

ARTICLE VI.

THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS.

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THE resurrection of Jesus Christ should not be taken as a type of the final resurrection of men in respect to its manner or its purpose. We do not know nor can we conceive of any necessity growing out of his own perfection, why the Son of God, who was from the beginning and by whom the worlds were made, should return to the body laid away in the tomb. We may conceive that the created human soul, by virtue of the laws of its being, is so related to a former organization that soul and body are essential to each other; that for the completion and perfection and continuance of finite personal identity of the individual, whose beginning depends on the union of soul and body, a resurrection of the body after death may be a necessity. How it is in fact we cannot tell. But there seems no reason why the Son of God should take human form again, so far as his dependence on a body is concerned. For instance, we cannot conceive of limitations of the Eternal and Omnipresent One by conditions of time and space, although he might be self-limited in his manifestations to finite creatures, but conditions conceived of only in terms of time space are the alphabet of all human knowledge. When we use such words as "decrees" and "foreknowledge," we are using the language of finite men, not the language of the Eternal. It may be that in the case

of mankind continued existence, or immortality, implies the necessity of resurrection of the body or some equivalent; perhaps some kind of metempsychosis. The subject is open only for conjecture, not for judgment. We may say that some one of these suggestions has seemed to be reasonable to one or another of the profoundest thinkers of the human race. But none of the reasons for the resurrection of mankind seem to belong to the Eternal Son, and it is of his resurrection that we are now concerned.

As we cannot discuss the necessity of Christ's resurrection on the grounds of his divine nature, because we cannot conceive of any such necessity, neither will it be necessary to discuss at this point its relation to the faith of his people in him; because this feature is well understood, and it has been elaborated with clearness and copiousness in many exhaustive arguments. The necessity seems essentially to lie in the fact that he is the Son of Man. For the sake of his people he accepted human birth. He shrinks from nothing which this human birth implies. He accepts and maintains his relationship to earth as of woman born. The time may come when the earth itself will pass away and this order of relationship cease, but it is not yet. So long as his body lies in the tomb there is nothing left of earth on which the hope of immortality for man can feed.

We think of God the Father, the Holy Spirit, and the angels as purely spirit, with spiritual activities. But it is difficult to form any practical conception of a man without physical embodiment. When Socrates was about to drink the fatal hemlock, Crito asked him, "How would you have us bury you?" Socrates replied, "In any way you like; only you must get hold of me and take care that I do not walk away from you," then he continues with a discourag-

ing complaint that after all his teaching and arguments his disciples were not able to think of him except as they thought of his body. Without going into any useless speculation as to the mode of existence of disembodied spirits it may at least be proper to seek to form some practical conception of the relations of the soul to the body as we know them. It is said in Genesis that the body was formed of the dust of the ground, and God breathed into it the breath of life, and man became a living soul. From this brief description we may form the practical conception of a physical form adapted to a variety of physical exercises and a soul capable of using the body for all the purposes for which it was designed. We are not concerned here with any question as to what the soul may do or be out of the body, but only of the soul and body in their relation to each other. To make the resurrection of Jesus accord with nature it seems only necessary that his body should possess the physical power and adaptation of a body as a man, and that the soul should come and take control of this body as the ordinary living person moves and has his being.

It is the purpose of this paper to bring into view the circumstances of the resurrection of Jesus in such a form as to call attention to the natural side of the series of events. If the body is ready to fulfill its mission, the question is not, "Can it rise again," but, "Will the spirit and the body come together again."

You look upon a body from which the spirit has almost or wholly gone, and you ask the question, "Will the body come back to life again?" You sit in the evening and watch the waning flame as the candle burns down into the socket of the candlestick. Dimmer and dimmer the light becomes. At length you see the flame leap a little from the wick, and

you think it is gone. But the heat of the candlestick generates a little more gas which rises and catches the flame before it has passed beyond its reach, and the flame comes down to the wick again. The candle truly reached out after the flame and brought the flame back to itself. As you watch a dying man sometimes the spirit seems to flicker over the body, like a waning flame, before the final separation, and you may ask if the body will come back to life again. But when the flame has wholly died away, the question is, "Will a flame be brought back to the candle?" So when the spirit has finally left the body, the question is not, "Will the body come back to life?" but, "Will life come back to the body?" If it should come back, would it find the support and readiness for service it must have to maintain the relationship once owned by both?

Let us now examine some of the conditions of life-activity, and see where the great difficulty lies in accepting the resurrection of Christ. The spirit seems to cease its control of the bodily functions when the physical organization becomes too weak in some of its parts to respond to the impulse of life; or the circulation becomes clogged by the accumulation of matter which there is not strength to remove. It does not seem that the spirit loses its force, but that the body fails. Often mental vigor remains at its height till the very close of life. It is beyond dispute that there are cases of resuscitation of the drowned, when life has lost its power over the action of the body so completely that it could never of itself recover it, and yet the power may again have effect, and the natural functions of the soul may be restored, by the use of mechanical means. The manipulation of the heart and the lungs and chest by physical means cannot be made to take the place of the soul, for if this has fully departed the

body will surely go to decay. But mechanical means may be used to stimulate conditions in the body which will arouse to life a vitality so feeble that it does not reveal itself, and never would reveal itself to the senses again were not these conditions restored by physical means. The case of drowning men being thus restored to vigor in a brief time, though not very common, is striking, but it does not differ essentially from the most familiar experiences of life. The use of restoratives and medicine in general is based on the same principle. The patient will surely die. He cannot withstand the ravages of disease. But a fitting use of medicines and care of the body will restore conditions of the body which will give the spirit a vantage ground from which it can claim its own again.

The writer had an experience some years ago strikingly to impress the fact upon him that flickering life may be kept for an indefinite time, although in weak contact with the body, by such physical means, when all power of restoration seems to have been beyond reach. He called on a friend one evening whose only son, a lad of eight years of age, was very low with diphtheria, not then generally thought to be contagious. He remained till late, and when about to take his leave the physician said it was so serious a case that he wished him to stay and watch with the lad during the night. As the family joined in the request it was gladly granted. The night passed with no special change, and the next day he taught his usual college classes and prepared his work for the day following. In the evening he came again to inquire after the sick one and was told that council had been held and little hope of recovery was given. The family and physician united in the opinion that the watcher of the night before had a stronger hold on the life of the child than any one else, and

they urged him to remain, if possible, and watch another night. They said that some one else could do his work the next day, and he could take it for rest. The physician said he would stay there all night to be ready for any emergency at a moment's notice, gave final directions, and about eleven o'clock all retired for the night. The watcher took his place on the floor beside the little bed, resting on his knees, and took the little wrist in his hand where he held it all night. It took but a moment to get the feeble pulse and catch its beat, and mark its frequency and strength. When the pulse showed the least sign of weakness he gave some stimulating drops, as ordered by the physician, and strength immediately returned. Again after fifteen or twenty minutes signs of failure reappeared, and the stimulus was repeated. This condition continued with frequent failing and restoration of the pulse all night, and not once did the strength fail to return at the time the prepared drops were given. Thus he knelt and watched the ebb and flow of life as the flame leaped and fluttered, almost went out, and then rekindled the smoldering wick. At seven o'clock the physician came in and examined the patient, and said he could at least say that the child had not lost any during the night. He would take charge of him for a time himself, and let the watcher go to his breakfast and take some exercise in the open air. This I did, and returned at eight o'clock to see the child caught up and breathing his last in his father's arms. That watcher has never had a doubt that the child's life was at his finger tips during all those watchful hours, and that its power to reveal itself waxed and waned under the effects of the medicine given. There is but too much evidence that the body is sometimes laid in the grave after life has ceased to reveal itself for days, and yet the effect of the soil or some other cause has restored

the physical conditions necessary to give the body back again to the dominion of life.

There is another fact that may be worth considering here. What do we mean when we say a man has struggled bravely for his life? It is that he has kept up hope and courage, and that his very desire to live has prolonged his life. Can we not imagine that the physical condition is often such that life would be prolonged if one cherished this desire to live. When the spirit of Jesus Christ returned to its body in the tomb, the body did not come back to life but life came back to the body, and it needed only a preparation of the body to receive it and the old power of control would be restored. In how many ways this preparation might be made we do not know; we cannot affirm anything as even probable. But even here something of deep interest may be said, based on a circumstance emphasized by the Psalmist and by both Mark and John, though passed over by commentators as of no significance except as showing the fulfillment of prophecy. A bone of him shall not be broken.

It is claimed that the best medical review of the history of the crucifixion has led to the conviction that the physical cause of the death of Christ was a broken heart. But the whole church has been most profoundly convinced from the beginning that his life did not end in disappointment and despondency, but in a most triumphant death. A broken heart in his case can mean only this, that he knew his mission had been completely fulfilled, and there was no further reason why he should wish to prolong his life. Let us now call to mind that when the scriptures had been finally fulfilled he said, "It is finished; Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit," and breathed out his life. And when the soldiers came to break his legs and hasten death, they unexpectedly

found him dead, astonishing to all, insomuch that Pilate called the centurion to confirm the report, and greatly wondered. One cannot read this story without the feeling that, humanly speaking, if Jesus had desired it he might have continued life, as other crucified ones are said to have done, for days, perhaps. He had been apparently in perfect health, and he was in the full vigor of manhood, and his physical condition seems to have been of the best. It seems almost necessary to suppose that his body was in a condition to retain life for a long time when the spirit went to the Father, and that there is profound meaning in the declaration of Jesus concerning his life, "I have power to lay it down." It is not a mere freak of the imagination to suppose that if this bodily condition was continued in any way till the third day, or restored at that time by any means such as may be easily supposed possible considering other cases, the spirit, when it returned, found a body ready for use and assumed its own proper functions in perfect harmony with the laws of bodily organization.

These suppositions are not made to suggest a claim that the resurrection has found its real or even its probable explanation, but it does show that there are ways in which the resurrection may have taken place, well within the domain of earthly laws, if it were the will of the spirit to take up again its bodily abode.

In view of these possibilities the fact of the resurrection, like the fact of the incarnation, is not a miracle at which we should stumble, but an event to challenge wonder that when the Son of God had condescended to take the form of man, and had been ill-treated and rejected and crucified with superfluous marks of ignominy, he should be willing again to take up the dishonored and despised remains. But while he is at

the head of a new order of beings, it is still the order of nature and in his treatment of nature he works in harmony with its laws, and he uses earth still as the support of his cause and the source of supplies for the people of his kingdom. It is the supernatural uniting with the natural and becoming a larger nature.