

**OUR OWN LIVES,
THE BROOK OF
JUDGMENT**

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Our own lives, the Brook of Judgment by Alexander Macleod

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THE BOOKS OF JUDGMENT.

Relig.
Theol.

OUR OWN LIVES
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BY
ALEXANDER MACLEOD, D.D.

'There the action lies
In his true nature ; and we ourselves compelled,
Even to the teeth and forehead of our faults,
'To give in evidence.'

SECOND THOUSAND.

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P R E F A C E.

IN the Moral Philosophy class of Glasgow University, about twenty-five years ago, our professor was in the habit of giving a short series of lectures annually, on the relation of Memory to the Moral Faculties. In the course of these lectures, he drew the attention of his students to Coleridge's suggestive hint, that 'memory might be the dread book which is to be opened at the day of judgment.' I have still a vivid recollection of the excitement, the joy of a new insight, which thrilled over the class that year I was a member of it, when the learned professor, looking kindly at the suggestion, went on to illustrate and confirm it by reflections and observations of his own.

What wonder if, among the earliest public efforts of the future preachers who then attended that class, the attempt to work out, for the purposes of religious instruction, the speculation which had given such delight to themselves, should have found a place! I can hardly doubt that many of my classmates besides myself tried their hand upon the tempting theme.

In my attempt, however, I did not find that Coleridge's hint carried me quite so far as I expected. It helped me, indeed, to develop memory as a record which might be used in the processes of the judgment; but somehow, when my lecture was finished, it was only the *dark* leaves of the record which had come out to view. It was not difficult to show how the guilt and sin in human life, the

materials on which *condemnation* must rest, could be reproduced by memory. But the faith, the love, the goodness of the righteous,—how could the reproduction of these, *by this faculty*, constitute a judgment-book for them? Were good souls simply to remember that they had been good? It was against the whole spirit of the dispensation of grace, that the mere recollection of good deeds should be appealed to, as the evidence on which the awards to the righteous would be given. The speculation of the philosopher was good for a part, not for the whole: for the dark, not for the bright portion of the awful record. Moreover, it proceeded on the assumption that there is to be only *one* book of judgment; while the statements in Scripture, which it was intended to illustrate, make it plain that there are to be, at the very least, *two* such books. ‘The books were opened, and *another book* was opened, which is the book of life.’ On the first of these the philosopher seemed to shed a real light. The second he did not so much as touch. In the one, the active principle is, or may be, *memory*. In the other, it is certainly and *only life*.

After a few years the subject came back upon me, and I worked out, as a companion discourse to that which I had given ‘upon the books,’ the illustration of the second judicial record,—‘the book of life.’ To my surprise, and I may confess, vexation, I found myself a second time in the presence of an uncompleted theme. Here were the books of the final judgment, but where were the similar instruments of the ordinary judgments of providence? If there are, in the revealed word, book-symbols of the one, are there no similar symbols of the other? I need not lengthen out these details further, by explaining how I came to be satisfied that ‘the book sealed with seven

seals,' and 'the little book open,' mentioned in the earlier portions of the Apocalypse, were the symbols of which I felt the want, and the first half of a fourfold symbol, which covers the entire area of retribution.

The pages which follow contain a free rendering and illustration of the facts and principles of which those several 'books' are the symbols. They have been written under the conviction, that the symbols are organically related; that the judicial element characterizes each; that the 'sealed' and 'open' books symbolize facts *in the ordinary prelusive judgments of Providence*, and 'the books' and 'book of life' similar facts *in the great judgment at the end of the world*.

At the same time I am anxious to say, that, although worked out by the aid of symbols which occur in the Apocalypse, my little volume advances no claim to be received as 'Apocalyptic exposition.' The few pages, scattered here and there—not more than a dozen in all—which may seem to impart this character to my work, are merely the loopings-up of its several parts,—the links to indicate, or prove, the unity of my theme. My aim is the illustration of certain laws of retribution. The symbols by which I work have suggested the illustration. But these symbols are not confined to the Apocalypse. And there is nothing advanced, so far as I am aware, which might not have been drawn from other portions of Scripture.

My subject covers, I have had occasion to say, 'the entire area of retribution.' It would be very great presumption in any one to attempt an exhaustive treatment of a theme so ample. It underlies, and would exact, a complete history of the race. I offer only a few familiar illustrations,—a hint here and another there: the suggestion rather than the completion of the attempt.

It can be nothing new to thoughtful readers, that good and evil are subject to law ; that their results are inscribed on the lives of those in whom they find a home ; or that judgment over all the spheres they occupy is administered by Christ. The laws of retribution are old acquaintances of our race ; and the deepest thoughts we are likely to have regarding them have probably been reached and expressed thousands of years ago. But this does not affect the duty of studying these laws. This cannot grow old. And we may gain a certain freshness of view and impression by looking at old facts through new mediums, especially if the mediums be as suggestive and true as 'the books of judgment.'

For the suggestion, and a portion of the proof, that the 'sealed book' is a book of judgment, I am indebted to Hengstenberg. What has been said by other writers, in elucidation of 'the books' (Part Fourth), I have already indicated in this Preface, and in the fullest way exhibited in the concluding chapters of the volume.

Christmas 1865.

Except the expansion of the Title, so as better to announce the character of the Contents, and the prefixing of an Analytical Table of Contents, to give a bird's-eye view of them, this volume remains every way as it was. I am under a great debt of obligation to those who have reviewed it, and return them here my cordial thanks for their favourable criticisms.

A. M'L.

BURKENHEAD, *March 1869.*