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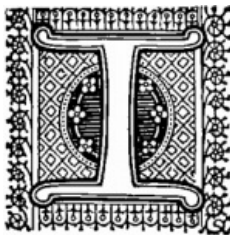
HAPPINESS IN PURGATORY.

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HAPPINESS IN PURGATORY.



It may be said of Purgatory that if it did not exist it would have to be created, so eminently is it in accord with the dictates of reason and common sense. The natural instinct of travellers at their journey's end is to seek for rest and change of attire. Some are begrimed with mud, others have caught the dust of a scorching summer day; the heat or cold or damp of the journey has told upon them and their attire. Perhaps, even, the way has made them weary unto sickness, and they crave for an interval of absolute repose.

Travellers from earth, covered with the mud and dust of its long road, could never wish to enter the banquet-room of eternity in their travel-stained garments. "Take me away!" cried Gerontius to his angel. It was a cry of anguish as well as desire, for Gerontius, blessed soul though he is, could not face heaven just as earth had left him. He has the true instinct of the traveller at his journey's end. Dust, rust, and the moth have marked their presence, and even the oddities and eccentricities of earthly pilgrimage must be obliterated before the home of eternity can be entered. *De mortuis nil nisi bonum* is interpreted, nothing short of heaven for those who have crossed the bourne. But, if the heavenly gates are thrown open to the travellers all weary and footsore, "not having on a nuptial garment," no heterogeneous meeting here on earth could compete with the gathering of disembodied spirits from its four quarters. It is human ignorance alone which canonizes all the departed, and insists on a direct passage from time to heaven. The canonization is not ratified in heaven, because heaven would not exist if it took place. The Beatific Vision is incompatible with the shadow of imperfection. To act as if it were belongs to the same order of things as rending the garment of Christian unity.

Purgatory makes heaven, in the sense that heaven would not be possible for men without it. As well might we try to reach a far-off planet, which is absolutely removed from our sphere, an unknown quantity, though a fact science does not dispute. Heaven without Purgatory is a far-off planet which must ever remain beyond our touch and ken, for it would be easier that we in our present condition should traverse space than that the sinner should see God face to face.

The vestibule of heaven, in which souls tarry in order to make their preparations, and to be prepared for the feast of eternity, can scarcely be an abode of pure suffering. Heart and mind, as they exist in the *anima separata*—that is, understanding and love—are at rest. On earth mind and heart are the source of the greatest pain as well as the greatest joy. The severest pain of body may be accompanied by happiness and a mind at rest, whereas remorse makes life unbearable. Hidden criminals at large have not unfrequently given themselves up to justice in order to arrive at peace by a public execution, that being the penalty demanded by their tortured conscience. Death, however ignominious, rather than remorse—the backbite of inwit, in the quaint language of our forefathers. Remorse is not in the organs of sense, but a purely intellectual operation, proper to man. It cannot be softened by worldly prosperity or riches, fame or success. On the other hand, a good conscience is a well-spring of happiness, be the outward circumstances of a man's life what they may. Bodily pain would add to the torture of remorse, just as it might deaden the joy of a good conscience, *per accidens*, as theologians say. Conjointly with the mind, the heart causes the keenest sufferings and the deepest joys of human life, joys and sufferings which are acted upon in the same way indirectly by pain of body. A severe toothache, for instance, quickens the pangs of remorse, whilst it deadens joy proceeding either from the intellect or the heart. It would madden a bride on her wedding morning, without in reality affecting her happiness. The root of both joy and grief is in the soul, not in the body. Conscience is the "worm which never dieth"—that is, hell, the torment created by man himself for his own punishment. The same applies to Purgatory, as far as conscience has been sinned against. The soul has created its own torment, but in Purgatory the fires die out because they deal with the *anima separata*, never with the senses. In each case the nature of the fire, which may not be material and is exercised on spirits, must remain mysterious to us. At least we can understand it by analogy. Remorse in the tortured soul of a murderer is sufficient to destroy the prosperous and pampered life of the body. Intensify it by the measure of eternity, and it may alone constitute hell. That is probably what theologians mean when they say that the fire of hell and that of Purgatory are identical. What fire is to the body, that burning sorrow is to the spirit, who sees things in their true light, and weighs lost opportunities in the balance of the next world.

By sorrow and love earth shows us the material, to speak in human language, out of which Purgatory is made. The pangs of remorse deaden the most intense bodily pain, and the power of love does more than render hard things sweet. *Many waters cannot quench charity, neither can the floods drown it*, says the voice of love in the Canticles. Whether human or divine, it is as a burning fire, which consumes all minor cares. I will not deal with passion, but with love in its noblest form and expression; the love, for instance, of a mother, or of a wife, or of an affianced bride. Earth has nothing better in the natural order than disinterested affection, a foreshadowing of Purgatory as much as the torture of remorse. Sin will not be there, neither will money-making; love will be the coin of the realm. *Non subtrahuntur deliciae sed mutantur*. As the action of purification is perfected, each human intelligence in Purgatory will be more and more fixed on God. The soul disengaged from the senses will learn all the more promptly the lesson of Purgatory, if it has not been learnt here, the perfect love of God. There is joy in suffering under these conditions, a joy which makes pain acceptable. A *promessa sposa* will be patient with sudden illness, and racking pain, if they promise to be temporary. She can afford to be so as long as her heart is fixed on the wedding day. The *sposo*, indeed, may weary of a sick affianced bride, and court another. This can happen in human things, but never in Purgatory. The souls there are fixed on the Unchangeable One, who can never prove them false; so be the suffering what it may, they can afford to bide his time, secure that the reward of their heart's long watching will never pass away. Their wedding day is far removed from the vicissitudes of earth, and the fever-tossed brides may suffer in perfect peace.

On earth it is more difficult to unlearn than to learn afresh, and it must be feared that to the great majority Purgatory is an unlearning. The idols, the false standards of the world must be swept away. In the first instant of eternity the soul has an intuitive perception of her errors. It may be likened to arrival in a foreign land, of which the language has been badly learnt at home. English-French will serve as a comparison. It is very soon proved to be no French at all. The foreigner immediately says: "I am all wrong. I must begin again." He had much better have learnt no French—at least his professor will think so—for he has to unlearn more than he learns, his expressions, his quantities, his pronunciation. Fully aware as he now is of his shortcomings, the work of imparting real knowledge will take time.

We say that knowledge is power. In Purgatory it is love; and who can call the process of arriving at it all painful, even if accompanied by torments? It is the burst of eternal day, coming gradually to those who ascend the steep mountain-side of Purgatory.

In it, as in the Father's house, there are many mansions. Whilst the saint may be punished with the pain of loss only, the sinner may be racked with fiery torments, "saved yet so as by fire." Whatever the "mansion," the suffering proceeds from the same cause, varying in degree: remorse for the past, love of God in the present. That which on earth causes our torture and our joy is prolonged in Purgatory, with this difference: *Here* our minds and hearts are unquiet because they are not fixed on God: *there* knowledge and love will be first established on their true centre, and then perfected.

There is one single and unique instance of purgatory on earth—not purgatory in the loose sense in which the expression is often used. Suffering by itself is not synonymous with Purgatory. There must be the absolute certainty of heaven, which has been given only once. *Amen, Amen, I say to*

thee, this day shalt thou be with me in paradise. The word was spoken by our Lord himself to one in fearful torture and ignominy. Was the good thief conscious of pain with that divine promise ringing in his dying ears? It may well be doubted.

He has spoken the same word to each of the holy souls: "Thou shalt be with me in paradise"; and they are so moulded to his will that his hour is theirs. They long to hear *this day*, but the security of Our Lord's promise tempers their suffering and puts it far above all pains and sorrows of earth. Who would not submit to be crucified, if *To-day thou shalt be with me in paradise* were the reward? Yet a state of crucifixion and perfect security is that of the souls whose blessedness exceeds their torments.

These thoughts may possibly suggest comfort to some who confuse suffering with unhappiness. They are not synonymous. Let us rather think of the holy souls as in the condition of the good thief. If they are suffering the torments of crucifixion they have heard the word which is to be their joy through eternity: *Thou shalt be with me in paradise!*

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