

Whither Whither?

By Horatius Bonar

IN THE beginning of last century, an old American Christian died, leaving on his death-bed this message to his son,—“Remember that there is a LONG ETERNITY.”

But this was not all. He laid upon his family the dying command, that the same message should be handed down to the next generation, and from that to the next again, as long as any of his posterity remained. The command was obeyed. One generation after another received the solemn message, “Remember there is a LONG ETERNITY.” And the words, we are told, bore fruit in the conversion of children, and grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

It is of this *long eternity* that God so often speaks to us in His book, with the words “everlasting,” “without end,” “for ever and for ever.” It is of this *long eternity* that each death-bed speaks to us,—each shroud, each coffin, each grave. It is of this *long eternity* that each closing and opening year speaks to us, pointing forward to the endless years which lie beyond the brief days of time,—brief days which are hurrying us without slackening to the life or to the death which must be the issue of all things on earth. Of that eternity we may say that its years shall be as many as the leaves of the forest, or as the sands of the seashore, or as the drops of the ocean, or as the stars of heaven, or as the blades of grass, or as the sparkles of dew, all multiplied together. And who can reckon up these numbers, or conceive the prodigious sum,—millions upon millions of ages.

A traveller, some years ago, tells that in the room of a hotel where he lodged there was hung a large printed sheet, with these solemn words—

“Know these things, O Man,— A GOD, a Moment, an Eternity.”

Surely it would be our wisdom to think on words like these,—so brief, yet so full of meaning.

Richard Baxter mentions the case of a minister of his day, the whole tone of whose life-preaching was affected by the words which he heard when visiting a dying woman, who “often and vehemently” (he says) “did cry out” on her death-bed, “Oh, call time back again, call time back again!” But the calling of time back again is as hopeless as the shortening of eternity. “This inch of hasty time,” as that noble preacher calls it, cannot be lengthened out; and if not improved or redeemed, is lost forever. While God lives, the soul must live; for “in Him we live, and move, and have our being.”

Our eternal future is no dream nor fable. It will be as real as our past has been,—nay, more so. Unbelief may try to persuade us that it is a shadow or a fancy. But it is not. It is infinitely and unutterably real; and the ages before us, as they come and go, will bring with them realities in comparison with which all past realities will be as nothing. All things pertaining to us are becoming every day more real; and this increase of reality shall go on through the ages to come.

Whither? whither? This is no idle question; and it is one to which every son of man ought to seek an immediate answer. Man was made that he might look into the long future; and this question is one which he ought to know how to put, and how to answer. If he does not there must be something sadly wrong about him. For God has not denied him the means of replying to it aright.

Whither? whither? Child of mortality, dost thou not know? Dost thou not care to know? Is it no concern of thine to discover what thy existence is to be, and where thou art to spend eternity? Thy all is wrapped up on it; and dost thou not care?

Whither? whither? Dost thou hate the question? Does it disturb thy purpose, and mar thy pleasures? Does it fret thy conscience, and cast a shadow over life? Yet, whether thou hatest or lovest it, thou must one day be brought face to face with it. Thou shall one day put it, and answer it. Perhaps, when thou art putting it and trying to answer it, the Judge may come, and the last trumpet sound. “While they went to buy, the Bridegroom came.”

Whither? whither? Ask the falling leaf. It says, “I know not.” Ask the restless wind. It says “I know not.” Ask the foam upon the wave. It says, “I know not.” But man is none of these. He is bound to look into his prospects, and to ascertain *whither he is going*. He is not a leaf, or a cloud, or a breeze, not knowing

whence they come and whither they go. He *knows* that there is a future of some kind before him, and into that future he must ere long enter. What is it to be to him? That is the question!

Whither? whither? Go to yon harbor, where some score of vessels are lying, just preparing to start. Go up to the captain and ask, Whither bound? Will he answer, "I know not"? Go to yon railway station and ask the guard of the train just moving off, Whither bound? No; these men have more wisdom than to go whither they know not, or to set out on a journey without concerning themselves about its end. Shall the children of time be able to answer such questions as to their route and destination, and shall a child of eternity go on in the dark, heedless of the shadows into which he is passing, and resting his immortality upon a mere perchance?

But can I get an answer to this question here? Can I secure my eternity while here on earth? And can I so know that I have secured it that I shall be able to say, "I am on my way to the kingdom: let this present life be long or short, the eternal life is mine?"

The gospel which God has given us is that by which we are enabled to answer the question, "*Whither? whither?*" for it shows us the way to the kingdom,—a way not far off, but near; a way not inaccessible, but most accessible; a way not costly, but free; a way not for the good, but for the evil; a way not hidden, but plain and clear. "The wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein." He whom the Father has sent to be "the Saviour of the world" says, "I am the way."

The knowledge of that way is everything to us: for he who knows it, knows whither he is going; and he who knows it not, knows not whither he is going. The right and sure answer to the question, "Whither?" depends entirely on our true knowledge of the way. For the world is dark, and can tell us nothing of the way; nor can it in the least enable us to answer the awful question, "Whither am I going, with all these sins of mine, and with a judgment day in prospect, and with the certainty that I must give an account of the deeds done in the body?"

In order, then, to get the answer to the question we must come at once to the "good news,"—the glad tidings which God has sent to us concerning Him who "died for our sins, according to the Scriptures;" "who was buried and rose again." It is the belief of this good news that *connects us with Him*; and in so doing, enables us to answer the question, "Whither am I going?" For if we are *connected with Him*, then assuredly we are going where He has gone before us. By the belief of the gospel we are brought into possession of that everlasting life which He has secured for sinners by His death upon the cross, as the propitiation for sin.

We knew one who, filled with dread of the unknown future, sought for years to get an answer to the question as to his own eternal prospects. He labored, and prayed, and strove, expecting that God would have pity upon his earnest efforts, and give him what he sought. At the end of many long, weary years, he came to see, that what he had been thus laboring to do, in order to win God's favour, another had already done, and far better than he could ever do. He saw that what he had been laboring for years to persuade God to give him, might have been had, at the very outset, simply by believing the good news that there was no need for all this long waiting, and working, and praying; and that now, at last, by receiving the Divine testimony to the person and work of the only-begotten of the Father, he could count with certainty upon the favor of God to himself, as one who had believed the record which God had given of His son (I John 5:10-12). Thus believing "he entered into rest,"—the present rest of soul which is the result of a believed gospel, and the earnest of the future rest which remaineth for the people of God.

To say to any sinner that he must answer that momentous question, "Whither?" and yet not to tell him the Divine provision made for his answering it, would be only to mock him. But to call on him for an answer, while making known to him the grace of Christ and the open way to God, is to gladden his soul, by showing how he may at once find the means of answering it, without working, or waiting, or qualifying himself for securing the favor of God.

To the troubled spirit, we hold forth the free and immediate pardon which the gospel places in our hands,—*a pardon which no prayers or exertions of ours can make more free*, or more near; a pardon flowing directly from the finished propitiation of the cross; a pardon for the ungodly and the unworthy; a pardon which, while it glorifies Him who pardons, brings immediate liberty and deliverance to the pardoned one. "Through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him ALL THAT BELIEVE

ARE JUSTIFIED“ (Acts 13:38,39). If justified, then we know our *future* as well as our *present*; for “whom He justifies, them He also glorifies” (Rom 8:30).

“It is all dark,” said a dying young man who had trifled with the great question throughout life. “I’m awfully afraid,” was the language of another in similar circumstances. “I have provided for everything but death,” said an old general, as he was passing away. “No mercy for me,” was the death-bed cry of one who in early life had promised well, but had gone utterly back. “I’m dying,” said another, “and I don’t know where I’m going.” Such death-beds are sorrowful indeed. Darkness overshadows them. No ray of hope brightens the gloom.

But he who has accepted the great salvation is lifted above these fears and uncertainties. The light of the cross shines down upon him, and he looks into the vast future without alarm. “I know whom I have believed,” he says; “and knowing Him, I know where I am going. I am going to spend an eternity with Him, whom, not having seen, I love. I am going to the city which hath foundations; and though worms may destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.” The question “Whither?” has no terrors to him. He knows that all is well. Eternity is to him a word of joy. He has believed; and he is sure that his faith will not be put to shame. The simple word of the Son of God, “He that believeth is not condemned,” suffices for him to rest upon, in life and in death.