

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE CONTINUATION OF GOD'S BLESSINGS.

God saith, verily My compassion overcometh My wrath.

—*The Holy Prophet.*

WERE it not for our physical sensations we should be unable to understand the meaning of pleasure or pain, and the very beauty of the word Paradise would be unintelligible to us. A spirit or soul never clothed in flesh conveys nothing whatever to our minds or hearts. All sensations of love for the wonderful beauties of Nature are connected with the life blood which unceasingly flows through our living frames. It is not possible to conceive any joys unconnected with bodily sensations. Take the case of kindly actions alone—I mean unselfish acts by which one human being is able to give great pleasure to another or help another without any prospect of worldly reward for himself—is it not a fact that every such act produces a thrill of physical joy or a light-heartedness which is beneficial to health and happiness? The question of *why* the spirits and souls should be clothed in flesh is not one for us to ask, we only know that it was God's will, and no human being can presume to inquire into such mysteries.

Heavenly blessings, and those good things which “pass man's understanding,” may not be identical with those pleasures we already know something about on this earth, but it is extremely unlikely that an entirely new set of conditions will be presented

when the transition time of passing from the earthly to the heavenly state takes place. We see continuity in all creation, and is it not, therefore, *reasonable* to suppose that in the future state we may experience a further development, in intensified and glorified form, of those pleasures we already know something about? Why not? There is nothing wrong in enjoying the pleasures of life, or the Merciful and Compassionate God would not have given us senses which enable us to appreciate those pleasures. As the Holy Koran says: "Bear good tidings to those who believe and do good works that they shall inherit gardens beneath which rivers flow. So often as they are fed in that life with fruits they shall say: 'These are the fruits which were given us formerly,' because they shall find the fruits of after-life resembling the fruits which were given them here."

The fruits of Paradise may not indeed be the *same* as those we enjoy on earth, but they will be such as we can understand and appreciate in an intensified form, and this would not be the case if we had not received the previous instruction and experience. The remembrance of God and His Mercies will be an everlasting source of joy, and will enable the true believers to identify the fruits of Paradise with those of this world, and they will be able to say, "These are the fruits which were given us in the former life."

The idea of *continuity* runs through the pages of the Koran. As Mirza Ghulam Ahmad said, in his remarkable work, "The Teachings of Islam," whatever good men enjoy spiritually in this life are really blessings not of this, but of the next life, and are "granted to them as a specimen of the bliss that is in store for them in the next life in order to increase their yearning for it."

From this we may be led to infer that whether we regard the existence of mankind from the standpoint of this present world—which we know *something* about—or from the hypothetical and more extended and wonderful platform of the next world—of which at present we know so little—we cannot get away from the fact that we are *ourselves*. Each individual must have had a beginning, ordered by God Himself, and it would seem that the identity of each must be the same whatever the environment or however extended the different stages of existence.

To the entirely unimaginative and stolid individual, who regards with indifference all the pleasures of this life, there can never come any very keen desire for an increase of those pleasures—his blunted faculties will not allow him to experience delight in the beauties of Nature and wonders of the universe, so that his conception of Paradise is probably very feeble. On the other hand, the sensitive and highly appreciative nature of one who gratefully accepts the bounties and pleasures of life is probably energized and strengthened by looking forward to a Paradise where there is the enjoyment in greatly intensified form of those delights he has already experienced.

It does seem strange that the teachings of the Western Churches have exerted so much influence for so many hundreds of years, when it is considered that such a needlessly insipid and unattractive future state is set forth in the doctrines advanced, which are held to be of vital importance. As a small boy my only dread of death was connected with a fear of being compelled to sit on a cloud for ever playing a harp. Exactly how the repellent idea got into my head I do not remember, but there it was, and it induced discomfort of mind. How much more

desirable would it have been had a beautiful flower and lovely view of earth and sky and sea been shown to me with the remark : " There, my boy, you see how pretty and sweet that flower is, and how splendid that view? Well, in Heaven there are flowers a hundred times more beautiful and sweet, and views a hundred times more magnificent." This would have given me something to look forward to and desire ; and even now the mere writing down of these words gives me comfort, as I feel they are so true.

Why should it be wrong for human creatures whose experience of pleasures is, so far as they know for certain, confined to this present world's lessons and attractions, to look forward to a continuation of such pleasures on a far grander scale? But here the sacerdotal element comes in and says, " No ; all is vanity, the pleasures of this world are wicked, you must not enjoy them, and above all, you must not expect anything of the kind in the next world." When sacerdotalism holds the key the difficulties as regards Heaven are greatly increased. Why should not Western churches teach the rational doctrine of a continuity of those blessings which mankind already understand and believe in? Why make fresh obstacles by conjuring up complicated statements as to rewards and punishments attendant upon the belief or disbelief in certain dogmas? Why not cultivate a simple faith in God, and trust in His power to intensify all our earthly pleasures in a spiritual existence? Would such a course be in any way hostile to the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ? I think not.

" In every blade of grass I see  
 Thy sacred, loving hand ;  
 In every thought that comes to me  
 Behold the promised Land."

In this verse, written many years ago, I recognize the spirit of continuity—if we can see God's wonderful handiwork in this world we can surely also form some faint idea of His infinite power to magnify the favours He has already showered upon us in such lavish profusion.

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Recently (May 21, 1914), "Heaven" was the subject of a sermon preached by Dean Inge in St. Paul's Cathedral. In the course of his remarks he is reported to have said that he "did not believe there was ever a time when Christians thought less about Heaven. As soon as the clergy left the subjects of this world and began to talk about eternity, men's attention obviously flagged." . . . .  
 "Many Christians tried to make Heaven a geographical expression and to put eternity within the framework of time." The very rev. gentleman concluded his outspoken address by saying that the average man now thought for himself, and knew enough astronomy to feel the absurdity of placing Heaven either inside or outside the Solar System. Many of the clergy were themselves perplexed and said as little about Heaven as they decently could. It was better, he thought, that the clergy should admit that they "do not know," than that there should be crude symbols given to the world as literal facts.

It is not often we hear such broad-minded expressions from the clergy of the Protestant faith, and it would be interesting to know to what extent the worthy Dean's ideas are in sympathy with Islamic truths. He is evidently no supporter of the dogmatic teachings built upon the superstitions of the Dark Ages—preferring the humble spirit of agnosticism which refuses to condemn whilst it cannot

support particular lines of human thought or conduct.

But we do not find one in a hundred Churchmen who will speak thus plainly because they are afraid to deviate from the beaten track, and thus incur the disapproval of "the Church," their superiors, or their congregations. Worldly considerations come in, and the loss of a living or a curacy may be a most serious matter to many men with others depending upon them for support. Recently we have had sad examples of the attitude of certain Churchmen who have not hesitated to attack Islam and thus provoke the hostility of the peaceful and law-abiding Muslims.

Speaking at the annual meeting of the Church Missionary Society in May of this year (1914), Dr. Whitehead, Anglican Bishop of Madras, gave it as his opinion that there was a movement amongst the outcastes of India, and that Christianity should be prepared for that mighty avalanche, when "some fifty or sixty millions of people would be crowding and making their way into the Christian Church." On the same day Dr. Lefroy, Bishop of Calcutta, in the course of a very outspoken and uncompromising address, declared that the problem of Mahomedan evangelization had never received a tenth part of the attention its importance deserved, and that there could be no question of neutrality between the Cross and the Crescent, and that the fight must be fought out. "The only sound method of Christian defence against the onward march of Mahomedanism must be that of attack, the Church throwing itself heart and soul into the great cause, winning the Mahomedan world to allegiance to Christ." The Bishop thus throws down the gauntlet.

All this seems indicative of a desire to see carried into effect the wish expressed in the preface

of the late Mr. Sales' translation of the Koran, viz., that the Protestants should reap the glory of exposing as spurious the Holy Book of the Muslims, and thus upset the Mohamedan religion! Considering how many points of similarity there are between Christianity and Mahomedanism, which are really sister religions, it seems little less than criminal to endeavour to stir up strife. Mahomet and Martin Luther both fought much the same fight, though at very different periods of the world's history, and they both fought against common enemies—Idolatry, Dogma, and Sacerdotalism.

Let us hope that wiser counsels may now prevail, and that every person in the British Empire will at least take the trouble to learn something about the Muslim creed, for this would certainly bring about a better feeling, and we shall no longer be classed with "infidels and heretics"—as the Protestant Prayer Book has it. It is humiliating to have to admit that there is such a display of uncalled for hostility on the part of the so-called Christians necessitating so much forbearance and forgiveness on the part of the Muslims. In these days of doubt and uncertainty, the Empire should encourage all its loyal subjects and discountenance any unfair attacks on Muslim subjects who are known to be well disposed and obedient to the laws of the land.

THE END.