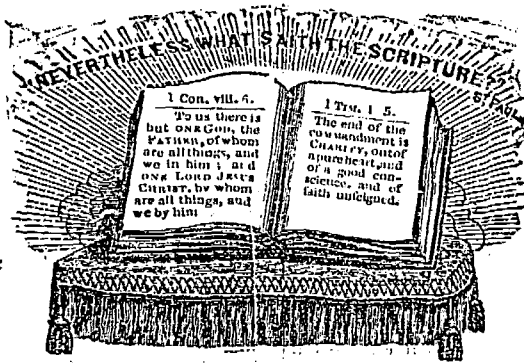


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CHRISTIANITY A UNIVERSAL RELIGION.

BY A. P. PEABODY.

Several reasons might be adduced which go to prove that Christianity is designed and adapted to become a Universal Religion. Among others is its adaption to all the varieties of external situation in which man can be placed.

The fanciful systems of Greek and Roman mythology could be embraced only by a nation of painters, sculptors, and architects. The loathsome objects of Egyptian reverence none but a resident of Egypt could worship. The Hindoo must live near enough to the Ganges to wash in its purifying stream, or he lives and dies in his sins. The worshipper of the god who requires the slaughter of flocks and herds can live only in a pastoral region; nor could a tribe of Nomades embrace a religion which demands the presentation of first-fruits or frequent libations of wine and oil. The Jewish religion commanded all its professors to appear at the temple in Jerusalem three times a year, and to maintain perpetually the daily, weekly, and annual sacrifices; and now that Jerusalem is deserted, that the temple is level with the ground, that the daily oblation has ceased, there is not a man living who, as to religion, has a right to call himself a Jew. Nor have the votaries of these several systems ever professed to regard them as of universal design or adaptation. They have not even attributed anything like a universal supremacy to their gods. The Egyptian would not have ascribed a civil war in Italy to his pet crocodile, nor would the Roman have supposed Jupiter much concerned in a change of dynasty on the throne of the Ptolemies. The Hindoo owns Juggernaut as his country's and his own god; but thinks that a more powerful deity, even his tutelary divinity, gave to the Englishman his Indian conquests. It is doubtful whether even the ancient Jews believed their God Jehovah the only God, or whether they did not rather regard him as the greatest of gods.

But Christ revealed a God who protects and governs, not this or that nation, but all men,—a God of impartial, universal benevolence,—a God, who is everywhere present, and to whom acceptable worship may rise from every portion of the world. The simple rites which the gospel enjoins demand no peculiar soil or climate or state of society. Wherever there is a well, fountain, or river, there may the infant or the convert be initiated into the church of Christ. Wherever fellow-disciples can meet for a social repast, there may the Saviour's dying love be commemorated. Christianity enjoins no expensive or burdensome offering. The sympathizing heart, and, where it can be extended, the liberal hand, are its only acceptable oblations. It demands no pilgrimages, no pompous assemblies or solitary fasts. Wherever the Christian is, his God is with him, around him, within him. And whether by day or night, in the closet or the market-place, in silence or amid confusion, whenever and wherever he would offer praise or prayer, the supreme Object of praise, the Hearer of prayer will accept and answer. The gospel imposes no fatiguing and unprofitable round of ceremonies. Every man, who is industrious and faithful in his avocation, honest in his dealings, pure in his conversation, lives in the constant observance of the Christian ritual. It enjoins obedience to no difficult and complex code of laws. Its great law of love,—love to God and man,—all can understand, all can keep, all must keep if they would be happy. Its privileges, too, may be enjoyed by all of every nation, in every place. The divine protection is extended over all. The sun of God's favour may enlighten every mind. The influences of his Spirit may pervade and sanctify every soul. The love of Jesus may be shed abroad in every heart. And wherever the Christian dies, whether on sea or on land, whether beneath the torrid rays of the tropical sun or on the ice-bound shore of the Arctic ocean, whether in the bosom of his family or among strangers, Christ, the resurrection and the life, is waiting to receive him to heaven. In fine, the rites of

Christianity may be observed, its duties discharged, and its privileges enjoyed, wherever be the home, the sojourn, or the death-bed of the believer. And this characteristic of our religion, as we have already observed, is one of those circumstances which eminently fit it to become a universal religion.

SECRET SINS.

Taking into view the insidious nature of secret sins, remembering how much less we are protected against them, how fearful are the consequences they bring in their train, how plainly they are denounced by the word of God, how important is it for us to keep it constantly in our remembrance, that we are to watch for them, if we would guard against them. If we would keep our hearts with diligence, if we would "perfect holiness," so far as it is permitted us in this trial state, we must do it, not in the fear of man, but in the fear of God. If we would truly judge ourselves that we may not be judged, then must we make conscience the vicegerent of the Most High within our breasts, and learn to look upon ourselves in the same light that God himself looketh upon us. The question, "Is my sin open or secret?" will not be one that we shall for a single moment entertain; but our simple inquiry must be, "Wherein do I transgress? What duties to my neighbour, to God, to my own soul, have I omitted? What law of God have I broken? What temper, feeling or thought have I allowed to influence me, that is inconsistent with the spirit of Christ and the injunctions of the Gospel?" In our hours of sober thought we shall endeavor to ascertain our real condition, and not satisfy ourselves with the inquiry, "How are we in the world's esteem?"

If you would know the value and importance of thus communing with your own hearts, I would have you think, my friends, in how short a time the estimation of the world will be a matter of comparatively small importance to any one of you. How little will it avail any one of us in that solemn hour when the soul is passing from its earthly probation to meet the award of the Judge of all the earth, how little will it avail that we have been successful in hiding our sins from the observation of the world. How flimsy the veil will appear that has covered up our moral deformity from the view of those with whom we have sojourned during the short pilgrimage of the present life, as we reflect that the hour is at hand when every secret shall be brought to light, every hidden purpose made known to the saints that dwell in the courts of heaven. At the tribunal to which we shall all be summoned, that judgment-seat of Christ before which, as the Scriptures assure us, we must all appear, it will not be the voices of our fellow-men that will produce our condemnation or our acquittal, but the voice of our own conscience must testify whether we have done good or evil. The sound of human applause, however loudly it may have swelled our praise ere we passed the boundaries of time, will bring no cheering consolation to the soul that has been desolated by secret sin, and must now depart from the presence of the Lord. The remembrance of it will be but a hollow mockery of our anguish of spirit. If we have lived and acted only that we may be seen of men, verily we have had our reward. The man who sins in secret while he bears himself before the world with an air of seeming goodness, may think that he is successful in imposing upon his fellow-men; but upon whom does he more cruelly impose than upon himself? Who so cheated as his own soul? Who shall suffer such consequences of his deception as he himself must endure? The whited sepulchre, beautiful to the outward view but within filled with "dead men's bones and all uncleanness," is but a faint emblem of his condition. Behold those whited walls thrown down, and the corruption which they covered up all laid bare, and you see the condition of the hypocrite in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men's hearts.

I repeat it then, my friends, think not lightly of secret sins. Be not satisfied with your spiritual condition because the condemnation of the world has not fallen upon you. It is only when your hearts do not condemn you, that you have any just grounds for confidence before God. It is only when your consciences are free, and you can say in truth before Him who looketh upon the heart, that it has been your effort to live and act constantly as in God's presence and in reference to your accountability to him, that you have diligently sought the paths of wisdom, that you have made Jesus the great exemplar of your life, it is only then that you may feel that you have done what you could to fulfil the commands of God and answer the ends of your being.—*Rev. Jonathan Cole.*

[From the Christian Citizen.]

THE RECOGNITION OF FRIENDS IN HEAVEN.

The following passages are from a letter addressed to a friend of the transcriber, who, being a few months since favored with the occasional privilege of social intercourse with Dr. Thomas Dick, ventured to request from him his views on a subject relative to which she felt a deep interest. As a tacit privilege was gained from the venerated writer to extend its perusal, it is believed he will not consider the use now made of these extracts, any compromise of epistolary confidence.

ACROS.

As to the question "whether friends and relatives recognize each other in Heaven," it would require a long dissertation instead of a short letter to enter fully into the subject. In few words we might argue, that if the disciples Peter, James, and John recognized Moses and Elijah, (whom they had never seen before,) on the Mount of Transfiguration,—if the apostle Paul shall recognize his converts as his crown of rejoicing in the day of the Lord Jesus,—and if our knowledge in heaven shall not be diminished, but increased to an indefinite extent, then we may rationally conclude that the redeemed who knew and had intercourse with each other on earth, shall also recognize each other in the heavenly world; though the *modus* or manner in which they will be enabled to form this recognition is beyond our power at present to describe. But we need not doubt that it is within the power and intelligence of the Divine Being to confer faculties and perceptions for this purpose; and if such endowments are requisite for our complete happiness in that state, we need not doubt, from a consideration of the Divine benevolence, that they will actually be furnished.

Were I to enter particularly on this subject, I might first consider the presumptions respecting it which reason suggests. I might endeavor to trace the sentiments which have prevailed in all ages and nations in reference to this question. In looking beyond the grave, all nations have connected with that state the expectation of *conscious* and *renewed* intercourse with their earthly companions. Socrates delighted himself in the prospect of conversing with Orpheus, Musæus, Hesiod, and Homer. Cicero exulted in an anticipated reunion with Cato amidst the assembly of the great and good. The Gentoo widow commits herself to the flames, that she may be replaced with her husband in the other world; and the mother in the Pacific Islands mourning for her children, comforts herself with the belief, that after her own death, she shall meet them again. In such concurrencies of opinion among mankind we have a presumption suggested by the light of nature, in support of the opinion that friends in a future world recognize each other.

It surely must appear extremely probable, that persons who have been trained on earth in one common faith, and who have walked in affection and unity, should not meet as perfect strangers to each other in the mansions of their common Father in the world above. Having pursued in harmony and love the same path of daily obedience, and having been instrumental in instructing, comforting, and edifying each other on earth, it surely is highly improbable that they should lose all

recollection of such Christian communion and personal fellowship, as that they should be deprived of the pleasure of recounting to each other "all the ways in which Jehovah led them in this wilderness." The saints will, we may suppose, carry along with them to the heavenly regions all the moral and intellectual faculties they now possess, and by which they were united on earth; and we cannot but suppose that when these faculties are expanded and invigorated in the heavenly world, they will enjoy the satisfaction of comparing their feeble and limited efforts, while in this sublunary region, with the ardors of love which will glow in heaven, and with the expansive range which the intellectual powers will take in that state of perfect vision and enjoyment.

The next source of argument on this subject would be derived from the sacred Scriptures. In Matt. xxvii. 52, it is stated that at the time of the Saviour's resurrection "the graves were opened, and many bodies of the saints arose, and came out of their graves, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many." Now it can scarcely be supposed that these saints will be deprived of all remembrance that they were distinguished from among the general mass of mankind as the first trophies of the Redeemer's conquest over the grave,—or that the friends whom they visited will never again have an opportunity of exchanging communications with those who once visited them in so extraordinary a manner.

The same inference may be drawn from such passages as the following: "In my Father's house are many mansions: I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go I will come again and receive you to myself," &c. These and similar passages seem to imply that Christ's disciples would be again united as part of one great family. For if he had told them that they should never recognize one another more, when they came to the heavenly mansions, instead of comforting their hearts, it would have filled them with deep sorrow.

Matt. viii. 11.—"Many shall come from the east and from the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven." Will Abraham not know Isaac or Jacob, or will those who sit down with them not know that they are associated with these venerable characters? It can hardly be supposed: for we are told by Luke, "Ye shall see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob," &c. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus appears almost decisive on this point. The rich man is represented as recognizing both Abraham and Lazarus, as recollecting the circumstances of his former state, and Abraham appears to these recollections.

1 Thessalonians iv. 13-18.—The object of this passage is to convey comfort to the minds of Christians who have lost pious relatives, that they should not "sorrow as those who have no hope." What is the "hope" here intended? Undoubtedly the hope of regaining and recognizing their friends at the resurrection of the just. 2 Sam. xii. 22, 23. "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me." This may be considered as an avowal of David that he was convinced he should rejoice and recognize the child he had lost, in a future world. Many passages of Scripture seem clearly to prove that at last, and particularly at the judgment-seat of Christ, a general recognition will subsist between the Apostles and preachers of the Gospel, and those who attended on their ministrations; and consequently the saints of God who were acquainted on earth, will distinguish each other in the heavenly world. But in order to shew the full force of these and many other Scriptures as applying to the question under consideration, a number of explanations and reasonings in reference to them would be requisite, which the limited compass of a letter will not permit.

May it be our happy lot to meet in that glorious world; to join the general assembly and church of the first-born,—Jesus the Mediator of the New Covenant, the innumerable company of angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect.

THOMAS DICK.