

An open book with a yellow bookmark is resting on a blue textured surface. The pages of the book are filled with text, and the bookmark is placed in the middle. The background is a soft, out-of-focus blue.

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I

GOD THE GOD OF THE LIVING[1]

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"Now that the dead are raised, even Moses shewed at the bush, when he calls the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. He is not a God of dead men, but of living men, for all live unto Him."—LUKE xx. 37, 38.

It is very likely that some of us may have been perplexed in the study of this passage at the answer which the Lord Jesus gave to the Sadducees, and doubtful as to whether their difficulties and questions were fairly met by the text that He quoted.

Certainly if we had been told to search the Scriptures for passages bearing on the Future Life and the doctrine of the Resurrection, this is about the last text that we should have thought of adducing; we should never have detected in these verses a key that would unlock the closed doors between two worlds and make sunlight be where previously all was dark.

And even if we had been pointed to this passage containing the revelation of God at the bush, we should probably only have seen in it another of the magnificent affirmations of the Divine self-existence, another of the grand "I Am's" which sound forth at times from the mount of cloud and vision. We might even have gone so far as to see how much more wonderful it is to have a faith in which, with

wonderful simplicity, God says "I Am," than merely to have a religion which affirms "He is," and we should have been glad that at any time there were men to whom God spoke for Himself. But we should not have supposed that the statement had any bearing on our life and existence, or that it solved, or put us in the way of solving, some of the questions that perplex us. Perhaps the principal reason for this lies in the words of Jesus Himself: "Ye do not understand the scriptures nor the power of God." And yet ought we not to be aware of this, that every revelation of God involves a revelation about the creature, just as the earth is affected by every potency and virtue in the sun? Revelation is not merely information about God, without relation to our own life and being. For instance: both the Spirit and the Scripture combine to assure us that God is Love. Is that merely a piece of theological information about God of which the universe is independent, or does He not in the revelation spread His wide pinions over all creatures that He has made and gather them together as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings? Out of such a revelation the willing soul discerns the New Jerusalem descend as a bride adorned for her husband; the eager soul receives, the wayward soul returns, the sorrowful soul is comforted. No revelation of God is possible that is simply information without a bearing on my history, my existence, my future. And so with our text we may say the "I Am" of God involves the "I shall be" of the creature. If one comes to me and says, "I was your father's friend," it may be either (i.) that my father is dead, or (ii.) that there has been a change in the affection of the person speaking; but if he comes to me and says, "I am your

father's friend," he implies two things: the existence of my father and the permanence of his own love for him; and the one just as much as the other. So when God says, not "I was the God of Abraham," but "I am," etc., He is not merely asserting His own existence and providence, but the continued life of the faithful of ancient days. And so the "I Am" of God proclaims the "I am" of the creature; the soul looks down the sloping years and says of its prospect, "God is, and I am." And Christ's answer to the Sadducee comes to this: "You are inconsistent in denying the future life; you ought first to have denied the being of God; but as long as He is, beat His saints small as the dust, scatter them to the four corners of the earth, yet He will send forth His angels and gather His elect again from the four winds, and lo! they are sitting down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God: for He is not the God of dead men, but of living men; and all live unto Him!"

Those who believe in God can easily take heart to look through the mysteries of life and death and to discern glory through the gloom; but the Sadducee did not stand in the line of the sunbeams that come from the other world; no wonder it was dark to him.

Not but what our life is full of mysteries: birth and death alike perplex us; the "Whence" and the "Whither."

He who has studied well his coming and his going, has written out two books of his Bible: the Genesis and Exodus of his book of life.

Birth and death are alike mysterious; they are something like the veils of the ancient tabernacle, each curiously wrought of purple and scarlet and fine twined linen, but the

vail of the most holy place had in addition cunning work and tracery of cherubim. So with our birth and dying—we may learn much from either; but death has the greater wonders traced upon its veil, if we could but get into the right light to read them. There is this difference, too, that, while the first veil is moved aside that we may enter, and closes behind us so that we may not tell from whence we came, the second veil is not drawn back but rent from top to bottom, so that we do not lose our sight of the world that is when we are made a part of the world that is to come.

It is through this rent veil that we are looking to-day.

It has pleased God that the first-fruits of our meeting should be laid upon the altar; He has called our dear Arthur Neale to Himself. Already it has been said over him, "Ashes to ashes and dust to dust"; it remains for us to take up our testimony and say, "and soul to soul."

Dear Arthur Neale! it has been said that "one cross can sanctify a soul," and he had many crosses; chiefest of all the fear of death. He was something like Bunyan's Mr. Fearing, only his fear was physical, and not produced by doubts as to his final acceptance. But it was grand to see how, at the last, this fear of death, which is, in its very nature, a solicitude for self, was transformed to care for others; just before he passed away, he turned to the dear one watching beside him and asked if she was afraid to see any one die.

Now let me read you a little about Mr. Fearing.

"When he was come to the entrance of the valley of the shadow of death, I thought I should have lost my man; not for that he had any inclination to go back: that he always abhorred; but he was ready to die for fear.... But this I took

notice of, that this valley was as quiet when he went through it as ever I knew it before or since. I suppose these enemies had a special check from our Lord, and a commandment not to meddle until Mr. Fearing was passed over it.... When he was come to the river, where was no bridge, he was again in a heavy case. And here, also, I took notice of what was very remarkable: the water of that river was lower at this time than ever I saw it in all my life. So he went over, at last, not much above wet shod.... I never had any doubt about him; he was a man of very choice spirit, only he was always kept very low, and that made his life burdensome to himself and troublesome to others."

He has sent us his last message: being asked if he had any word for friends, he said, "Tell them all, it's all right."

It comforts me sometimes to believe that, as we advance in the Life, the way becomes easier. I believe this to be the case not only with one who has death at his back, but with every one who walks faithfully with God. Jesus says, "My yoke is easy and My burden is light"; and I think to those who follow Him faithfully He says, "My yoke is easier and My burden lighter every day."

We learn to live with God until it becomes impossible to live without Him; we learn to lean on Him, until we acquire an instinctive abhorrence of all broken reeds. We begin with cherubim and a flaming sword that turns every way to keep the way of the tree of life; but we end with the same flashing armoury turning us from every path except that which leads to glory and honour and immortality and the city of God. We begin with "He shall give His angels charge against thee," but we end with this, "He giveth His angels