



Where Are Our Loved Ones After This Life?

BY NORMAN VINCENT PEALE

THERE IS a natural, wistful anxiety about what happens to our loved ones after they have passed from this life. Especially this is so in these war days.

When Thoreau lay dying at Concord, his friend Parker Pillsbury sat at his side. "Henry," said Pillsbury to Thoreau, "you must be very near to the border now. Tell me what you see."

With an almost imperceptible smile, Thoreau said, "One world at a time, Parker; one world at a time."

This may have satisfied the philosophical mind of the sage of Walden Pond, but it does not satisfy most of us. We are dealing with an inscrutable thing, about which it has seemed best to God that we should know very little.



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From that bourne no traveler has ever returned to speak to us. Yet, every so often, men call back to us as they voyage into the shadows and give us some indication of what we may expect.

When that great wizard of invention, Thomas A. Edison, came to die, it was seen that he was trying to give a message. Bending low over him, his physician heard him say faintly but distinctly, "It is very beautiful over there."

We must seek our information about the after-life from a source that is thoroughly reliable and has stood the test of time. To the question, "Where are our loved ones after this life?"—this text gives an answer: "Blessed (happy) are the



dead who die in the Lord."

It is difficult to associate happiness with death. For us, death is the ultimate tragedy. But can anything be a tragedy in God's plan. We cannot believe that God would make a tragedy of transferring a man from one form of life to another.

Next to the mystery of death, the greatest mystery of life is the miracle of birth. An infant, snuggled up under the mother's heart in the pre-natal days, is in warmth and protection. If he could reason, the baby might say, "I don't want to be born; I don't want to go out of this world into that other world where I am to live. I am happy here; I am afraid of birth." In his pre-natal existence, he might regard birth as we do death. It is the end of one certain experience and the beginning of another uncertain one. Then he is born, and the first thing he sees, looking down at him, is the kindest and sweetest face in the world. He is cuddled in his mother's loving arms. There he is held and protected, fed and loved. God made it that way.

So after many years, when a man comes to die, need he be terrified at the prospect of death—or, if you

please, of another birth? Should he fear to pass from this world into the next? If he had love and protection when first he came to this earth, will he not have the same for his second journey? Can we not trust God to care for us in death as He did in birth?

A woman of past middle age came to see me. "I have a hard problem for you," she said. "Three of the most distinguished physicians in New York have told me that I must undergo a serious operation not later than Monday morning, and that this operation may mean my death. They told me frankly, because I asked them for the truth."

She had the quality of personality that could take the truth, no matter how grim. "About a year ago," she continued, "I lost my son in the war." She showed me his picture, then said, "I ask you, sir, if I die as a result of this operation on Monday, will I see him again?"

She looked me squarely in the eye, searching for any indefiniteness or evasiveness. I looked squarely in her eyes and told her: "It is my positive belief, based upon what I know of Jesus Christ, that you will see him again."

"How soon will that be after I go?" she asked.

"I wish I could say," I replied,

"but if your son were in a foreign country and you went to see him, you would make for him as soon as the ship landed, wouldn't you?"

"You will find him. It can't be long, for love can never lose its own."

She said, "I have a husband and a daughter. If I die, I will see my son. If I live, I will be with them."

I said, "Yes. You are in a very fortunate position. Regardless of what happens, you still have all your family."

"God is very good," she said slowly.

When she stood up to leave, I took her by the hand, and said, "You are one of the greatest personalities I ever met."

Quietly, rationally, simply, she was getting ready for a journey. When she left me, she went to a photographer and had her picture taken. Later I saw those photographs and there was a light on her face. Next, she saw her lawyer and even made arrangements for her funeral. Then, quietly and in utter peace, she went to the hospital, where she submitted to the operation; but, despite the best skill of modern science, due to that inscrutable thing we call the will of God, she passed on. Today, I believe, she is with both her son and her loved ones.

I cannot prove this; I got over long ago the idea that, as a preacher of the Christian religion, I have to prove everything. The man who disagrees can't disprove it. Although I can't prove it scientifically, I can do so by a logic which goes beyond so-called scientific logic. It is the deep intimation and logic of the human soul which, in the final analysis, is the ultimate secret and source of truth. What we feel inwardly in the logic of experience is true. The Gospel of Christ tells us that death is a natural experience in the love of God.



Recently I sat in the home of two good friends who had lost their son in France. Two photographs were on their library wall. One was of the father in the uniform of World War I; the other was of the 20-year-old son in the uniform of this war.

In the intimacy of friendship they talked tenderly of their son. "He always whistled," the mother said. "Far down the street, when he came home from school as a little boy, you could hear him whistling, and as he grew up he whistled.



He would come dashing into the house whistling, and toss his coat and his hat at the hall hatrack; and both would catch the peg and hang there. Then he would run up the

stairs whistling, a gay, blithe spirit."

They told humorous incidents; and, in that intimate way of friendship, we were laughing—and occasionally the laughter would be through tears. Suddenly, the mother said, sadly, "But we will never hear him whistle again."

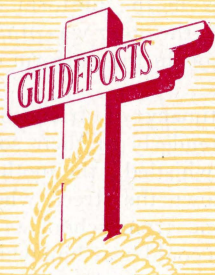
Strange as it seems, at that moment I had an indistinct, but nevertheless real, feeling that I had

"heard" the boy whistle as we talked. It might have been the mood we were in, yet I prefer to believe differently; but, as she said, "We will never hear him whistle again," I found myself saying, "You are wrong about that" — I hesitated — "I had a feeling that right this minute he was whistling in this room."

The father — a sturdy, unemotional person — spoke up quickly: "Strange that you should say that; I had the same feeling myself."

We sat hushed and awed. Ingersoll's great line passed through my mind — "In the night of death hope sees a star, and listening love can hear the rustle of a wing."

Norman V Peale



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