

# *THE PULPIT*

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**"And how can they hear without a preacher?"—ST. PAUL.**

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## THE CHRISTIAN'S HOME HEREAFTER.

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TEXT.—“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth.”—Revelation xxi: 1.

**T**HERE are so many ways in which the Lord's entrance into the world at Bethlehem can be taken and considered that the preacher never feels himself at loss for a theme. Only it must be stated that if we who preach are going to be entirely exempt from perplexity of the sort, it must be because we accept this Bethlehem Redeemer in His divine infinitude. It is small work preaching every 25th of December on the birth of a small Christ. It is small work and it is tiresome work. And by a small Christ I do not mean small in his body but small in his meaning, finite in the reaches of His life, and only a man in His genius and mission. If this little Christmas Jesus is only a man child, then we are under pretty heavy contract in trying to expatiate upon Him effectively every winter solstice: it taxes the original fecundity of the pulpit and loads still more heavily the devout forbearance of the pew.

But if, on the contrary, it is a God-child that we are concerning ourselves with, then we are on a circumference that never returns into itself again and we can go on preaching Christmas sermons until time gets tired and the world grows old.

My interest now in Christ's advent into the world lies in the fact that it rubs out so much of the distance that is ordinarily thought of as separating the world we live in and the world He came from. The children can understand what I mean by that if I say to

them this: there is a little red world off in the sky quite by itself that we call by the name of the planet Mars. In certain respects it is much like the world that we live upon. People have been studying it carefully these last years with their telescopes, and some queer and interesting discoveries have been made. It has been imagined that there may be people living up there. Still when we have closed up our telescopes and look away into the sky and see that little red dot shining so small and silently all by itself, it seems so fearfully far away that we come to think it is not exactly a real thing after all. We see it in a bright, clear evening, but it might about as well be a picture for all the real effect it produces upon us or all the real interest we feel in it. You will have to throw some sort of a bridge across, or run some kind of a telephone wire, before the little round world up there will begin to be a thing that will delote much to you or that you will have much care for. Thoughts work mostly at short range. It is not easy to be greatly interested in a thing a hundred thousand miles away. Indeed, a thing is never quite real to us so long as it is a hundred thousand miles away. But if we could get a piece of that Mars close by, so as to be able to see it and handle it, everything so far as relates to your feelings about it would be instantly changed. You know there are what we call falling stars; blazing stones sometimes go flying through

the air (you have yourselves seen them occasionally in the evening) and fall to the earth and sometimes fall with such tremendous speed and power as to bury themselves several feet under ground. Some have thought that these falling stars are simply bits of some old planet (like Mars, for instance), that has crushed itself into fragments by running against some other planet. But however that may be, supposing that some one of you boys could get hold of one of those blazing rocks that have tumbled down, say from Mars, and could knock off a piece (after it had gotten cold), a piece small enough so that you could handle it, bring it close to your eye and feel it; and then finally by examining it sharply could find the word "Mars" written on it. Then how do you suppose you would feel when you went out in the evening and looked up into the sky and saw that red star, that little blushing world that your little stone chip fell down from? It might still be a good ways away, but you would look at it with big interested eyes, and would have no doubt but that it was a real thing. You would know that it was there, and you would be as sure of it as you are that the earth you live on is here.

Still a sliver of rock is not much, even if the word "Mars" is written on it. And so, supposing, instead of its being a rock that slips down, blazing hot, into your door-yard, it is a letter addressed to you post marked "Mars," stamped "July A. D., 1899," for unless their postal facilities are a good deal nimbler than ours, it would require at least a year to reach you. If only a stone dropped down all you would know about Mars would, be that it was made out of stone; but if a letter came down, written in such a way that you could read it, you would know that there was somebody up there. Mars is beginning to be interesting, you see; and when you went out in the evening and looked up to the beautiful world you would wonder what sort of people they were there, what they were doing and whether they were much like us. It is no nearer than it was before, but

it is coming to mean a great deal to you.

Still a letter is nothing but paper and ink and envelope and postage stamp. It is better than the stone that tumbled down and that you knocked a piece from, but supposing instead of sending a letter, the man up there in Mars, or the boy who was going to write it, came himself. I do not know how, but never mind now. It was thought once that people could never get across the Atlantic, but they can, and perhaps we shall get across to Mars some time, or they get across from Mars to here. But the point is, supposing some one should come down from there, baggage and all, and you should look at his trunk or gripsack and find a "Mars" label on it, printed "Inter-Stellar Express Company," so that you would know it was not sent from Jersey or California, but from Mars; and how wonderfully interested you would be in him, and how, when you had looked him over, you would rush out of doors, if it were evening when he arrived, and look away off to the little red world shining up there in the sky from which the stranger had just arrived. And although so far away, how real it would be to you! Real? Real as your own bedroom or door yard.

Now it is in some such way that we have to be assisted before we can become interested in any far away place that we have never visited; we cannot feel such a place to be real till some real token has reached us from the place. And that is one of the reasons that the coming into the world of Jesus of Bethlehem has always meant so much to people. It has helped to make real to them the place that He came from. Those of us that are younger and those of us that are older can think and sing and pray a good deal about heaven without its denoting enough to make our meditation of any particular value. The boy can imagine that that ruddy little star up in the evening sky is a world solid and actual as the one we live on, but it would never quite seem so to him till he could close his hand upon a gritty little pebble that had slipped

down from that world into his own pocket. We always want something real to lean on and to tie to. It is fit, therefore, that we help not only the children but ourselves by making a great deal of the fact that the Jesus who appeared in Bethlehem did not begin here in the same way that other children do, but that He came here from outside; from another world; a sort of divine immigrant; like those that began life the other side of the Atlantic and come and live here later on. If you see a Frenchman arriving by steamer at the dock, you may know nothing of the France from which he comes, but he is so definite a thing himself that you know his country must be so also. He is so real that it gives your thoughts of France something fixed and solid to cluster around.

We may suppose that a great many of our imaginings about heaven are mistaken and visionary, and certain to be proved such when we ourselves reach heaven; but if the idea of heaven is to be of any service to us before we reach there, there will have to be even here enough of the real about it to give our thoughts and anticipations at least a sure footing; and that sure footing we get when we distinctly contemplate the Child of Bethlehem and the Man of Galilee as a Being who came out of the heavenly world in order to visit a little while in our earthly world. Heaven is just as real as this Child was real that came to the earth from heaven. We need not complain that that does not reach a great way, nor give us any considerable amount of definite knowledge about the heavenly world. Neither does the rock fallen down out of the sky give the boy any considerable amount of definite knowledge about the planet Mars, but it does give him the safe starting point for his thoughts about Mars to run out from. At least—and this is the important point—it prevents Mars from being to him merely a word, simply a name given to something that might just as well be nothing so far as all effect upon his sentiments or upon him personally is concerned.

I am not one of those who think

there is great danger in materializing these things. You cannot read the Apocalyptic description of the new Jerusalem without feeling that, with its walls and gates, its avenues and mansions, it will be as substantial an affair as the original Jerusalem. When we try to spiritualize matters beyond a certain point, we get into the region where the ordinary polarities do not work and no data are left us from which to calculate our mental latitude and longitude. It is with ideas something as it is with a balloon which requires to have a certain amount of solid weight before a rudder can be rigged up that will be good for anything to steer by. A world that is simply a spirit world is not a world that we can either think about with any safety, or that we are qualified to have any particular interest in. There is no warrant in Scripture for thinking that the more unlike this earth you imagine a thing to be, the more heavenly it is. Christ was somewhere before he was here, and there is no ground for supposing that that "where" is essentially unlike any other where. Human choirs will not become angelic choirs by undertaking to sing falsetto.

Heaven is undoubtedly a locality. The first Paradise, which was certainly an exceedingly commendable Paradise, was a locality, and there has been in the meantime no such change in the constitution of our nature as to indicate that a Paradise that is not local would be any improvement upon the original. All such spiritual expressions as the "New Heaven," and the "New Earth," fall directly into line with what we are here saying. That does not make it necessary for us to suppose that the earth and the heaven by which the present ones are to be replaced will not show an advance over the ones first established; but though the earth be "new," it is going to be "earth" still; and though the heavens be "new," they are going to be the "heavens" still. God does not discard His types; his initial movements are infinitely wise, and He never ceases to respect them. One of the discoveries made by geologists is that the texts which God laid down

for Himself in establishing the earth He has continued to stand by. The animals and flowers that are produced to day are true to the biological principles that asserted themselves in the animals and flowers that appeared during the creative week. But what geology teaches us in one way, astronomy teaches us in another way, and shows that away out in the celestial spaces stretching so far beyond us that it would take a flash of light a thousand years to jump the interval, things are made in the same way and work in the same way that they do here. In all the wide area covered by astronomy, and the still wider area covered by spectroscopy, there is no sign of God's getting tired of the law of things as it obtains in regions nearer home. So that, put heaven where you please, if you put it anywhere, everything is in favor of its being structurally a good deal like what we are familiar with here. One might about as well part with his identity at death as be thrust into a realm that is structurally distinct from the one we are used to.

We are not conjuring up any theory of the heavenly world—we are simply trying to conform with the suggestions of an enlightened sense, and with the intimations of a Bible interpreted simply, and in that way avoid the necessity of conjuring up theories.

This fixed fact of locality is a great help to us. It instantly possesses all this matter of the heavenly with the steadying feature of the real—the real as opposed to the visionary; the real as opposed to the indefinable. We cannot make a map of heaven, but it is a good deal to suppose that it could be mapped! Undoubtedly we can spoil things by over materializing them, but also we can just as certainly spoil them by over spiritualizing them. We are made of body and spirit, and every earthly situation and every heavenly situation we need to construe with reference to just that duality in our nature, and we suppose that duality will always continue. It was not dust that made Adam Adam, nor was it divine in breathing into that dust that made Adam Adam; it took dust and Diety both to make him

and to make you. No Scripture writer is clearer or more emphatic on this matter than St. Paul; it was one of the marvellous features of that all round man that he was jealous of the equilibrium intended to subsist between his spirit and his body. His thoughts ran high, his spiritual experience was transcendent, but he was just as sure that it took body to make him as he was that it took spirit to make him. He evidently was not particularly enamored of the body he had, and the probability is that it was in some important respects rather of an unprepossessing and uncomfortable misfit; but, willing as he was to dispense with that body, it was only with the definite understanding that he was to have an improved one in its place; he felt flesh, bones, nerves and blood corpuscles to be an essential element to his personality. Hence the emphasis which he laid on the matter of the resurrection and the new body. Now resurrection and the new body—all of that means heavenly locality; it means a place where the body is to be, as distinctly as the existence of an earthly body presupposes a place. We put heaven out of all intelligible and therefore out of all helpful relation to ourselves and our activities when we omit from our conception of it all those elements that present experiences and activity can frame into it. We might as well stop talking or thinking about heaven altogether as to subscribe to an inconceivable heaven; and the only heaven that is not inconceivable is a heaven that in its structural features is a prolongation of the earth we are living in now; a region that is somewhere and that could be put down in parallels and meridians in the universal atlas, if ever that atlas were to be produced and published.

Perhaps it will be said that there is in our generation tendency enough toward materialization without using our pulpit to the end of stimulating materialization. Undoubtedly there is no call upon us to materialize more than is already being done by the earthly life this generation is living. But it is not the earthly life we are taking account of just now. Undoubt-

edly, as things are going at present, it is the body by all odds that is in the ascendant. But I am disposed to believe that if we materialize the heavenly world more, we should be less tempted to overdo the materialization of this world. In other words, there would be less of the animal in our lives here if we did not pitch the realities of the heavenly world in so spiritual a key as to embarrass all thought about heaven and discourage all interest in it and all desire to go there. This is not said in the interests of an immoral heaven, but in the interests of an interesting heaven.

The easy reading of the New Testament references to these things makes it clear that Christ and those who were imbued with His Spirit handled such questions in an exceedingly commomplace way, by which certainly I do not mean that they treated the heavenly world carelessly or superficially, but that they pronounced heavenly realities with the same inflection that they did earthly ones. They had only one set of terms for the two, one complexion of feeling for the two. They were always in earnest, but no more so in treating future realities than in treating present ones. St. Paul seemed to feel that it was all part of one scheme. I believe that considerable of the solemnity that ordinarily prevails at a funeral is due to the absence, in the minds of those present, of fixed and definite points for reflection to attach itself to. Undoubtedly grief incident to earthly parting forms a very large element in the case, but apart from that there is a certain hopeless indecision of mind, a certain vacant interrogativeness, which is as distinct from the spirit in which Paul contemplated death as the dreary drift of a cloud is distinct from establishment upon visible foundation. On such an occasion there may be no lack of Christian faith, but all the possibilities in the case are not fulfilled even by faith, if by faith we understand only devout bewilderment.

A fog bank is a fog bank, even though the sun shines on it. There

was a crispness in Paul's faith. It was vertebrate. His confidence reached out into the dark, but it moved into the dark on fixed lines. The prospect of entering the other world never seemed to him to necessitate throwing overboard methods of expectation that had served him well prior to his departure. It is clear that whatever exchange of experience there might be between this world and the next he never anticipated being surprised, or at least bewildered by the exchange. Standing by the death bed of a friend was like going down to the dock and seeing a friend off on an Atlantic steamer, which may cost tears, but is not exactly a funeral. To one who takes the Gospel in its easiest sense—which is to say its truest sense—heaven is a place, some place. One of the bitterest elements of grief would be eliminated from the death bed scene if it were as distinct in our hearts as it is in Scripture that death is embarkation. Select the remotest star in the universe, and if you could suddenly realize that your departed and sainted friend were there, with what overwhelming brightness your whole conception of death and the heavenly world would be transformed, enlivened and beautified. Let your own thought dwell on that for a little while, and your own devout feelings play about it, and in these bright Christmas days in which, in imagination, we are again welcoming the little visitant from the heavenly world, may the Holy Spirit encourage our thoughts to move out cheerily along the line upon which that visitant came, and upon which He has since withdrawn again. May sweeter and richer consciousness of the somewhere of the heavenly world spring up within us; may a little of the bitterness be thereby subtracted from the bereavements that have shadowed our past, and may our anticipations incline with a firmer confidence toward the city which hath foundations, and toward reunion with those whose bark sped out into the night and over the sea while we stood weeping upon the shore.