

THE HOME OF GOD'S ELECT.

What Will Be the Employments of the Dwellers There?

AGES OF SERVICE AND PRAISE

The Teachings of Reason and Revelation on an Interesting and Important Question, as Interpreted by Revs. L. G. Stevens, B. D., R. Wilson, Ph. D., Costello, L. G. Macneil, M. A., D. Macneil, D. D., Elder T. H. Capp, G. Bruce, E. A. Robert French and A. MacDougall, Ph. D.—Attractive Ideas and Eloquent Words.

The Holy Scriptures, accepted by Christians as a revelation of God and His Son Jesus Christ, while very full and broad in dealing with the being and occupations of the life that now is, are singularly and no doubt divinely and purposely reticent concerning both the employments and the state of being of those who enter into the eternal life. As if to rebuke a prurient curiosity and perhaps because otherwise we should be blinded and bewildered, the Bible leaves the door both of heaven and of hell, only very partially open, ajar—but as we peep through we see enough both to stimulate our most ecstatic hopes and to incite our abjectest fears. Jesus has told us of "many mansions," but He has not revealed their form or places. Other masters have been minute, explicit in their descriptions of the future heaven; but the word of God plainly tells us, "It doth not yet appear what we shall be."

The Scriptures minutely describe the resurrection both of Lazarus and of Jesus. Yet we have no account of where they had been during those days of absence from the body, and of what they had seen and done. And if, as is possible, they were questioned by interested and curious friends, or by incredulous enemies, in the language of Tennyson's "In Memoriam," "there lives no record of reply." The question before us deals with heaven—not so much whether a place or condition of soul or both—whether we can determine the being and employments of the redeemed. I may say, however, in passing, that I believe heaven is a real substantial place—not that God is not everywhere, inhabiting eternity and infinite space, dwelling in every diverse and distant part of His universe—but heaven is the place where God specially dwells, and from which radiate as from a centre, the permeating and all-embracing influences of His power and love. "That where I am, there ye may be also." "They will be done as it is in heaven."

But no less is heaven a state, a condition of soul. When the ambitious wife of Zebedee came to Christ with her two equally ambitious sons, desiring for them a place at His right and left hand in His (to their mind earthly) kingdom, He answered (correcting their mistaken notions of time and place) "To sit on my right hand and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father." Christ's heaven, while it involves locality and external occupations, necessitates a definite preparedness of soul. There is great force and beauty in that prayer of Frances Ridley Havergal: "Prepare me, O Lord, for the things thou art preparing for me." Heaven being not only a place, but a condition of soul, follows there must be preparedness of soul. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." With all reverence be it said, God cannot, from His very nature and being, admit a bad, impure man into His abode. We fairly realize this thought both of place and condition, when we say "It is a very heaven upon earth," or "a hell upon earth."

It all within is right, All without is well. If all within is wrong, All without is hell.

Of a dear departed friend who himself enjoyed and caused others to share with him the blessed antepasts of heaven, a philosopher and poet thus wrote:

Of that good man let this just praise be given, Heaven was in him, before he was in heaven.

"Many walk," says the apostle, "of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ; whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things. For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ; who shall change our vile or humiliating, corruptible body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body." In this far-reaching and comprehensive passage of Scripture

we have heaven referred to both as a place "from whence," and a condition of "mind"—while both the occupation, "citizenship," and state of being—"glorious body"—of the redeemed, are emphasized.

The being and employment of the redeemed! If a puzzling inquiry, or rather one which cannot fully be answered, it is certainly a most fascinating subject to every thoughtful, investigating mind. We are curious, and reasonably so, to know what kind of bodies we shall have, and what we are to do with them. As we consign to God's care our dearly loved ones, fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, sweet little children in their freshness and innocence, the son or daughter with budding promise of brilliant prospects, the aged and careworn and wrinkled—all the blessed dead who have died in the Lord—we naturally and longingly think of where they now are, and what they are, and what they are doing. What are they, and what are they doing? "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." "There is a natural body and there is a spiritual body." We have here an immaterial soul and a "terrestrial" body—we shall have there an immaterial soul and a "celestial" body. Those who insist that the resurrection means the restoration of gross matter are always getting back to the idea of flesh and blood—an idea at which the best spiritual instincts revolt. The whole analogy of Scripture, the requirements of science and the demands of the religious nature are satisfied not in the "vile body," but in the "glorious body." "The glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is quite another." And unless that celestial state is to be a condition just like this terrestrial one, where being will be repeated under exactly the same circumstances, we can have no possible use for the earthly body—it would be a clog and hindrance. "As we have borne the image of the earthy," so, then and there, "we shall bear the image of the heavenly."

"When He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." Very little is said in the gospels of Christ's resurrection body; but in its power to appear and disappear, to seem tangible, and yet able to penetrate space, "the doors being shut," its swiftness of transit from place to place, its sudden and various phases of appearance—from all this we can gain some conception of its startling power and limitless possibilities.

But in such an ethereal spiritual body, will the individual preserve his identity? Yes. In His resurrection body Christ preserved His identity and was instantly recognized, with one or two exceptions—and then it was not that His body was suddenly changed, but purposely "their eyes were helden that they should not know Him." Just how our identity will be maintained, it is impossible for us to answer. "He shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself." Whatever the change, "when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption," and however, "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye"—"then shall I know even as also I am known." Moses and Elias and John and Paul, "the glorious company of the apostles, the goodly fellowship of the prophets, the noble army of martyrs, the holy church throughout all the world"—each and every one will be identified, recognized; not a line that is characteristic of the real personality will be effaced. King David will go not only to the "innumerable company of angels" and of the redeemed,—he will go to his loved and lost boy and will find him—"I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me." And next to meeting our blessed Saviour, how many of us will wish to go directly past the millions of millions of departed ones since the death of Adam, to some dear friend, to exchange our sad earthly farewell (if we were granted that privilege) for a triumphant and heavenly congratulation; or perhaps, in the very first moments of the eternal life, to seek from some departed one, now reunited to us, a long prayed for and satisfying forgiveness.

But there remains a further interesting question to discuss briefly—What shall we do in heaven?—what is the employment of the redeemed? That little piece of childhood poetry—containing at least one line of bad theology—

I want to be an angel, (which we can never be, however much we wish) And with the angels stand, A crown upon my forehead, A harp within my hand,

has only tended to emphasize from our earliest years that false conception that heaven is what the witty infidel has characterized "a great singing school." To the man who has no ear for music, for the concord of sweet sounds, the idea of spending an eternity in hymning and harping praises to God, brings unconscious—perhaps conscious—dissatisfaction.

But he does not rightly interpret the scriptures, in their frequent references to the music of heaven as a means of praising and worshipping God. The redeemed will sing hallelujahs, not in order that they may be happy, but because of their happiness—from gratitude and joy, out of the abundance of the heart the lips will sing. Music, as we well know, in the animal and human creation—as it will be in the heavenly—is the symbol of triumph and happiness. Untuneful and dumb here on earth, the very man to whom the idea of

heavenly music is utterly repellent, may, with his celestial, heavenly body, with its new and enlarged capacities for worshipping God, and in the way God may choose—that very man may be a leader among the jubilant choirs who shall sing Jehovah's praise. One of the many employments of the redeemed will be this one so emphasized in Scripture—praising God.

Another will be the acquisition of knowledge.

"Then," says the scholarly St. Paul, who would not count himself "to have apprehended," pressing on to the goal, thirsting yet more and more for new fields of investigation and study, especially if it concerned the being and character of God, "Then shall I know, even as also I am known." Heaven will be a glorious place for the scholar, for the intellectually able and earnest, to all who thirst for knowledge and improvement. And in the many mansions of the Father's House, the distant regions of creation, worlds and systems stretching out into the boundless immensity of space, and in the countless multitudes of beings who inhabit them—we may believe that ample provision will be made, and that eternally, for the widest and most far-reaching excursions of intellect. Heaven will be an eternally progressive life, of eternally expanding knowledge. This idea of progress in knowledge is thus beautifully expressed by a poet, addressing a dear departed friend, on the first anniversary of his death:

A year of progress in the lore That's only learned in heaven; thy mind Unclogged of clay and free to soar, Hath left the realms of doubt behind, And wondrous things which finite thought In vain essayed to solve, appear To thy untasked inquiries, fraught With explanation strangely clear. Thy reason owns no forced control, As held it here in needful thrall, God's mysteries court thy questioning soul, And thou mayest search and know them all.

But neither praise nor search for knowledge constitutes the chief employment of the redeemed—we must seek for something more comprehensive, something which includes these and every other employment.

A good and pious bishop, in the early days of the church, at a conference of his clergy, introduced for their meditation the subject of heaven. Beginning with the eldest he asked them to sum up each one in a single verse of Scripture, their idea of heaven, that feature in its life and work which appeared to them of greatest interest. The first said, the absence of sorrow: "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain." The next replied, the thought of rest: "There remaineth therefore a rest for the people of God." Another, who had narrowly escaped death by a terrible shipwreck, said, no terrifying suspense, no element of treachery: "There shall be no more sea." The next, who had spent a large part of his early life a wanderer on the face of the earth, replied: "No more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God." Another said, the vision and companionship of the Saviour: "These are they that follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth." Another, praise: "And I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps and they sang as it were a new song before the throne." The next said that to him the joy of heaven would be reunion with the loved and lost: "I shall go to him, but he shall not come to me." The aged bishop, turning to the last and youngest of the clergy present, asked what to him was the most interesting thought about heaven. With a glowing face he quoted that deeply significant verse from the last chapter of the Bible: "His servants shall serve Him."

Is not that a noble—the noblest—idea of heaven—loving, faithful, obedient service? Jesus was the servant of God as well as the Son of God. His meat and drink was, and always will be, to do the will of the Father that sent Him. He was sent once on a message to our earth, as He may have been sent on many messages to other worlds since that far-off Bethlehem day. He took upon Himself the form of a servant. He prayed and taught us to pray. "They will be done in earth as it is in heaven." All the employments of the redeemed are summed up in this thought of service. It is the "greatest" of all employments. The Master—Himself a servant—said: "He that is greatest shall be your servant." And the welcoming salutation and introduction into the ranks of the redeemed is to be: "Well done, good and faithful servant." "And when all things shall be subdued unto Him, then shall the Son also Himself be subject unto Him, that God may be all in all." It will be a noble, willing, obedient, happy employment,—one whose ramifications will be infinite, and whose service everlasting. Death will be a change—and but a change—of mere environments. The soul will withdraw from the gross material organism. "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was"—to its kindred elements, to recombine and perform the same office for yet other souls, yet unborn—"and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it."

Above all dread, hope, hate or fear, I lives, all passionate and pure; An age shall fleet like earthly year, Its years as moments shall endure. Away, away, without a wing, Over all, through all, its thoughts shall fly— A glorious and eternal thing, Forgetting what it was to die.

L. G. STEVENS.

FROM GLORY UNTO GLORY.

An Eternity of Growth in Knowledge of Nature, Providence and Grace.

If the language of the Bible is to be interpreted in accordance with well-established rules, and the terms and phrases employed therein are to be accepted in their generally received sense, then heaven is a place of active and varied occupations. Such is not the popular idea, but the popular idea of many things is not the correct one. The Bible is appealed to in defence of opinions that cannot be sustained by a tittle of evidence, and theories are propounded in the most dogmatic manner, which, when examined in the light of reason and revelation, are found to be without foundation, and like

The baseless fabric of a vision, Leaves not a trace behind.

Generally speaking, heaven is regarded as a place of rest and quiet, of release from the ills and burdens of life, of freedom from care and anxiety, a place where temptation and trial are unknown, and the losses, crosses, disappointments and discouragements of earth are never experienced. All this is doubtless true, and to the worn and wearied children of men is a comfort and a joy. Did it offer no more than this, it would be well worth seeking, and would amply repay us for all the effort necessary to secure it. If religion, by mitigating the miseries of this life, is worthy our best endeavors, it is surely much more so in their entire removal in the life to come. But heaven is more than a negation; it has also its positive side, and, not content with promising immunity from all evil, it speaks in enrapturing terms of its glorified inhabitants.

While all are agreed that the future life will be occupied in praising God, there is great diversity of opinion as to the manner in which this delightful duty will be discharged. The notion that God will ever be seated on a throne, high and lifted up, and around him will be gathered the millions of the redeemed, whose unceasing song will be: "Glory, hallelujah," is certainly one not sustained by the sober study of Scripture. Such service would be unworthy the worshippers, the place, and the purpose for which it would be engaged in, as well as contrary to the genius of the human mind and the usage of the church. Sameness in our services here would soon be ruinous, the best sermon ever listened to would become dull and uninteresting if often repeated, and experience and observation prove beyond a question that exercises to be attractive must be varied. To this universal rule even heaven itself will furnish no exception, for the sweet singer of Israel informs us that while, "In Thy presence is fulness of joy, at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore."

As we expect to spend eternity in the company of pure and holy beings from this and other portions of the Almighty's empire, it is every way fit and proper for us to learn all we can about our future home, the character of those with whom we are forever to associate, and the exercises in which we shall engage. We have no reason to believe that death will make any material change in either our mental or moral constitution, the chain of our existence will not be broken, what we will be at death we will be immediately after death, and the difference will not be in us but in our surroundings. In this life mind is ever active, the powers of the soul are in perpetual play, and to remain long in any one condition or mood is simply an impossibility. If then there is in us this living, acting principle, this demand for occupation, this spirit of inquiry and search for knowledge, and if death will not destroy this feeling, then it follows that the Author of our being must and will provide such employments as will best meet the requirements of the case.

The Bible enjoins upon us here and now intelligent service, and to aid us in our work we bring the results of our research in the varied departments of Nature, Providence and Grace. Nature is doubtless a grand study, and he who mingles in her mute ministrations and listens to the language of her unbreathing things cannot fail to be a wiser and a better man. But, after all, how little do we know even of our own earth, of its origin, its age and its destiny, and many are the questions that have been asked, but have never been answered, and never will be on this side the grave. The best and purest of the sons of Adam, from the days of Moses and David until now, have turned their eyes inquiringly towards the heavens, and have looked long and wistfully at these stupendous orbs that roll in silent grandeur in the unmeasurable expanse, and have wondered what they were, whether or not they were the homes of intelligent beings, and whether they were good and holy as the angels, or sinful and rebellious as the children of earth. Is this ignorance to be perpetuated? Are we to be kept in the dark concerning these things forever? Will the earnest questionings of the devout geologist and astronomer never be answered, and will the problems that perplex and puzzle them never be solved? Is honest inquiry never to be gratified, and is the patient and prayerful student of Nature to be doomed to eternal disappointment? And will the angels who sang at creation's birth, and who so gladly minister to our comfort and safety now, be silent then, and refuse to tell us what they know of such subjects? No! A thousand times, No!

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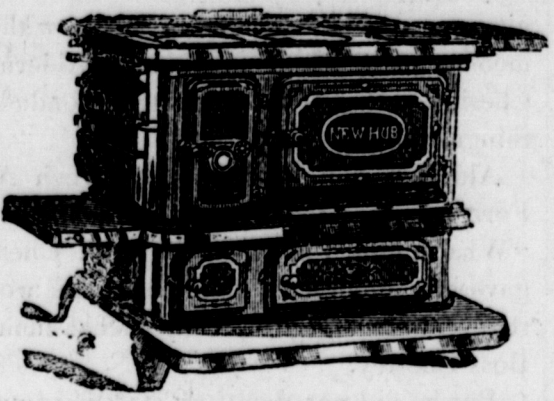
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