Our Children in the Other Life

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OUR CHILDREN

IN THE OTHER LIFE

BY THE

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CHAPTER I

WHAT CHILDREN ARE AFTER DEATH—WHO TAKES CARE OF THEM—THE HOMES PROVIDED FOR THEM.

A THIRD part of the human race, it is said, die in infancy and childhood. There are but few parents who must not feel a personal interest in the subject to which I invite your attention, for there are not many who have not been called upon to surrender one or more dear objects of their affections to the great Shepherd of souls. As the poet has beautifully sung:

"There is no flock, however watched and tended,
But one dead lamb is there;
There is no fireside, howsoe'er defended,
But has one vacant chair."

Viewed from this world, this mortality in our race in the first years of life is a great enigma. It is contrary to the Divine order; it is the defeat of the Divine purpose; it is the blasting of parental hopes; it is offering the cup of the richest blessings to the lips with one hand, and dashing it to the earth with the other. The Divine promise to parent and child is broken. How many a Rachel has mourned for her children and would not be comforted because they
were not! How many bereaved hearts have wondered why the Lord should bestow upon them such a priceless gift, only to take it from them; why He should open such deep and rich fountains of new life, only to change them to bitterness. These questionings of the sore and aching heart cannot be answered from the point of view of this life.

But when we regard the subject from the spiritual world, it presents a very different aspect. What seems to us as death is seen to be entrance into life. What appears to us as failure and defeat of the Lord's purpose is seen to be carrying it out to successful completion. Earth is the seminary of Heaven. The infant and childlike soul is not the bud of an immortal flower broken from its stem and left to wither and die. It is taken up by the living root and transplanted into the paradise above. It is taken from the wintry sphere of this world and placed in the warm spring of the spiritual world, where every faculty will unfold in order, harmony, and fulness.

The doctrines of the New Church give us clear light, and the most consoling assurance upon this subject, which so intimately touches the parental heart. They place us in a position from which we can see it as it is. They throw light upon its darkness, and not only give us the means of solving its enigmas, but they comfort our bereaved hearts; they heal our wounded affections; they show us that the Lord's loving-kindness is as fully manifested in taking them from our natural sight as in giving them to us.

They teach us that all who leave this life in infancy and childhood are saved. The children of heathen as well as Christian parents; the multitudes who are
exposed and left to die by the superstitions of the crowded populations of the East; the offspring of sin and shame—of the worst as well as the best of parents; all are saved. Here we have a third part of the human race sure of heaven, under whatever conditions they may have been born. Here also we find a rich source of consolation for those who have been naturally bereaved. If the Good Shepherd has taken a lamb from your fold, you are sure that it cannot be lost. You are sure that your highest hopes for your child have been fulfilled. You never did ask and you cannot ask for anything better than it has attained. If you had the wealth of the world, you could not surround it with so much beauty, you could not provide it with such abundant and excellent means of comfort and delight, as it now enjoys. If you had the power of the world, you could not protect it so securely from all harm, from every evil influence, from all spiritual and natural danger. If you had the wisdom of the world at your command, you could not direct the unfolding of its spiritual faculties so perfectly. You could not give it so large, so full, so liberal, so complete a culture as it will now attain. You cannot conceive, much less provide, such large, varied, and complete means of development and culture for every faculty of intellect and affection, as the dear child whom the Lord took from your fold and placed within His own has come into full and permanent possession of.

If this is true of those children whose parents have ample means for their wants and education, and who would grow up in a sphere of intelligence and purity in the circle of home and school, what shall we say of
those who would be kept in ignorance; who would be subjected to the contagion of evil influences; whose evil propensities would be stimulated to activity by evil example? The little one, innocent of wrong against the Lord or man, is taken from the midst of influences which could not fail to corrupt its moral nature, and placed in the best conditions for its spiritual health and happiness. How the infinite mercy and wisdom of the Lord shines out in clear light from what has been regarded as a most mysterious dispensation of His providence or permission!

When little children pass into the other life, they are infants and children still. They gain nothing by the mere transition. The little infant which goes from its mother's arms to the arms of the angels is the same little child when it reaches them that it was when it left hers. It is just as weak and ignorant, and needs the same care. If you should see it after it is raised up out of the material body, you would know that it was your child, for it has the same features, the same character; it preserves its individuality. It has left nothing behind that properly belonged to it. It loses nothing!

Many of you have seen what we call the death of children. It is one of the most touching scenes in human experience. Did you ever feel so helpless as when you saw the dear child of your affections going from you, slipping as it were from your hold? Bond after bond is severed. The little hand fails to return the pressure of your own; the lips no longer answer to the mother's voice. You hold them only, as it were, by the eye, and the light begins to fade and soon is gone from that. The last natural link which bound
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them to you is broken, and they have gone—fallen into the dark unknown. That is the too vivid and terrible appearance from this life.

If you could see the other side of the event, how different it would appear! You would see nothing of death. Two companies gather around the little one, invisible to each other. How different their feelings and the offices they perform! We are trying to hold it in this world, and every step of its removal is like breaking one of our heart-strings. We minister to it as long as we can reach it through the material body.

The other company stand with gentle hands and warm hearts to lift it out of the grave of the body, and to welcome it to their own home. They see nothing but life. New affections are awakened in their hearts, new joys fill their souls, as they see new opportunities for the exercise of them, a new being to love and care for. Their thoughts and affections must be somewhat of the same nature, only fuller, closer, and more ardent, as those with which the parent’s heart greets the newborn child.

If both sides of the event could be seen by both companies at the same time, what a change it would make in the thoughts and feelings of both! The angels could not but look with compassion upon the sorrowing parents. And what comfort they could give them! Oh sorrowing mother, they would say, grieve not so blindly and wildly. The dear child of your heart is not lost, but saved. It is not dead, but more than ever alive. The good and wise and all-merciful Lord, who loves us with infinitely more depth and tenderness than we can love each other, permits
this transfer of your child from your home below to our home above, for your good, for our good, and for the good of the child. We will love it with an affection as deep and pure as your own; we will supply its every want. We will keep the precious trust for you and restore it to you when you are ready to receive it. We will more than fulfil your fondest hopes and largest expectations.

As you saw the beauty and glory of heavenly wisdom shining in their faces, and the gentleness and purity of heavenly love embodied in all their actions, you could not fail to be comforted with the assurance that your child would want no good which love and wisdom could supply. As you saw it rising out of the material body, leaving disease and pain behind; as you saw life glowing in the face of your child, and its whole form springing into new activity; as you saw it welcomed by, and welcoming, the angel friends, you could not say, My child is dead. You might feel sad that one so dear to you was removed from your care and natural sight. But your sadness would be tempered with a calm and sweet sense of its happiness. You would see that this change is not death; it is transition; it is the springing up of the real child from the earth; it is the transplanting of an immortal life from the garden below to the paradise above. And if you saw this event in any degree of correctness, you would say, The Lord has more than fulfilled my hope. "The Lord gave; the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

In this light one of the most terrible trials of life is seen to be full of the loving-kindness and tender mercy of the Lord. The soul is comforted, sustained, and