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BOOK
REVIEWS

THE FAR LOOK.

(By Rev. J. A. R. Dickson, D.D.)

When death comes it does not end all. With the great majority, it is only the real beginning of life. Then, the soul is aroused and awakened out of a slumber that has lain heavy upon it all through its earthly pilgrimage. Then, it starts up to the exercise of a rational intelligence that has in great part been dormant through its life here. Then it stands face to face with eternal realities, "knowing as it is known." Surely this is a great awakening. Sir Walter Scott speaks of human life in this telling way: "What is this world? A dream within a dream. As we grow older, each step is an awakening. The youth awakes as he thinks, from childhood; the full-grown man despises the pursuits of youth as visionary; the old man looks on manhood as a feverish dream. The grave the last sleep; no; it is the last and final awakening." This is profoundly true; death is the last and final awakening. And to many, it comes with a rude shake that surprises them, terrifies them and makes them cry out as the life dream dissolves. In it the believing soul is set free from the burden of the body and the thralldom of the senses, so that it is at liberty to soar upward into the clear light and sweet sunshine of the life eternal.

In this last act, when the soul is on the boundaries of two worlds, there are often seen and heard things which we would gladly know more of. The veil is lifted but a little; it is not flung back so that the great invisible is discovered. We get glimpses only and faint hints of "the light that lies beyond the dark."

And these are the far look, the look into the other world, even if it only covers its outermost confines. Are these to be of any value to us? Are they to teach us anything at all? Or are they to be set down as pure imagination, as having no ground in reality, no basis of solid truth; how are we to regard them? For instance: Catharine Tait—the wife of Archibald C. Tait, Archbishop of Canterbury, whose memoir he wrote so lovingly and so wisely that today it is a most choice morsel of biographical writing,—on drawing near the end of her life, "her daughters sang to her some favourite hymns: 'Lo! He comes with clouds descending' and 'Lead, kindly light, amid the encircling gloom.' When they had finished, I (the Archbishop) repeated to her again the last lines, inscribed by her desire on the frame of Griepin's picture of the children who left her at Carlisle:

And with the morn those angel faces smile,
Which I have loved long since, and lost a while.

'Yes, yes,' she repeated, and either then, or a few minutes before, she spoke of those of us who had gone before stretching out their hands to welcome her. The physician wished her again to rest. Soon she became unconscious, and about ten o'clock, after I had offered up the commendatory prayer, her breathing ceased with a gentle sigh, and she was gone."

The beautiful life of the Rev. William Marsh, D.D., is written with a thoroughly loving sympathy and genuine honesty, by his daughter, the gifted writer of the "Memorials of Captain Hedley Vicars," and in the last pages there is a record of his last words and actions, among

which we find the following: "Several times in that day we believed that he was allowed to see one or more of the redeemed spirits, who would, we felt, be crowding down to the brink of the river to watch for and to welcome him; for he spoke more than once to our mother—the beloved of his early days—saying, 'Maria, darling;' and two or three times smiled and waved his hand toward the foot of the bed, when none whom our eye could see were standing there." A few days before Edward Payson, D. D., of Portland, died, in the midst of extreme bodily suffering, he said: "My God is in this room. I see Him! Oh! how lovely is the sight; how glorious does He appear! Worthy of so many hearts if I had so many to give."

These experiences might be multiplied indefinitely. We take these as typical of a Christian's experience who dies awake, with his soul intent to hear and his inner eye open and looking out to see. It is not at all marvellous that he should behold much that lies hid from mortal vision. The soul, filled with the spirit of faith and prayer and love, always sees more than the soul empty of these graces. This is the case in the midst of life, and how much more must it be the case as it is crossing the line that marks off the great spirit realm of God's immediate presence. It is only reasonable to expect on the part of those whose faculties are not oppressed and chained by disease, or inactive through weakness, or deadened by drugs, that they shall not enjoy less in their last hour of the presence of Jesus, and the spirits who minister to the heirs of salvation; but rather more, as they are then more free from elements which constituted spiritual barriers, and also better fitted for such communications. The mind is occupied with divine things, having thrown off the fetters of the things of sense, and the heart is reaching out through its affections to eternal realities and embracing them. That beautiful verse expresses well the feeling that fills the soul:

My heart is resting, Oh my God!
I will give thanks and sing;
My heart is at the secret source
Of every precious thing.

If Stephen, in his address before the Sanhedrim, being full of the Holy Ghost, could cry out: "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God," why should not the dying Christian see as much, if not more, far more? If the servant of the prophet Elisha, in Dotham—his eyes being opened in answer to the prayer of Elisha—saw the mountain full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha why should not the dying godly man see the spirits of the just made perfect, and Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and God the judge of all? Does not Peter assure the obedient Christian, who adds to his faith virtue and knowledge, temperance and patience, godliness and brotherly kindness and charity, that an abundant entrance shall be ministered unto him into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ—2 Peter i. 5-11? Does not David sing in the twenty-third psalm: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me!" Does not our Lord Himself comfort His disciples with this

great truth: "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you into Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also?" Christ comes to welcome the Christian home to the eternal city. Why then should we discredit those bright and glorious visions of dying saints? Why? They are not the result of a heated and disordered imagination. They are not idle statements. No. The instances we have cited lie in the lives of educated men and women who were far from being fanatical, whose previous experiences were by their devotion of heart and consecration of spirit, preparations for glorious revelations as they went up higher. They verified that oft-quoted Scripture: "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and unto the perfect day." The brightness is fullest at the close.

Edmund Waller, in his epilogue to his divine poems, has this stanza, which chimes in with our thought.

The soul's dark cottage, battered and decayed,

Lets in new light through chinks that Time has made;

Stronger by weakness, wiser men become,

As they draw near to their eternal home.

Leaving the old, both worlds at once they view,

That stand upon the threshold of the new.

How many are like Balmaun in this, that they are more touched by the death of the righteous than by life, and unite in the prayer, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!" Ah, we foolishly forget! this well attested fact that this day's deeds are the seeds sown for to-morrow's harvest. To-day becomes to-morrow's destiny. To enjoy the far look at the end of life's journey the eyes must be both purged and exercised by the way. The graces of faith and love and hope must carry their blessing into the heart. There must be diligence in their exercise now, that they may be strong and vigorous at the close. Unused graces, like unused powers, perish; while graces put forth in efforts suitable to their nature grow and flourish and bring home to the heart the highest revelations and the noblest joys. We should ever remember this, that faithfulness to all that God has commanded is the sure way to the reception and enjoyment of all that He has promised. "AT EVENING TIME IT SHALL BE LIGHT."

Galt, Ontario.

For the first time in its history the Episcopal Church in the United States reports a decrease in the number of its clergy, due in part to the large list of deposition from the priesthood and to the higher death rate in the past year. The annual statistics show a total of 5,411 clergy, a decrease of 13 from 1907. The deaths were 135, an increase of 30. There were 41 depositions, ascribed to the action of 16 or more who were opposed to the "open pulpit" canon adopted at the last general convention, and have entered the Roman Catholic Church. The list of candidates for holy orders shows a decrease of 17. The total number of communicants is 896,756, an increase of 24,260, or 3 per cent. over that of last year. The total contributions were \$17,952,500.