

LIFE ETERNAL ... the most vital in the world
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(GENESIS 2:9; JOHN 3:7; REVELATION 22:2)

Above us in outer space are innumerable planets, and their existence has aroused the interest of the entire world. Scholars study the night sky, and wonder what exists in the heavens. Are the planets inhabited? Will it be possible some day, with the aid of rocket ships, to explore the unknown? The Bible teaches that the heavens are the home of God, to which Christ and even the prophet Elijah ascended. It follows therefore that somewhere in the sky is the habitation of the great family of God. Death cannot be the termination of existence, but is rather the opening of a door to a greater experience-life eternal. The Bible has much to say in regard to this wondrous theme.

The Tree of Life in Eden

It should never be forgotten that eternal life is far greater than everlasting life. Eternal life is primarily something of quality. Everlasting life is something of duration-it never ends. Adam might have succeeded in living for ever-as mere man. He was meant to reach higher realms of experience-to share the nature of God; not merely to live endlessly, but to become a son of God by nature. Yet, man was not a robot, to be impelled by buttons or switches. Adam was given a free will. He was expected to exercise that gift, and thereby to demonstrate his fitness to share in the provision of his Maker. All this has been clearly revealed in the early chapters of Holy Writ. Man had to choose between the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The former was situated in the middle of the garden-the place of centrality, where its prominence invited attention; the latter tree was surrounded by God's prohibitions. When man permitted sin to stain his soul, the way to the tree of life was closed-" Lest man should put forth his hand, and take of the tree of life, and live for ever." Adam therefore lost his great opportunity, for sin had closed a highway.

The Tree of Life in John Three

I remember a man who complained, " It is not just. Why should I suffer because Adam sinned? It is not my fault that Adam went wrong. Why should God punish me? " This idea is false. When Christ discussed the topic with Nicodemus, He revealed that what had become an impossibility for Adam, was impossible no longer. He said, " Marvel not that I say unto you, ye must be born again." It was

possible for the Jewish leader to receive a new life-eternal life. This surely signifies that " the flaming sword " of Adam's day was now to be withdrawn. The question may be asked, How this could be; but the answer is unmistakable. The path to the tree of life was closed because of the existence of sin. If it is now to be reopened, it must be because the hindrance has been overcome. " For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." If Adam's sin robbed him of the power to choose eternal life, the death of Christ, by removing sin, restored what Adam lost. Once again man may choose unwisely; but- at least he can choose. If man now suffers eternal loss, he does so, not because Adam went wrong, but because he has emulated Adam's example.

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The Tree of Life in the New Jerusalem

In describing the new Jerusalem, John says, " In the midst of the street of it ... was the tree of life ... and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations." It would seem that this verse presents a problem. Why should the nations need healing in the eternal kingdom? We have been led to believe that then all need will have been abolished. This verse harmonises with the rest of Scripture. When Christ returns to earth, He will reign for a thousand years, and afterwards, Satan will rally his forces to make a final onslaught on the powers of righteousness (Rev. 20:7-9). But not all men will follow evil. Many may desire to remain the subjects of the King of Kings. They will be ordinary humans, as we are; so how then can they share in the gift of God which enables men to live as God's children for ever? It would seem that the tree of life supplies the answer. Whether this be literal or symbolical is not of primary importance. The fact is that God makes it possible for people in all ages to choose life; and that always, man's destiny is decided by what he does when opportunity knocks at the door. God may offer the Bread of life, but unless man takes it he might easily die of starvation. "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely " (Rev. 22: 17).

Red Ribbons In Basutoland

South Africa is a great country. Undoubtedly political unrest is spoiling certain aspects of life for the various people who live there; undoubtedly many things could be changed for the betterment of the various races; undoubtedly much criticism may be leveled against the nation: but when

has been said and done, Africa remains one of the greatest places in the world. I shall always thank God that He sent me to labour there for nearly four years. The native people are strange, and it was hard to escape the belief that although in some senses they seemed to be very primitive, there were many ways in which their innate wisdom surpassed that of the white man. I found cause for amazement and mirth in many of the antics of the untutored black people; similarly, they laughed loud and long at some of the things I tried and failed to do. The native peoples of South Africa charmed me. To sit with them around a camp fire, as I sometimes did; to listen to their strange tales; to examine their customs and beliefs, was at' education. Whilst my wife collected the stamps of Basutoland, Swaziland, and Bechuana-land, I went in search of stories and customs. Some of these I shall never forget.

The story is told of a man who was passing through a village in Basutoland. Accustomed as he was to strange sights, he was nevertheless intrigued to see certain prized chickens walking about with bows of bright red ribbon tied under their wings and across their backs. This was something new. Other scraggy chickens were not so decorated; but a few enquiries revealed the fact that the native owner was always looking for red ribbon. When the man asked the owner of the chickens why the ribbons were there, he was told, "The ribbon protects them from the many vicious hawks that would otherwise attack them." The speaker went on to say, " I have been here fifteen years, and I have never

LIFE ETERNAL ... the most vital in the world known a hawk to take a chicken that had red ribbon on its back. The hawks seem to be afraid of that particular color. Neither blue, nor green, nor any other color seems to be effective in keeping away the robbers. I have seen hundreds of chickens taken when these hawks swoop down from the sky; but I have never seen a red-ribbon chicken go." Probably the patriarch Moses would have found interest in that story. It would have made him think of a night in Egypt when the scarlet stain on the door-posts warded off an attack of another kind. Life, the continuance of life, life everlasting, can only be guaranteed to those sheltered beneath the precious blood of Christ.

He Preferred to Hang

Dr. Robert G. Lee, the renowned preacher and author, has told a stirring story on pages 35 and 36 of his challenging book, *The Sinner's Saviour*. In his masterly way he indicates the value of accepting a pardon, and to do so draws from one of the strange incidents in American history. He says, "The difference between salvation provided in the death of

Christ and the acceptance of the provisions made, is set forth by George Wilson. In 1830, George Wilson was tried by a United States court in Philadelphia for robbery and murder, and sentenced to be hanged. Andrew Jackson, President of the United States, pardoned him. But Wilson refused the pardon, and insisted that it was not a pardon unless he accepted it. That was a point of law never before raised. The Attorney-General of the United States said the law was silent on the point. The President called upon the Supreme Court to decide the issue, as the Sheriff must know whether to hang Wilson or not. Chief Justice John Marshall, ablest of lawyers, gave the following decision: 'A pardon is a paper, the value of which depends upon its acceptance by the person implicated. It is hardly to be supposed that one under sentence of death would refuse to accept a pardon; but if it is refused, it is no pardon. George Wilson must hang.' And he was hanged.

"Who was responsible for his death? No one but Wilson himself. The law said he must die. The President stepped in between him and the law, but the man refused his pardon. Indirectly, the Supreme Court of the United States decided that the atonement of Christ, in making provision for the salvation of the whole world, is only beneficial to those who receive Him as their own personal Saviour. . . ."

Dr. Lee is a famous preacher, whose influence has reached every part of America; but it is problematical whether in all his preachings, in all his very acceptable writings, he ever said or wrote anything more important than this striking paragraph.

Life everlasting is not for a day-for a week, month, or year. Life everlasting goes on endlessly through the countless ages of eternity. To bring this priceless treasure within reach of sinful man, the Lord Jesus was crucified. Now it can be proclaimed throughout the world: "The gift of God is eternal life." To refuse it is to sign one's own death warrant.

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