

THE INSIDE OF HEAVEN

By BRO. LEO LEWIS, O. P.

ON a certain holiday observed throughout all Egypt, Theodore, a son of Christian parents, young in age but mature in judgment, withdrew from the laughter, mirth and dancing that resounded throughout his parents' spacious home, and began to expostulate with himself thus: "Unhappy Theodore, you possess many things, but how long will you possess them? You are rich, you feast, you dance; but how long will these things last? This manner of life would be pleasing and afford a relish provided it could please and afford a relish for a long time." And rightly did the young Egyptian reason, for as Bailey in his poem "Festus" says:

Joys

Are bubble-like—what makes them bursts them too.

We know that earthly pleasures are transient affairs; at best, they have but a fleeting existence and finally they must surrender to the call of death. But we know also that the words "dust thou art, and into dust thou shalt return" was not spoken of the soul; it maintains its immortal existence, and hence its faculties somehow and somewhere must eternally be brought into play. Hamlet was not the only one troubled about the "undiscovered country from whose borne no traveller returns." The dreams that come after death have puzzled the minds of all nations and have been a subject of much speculation.

Apart from atheists and materialists, that is, those who deny the existence of God or the immortality of the soul, all peoples at all times conceded this "Hereafter" to be a place of some kind of happiness for the righteous. Going far back to ancient theories and beliefs we find that Egypt, India and Persia referred to a paradisiacal abode as a life without pain or death, where an abundant harvest, with six-ells-high stalks of corn under an eternal sunshine and mild zephyr winds, await the blessed toiler; or as a spacious hall brimful of light and joy

where the elect lounge under a beautiful tree quaffing the heavenly Soma sap, while streams of milk and honey flow in abundant supply.

Again, Greece expected an upper "mansion of bliss" where "saints," with jeweled crowns, rest on couches and banquet on the ambrosia and nectar of the Olympian gods. Rome pictured verdant fields of joy, where the happy souls listened to Orpheus' harmonious notes. The Mohammedans, offering perhaps the most sensual concept of all, believe in a heaven built of gold and silver and precious stones. There black-eyed maidens of perennial virginity serve the faithful sitting under trees or reclining on costly couches. Even the Indians, from time immemorial, speak of Paradise as a place of "happy hunting grounds."

These are beliefs originating in bygone and ancient ages. But today, in spite of divine revelation and the magnificent gift of reason with which man is endowed, many appalling and inconsistent ideas have gotten abroad concerning the eternal reward in store for the just. The fantastic and grotesque conceptions of the cartoonist and the scarcely less ludicrous expatiations of the street-corner theologian are feeble and often foolish efforts of the unaided human imagination to construct what only God could make and which He has made known only through revelation. All who expect some reward at the hand of God believe that it will be a happiness far more intense and inconceivably greater than all the joys and pleasures that this world can afford—a happiness absolutely secure and lasting, unmixed of sorrow or anxiety. But just what will be the nature of this happiness?

Many picture Heaven as some vague dwelling place of mere peace and rest—void of all action; a place of complete passivity resulting in ennui. They compare it to a sort of immense lounge or ethereal sanitarium where man can recuperate from the exhausting trials of earthly life. Others, still depending upon their experiences of this world for an illustration of the world to come, resort to a more dignified comparison. They look upon God as a ruler of a mighty nation, whose court is as splendid as it is spacious. There He rules His subjects, indeed with infinite kindness, and wisdom, and love, yet with a reserve as aloof and dignified as He is great.

This is not the true Christian idea of Heaven. It is indeed a place of rest and peace in the sense that it is a rest from all



The Ascension—Perugino



The Resurrection, in the Lower Church of San Francesco, Valle del Paradiso, Italy

tribulations and vexations of this life, free from the cares and dangers that affront us in this world; a peace, enjoying the tranquility and happiness of God and the Blessed in Heaven. But this concept describes only a minor phase of its glories; for Heaven is essentially a place of active industry without exertion, of action that completely fills the abundant desire of man to live eternally.

Life without action is an absurdity, and has no appeal for the manly, two-fisted, red-blooded person. Mere existence is not enough to keep any one content. The Episcopal Bishop, Rt. Rev. Charles H. Brent, when recently quoting Wesley's statement that, "there is no resting this side of eternity," rightly comments: "I don't think there will be any resting in eternity. I don't want to go to Heaven if it is a place of eternal inactivity. Sitting on the edge of a cloud and playing a harp does not appeal to me." We crave for fuller life, for expanded energies, for greater fields of action—something to do. In this material world with its pleasures and allurements sipped to the bottom of the cup we find that they do not gratify man's thirst for the better and more enduring things. No matter how intensely one plunges into earthly activity it cannot satisfy for more than a brief period and the activity itself cannot be sustained long. Yet, there is a yearning in the human breast—placed there by God—for some unending action. Heaven responds to this desire, for when we understand, even in an imperfect manner, what perfect Beatitude is, Heaven becomes for us a dwelling of intense activity.

At death, then, since the soul is spiritual and immortal, it shall lay aside its worn and tired body and, if purified from sin, shall go forth alone into that other world to contemplate the Beatific Vision. In this consists the essence of our happiness hereafter—the full operation of the faculties of the soul. The intellect will be ever active beholding infinite truth; the will, enjoying infinite good.

In Heaven we will see God and all else through Him. We will not exhaust the knowledge of God's essence—that would not be possible—but we will tax our own capacity for learning in the vision of Him. We will contemplate with accuracy the minutest details of mysteries; the Trinity of persons in the Godhead, the Incarnation, and other truths of our religion. Since the world was, man has been trying to fathom some of

the most common-place creations that come into his path of daily life; he has been trying to give an adequate reason for some of the very functions of his own body—but all in vain. An Infinite God has caused these, and we are finite. In Heaven, however, nature that now so baffles us, will be known in all its beauty. History will be open and made clear to us. The wondrous dealings of Providence in the government of souls will show forth the wisdom and justice and mercy of God. All this knowledge will be of angelic wisdom—beholding it in one superb survey with deep intuition, i. e., we will no longer operate through misty mediums, but will know all truth by perceiving God face to face in the Beatific Vision in the manner that God sees Himself.

The intelligence understands and knows, but the will enjoys and has to do with love and affection. Hence, in Heaven every wish of the heart will find adequate satisfaction. Of all the many joys that man cherishes in his sensitive heart, by far the greatest and most intense, are these coming from the exercise of pure love. There is one thing that can truly be called wealth and that is love. It is the very life of music, of poetry, and romance. It brings warmth to the desolate and despondent. Love coming from one, even from afar off, cheers him in a strange land. Yet this love, perfect as it may be in this world, seemingly fulfilling all the earthly requirements and in which man thinks himself completely happy, cannot endure. Fretted by anxieties in this world, restless and ill-appeased, we grapple in a darkness unsatisfied. We try these human love motives and these human love motives fail to fill our void, or often themselves completely dissolve.

In other words, the love among creatures in this life is not stable. Misunderstandings, jealousy, hatred crush out this life-giving germ—love—at any moment; even the tender bonds that tie wife to husband, mother to son, must break with death. How different is this love, this craving, this desiring of the heart lived in Heaven! There it finds itself in possession of, and united to, the supreme Good, the Infinite which is Love Itself, and from whose unfathomable and inexhaustible depths flows the very fountain of true contentment. There we will possess a peace real and lasting, full and living; free from unbounded ambition, unblushing injustice and furious animosity. The craving of the

heart, the longing for life are satisfied and final because they are dissolved in God Who is Love and Life Itself.

Now, although the soul leaves the body behind it at death and does not need it to enjoy its essential reward, yet the happiness of the Blessed will not be complete until the soul is reunited to the body at the end of the world. In the meanwhile, however, it will not lament this separation for it knows that in due time the body, which had its part in the many struggles here on earth, shall arise in a manner glorious and immortal and finally shall have part in the recompense which it helped to merit. In this glorified state at the resurrection each soul of the just will resume its own proper body spiritualized. Shinning as brilliant as the sun it will no longer be subject to suffering or death; it will move with the rapidity of thought and have the power to pass through matter without dividing it. Yet, it will retain its own individual features without deformities or superfluities. In this respect life in Heaven becomes perfect. The glorified state does not destroy the nature of the body, but perfects it; and since perfection consists in activity, the faculties and senses of the body must remain active in Heaven and have suitable objects to act upon.

There, then, the appetite will live; all the senses will thrive and enjoy their own proper delights. When we exist on this earth we are mortal and sick and offensive; if we are not actually decrepid or invalid, we are handicapped with physical inabilities and blemishes. With the resurrection of the body, sight, hearing, the senses of taste, touch and smell will be spiritualized and made capable of intense delights. The eye will gaze forever on the innumerable beauties of the kingdom of the Blessed; the ear will be enchanted with the sweetness of the celestial choirs. Although the elect will have no need of earthly nourishment, taste will be satisfied with a deliciousness far surpassing any earthly eating or drinking. Touch will find adequate pleasure by contact with the hallowed objects of Heaven; while the sense of smell will be gratified by the fragrant perfumes that satiate the heavenly air. These characteristics are no idle dream or fantastic illusions, but founded on the very nature of man's complete beatitude. We will be filled and inebriated with entrancing joy and gladness; engulfed and lost in a boundless sea of ecstatic happiness; yet, "as star differs from star in brightness, so shall the soul differ in glory"—each in proportion

to the merit it has gained while on earth. In fine, life in Heaven means the complete actualization of all the latent perfections of our nature.

The enjoyment of that surpassing company of angels and saints in Heaven is a doctrine not less consoling than it is attractive. In Heaven there are no strangers. The old and young, mother and father, brothers and sisters, will again resume that pure and hallowed love that once united homes. Friends whom we esteem and around whose associations we entwine some of the fondest memories of this life will meet again. Each will retain the special attraction for those whom he held in particular regard here below; though of course, purely carnal affections have no place in Heaven. However, if by reason of any grave fault on the part of creatures we find the absence of certain relatives and cherished friends in our heavenly home, it will not cause us sorrow or grief. The justice of God will be so manifest that we will not question His doings, for the will of each blessed soul shall be in perfect harmony with the will of God.

Our Lord describing the new Jerusalem to St. John in a vision said: "Behold, I make all things new." (Apoc. 21-5). Despite the fact that we will know all things, see all things and enjoy all things with one glance of the Beatific Vision, neither the things nor we will grow weary or stale. Although we will be satisfied to the utmost, and this to continue without end, yet Heaven shall never grow irksome because we will discover in the Divinity an inexhaustible source of wonders.

All our attempts and efforts to give a slight notion, even of the smallest particle, of the magnificence and life in the City of God, are tremendously short of the reality. We must say with St. Paul: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man what things God hath prepared for them that love Him." (I Cor. 2-9). Consider the beauties with which nature has surrounded us; mountains towering high into the firmaments, an ocean—while the sun sinking into its bottomless depth—dashes against a rocky cliff, and there in the valley, amidst giant trees and precious flowers, a lake still and as clear as crystal. Listen to the melody of a God-given sweet voice, or the pealing notes of an organ of man's invention. Fancy, if you will, the most sublime of phantasms. It would be

presumption to think that these even suggest an idea of the sweetness of Heaven.

May we not conclude then, that to die and go to Heaven is as natural as to be born. And true it is, because we are born to a new life, a perfect life, full of knowledge, of satisfaction, of wonders, of love. Surely, this is not the lazy, sluggish, insipid state of existence that people are wont to picture our Future Home—Heaven. Bearing all this in mind, and considering who God is, and His infinite promise: "I am thy reward exceeding great" (Gen. 15-1), without a doubt we should be bouyed up in the trials and vicissitudes of this life and be incited to live better lives by considering this reward than by fearing the terrors of hell.

A FRIEND

By BRO. CAMILLUS BOYD, O. P.

More precious than earth's treasured prize,
More trusted than the tongue can tell;
The silent guard with sleepless eyes
Who watches where our fond hopes dwell.

To him we go when all beguile
With him our joy and triumphs share;
Life's rainbow is his sunny smile,
The pledge of true love burning there.

Life's road is rough, its ways are cast
O'er miles of mount and rocky bend;
Yet he is faithful to the last,
God's greatest gift to man—A friend.