

SUPPLEMENT TO THE SAINTS' HERALD.

LAMONI, IOWA, MAY 13, 1893.

[Reported for the HERALD by E. Stafford.]

SERMON BY ELDER H. A. STEBBINS,

DELIVERED AT

LAMONI, IOWA, FEBRUARY 12, 1893,

AT THE FUNERAL OF BRO. G. W. WILLIAMS.

AFTER reading 2 Corinthians 4: 16-18, and 5: 1-11, the brother spoke as follows: A few days ago a lad of fifteen years was taken from our midst, a little before that went an infant of days, and to-day we come to pay our last respects to the mortal remains of one who had arrived at the age of three-score and ten, or nearly that, who has like some others before him, been summoned immediately away, the spirit departing from the body suddenly. George W. Williams was born on May 17, 1823, in Jefferson county, New York, and he died February 10, 1893, near Lamoni, Iowa; thus being nearly seventy years of age. In 1843 he was married to Miss Lauralia Palmatier, by whom eight children were born to him, four of whom are yet living. Some time after her death, namely, on February 28, 1864, he married Miss Mary E. McHarness, and to them also were born eight children, four sons and four daughters, all of whom are living. Thus after twenty-nine years of companionship their union has been suddenly severed, and it cannot be else than a stroke, a severe blow to the one who remains as the widow, and the mother of these children.

Bro. Williams came of a long-lived race, his mother having died in 1888 at the age of one hundred years, and two of his brothers and three of his sisters still survive him; but he had an attack of la grippe this winter, resulting in spells of faintness and rapid heart action, and, evidently, a sudden and more severe attack came while he was on his journey homeward, and took his life away, for he was found

lying upon his load of wood, dead, his team still traveling on. For one of his age he had continued to perform much hard labor and was out this winter more than he should have been, considering his condition of health as well as his years. He was baptized into the Church of Christ on August 28, 1870, in Lawrence, Van Buren County, Michigan, by Bro. E. C. Briggs, and, so far as is known to me, he continued in his faith in God, in Christ, and in the gospel.

For my text I take the eighth and ninth verses of the second chapter of Genesis, as found in the Inspired Revision, as follows:—

“And I, the Lord God, formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul, the first flesh upon the earth. Nevertheless, all things were before created, and spiritually were they created and made, according to my word.”

Thus is outlined, in a few brief words, what is spoken of as the creation of man; a statement that the outer man was formed of the dust of the earth, and that God placed within him the element of life, and that then man became a *living soul*; nevertheless all things were created spiritually before. And it is upon this strong ground, as we understand it to be, that we are based, as regards our origin, and also as to our hope and expectation concerning the results of this life and the finality of that eternal life beyond. The above declaration, which is found less complete in the King James' Translation, is strengthened and made more sure by

the statements of Moses, of Paul, and of other inspired teachers as to the fatherhood of God. Paul declares as follows:—

“Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence. Shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?”

And Moses, in the time of the rebellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, offered a prayer unto the Almighty in which he said, “Thou God of the spirits of all flesh.” It is a pleasing thought to me that man had indeed a prior existence, and that this existence of the spirit of man will continue, both while it inhabits this tenement of clay, and after it departs from it; that the intelligent entity that now dwells within our bodies will also continue hereafter to be conscious and intelligent.

During a conversation, that took place some years ago, a gentleman who was not a member of any church said, in the discussion of this point, that he would prefer to exist, even if he needed to be punished to reform and correct him, rather than that he should cease to exist, or become a non-entity, having no place in the universe of God; and we are glad to say that this is in accord with the law and order of God’s creation, for, as Jesus said, he is the God of the living; all live to him, all are known unto him, none are blotted out. Yes, it is a welcome thought, and one in accord with God’s word, that man must be reformed and corrected from evil ways, whether in this life or in the spirit state; but it is neither pleasing nor a fact that man, that the spirit of man, will be snuffed out like the flame of a candle. Rather, in accordance with the divine implanting within us, does the intelligence with which we were created demand (as God wills) that we be corrected for our wrongdoings, and, by necessary methods provided of God, be brought to righteousness, if we will give heed.

We find many statements in the Scriptures which fully warrant us in the belief that man is a duality; that the intelligences which look out of our eyes, out of these “windows of the

soul,” are indeed beings that have and will have separate existence from the outward man; that the power which sets these hands in motion, which moves these feet upon the earth, which governs the body to make all necessary efforts for the common good of both body and its tenant, which is so intelligent here, so capable of comprehension and of instruction, which is so irrepressible in the pursuit of knowledge under all circumstances, and so able to act in wisdom, in truth, in purity, in honor, in righteousness, and in the true dignity of life, is indeed the intelligent spirit which God made, and which does not cease to exist when the mortal part decays. No, but it enters into a state and condition where it comprehends still more, still greater things than was possible while it was tenanted in a mortal and dying body. It fills our hearts with gladness, yes with joy, that such a comprehension of God’s word has been opened to us by his Spirit, whereby we may understand the word of truth that was written in times past, and by that Spirit be able to say, like one of old, “I know that my Redeemer liveth.”

The earthly substance, the mortal body, as we read here, was formed of the dust of the earth, and within it was placed the life, as stated by Job, “There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding.” The outer man, made of the dust of the earth, is subject to decay and death, and, like the one before us to-day, this mortal part has to be carried and deposited in the dust, in the earth, because that part is of the earth. But the spirit, the tenant that God sent from above, goes back to the Creator, and, if worthy, into better conditions, as Paul gloried in declaring, as follows:—

“For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”—2 Cor. 5:1.

Here it is shown that if this earthly tabernacle is destroyed, yet God has prepared a dwellingplace for the spirit; and everywhere that Paul speaks of this change of the spirit’s

dwelling, he declares that the one over there is superior to the earthly one, more excellent than the mortal tenement of perishable clay. He speaks plainly of that residence which is prepared above for the spirit of man to dwell in, and in Philipians 1: 23, 24, says that personally he desires to depart thither, but that it was more needful for the church that he continue "to abide in the flesh."

The same idea of a conscious existence when separated from the body is expressed by him in 2 Corinthians 12: 3, 4, where he says that a certain man, who, whether in the body or out of the body, he could not tell, was caught up into paradise, and there heard things that were unlawful for him to utter upon earth. Though not permitted to speak fully of those things that he saw and heard, yet he plainly shows that his spirit in that state had superior privileges and there received knowledge of heavenly things, such as he had not been permitted to receive while tenanted in the body on earth; also that the real man, the sentient, intelligent entity that was caught up, whether his body went along with that spirit was a matter of no special importance, for it was the spirit that saw, heard, comprehended, and remembered, and that came back to earth and still held in memory what he saw and heard. So likewise the Lord has shown to other individuals some wonderful glimpses of the life beyond, so that we have not only the testimonies of Paul and other ancient worthies, but we have the living testimonies of men and women of our time who have had like experiences. I have myself known several most worthy and reliable men and women, who have solemnly testified that in times of prostration, when they were nigh unto death, yes, when there was no apparent life in the body, that the spirit was taken away to view the city of the great King, and that great and eternal truths were unfolded to them, and promises made that were afterwards fulfilled.

As one instance, I well remember one dear old sister in Plano, Illinois, whose funeral sermon I preached some fifteen years ago; Sr. Heroine Randall,

known to some of you in her time. Her testimony I wrote down from her own lips, which was, that while young, soon after her marriage, while a member of the Baptist Church, she was stricken with a consuming fever, and, to all appearance, she died, so that her friends began preparations for her funeral. She related to others as well as to me, that at that time her spirit departed from her body and rose above it, and that she looked down and saw her husband and friends weeping over it. Then a personage of beauty received her into his charge and conducted her beyond the confines of earth, even she realized to a great distance, until they came without the walls of a beautiful city, one that shone in splendor. The gates were open, and she looked within and saw its glory, and the throng of bright ones, a company of life, activity, and intelligence. As she gazed upon the glorious scene she desired to enter, but her guide said that she could not go in, that she was not yet prepared to enter there. When she asked him why she was not, he answered: "You have not yet received and obeyed the gospel in its fullness, but if you return to the earth, to your mortal body, the time will come when you shall have opportunity to hear the gospel of Christ preached in its completeness, and if you accept it and live faithful to the commandments, you will have right to enter into the city that you have seen." He then conducted her away to earth again, and she entered the room where her body was lying, and her spirit entered into it. Then her astonished friends saw her move, and her eyes open, and she spoke and said that they should not weep, for she would get well and remain with them. And very soon she received strength and speedily recovered from her sickness.

This occurred in the State of New York, before the year 1830, or thereabout, and a few years later the elders of the latter-day work came into that neighborhood, preaching Christ's gospel restored with its full doctrines and blessings. For a time she would not attend the meetings, but finally

went; and when she heard the plan of salvation unfolded as preached in New Testament times, when she considered its evidences, the words of her heavenly guide came to her memory, and as she listened more her heart was filled with the divine Spirit, and she realized that the truth was being preached. So she obeyed it, and all who knew her can truthfully say that she lived faithfully and reverently, and that she bore as clear a testimony, sustained by as able arguments as very many of the elders can state in giving reasons "for the hope that is within them," when called to answer. And she continued ever in the hope of the promise made her by the bright attendant when her spirit was "caught away" to see the city of God and be instructed. Of course she thought that she had received the gospel in full, the perfect law, when she was in the Baptist society, but the Lord showed her that something was lacking which was to come, and which did come as has been promised her.

I can also relate testimony of those who, because of their sins, were shown the state and process of punishment to which their spirits would be subjected in the prison house, a place of darkness where they must be corrected severely if they repented not, but lack of time prevents from relating these things. However the Scriptures abound in proof in support of the statement made in our text, that God made man in the beginning mortal, and that he placed the spirit of man within the body, and thus he became a living soul. That which is spoken of Christ in the second chapter of Hebrews helps to establish this fact. It reads as follows:—

"Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren."—Heb. 2: 14-17.

This shows that both he and his brethren had an existence prior to their dwelling in the body, and that he might in all things be "like unto his brethren," there was given unto him a body, as written of in Hebrews, as follows: "Wherefore, when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldst not, but a body hast thou prepared me."—Heb. 10: 5.

We may here ask the question, What is the benefit of our having to pass through this mortal experience, and enduring toil, sorrow, pain, and death? We can but reply that evidently there is something greater and better to be wrought out through the wisdom of God, else he would not have subjected man to this trial of mortality and of suffering. It must be that some great end was to be accomplished by the uniting of the spirit and the body together. For, if nothing was to be gained by Christ and his brethren through this humiliation, then he would not have come to earth to take a body. But the word says that he "by the suffering of death" obtained "glory and honor;" yet Doctor Talmage declares that he will spend the first fifty million years in heaven to find out the wonderful reason "why Christ left the ivory palaces above for the crucifixion agonies of earth," in learning why he did not stay in heaven and as well accomplish the salvation of men from there, is Doctor Talmage's idea.

Now he said that because he failed to realize that the Savior came to accomplish for himself and his brethren a greater good, a greater glory than they could otherwise have obtained, and to do this it was essential that he should inhabit a body here on earth, that he, "by the grace of God, should taste of death for every man," and that, for the suffering of death "that he, himself," should also obtain "glory and honor" as well as his brethren, as stated in Hebrews 2: 9-11 by Paul. Even those who shall prove themselves worthy of that glory will not comprehend its completeness till they shall come unto it, one that our Lord wrought out for himself and for man, which will by and by be made manifest and apparent to his people.

Now it is evident that there is a spirit belonging to each individual body; and each entity has its own body, as this man had his, just as took place in the creation declared in our text; and when the spirit that was resident in this man before us shall again receive a tabernacle (to be an immortal one), then will be fulfilled Paul's statement that God will give "to every seed his own body."—1 Cor. 15: 38. This is illustrated by the history of the raising of the daughter of the ruler (Luke 8: 54), when Christ, taking her by the hand, said, "Maid arise; and her spirit came again." That which came to give her life was not a breath of air, not a portion of the wind that swept down the valley, nor was it any spirit; but it was her spirit that came again, and she arose.

Now each spirit, each individual entity has its own characteristics, and they are far from being alike in all persons. Each of us have peculiarities of disposition and of general character; and I believe that our several mental and intellectual abilities and characteristics will remain with us whether we are in the body or out of it, except, of course, as we shall, by the help of God, overcome all evil and selfish tendencies, and put all our powers in subjection to righteousness and truth, and therefore be permitted to enter into higher conditions both in the spirit state and in the resurrection; but the same spirit, the same qualifications (only intensified), the same things that distinguish us from each other, will do so there, without the human frailties remaining. And it may be that the future state will give to me and to you a condition of life for which we are best fitted and adapted, perhaps those very similar to the condition of duty we are fitted for here. The life beyond will be one of usefulness and of progression in the places we occupy there; and, in proportion to our progress in wisdom and in truth, so shall we be better prepared to enter a higher course beyond. It is a grand thought, and one that ought to inspire every man and every woman, and especially the hearts of the young, to endeavor to make all

the progress that they can in this life, in order to be best qualified for the next one, according to your capacities and opportunities for good. In this way you may take up the life over there under the most favorable circumstances for yourselves, both spiritually and intellectually; hence by filling the mind and memory with a good store of knowledge of worthy and divine truths, by possessing the graces of character and virtues of heart, and by using all your powers to the best limit here, by avoiding the vain, the worldly, and the useless waste of time, of memory, or of other good things, you will become well prepared, and will take up on the other side the eternal conditions that God shall give according to your fitness. The Savior said that, to those who attained to doing the best service with life and its powers, it shall be spoken, "Thou hast been faithful over a few things; I will make thee ruler over many things."

This word itself is enough to prompt every child of God to strive to advance in all trustworthiness, in virtue, in honor of character, and in intelligence, no matter what may be the opposing powers. Certainly fathers and mothers wish their sons to grow up manly, brave, honest, and noble, and their daughters to be virtuous and lovely; and both to have integrity and righteousness, truth and purity in the heart; but, believe me, this life is but the beginning of the building; scarcely more than the foundation is laid in this life, and that work is not closed by death. Indeed, the superstructure thus begun will be carried onward and upward in that world of knowledge and glory which God has designed for all that shall prepare themselves for it; and Christ will say to such, "Because thou hast been faithful in a little, have thou authority over ten cities, or over five cities."

This shows that it is not God's purpose simply to keep man out of torment, or from punishment; for the divine idea appears to be grander than that. The Lord wishes man to be first exalted in virtue, in true knowledge, in powers of usefulness and intelligence; and when he is thus made ready, God will exalt him in honor, in

glory, and in dominion, as intended in his creation. This thought and motive is so much superior to that of fear, that when the preacher calls upon men to prepare to die we think it would be better to say, "Prepare to live," to turn their hearts to love virtue, and truth, and God, and their fellows, and to find how good and happy man can be in living for these things. Then the fear of death would be past, and they could say with Paul, "If we live, we live unto God; if we die, we die unto him; so whether we live or whether we die we are the Lord's." Isaiah wrote, "With my spirit within me will I seek thee early, and thus we see that the ancients understood the purpose of God in placing man upon the earth, even to seek the path of righteousness, and by his free agency making choice of that which will bring him to eternal happiness and everlasting reward.

Not through fear of punishment should we render service to God, but because we love his righteous government, because we believe that man was made in his Creator's likeness, the crowning piece of his workmanship; but "little lower than the angels," and intended for righteous dominion when he shall rise unto the dignity of his calling and become fitted for the exaltation and happiness that are born of knowledge and virtue. And when we shall have overcome, when the Son of God shall present his own to the Father, it will be because they have passed through the experiences and the trials of this life, and, by the grace of God have attained unto righteousness, and in Christ shall be fulfilled the promise of eternal life. Notwithstanding the power of death and Satan the time will come when Christ and his people will have the earth in subjection, in all righteousness and peace; when man shall have entered into the fullness of that which God has designed for him. Therefore I rejoice in thinking, that while there will be no wall about heaven, that the only wall will be our integrity and free agency, exercised both to will and to do right. It will not any more be the fear of punishment and misery as it is to-day that shall cause men to do

righteously, but because the path of duty is the path of safety and of happiness, and the world must learn that the opposite course is contrary to the well-being of man; contrary to his peace and happiness, contrary to the highest and grandest purposes of God concerning him. The incentives to do good are many, and the Scriptures abound with encouragement to those that love the truth, and that seek to press forward and to make themselves worthy for their Creator's service and their Savior's society when he comes again upon the redeemed and purified earth.

Death is but a separation. The wise man says that there is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain it in the day of death; therefore, when man reaches that extreme condition, his members being weakened by disease, his frame seized with fever, or his body sorely wounded, then his time has come, the spirit will no longer remain in the stricken body, but departs and returns to God who gave it.

This man who lies before us was alone when his spirit took its flight from the body, as he was journeying homeward; but when found his face looked calm and peaceful as if his end was peace. And we are called to mourn his departure, but we are satisfied that he has entered into a place or condition of happiness, and that in the resurrection the Lord will give to him whatever he is worthy of. I am satisfied that except to those who have sinned against the light and knowledge of God's Spirit, the life beyond is one of rest, and peace, and comfort; and that God is very gracious and kind, and very merciful, and that he will provide everything according to his loving purpose and according to man's fitness to receive of good.

Jesus said unto Peter, "Thou canst not follow me now, but thou shalt follow me afterwards;" and to the Father he prayed, "I will that these should be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory." These words were spoken concerning the spirit state. But the resurrection of the dead will bring to pass the union of body and spirit, and God shall give to every

seed its own body. The seed, the spirit of life,—that which belongs to this man,—shall be given its own body, and this man shall rise again. The Savior said that the hour was to come when all who are in their graves shall hear his voice, and shall live, and it is clear that they will be raised to conditions and glories according to their preparation in this life, for that which is to come. As the sun, the moon, and the stars differ in glory, so also is the resurrection of the dead.

Let us then meditate upon this important subject, and duly prepare ourselves, so far as possible, that even if our call shall come as suddenly as this man's did we may be ready. There is no need that man should fear death, if he is prepared. It is only like the weary laborer going across the field to his home, when his day's work is done, to sleep in order that he may be strengthened for the labors of to-morrow. It will be like that with us if we are as well prepared to enter the rest as is the tired man to go home-ward when the night comes, for they that are ready, that are prepared to live, are prepared to die, and when the night comes they can fold their arms and lie down, conscious that while the body sleeps, the spirit passes through the door into the joys beyond. It is written, "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord from henceforth; yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them."

To the wife who is called to mourn, I can only try to say such words as may

do good. If I fail it is mortal so to do. But I realize that she has borne many burdens, and that she has labored faithfully and uncomplainingly, and that these burdens still remain upon her now that she is left alone in charge of her children. May God give you patience, and may the guidance of his Spirit help you to perform the work that is laid upon you as a mother. May his Spirit bless you, cheer you, and guide you in the way of life and peace. May it indeed be a well of water springing up unto everlasting life, that you may drink and be satisfied in the mercies of God. And, you sons and daughters, I would charge you to be very faithful to your mother, and to be patient, and careful, and diligent to perform what you can to lessen her labors. Neglect her not, be faithful to her interests, watch over her to do her all the good you can. Be also patient and kindly toward each other. Turn from everything that is vain, hurtful, and foolish, and do that which shall be a help and strength to you in your coming years, and in your preparation for the life which is to come. I charge you to be faithful in these things.

Sister Williams, you have the sympathies of this congregation in this your trial, your bereavement. May God give you strength and judgment necessary for all your responsibilities, so that you may continue to do your part as faithfully as you have in the past, until you shall be called hence to rest. May God bless you all. Amen.

AT LAST.

THERE is something grand in the idea of being taken out of the busy scenes of human life when in the midst of the useful and busy pursuits which engage the occupation of the powers of body, mind, and heart. The slow decay of creeping old age, the wasting of the flesh from the ravages of insidious disease, the rapid sinking from malignant epidemic, or the cessation of existence from any form of self-murder, are all more or less abhorrent; but the soldier who falls in his place in the line of life's battle, where his warfare has been ardent, vigorous, and long, leaves no memories to color or shade the noble qualities which qualified him for the field of his activities.

One other form of meeting the grim reaper in the harvest field of time is to be compared with the sudden and

complete stopping of the wonderful sentient machinery of life in the flesh, and that the one represented in the Bible where it is said of the patriarch that "he gathered up his feet into the bed, . . . and was gathered unto his people." At the end of a long and eventful life, with his heart at rest concerning the welfare of those he was leaving, his work done, his strength spent, his human desires all satiated, he turned his face toward the sunlight from the other land on which were waiting the hosts of his people in glistening robes and shining feet to welcome him, and with the courage animating him that moved his valiant heart when he wrestled with the angel, went in sublime confidence to meet them. Happy death; glorious life change.

AT LAST.

When on my day of life the night is falling,
And, in the winds from sunned spaces
blown,
I hear far voices out of darkness calling
My feet to paths unknown.

Thou who hast made my home of life so pleasant,
Leave not its tenant when its walls decay;
O love divine, O Helper ever present,
Be thou my strength and stay!

Be near me when all else is from me drifting,
Earth, sky, home's picture, days of shade
and shine,
And kindly faces to my own uplifting
The love which answered mine.

I have but thee, O Father! Let thy Spirit
Be with me then to comfort and uphold;
No gate of pearl, no branch of palm, I merit,
Nor street of shining gold.

Suffice it if, my good and ill unreckoned,
And both forgiven through thy abounding
grace,
I find myself by hands familiar beckoned
Unto my fitting place.

Some humble door among thy many mansions,
Some sheltering shade where sin and striving
cease,
And flows forever through heaven's green
expansions
The river of thy peace.

There from the music round about me stealing,
I fain would learn the new and holy song,
And find at last beneath thy trees of healing,
The life for which I long.

—JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER.