

SPECIAL
ARTICLES

Our Contributors

BOOK
REVIEWS

THE HUMAN FORM DIVINE.

By Rev. Joseph Hamilton.

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"The Spirit World," Etc.

The book just published entitled "Christ's Teaching Concerning the Last Things" is a splendid memorial of the loved and lamented Dr. Caven. It would be hard to find a man who combined so much of amiability and culture. Especially in the gift of lucid expression, I never knew his equal. It was said of him that no man on either side of the Atlantic could make a point clearer. Certainly a large induction would be required to justify such a statement about any man; yet, if the whole truth were known, I think the statement would not be far from the mark. And yet it was his habit not to use a strong word if he could find a mild one. But the effect was not weak by any means; he was so manifestly sincere that he needed no strong expletives.

In the papers now published, many subjects of great interest are dealt with, more or less fully. There is one topic of peculiar beauty which is merely touched upon. I mean the beauty of the human form in the future life. The Doctor says:

"The identity of the body will not be lost in the great transformation. We can hardly imagine that the human form will not be preserved; and certainly, such speculations as those in which Origin indulged as to this matter are baseless and absurd. The human form, as we now see it, is symmetrical and beautiful, and to our present feeling it were painful to think of its being lost; and this at least we may say that there is nothing in what we read of the Lord's appearance after He left the tomb—nothing in the Scriptures anywhere—to suggest the loss of the form which is so dear to us."

This is all that the Doctor says on this fascinating theme. It would be interesting if he had gone somewhat into detail; but he occupies our attention with matters which I presume he deemed of more importance. But the topic is peculiarly fascinating; and I will submit some considerations founded on reason and Revelation, by way of confirming what has been advanced.

With regard to the intrinsic beauty of the human form, we see it so often disfigured by toil, and sin, and care, that it is hard for us to realize its beauty in a perfect state. But sometimes we have a vision of radiant spiritual beauty that draws from us an involuntary sigh, and makes us think of the beautiful better land. We have there a hint of the human face and the human form divine.

If anyone thinks this form of ours might have been more beautiful than it is, let him make a sketch of his ideal. If he finds that task more difficult than he supposed, let him take a year to make the sketch; let him take ten years—twenty years—fifty years. I think he will realize that he has attempted the impossible. It will not be so hard then to believe that this human form is God's ideal of beauty, and that in its glorified state it is fit even for the heavenly world.

Another consideration is, that when angels appeared in this world, they always appeared as men. Sometimes they appeared with more glory than at other times. There was a wide difference between the appearance of those angels that staved with Lot all night, and that angel who sat on the stone, whose face was like lightning; but in both cases

the human form was there. And I do not understand that those angels assumed the human form merely to come into more familiar contact with men. I believe rather that the human was their own proper form, but that for the time it was transmuted into the lower plane of human life. We have then some idea of the condition we may rise to, when the earthly is transmuted into the heavenly.

This idea of transmutation is by no means far fetched. We have many analogies of it in nature. Take, for instance, a mass of gunpowder. It is a dark, heavy, inert mass; but apply a spark of fire to it, and in a moment it becomes flame. Or take a block of ice. It is a dull, ponderous substance; but let heat of sufficient intensity come into contact with it, and in an instant it becomes steam. So these bodies of ours, so inert and dull as they may seem, may have in them the potentiality of transformation whereby the earthly in an instant becomes the heavenly. Thus we see that in the final transition we may be changed "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye." Now, if this body we wear at present has the potentiality of such beauty, it is not far fetched to believe that the glory into which it will be "changed" will really be "heavenly."

We could also note this—that not only the angels who appeared to men actually, but those that were seen in vision, had the human form. We have many instances of this: but take one of the visions vouchsafed to Ezekiel. It would be worth your while to read his first chapter, and see how hard he labors to show us what was really impossible to be put into human speech. Instead of giving us any clear description of what he saw, he gives us a most confusing, yet most inspiring conglomeration of a whirlwind, and a cloud, and lamps, and burnished brass, and a firmament, and a terrible crystal, and a flash of lightning, and the noise of waters, and the voice of an host, and a sapphire stone, and amber, and faces, and eyes, and rings, and wheels, and wines, and coals of fire. Yet it is remarkable that all this confusion and mystery of display did not disguise or conceal the human appearance of the living creatures. On that one point Ezekiel is clear, though so obscure on all other points. This is what he says:

"Out of the midst thereof"—that is, out of the midst of the fire—"came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance: they had the likeness of a man."

So, the human form was there, in stantly and easily recognized, notwithstanding all the surrounding, glorious obscurity. Does it not begin to appear that this human type is the ideal type—yes, the ideal type, not for the human race only, but for all races, and all worlds? There may be thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers, and there may be striking differences peculiar to each order; but the human may be the ideal form among them all.

It is not so difficult, then, to believe that this human body of ours—beautiful even in its ruins—may be the prevailing form in all worlds. And it seems to me that the retention of this human form will have the effect of making us realize our own identity, whatever added excellencies it may attain. For it is quite conceivable that this form may attain more and more of power and beauty as the eternal ages move on, yet that it may retain all of its essential human features. It is certainly a curious, but a most gracious law of our nature, that we

love our own identity. So much is this the case that we would not willingly change it to any other, though we knew well that other to be vastly superior to our own. Our highest ambition is to be satisfied with gradual progress; and that is the law of our being.

Thus, if heaven is to be an aggregation of human beings of different grades from all worlds, we can conceive that we shall see in every one, from whatever world he comes, the glorified type of his own race.

And this idea of the human form being the universal form, creates a bond of unity and brotherhood between ourselves and the dwellers in all other spheres, however widely those spheres may be scattered through universal space, and however differently dwellers in them may be endowed. This would only be a large application of the law of unity and variety that characterizes the Creator's works.

A great deal more might be added along the same line. This and kindred topics are treated at length in the "Spirit World."

CHINA'S FUTURE.

Of one thing the western world may rest assured, says the London Times, whatever may be the future form of rule in China, that great empire, with its vast resources and its swarming myriads of tireless workers, is certain in the fulness of time to claim and to obtain a larger place in international affairs. We are not likely to see another book written about the break-up of China, and we need not wish to see one. Loose and amorphous though the Chinese empire may be, it still has many elements of solidarity, and they are growing more cohesive. We are not led away by the dreams of those seers of visions that predict the rapid emergence of China, panoplied and militant, into the front rank of world power. The Chinese have a very long way to travel yet, and it is not at all clear that they are following in all respects the right path. The shoals of Chinese students who pass fitfully through foreign countries more often than not return home only half educated with their minds in a hazy ferment. Unassimilated by the west and sometimes unfitted for the east, they may become a source of danger rather than of help to their countrymen. China will never advance very far, moreover, while every department of her administration remains hopelessly corrupt; nor will her progress be sound while her officials are encouraged to regard the nations of Europe as complaisant spectators from whom money may be had for the asking. But, despite these and other defects, the steady development of China is probably inevitable. The genius of the Chinese race is not in these days aggressive in a warlike sense; among the pure Chinese it has for centuries ceased to be so. But when, under more enlightened control, the Chinese embark upon a more general system of manufactures according to western methods, and with their inexhaustible supplies of cheap labor thrust their products upon the world's markets, they may exert a profoundly modifying influence upon other nations. That time has not yet come, and may still be far off; but the apostles of western labor never seem to realize the possibilities it implies. The real "Yellow Peril" is industrial.

The heart of all reforms is the reform of the heart.