

Editor's Note: The following information has been gleaned from issues of The Earthen Vessel and Christian Record from the 1858 issue. These and the subsequent letters were published in the 19th century but have been long out of print. I have added headings briefly summarizing the subject of each letter. The location within the Vessel is given for reference.

The Letters to Theophilus being the substance of James Wells theology: Letters 41 through 50

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Epistles to Theophilus Letter 41 - pages 59ff 1858

The Resurrection of the Just

Most excellent Theophilus, the resurrection of the just is a truth as delightful as it is wonderful. I will, after a few preliminary remarks, lay before you some of the main parts of this matter, as given 1 Cor. xv.

The first inexplicable point that we here meet with, is that of the identity of the body. There is no known law of nature by which we can at all understand this part of our destiny. The laws of waste and addition in our bodies, so go on during our lifetime that you have already had several new bodies, so that the atoms, the particles, which compose, form, and constitute, your body of to-day are not the same particles which ten years ago constituted the body you then had; yet the resurrection will be a resurrection, not a new creation out of the common dust of the earth. No, it will be somehow or another, an identical resurrection, the dust of your body when you die, may enter into the composition of the vegetable world, and those vegetables or grasses be eaten by sheep or oxen, and those sheep or oxen eaten by human beings, and become component parts, the second time, of human bodies, and this process may so go on that the identical particles now constituting your body may become the component parts of the bodies of men or women or both to a thousand generations. Is it, then, much to be wondered at, that gospel-hating philosophers should despise the doctrine of the resurrection? It is clear that nothing but the sure word of prophecy is capable of being a true guide in this matter.

Faith can well afford to smile at all these difficulties. It is God, the Creator of the world, who says the dead shall be raised; it is God our Savior who shall raise the dead; known unto him is every particle which compose the whole universe. We cannot number the stars, but he numbers every particle which compose them, and he knows, for they all lay open to him, even every atom of your body essential to its identity at the resurrection. He can number the atoms of the universe with more ease than you can count your ten fingers. What concern then ought to be to us, that we cannot comprehend the way, the manner, how out of the same body which lives and dies shall arise a new body? It is enough, quite enough, that the God of truth says it shall be so; and such too will be the order of things, that though the just and unjust are mingled in one and the same tomb, yet the one will still be held precious, and the other vile; nor will there be any interchange of that dust—each particle shall find its own place, that which is for hell, to hell; and that which is for heaven, to heaven. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints," or that part of the saints which must lie in death until the resurrection morning. Even this their dust is precious in the sight of the Lord. And the ground will be cleared of this chosen, redeemed dust first—"the dead in Christ shall rise first;" not a hoof, not an atom shall be left behind.

Well then, my good Theophilus, while we have in this matter of bodily identity an inscrutable mystery, yet to faith there is not, as I have said, the slightest difficulty. Let me then again remind you that every particle composing even the whole universe lies open as clear and visible, and distinct to God, as your ten fingers are to you. "There is no searching of his understanding; his understanding is infinite."

Blessed God—Father, Word, and Holy Ghost—would that I could leave a thousand other difficulties, troubles, infirmities, adversities, enemies, necessities, and even death itself, with thee, O, God of love—my hope for ever—as easily as I can leave in thy blessed bands the identity of the resurrection of the body, O, I laugh at all carnal reasoning's against the resurrection of the body. To comprehend this identity I know is with men impossible, but with God it is possible. It matters not to him in what part of the globe the dust of his saints may be, whether at the bottom of the sea, engulfed in earthquakes, burnt to ashes and the particles scattered thousands of miles from each other, all lies open to his immense survey. This truth of the resurrection is not, because the identity of the body cannot be comprehended, the less endearing. The resurrection of the body is certainly one of the forms in which our God is lore.

Our personal identity is not to our reason even quite so difficult a matter. You feel conscious that you are the same person who was a child, who was once a youth; therefore, personal identity will lie in consciousness. You will, in glory, ever be conscious that you are the same person that travelled through this wilderness world — that you were a lost sinner called and saved by grace. There is no change that will ever deprive you of this consciousness of your identity; you will see and know for yourself, and not another for you.

He who died for you was the same that rose from the dead; of this the disciples by infallible proofs became convinced; and not only so, but he was still the same in mind: he left his peace with the disciples, and relived in them that same peace when he reappeared to them—" And the angel said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus which is taken from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." Acts 1. 11. You see here is a three-fold sameness—sameness of person, of name, and of manner. It is the same person who shall appear the second time, and in the same name or relation, the same Jesus. Now the word Jesus means Savior; and the apostle says "he shall appear the second time without sin unto salvation." You see how the word—salvation—answers to the word— Jesus. He then is the same in person, and the same in salvation: and also in manner— "he shall come in like manner." Now, his manner was this: "he lifted up his hands and blessed them." And so, when he shall come again, it will be with, "Come ye blessed, inherit the kingdom prepared for you (from the foundation of the world." So his people will be identical, and they will stand in salvation relationship; and after the manner or order of a sworn covenant, saying unto them, "In blessing, I will bless thee." Blessed Jesus, thou art our forerunner; thou art the surety of all the glory yet to be revealed.

You may, my good Theophilus, look upon this letter as being an introduction to my remarks upon that for which all true Christians are waiting, to wit, the redemption of the body. I will, therefore, now close with the commencement of the apostle's argument upon the heavenly truth of the resurrection, namely, that "if there is no resurrection, then our faith is vain; we are yet in our sins; preaching is vain, and they which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished." O, poor Sadducee, what a gloomy hope is thine! too gloomy to dwell needlessly upon. Now Theophilus, just reverse these ideas of the apostle.

"Your faith is vain." No; your faith is not in vain; it is one of the most precious gifts that you can possess; it gives you every advantage for all things, that is, all things needful to your true welfare are possible to him that believeth: and numbers of scriptures this one fruit of the Holy Spirit enables you to understand. Without this precious gift you cannot escape being excluded from the heavenly city. It is by faith we are united to Jesus, and by his truth purifying the heart from enmity against him, and filling it with love to him, and by his blood and righteousness we become all that which fits us for the holy city. How terrible then the sentence—" your faith is vain." Alas, if wrong in this, we are wrong in everything; for "whatsoever is not of faith is sin;" but the faith which worketh by love to his truth is not vain.

"If there be no resurrection ye are yet in your sins." But ye are not in your sins, but in Christ, complete in him. Our first Adam-life is passing away, but our second Adam-life is, and will be, flowing on to perfection, and the light thereof shining more and more unto the perfect day; the curse and condemnation, and power of sin, are gone; but the mercy of the Lord endures forever.

"And they that are asleep in Christ are perished." "But now is Christ risen," saith the holy apostle; therefore, they which are fallen asleep in Christ are not perished, but "are present with the Lord," their greatness increased and comforted on every side, and are kings and priests to God for ever; and because Jesus lives, they must live also. And so much are they like Jesus that perhaps a thousand years are to them as one day, and one day as a thousand years, so greatly does possession of eternity reduce the ages of time. So that while with us the difference between one day and a thousand years is immense, yet with them perhaps it is too insignificant to have any effect upon their enlarged, exalted, happy, and perfect spirits. "They know even as they are known." Truly then, they are not perished; and never will and never can perish. Believe thou this? I know that thou believe; so also doth A Little One.

Epistles to Theophilus Letter 42 - pages 80ff 1858

The Order of the Resurrection

Most excellent Theophilus, after having, in my last, set before you simply the truth of the resurrection of the body, I now proceed to set before you the order of the resurrection of the saints of the Most High, together with some of the main circumstances leading thereto.

Now, mind that the apostle is speaking in this 15th of Corinthians, of the resurrection, not of the unjust, but of the just; not of the resurrection of the lost, but of the resurrection of the saved, and of the resurrection of the saved only. We must keep this in view, otherwise we shall be misled; while the chapter itself is one great and effective argument against the doctrines of the Sadducees of that and every age, and nation. Before I proceed then, to set before you the two points —how the dead are raised up, or with what body they come, I have first to set before you, the relative order of the resurrection.

Every man will rise in his own order. Christ was the first-fruit, then, they that are his at his coming. To almost everything pertaining to the welfare of the Israelites, there were first-fruits: children, cattle, harvest, and vintage; and these first-fruits belonged especially to God; and these first-fruits were, when accepted of God, a kind of pledge, an assurance, of the safety, well-being, and excellency of all the rest; their children were to be as olive plants round about the table; their cattle were not to diminish, nor mildew or blasting to come upon their harvest or vintage. So then, is the Savior. He is the pledge, the assurance, of our safety, wellbeing, and excellency; for all the good we have, we derive from him, being born of an incorruptible seed which liveth and abideth forever. He is the first fruit of the flock, the sacrificial Lamb, and if his sheep can never diminish, not one can be lost; and as the corn of wheat, which fell into the ground and died, and is risen and become the first-fruits of them that slept,—so he will gather his wheat into his garner, not a grain shall be left behind.

But, my good Theophilus, mind this one thing that the Lord of life and glory, is the first-fruit only of those, who, by divine ordination belong to him. Now, as all that belonged to Adam died in Adam, so all that belong to Christ, live in him; that in Adam, as is solemnly self-evident, all the human race died, so in Christ shall all the redeemed race live; for the redeemed shall return and come to Zion; and then Cometh the end, when He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule, and all authority, and power.

Now, you see some of the circumstances leading to the great event: all rule is to be put down. Now, mind, as I have before told you, the apostle is here speaking of the destiny of the people of God, and of them only. What rule, authority, and power, then, are these which are to be put down? What, I say, are these principalities which are to be spoiled and put down, but the rule of sin? Sin hath ruled unto death, but this rule is to be put down; and already, my good Theophilus, is this glorious work begun in your soul; already has the light of salvation broken in upon you; already are you turned to the stronghold—the blood of the everlasting covenant; already, by faith, do you begin to lay hold on eternal life; already have you found that the precious blood of Christ has infinitely more power to rule over you in a way of hope, than sin has in a way of despair. The blood, then, of the everlasting covenant is the stronghold to the prisoner of hope, and so sin shall not keep dominion over you, seeing you are not under the authority of the law, but under pardoning and reigning grace, against which grace you cannot willfully sin. He that is born of God sinneth not, for the incorruptible seed of truth remaineth in him, and keeps him in love, sincere to the truth as it is in Jesus.

But not only the ruling power of sin, but also the authority of the law over the conscience is to be put down, and the conscience and the soul delivered therefrom, and become dead to the law; but is brought under another law, for the soul is not without law to God, but is under the law of faith, of life, of love, and of liberty, and thus prepared to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light. But do we make void the law through faith? Nay, verily, for if the law demands perfection of love to God, and man, that perfection can be found nowhere; nor can we come into possession of it anywhere, but in Christ Jesus. So that in relation to the saints the law will finally be doubly fulfilled; first, in the life of Jesus for them; and second, by them being perfected in love. And thus is the law fulfilled both for man and in man.

But here is not only the rule of sin, and the authority of the law, to be met, but also a power, another power; and, do we not read, that "through death the Savior destroyed him that had the power of death, that is the devil." So, my good Theophilus, the devil with his lies, delusions, and murderous enmity against the truth, is not to have dominion over you; for Jesus must reign until he hath put all enemies under his feet. Now, mind, this refers to the enemies of his truth, and people; for he that despiseth his truth, despiseth him; and he that despiseth only a little one belonging to Christ, despiseth him. Now all these enemies shall be crippled and unable to reach the people of God to do them any final harm; for "he kcepeth the feet of his saints; but the wicked shall he silent in darkness;" and when by faith we are standing on the vantage ground of the completed warfare—standing on the rock of eternal truth—standing on the borders of the land of promise—standing in an even place—standing in that righteousness which meets all the demands of law and justice; then we have to look forward to the final destruction of the last enemy, death.

But, mind this, my good Theophilus, the Savior, though he puts down the rule of sin, and has delivered us from the law and its curse, and so takes its authority from our souls, and has, and does, and will, put down the power of Satan, yet he will never put down the covenant, the counsels, or purposes of God the Father. No; he will never change the special for the general; the certain for the uncertain; the new covenant for the old; an earthly thousand year kingdom for the heavenly and everlasting. Therefore, saith the apostle,

"when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is accepted which did put all things under him." And indeed, so far from any lowering of God the Father in the immutability of his counsel, it shall be that when the whole election of grace—all the true Israel—shall be made free, and thus all things essential to the final and glorious liberty of the sons of God shall be brought about, it shall be then, that as the Son of God did in his humiliation do the will of God, was subject to God—to the will of God; so, in final glory, the Son of God will still feed his Father's flock, "The Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and lead them to living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." And if he delighted to be, in his humiliation, subject unto the Father, how much more in his exaltation will he delight to do the will of God! It was for this joy set before him that he endured the cross; nor can we see how in any other way God can be all in all; for if the new covenant order of things were altered, and an angel, or any mere creature, brought to govern in the world to come, then such creature would be something, and God would not be everlasting. But as Jesus Christ is both God and the Son of God, then here by God, Father, Word, and Holy Ghost, will be all in all. Can anything be more suitable than this order of things? Either to support us now, or to make us happy in that eternity which lieth before us? And hence, that you were baptized as expressive of the death you have by faith in Christ, all death you have in him unto sin, the law, and death itself; and also the resurrection-life you have in him. So that those Corinthians acted most absurdly who, while by being baptized they practically acknowledged the resurrection, yet in theory denied it; and the apostle turns this into an argument against them, saying, "What shall they do (with their Baptism) that are baptized for dead;" for so is the meaning. This Scripture is a puzzle to many, and innumerable have been the learned conjectures of men as to its right and proper meaning. All the ambiguity originating in the use of the definite article— "the." "They loved not their lives unto the death," is a sentence which would suit the genius of our language better without the article, "They loved not their lives unto death." So here leave out the peculiar structure of the original, and simply anglecise the sentence, which it is perfectly right to do, then it will read, "But what shall they do (with the public profession they have made) that were baptized for dead."

Thus, my good Theophilus, you see the order of the resurrection, and also that way in which the Savior will reign until he shall present the kingdom to God, even the Father, without fault or flaw, or any such thing. To this blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, may we ever press; so prays A Little One

Epistles to Theophilus Letter 43 - pages 113ff 1858

The Truth of the Resurrection - No degrees of blessedness in heaven.

My good Theophilus, the great truth of the resurrection, rightly known, is both experimental and practical. The experience of this heavenly testimony is one of the greatest present advantages, as well as one of the greatest ultimate glories of the gospel. What present advantage can be greater than to die daily? for there is a mysterious proportion between deadness to the present world, and liveliness to that which is to come. We unhappily often work hard to make the two live together, but our labor is in vain: we cannot serve God and mammon; we cannot establish fellowship between righteousness and unrighteousness, nor make thick darkness and perfect day one and the same thing, nor unite Christ and Belial, nor make infidelity and the faith of God's elect friendly with each other, nor reconcile the temple of God with the temple of idols. Yet, my good Theophilus, you feel that you are made up of all these antagonistic qualities, and that the powers which are at deadly war with the soul are strong, and are lively, and, at times, all but

kill us to everything heavenly and eternal. Yet grace is infinitely rich to forgive, and almighty to govern; and the more we are blest with earnestness after God, the more we shall live to him; and so shall we go on dying to that which is not only not worth living for, but which would destroy us with a sore destruction. So then, in our affection, the kingdom of God is to stand first, and our souls are in right and due order only as this is the case; and just in proportion as this is the case, so we die daily, and serve God acceptably. And thus, by a revelation unto us by the power of the Holy Ghost of eternal things, we so die daily that when death shall come we shall have nothing to do but depart, and be with Christ, which is far better. Nothing to do but fall asleep in Jesus. Only think, Theophilus, of this; we have only to fall asleep, until awakened at the last day to take possession of the kingdom, by which time, the soul having possession, will be well familiarized; and the body, when awakened into immortality, will in one moment be forever at home.

Well then may the apostle call a denial of the resurrection an evil communication; and, one too of those evil communications which corrupt good gospel manners. "Awake then," saith the apostle, "to righteousness, and sin not." Some of those received into the church at Corinth, had not the knowledge of God; this the apostle said to the shame of those who received such into the church. But receiving people into churches who have not a true divinely taught knowledge of the truth is now become so common that the shame of so doing is well-nigh departed from our midst; and if men can boast of numbers they are satisfied, and are not at all ashamed to glory therein. Never were the Babel builders more numerous, or more of one language, than in the present day. The time has not yet arrived for their language to be confounded. But nevertheless, there is still a remnant, whose gospel communications are good — living, free grace communications, and which bring people into good gospel manners, and whose spirit and manners shew that they are men after God's own heart. And God's heart of love is in Christ, and that after the order of an immutable covenant. And there are some few (and they are but few) among us whose hearts are set upon the Savior after the order of that immutable counsel which the blessed God wills so abundantly to shew unto them.

Meeting you, my good Theophilus, on these heavenly grounds, let me freely speak to you concerning the great truth that Jesus shall change these our vile (Or. weak) bodies and fashion them like unto his glorious body. You observe that the apostle supposes two questions, and he proceeds to answer the second of the two first—"How are the dead raised up, and with what body do they come?"

The apostle gives a fourfold illustration of the nature of the body with which they come, that is, he uses a fourfold comparison, rising as he goes along from the humblest to the highest.

First, here is the grain of wheat; so that if wheat be sown, wheat will result. There is in the grave no change of character. The wheat, the good seed, are the children of the kingdom now, and so they will be then.

The apostle, secondly, passes from the grain of the earth to the animal world, keeping up substantially the same idea that as offspring accords in nature with parentage, so the resurrection will be the youth of the present waxing old, wearing out state of things. And from Christ's resurrection, and from the last great rising morning, we shall forever retain the dew of our youth.

The apostle has also another idea in this imagery, besides that of youthful produce. I will set that idea before you presently, after just noticing,—thirdly, the terrestrial bodies. These terrestrial bodies will, I should suppose, refer to something visible, because the apostle is here teaching invisibilities, by the instrumentality of visibilities, therefore the terrestrial bodies must, mean something visible, and perhaps means terrestrial bodies in general, both animals and trees; and these all help to carry out the apostle's

meaning; there is hope of a tree if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and the tender plant thereof will not cease. Job 11 v. 7.

But, fourthly, the apostle passes on to the celestial. The most glorious of these, set forth the ultimate glory of the resurrection body:—thus, as in the physical world, life rises as it were from death, so shall every grain of heavenly wheat rise to glory, and range as sheep over the ever-green pastures of the new earth, and shall rest at ease, and bathe in seas of heavenly rest, and fly in the open firmament of heaven, and shine as the brightness of the firmament, and as the stars for ever and ever.

But there is another idea in this imagery which you do well to notice; and I wish you to observe, that after the apostle reminding us that whatever advantages are enjoyed by the fruitful production of wheat, or of any other grain; whatever privileges men have, or, whatever freedom is enjoyed by the beast of the forest; however much the aqueous tribes enjoy the wide ocean, or with whatever delight the winged tribes enjoy their atmospheric excursions; and however much earth's surface may be adorned with arbocultural beauties; and however gloriously the heavenly bodies light up the concave of heaven; with whatever majesty they go their mighty rounds; however disdainfully they look down upon puny mortals; who would attempt to disturb their harmony, impede their course, tarnish their splendor, or bring them in whole or in part under human, or even under angelic command; or however brilliant their shining faces; however constant their smiles, or however laughingly they hold their high and proud position; however little they think of a thousand years, or whatever their independence of earth, and the things thereof, all that is meant by this, will, in perfection be carried out in the resurrection, and final glory of the saints. Do you then, my good Theophilus, catch this part of the apostle's meaning? namely, that the sum of the things produced and enjoyed by these visible things, is but a shadow of that which is embodied in the ultimate blessedness of those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb,

Now the other idea to which I have alluded in addition to the above, is this, that as the blessed God has constituted a state of things here, having in it such a variety, has he not thus given open demonstration that he is able to constitute us as different from what we are now as one star differs from another star in glory. He has not yet done all he can do, or all he will do; so then let the variety of things in the visible world be a figure of the contrast between our present and our future state, even as one star differs from another star in glory. The word glory here means light. So our present state is compared to the less brilliant stars, and our future state to the more glowing and glorious stars. Such is the change that the resurrection will bring about.

You must here, my good Theophilus, notice that the apostle is not here contrasting one glorified saint with another, but is contrasting our present with our future state. There cannot, from the nature of things, be different degrees in glory. If there be, wherein does it be? Not in holiness, for all are equally holy; not in righteousness, for we are justified in one righteousness; Jesus is Jehovah their righteousness to them all; not in knowledge, for they are all to come to the perfect stature of a man, and that which is in part is to be done away; not in happiness, for there is without exception, fullness of joy; not in capacity, for then they would not be perfect in knowledge; not in honor, for all are kings and priests to God, and all are equally the sons of God; not in reward, for the reward is of grace, and they who labored more abundantly, it was not they, but the grace of God in them; and they who were most devoted to God, it was not them, but Christ was pleased to live and work more mightily in them than in some others. Nor can any degrees of glory be in duration, for none of them can die anymore; not in worthiness, for no one is by nature worthy of the least mercy.

The difference between the dying thief and the apostle Paul, between Moses and a saved infant, between a mighty preacher of the gospel and an obscure Christian, may appear, and does appear, very great to us, but when viewed from and in comparison of the greatness of eternal glory, appear as nothing. The Alps, the Pyrenees, the Andes, and the Himalaya mountains appear to us when viewed by themselves, or rather in connection with mere undulations upon the earth's surface, these mountains, thus viewed, appear both in altitude and magnitude, most tremendous, but the merciless matter-of-fact philosopher steps in and spoils our wonder, or rather turns it into another direction, and shews by facts which cannot be gainsaid, that these great mountains are no more interruptions to the spheroid, that is the globular shape of the earth, in proportion to its magnitude, than the tiny pimples of an orange are to its rotundity, and so when we come to the perfection of Mount Zion, inequalities will vanish. One spiritual equality, one universal spiritual level, will appear; mountains lowered, valleys exalted, crooked things made straight, and rough places plain, and the glory of the Lord revealed. So believes A Little One.

Epistles to Theophilus Letter 44 - pages 127ff 1858

The Resurrection of the body continued.

My good Theophilus, I will now proceed with a few more remarks upon the resurrection of the body. I will notice how the body is to be raised up, the state to which it is to be raised, the prospect for which it will be fitted, together with the desirableness of this ultimate state of things.

How, then, will the body be raised up? The body will be raised as it appears to me, in a way that will require every perfection; every attribute of the Most High God, and as the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is to raise the dead, will not this great event be a full demonstration of his Godhead, and to the confirming of every one of his friends, and confusion of his foes?

The living are to be changed, and the dead to be raised in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. Here, then, must be Omniscience; that is, infinite knowledge, for if there could be one atom unknown to him that raised the dead, he then could not know that the resurrection is complete: something may be gathered up which ought not to be gathered up, or something left to be consumed with the earth, which ought not to be consumed. The Messiah will indeed then demonstrate that he knows all things. This infinity of knowledge is one of the seals of our security, and it is a seal that stands sure. The Lord knows them that are his.

Omnipresence is also essential to the resurrection, for it is only where he is, that the dead can be quickened, but the dead as well as the living will be found in the four quarters of the globe; and they are to be raised not as they were called by God, one by one, or one at one time and another at another time, for they are to be all raised at the same time, even at the selfsame moment.

Omnipotence: for what but Almighty power could raise, in a moment, the dust into immortality of a number which no man can number, and at the same time lift them from earth to heaven, even to the

heaven of heaven's most glorious height, that they may not have a lower heaven than the Savior himself, but that where he is, they may be also.

Eternity: for the resurrection is for eternity, and that eternity to the saints maintained by the Person, and by the Priesthood, of the Savior.

Holiness, to assimilate them to himself, and present them holy, and without blame, before him in love.

Love: for what but great love could or would raise us up into joy unspeakable and full of glory? and this glory follows in accordance with the work of redemption. Skillfulness; he guides them now by the skillfulness of his hand, and feeds them according to the integrity of his heart: but what will be the skillfulness needed to so construct the body that it shall, without fault or flaw, drawback or hindrance, go rejoicing on to all eternity?

Thus shall the Savior appear in his omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence, eternity, holiness, love, and skillfulness; when every empire, every province, every city, every town, every village, every house within the "wide, wide world " shall be broken up; not one stone shall be left upon another. Landslips, volcanoes, and earthquakes, are but symptoms of the approaching event of nature's final groan. Old Father Time must give up the ghost. There are already some signs of his nearing the autumn of his age; the days (peradventure) of affliction which now keep the nations in darkness, will soon be shortened, and then comes a more extensive spread of the gospel of the grace of God, and a great harvest of souls ingathered to Christ. Then cometh the end, and that end will be sudden, it will be in a moment. The earth will stay her course, and yield up her living and her dead.

How these things can be, can be explained only by the will and ability of him who says it shall be so, and as the universe came into being at his word, it, shall pass away at his word.

But look, most excellent Theophilus, not only at the glory of the Savior's mighty power in raising the dead in a moment, but look also at the five-fold contrast given to us by the Apostle in this 15th of Corinthians.

It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption. Incorruption! What does this mean? First, it means freedom from disease; and secondly, freedom from all liability to disease or death. This, then, I will call substitution the first.

Second, honor for dishonor. Sin is our corruption and our dishonor; and so the body sinks under the weight of its own dishonor: but it is raised in glory; fitted for nearer approach to God than perhaps the highest angel can ever reach: for Jesus passed by the nature of angels, and took upon him the seed of Abraham, and so shall the body be forever buoyant, bold, glorious, happy, and bright as the morning star.

Third, power for weakness. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power, all its Godlike powers will be mighty in oneness with the soul to range in the boundless pleasures and delights of God and the Lamb; no time lost in sleep; no clogging from sameness: everlasting good tidings meeting and following them everywhere; no loss to regret no foe to fear; no sin to startle the conscience, to burden, or to distress; no accusing devil; no frowning world; no false brethren; no clouds to obscure the vision of a smiling God.

Fourth, spiritual for natural. It is to be raised a spiritual body, not ethereal, but it is to be substantial, or it would not be a body. The body then is not to be turned into a spirit, but yet the body is to be spiritual; that is that the sights, scents, sounds and touches of the heavenly world will in perfection be recognized

and enjoyed by the body; whereas, in our present state, the body, in its various senses, is only fitted for this world.- though, my good Theophilus, you are enabled, upon the whole, to "present your body a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God," yet it is not by any delight the body has in the service of God, that you are enabled so to do, for now it is merely a natural body; but then it will be a spiritual body.

Fifth, it is to be not an earthly body, but a heavenly body; as superior in all its powers to Adam in an earthly paradise, as is the glorified body of the Savior to the heavenly paradise. Here, then, will be complete personal conformity to Christ: for "we shall be like him," and "see him as he is:" and for all the nearest and dearest natural ties and affections will be substituted heavenly ties, and pure, perfect, infallible, immortal affections; for we are to be perfect in love, and we shall know each other there by remembrance, much as two persons brought to know the truth, recollect each other while each was in a state of nature, but then this part of their knowledge does not much interest them, for they have the same union of soul to those whom they did not know in a state of nature, as to those they did know in a state of nature; but this part, as I have said, of their knowledge does not much interest them: it is their knowledge of, and oneness in the truth, that supremely interests them. And so it will be in heaven, their perfect knowledge of each other with whom they sojourned on earth, will not much interest them; it will be their then present state and prospects which will supremely unite and interest them: and, therefore, the feasible fables of wives and husbands, parents and children, making a part of the delight in heaven, have no place in the Bible! for if you carry this notion into eternity, most terrible consequences must follow; namely, that if the presence of one who was an earthly relative gives delight, then the absence of others must create distress; therefore, every human tie must perish.

I am aware that in thus speaking I am robbing the effeminate ladies-man kind of preacher of a very essential element to his pathos, an essential element to his charity, and sometimes an essential element to a good collection; and nature, as these soft-tongued prophets well known, is much easier affected by its own fables, than by the facts of the gospel.

But, my good Theophilus, be not thou like unto them; for in God's truth you must know nothing but the truth, and for the truth sake, let who may oppose, whether it be wife, husband, child, parent, or any other relative, you, I say, for the truth sake, must take up your daily cross, and "know no man after the flesh."

Thus then, you see, though some things in this order of things seem hard to flesh and blood; yet, there is enough of glory to more than make up all the sacrifice, which nature has to make — all tears for ever wiped away.

Prospect. But look for a moment at the passport with which, on the resurrection morning, you will set out for your endless round of pleasures, mixed up with none but those whom you in perfection love—God and the Lamb, angels and saints. How good and pleasant it will be to dwell in that divine unity, we must be there to know: the whole glory thereof is unshakable. Thy sun will never go down, thy moon will not withdraw its brightness, thy person and inheritance forever; the Lord shall be unto thee thine everlasting light; and thy God thy glory; the days of thy mourning shall be ended."

Is it then, any wonder that those who have, through grace, known most of the Savior— most of the love of God,—have a desire "to depart and be with Christ, which is far better;" that they have hastened on by faith and love, to the coming of the day of God; and though the heavens will be on fire, and be dissolved, and intermediate elements melt with fervent heat, and though worlds unnumbered will lose their equilibrium, and after rolling thousands of years in silent majesty, and uninterrupted order, will burst into fragments, and fly in wild and universal disorder; helping, with infinite fury, to tear each other to pieces;

yet drawn to, and falling upon the orb, which has ruled the day; the collision of broken fragments, to reach their final grave, their collisions will be so fearful, that the loudest thunder ever heard, is, in the comparison, but a mere whisper, and hardly that, when these broken worlds are drawn to the sun, and there formed into one boundless funeral pile, so that with infinite thunders, shall be heat, infinite in intensity, and the sun shall do its last office: shall burn to annihilation the worlds it has lighted and controlled; and then, with infinite struggle, the sun itself shall turn dark, tremble, stagger, roll to and fro—begin to rend in twain; and then a groan shall reach to hell's tremendous deep, and heaven's wondrous height: hell trembles, heaven is silent! What awful vibrations are these! How slowly their thunders lessen! Some mighty angel! tell me what means this? take a wide survey through the vast expanse! Gabriel comes with solemn looks, and yet an under smile, and brings the tidings true! He it was, the king of time, dying,—the king of time is dead; and time itself shall be no more: nothing but eternity left for the lost and the saved! though then, I say, all this must take place, yet you have a gospel of holy conversation, —a gospel of Godliness. Now, in this gospel conversation, and in this gospel Godliness, what manner of person ought you to be? Well, you ought to follow the faith of those, to whom Jesus Christ was the same yesterday, today and forever. Now, you will meet with some, of such ill manners, that they, in the course of a few years, preach or profess half-a-dozen Jesus Christ's;

"Such turn and twist at every blast;
Must to a point, and fix at last."

I trust never to see you this manner of person, for I am sure it is a very bad manner. But, the Lord hath turned to you a pure tongue, and has brought you into oneness with the great mystery of Godliness—God manifest in the flesh. So that you have wherewith to hasten unto the coming of the day of God; being justified by faith, you have peace with God; and you are to be diligent, to see that you are found in this peace; and your hope is in the blood of the everlasting covenant, and by which you will be found without spot; for the blood of Christ leaves no spot; it cleanses from all sin. You must be diligent to look to this part also, of your standing; and also, you must not draw back from the truth; you must not apostatize, for then you would not be found blameless. Thus, then, to be found of him, as you do pray to be found of him, you must be justified by faith, and so be found of him in peace; and you must be washed in his blood, and so be found of him without spot; you must hold fast his truth, and so not to have to bear the blame of apostasy; hence, says the apostle, "that I may be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law; but that which is through faith of Christ, the righteousness which is (not of man, but) of God by faith." And in this way, and this way only, you will find that death has lost its sting—the grave has lost its victory, while you will be, through God, more than conqueror—he giveth you the victory.

Thus, I have tried to set before you the truth,—the order; and, in this letter, a few remarks (though very feebly,) upon the glory of the resurrection. I say feebly, for what you can expect of such A Little One

Epistles to Theophilus Letter 45 - pages 148ff 1858

The Resurrection and the destiny of the Lost

My Good Theophilus, I now make a few remarks, (and they will be but few,) upon the resurrection and destiny of the lost; that the just, as well as the unjust; the wicked, as well as the righteous; the hated, as well as the loved; will be raised from the dead. We know, from express declaration of Holy Scriptures, that there will be a resurrection of the just and of the unjust; but with what body the unjust will rise is nowhere clearly revealed. Some, it is true, have by contrasting the resurrection body of the unjust with the just, endeavored to give us a fair idea of the resurrection body of the unjust; but the contrast, does not in some very material points, hold good; for if we say the one is as the glorious body of the Savior, then, where is the contrast here? For although the unjust are spoken of as the children of the wicked one, yet Satan has not a material body, therefore they cannot in this material respect, be like him.

Again, the just are to be raised immortal, but will the unjust be raised mortal! Will they not rather be raised in the same kind of durable existence as that possessed by Satan? Yet there can be no doubt but the just and the unjust will, in very many respects, perfectly contrast with each other. The terms fox, wolf, serpent, viper, with many other terms of the like import, no doubt, most solemnly indicate the state of most awful degradation in which they shall rise; each feeling himself to be all that which is implied in such terms; not one of them all will then be able to congratulate himself upon the possession of one good quality, yet possessing a soul capable of seeing, and feeling, the full force of such degradation. Alas! for poor, degraded, lost, and miserable man. Truly the judgments of the Most High are a great deep. I sigh as I write these gloomy lines, and, but for the humble hope, my good Theophilus, which we have in covenant mercy in Christ, I am sure that you with me, would wish you had never existed; it would, indeed, have been good for that man who dies in his sins, if he had never been born.

Now the wicked will be raised by virtue of their accountability to God, and I hope in my next letter to set this matter of human and Christian accountability to God somewhat clearly before you.

I will here just suggest that there are three causes of a sinner's condemnation.

I. The criminal cause. This criminal cause is two-fold: original and personal. 1st The original is Adam's transgression; by which transgression judgment came upon all men to condemnation. 2nd The personal. This will mean all sins against light and knowledge.

II. There is the legal cause of condemnation. The righteous law of God is the legal cause of condemnation; and from the laws, all the laws of God, arise more from sovereignty, than what men are pleased to call his moral perfections; any deviation, therefore, from those laws, is a sin against his authority, and is therefore, a sin against all his other perfections; and this is the reason that "he that offendeth in one point is guilty of the whole." Because all laws arise from his authority, and they are holy, chiefly because of this. For what a number of things have the people of God done that were holy, simply because they were done by Divine authority. Take as a sample the wars of the Jews with the Canaanites; these wars, without Divine authority, would have been wholesale murder. But Divine authority precluded all fault on the part of those chosen ministers of Divine judgments. Many of the Psalms of David, apart from Divine authority, would be anything but holy. What could be more unhallowed than merely on human authority for one man to say of the little children of another man "happy shall he be that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones?" But before God here existed a criminal and a legal cause, and his righteous authority is shewn in carrying out penally the law, which he, not of necessity, but sovereignly, gave.

Then there is also the executive cause of condemnation. The will of God is the executive cause of condemnation. Take it thus: here is a man condemned to die, now his crime is the faulty, the criminal cause of that sentence. The law of the land is the legal cause; but now comes the will of the monarch.

Shall the man live or shall he not? Now this will help you to see what I mean. Here is the sinner under sentence of death; "dying thou shalt die." Now it lies with the Lord to say whether or not that man shall die. Thus it is that he hath mercy upon whom he will have mercy. He wills one by the Savior's meditorial work to life; the other he wills by the law for his sin to degradation.

Thus, my good Theophilus, you cannot rightly respect the blessed God in any of his perfections, unless you, first of all respect his authority, cavil at his sovereignty; and all pretenses to be holy and righteous will amount only to a little show before men, but in vain will you try to please God, all the time human sovereignty is put in the place of his sovereignty. Let us then tremble, and not trifle with his holy word: let his sovereignty as well as his justice be known in condemnation, and it will soon exclude boasting, and make us fly to the word of his grace for mercy and for hope.

Nor will the hell of the lost be temporary; would to God it were; gladly would I sound abroad, the doctrine of a quenchable fire; gladly would I hail the news, that the punishment is not everlasting; that their torment is not for ever and ever; that that mysterious thing, the worm, does die. Alas! what is this mystic worm? is it the conscience? or, what is it, for it dies not! Some do say, the punishment is not everlasting; that the worm will die; that the torment is not for ever and ever; but that these Scriptures ought to be understood in subservience to such Scriptures that say, that the wicked shall be burned up as chaff. But I fear the figurative must be subservient to the plain and literal, and not the plain and literal subservient to the figurative: everlasting punishment—tormented for ever and ever—the fire not quenched, and the worm dying not, are terms, which, I fear, must have their full absolute force and meaning. And, besides, those who contend for a limited duration of punishment, or a second death, or annihilation by a fiery process, these admit that the unjust will have a future existence. Is not this admission fatal to the whole plan of the annihilation scheme; for, if they can exist at all in eternity, apart from eternal life in Christ; if they can exist at all in eternity, why not that existence be as likely to be two thousand years as one thousand years? And if two thousand years, why may it not be ten thousand years? And if ten thousand years, why not for ever? and I greatly fear it is so — I believe it is so: and I must leave this awful and infinite mystery with him to whom secret things belong, and while, on the one hand, I will not speak reproachfully of those who conscientiously hold to the doctrine of the final cessation of the existence of the lost, yet, on the other hand, I do not feel that I dare to deny the eternity of future punishment. Thrice happy, indeed, is that man who is delivered from this mysterious second death, this unquenchable wrath to come!

My good Theophilus, I have written this short letter with a heavy heart, but still it is good sometimes, at least, to go to the house of mourning, but if it make me heavy hearted and gloomy in writing it, and you in reading it, what must the awful reality be? We may well beseech the Lord to "teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom;" and our days are not so many but that they are easily numbered and are soon gone, and we soon fly away. Alas! Then, for all things under the sun! "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity, saith the Preacher," and not able to supply the real needs, even, of A Little One.

Epistles to Theophilus Letter 46 - pages 176ff 1858

Our accountability to God

Allow me now, my good Theophilus, to have a word or two with you upon the subject of accountability to God. Now as to your legal accountability to God, that has been entirely met by the Surety of the new covenant; and God, not of necessity, but sovereignly, gave a law, and as sovereignly determined that not one jot or tittle of that law should fail, but that its majesty should stand, and remain forever, and is a law, therefore, to a sinner fearful, terrific, and damning. Now Jesus Christ the Lord was made under this law, substitutionally)-, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, and he bore our sins in his own body on the tree. What must he be in dignity and power to bear the sins of millions? You're knowing something of this your legal accountability, makes you prize supremely the blest Surety of the new covenant. Had you one sin to answer for, or one jot or tittle of the law to meet, how would you appear? Whence could you find a ransom? For remember, that he that offends in one point, is guilty of the whole! Where, then, say, could you find a ransom? For this one sin would constitute you a sinner, a law condemned sinner, a lost sinner, an outcast and helpless sinner. If men did but see this, their legal accountability, and in their consciences feel the force of this, how welcome then, truly welcome, would be every testimony concerning the efficacy, perfection, and certainty of the atonement of Christ! How clearly would they see that unless the blood of Christ cleansed with eternal certainty from all sin, that not one soul could be saved. As for saying, that some are in hell for whom Christ died, you might as well say that Christ himself is in hell; that Christ himself is lost; yea, he was in infinitely the greater danger of the two, for he was the Surety, and all law charges fell upon him. The Shepherd smitten, but the sheep free, and free for ever. What the Savior has done for them, is eternal, and he himself also is eternal, "the same yesterday, to-day, and forever."

Freewill, therefore, is a liar and a deceiver, and the twaddle of half-way Calvinism is little better than freewill. Yea, in some respects worse, because more deceptive. Let, I say, your real law accountability to God be seen, known, and felt, and you will see that it is something which you cannot touch; yea, something that you can no more touch than an Israelite could touch Mount Sinai, and yet escape with his life. Saul of Tarsus did not become a true lover of Christ until his law accountability to God was opened to him, and the faith of Christ implanted in his soul. Were everyone who names the name of Christ made to feel what their real law accountability to God is, they would be very different Christians from what they now are; what they now sneeringly call hyperism and dangerous doctrine, they would with all their souls embrace, and would cleave to the truth as to their life. Oh, how would they bless that dear Surety who took all the law accountability into his own hands, set them free, and became just as much a Surety for the safety of their persons as for the atonement of their sins; be is accountable to God as much for their ultimate presentation before the eyes of his glory without fault, as he was for the redemption of their souls by his blood. It is as much his work to gather in his sheep as it was his work to lay his life down for them. The two are joined together, and never can be put asunder; and whatever men may say about the non-importance of doctrine, if they cannot be saved by truth, I am sure they cannot by falsehood; and as to what carnal carping philosophers and Pharisees may indulge in as to the moral tendency of such doctrines, every saved sinner well knows that however important and excellent, good works before men may be, and are, yet the truths of the gospel have ends in view infinitely higher and beyond even the noblest purposes of this life. The truths of the gospel bring us a kingdom which is not of this world, and it is an everlasting kingdom which shall not pass away; and this kingdom comes, and the people come to the kingdom, the one, with as much certainty as the other, by the Surety-ship of Christ.

"His kingdom cannot fail,
He rules over earth and heaven;
The keys of death and hell
Are to our Jesus given."

Unto you, therefore, my good Theophilus, he is the end of the law for righteousness. You are free, and you live, and walk, and pray, and love, and praise, and abide firm and immovable, by faith in the Surety, Christ Jesus, Here the Father is well pleased, here the Holy Spirit glorifies Christ, and here by hope you are saved.

Now having said thus much, let me get you to notice carefully this one truth, that in the final account you will have to give to God, it must be All Good, or else All Bad. There can be no mixture. No weighing the good against the bad, or the bad against the good, to see which is the heavier of the two. No! it must be All one way or All the other; and so, in the judgment, the Savior will say nothing good to the one, nor anything evil to the other. But mind, I am here speaking of our final account, and of final judgment; there is an intermediate judgment, where things are different, but you shall have a word upon that in my next epistle to you.

Now, then, your final account must, I say, be all good, or all bad; all for you, or all against you; there is no medium or mixed account, for every one shall be rewarded according to his works, "whether they be good, or whether they be bad;" thus you see each is distinguished, not by the quantity, but by the quality of his works, whether they be good, or whether they be bad; they that have done good to the resurrection of life; they that have done evil to the resurrection of judgment, and "for every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment, for by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." Again, "We must appear before the judgment-seat of Christ to give an account of the deeds done in the body, whether they be good or whether they be bad."

Thus you see in all these Scriptures with the one it is all good, but with the other all bad. Now let us see if we can, in holy reverence, get clearly at the meaning of these solemn scriptures: but is there any difficulty in getting the meaning of these Scriptures? No, my good Theophilus, not the least; the one little word, faith, unlocks them all. "Justified from All things by faith." Now if you are thus justified by faith from all things, then "who is he that condemneth, seeing that it is God that justifieth." Now then, being justified by faith, what will your works and words and deeds be? What shall be your final account? What is the language in which you shall state it? For there it is all ready for you by the time you want it; and if you say, where? I answer, in the Bible. Are you a believer? I know that thou believest. Well then, what is one of the good things you do? Is it not that you keep in the faith? That you cannot move away from the hope of the gospel? You are decided for the truth, and you so contend for it as to hold it fast. You thus fight a good fight; a very different fight from that of fighting against the truth, for that, truly, is not a good fight, but a very bad one; for all such are sure to lose the victory, and be judged enemies at the last, nor will one of their good works be mentioned, but only their evil ones, as by these those who are not justified by faith must be judged; nor, on the other hand, will one of your faults, numerous as they are, be mentioned, because you are to be judged by the completeness you have in Christ, and by your evidences of interest in him. Thus you will say, "I have fought a good fight; finished my course; held out in the truth to the end; kept the faith." Again you will say, "He loved me, and gave himself for me," and that you have been enabled to profit by the talents, that is the truths of the gospel, which he hath graciously given to you; for the talents spoken of in Matthew xxv. are not personal qualities but property, and what is this property but gospel truth, and it is given to one in greater abundance than to another.

Well, what say you to these talents? Can you say that you do trade with heaven by them? For the occupation must be spiritual and heavenly? Can you, then, say that by these truths you are encouraged to hope in God? That you are encouraged in seeking the Lord, and in prayer? And do you wish to get more and more of the gospel, in the life, light, and love thereof, into your possession? And do you thus

somewhat grow in grace that you are more and more sure that it must be all of grace? and if the Lord come to thee, can you give him a good account of his own truth, that you have been comforted and supported by it; that you are all the better for it; that you have, as it were, gained five talents or two talents more? That two talents of gospel truth sufficed you once, but now ten talents of this heavenly gold is not too much? Is it thus with you? If it be, then thy account and thy final judgment are thus written, "Lord, thy talents have gained more talents." This is your account. What say you? Ask your heart and conscience can you give, truly, such an account? Or are you,—no, you are not, but I will speak to you for a moment as though you were, just where the one-talent man was. He professed to be a servant of the Lord, therefore the Lord delivered unto him, providentially, the law of truth, but David saith, "Grant me thy law graciously." Now here the law of truth was delivered unto this free-willier, providentially, and merely in the letter of it, and reckoned one talent, because the law of truth is not much accounted of in the estimation of such; he therefore lays it aside and adopts into its place a law of austerity; the gospel was too easy for him; it was not pious enough; made too much of Jesus Christ; too much of the grace of God, and not enough of the creature. Therefore he carefully conceals the law of truth, as something not suited to trade with; aye, and prides himself, too, in so doing. He would not run any hazard with this dangerous talent, but tells the Master that he knew he was an austere man, taking up where he had not laid down; so this man was judged according to his own words, according to his own gospel, and as he cast the talent of truth out from the heavenly commerce, he himself was cast out of the business of free grace altogether, and so rewarded according to his works, and according to his words. Could you, my good Theophilus, cast out, or set aside the truth? You know you could not. Well, then, as you give a good account of the truth, the truth will give a good account of you.

You see here nothing is said of the faults of these faithful servants, nor anything good said of the unfaithful, unbelieving servants. No doubt many infirmities mingled themselves with the services of these faithful servants: trade would sometimes be very dull with them; they would feel at times very discouraged; have their doubts whether they should not break down; that their hope and strength would perish from the Lord; they would feel at times rather lazy, rather dull, rather indifferent; yet they remain faithful in the truth, and the Master who is meek and lowly in heart, will not remember one of their faults; but will say, "well done, thou good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

But you also practically love the brethren, and will do them good and not evil; and so will be found among those who have not withholden the cup of cold water from the disciples. Thus you see something of the reward of the works of faith: you will have nothing whatever to do with any of your sins; the Surety has answered for them all; and to sum up all I can say in this letter upon this matter; you will give to glorify God, by joining with others, in giving that good account of yourself; for "everyone must give an account of himself to God;" "unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God, and his Father, to whom be glory forever." Would you wish to have a better account than this to give? Is your heart one with such words now? Then by these thy words, (for the Lord hath made them thine,) by these thy words thou shalt be justified.

So believes your willing servant in the gospel A. Little One.

Epistles to Theophilus Letter 47 - pages 230ff 1858

More on Our accountability to God – Our personal accountability

More against Duty-Faith

My Good Theophilus — I Close, for the present, my remarks upon the subject of man's accountability to God; and, to make the personal accountability of man to God, as clear to you as possible, let me here just remind you, that I am now to speak of that accountability to God, which depends upon the circumstances in which men are placed; distinguishing this from that original accountability, in which all men in the first Adam are alike: all are fallen, lost and helpless; but, circumstances give rise to different degrees of accountability, for, "where much is given, much is required." Now, when the Lord was pleased to give to the Israelites a covenant of laws and ordinances, it was for their good, that is, for their temporal and moral good; and, by walking in these laws keeping to the one true God, and following his institutions, they thereby spent their days in peace, and their years in prosperity; and, the Lord, from time to time stretched out his hands to them, to deliver them and to uphold them, and to bless them; but, the majority of them refused—they set at nought God's counsel, and would none of his reproof, and hereby did themselves a twofold injury. First, in bringing upon themselves present calamities; and, second, treasuring up sins, for which they would have to answer at the day of judgment; and, therefore, it will be more tolerable in the day of judgment, for Sodom and Gomorrah, than for those who have despised God to his face—slain his prophets, and digged down his altars. And you see that the Lord put the Israelites upon a conditional footing, he never aimed at, never intended their eternal salvation, because, eternal salvation runs altogether in another line of things; all God aimed at with the Israelites, was to give them certain advantages, (temporal and moral,) by obeying his laws; and even this, he aimed at, only by such means as that covenant afforded. God's decree concerning them (as you may see in Duet, xxviii., and many other places,) was, that if they obeyed his laws, they should live in all the prosperity the promised land could afford, and if they disobeyed, they must die and lose it all; and, it must be left to them as voluntary creatures, to obey and live, or disobey and die. There was nothing to obey, which the natural man was not well capable of obeying—the priesthood, royalty and ordinances, were all after the law of a carnal commandment, and there were miracles and wonders enough, to prove to them that those laws were of God; and, added to this, the Lord multiplied visions, and used similitudes, and also reasoned with them, and said, "turn, O house of Israel, why will ye die?" but they would not turn, so the Lord said, he would "laugh at their calamity, and mock when their fear came;" thus you will know how to understand such Scriptures, as—"When a man turns from his wickedness, and does that which is lawful and right," &c.

There are, as you are aware, men, who set up such Scriptures as offers of eternal salvation, and thus make out, that the Israelite, after the flesh, was condemned for not receiving what God never intended for him; and so far drawn into delusion are such men, that they even tell us, that it is the duty of all men to repent and believe, and to come to Christ, and be saved; and, whereas, the duty of men consists of nothing of the kind: as well may they tell us, that it was the duty of Ishmael to become what Isaac was—a son of the free-woman, and a child of promise: as well may they tell us that it was the duty of Esau to be loved of God, as was Jacob. It was not Ishmael's duty to make himself a child of promise, his duty was to behave himself, and not get mocking and persecuting Isaac. It was not Esau's duty to make himself loved of God as was Jacob; his duty was to have kept his priesthood birthright, have sacrificed unto God as an act of

homage to his Maker and not against the light and knowledge he had to run off into heathenism. It was not Cain's duty to be justified by faith as Abel was; Cain's duty was to do not only as he did do, bring an offering unto God, but to bring it in love to his Maker, and in faith in him as his Creator; and to have abstained from his popish (that is, murderous, for the terms are synonymous) intentions towards Abel. Then the Lord would have had respect unto him, and to his offering. Not the respect he had unto Abel, and his offering; no, for Abel was a regenerated man, and his worship was not merely natural but spiritual, and the Lord accepted him and it as such; but Cain's would have been accepted as a creature act of duty-faith homage to his Maker, and thus Cain would have done well as a creature, and would have been accepted as such. Yes, even after he had brought his offering with a wicked heart and after the acceptance of Abel's offering had brought out more prominently the evil intentions of Cain's wicked heart, even after this, the Lord said to him, "Why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? The desire of thy brother shall be unto thee, and thou shalt rule over him." To do well, was to act conscientiously, and to be accepted was, to have the creature advantages of this creature well doing; but what has all this to do with that grace wherein Abel stood and rejoiced in hope of the glory of God?

You will thus, my good Theophilus, see that all who make that spiritual which is only natural, are under a delusion; and being hereby deceived themselves, they draw others into the same delusion, and would delude, if it were possible, even the very elect.

But let me now come to the New Testament age, and here I shall find that the responsibility of man is solemn, and most awful is the account that thousands will have to give. Take the man who wantonly desecrates the Sabbath day, who makes a jest of religion, and who perhaps, can delight in the despising the ministers, the ways, and the people of God; and who, in the open daylight of the New Testament, has pleasure in nothing but unrighteousness. By these their works, such will be judged, but to preach unto such, a duty-faith, and a duty-repentance as the way of eternal salvation, is as unscriptural as anything can well be; and if such be converted by and to such a doctrine, then they are converted by and to a huge lie; and where such deceived souls will be found at the last, I must leave.

Both John the Baptist, and the Savior, began their ministry by exhorting the natural man to repent and believe the gospel, and had the Jews have done so, they would have saved their city to this day. It was their sin that when the Savior by miracle and by truth, demonstrated his mission to be from on high, it was. I say, their sin, that they did not repent and believe his testimony, and so have ceased even to oppose him, much less crucify him, and put him to death; but, my good Theophilus, that repentance by which Sidon and Tyre would have continued to this day, that repentance which would have saved Jerusalem from destruction, and that repentance which is unto eternal salvation, are widely and essentially different matters.

Thus, my good Theophilus, you will see that we few poor despised hypers, do not deny human accountability, nor find an excuse for any one wrong of man, nor do we put the duty of the creature into the place of the grace of God, nor do we lay the blame of men's damnation upon the grace of God, nor upon the death of Christ; but we lay the blame of man's eternal perdition entirely upon original sin, and the amount of punishment we blame upon personal sins against light and knowledge; and those sins consisting, not in rejecting what was never meant for them, and never offered to them. Eternal life is offered to no one; it is a free, eternal, sure gift. Nor do we hypers hold out two ways of eternal salvation, one by duty-faith, and another by the faith of God's elect: we believe that these two ways, that such two doctrines, are in direct collision one with the other; we believe one of these doctrines, namely, eternal salvation by the faith of God's elect, to be of God, but that the other doctrine is not of God, nor do the men that preach it dare to say, that any soul was ever yet saved by it. They themselves despise the thought

of being saved by it; they send others that way, but they will not go that way themselves. Nor will these two doctrines ever, either on earth or in heaven, coalesce; they are a deadly and an everlasting contradiction one to the other, and the two put together make a yea and nay gospel; and so is another gospel; and would bring an angel from heaven, should he advocate such a gospel, under the apostolic curse.

Let ministers, therefore, tell men the truth, and rightly divide the word of truth, and let the law of human accountability be kept in its place, and the law of life and liberty have its place.

This duty-faith doctrine feeds Pharisees, and tips with poison the arrows that are sent at men of God. Let those who luxuriate so much upon duty-faith, beware how they despise those with whom they pretend, in the free-grace part of their creed to be one. This duty-faith doctrine is no new heresy; it is one of the last leprous spots of popery, that marked nearly all the Puritan Fathers; but still, it is high time that this black spot was taken away; it ought to be cast to the moles and to the bats; it makes empty the soul of the hungry, and causes the drink of the thirsty to fail. It aims to tie truth and error together. But why then have some good men preached this duty-faith doctrine? They have preached it for these two reasons: first, because they have thought that they have found it in the letter of the Word; and second, that they have not faith enough in God to trust him with his own truth, and therefore to make up this their lack of faith in God, they exercise a little faith in the creature; and, fearing God will not begin the work soon enough, they appeal to the creature to begin at once as it is, say they, his duty to do. They feel that they ought to speak to the dry bones as well as to the living bones, and they are not content to prophecy as the Word commands, but must call upon the dry bones to help themselves; and so, after confessing, tacitly deny the state men are in by nature, and though their duty-faith doctrine be a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint, yet they still have great confidence in it, and while they thus try to serve two gospels, they are faithful to neither. The Lord open their eyes and set them right; so prays A Little One

Editor's note: There is no Letter 48 in the 1858 Earthen Vessel. They go from letter 47 to letter 49.

Epistles to Theophilus Letter 49 - pages 248ff 1858

A door opened in Heaven and a Throne; Remarks on Revelation chapter 4

My Good Theophilus, I now propose to write a few letters to you upon the 'Seven Seals,' we read of in Revelations 6th chapter; but as this letter will be merely introductory, I will begin with the 4th chapter of Revelation.

And the first thing we here meet with, is, one of the best of all things, a door opened in heaven: all earthly doors must with us very soon close, and therefore the one thing needful is a door opened in heaven; let this door of heaven be shut, and all hope is gone, and we are left in black and eternal despair.

The first entrance of the Israelites upon the Promised Land, is called the 'door of hope' Hosea ii. 15. Now the promise of God in Christ Jesus is our 'door of hope;' whatever promise appears suited to us is 'our door of hope;' not but that all the promises are suited to us; but we are at different times in different

states of experience, and circumstances; and so there are promises suited to all our possible necessities, and these are 'our door of hope.' That is—we feeling our need of these promises, and being persuaded of them, we by them begin to have hope; and though we see these promises, (as to their fulfilment) as yet afar off, yet they are unto us a 'door of hope.'

Then there is the door of salvation: 'by me', (saith the Lord,) 'if any man enter in, he shall be saved.' Thus, then, the door of hope, and the door of salvation, bring us to the door of heaven; and this door opened in heaven is by the atonement of Christ reaching to all the demands of law and justice; and he therefore entered heaven by his own blood; and so we have boldness to enter into the holy of holies by the blood of Jesus; and so a door is opened in heaven. And a door opened in heaven is a door of revelation from heaven, as well as a door of entrance into heaven. And hence, said the voice to John, 'come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter.'

Here you see, that just where men dishonored John, just there the Lord honored him: men cast him out, but the Lord received him; men cast him down, but the Lord lifted him up; men hated him, but the Lord loved him; man would have destroyed him, but the Lord preserved him; man did all he could to put him to silence, but the Lord hath made him speak so as to be heard to the end of the world, and to earth's remotest bounds; men would have cast him down to hell, but the Lord lifted him up to heaven; men separated him from their company, but the Lord took him into his highest counsels, and into his bosom secrets.

John was, in God's truth, as all good men now are, too high to be acceptable to a deluded world; but when John was in the Isle of Patmos, the Lord said to him, 'come up higher.' So that if John were high before he went to the Isle of Patmos, he was higher still when he arrived there; and he found this increase of altitude; this additional ascent up the sides of Mount Zion; this nearer approach to the house not made with hands, he found it good to be thus high; 'for immediately,' saith he, 'I was in the Spirit.' And so by elevation and transformation, he was well fitted for divine revelations. They would, while he was thus placed, be sure to have their full weight with him; whereas, keep him down amidst a routine of mere formalities, eternal realities may then pass by unheeded; but let him be taken up somewhat toward the third heavens, then mortality, and all its sins and cares, are swallowed up of life. Thus, then, in the very opening of this fourth chapter, you have these three things: the door opened in heaven; John brought up to that door; and the transforming power of the Lord's presence. 'Immediately I was in the spirit.' Nor had John any hand in opening this door, it was opened for him, and to him, but not by him. He looked!—ah, where did he look? Not to earth—for, alas! all was gloom, desolation, and anguish there; but he looked unto the Lord, and saw a door opened in heaven. And so it is, my good Theophilus, your happy lot to see that by the blood of Jesus a door is opened in heaven; and the truth, and faith therein, are the way thereto.

Now you will see that at the end of this 4th chapter, that the purpose of God in the creation of the world, is the song of adoration: 'thou hast created all things; and for thy pleasure they are, and were created.' And, thus, before they pass on to salvation matters, they recognize the right of the blessed God in the first creation; and there is great propriety in this, because we need the Lord as a God of Providence; and as all these things were by and for the Divine Word, in whom is all Jehovah's Pleasure: so — our God, having full right in the creation, in the world, and all things pertaining thereto, we may look with assurance to him for the supply of our temporal, as well as for our eternal needs. The throne therefore of God is a throne of government to both worlds: hence, to denote his possession and command of riches, his appearance is as a jasper and sardine stone. This, then, I say, means not only the glory of his appearance, but indicates the niches he has at command; and, therefore, it is that Christ is that gift, which is as a precious stone in the eyes of him that hath it; and wither so ever it turneth it prospereth. The city of God

also, is adorned with precious stones; and Israel was represented on the High Priest's breastplate by precious stones; so that altogether, it would seem to be this, that as precious stones are distinct from the common pebble, so the people of God, the city of God, and God in covenant, all stand out in distinction, glory, and richness, from everything else; for 'who is like unto our God?' and what city is like unto the city of God? and what people is like unto the people of God?

This throne is said to 'be set in heaven.' The scene, you will see, is taken from the temple; and perhaps partly also from the tabernacle in the wilderness. This is to shew to us, that as the tabernacle and temple had special reference to the people of God, so the throne here will mean what was there called the 'mercy seat;' and, hence, to prove this, there is a rainbow round about the throne, in sight, like unto an emerald; thus shewing, not only that he is the God of peace; but also that it shall be seen that he is the God of peace; it shall be seen that Jesus hath made peace by the blood of his cross.

As the Lord's covenant of seed time and harvest was positive; so as we see (Isa. liv.) is the covenant of mercy and peace; and as the rainbow is above the reach of, and independent of men, so it was not in the power of man to make peace with God: Christ alone could; and so it is not in the power of man to break that peace which Christ hath made; it stands independent of man, and into this heavenly reconciliation and peace you are brought. This rainbow is the triumphal arch under which you will have 'an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom' of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

You see that neither the Lord nor the throne is solitary, here are a people belonging thereto; 'four and twenty Elders' are intended as secondary representatives of the people of God. Christ is the primary, and also the ultimate representative of the people of God. These Elders, then, I say, are a kind of secondary representatives of the people of God; and if the number, twenty-four, allude to the twelve Patriarchs of the Old Testament, and to the twelve Apostles of the New Testament, then these four and twenty Elders will represent the Old and the New Testament people of God. If this be the allusion, then we must take the blessing of Duet. 33rd, and the apostolic testimonies of the New Testament to explain the sense in which the four and twenty Elders represent the people of God. Or, as David divided the Levitical service into four and twenty orders, and that each order had its chief priest; then here would be four and twenty chief priests, and these would represent the people of God in their sacrificial consecration to God. Whichever be the allusion here, whether to the twelve Patriarchs and twelve Apostles, or to the four and twenty chief priests, the meaning is substantially the same; just reminding you that over these four and twenty orders, and four and twenty chief priests, was one who was called the high priest; the high priest it was who was specially a type of the Great High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus. And as these Elders are clothed in white raiment, and have on their heads crowns of gold, so shall all the people of God be 'holiness unto the Lord,' and be crowned with glory, called a crown of gold because of its purity, preciousness, and beauty.

And as justice and judgment are the habitation of his throne, so there are two orders of truth proceeding from this throne; the one, that of mercy; the other that of threatening to the adversaries; hence these threatening's are called lightening's, thundering's, and voices. And as there were seven lamps in the Tabernacle, to give light in the holy place, so there is a true tabernacle which God pitched, and not man; and here in the church the Holy Spirit dwells in all the fullness of his ministrations; but mind, it was before the throne that these seven lamps were placed; and so the saving illuminations of the Holy Spirit are sure to lead the soul to a throne of grace. And as there was a brazen sea before the temple, as a type no doubt of the gospel; so here it is called, because of its clearness, a sea of glass; and as Aaron and his sons were to be washed at the door of the Tabernacle, so we have here indicated the washing of regeneration. And as after the first washing Aaron and his sons were, with this clear crystal water, to wash their hands and

feet, when they went in to serve in the holy things, so we, after the washing of regeneration, need renewing again and again; for there is not a just man upon the earth, that doeth good and sinneth not; and these renewing's are those mercies of the Lord which keep us from being consumed.

Thus then, my good Theophilus, you have here a door opened in heaven; access thereto; transformation thereby; you have here a throne of grace, a God rich in mercy; also a rainbow token of peace, brotherly representatives; the Holy Spirit, and the fullness of his ministrations; and a gospel sea clear as crystal; and as far as I can at all see my way dear, I hope to go on as your humble Servant in Christ, though but A Little One

Epistles to Theophilus Letter 50 - pages 283ff 1858

The Four Beasts Revelation v. 8, 9

MY Good Theophilus—I now proceed to notice next in order, the four beasts, or more properly rendered, 'the four living creatures.' These, no doubt, are the same living creatures, seen by Ezekiel, as recorded by that prophet, in his first and tenth chapters, though some have absurdly enough told us, that Ezekiel's four living creatures are the angels, and that the wheels of which Ezekiel speaks, are the general or universal providence of God. But Ezekiel's four living creatures came from the north; and what is this north, but the wintry curse of a violated law. Here was also a whirlwind—this is the whirlwind of sin; our iniquities, like the wind, have carried us away. Here is also a great cloud—what is this, cloud, but sin in its results? Darkness is the result of sin, even a great cloud of eternal darkness. Here is also a fire in-folding itself, and a brightness was about it; that is, there was no sign of its dying out—it is the fire of Almighty wrath, and will burn as brightly after the lapse of countless ages, as it does at the present moment: out then from this northern blast, out from this whirlwind, out from this great cloud, out from this consuming fire came these four living creatures, and they came before God, even to his throne of grace. The throne adorned with the rainbow—the token of peace; they were reconciled to God, and were without fault before the throne; Christ being unto them 'the end of the law for righteousness.' This brings them out of the north; Christ stayed the rough winds at Calvary's cross; there he held the winds in his fists; and so here these living creatures can be carried away no more for ever; Christ went into the thick darkness of the guilt of sin; and penalty and substitution-ally did bear the blame thereof, and 'sets the prisoner free.' Christ quenched the otherwise unquenchable fire, and so these living creatures show that they 'are as brands plucked out of the fire.' Is it any wonder that these four living creatures (Revelations v. 8, 9,) should fall down before the Lamb having every one of them harps, (gospel testimonies,) and golden vials (pure hearts) full of odors? What a delightful experience is this—the heart full of the name of Jesus; full of faith and love j full of longings to honor and praise the God of all grace. Is it then, I say, any wonder that these living creatures should thus fall down before the Lamb, saying, 'thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof, for thou was slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God, kings and priests; and we shall reign on the earth.' Here, then, my good Theophilus, the matter is decided, as to who these living creatures are; for none but the redeemed can learn redemption's song. They are called four living creatures. In allusion, first, to the encampment of Israel in the wilderness. You will see in the second chapter of the book of Numbers, that the Israelites were ranged on the four sides of the tabernacle, and that the three tribes on

each side, is represented as one living creature. In allusion, then, to this, you will see that the church is compared to four living creatures, living in contrast to their state by nature, and in contrast to those around them, and also in contrast to eternal banishment from God called the second death. Called living creatures also, because they are new creatures, and live with God, to God, for God, and by his never ceasing care of them. And they are said 'to reign on the earth;' that is, though they are as yet on earth, yet they, by faith in Christ, and by oneness with him, prevail over all, and cannot be separated from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. Our best Greek scholars prefer rendering the preposition 'epi,' ever, and then it will read, 'we shall reign over the earth.' Now, mind, this is not an ecclesiastical or political reign, nor indeed a temporal reign at all; but a reign infinitely (only men do not think so,) better than all other dominions put together: it is a reign of reconciliation with God, over all the enmities of the earth which are against him: it is a reign of peace by the blood of Christ, over all the earth's wars against the perfection of his atonement: it is a reign of joy over all earth's sorrows: that it is a reign of righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost Now, the Lord has been pleased to set forth the church emblematically, or, to use a finer word meaning the same thing hieroglyphically; and therefore, we must not take these living creatures in a literal sense, seeing no such beings literally exist. But we must take the several parts of this emblematical representation, as expressive of certain qualities of these living creatures; a few words upon which, I shall give you presently, after just observing, that as these four living creatures are called four, not only in allusion to the square encampment in the wilderness of the Israelites, but also as the Word of God explains, they are gathered from the four winds, of every kindred, tongue, people and nation. Well then, what can the mystic and majestic wheels, which accompany them, as spoken of in Ezekiel be, but the truths of the everlasting gospel? These wheels were high and dreadful; and so are the truths of the gospel, they are the highest of God's ways, and everything in heaven and in earth, and under the earth, must be subservient to these endless testimonies; and, to meet the blessed God by these blessed truths, will cause us to understand the meaning of the Patriarch Jacob when the Lord so met him, and he said—'how dreadful is this place, this is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.' And these wheels would not separate one from another, nor will the truths of the gospel — ancient and eternal election, mediation, regeneration, and future glorification, are forever inseparable. These wheels united, and formed a kind of living chariot, which carried the living creatures along, and the wheels would not go without taking the living creatures with them. And is it not so? Are you not carried along towards God and with God, by the truths of the gospel? And the wheels were full of eyes; so the truths of the gospel are not blind; they see what has been, what is, and what is yet to come: no guess work with them; the Scriptures foresee all things; and these four living creatures were full of eyes before and behind; that is, a knowledge of the future and the past — looking forward for that kingdom; 'which was prepared for them, from the foundation of the world.' But they are also full of eyes within, or among themselves, so as to know and recognize each other; and that their knowledge is heart knowledge, not mere observation knowledge. The spiritual meaning of the four faces, and six wings, is so simple and clear, that I scarcely need trouble you with any remarks thereon. The face of the lion you will at once see, means strength, and Christian boldness. The face of the man— their likeness to the Man Christ Jesus. The face of the ox — their patient labor in the cause of God. The face of the eagle—their love of light—their upward course—their altitudinal progression—their ultimate habitation of 'the rock that is higher than they.' These are mere hints at the meaning of these faces, for each face will bear a physiognomic investigation, or, if you" like theological investigation; and we have, no doubt, in our Zion, some laborious, well-taught men, who could give us a good sermon upon each of these four faces. But we must not tarry here, but must get on towards the seven seals as fast as we can; yet, in closing this letter, I would just give a word upon the six wings of these living creatures. 'With twain he covered his feet.' 'Keep thy foot (saith the wise man) when thou goest to the house of God.' Here then, is their cautiousness of approach to God—'with twain he covered his face,'—here are their modesty and humility before God. 'With twain he did fly,'—here is the rapidity of the soul's obedience to God. There are the wings of faith

and love, called further on in this book of Revelation 'two wings of a great eagle's—these wings enable the soul to do wonderful things. Yes, my good Theophilus, faith in, and love to God, will carry you through anything, such is the persuasion of A Little One.