

(3)

INFANTS IN HEAVEN :

OR THE

Probable Future State

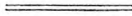
OF

DECEASED CHILDREN.

BY THE

REV. R. EDLESTON,

Minister of Albion Chapel, Leeds.



LONDON :

Hodson, 22, Portugal Street, Lincoln's Inn.

LEEDS:—*J. Heaton, Briggate.*

MANCHESTER:—*L. Kenworthy, Cateaton Street.*



PREFACE.

THE author of the following few pages has frequently witnessed the poignant grief of bereaved parents; and he has observed with pleasure, when the views herein advanced, have been introduced, that the distress has been considerably alleviated. He has therefore deemed it an act of charity to lay them before the public, in the hope that they may be more extensively useful. Notwithstanding that the ideas may be new to most readers, the author claims no originality. They are part of a great system of religious truth, which is silently but extensively extending itself in this and other countries. The writer, however, having adopted them as his own, is willing to be held responsible for their truth. He thinks that the world is in need of some clearer and more definite doctrine on Death and the Eternal State, than that which is commonly prevalent; and in the sincere desire that his little publication may be useful in this respect also, he sends it forth to his fellow creatures, trusting in Providence to bless and direct the effort.

ELMWOOD PLACE,
Leeds, Feb. 15, 1851.

INFANTS IN HEAVEN.

I.

THE death of a child is necessarily painful to the natural feelings of parents and sympathizing friends. From the first hour of his birth he is a beloved object. His sweet smiles, in wakeful moments or peaceful slumber, which are caused by angelic influences, his opening mind, his artless ways, and even the very trouble he gives, all serve to endear him to a parent's heart. Day by day his growth is watched, his health is cared for, and every hour his father's power and mother's love protect him. Each new achievement is registered in fond hearts; and ardent love produces lively hope, and the parent's mind is filled with visions of his child's future fame and welfare.

But death comes and breaks down these vain hopes, and the parents are overwhelmed with the shock. They become like "Rachel weeping for her children, and will not be comforted because they are not."* The minister, friends, and neighbors, come in to console, and sometimes to reprove, their excessive grief. But still the parents mourn on,

* 2 Matt. 18.

and often so continue, until the remembrance of the event is dulled by time, or outbalanced by some heavier calamity.

The uncertainty which hangs over the future state of deceased children, is the most painful feeling of a bereaved parent's mind. The mother could, perhaps, surrender her offspring to death, with but a parting tear, if she were assured of his happiness beyond the grave. Her love does not die with the body of the child; it follows him into eternity, and yearns for his welfare there. She turns to those who profess to have studied the state after death, and anxiously asks, "Where is my child?" "What is he now?" "Is he blessed?" "Is he cursed?" "Shall I ever behold him again?" These and similar enquiries she makes, but sometimes they are met with a gentle reproof; and the mother is told that she is wishing to penetrate into things that are not revealed. She is thus silenced, but not consoled. The minister will sometimes speak according to his doctrine; but this confounds her even more than the above; in some cases it does more, it adds horror to her confusion, and confirms her worst fears.

There are various doctrines bearing on this subject, which are extensively taught and believed in the world. There is *Predestination*, which declares

that man is approved for heaven or condemned to hell, before his birth, or even before the creation of the world ! Then there are others who teach *Baptismal Regeneration*, and declare that, unless a child be baptized by an authorized person, he cannot be saved ! Others again teach, that however a child may be predestinated, or baptized, *his soul*, and the soul of every other being, *will have to tarry in the cold grave*, and be unconscious until the general resurrection ! While others have a very indistinct view, and sometimes describe the departed soul as having gone to heaven, and in the enjoyment of all its beatitudes, yet at other times they describe this same soul as liable to be brought from thence, to undergo resurrection and judgment, no doubt to see whether he be fit for heaven or not, just as if God had made some mistake in sending him thither in the first instance ! And lastly, some have imagined a place, which they call *Limbo*, which is supposed to be on the confines of hell, and a place of neither pleasure nor pain ; it is believed that the souls of unbaptized infants are all gathered into this neutral place, where they must remain for ever.

The disconsolate mother may be taught any of these views, or all of them may be placed before her, and sometimes are, so that she may adopt that which is most agreeable to her feelings. But

alas! there is little consolation in any of them. Some of them are positively terrible to contemplate; while others are so indistinct, as not to fall, with any certainty, into human thought. It is, therefore, to assist in removing these distressing feelings of bereaved parents, that we have penned the following pages.

We will begin where the parent begins to feel her loss, namely *death*. *What is death?* Some imagine that it is impossible for a *living* being to answer this question; for it is supposed that death can only be known in *dying*. But what is revelation for? Are there no facts recorded there, from which our reasons may draw conclusions and satisfactory evidence on such a subject? We think there are; and therefore, though we may not have experienced death and its consequences ourselves, there are others who have, and God has recorded their experience in His Word, which amply compensates for our own deficiency. It is manifestly one of the principal uses of Scripture to enlighten men on such subjects as they cannot themselves possibly *experience* in this life.

We therefore turn to the Word, and seek in it that experience which man does not possess. The first thing which the Scriptures demonstrate is, the existence of *two worlds*, the world of *matter* and

the world of *spirit*. The world of matter is the world that now is, and is adapted to the life of man when clothed with a *material* body. The world of spirit, is "the world to come," (not that it does not already exist, but that we are not as yet conscious inhabitants of it), and is fitted for the life of man when clothed with a *spiritual* body. Now, *death* is simply a passage, from one world into the other. It is a kind of a gate which divides time from eternity; hence the saying "*mors janua vitæ*,"—death is the gate of life. Death is, therefore, but an event in life. A thing to be expected, "for it is appointed unto all men once to die."* Man is simply elevated thereby from an external to an internal sphere of existence, in which he will be happy according to his state. The process itself has been variously described. Sometimes as a man leaving a dusky chamber, and going through a dark passage into a brilliantly lighted palace. Others think of it much as they do of sleep, (in itself, that is, without disease,) as a painless, necessary, and certain operation of nature; thus they would say, that death, is only like going to bed in this, and getting up in the eternal world! This passage from one world into the other, is effected by putting off the body; it has, therefore,

* 9 Heb. 27., Google

10 MAN, A BEING OF TWO-FOLD ORGANIZATION.

been also compared to the process by which the butterfly puts off its caterpillar state. Man, in this world, is thus like a crawling worm, whom death strips of his cumbrous load, and then, if good, he becomes an angel-man, "in lighter habit clad." Others have likened the casting off of the body to a man throwing down for ever an old worn-out garment. The Apostle has also his peculiar simile, for he says that man is like a seed thrown into the earth, which cannot be quickened except it die;* that is, man's immortal part cannot rise until the death of the body; which, like the outer covering of the seed, is put off, and never resumed again.

All these similies are doubtless near the truth, and when acknowledged, they disarm death of all its terrors, for who would fear to die, if any one of them expresses the true character of death? Let a good man, on the eve of this change, contemplate its character, and its consequences in the above light, and though he may regret his departure on account of those who are dependent upon him, yet on his own account he will rejoice at the glorious prospect which is thus spread out before him. And, what wise mother, who believes in such a doctrine, would not rather (if it be the divine will) that her suffering child should

* 1 Cor. xv, 37.

undergo this simple process, and rise into a glorious world, in the vigour of immortal health and beauty, than linger on a few years longer in a painful, helpless, and joyless state of being ?

This view of death totally destroys the doctrine which teaches, that the soul stays in the grave until a supposed resurrection of the material body. The Scripture knows nothing of such a doctrine ; but, on the contrary, its teachings are all in perfect harmony with the view just advanced. When Lazarus died, there was no tarrying in the grave, for we are informed that he was immediately "carried by angels into Abraham's bosom ;" and when Dives died, he also soon "lifted up his eyes, being in torment." * Thus both of them rose immediately after the death of the body ; or at least before the death of the brothers of Dives ; for they were living on earth after he had lifted up his eyes in torment. † The dying penitent was to pass the gate of death and rise again in paradise, before the expiration of a day. "To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise." ‡ Moses, and some of the prophets had also died, and risen again, according to the Scriptures. In none of these cases was there any delay in death ; and the plain inference is, that it is a com-

* Luke xvi, 23. † Luke xvi, 28. ‡ Luke ii, 43.

paratively quick and interesting process of nature, by which the soul is liberated from the body, and introduced into a higher world, exactly fitted for the enjoyment of its life, just as this world is fitted for the enjoyment of the life of the body.

Death thus involves no loss, but that of the material body. The life beyond the grave is a perfect state of existence. We shall be as much human beings, and even more so, than we are in this world. Men, will be men, and women, women, and all will be endowed with organs of thought and will, and with every other sensation which constitutes a human being in this life. The only difference will be, that the man, his body, and its attributes, will be composed of *spirit* instead of *matter*.

It will be seen that this view teaches the fact, that man is a being of *two-fold* organization, that is, he has an organization for time, and an organization for eternity. No one denies that the material body is an organized form. Here, then, is *one* organization. And the experiences named in Scripture plainly show, that after death, when the material organization is put off, there is still *another* remaining! In fact, this double organization of man, is stated so decidedly in the following words of the Apostle, that it cannot

be denied by a believer in Scripture; "there is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body." The "*natural body*," is one organization, and the "*spiritual body*," if it be a body at all, must be another; for it cannot be a body without being organized. Both of them are described as existing with man at this present moment; "there *is* a natural body and there *is* (not there *shall be*) a spiritual body."* Hence it appears that man possesses a spiritual organization while living in the body. And when he has done with time and passes into eternity, he will find himself in the enjoyment of it. Hence the Apostle says, "We know that if the earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."† The "*earthly house*" is the natural organization; and the *house in the heavens*, is the spiritual organization: and when the first is dissolved, there is still the other, which is "eternal."

A man is, therefore, really a man after death; possessing an organized spiritual form, with every faculty of love, thought, speech, and action; and the world in which he lives, is also as real a world as this, with this simple difference, *it* is composed like the spiritual body, of spiritual substances,

* 1 Cor. xv, 44.

† 2 Cor. v, 1.

while *this* is composed of material. Scripture distinctly proves that a man is a man independently of his material body. Moses by death was divested of his material body, and yet when he appeared at the transfiguration he was as real a man as before. The disciples could *see* him and *hear* him, and so completely were they convinced of his reality as a human being, possessing all the senses and attributes of man, that they desired to build him a habitation to dwell in! * The angel that showed John the New Jerusalem, confessed that he had once been a man on earth, a prophet, a fellow-servant, but had died, and through death had put off his material organization, and yet after all, he was a perfect *spiritual man*, and had a head, arms, feet, speech, and clothing; and so glorious withal, that John mistook him for God, and was about to worship him! † It is the very nature of the human soul to possess a human organization, for how could the soul exist without it? That which has no form, is in reality no thing, therefore, it is folly to say, that the soul possesses no organization, for it is impossible to predicate either life or action of such a supposed entity. If the soul lives after death in a separate state of existence, it must be spiritually organized, or it could not THINK and

* Matt. xvii, 1, 8.

† Rev. xxii, 8, 9.

LOVE; for that which has no organized form is not even capable of living. A formless soul must be a *dead* soul; the Bible does not speak, however, of such souls as these. Its description of the human spirit is, that of a substantial organized living being. The souls that John saw under the altar were organized beings,* for they could speak, feel sorrow, and be clothed; not one of which can be imagined of a formless entity.

From these particulars it will be seen, that we should regard the dead, not as remaining in the cold grave, nor as existing in an imperfect state of being, but as living in an inner or higher world of eternal realities, possessing still the form and attributes of men, having lost nothing by death but the material body. Let the bereaved parent think of this, and let her contemplate her deceased child, as having been only withdrawn from her sight, and still existing in another world, as real as this, and far more perfect and glorious. If she can thus invest the soul and eternity with the idea of something substantial, though of a spiritual kind, she will arrive nearer the truth, and at the same time find herself much reconciled to her apparent loss. She will still be able to count her children as heretofore, and say, "I have so many on earth

* Rev. vi, 9.

and so many in heaven ;” and she will think of them all as equally living, real, and conscious.

II.

We have now followed the child through death, and seen him safely raised, by the providence of God, into eternity, as a living organized being. But if even satisfied of this fact, the anxious mother will still enquire, what is his state there? *Is he saved?* Is he lost? Rest contented, loving parent, *all is well.* Thy child is saved. There is every probability that *all* children, whether born of Christian or Pagan, pious or infidel parents, are elevated at death, by the mercy of God, into blessedness and peace!

Predestination, which is one of the doctrines which oppose this reasonable view, is so monstrous, and so opposed to benevolent feelings, that it is astonishing how any well-disposed mind can accept it as the truth. It presumes that the babe which dies as soon as he is born, may be consigned to eternal torment! It denies that man is accepted because he is good, or rejected because he is evil. The words of the Lord to Cain are, therefore, of no meaning to a believer of such a creed. “If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest

not well, sin lieth at the door." * It is fortunate for mankind that this doctrine is gradually declining. Fifty years ago it was commonly professed, especially amongst the Independents and Baptists ; but now there is only here and there one, who will avow it. It still lurks, however, in many places, but it is seldom brought into prominency anywhere.

The bare mention of such a view to an uninitiated well-disposed person, is almost sufficient to insure its rejection ; and it is commonly retained by the initiated, only because education has made it familiar ; for it is with Predestination as it is with vice,

" It is a monster of such frightful mien,
As, to be hated, needs but to be seen ;
Yet seen too oft, familiar with its face,
We first endure, then pity, then embrace."

It is a doctrine that narrows human sympathy, dispenses with human virtue, and is in all respects destructive of human good. " It imposes no duties, inculcates no virtues, enjoins no sacrifices, commands no charity, suppresses no crimes, expels no evils, but leaves man a slave to his corruptions ;" and hence, it is agreeable to the depraved inclinations of our nature, and is soon accepted by them. But bad as all this is, Predestination is most awful when God is contemplated from its

* 4 Gen. 7.

aspect. It totally subverts the benign, parental character of the Eternal, which is given in His Word, and which is so soothing and consolatory to the pious Christian; and in its place it plants the idea of a monster more terrible and vindictive than an infernal. If any *man* were to do as Predestinarians say God does, he would be universally detested, and his name held up to opprobrium for all time to come. Only think of a human father deliberately sending his infant child to eternal torment, and at the same time insuring another of everlasting happiness, without fault in the one or virtue in the other!! But we scarcely need reason about it; for the outrageous nature of the doctrine is sufficiently evident. Those who can suppose that God sends an infant to hell must have strange feelings, they must despise the child, for they cannot presume to love that which God condemns: they must also imagine that God despises him too, for if He does not, why the condemnation? But how plainly is all this opposed to the Lord's words, where He says, "Take heed that ye despise not *one* of these little ones." * Not even *one* little one is to be despised, and if they are not to be despised surely they will not be condemned, so that all are

* 18 Matt. 10.

saved. Dear parent, believe these gracious words of the Saviour; think not that thy God does what He forbids man to do; for what is evil in us, cannot be good in Him, and that, therefore, He does not despise thy innocent babe, even though thou mayst be guilty.

The true doctrine of the Bible is, that God does not reject any one, much less an infant, whose innocence should be his protection. The gates of heaven stand wide open, and none are denied admission. All are invited; "The spirit and the bride say come, and let him that heareth say come, and let him that is athirst come; and whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely."*

Depend upon it that predestination is a false doctrine. The whole tenor of the Word of God is against it; as well as all right feeling and good sense. There are no irresistible decrees connected with salvation. Heaven and hell are the eternal results of good or evil living in this world; and as man can live either virtuously or viciously, just as he pleases, therefore final happiness or misery are manifestly matters of choice. God forces no one, either to one state or the other.

"The soul of ev'ry man is free
To choose his life and what he'll be :

* 22 Rev. 17.

For this eternal truth is given ;
That God will force no man to heaven.
He'll draw, persuade, direct aright,
And bless with wisdom, love, and light ;
In nameless ways be good and kind
But never force the human mind."

"I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have *set before you* life and death, blessing and cursing ; therefore *choose* life that thou and thy seed may live. That thou mayst love the Lord thy God, and that thou mayst obey his voice, and that thou mayst cleave with him ; for he is thy life, and the length of thy days : that thou mayst dwell in the land which the Lord swore unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them."* It is true, that a child cannot exercise this choice ; but it shows that the choice exists, and that it is natural to man, and that, therefore, there is no such thing as predestination to hell. A child is accepted not from the presence of *actual good*, but because of the absence of *actual evil*. Nothing but actual sin can exclude from the divine presence, for where it is not, there cannot be any crime, and without crime justice cannot condemn. It may be urged, that if children have not actual

* 30 Deut. 19, 20.

evil, they have hereditary evil ; true, but this is not condemnatory (as will afterwards be shown) until they have brought it into actuality, by willing it, and thinking of it, and daily practising it, and thus adopting it for their own ; but a child cannot do that, for he knows not what sin is, and therefore when he enters the other world, he will be protected from the influence of his hereditary nature. So that his soul, at death, will be presented before God, as an innocent and acceptable sacrifice !

The reasonableness of this view would be generally admitted, were it not for the doctrines of predestination and *original sin*. These two things have blinded men's minds, and hardened their hearts, so that they can scarcely either see or feel the benevolent influence of more elevated views. Parents, however, have need to regret the existence of such doctrines ; for many have experienced most poignant anguish, and sometimes positive madness, in consequence of the ideas which the doctrines teach respecting the eternal state of children. The notion about original sin, supposes that we are condemned for the transgressions of Adam, as well as for our own ! It is thus imagined, that though a child may have committed no sin of his own, yet in consequence of this original sin, in

the sight of God, he is guilty, and worthy of condemnation! But the monstrosity of condemning an innocent child for the sins of his forefathers, is so abundantly evident, that even some of the advocates of this doctrine, have themselves found it expedient to soften its enormity, by inventing a process, through which the child may be saved, and the doctrine still retained. This process is, "baptismal regeneration;" and hence it is imagined, that when a child is baptized, the guilt of original sin is washed away; and by the same process, it is further supposed, that the infant is regenerated by the Holy Spirit!*

It is our intention to enter upon the question of baptism,† only so far as may be necessary to place our present subject in its proper light. But we must first remark, that there is no evidence whatever in the Scriptures, of this doctrine of "original sin." Nay, it is not only not mentioned there, but the very opposite is plainly declared. The doctrine of original sin, means that a child is guilty, because of the transgression of his progenitors; but the

* See the Church of England baptismal service.

† For a full investigation of this vexed question, we beg to refer the reader to a work recently published by the Rev. W. Woodman, on "Baptism, its true nature, object, necessity, and uses." London: Hodson.

doctrine of the Bible is, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die. *The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son.*" 18 Ezech. 20. This doctrine and the Bible are consequently completely opposed. We will not stop to prove which is the more likely to be right, for we may safely leave the decision to the pious and candid reader.

But we must not be misunderstood; when we deny the doctrine of "original sin," it must be remembered, that we do not thereby deny the doctrine of "hereditary evil." Every man inherits certain *tendencies* from his parents, both mentally and bodily. Hence it is well known, that parents frequently transmit diseases of various kinds to their children, especially scrofula, consumption, and insanity; and as these bodily evils are inherited, so are mental evils also; and, therefore, it appears that every sin a parent does, inasmuch as he thereby incorporates it into his own mental and bodily constitution, he transmits to his offspring a *tendency* to the same evil. Thus the consequences to the first sinner were, not only that he began to "die" himself, in the day that he ate of the forbidden tree, but that he also became liable to transmit a tendency to the same "death" or sin to his next posterity. And as that

and succeeding generations, made this hereditary evil into actual sin, evil continued to be transmitted in greater intensity and in a more aggravated form, until at last it grew so great, that human freedom was about to be destroyed; for as evil accumulated, it perverted the mental and bodily faculties of man even from his birth, and if it had continued, heaven would not have been attainable by him; hence it is declared that "no flesh could have been saved," if Jehovah had not manifested Himself in the person of Jesus, to "destroy these works of the devil," and to "save his people from their sins." This commencement of sin, and redemption from it, is described by the Apostle, when he says, "Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in *Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.*"*

From this it is manifest that there is such a thing as "hereditary evil," and also what it is, and how it accumulated and made redemption necessary; but it is plain, that it is a very different thing from "original sin." The last is a pure invention, and ought to be rejected, but the first is evident to every one, and cannot be denied. But we are not to imagine that any one is condemned

* 1 Cor. xv. 21, 22.

for "hereditary evil." Man will be judged for his own deeds, but for no other. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father." The question then is not what effect has baptism on "original sin?" for there is none; but what effect has it on hereditary evil?" If "hereditary evil" be not condemnatory, then baptism does not take away any condemnation, for what is not, of course, cannot be taken away; and that baptism does not take away "hereditary evil" itself, is plain, for the inherited tendencies remain just as powerful after as before it. Baptism, therefore, does not remove any guilt from children, nor yet any hereditary evil; and, consequently, the whole doctrine of a child being condemned because of his not being baptized, is purely imaginary, and has no foundation in either Scripture or reason. We do not undervalue the rite, nor deny the efficacy of baptism, when properly understood, and applied to the right purpose, but it is inapplicable here.

That a parent may be still more satisfied that his deceased child is not condemned for want of baptism, let him consult his reason and judgment, and infer from them the probabilities of the case. The doctrine under consideration, not only assumes that an innocent child may be con-

demned for the sins of others, but also that his salvation, depends upon a mere contingency! An event that may or may not happen. It may be utterly impossible to have the child baptised before death, for in thousands of cases children die almost as soon as they are born; and yet this doctrine teaches, that even these children may be "damned" for an omission on the part of the parents, which it was *impossible* to avoid! Or the minister may be absent, and the attendants ignorant of the fact, that the officiation of others is as efficacious as that of the priest, and in consequence, the poor little innocent dies unbaptized; in such a case, according to the doctrine, the child is not saved; simply because of the ignorance of his attendants and the inattention of the priest! Surely no parent, who possesses reason and judgment, can hesitate to reject a doctrine of this sort. Again, a large portion of our christian brethren conscientiously object to infant baptism; and thus every child of theirs, that dies in infancy, is expelled from heaven, for no fault of the child's, but because his parents conscientiously objected to his baptism! Who can believe that there is a God in heaven who acts according to this doctrine? A thousand similar contingencies may be

supposed, every one of which would put the doctrine in an equally outrageous position.

The salvation of one never can depend upon the will or ignorance of another, and therefore the eternal happiness of a child, is unaffected by inattention, ignorance, error, or any other conceivable thing on the part of his parents or others. We can neither be condemned nor saved by what others either are or do ; so that an infant is in no jeopardy whatever from anything that may happen to him, during his brief existence in this world. He is under divine protection, and man cannot injure his eternal welfare. We therefore say again, that all deceased children are saved, whether they be born of Christian or Pagan, pious or infidel parents ; for they are all alike free from actual guilt, and possess a certain natural innocence, which is the receptacle of every thing that is heavenly.

It is innocence that makes heaven ; and though the innocence of infancy is but the innocence of ignorance, it is still perfect of its kind, and is accepted by the Lord, because it is impossible for children to present anything better. The divine acceptance of all children is declared in these words—"Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom

of God." * Those children which were brought to the Saviour, were not baptized, and yet they received his blessing! and even so it will be with every child, whether he die baptized or otherwise. He will go into the eternal world, and be protected from all evil, and his infantile mind will be gradually trained to heavenly life and happiness, and in due time he will become an angel, and a conscious recipient of bliss.

It may be asked, up to what age is a child preserved in this salvable state? It is, perhaps, impossible to say; but we should suppose that the state continues up to the time, when the mind becomes capable of acting from reason, deliberation, and reflection. A man cannot be held responsible for what he does not understand; and no one can understand until he is capable of experience. We must not confound mere *knowledge* with *understanding*; for they are very distinct things. It is possible to know and yet not understand. To *know*, is the mere recognition of a general fact, which is retained through a simple effort of memory; but to *understand*, is to bring reason into operation upon the same fact, for the purpose of ascertaining the *how* and the *why* of it. In this

* 10 Mark 14.

sense, knowledge is more or less an attribute of all living things. A beast can recognise the existence of a mountain and the herbage upon it ; (here is the general fact,) but man alone is capable of understanding the nature of the mountain and its productions, (here is the *how* and the *why* of the fact.) Hence, we must not imagine that mere knowledge implies much responsibility ; for as beasts have knowledge, and may be considered to be responsible as far as they know, yet this sort of responsibility is so imperfect, that it is generally considered as nothing ; it is, therefore, manifest that mere knowledge, even in man, does not constitute him truly responsible. It is only when reason and intelligence begin to pervade our knowledge, that we become strictly accountable for our deeds. A child, though he may possess a great amount of knowledge, is often very feeble in the quality of understanding. He knows much, but understands little. Hence we justly attach but little blame to him if he do wrong, because we know that he has had but little experience. It is only by practice that his knowledge becomes really converted into understanding. It therefore follows, that a child has to become an understanding being, as well as a knowing being, before he can be held truly account-

able in the sight of God. Some arrive at this state at one age and some at another. It all depends upon the mental and bodily constitution of the child, and the position in life in which he is placed. Children, with the same character of mind, when thrown upon their own resources at an early age, become much more experienced in understanding, than others, who have had everything done for them. The former will, therefore, become responsible much earlier than the latter. But no precise age can be fixed, under which it would be proper to say all are saved, and above which all are held responsible. It may be stated, however, as a probability, that there is hope for all who die under eighteen or twenty, and scarcely any doubt respecting those who die under twelve or fifteen.*

Some may observe, when reviewing this doctrine of the salvation of *all* infants; "why does not God

* The following remarks of Swedenborg are pointed and interesting:—"The good of infancy is inseminated from man's infancy to the tenth year of his age; the good of ignorance from the tenth to the twentieth; from this year man begins to become truly rational, and to have the faculty of reflecting upon good and truth. It was upon this account the Jews were not permitted to go to war, before they were twenty years of age." 1 Num. 20 to 45. A.C. 2260.

cause all to die in infancy, so that all might be saved?" In the first place, it may be asked in reply, if all were to die in infancy, or early life, how would the human race be continued? There would certainly be a difficulty here. It is plain, that in such a case mankind would soon come to an end. One reason, then, why all do not die in infancy or early life, is, because the human race could not be continued; and thus the design of creation, which is to form a heaven of holy and happy beings from the human race, would be frustrated. This is a conclusive reason.

And in the next place, though all infants are saved, and consequently eternally happy, it does not follow that living to mature years is a less desirable blessing. In fact, if we live well, life in this world is a blessing in addition to that which infants enjoy. In adult life, there are uses which do not and cannot belong to infancy; and if men perform these well, Providence will bless them, for He has provided, that, for every additional use, there shall be given additional good. So that men have only to live well, and they will receive blessings at least as great as those of infants.

Because we say that all infants are saved, it may be imagined we mean, that they do not need

regenerating, and thus that all the "*trouble*," consequent upon that work, is avoided in their case. This, however, would be a mistake. Infants as well as men must be regenerated; that is, they must be built up in the life and character of heaven; and inasmuch as they die, without "*actual sin*," there is nothing to oppose the reception of these in heaven itself. It is obvious that all who live in heaven must be principled in the *innocence of wisdom*, for this constitutes heaven itself. This state is that childhood of the kingdom of God, which the Lord means when he says— "Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall not enter therein."* And the way to this spiritual infancy, is described as the "*new birth*;" therefore, "ye must be born again."† Now a child, though himself the symbol of this wise innocency, is not in it, but he has the groundwork of it, and is introduced to it by the teaching of angels and the introduction to what is good in heaven. Infants, therefore, are regenerated in heaven, and men on earth: there is a difference, however, between these two kinds of regeneration, arising from the different grounds on which they are erected, and the different circumstances in which they are accomplished.

* 10 Matt. 15.

† 3 John 7.

The hereditary evils of man are either expelled or conquered by regeneration, but those of a child are neither ; he is, however, protected from them, and he learns to resist them. In this then there is a difference, and it appears to be a difference in favor of man, for it seems better to have an evil conquered, than simply to have it closed up.

Moreover, an adult acquires a plane from the external world, which a child, in his brief stay there, does not. This is regenerated, and becomes the ultimate of his thought and life in heaven. So that a man begins his progress to the innocence of wisdom, from a lower ground than a child, and yet he is capable of ascending to the same elevation. If, therefore, there be any eternal advantage in one over the other, that is, between dying in childhood and dying in adult age, it seems to incline to the side of manhood, providing man will make good use of his time in this world ; for a saved man may have all that the saved child has, and this lower plane in addition ; and he enjoys whatever advantage may be in it, over and above that, which the child can enjoy.

Notwithstanding that all infants are saved, it is scarcely probable, that infancy is the most orderly period, in which human beings should pass from

time to eternity. Before the fall, that is, amongst the race of beings, whose quality and character are represented by Adam in paradise, one may imagine that few, if any, died in childhood; for then society was comparatively perfect, and free from disease. There was no disease until there was sin, and without disease it is probable, that there would be no deaths in infancy. Even the advance we have made in outward civilization* has made a perceptible diminution in the deaths of children. In our own country, the deaths of infants have been fewer for some years, in proportion to adults, than formerly, † which must be in consequence of subjecting children to a more faithful obedience to the laws of creation.

* We speak of outward and inward civilization, by the first we mean, a knowledge of, and obedience to, the physical and moral laws of creation; by the latter, a knowledge of, and obedience to, the mental and spiritual laws of creation. These two kinds of civilization, when united together, constitute a perfect Christianity. Society is rapidly improving in the first, and the elements of progress in the second, also exist. And in proportion as both prevail amongst mankind, in the same proportion will man spiritually, and more or less naturally too, approach that state, which is mentioned by the prophet, "There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days; for the child shall die a hundred years old." 65 Is. 20.

† Registrar General's Reports.

If then by obedience to the laws of God, as manifested in physical creation, some children are preserved alive that would otherwise have died, we may infer that it is only through disobedience to the divine laws that any die at all ; and that if we were to fulfil all the conditions of which our nature is capable, we should all pass through regeneration on earth, and death would, perhaps, be without disease, and at the time when life is beginning to be least useful and pleasant. It is probable, therefore, that it is more in accordance with divine order, that all should live to adult age ; and if so, it seems to follow, that death at mature life, is, at least, as desirable as that in infancy.

From these particulars, then, it is plain, that all could not die in childhood without the human race ceasing to exist. And it is also manifest that there is no partiality shown towards infants in permitting them to die an early death, for all adults, if they make use of the appointed means, may arrive, by regeneration in this life, at an equal state of glory in heaven.

God distributes his blessings with an equal hand ; and if, in this life, we have not all to labor at the work of regeneration to the same extent, and in the same manner, it is because of the difference in our individual natures. And if we pass into

eternity, at different times, and in different conditions, it is doubtless the best that can be under the circumstances. Our good Lord of the vineyard will do us no wrong. If we all "work while it is day," according to our several conditions and necessities, we shall all receive our "penny;" that is, the *reward* we are most fitted to enjoy. Every man will not get the *same* "penny," but every laborer will receive what is of equal value to him; he will be blest according to his capacity for receiving blessing. It is an important truth to remember, that every man, both good and evil, shall receive hereafter, the results of his deeds done in the body "Verily, verily, I say unto you, they have their reward."*

III.

Now, as infants rise immediately after the death of the body, and are all saved, it will be interesting to dwell a little upon their probable future condition. The first thing which we may suppose to occur is, that as soon as the child is raised from the dead, he will be carried by angels into heaven; just as the Scriptures describe the translation of

* 6 Matt. 5.

Lazarus;* for as children have no actual evil, there can be no place fit for them but heaven.

The first state of man after death, is, most probably, very similar to his last in this world. He takes with him every thing but the body. Lazarus was mentally, still the same Lazarus, and Dives was also Dives. Man's immortal part is not changed by death. The mind remains precisely the same; and, therefore, an infant is still an infant, a child is still a child, a man is still a man, and a woman is still a woman; for these conditions of human nature, belong more to the mind than to the body. It is not a large body that makes a man, nor is it a little body that makes an infant. If you put the mind of a child into the body of a giant, you have but a large child after all. And however diminutive a man's body may be, he is still a man, if he possess the mind of a man.

It, therefore, seems to follow, that the first state of an infant, in heaven, will be infantile, that of a youth, youthful, &c., for their minds were such when they left this world. But are we to imagine that infants will remain infants for ever? This is scarcely probable. There are some children who die almost before consciousness begins; the activi-

* 16 Luke 22.

ties of their affections and thoughts, must be both few and of the faintest kind imaginable. Now what use or pleasure, can the child perform or enjoy, if he have to exist in eternity in this state? What mother could feel delight in contemplating her child as an eternal babe, shut out, because of the undeveloped condition of his faculties, from new thoughts, new affections, and, as a consequence, from new joys? There must be some error in this doctrine of everlasting infants. We cannot think it probable, that God would permit such beings to exist to eternity. And the good sense of mankind, would have abandoned the notion long ago, if it had not been constantly perpetuated and confirmed, sometimes by foolish stories, and at other times, by images and paintings of cherubs in churches and chapels, which young persons are taught to consider as truthful representations of the eternal state of children.

We may arrive at a very reasonable solution of the subject, by simply supposing that a child takes with him every mental capacity with which he is endowed in this life; and amongst the rest the capacity for receiving intelligence and wisdom through the medium of instruction. He must have strange notions of the eternal state, who would doubt this and say, that a child could not receive

knowledge in heaven. It is doubtless one of the peculiar blessings of the kingdom of God, to be able to grow there in wisdom and intelligence ; and perhaps even more rapidly and correctly than on earth ; and we cannot imagine that children will be deprived of this blessing, for they, above all others, have the most need of it.

Let it then be granted that a deceased child will grow in the knowledge of what is good and true ; and if this be admitted, we may easily infer that children will not remain children for ever ; for as the mind is the real man, so the mind of the child becoming developed and filled with intelligence, he will become more and more manly, until at last he will altogether cease to be infantile, and attain to true angelic manhood. We have shown that it is intelligence and wisdom which constitute a man, and the absence of them which makes a child ; when, then, a child becomes possessed of them, he must cease to be a child, and become in all respects a man. So that infants will probably grow more manly in form as well as in mind, exactly in proportion as they receive intelligence and wisdom, and will go through the various gradations of life, until they arrive at a state of youthful beauty and intelligence ; and inasmuch as this state is the most joyous and vigorous of

our existence, it is likely that it will be everlasting. Innocence and wisdom are the cause of true human beauty; and where they eternally exist, we may suppose, that they will eternally retain the form of beauty and intelligence. And there being no form which combines beauty and intelligence so much as that of youth, when it is just entering into manhood, we think that this will be the form of their immortality. Thus the common phrase, "immortal youth," is not merely a beautiful poetical expression, but an absolute reality.

With a little thought, there will be no difficulty in perceiving the truth of this position. Parents behold, then, your dear children grown up and become "young men and maidens" in the kingdom of God! Brought into being by your means, they have now left your guardian care and become the children of the Lord. They have been adopted by Him, not from any merit on their part, or favoritism on His, but from His pure mercy towards their innocent condition; to Him, therefore, be all the glory!

But through whose medium is all this blessedness effected? The Lord tells us, and it is also what reason will assent to, that all children, both on earth and in heaven, are under the especial auspices of God himself. This is what was repre-

sented by the Lord, "when he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them."* How beautifully is the Lord's *affection* for children symbolically expressed by that peculiarly endearing act, of "taking them up (or clasping them) in His arms," and thus pressing them to his bosom! His *protection* and *care*, by his "putting his hands upon them," and the *eternal joy* and *happiness* which they shall receive, by "His blessing!" One reason of this especial providence, is, the utter helplessness of children themselves. When humanity is weak, God supplies the deficiency; for where can divine protection be more useful, than where it is most needed? We may, therefore, infer, that all who are innocently helpless, such as infants, imbeciles, and the uninstructed, are peculiarly protected by the divine Providence.

Providence, however, works through human mediums, and in various ways, consistently with their freedom, disposes the hearts of men and angels, to love and nourish these "little ones," until they can be endowed with the intelligence and wisdom of men. Some persons, and especially some females, are so actuated with the tenderest affection towards children, that they are never

* 10 Mark 16.

happy unless engaged in some work of love for them. We do not mean, by such persons, those whose devotedness to their own offspring alone is conspicuous, but those who have a universal love for children. The hearts of such swell with delight, the eye brightens, and a thousand pleasant things are brought into activity, when they are in the company of the young. They draw, persuade, direct aright, and in nameless ways are good and kind. In this manner they manifest a wise and tender sympathy, and while they thus bless children, they also bless themselves, for they find their highest happiness in such employment.

Now, if it be a fact, as we have already observed, that the dead take with them into eternity, every characteristic of mind, which they possessed in this life, particularly those affections and practices in which they found their principal delight and pleasure; is there anything improbable in the idea, that those who have loved children so tenderly on earth, will love them as tenderly in heaven? A supposition of this kind, is in perfect harmony with reason; there is also something beautiful and satisfactory in it; something that is pleasing to our better nature, and just the very thing that a bereaved mother would wish to find true. We may, moreover, perceive that it is neces-

sary it should be so, not only for the sake of children, but also for the purpose of completing the happiness of those, when they become angels, who love infants; for unless they were permitted to gratify their love for children, by assisting them in their progress toward the innocency of wisdom, they could not be happy, and heaven itself would not be delightful to them; for no one can be happy in heaven, unless he be permitted to gratify his ruling affection.

We, therefore, think that, as soon as infants are raised from the dead, and enter into heaven, they are delivered into the care of those who have loved children on earth; and thus a double good is accomplished, the infants receive tender protectors, and those employed in protecting them, find objects through whom their love can be gratified. The infants obtain, as it were, new parents, who love them as tenderly, as if they were their own offspring, and the children, in return, love their protectors, as if they were their own mothers! The Lord seems to speak of these angels, and to teach this very circumstance when he says—"Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, that in heaven, *their* angels do always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven."*

* 18 Matt. 10.

Here He speaks of "angels" that properly belong to children, and hence the emphatic manner of His expression; He does not say—"the angels," but "*their* angels," that is, the angels whose especial office it is to guard and assist deceased children.

In this manner, then, does our heavenly Father provide for the guardianship of our dear children when taken from us by death. How sweet and consoling is this view to a disconsolate parent! Let not an anxious mother doubt the affectionate and kind spirit of these guardians; for none can be admitted to this office, who do not tenderly love children, and whose heavenly life is not of the most elevated kind. In heaven no one can instruct, who is not good. The exalted character of these angels is indicated by their dwelling in the immediate presence of God; "*they do always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven;*" for all who dwell in the divine presence, must be holy, or they could not exist there. It is even possible that, in some cases, these angelic guardians may be the departed spirits of valued friends or dear relations; in others, they may even be the mothers of the parents, the grandparents of the child, who, after having carefully nourished the mothers, have been called to heaven, to train and perfect the children! What mother, with such a

view as this before her, would wish for her child on earth again ?

But further,—In the hands of such angelic beings, we may imagine, perhaps imperfectly, but still as far as it goes, truly, the treatment and the kind of training that children in heaven receive. In the first place, the affectionate and holy nature of these guardians is a guarantee, that their treatment will be of the tenderest kind conceivable; and the wisdom with which we may also suppose them to be endowed, is a sufficient security, that they will train them with wisdom. How wisely and how wonderfully, they will gain the confidence of their immortal pupils, and then implant, first a truth, and then a good, until at last the simple innocence of childhood, shall give place to the innocence of wisdom !

From the perfect knowledge of character, which doubtless exists above, we may imagine that the peculiarities of age, temperament, and capabilities, of every child, as he arrives in the eternal world, will, in a wonderful manner, be consulted and moulded, in such a way, as will be most productive of final happiness. All the characteristics, too, of children, such as their engaging simplicity,

from anxiety concerning the future, their joyous dispositions and contentment of mind, their impressions that toys and every other thing, are endowed with life, their willingness to be taught, and inclination to obey, and their love of parents, nurses, and companions, will all be made use of as so many foundations of the angelic life.

There will be no cultivation of one faculty at the expense or neglect of another. No one will be made clever, who is not also made good. The intellect will not be a garden, while the heart remains a desert. Neither will that be taught which is not in agreement with the nature of the child to learn. But every capacity will be harmoniously developed, and built up according to its own peculiar nature. The mind will be thus balanced, and like the different limbs of a perfect body, every faculty will contribute to the use and power of another; mental attributes will agree; for "Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim."*

There is one distinction, which will stand out prominently in the character of children, in heaven. Some are naturally soft, yielding, and full of affection. They delight in loving; and adore what they love. They are the sweet *Maries* of the

* 11 Is. 13.

Gospel, who anoint the Lord, and sit at his feet. They think, speak, and act with such gentleness, that everything seems spontaneously to flow from love. They may be described as being of *celestial* genius. There are others, on the other hand, whose intellect predominates over their voluntary faculties. They are hard, quick, resentful, dominant, soon offended, but generally soon inclined to forgive. They are the Marthas of the Gospel. If they grow up in this world, they become anxious, careful, and troubled about many things. And if they become virtuous, they love truth, and have an intense admiration of uprightness and integrity of character. They are of a *spiritual* character.

These distinguishing peculiarities will naturally give a cast and inclination to the whole immortality of both classes ; and in order that they may obtain the highest joy of which their nature is capable, they must be differently placed, and surrounded with such things as suit their different

earth, mankind would become wiser and better from generation to generation.

In heaven, therefore, we may imagine that there will be as much variety in the modes of communicating what is good and true, as there are differences in disposition and capacity. Sometimes they will be taught in a direct form ; at others by gentle insinuations into the yielding affections of infants ; but, perhaps, most frequently by beautiful representations of heavenly and divine things, which will both interest and instruct.

In heaven, every external thing is the correspondent or outbirth and type of some internal thought and affection. An angel lives in the midst of the symbols of his own mind, which are beautiful, in proportion as he is good. Angels, thus, become acquainted with each other's thoughts and dispositions, through the medium of emblematic forms, and are also instructed by the same means ; and children will doubtless be trained to recognize symbols, so that wherever they go, and in whatever they see, they will find lessons of wisdom. Their little clothing will be beautiful according to their perceptions of truth ; and should there exist any blemish, either in their thoughts or affections, it will immediately manifest itself in something around them ; perhaps as a dark spot upon their

garments, or in the absence of some symbol of holiness, such as the Bible; by this means the internal fault, if we may call it one, will become reflected upon their external senses, and they will thus see that something is amiss, and immediately endeavour to rectify it.

We see nothing unreasonable in the thought, but if it be a mere fiction, it is at least delightful to imagine our dear children, who are beyond the grave, as clothed with simple but beautiful garments, with perhaps garlands of spiritual flowers adorning their breasts, each of which, may be supposed to be the emblem of some pleasing thought, which is occupying their infant minds. We may think of their guardians too, as leading them into paradisiacal gardens, which are full of symbols of sacred things, and in consequence, whose trees may be called, trees of knowledge, and whose flowers will send forth a glad radiance, which shall penetrate the infant mind, with pleasure and delight. We may also imagine, that in these symbolic gardens,

glorious exhibition of all that is true and good ; through which, things divine, are made manifest to angels.

This may be, and doubtless is, one of the modes of instruction in heaven. It is a beautiful plan, and it is most efficacious too, for something of the kind, but much more imperfect than our conception of the thing, as it exists above, has been tried on earth in modern times, and succeeded admirably, as far as it was carried. In ancient times, it seems to have been the common mode of instruction ; and it is probable, that the fables, myths, and other remnants of the early ages of the Grecian, Egyptian, and Indian nations, are the remains of symbolic teachings. The Bible itself is filled with symbols, which are most seen in the early part of it, where Eden, its gardens, its trees of life, and knowledge, are described. And if symbols are thus made use of in the Word, why may we not suppose that they exist in heaven too ? If we admit that the prophets, the apostles, and the revelator, had communication with the eternal world by their visions, it becomes manifest that symbolic things do exist there ; for how can we otherwise understand the extraordinary appearances, which they describe as having seen there. In all this, there is sufficient evidence to warrant,

at least the supposition, that there are beautiful emblems in the kingdom of God, which exhibit truth in most charming forms, and give it a fixedness and definiteness, which it could not otherwise possess.

Nothing can obstruct the understanding of truth or the reception of good, where there is neither actual falsehood nor evil; we may, therefore, conclude, that children will rapidly increase in both; and as infants, in heaven, grow and obtain complete use of every faculty, both mentally and bodily, in proportion as they receive truth and good, we may infer, that they will sooner arrive at angelic manhood, than those who remain on earth. There is something very obtuse and slow about the body, which greatly interferes with man's perception of truth, and reception of good; and it is reasonable to imagine, when it is taken away, and the mind begins to act through a purely spiritual form, that the thoughts will expand and seize hold of things with a quicker, firmer, and truer grasp; and those things, the very existence of which was scarcely

plished, the child will also come into the exercise of the various faculties of his spiritual body. So he that will be able to speak, walk, &c., as soon as he learns to think and love. From which it appears, that the state of infants in the other life, is much more perfect than that of infants in this.

It is possible, that those who die in very early life, may scarcely know that they have ever existed on earth. All who die under two or three months old, cannot know much of this world ; hence, it is possible, that they may suppose themselves to have been born in heaven. In that case, they will know no other Father than the Lord. It is true, that God is the only Father acknowledged in heaven even by angels,* and that natural relationships cease, and spiritual ones begin, after the death of the body ; but from the fact of children knowing so little of earth, they will doubtless grow up in this idea, more completely than others. In this case, it is possible that infants, having grown up in heaven, and having never known actual evil, may imagine, that the goodness and truth which they possess, are from themselves and not from the Lord. There is a strong tendency in the human mind to this supposition. That they may know, however, from experience, that it is not so,

* 23 Matt. 9.

it is probable, that they will be occasionally let into their hereditary evils, and left in them, until they see and acknowledge, that all things good and true, are from the Lord alone. By this means they will gradually be taught to acknowledge, that God is "the truly Good and Wise," the all in all of heaven and happiness; and also to refuse to be led by others, or to speak and act from others, or even from themselves, and thus they will yield themselves up to be led and governed entirely by the Lord.

Such then, is a probable view of the education and state of children after death. No breath of evil or error is permitted to tarnish their eternal glory; no evil word, or wicked example, occurs in their presence. How different this is to the training of many "little ones," on earth! Day by day they hear and see things, for which parents ought to blush. Scenes of passion, contention, arbitrary treatment, untruthfulness, and sometimes even worse still, form the constant experiences of some

Providence that so many of the human race die in infancy.

To those who believe in the *substantial*, as distinguished from the *ideal* or *vapoury*, character of the eternal world, it will be admitted that, there is nothing improbable in any of the views we have now advanced; and, therefore, we feel ourselves justified, in placing them before the public, as materials for thought on the state of children in the other life. If they should prove to be true, what blessedness our dear children will experience in the kingdom of God! But let us hope, and resign ourselves and our children to the will of our heavenly Father, for if the facts of their immortality, be not as we have supposed, yet we may rest assured, that whatever they may be, they will not be less beautiful and benevolent; for the highest imaginings of men, can never be more glorious than the eternal realities of the kingdom of heaven.



FINIS.

LEEDS:

PRINTED BY JOHN MILLS, TRINITY STREET.