

## CHAPTER XLIII

### DEATH AND THE FUTURE LIFE

I. The vision of man is directed upwards and forwards; he will not resign himself to decay in the dust like the beast. As he bears in his breast the consciousness of a higher divine world, he is equally confident of his own continuity after death. He cannot and will not believe that with the giving up of his last living breath his being would become dust like that of the animal; or that his soul, which has hitherto accomplished and planned so much, should now suddenly cease altogether to exist. The longing for a future life, however expressed, has filled him and buoyed him up since the very beginning of history. Even the most primitive tribe does not allow its dead to lie and rot like the carcasses of the beast, but lays them to rest in the grave with all their possessions, in the expectation that somewhere and somehow, under, over or beyond the earth, they will continue their lives, even in a better form than before.

This longing for immortality implanted in the human soul is so represented in the legend of Paradise that the tree whose fruit bestowed upon the celestial beings the gift of eternal life — like the Greek ambrosia, “the food of the gods” — was originally intended for mankind also in the divine “Garden of Bliss.” But after man fell through sin, all access to it was denied him, in order that he might not stretch out his hand for it and thereby attain that immortality which was vouchsafed only to divine beings.<sup>1</sup> According to his original destiny, therefore, man should live forever; and, just as legend allows

<sup>1</sup> Gen. III, 22.

those divinely elected, like Enoch and Elijah,<sup>1</sup> to ascend to heaven alive, so at a later period prophecy predicts a time when God will annihilate death forever.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, through the power of his divine soul man possesses a claim to immortality, to eternal life with God, the “Fountain of life.”

2. It was just this keen longing for an energetic life on earth, this mighty yearning to “walk before God in the land of the living,”<sup>3</sup> which made it more difficult for Judaism to brighten the “valley of the shadow of death” and to elevate the vague notion of a shadowy existence in the hereafter into a special religious teaching. Until long after the Exile the Jewish people shared the view of the entire ancient world, — both the Semitic nations, such as the Babylonians and Phœnicians, and the Aryans, such as the Greeks and Romans, — that the dead continue to exist in the shadowy realm of the nether world (*Sheol*), the land of no return (*Beliyaal*),<sup>4</sup> of eternal silence (*Dumah*), and oblivion (*Neshiyah*),<sup>5</sup> a dull, ghostly existence without clear consciousness and without any awakening to a better life. We must, however, not overlook the fact that even in these most primitive conceptions a certain imperishability is ascribed to man as marking his superiority over the animal world, which is altogether abandoned to decay. Hence the belief in the existence of the shades, the *Refaim* in *Sheol*.<sup>6</sup> But throughout the Biblical period no ethical idea yet permeated this conception, and no attempt was made to transform the nether world into a place of divine judgment, of recompense for the good and evil deeds accomplished on earth,<sup>7</sup> as did the Babylonians and Egyptians. Both the prophets and the Mosaic code persist in applying their promises and threats, in fact, their entire view of retribution, to this world, nor do

<sup>1</sup> Gen. V, 24; II Kings II, 1.

<sup>2</sup> Isa. XXV, 8.

<sup>3</sup> Isa. XXXVIII, 11; Ps. CXVI, 9.

<sup>4</sup> Ps. XVIII, 5, and J. E., art. Belial.      <sup>5</sup> Ps. CXV, 17; LXXXVIII, 13.

<sup>6</sup> Isa. XXVI, 14, 19; Ps. LXXXVIII, 11; Prov. IX, 18; Job XXVI, 5.

<sup>7</sup> Ps. XLIX, 15.

they indicate by a single word the belief in a judgment or a weighing of actions in the world to come.

3. Whether the Mosaic-prophetic writings be regarded from the standpoint of traditional faith or of historical criticism, the limitation of their teaching and exhortation to the present life can be considered narrowness only by biased expounders of the "Old Testament." The Israelitish lawgiver could not have been altogether ignorant of the Egyptian or the Babylonian conceptions of the future world. Obviously Israel's prophets and lawgivers deliberately avoided giving any definite expression to the common belief in a future life after death, especially as the Canaanitish magicians and necromancers used this popular belief to carry on their superstitious practices, so dangerous to all moral progress.<sup>1</sup> The great task which prophetic Judaism set itself was to place the entire life of men and nations in the service of the God of justice and holiness; there was thus no motive to extend the dominion of JHVH, the God of life, to the underworld, the playground of the forces of fear and superstition. As late as the author of the book of Job and of the earlier Psalms, Sheol was known as the despot of the nether world with its demoniacal forms, as the "king of terrors" who extends his scepter over the dead.<sup>2</sup> Only gradually does the thought find expression in the Psalms that the Omnipotent Ruler of heaven could also rescue the soul out of the power of Sheol,<sup>3</sup> and that His omnipresence included likewise the nether world.<sup>4</sup> In this trustful spirit the Hasidic Psalmist expressed the hope: "Thou wilt not abandon my soul to Sheol, neither wilt Thou suffer Thy godly one to see the pit. Thou makest me to know the path of life; in Thy presence is fulness of joy; in Thy right hand bliss forevermore."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Isa. VIII, 19; XXVIII, 15, 18; I Sam. XXIX, 7-14.

<sup>2</sup> Job XVIII, 14; Ps. XLIX, 15.

<sup>3</sup> Ps. XLIX, 16; Job XIV, 13.

<sup>4</sup> Ps. CXXXIX, 8.

<sup>5</sup> Ps. XVI, 10-11; Hosea XIII is a late emendation of the text.

4. Biblical Judaism evinced such a powerful impetus toward a complete and blissful life with God, that the center and purpose of existence could not be transferred to the hereafter, as in other systems of belief, but was found in the desire to work out the life here on earth to its fullest possible development. Virtue and wisdom, righteousness and piety, signify and secure true life; vice and folly, iniquity and sin, lead to death and annihilation. This is the ever recurring burden of the popular as well as of the prophetic and priestly wisdom of Israel.<sup>1</sup> In the song of thanks of King Hezekiah after his recovery, the Jewish soul expresses itself, when he says:<sup>2</sup> "I said, I shall not see the Lord, even the Lord in the land of the living. . . . But Thou hast delivered my soul from the pit of corruption. For the nether world cannot praise Thee; death cannot celebrate Thee. The living, the living, he shall praise Thee, as I do this day. The father to the children shall make known Thy truth." Therefore the author of the seventy-third Psalm, ennobled by trials, finds sufficient comfort and happiness in the presence of God that he can spurn all earthly treasures.<sup>3</sup> Job, too, in his affliction longed for death as release from all earthly pain and sorrow, but not to bring him a state of rest and peace like the Nirvana of the Indian beggar-monk, or an outlook into a better world to come. Such an awakening to a new life seems to him unthinkable, — although many commentators have often endeavored to read such a hope into certain of his expressions.<sup>4</sup> Instead, his belief in God as the Ruler of the infinite world, with His lofty moral purpose far outreaching all human wisdom, lent him courage and power for further effort and persistent striving on earth. Since to this

<sup>1</sup> Deut. XXX, 19; Jer. XXI, 8; Ezek. XX, 11; Lev. XVIII, 5; Ps. XXXIV, 3; Prov. III, 22; V, 5 f.

<sup>2</sup> Isa. XXXVIII, 10-20.

<sup>3</sup> Ps. LXXIII, 25-28.

<sup>4</sup> Job XIX, 25 f., challenges God to be his vindicator on earth or on his tomb, testifying to his righteousness. Resurrection is denied directly: VII, 8-21; XIV, 12-22. The whole argument of the book excludes the thought.

suffering hero, impelled to deeds by his own energy, life is a continuous battle, a hereafter as a "world of reward and punishment" can hardly solve the great enigma of human existence in a satisfactory manner for him. The wise ones — says a Talmudic maxim — find rest neither in this world nor in the world to come, but "they shall ascend from strength to strength, until they appear before God on Zion."<sup>1</sup>

5. In the course of time, however, the question of existence after death demanded more and more a satisfactory answer. Under the severe political and social oppression that came upon the Jewish people, the pious ones failed to see a just equation of man's doings and his destiny in this life. The bitter disappointment which they experienced made them look to the God of justice for a future, when virtue would receive its due reward and vice its befitting punishment. The community of the pious especially awaited in vain the realization of the great messianic hope with which the prophetic words of comfort had filled their hearts. They had willingly offered up their lives for the truth of Judaism, and the God of faithfulness could not deceive them. Surely the shadowy realm of the nether world could not be the end of all. So the voice of promise came to them from the book of Isaiah, where these encouraging and comforting words were inserted by a later hand: "Thy dead shall live; thy (My) dead bodies shall arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in the dust, for Thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast forth the shades."<sup>2</sup> Even before this time the God of Israel had been praised as "He who killeth and maketh alive, who bringeth down to Sheol, and bringeth up."<sup>3</sup> So was also the miraculous power of restoring the dead to life ascribed to the

<sup>1</sup> Ber. 64 a, with ref. to Ps. LXXXIV, 4.

<sup>2</sup> Isa. XXVI, 19. Read, "thy dead instead of My dead." The translation given here differs from the new translation.

<sup>3</sup> I Sam. II, 6.

prophets.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the vision of the prophet Ezekiel concerning the dry bones which arose to new life, in which he beheld the divine revelation of the approaching event of the restoration of the Jewish nation,<sup>2</sup> shows how familiar the idea of resurrection must have been to the people. Hence the minds of the Jewish people were sufficiently prepared to adopt the Persian belief in the resurrection of the dead.

6. This, however, led to a tremendous process of transformation in Judaism with a wide chasm between Mosaism and Rabbinism, or, more accurately, between the Sadducees, who adhered to the letter of the law, and the Pharisees, who embodied the progressive spirit of the people. On the one hand, Jesus ben Sira, who at the close of his book speaks with great admiration of the high-priest Simon the Just as his contemporary, knew as yet nothing of a future life, and like Koheleth saw the end of all human existence in the dismal realm of the nether world. Yet at the same time, the Hasidim or pious ones and their successors, the Pharisees, were developing after the Persian pattern the thought of a divine judgment day after death, when the just were to awaken to eternal life, and the evil-doers to shame and everlasting contempt.<sup>3</sup> This advanced moral view, frequently overlooked, transformed the ancient Semitic Sheol from the realm of shades to a place of punishment for sinners, and thus invested it with an ethical purpose.<sup>4</sup> After this the various Biblical names for the nether world became the various divisions of

<sup>1</sup> II Kings IV, 20-37.

<sup>2</sup> Ezek. XXXVII, 1-14.

<sup>3</sup> Dan. XII, 2, and comp. II Macc. VII, 9-36; XII, 43, and the Apocalyptic books such as Enoch, Test. Twelve Patriarchs, Jubilees, Psalms of Solomon, IV Ezra and Baruch Apocalypse, whereas I Macc., Judith and Tobit, belonging to the Sadducean circles, never allude to the future life.

<sup>4</sup> Passages like Ps. IX, 18; XI, 6; XLIX, 15, comp. with Isa. XXXIII, 14; LXV, 24; Mal. III, 19, lent themselves especially to this conception of Sheol as a fiery place of punishment identified afterwards with *Gehinnom*. Jer. VII, 31 f.; XIX, 6. See J. E., art. Gehenna, and R. H. Charles, *Hebrew, Jewish and Christian Eschatology*, 2d, 1913, p. 75 f., 132, 160 f., 292 f.

hell.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the Psalmists and the Proverbs had announced to the wicked their destruction in Sheol, and on the other hand held out for the godly the hope of deliverance from Sheol and a beatific sight of God in the land of the living. Thus the transition was prepared for the new world-conception. All the promises and threats of the law and the prophets, when they did not receive fulfillment in this world, appeared now to point forward to the world to come. Moreover, the Pharisees in their disputes with the Sadducees made use of every reference, however slight, to the future life, — even of such passages as those which speak of the Patriarchs as receiving the promise of possessing the Holy Land, as if they were still alive, — as proofs of the continued life of the dead, or of their resurrection.<sup>2</sup> Thus it came about that the leading authorities of rabbinic Judaism were in the position to declare in the Mishnah: "He who says that the belief in the resurrection of the dead is not founded on the Torah (and therefore does not accept it) shall have no share in the world to come."<sup>3</sup>

7. The founders of the liturgy of the Synagogue, in opposition to the Sadducees, formulated therefore the belief in resurrection in the second of the "Eighteen (or Seven) Benedictions" of the daily prayer in the following words: "Thou, O Lord, art mighty forever. Thou revivest the dead. Thou art mighty to save. Thou sustainest the living with loving-kindness, revivest the dead with great mercy, supportest the falling, healest the sick, loosest the bound, and keepest Thy faith to them that sleep in the dust. (This refers to the Patriarchs, to whom God has promised the land of the future.) Who is like unto Thee, O Lord of mighty acts, and who resembleth Thee, O King, who killest and bringest to life, and causest salvation to spring forth? Yea, faithful art Thou to

<sup>1</sup> Midr. Teh. Ps. XI, 5-6; Erub. 19 a.

<sup>2</sup> Sanh. 90 b; comp. Matt. XXII, 32.

<sup>3</sup> Sanh. X, 1; see J. E., art. Resurrection, and Neumark, art. Ikkarim in l. c.

revive the dead. Blessed art Thou, O Lord, who revivest the dead." In this prayer dating from the age of the Maccabees<sup>1</sup> the Jewish consciousness of two thousand years found a twofold hope, — the national and the universally human. The national hope, which combined the belief in the restoration of the kingdom of David and of the sacrificial cult with the resurrection of the dead in the Holy Land, can be understood only in connection with a historic view of Israel's place in the world, and is treated in the third part of this book. The purely human hope for the continuity or the renewal of life rests on two fundamental problems which must be examined more closely in the next two chapters. The one belongs to the province of psychology and considers the question: What is the eternal divine element in man? The other goes more deeply into the religious and moral nature of man and considers the question: Where and how does divine retribution — reward or punishment — take place in human life? To both of these questions our modern view, with its special aim toward a unified grasp of the totality of life, requires a special answer. This can be neither that of rabbinic Judaism, which rests upon Persian dualism, nor that of medieval philosophy, which was under the Platonic-Aristotelian influence.

<sup>1</sup> See Singer's *Prayerb.*, 44 f., and Abrahams' Notes, LIX.