

The King's Highway.

And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The Way of Holiness: The wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein. Isaiah 35:8

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DEATH AND RESURRECTION.

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"But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept." 1 Cor. 15:20.

The fact of Christ's resurrection is exceedingly well attested. It was needful that it should be beyond dispute, since it lies at the very basis of our holy faith. It is consoling to think that it is so; for thus our foundation standeth most secure. Our Lord was careful to show Himself after His resurrection to those who, having known Him before His decease, would be able unflinchingly to answer for the identity of His person.

Our Lord, to put the matter beyond controversy, took care to appear many times, and to numerous companies. Our apostle gives a summary of those appearances which had most fully come under his notice: "He was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve; after that, He was seen of about five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that He was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all He was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time."

There may even have been more than these, for we have no proof that all His appearances are on record. Enough, however, we have, and more would answer no useful end.

AN INFIDEL'S CONFESSION.

So clear is the evidence of Christ's resurrection, that when Gilbert West—a celebrated infidel—selected this subject as the point of attack, sitting down to weigh the evidence and to digest the whole matter, although filled with prejudice, he was startled with the abundant witness to the truth of this fact, that he expressed himself a convert, and has left as a heritage to the church a most valuable treatise, entitled "Observations on the Resurrection of Christ." He went to the subject as though he had been a lawyer examining the pros and cons of any matter in dispute; and this, which is the fundamental doctrine of our faith, seemed to him so exceedingly clear that he renounced his unbelief, and became a professor of Christianity.

Does it not strike you that very many events of the greatest importance recorded in history, and commonly believed, could not in the nature of things have been witnessed by one-tenth as many as the resurrection of Christ? The signing of famous treaties affecting nations—the births of princes—the remarks of cabinet ministers—the projects of conspirators—and the deeds of assassins—any and all of these have been made turning points in history, and are never questioned as facts, and yet but few could have been present to witness them.

If it came to a matter of dispute, it would be far easier to prove that Christ is risen than to prove that Oliver Cromwell or George Washington is dead. If it came to the counting of the witnesses who saw them die, and could attest the identity of the dead body with that which they saw in the death chamber, it strikes me they would turn out to be far fewer than those who saw the Lord after He had risen, and were persuaded that it was Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified, and had burst the bonds of death.

If this fact is to be denied, there is

an end to all witness, and we may say deliberately what David once said in haste: "All men are liars"; and from this day forth every man must become so sceptical of his neighbors that he will never believe anything which he has not seen himself. The next step will be to doubt the evidence of his own senses. To what further follies men may rush, I will not venture to predict. We believe that the very best attested fact in history is the resurrection of Christ. Historical doubts concerning the existence of Napoleon Bonaparte or the stabbing of Julius Caesar would be quite as reasonable as doubts concerning the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. None of these matters have such witnesses as those who testify of Him—witnesses who are manifestly truthful since they suffered for their testimony, and most of whom died ignominious and painful deaths as the result of their belief. We have far more and better evidences for this fact than for anything else which is written in history, either sacred or profane. Oh! how should we rejoice, we who hang our salvation wholly upon Christ, that beyond a doubt it is established that, "Now is Christ risen from the dead."

PICTURES GIVEN OF THE DEATH OF SAINTS.

The representations of the context, I take it, are twofold. Death is here compared to a sleep—"The firstfruits of them that slept"; but moreover, you will plainly perceive it is compared also to a sowing—for Christ is pictured as being "the firstfruits." Now, to obtain a harvest there must have been a sowing. If the resurrection of Christ be the firstfruits, then the resurrection of believers must be looked upon as a harvest, and death would therefore be symbolised by a sowing.

1. First, then, we have before us the picture so commonly employed in scripture of death as a sleep. We must not make a mistake by imagining that the soul sleeps. The soul undergoes no purification or preparative slumber; beyond a doubt, "Today shalt thou be with Me in Paradise" is the whisper of Christ to every dying saint. They sleep in Jesus, but their souls sleep not. They are before the throne of God, praising Him day and night in His temple—singing hallelujahs to Him who has washed them from their sins in His blood. It is the body that sleeps so deeply in its lonely bed of earth, beneath the coverlet of grass, with the cold clay for its pillow.

WHAT IS THE SLEEP OF DEATH?

But what is this sleep? We all know that the surface idea connected with sleep is that of resting. That is doubtless just the thought which the Holy Spirit would convey to us. The eyes of the sleeper ache no more with the glare of light or with the rush of tears. His ears are teased no more with the noise of strife or the murmur of suffering. His hand is no more weakened by long protracted effort and painful weariness. His feet are no more blistered with journeyings to and fro along a rugged road. There is rest for aching heads, and strained muscles, and overtaxed nerves, and loosened joints, and panting lungs, and heavy hearts, in the sweet repose of sleep.

On yonder couch the laborer shakes off his toil, the merchant his care, the thinker his difficulties, and the suffer-

er his pains. Sleep makes each night a Sabbath for the day. Sleep shuts the door of the soul, and bids all intruders tarry for a while, that the royal life within may enter into its summer garden of ease. From the sweat of his throbbing brow man is delivered by sleep, and the thorn and thistle of the wide world's curse cease to tear his flesh.

So it is with the body while it sleeps in the tomb. The weary are at rest. The servant is as much at ease as his lord. The galley slave no more tugs at the oar. The negro forgets the whip. No more the worker leans on his spade, no more the thinker props his pensive head. The wheel stands still, the shuttle is not in motion; the hand which turned the one and the fingers which threw the other are quiet also. The body finds the tomb a couch of sufficient length and breadth. The coffin shuts out all disturbance, labor, or effort. The toilworn believer quietly sleeps as does the child weary with its play when it shuts its eyes and slumbers on its mother's breast. Oh! happy they who die in the Lord; they rest from their labors, and their works do follow them. We would not shun toil, for though it be in itself a curse, it is when sanctified a blessing; yet toil for toil's sake we would not choose, and when God's work is done we are only glad to think that our work is done too.

The mighty Husbandman, when we have fulfilled our day, shall bid His servants rest upon the best of beds, for the clods of the valley shall be sweet to them. Their repose shall never be broken until He shall rouse them up to give them their reward. Guarded by angel watchers, curtailed by eternal mysteries, resting on the lap of mother earth, ye shall sleep on, ye heirs of glory, till the fulness of time shall bring you the fulness of redemption.

HOW BRIGHT THE AWAKING!

But yet once more, sleep has its intent and purpose. We do not close our eyes without aim, and open them again without benefit. The old cauldron of Medea has its full meaning in sleep. In the old tradition we read of Medea the enchantress casting the limbs of old men into her cauldron that they might come forth young again. Sleep does all this in its fashion. We are old enough oftentimes, after hours of thinking and of labor; but we sleep, and we wake refreshed, as though we were beginning a new life. The sun begins a new day when he rises from the eastern sea; and we begin a new life of renewed vigor when we rise from the couch of quiet rest.

"Tired nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep."

Now, such is the effect of the body's visit to its grave. The righteous are put into their graves all weary and worn; but such they will not rise. They go there with the furrowed brow, the hollowed cheek, the wrinkled skin; they shall wake up in beauty and glory. The old man totters thither, leaning on his staff. The palsied comes there, trembling all the way. The halt, the lame, the withered, the blind, journey in doleful pilgrimage to the common dormitory. But they shall not raise decrept, deformed, or diseased; but strong, vigorous, active, glorious, immortal. The winter of the grave shall soon give way to the spring of resurrection and the summer of glory. Blessed is death, since it answers all the ends of medicine to this mortal frame, and through the divine power disrobes us of the leprous rags of flesh, to clothe us with

the wedding garment of incorruption.

NOT A DREAMY SLUMBER.

One reflection must not escape our notice—this is not a dreamy slumber. The sleep of some men is much more wearying than refreshing. Unbidden thoughts steal away the couch from under them and throw them on the rack. The involuntary action of the mind prevents us at times from taking rest in sleep. But not so with our dear departed. In that sleep of death no dreams can come, nor do they feel a terror in undressing for that last bed, for no phantoms, visions, or terrors by night shall vex their peace. Their bodies rest in the profoundest slumber. It is sleep indeed, such as the Lord giveth, for "He giveth His beloved sleep."

HOPEFUL.

And ought we ever to look upon it as a hopeful sleep. We have seen persons sleep who have been long emaciated by sickness, when we have said: "That eye will never open again. We have felt that the sleep was the prelude of the eternal slumber, and might probably melt into it. But it is not so here. They sleep a healthy sleep—not thrown over them by death-bearing drugs, nor fell disease. They sleep to wake—and not to die the second death. They sleep to wake—to wake in joyous fellowship, when the Redeemer shall come again to claim His own. Sleep on, then, ye servants of the Lord, for if ye sleep, ye shall do well."

PREPARING FOR THE HARVEST.

2. The context gives us, however, a second figure. Death is compared to a sowing. The black mould has been ploughed. Certain dry-looking seeds are put into a basket, and the husbandman takes his walk, and with both hands he scatters right and left, broad-cast, his handfuls of seeds. Where have they gone? They have fallen into the crevices of the earth. The clods will soon be raked over them, and they will disappear.

So it is with us. Our bodies here are like those dry grains. There is nothing very comely in a grain of wheat, nor yet in our bodies. Indeed, Paul calls them "these vile bodies." Death comes. We call him a reaper—mark, I call him a sower—and he takes these bodies of ours, and sows us broad-cast in the ground. Go ye to the cemetery, and see his fields. Mark how thickly he has sown his furrows! how closely he has drilled the rows! what narrow headlands has he left! We say, they are there buried; I say, they are sown. They are dead, say we; no, say I, they are put into the earth—but they shall not abide there for ever.

In one sense these holy bodies of the just are dead; "For that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die"; but it is not a death unto death, but rather a death leading unto life. That mouldering body is no more dead than yonder decaying seed which shall soon spring up again and thou shalt see a harvest. We do lose sight, it is true, of those who have gone from us, for there must be a burial. How else can the seed grow? Truly it is never a pleasant sound, that rattle of the clay upon the coffin-lid, "Earth to earth, dust to dust, ashes to ashes," nor to the farmer, for its own sake, would it be a very pleasant thing to put his grain into the dull, cold earth; yet I trow no farmer ever weeps when he sows his seed. We have not heard the husbandmen sigh when they scatter their baskets of seed corn; rather, we have heard them cheerily singing the song of mirth, and heard them anticipate the reaper's joy, when they have trodden the furrows.

Have ye seen them robed in black, or wearing the dull weeds of mourning, while they tread the brown ridges of the fertile earth? We grant you that in itself considered, it were no wise or glad some thing to bury precious grain amid dead clods of earth, but viewed in the light of harvest, since there must be a burial, and after the burial a rottenness and a decay, both of these lose all traces of sorrow, and become prophets of joy. The body must become worm's meat. It must crumble back to its former elements, for "dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return," but this is no more our sorrow, for "In Christ shall all be made alive."

THE COMING RESURRECTION.

After sowing and decay comes an upspringing, and the farmer soon perceives, in a few short weeks, the little green blade, the son of the buried life. So with the dead. There is soon to come,—and

how soon we do not know—the upspringing. We shall thus perceive that they were not lost, but only committed to the grave in readiness for "the redemption"—put there that our souls might, when reunited, receive them in a better and nobler form.

Dear friends, if such be death—if it be but a sowing—let us have done with all faithless, hopeless, graceless sorrow. "Our beloved family circle has been broken," say you. Yes, but only broken that it may be reformed. You have lost a dear friend. Yes, but only lost that friend that you may find him again, and find more than you lost. They are not lost—they are sown; and as "light is sown for the righteous," so are the righteous sown for light. The stars are setting here to rise in other skies to set no more. We are quenched like torches only to be re-lit with all the brilliancy of the sun.

Oh, how blessed it is to have such a hope in Christ! He has died for us to take away death's sting, and dwell in the once gloomy grave that He might dispel its ancient terror. And has He not risen again, that we may see in Him the first-fruits of all the dead who fall asleep in Him? Blessed prospect! When He comes to earth again, "the dead in Christ shall rise first," and then the living sprints shall be translated to meet Him.

TOBACCO VS. SANCTIFICATION.

A minister was preaching the gospel one day among some Christian brethren, and urging upon them the importance of entire consecration to God. He told them that habitual wrong-doing of any kind was in direct conflict with all acceptable prayer for holiness of heart. "Brethren," he inquired, "how are you daily employed? Are you manufacturing, selling or using tobacco? Chewing, puffing or snuffing? Are you patronizing deadly drugs and drinks, and swelling the curse of intemperance? If so, I beg you to change your course. You live in known sin, and your prayers for sanctification are worse than vain, for they are an abomination at God's throne. Refrain from every wrong practice, yes every suspicious practice; and then you may pray for sanctification consistently and with a better grace."

He had unusual freedom, and it was an hour of marked solemnity and tenderness. As he withdrew to the vestibule, a well-looking brother approached him under some strong excitement.

"You have struck the nail on the head once," he said, in trembling, tearful tones. "You have struck the nail on the head," he said again, in a louder voice, and sobbed like a broken-hearted child.

"Tell us, brother," said the minister, "what you mean?" After a while he replied:

"I have been praying for sanctification five or six years. There has always been an Achan in my soul—always something in my way; and you are the first that ever told me what it is. It is my pipe. When I have been praying in my closet for the blessing, something has raised me suddenly from my knees, and I have run to the mantelpiece for my pipe! My pipe has been stronger than God! And when reading the Bible in my family devotions, I have often cut short the exercises, and, before I was aware, have run for my pipe. My pipe has been stronger than God! Then, straightening up with the dignity of a man, wiping the tears from his eyes, raising his hand, and looking upward, he exclaimed:

"The dearest idol I have known,

Whate'er that idol be,

Help me to tear it from thy throne,

And worship only Thee,"

and suiting the action to the word, he drew his meerschaum from his pocket, dashed it down indignantly upon the steps of the church, and, like the baptized eunuch, went on his way rejoicing.—The Safeguard.