

our true life. If we take his words strictly, it might even seem that to him the remotest antiquity is the time of Tao without *its attributes* (Teh)—for it was only when Tao was lost that its attributes appeared—the time of spontaneity without spontaneous action, which is, I should suppose, about as near as one can get to the idea of pure potentiality, a primitive Nirvana from which we have fallen. At any rate, in this calling forth of good by its corresponding evil, Lao-tsze had before him a concrete case of the law of association of contradictories, and this law of thought no doubt had its own influence in Lao-tsze's thinking, suggesting undeveloped unity as origin and in a sense as goal, or justifying the adoption of such a suggestion. He had the law clearly before him, for in his second chapter we read, 'Existence and non-

existence give birth the one to the idea of the other; difficulty and ease produce the one the idea of the other: so with length and shortness, height and lowness, the musical notes and tones, the being before and behind. Therefore,' continues Lao-tsze in his abrupt way, 'therefore the Sage manages affairs without doing anything, and conveys his instructions without the use of speech.' The link of connexion is this. Anything positive is accompanied by its inevitable shadow. It is better, therefore, to abide in the indefinite, *i.e.* the instinctive life, and not advance to the definiteness of a life of deliberation and regulation. That this is the connexion is made more evident by Lao-tsze's next paragraph, which holds up for our imitation the quiet processes of nature.

(To be continued.)

The Great Text Commentary.

THE GREAT TEXTS OF REVELATION.

REVELATION XX. 12.

'And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne; and books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of the things which were written in the books, according to their works.'—R. V.

INTRODUCTION.

This verse belongs to the sixth of the visions described in these chapters. It is the vision of the Last Judgment. And although it occupies only five verses (20¹¹⁻¹⁵), it contains all that the Apocalyptic writer has to say about that great assize which is to follow the resurrection. There is no more impressive picture even in this book where such pictures abound. It says so little, and yet all is said. The throne, dazzling with the whiteness of the Divine purity; the Judge, reverently indicated, but not named; the whole material fabric of the universe gone, fled, so that there are not even rocks which men may call upon to fall on them; 'the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne,' and, besides, nothing but the books in which their works are written, and that other book, the Book of Life.¹

¹ C. A. Scott, *The Book of the Revelation*, p. 298.

The subject is the Judgment of the Dead. It may be treated in four parts: (1) the subjects of the judgment; (2) the ground of the judgment; (3) the evidence; (4) the acquittal.

I.

THE SUBJECTS OF THE JUDGMENT.

'I saw the dead,' says the Seer, 'the great and the small, standing before the throne.' It is often said that this judgment is a judgment of the wicked only, and therefore only for condemnation. But the context suggests that the judgment is extended to all humanity; and only in that sense can the wording of the passage itself be taken. The phrase 'the great and the small,' which is of frequent occurrence in the Apocalypse, is a synonym for all men (except where it is expressly limited, 11¹⁸).² 'The dead, small and great, will stand before God; *all* will stand, all the righteous, as well as all the wicked, from the Apostles downwards. St. Paul is very express upon the fact that he himself will be judged, "He that judgeth me is the Lord" (1 Co 4⁴). "Who will render to every man according to his deeds: to them who

² *Ibid.* p. 299.

by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life" (Rom 2^{6, 7}). "For we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body" (2 Co 5¹⁰). Again, Rom 14¹⁰, "We shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ." "The Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom" (2 Ti 4¹).¹

Why are only the dead mentioned? Why not the living? Swete thinks it is because they form so insignificant a minority; but he suggests also that the omission may be due to the fact that the keen interest which the first generation had felt in the bearing of the Parousia upon the living (1 Th 4^{13, 14}) had abated before the end of the century.

The dead are all there, whatever their condition on earth may have been, 'from the Pro-consul, as that official was often reminded by Christians who appeared before him, down to the meanest slave.'

'In that great judgment-day the difference of sizes among human lives, of which we make so much, passes away, and all human beings, in simple virtue of their human quality, are called to face the everlasting righteousness. The child and the greybeard, the scholar and the boor, however their lives may have been separated here, they come together there. It is upon the moral ground that the most separated souls must always meet. All may be good: all may be bad; therefore before Him whose nature is the decisive touchstone of goodness and badness in every nature which is laid before it all, souls of all the generations of mankind may be assembled. The only place where all can meet, and every soul claim its relationship with every other soul, is before the throne of God. The Father's presence alone furnishes the meeting-place for all the children, regardless of differences of age or wisdom.'²

'What is meant by standing before God? We are apt to picture to ourselves a great dramatic scene, host beyond host, rank behind rank, the millions who have lived upon the earth, all standing crowded together in the indescribable presence of One who looks not merely at the mass, but at the individual, and sees through the whole life and character of every single soul. The picture is sublime, and it is what the words of St. John are intended to suggest. But we must get behind the picture to its meaning. The picture must describe not one scene only, but the whole nature and condition of the everlasting life. The souls of men in the eternal world are always "standing before God." And what does that mean? We understand at once if we consider that that before which a man stands is the standard, or test, or source of judgment for his life. Every soul that counts itself capable of judgment and responsibility stands in some presence by which the nature of its judgment is

decreed. The higher the presence, the loftier and greater, though often the more oppressed and anxious, is the life. A weak man, who wants to shirk the seriousness and anxiety of life, goes down into some lower chamber and stands before some baser judge, whose standard will be less exacting. A strong, ambitious man presses up from judgment-room to judgment-room, and is not satisfied with meeting any standard perfectly so long as there is any higher standard which he has not faced.'³

II.

THE GROUND OF THE JUDGMENT.

'The dead were judged . . . according to their works.' So it is a judgment according to works, according to the things *done* in the body, which no doubt includes the things spoken and thought. And a judgment according to works is clearly taught in all the Scriptures—in the Gospels (Mt 16²⁷ and parallels), by Paul (Ro 14^{10, 12}, 1 Co 4⁵, 2 Co 5¹⁰, Gal 6⁷), and John (5²⁹, Rev 20^{12, 13}). But there is also another doctrine taught—that salvation is granted to faith, and to faith only. How are these two doctrines to be reconciled?

The fundamental grace, says Godet, is that of the forgiveness of sins, and it presupposes no other moral condition than faith only. But this immense act of grace is no sooner granted by God, and accepted by man, than there results from it a new task, with the responsibility which attaches to it. This is the work of sanctification; the renewal of the life in the likeness of Christ. And this is the *work*, according to which the believer will one day be judged. Godet recalls by way of illustration the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant.⁴

And this is in accordance with reason and experience. In this world men are judged according to their works. I believe it to be true, says Dr. Salmon, that Nature never forgives: the utmost indulgence she bestows is often to postpone the execution of her penalty. In this life the rewards for what is well done are duly paid, the punishment for what is done ill strictly exacted. And what the Bible says is that the same principle is followed in the future life.⁵

At the same time, judgments in this life are not always unerring, or always passed on good grounds; and St. John is probably making a

¹ M. F. Sadler, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, p. 259.

² Phillips Brooks, *Twenty Sermons*, p. 60.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

⁴ F. Godet, *Studies on the New Testament*, p. 179.

⁵ G. Salmon, in *Contemporary Pulpit*, 2nd ser. i. 140.

contrast as well as a comparison. He knows that Cæsar has a throne, and that men are made great or small by standing before that throne, but he objects to the ground upon which judgment is given. Men are given their places without reference to character; they are not judged according to their works. Their position is often determined by arbitrary circumstances—family, name, wealth, influence. He sees men stand before a new throne, before a tribunal guided by other principles. Many of the first become last, and many of the last become first. 'Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, were at the top of the list in the old society; in the new they are very near the end of it—only saved from being quite at the end by the imputation of insanity. And, in the place of honour which was held by Tiberius and Caligula and Nero, stands many a despised slave, many a deformed outcast—outcast by reason of his deformity, many a poor invalid considered unfit for survival, and whom the old world's chariot had passed; contemptuous, by.'¹

'A friend of mine who had travelled in America told me that he once heard Colonel Ingersoll lecture on the Last Judgment. That blasphemous atheist described with all the brilliant sarcasm which he possesses the last dread scene, and pictured different characters coming up to receive their sentence. First there came one who had ever helped his neighbour, who in life had done all that he could to make the world brighter and happier; and Jesus, the Supreme Judge, asked him if he believed the story of Eve and the rib; and on replying in the negative, sentenced him to eternal damnation; and so on with a number of characters. Then there came a defalcating bank director, who had broken the heart of the widow and ruined the orphan by his dishonesty and hypocrisy; but he believed this story, and so was rewarded with eternal happiness. Ingersoll's caricature is more than a caricature; it is a wilful lie.'²

III.

THE EVIDENCE.

'And books were opened.' The imagery is evidently suggested by Daniel's vision of judgment (7¹⁰): 'Thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the judgment was set, and the books were opened.' The idea of a special book of life is to be found in the same prophet (12¹): 'At the same time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book'; but this figure

can be traced much further back. You will remember the passionate intercession of Moses for his people (Ex 32³²): 'If thou wilt not forgive their sin, blot me, I pray thee, out of the book that thou hast written.' And not to speak of some passages in the prophets, which speak of 'those that are written among the living' (Is 4³, Ezk 13⁹), one of the imprecations in the 69th Psalm (v. 28) is, 'Let them be blotted out of the book of life, and not be written with the righteous.' These Old Testament passages illustrate the meaning of our Lord's promise (Rev 3⁵) to him that overcometh: 'I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels.' St. John is not the only New Testament writer who has adopted this language. St. Luke (10²⁰) records our Lord's words to the seventy disciples when they returned successful from their mission, 'In this rejoice not that the spirits are subject unto you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.' The Epistle to the Hebrews (12²³) speaks of 'the general assembly and church of the firstborn which are written in heaven'; and in the Epistle to the Philippians (4³) St. Paul has the very phrase, 'Clement also, with other of my fellow-labourers, whose names are in the book of life.'³

Before considering what books are opened, notice that they *are* opened, that it is an open judgment. 'This,' says Mozley, 'is the great characteristic of future judgment. It does not leave the subject of punishment uncertain, so that a man does not know what he is punished for. All is open and plain dealing. We are told the reason of everything. We naturally connect a future judgment with a revelation of sin. The court is an open court; the proceedings are proclaimed, the charges are published, and the dead are judged out of the things that are written in the books. It would seem to be a kind of *Magna Charta* of the next world, that nothing shall be done without making known the grounds on which it is done. It is a transparent world; justice is a public justice, and proclaims its sentence upon the house-tops. The whole congregation of God's creatures is made a witness to it—confirms and ratifies the great work of divine reward and punishment, and stamps the impress of conscience upon it.'⁴

¹ G. Matheson, *Sidelights from Patmos*, p. 238.

² H. S. Lunn, in *Christian World Pulpit*, xxxvii. 279.

³ G. Salmon, in *The Contemporary Pulpit*, p. 129.

⁴ J. B. Mozley, *Sermons Parochial and Occasional*, p. 337.

The books that are opened may be taken as the records of man's works wherever they may be found, although Augustine is probably right when he says that there is supposed to be a separate record for every man.

I. The Book of Nature.—Paul says: 'The invisible things of God are clearly seen, being understood (or interpreted) by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead, so that they (the heathen) are without excuse.' Yet Paganism had its birth and grew up under the glowing presence of God, to the wretched moral extremity portrayed by history, and of which things it is a shame to speak. Pantheism, which makes God and nature one, robbing him of personality after infecting him with sin; Deism, which smites away providence and makes the world a God-forsaken machine; Atheism, the conclusion of 'the fool'; Agnosticism, the label of the man who claims to know nothing about any God,—must all be judged for their godless reputation by this book of nature, which protests by day and by night against their degrading doctrines.¹

'You know that trees, by virtue of certain marks inscribed upon the inner surface of them, reveal the number of years they have been growing. Here, say, is a majestic oak; it has stood the breezes of a thousand years; at last the lightning flash, the sweep of the hurricane, or the stroke of the woodman's axe fells it and snaps it in twain. What does the eye catch sight of? A series of circles marked upon the inner surface of the trunk, each circle lying outside the other, of different degrees of thickness, and different shades of colour. And what a story have we there! The number of those circles marked upon the trunk tells the number of years that oak has been growing. Here is one circle thinner than its neighbour, of less decided colour—it teaches us that that year, in the history of the oak, was a year of drought, when the windows of heaven refused to open and the floods declined to come, and the life was checked and stunted. Side by side with it is another, thicker than its fellows, of more decided colour. That tells us that that year in the history of the tree was a year of the fulness of moisture, when the windows of heaven were opened, and the floods came, and the life of the tree waxed strong and lusty. All these years the oak has stood with all these secrets in its heart. At last the time of discovery comes. Then the instructed eye can see that all the time the oak has been writing out upon itself for us to read the history of years.'²

2. The Book of Revelation.—This is not the Apocalypse simply, but the whole Bible. For the whole Bible is an apocalypse or revelation. Our

¹ A. W. Ringland, in *The Homiletic Review*, xvii. 37.

² S. D. F. Salmond, in *The Christian World Pulpit*, xxxiv. 265.

Lord said, 'He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.' That word is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament we find the Law. Its sum is 'Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.' In the New Testament we find the gospel. Its sum is 'Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.'³

3. The Book of Memory.—A perfect memory will accompany judgment. This will not seem incredible to those who reflect upon the phenomena of the decays and revivals of memory in this life. Read the chapter in Locke (*On the Understanding*) to which he gives the name of 'Retention,' A section in that chapter is headed 'Ideas fade in the Memory.' They leave no more footsteps, says the philosopher, than shadows flying over fields of corn. They are like children of our youth who die before us—'like the tombs to which we are approaching, where, though the brass and marble remain, yet the inscriptions are effaced by time, and the imagery fades away'—like pictures laid on in fading colours. Yet there are revivals of memory, to which Locke does not refer, which are more wonderful by far. The fields of memory at some magic touch give back again all the lights and shadows which have ever swept across their surface. The children of memory rise again from their graves, and wander in without warning into the once familiar rooms which they have long ceased to visit. The canvas of memory is retouched by some artist whose skill restores the tints which had faded away. The colours of memory are like those in Egyptian halls, long concealed by sand, but fresh as if they had just come from the painter's hand when the drifted heaps are blown away.⁴

'Some accident often brings up to our remembrance events or conversations of times long gone by, which had been absent from our minds for years. A statement made by the late Admiral Beaufort has been often quoted. He was rescued from drowning and reanimated after he had for some time lost consciousness. He stated that in the last few moments of consciousness a host of long-buried memories had suddenly started into life, and that he seemed in these few moments to peruse the history of his whole past life. I think it is too much to assume, as has sometimes been done, that this is the ordinary experience of drowning persons, but we cannot

³ C. Jerdan, *Pastures of Tender Grass*, p. 424.

⁴ W. Alexander, *The Great Question*, p. 96.

doubt that the book of our memories contains stored up materials for the account we have to render, and that when God brings each of us into judgment, He can make our own recollections bear witness to the truth of the secrets disclosed, and force us to own that it is we ourselves, and no others, whose history is laid open.¹

4. **The Book of Conscience.**—But the book of memory is by itself not a source of judgment. There is a very common misconception on this point. It is quite safe to affirm that any man who has been able to do a bad deed without a twinge will, other things being equal, be able to *remember* it without a twinge. Surely perception is at least as vivid as memory; if the actual sight of evil has failed to move, the mere remembrance of evil will move still less. Why is it, then, that in the dawning of moral conviction men shrink from memory—that even a Newman cries, ‘Remember not past years’? It is because another book has been opened—the book of conscience. If the book of memory were opened alone, it would be morally powerless, valueless; its power lies in the volume below. What, then, is the influence which, according to St. John, is to open this underlying volume—this book of conscience? He tells us what it is in the preceding verse quite explicitly: ‘I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them.’ That which opens the book of conscience is the vision of the great white throne—the sight of an ideal of superhuman purity. Man will know his sin by Christ, not Christ by his sin; nothing but the blaze of the throne can teach him his own night.²

Isaiah had a vision which revealed to him in the same moment the holiness of God and his own sinfulness.

‘Let me give you one instance of the revival of what may be called the memory of conscience.

‘Some sin committed years ago, long veiled over, perhaps deeply repented, perhaps really forgotten, turns up, by some extraordinary combination, in the infinite variety of human concerns, in a court of law. You are placed in the witness-box for torture worse than that of a wretch broken upon the wheel. An insolent master of the science of sarcasm plunges his steel into your soul, and turns it round in the wound until you writhe in agony. Then comes a question calling for exact recollection on your part of certain apparently minute circumstances, which intensify your shame. You say, and perhaps with truth, ‘I cannot remember.’

Then the master of the torture turns upon you, and fiercely says, ‘You do not remember! I will make you remember.’ He is as good as his word. The night which you thought had faded away into the oblivion of eternity; the letter which you had tossed into the fire, that great keeper of secrets;—you shall recall the exact point at which you noted the hand upon the clock, you shall respell every line scrawled with a trembling hand upon the paper. The book shall be opened for you.’³

5. **The Book of Character.**—This last book, which is the most difficult to read here, will be as plain to read as the others there. It is a book in two parts. One part is the record of all that has gone to make up our own character. The other is the record of all the influence we have had on the character of others.

It may be said that impressions are so numerous and conflicting that they can yield no distinct picture hereafter. But we must not limit the capacity of the soul in this respect, in the presence of greater mysteries. In some sense, it may present, as it were, a continually fresh surface. A most apt illustration waits upon our thought drawn from the palimpsests found in the monasteries of Italy; parchments that, centuries ago, were inscribed with the history or laws of heathen Rome, the edicts of persecuting emperors, or the annals of conquest. When the Church arose, the same parchments were used again to record the legends and prayers of the saints. Later still, they were put to further use in rehearsing the speculations of the schoolmen, or the revival of letters, yet presenting but one written surface. But modern science has learned to uncover these overlaid writings one after another, finding upon one surface the speculations of learning, the prayers of the Church, and the blasphemies of paganism. And so it may be with the tablets of the soul, written over and over again, but no writing ever effaced, they wait for the master-hand that shall uncover them to be read of all. What are these Apocalyptic books but records of our works printed upon our hearts? What are the books opened but man opened to himself?⁴

Science has been showing us of late something of the force residing in the actinic rays of light, by which it transfers impressions from one object to another. Wherever light goes, it carries and leaves images. The trees mirror one another, and opposing mountains wear each the likeness of the other upon their rocky breasts. These fine properties in nature suggest corresponding probabilities in man. It is poor logic to accept these fresh miracles of nature that are being so often

¹ G. Salmon, in *Contemporary Pulpit*, 2nd ser., i. 133.

² G. Matheson, *Sidelights from Patmos*, p. 242.

³ W. Alexander, *The Great Question*, p. 97.

⁴ T. T. Munger, *The Freedom of Faith*, p. 353.

revealed, and hold that we have compassed man and his possibilities. If such a process as this is going on in the dull substances without, how much more surely is it going on in the soul. All contact leaves its mark.¹

LOST DAYS.

The lost days of my life until to-day,
 What were they, could I see them on the street
 Lie as they fell? Would they be ears of wheat
 Sown once for food but trodden into clay?
 Or golden coins squandered and still to pay?
 Or drops of blood dabbling the guilty feet?
 Or such spilt water as in dreams must cheat
 The undying throats of Hell, athirst alway?
 I do not see them here; but after death
 God knows I know the faces I shall see,
 Each one a murdered self, with low last breath,
 'I am thyself,—what hast thou done to me?'
 'And I—and I—thyself,' (lo! each one saith,)
 'And thou thyself to all eternity!'

DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI
 (*House of Life*, Sonnet 86).

IV.

THE BOOK OF LIFE.

THE best account of the ideas associated with the Book of Life will be found in an article under that title in the second volume of the *ENCYCLOPÆDIA OF RELIGION AND ETHICS*. In that article Dr. Alfred Jeremias of Leipzig shows that the idea of heavenly books is present in the religion of Babylonia, Egypt, Persia, India, China, and Islam. In the mythology of Babylon, reference is often made to the 'tables of destiny,' which probably refer to two heavenly tablets, on one of which were written the commands of the gods, on the other the records of the life of men. The idea of a reckoning kept in heaven of men's deeds frequently occurs in the Apocryphal literature. The suggestion of such a reckoning may have come from the roll or register of citizens, such as the register of the citizens of Jerusalem referred to in

¹ T. T. Munger, *The Freedom of Faith*, p. 353.

Is 4⁸. Such a roll God Himself keeps of the names of His own people. Moses refers to it when he says, 'And if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written' (Ex 32³²). In Ps 79²⁸ it is called the 'book of life.' In Rev 13⁸ it becomes the Lamb's book of life.

It is as the Lamb's book of life that it is referred to in our text. The book contains the names of those who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. After all the books on which the works of men have been recorded are opened, the Book of Life is opened. Upon the record of the other books, what can a man hope for but condemnation? But those whose names are found in the Book of Life have been purchased unto God through the precious blood of the Lamb. There is therefore now no condemnation to them.

It is true Moses spoke of the possibility of being blotted out of the book of life; and St. Paul himself insists that faith must work by love—'Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity' (2 Ti 2¹⁹).

JUDGMENT.

Almightie Judge, how shall poor wretches brook
 Thy dreadfull look,
 Able a heart of iron to appall,
 When Thou shalt call
 For ev'ry man's peculiar book?
 What others mean to do I know not well;
 Yet I heare tell
 That some will turn Thee to some leaves therein
 So void of sinne,
 That they in merit shall excell.
 But I resolve, when Thou shalt call for mine,
 That to decline,
 And thrust a Testament into Thy hand:
 Let that be scann'd,
 There Thou shalt finde my faults are Thine.
 GEORGE HERBERT, *The Temple*.