THE FOUNDATION FACT OF OUR HOLY FAITH.

A Sermon Preached on Easter Sunday Morning by the Rev. C. W. Townsend, at the Baptist Church, Jemseg, N. B.

"The Lord is Risen Indeed."

These words were uttered on the evening of the first christian Sabbath. Early on the morning of that day Christ had risen from the dead, and already He had appeared at least four distinct times. First, to Mary Magdalene—to her the Lord revealed Himself in the garden; next to other of those loving and devoted women; then to the recreant, but now repentant, Peter (the particulars of which most pathetic meeting are not disclosed); and again to the two disciples on their way to Emmaus. These two unknown believers had their sad conversation interrupted by Jesus, who drew near to them under the semblance of a stranger. He listens to their mournful narrative, and, after upbraiding their dulness and unbelief, He expounds unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. Not until He sat down with them to their simple meal did they recognise Him.

"He blessed the bread, but vanished at at the word,
And left them both exclaiming, 'twas the Lord."

And then, with darkness about them, but a new and inextinguishable light within them, eagerly, quickly, joyously, they return to Jerusalem. With glad, bounding hearts they make their way to the upper room, where are gathered the followers of the Lord. Ere they can tell their wondrous tale, they are greeted with words, anticipative of it, "The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon." So it is only left for them to confirm the glorious tidings and tell what things were done in the way, and how He was known of them in the breaking of bread. And, now, after the lapse of eighteen hundred years, I salute you this Easter Sabbath with these exultant words, and invite you to consider with me something of their most blessed significance. The subject is so vast, that we can only hurriedly glance at its most salient and striking features.

Our text contains:—

I. *The Announcement of a Great Fact.* It is no mere opinion, no expression of a probability, or the utterance of a supposition. It is the plain statement of an indisputable fact. He is risen—not in thought, not in the fervid fancy of fanatical followers, (as modern sceptics explain it), not in the glowing imagination of religious enthusiasts; but IN VERY DEED the Lord is risen! Just analyze that word "*indeed*", and you get the exact meaning here. *In deed* which is synonymous with "in truth," "in reality," "in fact." He is actually risen. We preach the resurrection of Jesus as a certainty, as true as any event in the whole compass of human history. "Nothing," says a keen critic, "stands more historically certain than that Jesus rose from the dead and appeared again to His followers." And another writer says, "Surely never was there any one fact so fully, so clearly, and so circumstantially confirmed. It has the united testimony of heaven and earth, of angels and men, of the living and the dead, of friends and foes, and, above all, the testimony of God in the gift of the Holy Ghost." Yes, everything goes to shew the reality of it. How honest are the records of the four evangelists: doubts are mentioned; the gradual acceptance of the fact under the pressure of overwhelming evidence is stated; the subterfuge of the enemies of Christ to account for it is described; and the whole history has about it an unmistakable air of veracity. Many and various were the witnesses to the fact, most clear and convincing were the evidences of it. Jesus shewed Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs. There was the proof of *sight*, He was seen; *of hearing*, He spake of the things pertaining to the kingdom; *of touch*, they came into contact with Him. He ate and drank in their presence; He exhibited His wounds; and He invited them to put His identity to the test, saying "Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have." And there were many to testify;

"The Lord is risen indeed!
And are the tidings true?
Yes, we beheld the Saviour bleed,
And saw Him living too."

The early christians firmly believed the fact of Christ's resurrection; boldly proclaimed it; they suffered in the defence of its truth; and not a few of them sealed their testimony to it by their blood. Let us follow their faith, then may we hope to experience their joy, and achieve their success.

Yes, bless God, the Lord is risen indeed. It is a fact! Not a beautiful legend; not a comforting theory; not a theologic invention; but a great fact. Let us not profess to believe in it, and then by our unmitigated grief and defiant despair at the departure of friends, and our shuddering dread in anticipation of our own dissolution, discover our real inward incredulity. No, let us enter into the triumph of it, and with unspeakable delight live and labor under its potent impulse.

Our text reminds us of:—

II. *The fulfilment of a Great Prophecy.*—He rose the third day according to the Scriptures. His resurrection had been foretold ages before. And He Himself had repeatedly predicted it. In plain language He had often said that He should be crucified and the third day rise again. In figurative terms He had also foreshadowed it, as when He said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." And again, when the Pharisees requested a sign, He said, "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: for as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." The disciples in their sorrow had forgotten His words. His enemies in their unsleeping hate remembered them, and took precautions against their fulfilment.

I think it was intended as a gentle rebuke as well as a comforting reminder when the angels said to the women: "He is not here, but is risen; remember how He spake unto you when He was yet in Galilee, saying, the son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again." They must have felt a sense of shame when His words were thus brought to memory, and their own unbelief exposed.

Yes, Jesus has fulfilled His word, verified His gracious promise: all has happened according to the prediction made.

The fulfilment of this prophecy substantiates the claims of Jesus. "It was the divine seal on all His declarations concerning Himself." He professed to be the Christ and His profession is made good. He came as the Saviour of sinners, and His character as such has been established forever. He called Himself the Son of God. His enemies had taunted Him with this when He hung helpless upon the tree. They passed by reviling Him, wagging their heads, and saying, "Thou that destroyest the temple and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross." And the leaders and spiritual guides of the people joined in the bitter mockery and said, "He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God." But His divine Sonship was to be demonstrated in a more marvellous way: not by coming down, when half dead, from the cross; but by coming up, after being quite dead, from the tomb. He was "declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.

The fulfilment of this prophecy confirms the teaching of Jesus.

His prophetical character is placed upon the loftiest platform. Other prophets had raised the dead; but this prophet Himself rises from the dead. He has the strongest claim upon our attention, our faith, and our reverence. The principles He originated and inculcated now become vital and mightily operative, the promises He extended to sinful man now shine with the radiance of a heavenly glory, the hopes which He awakened in human hearts are now quickened into a deathless life, and the system which He inaugurated now rests upon a rocky foundation against which the gates of hell cannot prevail. All His sayings become luminous in the light of His resurrection.

The fulfilment of this prophecy gives credibility to all the previous circumstances of His mission. Henceforth we stagger not at the mystery of the incarnation; we can believe in the apostles holiness of His life and the stainless beauty of His character; we can accept, without question, all that is recorded of His wonderful works. All the other miracles become easy of belief in presence of the stupendous miracle of the resurrection. The taking away of the stone from the mouth of the sepulcher is to us the unsealing of a mystic scheme, and while we understand but little of its infinite meaning yet as we pore over it "our faith prevails and love adores."

Thus we proclaim a Christ who is true to Himself and who has firmly established His Kingdom by rising from the dead. Our gospel is that preached by Paul—"For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures."

We further observe that our text:—

III. RECORDS THE ACHIEVEMENT OF A GREAT TRIUMPH. "The Lord is risen indeed!" This is a shout of victory. We can hardly understand the rapture with which these words were uttered in that upper room. Jesus had appeared defeated, His kingdom seemed overthrown and His followers were dismayed and discouraged, but now defeat is changed into victory, out of seeming ruins the kingdom rises fairer, stronger and more enduring than ever, and the disciples of the Lord are filled with confidence, courage, and joy which nothing henceforth can shake.

This triumph is fourfold:—

He has triumphed over His human enemies. Those chief priests, elders, scribes and others. How confident and jubilant they were when the object of their hate had been put to death. They thought they had got rid finally of that fearless teacher who had been a source of such trouble to them. They had now broken His power, put an end to his influence, and scattered His adherents. Everything is secure. His body is placed in a sepulchre, the heavy stone is rolled at the mouth of the tomb, the seal, (so authoritative and binding) is affixed, and stern sentinels are set to guard the spot. But "vain the stone, the watch, the seal!" There is one within that grave who cannot be holden of death, and who bursts aside all bands whether human or infernal.

"Up from the grave He arose,
With a mighty, mighty triumph o'er His foes,
Hallelujah! Christ arose!"

Go and tell poor vacillating Pilate—"the Lord is risen indeed!" Go and tell mocking Herod that this is no jest—"the Lord is risen indeed!" Go and tell the sceptical Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection—"the Lord is risen indeed! Go and tell the malignant Pharisees who pursued him with such unrelenting hate—"the Lord is risen indeed!" Go and tell the fickle populace who cried, "away with him!" that He has returned again—"the Lord is risen indeed!" Go and tell all His foes that He is risen indeed, and that He must reign until he has put all His enemies beneath his feet. *He has triumphed over the powers of darkness.* They summoned all their forces against Him and for awhile they appeared to succeed. I see the foul fiends hovering around the blood-stained tree. Above the dead Christ they hiss out their vindictive glee. But their hour is very brief. As He rises the hosts of darkness are put to rout and all hell is made to quake. Our great champion shakes off his slumbers and goes forth "conquering and to conquer."

He has triumphed over sin.

Sin slew him but He has put it away forever. He has finished transgression, and made an end of sin and brought in an everlasting righteousness. He has borne all our iniquities into the land of forgetfulness and returns rid of the frightful load. Where sin abounded grace does much more abound. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." "Who is He that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."

He has triumphed over death.

He "hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light." He entered the lists with the king of terrors and conquered him forever. Now He leads captivity captive. As He rises from the grave we seem to hear a great cry go up which makes the very heavens ring, and re-echoes through all the habitations of the dead. "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" "Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Let us take up and sound forth with joy this triumphant exclamation—"the Lord is risen indeed!" Here we have the pledge and promise of our victory. Let us go forth today against error, sin, superstition, infidelity and everything that opposes itself to the Church of Christ, and let this be our battle cry, "The Lord is risen indeed!"

Again our text indicates:—

IV. THE FOUNDATION OF A GREAT ARGUMENT. The whole argument for christianity rests here. If this be refuted the entire fabric falls to the ground. If this foundation be destroyed the stately edifice (which has been a shelter to millions, a refuge for the distressed, a home for the destitute, a temple for the devout) of our christian religion will utterly collapse. But if this stands secure our holy faith remains unshaken and will abide unmoved amid all tempests of earth or hell.

The importance of the resurrection of Christ considered evidentially is seen in the care with which Jesus selected and commissioned the apostles as witnesses of it. And it will be noticed how those early teachers always laid down this as the great fundamental article of their faith. Upon the basis of this fact they built the magnificent superstructure of christian doctrine. This was ever laid down clearly and fully. This was the principal part of Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost, and so on other occasions. It is at the root of all Paul's teaching; wherever he went he preached Jesus and the resurrection. In his splendid deliverance on the subject in the first epistle to the Corinthians, he gives the whole pith and gist of the matter in those memorable words: "For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised; and if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished." Yes, Paul with his master mind saw that this was the key to the whole situation. If this be allowed all else in the christian system follows in logical sequence. And the force of the argument lies in this, that the resurrection is a fact which cannot be gain-said. We know that we have not followed cunningly devised fables. The apostle Paul in the passage previously alluded to, while supposing what the dire consequences would be if Christ were not risen, suddenly breaks forth, as if in trumpet tones, in that glorious affirmation, "*But now is Christ risen from the dead and become the first fruits of them that slept.*"

Let us preach emphatically and so shall we have power and our ministry shall be attended with signs following.

In the last place our text may be regarded as:—

V. *The proclamation of a great hope.* "The Lord is risen indeed." These words are vital and vibrate with hope. We may well sing "Hallelujah!" on this Easter Sabbath. The Resurrection is most appropriately associated with springtide, for spring gives testimony to it and affords illustration of it. Both naturally and spiritually we may adopt the language of the song of Solomon, "The winter is past"—the winter of death doubt, discontent and despair. "The rain is over and gone,"—the rain of hopeless tears and godless sorrow; "the flowers appear on the earth"—this old world is sweet with the fragrance of Paradise regained; "the time of the singing of birds is come,"—the air is full of celestial music and song birds of heaven sing in the hearts of men.

Hope! Hope! Hope! for our fallen race.

Here is the hope of salvation.

"He was delivered for our offences and raised again for our justification."

Here is the hope of our own resurrection. He is the first fruits of them that slept. Let us not sorrow over our dead as those without hope. The Moravian christians are said to have a beautiful custom on Easter Sabbath morning. They visit the resting places of their departed friends, and some will say "the Lord is risen," to which others will respond, "the Lord is risen indeed!" Let us not tremble at the thought of our own decease; remembering that Christ came to deliver them who through fear of death were all their life-time subject to bondage. *Here, too, we have hope of success in service for Christ.*

We labor not for time, but for eternity. "Therefore my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."

And, last, we have in our text the hope of the perpetual presence of Christ.

We do not worship or serve a dead Christ. He says to each of us as He said to John on Patmos, "I am He that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive again for evermore." And from the mount of Ascension came to us in strains of exquisite melody His farewell promise, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

Let us thus inspired and comforted, labor gladly on, knowing that the risen Lord is working with us, and will confirm the word with signs following.

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"MIND YOUR OWN BUSINESS."

The old adage is not a quotation from the Bible, but it is a very important piece of advice. It is generally regarded as a rebuke to those persons designated by Paul as "busybodies," who are so intent upon watching the weeds in their neighbor's garden that they may neglect to cultivate any useful plants in their own.

These "busybodies" are not confined to Turkey, where the barbarous Kurd is not restrained by law from intermeddling with the affairs of his Armenian neighbors. They are found in every country and every circle of society, occasionally even within the pale of the christian church. They can readily detect the faults and censure the conduct of others while totally blind to the greater blemishes of their own characters. They understand just how the affairs of their neighbors should be conducted, although they may not have been very successful in the management of their own.

When Christ was here in the flesh he came in contact with some of these people, to whom he said, "Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?" They needed a strong dose of "Mind your own business," and this Jesus gave in his scathing rebuke, "Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye, then shalt thou see clearly to cast the mote out of thy brother's eye." But let us not regard our text as an injunction against interfering in any way with "other men's matters" and thus make it an excuse for selfishness.

There are those who say, "What if my neighbor is suffering or sinning, transgressing the laws of God and man, hastening on to destruction and leading others to the same destiny? it is no concern of mine. I mind my own business. What if millions are perishing in darkness and unbelief? I have enough to do to secure my own welfare. I mind my own business.' Alas, how often the assertion of the first murderer, "Am I my brother's keeper?" is used as a justification of indolence and avarice.

Let us look at the text in another light, emphasising the "Mind" and inquiring what is to be understood by "your own business." The injunction of Paul in his letter to the Philippians, is, "Look not every man on his own things but every man also on the things of others." And this advice does not conflict with that given to the Thessalonians, "Study to be quiet and do your own business."

No man is minding his own business who has no regard for the glory of God, and the welfare of his neighbors.

When Jesus was twelve years of age he said to his mother, "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" This was his own business. Elsewhere he says, "I came not to do my own will but the will of Him that sent me." The business of a soldier is to obey the commands of his superiors. The business of a sailor is to carry out the instructions of his captain. A servant is minding his own business when he is doing his master's work. Your first duty is to obey God. No matter how much or little that obedience may have to do with the affairs of others. We are commanded to do good unto all men, but that often implies interference with other people's conduct and condition. If a man is going through the community setting fire to houses and scattering dynamite bombs it is your business to do what you can to procure his arrest. If a rumseller is sowing the seeds of poverty, vice, degradation and death, as every rumseller assuredly is, and you can bring any influence to bear for the destruction of that traffic, you are not minding your own business unless you exert that influence.

I met a man in a prohibition town where liquor was sold contrary to law. He said, "This rum traffic is a curse. Many promising men of this town have been ruined by it, and many are now on the same road. It ought to be stopped and it would be easy to stop it. I could furnish evidence any day and have these transgressors brought to justice." I said, "My dear sir, you are the very man we are looking for. Come right along and give your testimony." "Oh, no," said he, "it is none of my business." At the same time his own son was being snared in the serpentine coils of these destroyers. Was that man minding his own business?

If your neighbor is destitute you are minding your own business in feeding the hungry and clothing the naked. If he is perishing in darkness and unbelief you are minding your own business if you do to him as you would have him do to you. If appeals are made for the perishing heathen you are minding your own business if you aid in carrying out the great commission, "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature." Happy the man who will hear the Master say, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren ye have done it unto me."—W. H. Richan.

THE ROSE OF SHARON.

What so beauteous, so sweet, as the rose in color and form! What so ravishing as its perfumed breath! With what rapture we hail its first appearance! It is the symbol of the flush of health, the bloom of youth, a lovely fragrant thought. Right royally it reigns the queen of the flower-land by virtue of its own intrinsic loveliness; and yet, in such profusion did it bloom upon the happy Plain of Sharon that there was none of all the flowers round so lavish in its favors.

Ah then, what significance underlies the passionate singer's striking metaphor! Above all others to be desired was the royal rose on Sharon's incensed plain, by reason of its promises and its worth; and yet it grew wild in boundless profusion. It was no exotic obtainable only by the wealthy, no jealously guarded hot-house rarity for the favored few; but strewn broadcast, like the violet in our own woodland dells, it might be plucked by any attracted by its myriad charms. No less free then that Sharon rose is the peerless Christ to all. The hand, sin-stained and befouled, falteringly stretched forth, may as readily grasp Him, and call Him its own, as the hand all lily-white and pure. Lo! He bends, He breathes the aroma of His love about you, and He beckons. Look at the Rose, and not at your hand.

How frail and evanescent the roses of earth. One morning the diamond dew is glistening on their faces so radiant with rarest beauty; the next they have drawn mantles over their drooping heads, and shrunk away—poor, blighted things. Roses that will last!—where are they? We evermore seek them. We pluck them when opportunity offers—health, riches, pleasure, fame! and in a few fleeting years where are they?

"I made a posy as the day ran by:
But time did beckon to the flowers, and they
By noon most cunningly did steal away,
And withered in my hand."

Ah! let us seize, before dim twilight shuts out the glow and glory of the prospect, the immortelle of eternal life, the Plant of Renown, that never fades, never ceases to reveal its beauty, to shed its fragrance, and to which we need never say farewell.

HENRY ALFORD PORTER.

Only Today.

Yesterday now is part of forever,
Bound up in a sheaf which God holds tight,
With glad days and sad days and bad days, which never
Shall visit us more with their bloom and their blight,
Their fullness of sunshine or sorrowful night.

Let them go, since we cannot relieve them,
Cannot undo and cannot atone;
God in His mercy forgive, receive them!
Only the new days are our own.
Today is ours and today alone.

—Susan Coolidge.

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