

HUGHES, BISHOP WILLIAM A. C.

Bishop William Alfred C. Hughes

(Remarks at the funeral service in Baltimore, July 17)

FOR the second time within a few weeks, American Methodism has been reminded of the fact that, "in the midst of life, we are in death." Another of our outstanding leaders has heard the heavenly summons, gone to his eternal home, and will walk with us no more. Bishop W. A. C. Hughes is now numbered among those who have reached "the land where tired feet, with sandals loosed, may rest," and reap the reward of their labors among men. While we mourn what to our finite judgments is his far too early departure from earthly scenes of activity, we rejoice in the triumphant faith and coronation of our beloved Brother in Christ, thank God for his serviceable life, and take courage as we face the future; for we know that

*"Sometime, when all life's lessons have been learned,
And sun and stars forevermore have set,
The things which our weak judgments here have spurned,
The things o'er which we grieved with lashes wet
Will flash before us, out of life's dark night,
As stars shine most, in deeper tints of blue;
And we shall see how all God's plans were right,
And how what seemed reproof, was love, most true.*

*"But not today. Then rest content, dear Heart:
God's plans, like lilies pure and white, unfold;
We dare not tear the close shut leaves apart,
Time will reveal their calyxes of gold.
And if, through patient toil, we reach the land
Where tired feet, with sandals loosed, may rest,
When we shall clearly see and understand,
In the dawning day, we'll say: God knew best."*

Whether it be the loss of a little child, with all of life ahead, the sudden severance of youthful activity, full of promise and possibilities; the sundering of tender earthly ties during life's strenuous service years, or even the departure of those who tarry long enough to justify expectations of an early release from the bonds of human existence, the passing of loved ones and friends always brings something of a shock to our sensibilities. We cannot quite get used to what we call "death."

However, disturbing as such experiences may be, our Christian Faith has radically altered the significance of death and the grave to mankind: changed it from a "stop-sign" to a "clear-track" signal on life's highway; created an open "sesame" which challenges humanity with an abiding conviction that, freed from the limitations of time and space, life is destined to continue its immeasurable expression of possibilities throughout eternity, unhampered by earthly restrictions.

I know of nothing more beautiful than the benediction of a life, dominated by spiritual incentives and undergirded by an unflinching faith in the reality of changeless moral and spiritual values, evidenced by a constant purpose to render unselfish service and to make a substantial contribution toward the sum total of good in the world. It is this type of human investment that ensures the material, social and spiritual enrichment of mankind.

Those who knew him best, will readily recognize the reasonableness of such a characterization of the life and ministry of Bishop W. A. C. Hughes, for nearly a quarter of a century the able and fruitful Director of our Bureau of Negro Work, Board of Home Missions and Church Extension, which has commissioned me to bring that body's expression of appreciation relative to his service and achievements, as well as prayerful solicitude for the family of Bishop W. A. C. Hughes, on this sacred and solemn occasion. Under his initiative and wise leadership the "Summer Schools for Pastors," plus various institutional and other forms of constructive activity, registered remarkable contributions toward the enrichment of individual and collective life, especially among our colored constituencies, in behalf of whom he gave himself with such utter devotion. His eloquence as a speaker, wide contacts with the churches of our colored and white conferences, at both of which he was always welcome and in great demand, made Bishop Hughes one of the best known leaders of his race in America. His elevation to the Episcopacy, the first Bishop to be elected since the unification of American Methodism, was a well merited recognition of his personal worth and sacrificial service to underprivileged areas of life.

As a long-time member of our Board of Home Missions and Church Extension Staff, Bishop Hughes had won the confidence and affection of his administrative colleagues, as well as of the entire office force, both men and women. How we shall miss his genial presence, his wholesome fellowship, his soul-stirring stories of missionary ministries and glorious achievements, his thrilling messages and reports at our chapel, Annual

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Board of Home Missions and Church Extension and Executive Committee meetings. His memory, enshrined in our hearts, will be a stimulus to sacrificial service throughout the years to come. To me, Bishop Hughes was more than an administrative colleague; he was a very close, personal friend, with whom it was a privilege to fellowship on terms of equality and Christian brotherhood.

To my mind, one of the secrets of his success in living a poised life, characterized by an exemplary spirit and such fruitage, can be traced to the following prayer, with which he greeted the dawning of many a new day, with this significant petition in his heart, and upon his lips:

*"Fronting my task, four things I ask:
To be true, this whole day through;
To be content with honest work,
Fearing only—lest I shirk;
To see and know and do what's right;
To come, unsullied, home at night."*

—Wycoff, Yale,

E. D. Kohlstedt.

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