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WOODSTOCK, N. B., FRIDAY, APRIL 5, 1907.

WHOLE No. 3133

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The Basis of Faith In the Future Life.

EASTER SERMON PREACHED IN THE MAIN STREET BAPTIST CHURCH BY THE PASTOR, REV. W. C. KEIRSTEAD, PH. D.

I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. God is not the God of the dead but of the living.—Matt. 22:32.

This is the reply of Jesus to an ironical question of the Sadducees. Jesus is engaged in one of several controversies which he waged on this day with the leaders of the nation. Possibly, the leaders had said to themselves, "This man has achieved his fame as an able teacher among the uncultured and indiscriminating minds of Galilee, but when he meets us students and scholars and lawyers and thinkers of the metropolis, he will soon come to understand his limitations."

At any rate, Jesus is now in the temple, and teaching with authority and power. More than that, the people are much impressed, and regard him as a prophet. The leaders of the different parties unite in common cause against him and seek by ridicule and subtle argument to humiliate and silence him. They bring forward to this unschooled man of Galilee all the critical questions and the unsolved problems which had been debated by the most celebrated rabbis of the nation. In the present case the Sadducees proposed their favorite objection to immortality. They say, "Master, Moses tells us that if a man die having no children his brother shall marry his wife and raise up seed unto his brother. Now there were with us seven brethren, and the first married and deceased, and having no seed, left his wife unto his brother, and in like manner the second and the third unto the seventh, and after them all the woman died also. In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife shall she be of the seven? for they all had her." I can imagine when they finished this question, they waited with a sardonic smile of triumph. For to them, the question was unanswerable. They had proposed it many times before to the discomfiture of the Pharisees, who could only reply that under such conditions she would be the wife of the first husband.

The Same Old Question. But do we not have in this question, in a form to suit the age, to be sure, the one great objection to the doctrine of immortality, the objection which in different forms arises anew in every generation? Expressed in our own language the question is this: If life continues in the future at all, it can only be under the same conditions and relations that exist here, and yet it is not possible to carry forward these conditions and relations into a future life. Modern science, with its knowledge of physiological psychology, raises this objection even more strongly to-day than even before. Dr. Osler, in his Harvard lecture; Science and Immortality, expresses it as follows: "The association of life in all phases with organization, the association of a gradation of intelligence with increasing complexity of organization, the failure of the development of intelligence with an arrest in cerebral growth in the child, the slow decay of mind with changes in the brain, the absolute dependence of the higher mental attributes upon definite structures, the instantaneous loss of consciousness when the blood supply is cut off from the higher centers—these facts give pause to the student when he tries to think of intelligence apart from organization."

In other words, the soul cannot exist apart from the body. Personality cannot develop apart from the social relations, and yet, it seems impossible to carry these into the future; for the body decays and disintegrates and human relations and institutions pass away. The objection, then, brought by these learned and subtle thinkers to the doctrine of immortality is far stronger and weightier than the spirit in which it was propounded would lead us to suppose.

Jesus Presents Only Answer.

But if the objection were weighty the answer is weightier still. I take it that Jesus presents here the only answer, and I believe these utterances are the deepest thoughts ever expressed on the subject of immortality. Jesus does not seek to give his faith in immortality a scientific or philosophic grounding, but he brings it back to the religious experience out of which it arises and on which it rests. The untaught prophet of Galilee answers these hair-splitting

thinkers of the nation, "Ye err because you do not really know the scriptures or the power of God."

Now these men believed in God as He revealed himself to Moses, and they accepted the pentateuch as his inspired word. Jesus replies, "if you really believe in God then you have no right to limit his power, and to assert that present relations are necessary to the life in the future. God is greater than you think, and man is of more value than you ascribe to him. God has a higher life for him, and the present relations are not adequate for that future and more exalted life. In the resurrection men are to be the sons of God and equal to the angels and 'in heaven they neither marry nor are given in marriage.' Marriage may be the highest and most sacred institution of our present existence, and the home the most adequate symbol of the future life, and yet like all earth's institutions it is imperfect, and so transient. Browning makes the dying Pompilia say:

Marriage on earth seems such a counterfeit,

More imitation of the inimitable: In heaven we have the real and true and sure.

'Tis there they neither marry nor are given

In marriage but are as the angels: right,

Oh how right that is, how like Jesus Christ

To say that Marriage-making for the earth,

With gold so much, birth, power, reputation so much,

Or beauty, youth so much, in lack of these:

Be as the angels rather, who, apart Know themselves into one, are found at length

Married, but marry never, no, nor give in marriage.

Jesus denies the premises of the Sadducees. He asserts that when one believes in a God, who is infinite in power and love, he can well leave it in his hands to devise conditions and relations, higher and more adequate for the exalted future life. And it seems to me, the words of Jesus meet the same objection when it is urged to-day. Our astronomers are now telling us that the law of gravitation may not be operative between the most distant stars, or, at least, that electric or other forces may so counteract its influence that it is not possible to regard it as effective. Recently in a book entitled Man's Place in the Universe, an astronomer sought to demonstrate that life did

not exist on any other body except the earth. He pointed out that on no other planet or star could one find all the conditions necessary for the existence of life. But his scientific critics said he had taken too much for granted, and they affirmed that other bodies might have different forms of life where our conditions did not obtain. And if that be the opinion of scientific men, when one has already come to believe in a God of omnipotent love and wisdom, it is not impossible to-day, to believe that He is able to cause life to go on in the future apart from the organization and relation in which it arises and develops. So the answer of Jesus is still pertinent, "Ye do err, not knowing the power of God."

Faith Rests Upon God's Character.

But Jesus, when he had disposed of the objection, passes on to assert the reason for a faith in a future life. He says, "Have ye not read what was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead but of the living." Some have been able to find here merely a questionable forcing of the verb tense. I say questionable because the tense of the original does not have the same meaning as the equivalent English. According to them the point of Jesus is this: Centuries after the death of Abraham God said to Moses, I am, not I was, but I am the God of Abraham; therefore Abraham and Isaac and Jacob were living with God in the time of Moses. This would also presuppose that both accepted the Mosiac account as infallibly inspired. But I find more than this in the reply of Jesus. I think He means that his religious experience is a fellowship with a living God, and guarantees to him that the God in whom he trusts will never allow that conscious fellowship to cease. He means that when religious faith becomes conscious of its nature and of the nature of the God which is its object, it carries with it as an inalienable constituent of that faith which has reached its highest, the hope of immortality. If Abraham and Isaac and Jacob live in the memory and heart and thought of God, then they live as well in loving fellowship with Him. God does not say to Moses, I am He in whom your illustrious ancestors, now dead and no more, have trusted. Moses could be inspired to the noblest service, the most implicit trust and the most perfect fellowship if he realized that God is a living God and will never forsake, no, not even in death, those who put their trust in Him. A God who allowed death to sever his fellowship; a God whose believers died, who could not, or would not, save from death, would be an impotent God, He would be of the dead and so virtually a dead God. Thus for Jesus, the hope of immortality, is implied in his faith in God and

rests for support upon the character of God.

Old Testament is Silent.

That Jesus placed his finger on the source and basis of the hope in the future life, is seen as we watch the emergence of this hope in the life of the Hebrews as we find it reflected in the Old Testament scriptures. When we turn to this book we are impressed with its silence in regard to the life beyond. Take, for example, David's lament for Saul. As G. A. Smith says, "the verses of this noble elegy throb with joy and life. They are inspired with a feeling for greatness and the spirit of generous forgiveness. But none of them light one spark of the life to come. The poetry, the reverence, the love of the elegy re perfect but it breathes no hope. If we turn to the psalms we find the same silence." "For in death there is no remembrance of thee. In the grave who shall give thee thanks? The dead praise not Jehovah, neither any that go down into silence." If we turn to that remarkable 90th Psalm, which we read so often, we find there the brevity of life described and a petition that the divine favor may rest upon the remaining days and that our work may be established, but not one word is said about the life beyond. So long as the nation was the unit and Jehovah was God of the nation then they were satisfied with corporate or national immortality, but when the nation was broken up, and the individual came to realize his own personality and moral responsibility, when it was revealed to him that God had written his covenant in his heart, when religion became the personal relation of the individual to his God, then the hope of immortality emerged. It was then when he realized that God loved him and made him his own and that God was omnipotent and eternal that he desired immortality, and God could no longer be to his soul what he had been if he were to abandon him at death.

I have set Jehovah always before me.

Because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved,

Therefore my heart is glad,

For thou wilt not abandon my life to shame,

Neither wilt thou suffer thy pious ones to see corruption.

Thou wilt make me to know the path of life;

In thy presence is fullness of joy.

At thy right hand are pleasures evermore.

In another Psalm we see how the pious soul starting from the problem of evil, when his feet well night slipped, is led to believe that God will give a future life to vindicate his righteousness. He cries out: "Nevertheless I am continually with thee; Thou hast holden me with thy right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy (Continued on eighth page.)

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