

ARTICLE VII.

HEAVENLY NON-RECOGNITION.

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“EYE hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him,” are the words in which the Apostle to the Gentiles paraphrases the utterance of Isaiah. The mysterious truth of these and other biblical declarations regarding the future life is attested by the instincts, as well as the reason, of all devout men. Christians recoil from the realism of Swedenborg and his sentimental imitators hardly less than from the stern hypothesis of Michael Wigglesworth and some old theologians, that the saved, in their devout appreciation of the goodness and justice of God, will view with complacency, if not gratification, the sufferings of the lost. Neither picture satisfies the moral consciousness.

Yet we all project the associations and relationships of this world into that which is to come, and our faith is strengthened by the hope that we shall ere long rejoin those who are gone before. The recognition of friends in heaven is one of the most strongly cherished of spiritual expectations, and deservedly so within due limitations. Far be it from me to weaken its influence in any heart, or to deprive any mourner of solid consolation. It must appear evident to every thoughtful person, however, that there is another side to the question. Unless Universalism be literal truth, we must miss, as well as find, some of those we have loved on earth, should we be so favored as to reach the abode of the righteous.

Death, as some claim, is the mere passage of a narrow

river, and so we reach the farther bank unchanged, save for the dropping of our fleshly burden. If this be true, we cannot see why the absence of those we hoped to meet, especially if accompanied by the knowledge that their sorrows are more than negative, should not disturb, and perhaps overbalance, our joys. George Macdonald, whose humanitarian fervor is often too much for his orthodoxy, and logical consistency as well, has drawn a striking, and if irreverent, not intentionally profane, picture of the working of this disappointment. One of his characters has a father, a dissolute man, though the subject of many prayers, who is supposed to be dead. The man's strongly Calvinistic mother can see no good for him in eternity; but her grandson, with what Tennyson would call "the larger hope," exclaims (we translate broad Scotch into every-day English):

"Well, if I were in there [heaven], the very first night I sat down with the rest of them I should rise up and say,—that is, if the Master at the head of the table did not bid me sit down,—'Brothers and sisters, all of ye hearken to me for a moment, and, O Lord, if I speak wrongfully, just take my speech from me, and I will sit dumb and rebuked. We are all here by grace and not by merit, save His. But it is straining and tearing at my heart to think of those who are down there. Perhaps you can bear them. I cannot. Now we have no merit, and they have no merit, and why are we here and they there? But we are washed clean and innocent now, and when no burden of our sins remains upon ourselves, it seems to me that we might bear some of the sins of them that have over many to carry. I call upon every one of you that has a friend or neighbor down yonder, to rise up and taste nothing more until we go to the foot of the throne and pray the Lord to let us go and do as the Master did before us, and bear their griefs and carry their sorrows down in hell there; if, perchance, they may repent and get remission of their sins, and come up here with us at last, and sit down with us at this table, all through the merits of our Saviour Jesus Christ at the head of the table there.'"

As we have said, the author is not intentionally profane, but he is, in reality, none the less extravagant and unscriptural because his sentimentalism is accompanied by strong protestations of Christian loyalty. If obdurate sinners on earth would not believe a messenger from the

dead, after having rejected Moses and the prophets, we could have little hope that a mission from heaven would subdue their rebellion. Especially would it prove a failure if undertaken by saints still so full of earthly alloy and earthly conceit as to think that their philanthropy and self-devotion could conquer where Divine grace felt there was no opportunity for exercise. Its very conception, indeed, involves the germs of insubordination, and insubordination first made hell a reality.

I have given too much room, perhaps, to a mere rhapsody, but it embodies what many men and women have felt. We cannot always say from the heart, "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth unto him right," when one has been taken from us, much loved, but apparently destitute of true Christian faith. It is an old saying attributed to various eminent ministers, — and all, and many more, may have echoed it, — "When I get to heaven I expect to be surprised at finding many whom I never thought I should see there, and at missing many others whom I confidently believed I should meet." There is sense in this. Man, the wisest of the race included, must largely judge by outward appearances, but God reads the heart. Thus the police justice sends to the work-house for several months the drunken laborer who beats his wife, drives his children out of doors, and breaks the windows of his house. Yet the poor wretch may be far less deserving of many stripes than the educated, polished, and wholly heartless man of wealth whose debaucheries are veiled, and who kills his wife by the slow torture of neglect and unfaithfulness. If he who hates his brother, but refrains from killing him through fear of the consequences or lack of opportunity, is a murderer in the estimation of infinite wisdom; may not the lives which are rendered incomplete or are wholly wrecked, largely through circumstances, be differently judged at the bar of God and that of the earthly magistrate? Conscience warns every sinner that the plea of hereditary or social

influences is insufficient to justify him. Yet it may afford palliation. Of this, however, Omniscience, and not the interested and crime-blunted offender, is the judge. Dr. Holmes, in unconscious and witty recognition of what we are accustomed to call natural depravity, says that the training of children will do much for them, but, to be fully effectual, it should be begun two hundred years before they are born. So, the form, at least, of many a man's wrong-doing is largely dependent on ancestral transgressions. God, we may be sure, will make all due allowance for this, whatever human critics or tribunals may do. The real issue is the voluntary sin or sinfulness, of which deeds of selfishness or of positive violence or stupid neglect may be the outward expression.

Let us take another case. A little girl is rescued from the slums and a drunken father or mother, by a Christian family. She is washed and clothed; is sent to day and Sunday-school, and is beginning to learn how to use this life and prepare for that which is to come. At this juncture the priest interposes. The wretched parents are made to believe that their child is becoming a heretic. She is taken "home" again, is surrounded by evil influences, perhaps forced into intemperance and other vices. If she falls, and dies an outcast, God alone knows just how much her consent was involved in the process of degradation. And so it is regarding the drawbacks of every individual's situation. If we are all held accountable for our uncompleted transgressions, we shall be credited, so to speak, with the good we would have done had not outer influences prevented. This consideration throws light upon the state of the heathen, and offers consolation regarding that large class who are weak rather than wicked. The Judge of all the earth will surely do right, and insanity may often be the incitement to a life of reckless vice, as well as its consequence.

The point just considered has a bearing on my subject, and so I have dwelt upon it with considerable minuteness,

but the main issue is the compatibility of perfect happiness in heaven with the retention of those kindly emotions which give humanity its dignity and emphasize its correspondence with the divine image. If we enter heaven with even the holiest and purest of our present interests in their concrete form, it is not easy to see how we can be happy there if any who are or have been dear to us are among the lost. If we are utterly oblivious of all that has passed on earth, heaven becomes to our minds a kind of Nirvâna, or George Eliot's choir invisible, too impersonal to be interesting or inspiring. We cannot accept Universalism and the awful warnings of Christ at the same time. We want neither Buddhistic nor Agnostic impersonalism: what then of heaven?

The text quoted at the opening of this paper admonishes us that the life to come cannot be surveyed by mortal eyes. Another passage tells us also that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Where all is spiritual, and clouded in mystery as well, we must tread with cautious and reverent steps. Our reasoning must be analogical, for most of the known facts are on one side. Whether the changes worked by the article of death are great or small in all respects, they are certainly great in their release of the intelligent principle from the physical body. The man who has passed from the earthly to the heavenly life differs from those he has left on earth, in kind as well as in degree. The living man of fifty years, and still more the best preserved octogenarian, is very different from the boy of forty or seventy years back, or from his grandchildren; but the disparity is one of degree. He has grown out of his youth, and his descendants will grow into his maturity if their lives are protracted. Every adult remembers with amusement and wonder how certain sports, exercises, or occupations delighted him when young. Now he has not the remotest fancy for them, and can hardly conceive how even a child can enjoy them. Old men and women who were cronies when young, but

have long been separated, are surprised, on meeting, to find how thoroughly they have grown apart from each other. They feel no aversion, but they soon discern that they have nothing in common.

We are animals as well as spirits, and many of our relations, even those deemed most sacred, are largely alloyed with merely physical and earthly considerations. We live in one town and leave it for another; perhaps with regret at parting from so many friends. We soon find, however, that we can duplicate most of our associates in our new place of residence; and, as time passes on, and motives of policy assert the necessity of concentrating our attention on the present, the dearest interests of the past are likely to become forgotten. As Bulwer-Lytton says, absence is the surest test of friendship, killing mere liking and strengthening genuine affection.

The same may be true of the more intimate relations of parent and child, of husband and wife. If there is not the sure link of a common Christian hope, the nearest relatives are united only in part, and in their lower and distinctly mortal natures. A vast moral gulf yawns between the regenerate and the unregenerate, of which the searching light of eternity alone can reveal the breadth and depth. The wife who goes her little round of household cares, whose whole mind and soul are taken up with thinking what shall we eat, what shall we drink, and wherewithal shall we clothed; the husband who meets her with talk about the dinner, the new horse, or the proposed summer trip,—this couple, whose whole intercourse is bounded by their material life, the prospects of their children, their settlement, their social position, of the earth, earthy, have no "acquaintance" upon which to base a recognition in heaven, supposing that they should both get there at last. Their dinners have gone by, their houses and lands and horses have passed away, the spirit which they were "of" is gone. If one or the other is born again, these old things have passed away. If both become new creatures

in Christ Jesus, this only is the starting-point of the life eternal.

The tender love of a mother is, in certain features, akin to that of the lower animals, instinctive rather than rational. It is ennobled by its alliance with the spiritual, but, like the moon, shines by borrowed light. It may become Christ-like when faith overcomes maternal solicitude, and the child is resigned to martyrdom. It is noble in a very high degree when patriotism induces sacrifices only less holy than those of religion.

Marriage may be a type of Christ's union with the church, but it is often a union on lower motives even than those of the most secular poet's ideal. At best, our mixed and confused natures, in which *ψυχή* and *σάρξ* are generally too much for *πνεῦμα*, work in an unpleasantly variable way. If our relatives do not share our Christian convictions, we are inclined to rest content in hoping that they will ere long do so, and make the expectation an excuse for our inaction. When we find that the most earnest Christians are wont to confess their apathy in this direction, we have a sure proof that their affection is largely mingled with secular and physical influences.

Nothing more surely works a division between mere earthly friendships than the entrance of one person into a Christian life and the persistent refusal of his late companion to follow his example, or at least offer him respectful sympathy. Former intimates thus become virtually dead to each other, and the deadness is in exact proportion to the convert's zeal and the worldling's obduracy. Separations hardly less striking, though based upon much less creditable grounds, have occurred where one friend has grown rich or learned while the other has remained poor or illiterate. In both instances, however, it is shown that profound attachments can alone survive the shocks of change, and profound attachments must be based on thorough unity in the dominant tastes and affections.

Applying these facts to the separations of the future

life, and bearing in mind that flesh and blood cannot enter the abode of the blessed, it appears probable that the radical transformation of life through a change of body and of worlds must work far greater modifications in our characters and opinions, without affecting our identity, than the increase of earthly years, the adoption of new views, or removal from one locality to another. If there can be no complete friendship, even on earth, between the Christian and the unbeliever, much less could there be in heaven; where there is no marrying or giving in marriage, and where earthly connections, like the earthly body, have passed away forever.

We quit much more than our fleshly tabernacles in crossing the river of death. We find ourselves not, as often occurs here, surrounded by relatives less congenial to us than those with whom we have no ties of blood. Principle is ever stronger than pedigree, and the higher the principle, the closer the association between those who have maintained it. As, in our Rebellion, the brother hesitated not to maintain the honor of his country's flag because his brother was among its assailants, but was willing to leave and lose all, that an unbroken Union might be preserved; so the redeemed saint, the successful warrior in his Maker's cause, will perfectly, as does his still militant fellow-soldier imperfectly, forsake all else and think only of the Leader and his cause. Our memories of our youth come back to us in old age transmuted and enlightened by the experience of years. So on the heavenly shore will our recollections of earth be modified by influences and surroundings which, we are told, are inconceivable by mortal senses or human intellect. Our transfer to heaven with all our earthly prejudices, interests, and associations; with every thing, in short, save our bodies, would be a mere perpetuation of the present world, a heaven only in name.

Such considerations as we have here outlined have suggested themselves to others. Sir James Mackintosh says:

“The dissimilarity between Socrates at his death, and Socrates in a future state, ten thousand years after death, and ten thousand times wiser and better, is so very great, that to call these two beings by the same name is rather a consequence of the imperfection of language than of exact views in philosophy. There is no practical identity. The Socrates of Elysium can feel no interest in recollecting what befell the Socrates at Athens. He is infinitely more removed from his former state than Newton was in this world from his infancy.”

There may be a lurking fallacy in this citation, akin to that of the sceptic who affirms that our world is too small for the notice of God. As the microscope shows, the Infinite is as glorious in the little as in the great. The greatest of philosophers is finite, however, and will always remain finite, and earthly affairs can remain fixed in his sympathies and memories, only as interpreted by the experiences of the life eternal.

The foregoing conclusions relate exclusively to the subjects of the new birth. These are assured, first by faith and then by fruition, that the Judge of all the earth will do right. With those who have passed from this life, carrying with them only earthly natures, not even undeveloped faith, but positive faithlessness, no such transformation can occur. Unless there is something remedial in their discipline—and for this only the dilution of the solemn utterances of our Lord with our own theories can supply a hope—the laws of their new abode must work out the principles of their former being. Without hope for the future, and without comfort in the present, recollections of misused and neglected opportunities must haunt the lost. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus is very suggestive on this point.