magnificent passage in Hebrews (xi. 13-16), the boldest in expression of any in the New Testament, which speaks of the faith of the patriarchs. "Now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly; wherefore God is not ashamed of them, to be called their God, for He hath prepared for them a city." It is God, the writer means, whose faithful love, experienced all through this life, calls forth in the hearts of His people a hope which goes beyond life; it is God's present goodness which has the promise of an immeasurable, inexhaustible goodness as yet unseen. And God dare not frustrate the hope He has Himself inspired. He would be ashamed to be called our God, if He led His people to live and die in an expectation that was never to be fulfilled. Christ tells us, for His part, that He would not have suffered an illusory hope to root itself in His disciples' hearts. "In My Father's house are many mansions; *if it were not so, I would have told you.*" The whole argument for immortality is there; it is God who inspires the hope, and God is faithful.

We see, then, how strong it can be, and in a manner we see its limits. In its full Scripture sense it is the hope of the friends of God. It is they who are accounted worthy to obtain that world. Conceivably, immortality might be a dread as well as a hope; but only one who could wish there were no God could wish that death ended all. It is a hope to those who walk with God, who can say all their life long, "I am continually with Thee," and at the last, "Into Thy hands I commend my spirit." It is a hope to be kept alive in God's company by strenuous spiritual effort, by fighting the good fight, and purging out the leaven of the Sadducees. It is difficult only as everything is difficult which raises life to a higher level, and connects it more closely with God.

Blindness to the revelation made in the Scriptures, and in the faith and experience of God's people, is the first cause of the Sadducean denial. The other is ignorance of God's

power, or what a psalmist calls "limiting the Holy One of Israel." The Sadducees looked upon Nature and the visible constitution of things, and made them the measure of the resources of God. They saw signs of power indeed, but of power perfectly well defined. They saw birth and death in endless alternation; the generations of men, as of all living creatures, each continually displaced by the next; but in all the immensity of Nature they saw nothing abiding in one stay. Under present conditions, immortality was clearly impossible; and as they could not imagine other conditions congruous to such a conception, they denied it outright.

This is one of the most powerful sceptical motives at the present time. The current scientific conception of Nature, at least in its effect upon the imagination, is that of a self-contained system of forces, beyond which there is nothing. It not only illustrates, but defines the power of God. When we know it, we know the limits of His action, the possibilities within His reach. It is against this idea that Jesus enters His protest. All we see in Nature, all we ever can see, is, as Job says, but the outskirts of His ways: how small a whisper do we hear of Him! but the thunder of His power who can understand? Neither our senses, nor our imagination working on the materials supplied by sense, can measure the resources of God; His power transcends imagination and experience alike. Christians, indeed, ought not to be so easily imposed upon in this matter as Jews. If we know more of the immensity of Nature, we know more also of the power of God. The resurrection and exaltation of Jesus, and the revelation of a new mode of man's being in His glorified life, have permanently enlarged our conception of what God can do. This is so much the case that in the New Testament these two ideas are habitually connected: God Almighty is really a synonym of God that raiseth the dead. The Christian assurance of immortality is in the last resort this, that the *power* which worketh in us is the same with

which God wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places (Eph. i. 19, 20). A Christian, therefore, is not put out when he is told that the whole analogy of Nature is against immortality. The truth is obviously so, but it has nothing to do with his faith. He believes in immortality, on the one hand, because man is not merely a piece of Nature, but the friend of God, and on the other, because the power of God can sustain man's being in other modes than the present physical one—modes of which a glimpse at least has been given in the exaltation of Jesus.

We cannot help being struck with the repetition, in our Lord's closing words to the Sadducees, of the assertion that they are in error, greatly in error: *πολὺ πλανᾶσθε*. There is an indignant ring in this abrupt, emphatic iteration, and we feel through it how Jesus resented the degradation of God's character, and of man's nature and destiny, involved in such a question as the Sadducees had put, and in such a tone of mind as had contrived it. Jesus stood there in the world representing at once the goodness and faithfulness of God, and the supreme hope of humanity, ready within a few hours to lay down His life for God and man; and it wounded Him cruelly to meet men who made these high and priceless things a subject for ribald jesting. We are often told that feeling ought to be kept out of argument; and so it should be, except in cases where it is itself an argument, and the supreme one. There are subjects in which the touchstone of an argument is the impression it makes on a good and honest heart, and of these immortality is one. To argue it without feeling is to argue it without comprehension. To argue it without a deep impression of the greatness of man, and the power, the condescension, and the faithfulness of God, is to put the truth out of our reach. The indignant resentment of Jesus, as we catch it in these last words,—you are far astray indeed—shows us the pro-



found importance it had for Him. Schleiermacher thought there was such a thing as an impious laying claim to immortality. It may be that there is; but if we are in sympathy with Jesus, we will not agree with the extension of Schleiermacher's doctrine by a later theologian, viz., that there is such a thing as a pious resignation of immortality. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his Master.

JAMES DENNEY.

THE WESTERN TEXT OF THE GREEK  
TESTAMENT.

II.

IN dealing with the difficult *ἐπιβαλὼν ἔκλαιεν* of Mark xiv. 72, where D has *et coepit flere*, Mr. Harris suggests that the Latin is only intended to render *ἔκλαιεν*, and that this was turned back into Greek as *ἠρξάτο κλαιεν* in Δ, *ἐπιβαλῶν* being then extruded to keep up the symmetry. If this be the true explanation, it goes to show that not only the Latin versions but also the Syriac, the Theban and the Gothic have been derived from a source thus tampered with. In Acts xvii. 19 it is possible that *πυνηθόμενοι καὶ λέγοντες* may have come from *rogitantes et dicentes*, but there seems no reason to postulate a free rendering of the original *λέγοντες*, which surely needed no expansion, rather than an interpolation in the Greek. In any case we may notice (1) that the blunder *cogitantes* in D throws the supposed assimilation back a stage or two in the history of the text; (2) that an insertion just before of the words *μετα δε ημερας τινας* without any apparent motive shows that an interpolating hand has been at work on the passage. In Acts xxi. 39 Δ departs from all other MSS. by giving *συνχωρησαι* for *ἐπίτρεψον*; if this be a capricious variant, it may serve as a precedent for a good many more; there seems no reason to assume that it has come through *permitte*. The Latin