

WILLIAM ARCHER BUTLER (1814-1848).

"Ye are dead." This spiritual death must surely be in some profound sense—so often and so earnestly is the phrase reiterated—the mystical image of that death from which it derives its name. Whither does death conduct us? "To-day thou shalt be with me in paradise," said the Lord of life to the dying penitent. He Himself "preached to spirits in confinement"—preserved in the secret citadel of God—a world where as He declared, "all live unto Him," and whose happier region perhaps is typified in that "bosom of Abraham" which the Jews employed to express it, and which our Lord has consecrated by His adoption. His servant, "absent from the body," expected to be "present with the Lord," desired "to depart and be with Christ which was far better"—to "die unto the Lord," and "whether he waked or slept, to live together with Him." The triumphant fullness of heavenly glory seems to demand the body no less than the spirit; and may we not fairly deem with many of our sagest and holiest divines, that there is beyond this scene, in some lone region of the illimitable universe, a home for the spirit embodied, or clad it may be with some finer and invisible materialism, where in the calm expectation of consummate bliss it learns the art of higher happiness, and trains its faculties for coming glory. Is there not a world of spirits—the antechamber of heaven—where the eye long accustomed to the gross darkness of the flesh is gradually couched for the luminous presence of the ineffable One, a gentle twilight, between the night of this life and the morning of immortality?

Thither, doubtless, often descends from the throne of his glory—there, perhaps, more constantly dwells by some imaginable Shechinah—the man Christ Jesus with whom "our life is hid;" and who, by promise and earnest of the fulness to come, teaches his expectant people that they have, indeed, "a building of God eternal in the heavens." And as in all our physical changes, spiritual changes more intimate and essential seemed pictured, I cannot but think that as our death represents the spiritual death that opens the Christian's course, so this intervening state of holy anticipation seems eminently to represent the peculiar blessedness that follows that "death to sin," and "to the law." Few are our intimations of the condition of the saints departed, but these few breathe of profound repose, tranquillity whose stillness nothing further can disturb. They are "asleep in Jesus." The bodies that arose at the crucifixion were "the bodies of the sleeping saints." They are blessed, for they rest from their labours. "We now groan, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of the body," but when the first great step towards it shall have been assured all the rest, we can afford in joyful peace to "wait." And if such a state be real, (and some such state can scarcely be denied), peaceful, though till the final resurrection incomplete, full of quiet hope, and calm confidence that blessings possessed are the heralds of blessings far greater to come. If death does release the children of God into this, or some such happy territory, how think you do its tranquil people look back upon the life of this world? that restless and unhappy tumult in which they once were struggling? They may remember it, faintly recall it as some confused and painful dream; but the motives, and principles, and practices of that shadowy state can have no further relation to them, and their thoughts wander no longer among its sorrows and its guilt. They are "dead" to the world, "dead" to its sin, "dead" to its avenging law. It cannot cast its shadow across the grave; it cannot prolong one pang of bitterness, one touch of temptation. Its waves are broken beneath the walls of that sheltered paradise. These are the franchised of Christ and of death; dust has returned to dust that the spirit might return unto God; they have died into His eternal life!

INTERMEDIATE STATE.

SIR,—I have just returned to the city from a visit to Forest Castle, where I have been resting a little while recuperating. On looking over your paper I find a lecture on "Where do human souls go to after death?" by my old friend, the Rev. W. J. Mackenzie, who says: "This ought to be a question of the greatest interest to every one who loves the Saviour." Who among us has not asked in the deep necessities of his immortal spirit, what shall become of me when I die? Where shall I go when I leave this world? My friend has gone outside the gates of this world to mentally explore "a land of deepest shade, unpierced by human thought." James Montgomery says: "Ye dead, where can your dwelling be? The place for all the living come and see." And Blair, in his beautiful poem, says: "O that some courtly ghost would blab it out. What 'tis you are and we must shortly be." The present is an age of profound religious enquiry. What a mine of speculation this subject opens up to query! Liberty of opinion, however, is recognised in the Church on such points

as the intermediate state, and the possibility of a dispensation of mercy for sinners beyond the grave. Wheatley, late Archbishop of Dublin, supposed that the soul at death goes into a state of unconsciousness until the resurrection. Certain principles of interpretation of Scripture could be made to teach anything which the interpreter sought to find in it. How vain are most of the descriptions and speculations concerning the future world. We may talk of Sheol and Hades, Paradise and Heaven, Tartarus and Gehenna, in the most learned and philosophical manner. But there is a veil that separates us from these places, which the hand of philosophy cannot lift to show us what is doing on the other side. But when Christ the light of life shines upon that veil, it becomes transparent and through it we see reflected the friends over whose departure we wept standing on the immortal shores. We see Lazarus in Abraham's bosom and Dives in hell.

Nothing can be said on the subject of the intermediate state which has not often been said before. To say nothing of essays and sermons, every treatise of systematic theology has discussed the subject fully. If the subject has been treated so often, so fully and so ably, why should we say anything more about it? Books are not accessible to everybody, and if they were there are many who would read an article in the columns of a newspaper who would not read a treatise in a book. Besides this, each generation, while it uses the thought of its predecessor, is not satisfied with distilling that thought through the alembic of its own mind, and a religious journal is to a certain extent a thinker for many readers. For more than forty years I was accustomed to bring the subject of the intermediate state before the people on Easter even. I went into a great deal of research on the subject, and made a collection of material from the writings of the most learned and celebrated men of the different denominations. The compilation would make quite a book. The first lecture I gave on the subject of the intermediate state, there were present on the occasion the Presbyterian minister, two Methodist ministers, and two Calvinistic and Free-Will Baptist ministers. The church was crowded to excess with people of all denominations. It took me two hours to get through with the discourse, delivered with all the fire and energy of my youth. The subject to most of the people was new and striking; and so absorbed and interested were they in the subject that they said they could have remained two hours longer to listen. Indeed at the close some were unwilling to leave the church; they wanted to hear more. Notwithstanding that I was charged by some with preaching the doctrine of purgatory in the newspapers. Yet some of the ministers seemed to have adopted the views which I announced, and the next year brought the subject to the notice of their respective congregations.

What is called the intermediate state is the intervening period between death and the resurrection, when the soul is separated from the body. The faith of the Church generally received with regard to the intermediate is briefly this: "At death the soul enters the place of departed spirits, called in the Greek Hades, in the Hebrew Sheol. The righteous go to that part of Hades called Paradise, called by the Jews Abraham's bosom, where they are in joy and felicity, but not at once admitted to the full rewards of God's heavenly kingdom. Those who are truly united to Christ are in a state of peaceful rest and enjoyment on their departure hence in paradise, but paradise is not heaven. A far higher degree of glory and bliss awaits them at the general resurrection at the last day, when they will have their perfect consummation and bliss both in body and soul in God's eternal and everlasting glory. This distinction is maintained in all the formularies of the Church. The wicked go to that part of Hades called Tartarus, where they will be in a state of misery, but not in so great a state of suffering as when the soul is united to the body, when they will be cast down to Gehenna, properly the hell of the damned." This then is the doctrine of the Catholic Church in opposition to the Papal doctrine of purgatory.

The doctrine of the intermediate state is very different from the Roman purgatory. The Roman Catholic doctrine is, that the saints go direct to heaven, but the very bad or those dying in mortal sin go direct to gehenna—the hell of the damned; but those dying in venial sin, that is, not very good or very bad, go to purgatory, which is a place of punishment in which persons who have not fully satisfied the justice of God on account of their sins, suffer for a time. They are assisted by the prayers and merits of the faithful, and are purified before entering into heaven.

In my boyhood I learned by heart the following verses which I quote from memory, which I wish you to give as an appendix to this letter.

Toronto, March 12th.

PHILIP TOCQUE.

APPENDIX.

We talk of heaven, we talk of hell,
But what they mean no tongue can tell.
Heaven is the realm where angels are,
And hell the chaos of despair,
But what these awful words imply
None of us know before we die.
Whether we will or not we must
Take the succeeding world on trust.
This hour perhaps our friend is well,
The next we hear his passing bell;
And then at once, for ought we see,
Ceases at once to breathe and be.
Swift flies the soul, perhaps 'tis gone
Ten thousand leagues beyond the sun,
Or thrice ten thousand more thrice told
E'er the forsaken clay is cold.
But ah! no notices they give,
Or tell us how or where they live;
Though conscious while with us below,
How much themselves desired to know,
As if bound up by solemn fate
To keep the secrets of their state—
To tell their joys or pains to none
That man may live by faith alone.
Then let our Sovereign if He please
Look up His marvellous decrees.
Why should we wish Him to reveal
What He thinks proper to conceal.

SKETCH OF LESSON.

Palm Sunday.

MAR. 25TH, 1888.

Gideon's Victory.

Passage to be read.—Judges vii. 1-7, 16-22.

We saw in our last lesson who was chosen by God to deliver Israel. To-day we are to consider how Gideon performed his commission; how his great victory over Midian was won.

I. *Israel's Insurrection.*—Seven years of plundering and ill-treatment had driven Israel to despair. Gideon's proclamation, however, had gathered a small army of 32,000 men. He pitches his camp at the well of Harod, at the foot of Mount Gilboa. Two or three miles away are the headquarters of the immense army of Midian, 120,000 men. (ch. viii. 10). God says that Gideon's army is too large (v. 2). What men did He tell Gideon to send away? 22,000 are only too glad to go home. But God says that there are still too many (v. 4). By a curious method He chooses the champions. Gideon is told to take his men to the river to drink. Those who cautiously dipped their hands into the water and drank out of their hands, instead of lying down, were chosen. How strange if these 800 men should win the battle (v. 7)!

II. *The Sword of the Lord and of Gideon.*—The Midianites had heard of Gideon, but felt secure. Gideon, on the contrary, is anxious. Under cover of night he creeps with his servant close up to the enemy's camp: hears one of the soldiers awake and tell his dream to his neighbour (v. 13). Gideon, reassured, worships God in grateful prayer (v. 15); returns, rouses his men with the glad news, and at once prepares for battle (v. 16). Strange weapons chosen. By these a panic was to be caused. By midnight everything is in readiness, and at a pre-arranged signal Gideon's men blew their trumpets: and the battle cry "the sword of the Lord and of Gideon" awakes the sleepers. They hear the crash of the pitchers and see the flash of lights all around them. Utterly demoralized, they trample upon and slay each other in frantic efforts to escape. Only 15,000 men of all that host crossed the Jordan (ch. viii. 10); and these Gideon with his men, "faint, yet pursuing," overtook and destroyed next day. In consequence of this victory Israel had forty years of peace.

Observe that the secret of Gideon's strength lay in his faith in God's promise. (Compare 1 St. John v. 4). He sought God's guidance. So should we. He obeyed God; and God blessed the feeble means used. So the source of victory over our spiritual foes is the same. (See Zech. iv. 6). We seem to be weak, they strong; but victory is promised. (Rom. viii. 31). It is sure, if we believe, obey and persevere.

ONE OF THESE DAYS.

One of these days it will all be over,
Sorrow and laughter, and loss and gain,
Meetings and partings of friend and lover,
Joy that was ever so edged with pain.

One of these days will our hands be folded,
One of these days will the work be done,
Finished the pattern our lives have moulded,
Ended our labor beneath the sun.

One of these days will the heartache leave us,
One of these days will the burden drop
Never again shall hope deceive us,
Never again will our progress stop.