

Studies in Pauline Eschatology.

I.

ST. PAUL'S DOCTRINE OF RESURRECTION.

IT may fairly be said that there is scarcely anything in St. Paul's teaching which is more clearly and explicitly stated than his doctrine of resurrection, as it appears in the Epistles to the Corinthians and the Thessalonians. It may be summed up as follows :

1. Man survives the death of the body.
2. The human spirit after death does not exist in a disembodied condition, but is clothed with a body.
3. This body is not the same body which was buried after death, nor is it even a body of the same kind ; but is wholly new, and entirely different from the former, earthly body.
4. The resurrection, at the coming of Christ, will not be from the grave, but from elsewhere.

The first of these statements need not detain us, for it is obvious to every reader of the Pauline Epistles.

The second statement will also meet with general acceptance. It asserts the doctrine which the Apostles' Creed concisely expresses in the words, "the resurrection of the body" ; and it separates St. Paul from those Jewish Apocalyptic writers who, believing in the life after death, did not regard that life as a state of bodily existence, but as wholly spiritual.

This statement, however, involves more than some readers of St. Paul have perceived in his teaching. They recognize the fact that the Apostle teaches the bodily existence of those who rise again at the last day ; but they have missed what appears to be no less the teaching of St. Paul—viz., that it is not only at that remote period that the departed enjoy a bodily existence, but that in the interval between death and resurrection they are likewise clothed with a true body. This appears from the opening verses of the fifth chapter of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, the teaching of which may be tabulated as follows :

- (1) If our earthly body perishes, *we have* then and there (not we shall have at some future period) a new habitation of our spirit, a new body (ver. 1).
- (2) This new body is "not made with hands"—*i.e.*, "not of this creation" (*cf.* Heb. ix. 11)—but it is "from God," eternal, heavenly (ver. 1).
- (3) Burdened in this earthly body, we groan, longing for our heavenly body, yet shrinking from the idea of a disembodied condition—the nakedness of the spirit in death—and desiring rather that our spirit may be clothed upon, instead of being unclothed—*i.e.*, that the new and heavenly body may clothe the spirit in the very act of death (vers. 2-4).
- (4) Now, *God has wrought us for this very thing that we desire* (ver. 5). He has so fashioned us that in death the spirit shall experience no disembodied state, no nakedness of death.

The significance of this doctrine, the comfort for the dying which it imparts, the possibilities of the life in Paradise which it suggests, must not detain us now. Let it suffice that we should clearly apprehend the doctrine. Presently we shall consider from what source St. Paul derived it, in common with the rest of his resurrection doctrine.

We pass on, then, to discuss the third statement, *viz.*, that the resurrection body—*i.e.*, the body with which the man's spirit is clothed after death, and in which he rises from the dead—is not the same body which was buried, nor is it even the same sort of body; but is wholly new, and is altogether different in its origin and in its properties. This statement, I am afraid, may perhaps sound strange and startling in the ears of some of us. Let us therefore consider very carefully—

- (a) What this statement of doctrine involves.
- (b) Whether it can clearly be proved to be St. Paul's teaching.
- (c) From what source St. Paul can have obtained it.

(a) The statement of doctrine which is here claimed to be Pauline definitely contradicts a great body of teaching which has from very early times been regarded as orthodox, and which has been embodied in one Church formulary, in sermons and treatises, in art, and in popular hymns. The Church of Aquileia, not content with the usual expression, *carnis resurrectionem*, the equivalent of the Greek *σαρκὸς ἀνάστασις*, more rigidly defined their belief by saying *hujus carnis resurrectionem*, the resurrection of *this flesh*. Bishop Pearson, in his "Exposition of the Creed" (Art. xi.), insists upon the Divine ability to identify and in due time reassemble every atom and particle of every dead body, so that the very same body, in all its constituent parts, shall rise again. Hymns like Baring-Gould's well-known funeral hymn, "On the Resurrection Morning," express the same idea; and it is elaborated in innumerable sermons, both ancient and modern, and illustrated in works of art.

(b) But in strong contrast with this great body of popular theology stand the clear-cut and emphatic statements of St. Paul. In 1 Cor. xv. 35-54 he deals with the specific subject of the resurrection of the body, in answer to the question, How are the dead raised? and with what manner of body do they come? His argument when analyzed appears as follows:

- (i.) The grain that is sown in the earth must first die before it can realize its fuller life (ver. 36).
- (ii.) That which is sown is *not the body that shall be*: it is a minute, living germ, embodied in a bare grain; but whilst the body of the grain is lying decaying in the ground, God gives to the living germ a body even as it pleased Him, and to each seed a body of its own (vers. 37, 38).
- (iii.) *So also is the resurrection of the dead*. Here also it is the fact that the body which is buried in the earth is not the body that shall be; but to the human spirit, liberated by death from its corruptible body, God gives a body even as it pleased Him, and to each a

body of its own—its most true and personal embodiment.

- (iv.) The difference between *the body that is sown*, in burial, and *the body that shall be*, after death, is as complete as can conceivably be :

The body that is sown is sown in corruption ; the body that shall be is raised in incorruption (ver. 42).

The body that is sown is sown in dishonour ; the body that shall be is raised in glory (ver. 43).

The body that is sown is sown in weakness ; the body that shall be is raised in power (ver. 43).

The body that is sown is sown a natural body ; the body that shall be is raised a spiritual body ; for “ if there is a natural body, *there is also* a spiritual body ” (ver. 44).

- (v.) Flesh and blood—*i.e.*, the kind of body that we now possess—cannot inherit the kingdom of God ; for corruption cannot inherit incorruption (ver. 50).

- (vi.) Therefore even those who are alive on the earth when Christ returns shall, by God’s almighty power, be instantaneously transformed ; so that instead of a corruptible body they shall be clothed with one that is incorruptible, and for their mortal body they shall have one that is immortal, and thus for them shall come to pass the saying, Death is swallowed up victoriously (vers. 52-55).

It is difficult to understand how any candid student can carefully examine this elaborate argument and fail to see the Apostle’s meaning ; and it is not a little significant that Pearson, in his exposition of the article, “ The Resurrection of the Body,” has studiously avoided this specific answer of St. Paul to the question, With what manner of body do they come ?

In the passage from the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, to which reference has already been made, the same distinction is drawn between our earthly habitation of this bodily frame and

our habitation which is from heaven—this mortal body being of earthly origin and substance, but the spiritual body of heavenly origin, God's particular gift to each soul that is ransomed from death. In the eighth verse of this same chapter we note that presence with the Lord implies absence from the body. We shall completely have laid aside this earthly body before we are at home with the Lord in the life that is beyond.

(c) The question must now be answered, From what source did St. Paul derive this doctrine of resurrection?

On this point the Apostle leaves us in no doubt whatever. In the earlier part of the fifteenth chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians he shows that the resurrection of the Man, Jesus Christ, is proof positive that a human being can survive death; for as through Adam death is evident as the portion of mankind, even so through Christ resurrection is equally evident as pertaining to humanity (1 Cor. xv. 12-23). He claims the Lord Jesus Christ as the Firstfruits of the dead, exhibiting in His risen Person not only the evidence of man's ability to survive death, but also the pattern of what man's bodily life after death shall be; just as the firstfruits of harvest indicated not only that there was going to be a harvest, but also what sort of harvest it was to be. And further, when he is dealing with the question, With what manner of body do they come? the Apostle definitely contrasts the risen Christ, "the last Adam," with "the first man Adam." The latter is "of the earth, earthy," the former is "of heaven"; and he tells us that "as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." It is in this connection that St. Paul asserts the impossibility of flesh and blood inheriting the kingdom of God. It is evident, therefore, that St. Paul's doctrine of the resurrection of the body is derived from his knowledge of the bodily manifestation of the risen Christ, to which indeed he specifically refers in the opening verses of this very chapter. We are thus confronted with the fact that St. Paul, with the risen Personality of Jesus Christ before his mind's eye, deliberately asserts that the body that shall be in the resurrection is

not the body that was sown in burial, but is the gift of God in the case of every particular person ; and that it is not of the earth at all, but of heaven. It would therefore appear that, for St. Paul at all events, the resurrection of our Lord did not mean the raising again of that very body which had been buried, subject to a certain amount of "glorification" or "transfiguration," whatever these terms in this connection may be supposed to mean ; but that it meant something wholly unique in human experience, something that may be summed up in such words as these, viz., that a corruptible, earthly body had, *without seeing corruption*, passed away and been wholly replaced by a new, incorruptible, heavenly body. In the case of our Lord, the Firstfruits, as in the case of us, the harvest, the body that was sown in burial was not the body that should be in resurrection, but as different as corruptible is from incorruptible, as mortal is from immortal, as natural is from spiritual, as earthly is from heavenly.

With this Pauline conception of the Risen Christ before our mind, we begin to understand the reason for that atmosphere of wonder and bewildered surprise which pervades the resurrection story in all the four Gospels : the grave-clothes empty indeed, but "lying" just as they had been left when wound around the Lord's body, undisturbed by any human hand, the contemplation of which convinced St. Peter and St. John that Christ was risen, and sent them home silently to ponder ; the disbelief for joy, mingled with wonder ; the failure even of Mary Magdalene to recognize her Lord, every feature of Whose earthly body she knew so perfectly ; the appearing and the vanishing away ; the necessity for eating food in order to convince astonished disciples of the substantial reality of that mysterious body that so utterly baffled their senses ; the experience at the Lake of Galilee ; at last, the ascent into the skies—and all this without the faintest suggestion of miracle, the Lord only striving by these manifestations to bring home to the hardly awakened minds of His disciples something of the meaning of the new bodily life that follows after death ; His resurrection being just

such as ours shall be, except in this particular, that our flesh shall see corruption; but He whom God raised up saw no corruption, in order that His resurrection might be for mankind a sign from heaven, even as He had promised, to convince them that He was truly what He claimed to be—the Divine Son of the Father, and the Saviour of man.

It may be well, before we go further, to anticipate two very natural objections that will no doubt already have arisen in the mind—viz., the fact that our risen Lord exhibited the wounds in His hands as evidence of His identity, and that He spoke of Himself as having flesh and bones.

With regard to the first, it is to be observed that there is no appearance of the wounds of the passion except as an aid to identification, just as there is no account of our Lord, after His resurrection, eating food except for the purpose of demonstrating His bodily reality. Mary Magdalene at the tomb discerned no wounds in hands or feet, for, had she done so, she could not have failed to recognize the Lord that instant. The disciples on the way to Emmaus saw none, though their eyes could see everything around them; nor do we read that even at the moment of recognition they noticed any wounds in the hands that held the loaf. The fact would seem to be that He Who could cause His whole body to be recognized or not, or even to disappear entirely, just as He pleased, condescended to exhibit in that glorious body the marks of wounds such as had accompanied His death, in order that He might help His utterly bewildered disciples to realize that it was truly He Himself who had returned to them. And surely there is no one amongst us who supposes that in our own resurrection body every mutilation and deformity that may have disfigured our earthly body must needs be reproduced! Why, then, should we imagine that in the Saviour's resurrection body the marks of crucifixion should reappear, except by His will and for some special purpose?

With regard to the second objection, it was only to assure the disciples that He was a real, bodily person, and not a

Him." Those who are alive when the Lord comes shall by no means precede the departed, for the latter shall first rise ; and only afterwards shall the living be caught up to meet the Lord along with them. Here the suggestion that the dead arise from the grave in order that they may ascend is quietly negatived. They cannot rise from earth or sea to meet Him, for God brings them with Him. And if we ask from whence they are brought, from whence they rise, the answer can only be, from Paradise, where, according to the teaching of our Lord, they have been since their departure from earth. St. Paul's teaching is thus one consistent whole.

It may occur to some that this teaching of St. Paul is in conflict with the statement in the Apocalypse which refers to the sea giving up its dead (Rev. xx. 13), and with the words of our Lord which speak of those who are in the tombs hearing the voice of the Son of God and coming forth to the resurrection of life or of judgment.¹ With reference to the former, the object of the writer is simply to emphasize the fact that all the dead without exception appear for judgment ; for it is impossible to imagine him to mean that there are dead in the sea whom neither death nor Hades holds. And as regards our Lord's words, a reference to the context shows plainly in what sense He used them. He had spoken just before of the spiritually dead (ver. 25) ; when, therefore, He wished to refer to the physically dead, in order to avoid confusion of ideas He used the expression "those that are in the tombs," but not in the sense that the departed were literally in the tombs so as to be able there to hear His voice, for He Himself, in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, taught that the departed were alive and conscious in the unseen world ; and to the dying thief He promised that very day an entrance with Himself into Paradise.

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¹ St. John v. 28.

