

“The Resurrection of the Dead.”¹

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NOT many months before his death, St. Gregory Nazianzen wrote regarding the ecclesiastical state of his age in an epistle to a friend (Ep. 55): “I am sick of struggling against the jealousies of holy bishops, who render harmony impossible, and make light of the interests of the faith in the pursuits of their own quarrels. For this reason I have resolved (as the saying is) to try a new tack, and to gather myself up, as they say the nautilus does when it feels the storm; to gaze from afar at others buffeted and buffeting, intent myself on the peace of heaven.” It would be difficult to find more suitable expression for the religious state of mind of the great Christian divine and Scottish churchman whose earthly course so recently was closed, and who, more especially during the last few years of his life, sought after the things which make for peace, harmony, and charity. Like the great Oriental father, whose words we have quoted, and like many another pious Christian on the eve of departure from the world, his thoughts were more concerned with the land whither he was travelling than with the disputes and quarrellings of his fellow-pilgrims. Hence the appropriateness of the appearance of the present volume, which gathers up the thoughts and aspirations and beliefs of Professor Milligan’s closing years. The same spirit of chastened piety—the fruit of a ripe experience, resulted when Jeremy Taylor was advanced in years, in the *Holy Living and Dying*. “I have lived,” wrote the much-trying bishop in his dedication to Lord Vaughan, “to see religion painted upon banners and thrust out of churches, and the temple turned into a tabernacle, and that tabernacle made ambulatory and covered with skins of beasts and torn curtains; but we have no remedy but what we must expect from the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings, and the returns of the God of peace.” The same spirit of chastened, pious retrospection characterised the writings of Leighton during the eleven years in which he resided in a little farmhouse with his sister in

Sussex, after all the trials and struggles of Episcopalians and Covenanters were for him at an end; and the picture of the saintly old archbishop trudging through the rain to the little parish church of Horsted Keynes, near East Grinstead, and mingling in simplicity and gentleness with the rustic, and the humble preaching to them of the hope of heaven (the subject of his last sermon in Horsted Keynes church, where he was afterwards buried), is as touching in its beauty as it is instructive of the end of all earthly greatness. The closing years of the best men are spent in works of simplicity and gentleness and in thoughts of the Promised Land, of which from the altar-stone of the earthly sanctuary they catch a Pisgah view.

Following in the suggestive lines of his treatise on the Resurrection of Christ, which called forth the praise of so large a part of Christendom, Professor Milligan’s last work deals with the “Resurrection of the Dead”—and a careful exegetical commentary is given, in twelve chapters, of the verses in 1 Cor. xv., which form the grandest panegyric in the world, and deserve to be written in letters of gold.

The first chapter is an elaborate treatise on the Resurrection of Jesus as the basis-doctrine and dogma of all resurrection. The gospel which St. Paul preached at Corinth was a resurrection-gospel, based on the rising of the Lord: “and that He hath been raised again” (1 Cor. xv. 4, R.V.) is the foundation truth of Christianity, and the basis of all Christian hope for ourselves and others in a future state. If the Head be not risen, the members of the Body cannot rise. On the other hand, to echo the Puritan, “on rising from your bed this morning, first your head rose, and with it your shoulders and your body, till all was raised, and of the whole it could be said that ‘he is risen’”—so this resurrection of men is dependent absolutely on the resurrection of the Head of humanity.

In chapter after chapter of his book, Dr. Milligan unfolds the blessed truths which flow from this dogma. In verse 20, “But now is Christ risen from the dead,” is not only an expression of time, it is also the mark of a change of tone and feeling, “as with a shout of joy and triumph, the miser-

¹ *The Resurrection of the Dead: an Exposition of 1 Corinthians xv.* By the late William Milligan, D.D., Professor of Divinity and Biblical Criticism in the University of Aberdeen. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 38 George Street, 1894.

able consequences which he had shown must inevitably flow from the admission of the idea that Christ had not been raised from the dead," are thrown off by the apostle, and he finds in Christ's rising not only the ground of Christian hope, but the warrant and argument and evidence of Christian preaching.

The closing chapters describe the nature and action of the final Resurrection—"in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump." "The dead are dead," says Dr. Milligan, "and shall soon awake. We shall be changed. Let us admit that St. Paul expected not to die, and we may still urge that his inspiration, in any just sense of the word, is not weakened because the expectation was not fulfilled." The last chapter is a critical disquisition on the abolition of death. "When the question is asked, 'O death, where is thy sting?' our attention is not directed to the human victim of death, or of the fear of death, as he recalls his transgressions and trembles in the thought of judgment, but to Death itself with its dart in its hand, first raging over the field, and then not only prostrate, but the dart fallen from its grasp, and lying useless by its side." The mind harks back to the famous sculpture in Westminster Abbey representing Death as a skeleton with his dart emerging from a gated doorway, and creeping upwards to strike a woman, whom her husband agonisingly struggles to shield. What is spoken of is the abolition of this *creature*, which began not in this world, but ages before this world began, remembering as we do that in meteoric stones, and the like, shells have been microscopically detected, proving death elsewhere, and earlier than on this earth. Lastly, the hope of this joyful resurrection of the dead is shown by Dr. Milligan to have been the source of all St. Paul's energy and work—to meet the Lord, "and so to be for ever with the Lord." Labours for Christ, he says, "struggles in the distant recesses of the soul, and in the private chamber to rise above the world, and to gain in large measure the spirit of Christ"; the renouncing of the world and self-sacrifice and self-abnegation may seem fantastic and ridiculous to many; "but they assume a new character in

the light of the eternal world, and of the resurrection of Him who died for us, and rose again, that we, having partaken of His spirit, may also share His glory. They are the labours of the seed-time, to be followed by an abundant harvest. They are the battle to be crowned with victory, the race to be ended at a glorious goal, the voyage over stormy seas that the ship may reach a smiling land and may enter an eternal haven. In Him our weakness is strength, our tears are smiles, our sorrow is joy."

The greatest of sacred composers, the chief musician, whose remains rest in Westminster Abbey (Handel), passed away into the unseen on a Good Friday, "in hopes," as he whispered on his deathbed, "of meeting my good God, my sweet Saviour, on the day of his resurrection." Such is St. Paul's spirit, for though, on his own confession, life was to him very much one prolonged Good Friday, with its tribulations and hunger and nakedness and weariness and toils and perils, yet far off at the end of it, he saw the rolled-away stone, and the angels in white sitting, and the risen Lord walking among the resurrection flowers. This is not only Paul's Christianity; it is Christ's Christianity, for "Christianity," as Luther said, "is Christ and Christ only," and that Christ not a dead Jesus lying white and cold in a holy sepulchre, but a living Saviour and High Priest, who "liveth" and was dead, and is alive for evermore, and has the keys of Hades and of death." Over every Christian can be written the inscription, which is inscribed over General Wolfe's grave, "Here lies General Wolfe victorious." A better statement than that is also a truer Christianity and a more comforting belief:—"Over every Christian grave may be written—'He is not here; he is risen with the risen Head.'"

They looked, she was dead ;
Her spirit had fled
Painless and pure as her own desire.
The soul undrest
From its mortal vest
Had stepped in its car of heavenly fire :
And proved how bright
Are the worlds of light
Bursting at once upon the sight.