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BEYOND THE GRAVE.

A LECTURE

DELIVERED AT THE MECHANICAL INSTITUTE, CASTLEMAINE,

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BY

G. C. LEECH, ESQ., B.A.

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"BEYOND THE GRAVE," is a phrase bringing with it not only awe but terror to the superstitious and ignorant. To the believer in the true spiritual life of man, it, on the contrary, brings not only hope and faith, but even joy. To the mind which correctly apprehends man's origin and destiny, the change called death is but the gate to the true life. In a matter thus so momentous—momentous for this clear reason, that the great change is inevitable to all—and being thus inevitable, it is well that it should be regarded in its true light, so that it may be looked forward to as a deliverance rather than as a captivity, that it may be looked upon as being to us a source of joy rather than alarm—being thus momentous to humanity, as I say, let us consider what are our legitimate hopes beyond the grave. As I have on previous occasions endeavoured to explain to you our theory concerning the soul, is that the creature called man did not originally possess immortality or a spiritual life at all; that contrary to what is called "the fall," by orthodox teachers, man rose to his dignity of position by progressive stages. The orthodox churches teach that the first man was created perfect, and then, contrary to all teaching by analogy, became a lost, degraded, creature. Instead of that theory, we hold the belief that the first creature worthy to be called a man was formed physically stronger than we are, but was without spiritual perceptions or high faculties; that by the great law of development, man, as all other things and creatures in God's universe, rose higher and higher. His perceptive faculties first enlarged themselves, and then grew to be capable of a spiritual life. It does not necessarily follow that when man

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became capable of perceiving the spiritual element within and around him, he also became possessed of a hope of life beyond the grave. A man, or a collective gathering of men, whether tribe or nation, may be religious, or may be possessed of religious faculties, that is, have a perception of the supernatural, and yet have no conception of a life beyond the grave. There have been, and are, nations who have religious beliefs, who have no conception of a hereafter. There is every reason to believe that for ages and ages men were religious—that is, believed in the overruling power of a Supreme Being—without having any hope of a life beyond the grave. Take what we call the Old Testament, a book of great value as containing a history of Semitic thought, and an account of the most religious nation the world ever produced. Call to your mind the story of Abraham, and you will observe that all the rewards promised to the patriarch and favourite of God are of a temporal nature. “As the stars of heaven and the sands upon the sea shore, so shall be the nation that shall spring from thy loins” In the whole of the Sinaitic law there is not one scintilla of proof that either the law-giver or the people to whom the law was given, believed in or had any hope of the life beyond the grave. All the promises, all the menaces, apply solely to this earthly life. Some people say it was not necessary to introduce any promises about the future life, inasmuch as the Jews had a perfect knowledge of it. I do not believe the explanation is worth one moment’s consideration. The minutiae, the niceties into which the law enters are too detailed and too exacting to allow us to suppose that such a weighty matter as the question of after-life would be omitted as a matter of course, and as a thing so thoroughly understood as not to require a passing word. If it had been within the conception of the people to whom the Decalogue was addressed there would, beyond all question, have been a lengthy dissertation thereon. You will observe how the slightest minutiae are attended to with religious care. We are told that God instructed Moses as to the number of tassels that were to depend from the tapestry of the Tabernacle, what should be cedar and what Shittim wood, and other details, and yet there is not a single word about the life beyond the grave. Furthermore, the promises only refer to this life. In that tremendous precept in reference to worshipping God only, the commandment reads thus:—“For I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me, and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.” There is mention of a continuity of punishment in this world beyond the life of the offender, but it falls upon his children, and could only reach him by causing him to feel remorse at the thought that he had sown tribulation to be reaped by his children. There is, however, no threat of punishment to the idolater beyond the grave. All is hushed and silent with regard to that. In the precept as to obedience to parents, the same temporal inducement is held out for its

observance. "Honor thy father and thy mother, *that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.*" In all the utterances delivered before the Babylonish captivity there is no trace in a belief in an after-life. Of course there were individuals who were capable of higher thoughts, but the people *en masse* had no conception of an after-life. Such men as Moses, Confucius, Zoroaster, Cakyamouni, were capable of such conceptions, but we have no recorded account of men having such as an established belief. In the Book of Ecclesiastes, c. 3, v. 19 and 20, we find these remarkable words:—"For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them—as the one dieth, so dieth the other—yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no pre-eminence above a beast, for all his vanity. All go unto one place, and are of the dust, and all turn to dust again." After the Babylonish captivity, though there was but a very slight mention of it even then, there was growing up in the minds of the Hebrews a belief in an after-existence and another world, and that advanced thought was represented by the Pharisees. The Sadducees were the true orthodox Jews. Jesus denounced the Pharisees, but it was not because they believed in an after-life, but because they paid too much attention to ceremonial and neglected the weightier matters of the law—they observed the letter and neglected the spirit of the law. Jesus also rebuked the Sadducees, and he rebuked them for their unbelief. They came to him with what they thought a very puzzling question, as many men do in our day, men who appear to think that the after-life is in all things like this. There was a certain widow, said they, who was married to her deceased husband's brother, and he died, and so also did the other brothers, until there were seven buried who had had her to wife. Whose wife should she be, they asked, in the resurrection? It was just such a question as materialists put in the present day. They are the men who believe in nothing they cannot see, touch, and taste; men who believe in nothing but gold and silver, and who consider it waste of time to bestow thought and labour on anything else. But you see the answer given to the Sadduces was just such an answer as may be given in the present day to men of the kind I have mentioned. Would it not be a waste of time and words to expatiate to a man who had been born blind on the beauties of a picture? What to a man, who had lost the drums of his ears, would be the effect of the sublime music of Mendelssohn and Beethoven? They cannot perceive with anything like clearness any idea that is not related to materialism. Jesus of Nazareth told those Sadducees that they had no true spiritual conceptions, that "In the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in Heaven." However, the Pharisees, no doubt, a long time before the appearance of Jesus, had conceptions of a spiritual life; but to the ordinary eye, and the sons of humanity generally, the exact nature of that after-life has been hidden. Some despair altogether of having a view beyond, and those in times past who have drawn sketched

of the hereafter, have unhappily allowed their vision to be obscured, and made dull and gross, by their education and earthly conceptions. Jesus of Nazareth has drawn the sublimest and truest visions of the life beyond the grave that humanity has probably yet received, but the visions are but metaphors or allegories. For instance, in one case he portrays the Great King of Heaven and Earth seated upon a great white throne, and before him are gathered the multitudinous hosts of men. To those who have fulfilled, according to their ability, the great laws of love to God and man—love to man is after all but the expression of love to God, it is the method by which it is evident man loves God. "If," says the apostle, "we love not our brothers whom we have seen, how can we love God, whom we have not seen?" This is the visible speech by which man gives expression to his love to God. So before the Great King stand the crowds of earth, and those who have done with loving hands deeds of kindness go into a place of bliss and reward. "I was an hungered and ye gave me meat, I was thirsty and ye gave me drink, I was a stranger and ye took me in," &c. The other portion of mankind who sought their own selfish desires, the multitude who just cared how they themselves fared, how they were fed, and wherewithal they were clothed, are ordered to depart to condign punishment. You see that this is just a figure as to after retribution, drawn from an ordinary earthly tribunal, so that we can hardly take those pictures as intended to give us an idea of the real manner of life beyond the grave. One parable does seem at first sight to do so, and if we were to accept it as a literal truth instead of taking it as a figure, its teaching would bring us to a conclusion which would certainly sustain the popular and orthodox view—that the unfaithful are burnt in hell fire for ever without remedy. "There was a certain rich man, who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day. And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, who was laid at his gate full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table; moreover the dogs came and licked his sores." Then the scene passes from earth to the next world. The curtain which divides us from what is called eternity is drawn aside. The rich man died, and was buried. He had all the rights of sepulture and all the honours that are paid to the rich. Next, with awful and sudden transition, the parable says, "and in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torment, and seeeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom." Then, according to the awful picture, across the deep gulf comes the terrible wail of the rich man. "And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame." But the great father of the Hebrew race makes answer to his lost child: "Son, remember that thou in thy life-time receivest thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that they

who would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us that would come from thence." Now that this is simply an allegory, no reasonable man would attempt to controvert, for we cannot for an instant conceive that so materialistic an idea should be literally true of the after-life. The rich man died, and was buried. The mouldering corpse of the man who was clothed in purple and fine linen was laid in the grave to become the spoil of the worm. Then what should be burned in Hell? What should be suffering thirst? An immaterial soul or a spiritual body? Here common sense must come into collision with a literal interpretation of this allegory! Then again, the Almighty Creator of Heaven and Earth, God the great first cause, Jehovah, is not introduced into the scene at all; it is Father Abraham who seems to be ruling in Heaven. All our orthodox friends who insist on the literality of this parable had better go over to the Church of Rome, where the rule of Heaven seems to be delegated to dead men and women! Now, the meaning of this sublime and startling allegory I take to be this: The parable is the utterance of a teacher who began to declare war against wealth and power. It was the utterance of a teacher who had already declared how hardly shall they that have riches enter life; of a teacher who declared that it was easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. Woe unto you, rich men, howl and lament, said one of his apostles in after years. The Kingdom of Heaven predicted by the Baptist, who came forth from the wilderness, was offered to all, and was rejected by the rich. Therefore the offer went to the poor. "Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." Jesus of Nazareth declared war against wealth and power, and the spirit of the founder went forth in after days and produced in his apostles a communistic church—a church in which all men brought their possessions into a common fund—a church into whose history is interwoven the story of Ananias and Sapphira. They professed to have brought all their wealth to the church, though in reality they had not, and for the lie they were condemned by the apostolic choir to a terrible and sudden death. The whole of the story in reference to an after-life, as contained in the parable of Dives, is a denunciation of riches. There is no averment in the parable that this man had been cruel or dishonest. We are simply told that a certain rich man was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day. I presume there is no actual sin in this. I suppose that neither the Pope nor the Bishops of the Church of England would say that was a sin to be punished—and punished with eternal damnation. It simply relates to the principle of compensation. The answer is—"Son, thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and Lazarus likewise his evil things." According to the parable the rich man has his portion of good on earth and the sorrowful beggar is comforted hereafter. We cannot therefore hope to have any conception of what lies beyond the grave, excepting a very general one, from the teachings of

Jesus. He fulfilled his glorious mission. He taught his gospel of peace and goodwill amongst men. He taught them that which they were capable of receiving—that a preparation for a life beyond the grave is a life of self-sacrifice on earth. But the spiritual nature of man is capable not only of advancement but of unlimited development, and the mistake of those who teach us about special revelation and absolute religion is, that they tell us that some certain number of years gone by, a great teacher appeared, and that his teachings were to the soul of man an utter finality. That it is not so we may gather by all analogy in God's kingdom. We know that development and unlimited progress must be the endless destiny of the soul, not only after death, but beginning here on earth, in this birth world. Now I will give you my own conceptions of the life beyond the grave, and of that condition of things which goes towards the formation of our lives here relatively to their condition in the after-life; and in doing so I shall present in a humble way my own conceptions, aided by others, for your consideration. You will hear, mark, learn, and digest, and if there is anything you consider worthy of your belief, you will, as rational and free-minded men, accept it. If there is anything that strikes you as worthy of consideration, I hope you will give it your earnest attention. No man in any age has a right to declare that what he utters is absolute truth. Having thus far prefaced my remarks, it will be for those who hear to say whether they will accept or reject what I am about to submit for their consideration. My belief, and the belief of others who are with me, is that this world is the first stage of the soul's existence, or, at least, individuality. Having come from God, it must ever have been a part of the Divine nature; but its individual existence begins in this life, and this is therefore called the birth world. We believe that when there comes the physical change called death, there is no break whatever in our life. It is merely a physical change—the soul's existence is continuous and unbroken, and it is extremely probable that in many instances the soul may not for a time be conscious of the change. When death supervenes, we have done with this body for ever. We do not believe in a material resurrection, nor did Paul either. He is misrepresented and misunderstood. He undoubtedly meant a spiritual resurrection. Read from the 15th of the 1st Corinthians, beginning at this verse—"But some will say how are the dead raised up, and with what body do they come?" &c. There you will perceive that the apostle evidently means that there is no more a resurrection of the material body of man than there is a resurrection of the seed of corn that is placed in the earth. The seed is planted, and from it springs, first the blade of grass, and by and by the stalk; and analogous to that is the spiritual body grown from the natural body. The original body, the body of flesh, does not rise from the grave, but a spiritual body. Men of modern thought have developed ideas more clearly upon this subject than the apostle of the Gentiles did, for their belief is that the spiritual body is not called into

existence when the natural body dies, but that the spiritual body already exists, permeating and pervading every joint, every bone, and every muscle of the material body; and then, when this the earthly house of our tabernacle is dissolved, the soul waits not for an after home, but is already in his habitation long since made ready for it. This at once gets rid of the difficulty raised by orthodox divines. They aver that the soul must await the assembling of all God's creatures at the Great Tribunal, which may be ten thousand years hence. The late Archbishop Whately considered that the soul would have no consciousness after death, but that it would waken up upon the sound of the great trumpet. Now, you must at once see that this is opposed to the teaching of Jesus, for he said to the expiring thief on the cross, "This day shalt thou be with me in Paradise. Now, the mutilated body of the thief was flung into the valley of Gehenna. What then was it that should be with Jesus in Paradise? Is it clear from this, that the spiritual body is not a thing of the after world, but of the Eternal Now. It is more truly the home of the soul than the house of clay. Further, let those who ask incredulously—how can the change of death be a change for the better for the wicked—pause and consider what a deliverance it will be to them when they are rescued from that gross house of flesh, whose strivings have often been struggled against in vain, whose promptings have so often been prayed against without avail. The life beyond the grave is the unbroken life of earth, and into the after life shall we carry a nature moulded and formed by our life here. The sensual man will have a spiritual body dwarfed and stunted by his base practices while on earth; while the pure and unselfish will reap the fruits of the glorious seeds which were sown by them on earth. Some will ask, "how can these things be; where do we gather our teachings concerning these matters?" We believe that in all ages certain classes of men and women, who have had nicer and clearer perceptions than others, sought out and found truths which were hidden from the masses of mankind. The prophets of old, the Buddhist devotee, the Greek Pythoness, felt the power of those spiritual gifts, but they did not understand them. They were groping in the dark, like men when they felt the presence and power of electricity; but it required years before they could turn it into a science that made it a boon to man. We believe that in these later times there has been, in accordance with the great law of spiritual development, a nearer approach, a higher and truer access to the life beyond the grave than heretofore. Upon this matter no man can venture to dogmatise, but no one who loves his fellow man can venture to despise the investigations and the phenomena presented through the researches of any section of the community. Therefore, I say to you and to the world, as I have said to myself—"Examine, investigate, and weigh. Accept nothing that is not commendable to your reason, but do not reject that which is made patent to you as men and women of common sense. Remember, above all things, that material nature alone will not afford us true happi-

sionally practised by spirits who are eager to avail themselves of writing to any media they control. Therefore leave not yourself open to any spirit, but always write at regular periods, and remember prayer."

Now, as I said in going into the question, the reality of these communications is admitted by Dean Macartney. He grants they are the teachings of the denizens of the world beyond, but he says they are prompted by the devil. I ask you, are those communications I have read, such as you would expect from "the author of evil," who has, according to the opinions of orthodoxy, but one business and one aim, namely, to destroy and make ruinous the spiritual nature of man? Subsequently to the first communication there was this addition:—

"The life beyond the grave is one of progressive development, ever onward and upward. The spirits inhabiting the summer land are happy in degree according to the height they have attained in the spheres. Those who, from the accident of their birth, are low in the scale of intelligence, can receive but little assistance from surrounding objects to help them. Still there is progress made. In other cases where the mind has been warped and dwarfed by early training in a belief which has for its tenets the salvation of a few chosen ones to the exclusion of all others who do not entertain that belief—all those who would place a limit to God's fatherly goodness and care—those minds take ages to progress, because of their unwillingness to be taught the grand and sublime lesson that God loves *all* His creatures, and has destined that all shall become pure, perfectly happy, and holy. But the pure mind that earnestly seeks truth for its own sake and leaves no means untried by which it may gain a better and purer knowledge of God and nature—this is the mind that makes rapid progress in this spirit world, rising from height to height, and surveying the boundless expanse of the great universe, revelling amidst the beauties of the highest spheres where the eye or sense cannot follow. Oh, be ever thankful, and praise the Infinite Father and Creator of all for not only the capacity to attain such noble heights, but for the wise and beneficent power, He has bestowed upon man—the power of ever rising above the material to the pure and spiritual nature. Think it not a vain thing if you can but succeed in implanting in man one small desire to rise above the material nature, Tell them more of the beauties of the spirit home, that whatever pure desires they may feel on earth, if they cannot be satisfied when on earth, they will be in the Summerland. In that land all are occupied in whatever has been congenial to the taste when on earth. Here is none of that forcing into distasteful pursuits we so often see on earth; but the taste and inclination rule here. Plenty of congenial work for all, for the tender loving mothers who have passed away to the life beyond the grave, in nursing and training and taking care of the little helpless innocents that throng the

happy home; plenty of work for those who love to impart knowledge in all its branches combined with the unity and harmony of purpose to promote the general good and advancement of all. Those great reformers who have appeared from time to time on the stage of earthly life, love to return and watch the progress that has been made in the truths they have propounded, and help those who are propounding them with their advice and counsel, and comfort them amidst the persecutions they have often-times to bear. Could you but see the lovely homes some of the great sons of earth inhabit in the spheres, you would think no sacrifice too great to obtain a home similar. The true nobility of the mind is stamped everywhere; throughout the mansion all is radiant and beautiful, reflecting the mind of the owner. But never forget this, that you must adorn it when on earth. Every noble act and thought is carried away and added to the structure. Its foundation is laid in early youth, and, fathers and mothers, here is where your influence must be exerted. Your hands, in a great measure, determine whether the structure will be fair or otherwise. Lay the foundation well, and all else will be well. Never crush the spirit of your child, but strive to expand all that is noble and good. Strive to cultivate by all the power of your influence and example all that is noble hearted, unselfish and charitable. Strive to do away with all little petty feelings of envy or revenge. Act upon the broad free principles of love to God and your fellow man, and you may then look forward with certainty to receiving a rich reward, in comparison with which all the treasures of the mines of earth sink into nothingness. Expand your souls, and words of wisdom shall be yours to guide you along the path of life, and God will shed the light of His divine love upon you all."

Now, men and brethren, for the most part it is asked, in matters of speculation and theory, what good do such things produce? Are these things just matters of speculation, producing no palpable benefit upon our common life? If this were so, the time to-night would be wasted; but I tell you that a strong and sure faith in a life beyond the grave is productive of incalculable good to humanity. If the son believed that the pure, gentle, tender mother, whose material body he had seen consigned to the grave, was never far off, but always near him, and wounded and grieved when he yielded to selfish passions, but pleased when he fought against what was low and sensual, would not such a faith be a present and real power leading to good? I ask you if the soul of the mother who has wailed over her dead child—who still wails over the empty cradle—would not be comforted by the strong and certain faith that her child is not far off—not that she will go to him, but that he has never departed from her. Was it only a fancy sketch of America's sweetest poet when he sung:—

Then the forms of the departed
Enter at the open door;
The below'd ones, the true-hearted
Come to visit me once more!

With a slow and noiseless footstep
Come the messengers divine ;
Take the vacant chair beside me ;
Lay their gentle hands in mine.

And they sit and gaze upon me
With those deep and tender eyes,
Like the stars, so still and saint-like,
Looking downward from the skies.

Yes, men and brethren, that belief ever deepens our strong faith in the spiritual life. That religion ever brings home to us the consciousness that we are not widely separated from the spirits of the departed. Everything that saves us from the old, hard Sadducean belief—a belief that there is no spirit, and no life beyond the grave—is a good and hopeful thing for humanity. Departed mother, father, brother, long since laid in the cold grave-yard in our far-off home; gentle wife, lost to earthly sight; children taken away to the Summerland; all still have power by their spiritual presence to tranquilise, to comfort and elevate the nature of man; though with the dull eye and heavy sense of earth we may not be able either to see or hear the viewless and voiceless. For,—

Uttered not, yet comprehended,
Is the spirit's voiceless prayer,—
Soft rebukes, in blessings ended,
Breathing from their lips of air.

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