

*THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY.*

AMONG the clauses of the Apostles' Creed there is one which is very trying to the modern mind, and often closes the lips of conscientious people: "I believe in the resurrection of the body." In spite of that merciless saying of Strauss, "the last enemy which shall be destroyed is the belief of man in his own immortality," there is no hope which nestles deeper in the human heart, and none which in our day has had more wistful expression. Among a thousand people there will not be one who does not wish to cast himself with all his heart and mind into this inspiring belief, and declare his conviction, if he can, that death is not the end of all his labours, his sorrows, his endeavours, his victories, his love, but that he, a complete human being—not soul only but body and soul—will enter into fulness of life when he passes from this world into that which encompasses us on every side. Apart, however, from every other difficulty, he is apt to be hindered through the conventional reading of this Article, by which the body is understood to be that body of flesh which we have inhabited in this present life, which is buried in the grave, and which sees corruption. When any one is asked to believe that this body will be raised up and be in a future state the dwelling-place of the soul, a demand is made on faith which, with most people, it cannot bear, and an almost insuperable difficulty is thrown in the way of that belief in a future life which all men desire to possess, and which is the strength of the life which now is. No article of faith so tempts an honest man to insincerity, none is rejected with such profound regret, as that which declares the resurrection of the body.

It is a case where the heart and the reason are in conflict, so that one cannot believe what he wishes to believe; it is

also a case where a double strain is put upon reason, so that one is asked to believe, not only what is above reason, but what is contrary to reason. With the exception of Christ's trial at the hands of Pontius Pilate and His crucifixion, together with His death and burial, all the Articles of the Apostles' Creed, although it be the simplest of the three Catholic creeds, touch on profound mysteries where reason must give place to faith. But in such cases reason is simply superseded, it is not outraged. It is one thing to believe, upon good evidence of the fact, that Deity and Humanity have met in the person of Jesus Christ, although it be impossible to understand the conditions of the union and quite another to believe that a dead body, whose particles have been scattered and passed into the most various shapes, shall again be collected and form the same body. This belief raises questions, which are not only difficult, but which also have become childish, so that even a theologian like St. Augustine forgets himself and loses his intellectual sanity when he seeks to explain the literal resurrection of the body. It is impossible to indicate the unreasonableness of this idea without falling beneath the dignity of the subject, but if one can believe that his scattered dust will be reclaimed from every quarter into which it has wandered, and restored from every form into which it has passed, he is able to believe anything, and he must not say that reason in this matter has called in the resources of faith, and that they work together in loyal companionship—as, for instance, in the doctrine of the Incarnation—for in this case reason has been dethroned, and silenced, lifting up her voice all the time and protesting against the insult.

This attachment to our present body is all the more strange because most of us regard with horror every effort to preserve it after death and every religious use to which it may be put. The tabernacle in which any one has lived whom we love is dear to us, and we would not allow it to

be treated with disrespect, and yet we hasten to bury it out of sight, and we are careful to remind ourselves that the person whom we knew, and whom we shall never forget, has not in any sense been buried with his body. It seems to us an act of ghastly irreverence to embalm a human body, and to make it imperishable, so that long centuries after some monarch of ancient Egypt died his poor body is unveiled and exposed to the vulgar gaze. Protestants have perhaps even too little patience for their Roman brethren when they cherish the remains of saints and believe that the bone of one long dead will cure diseases and restore the dead to life. As a matter of fact we regard the body from which the soul has departed as so much dead matter, which ought to be restored to the earth without delay, and we are of opinion that the sooner it is dispersed amid the dust from which it originally sprang the better for the living; and we are learning to regard the city cemeteries as a danger to the community.

So intimate is the relation between the soul and body in this life, that of necessity we have a tender care of our body, which is both the habitation and instrument of the soul, but it has not served us so well that we should be sorry to pass into a new house. When one remembers how often the body has been a hindrance rather than a help, and what he has suffered in it, both through pain and through weariness, it is not a cheerful prospect to have the same partner in the life to come. It was with keen feeling that St. Paul, with his thorn in the flesh and his many infirmities, referred to the body of humiliation, and it was with gladness that he looked forward to the body of glory, which would accomplish whatsoever his soul desired, so that he could imagine no high endeavour but this perfect servant would carry it into action. Many of the chief saints have been diseased and infirm men, exhausting in their body the punishment of sins which were committed by their fathers, and they will

see this frail tabernacle, unsightly as well as frail, taken down and laid aside for ever, without regret. It is also another argument against the resurrection of the present body that it could have no place and fulfil no function in the future life. As we understand it the body is the means by which a person is connected with his environment, and this present body is in perfect touch with this present world, and just as it fits into the arrangements of this world it would be a stranger amid the circumstances of the other. While we cannot imagine those circumstances, and speculation on the matter is altogether futile, we know that they will be very different from those amid which we have lived here. The action of our senses in this life and our physical experiences are no indication of our life after death. We may therefore take it for granted, and any other view is incredible, that when we part from this world, we part from our present body; and when we become citizens of the new world, we obtain its new body.

The argument against the resurrection of this body is indeed so strong at every point and so convincing that piety has only evaded its course by falling back upon the miraculous. The impossibility of a literal resurrection are to be met by the prodigal exercise of Almighty power. The scattered dust of Saints is to be disentangled and restored from earth, and sea, and air, from vegetation, from the bodies of beasts and men, into which it may have passed, and be re-created in its original shape. The body which was constructed for the physical ends of this universe is to be so changed as to be perfectly adapted for that other state where "men neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God." Although the body be the same, the very dust laid in the grave, the entail of weakness, disease, corruption, sin which was inherent in that flesh shall cease and disappear, and corruption shall be made to inherit incorruption, and flesh and blood the kingdom of

God. Granted that the power of God has no limits, yet are we not bound to believe that there must be a certain economy in the miraculous, and that in this matter also wisdom ought to be justified of her children? Why should miracle be added to miracle in order that the body which we have laid down with relief should again be annexed to our souls, and that we should begin life in the world to come with a body which was created for the world that has passed away?

Nothing would justify this belief, which crosses both our wishes and our thoughts, except the positive teaching of Jesus and His Apostles. If our Lord declared plainly that our present bodies were to be raised at the last day from their graves, and be again the habitation of the soul, or if, in his silence on the resurrection, St. Paul were to affirm this doctrine, then those who believe that Christ is the Son of God, and that His Spirit inspired the Apostle, would accept the literal resurrection, bidding their own hearts and their own reason be still. It is, however, a remarkable circumstance that this is what neither the Lord nor St. Paul does teach, but that so far as one understands they teach the opposite; that the resurrection is not a distant event, and will not be of this body, but that the resurrection takes place at death, and is the resurrection of a spiritual body. When Martha said unto Jesus, "I know that he (Lazarus) shall rise again in the resurrection of the last day," Jesus did not confirm this belief of hers, nor set His seal to it, but He taught a very different truth, saying, "I am the Resurrection and the Life; he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die." And in St. Paul's great deliverance on the same subject he pours contempt upon persons who believe that this body is to be the body of the future, and who ask vain questions about how it is to be raised up. This body is "natural," and will disappear; the

body of the future will be a "spiritual" body, and has not yet been seen. While he uses the image of a sowing, so that the present body is like the seed which dies and the future body the kernel of life within, and while he also employs the Jewish illustration of a trumpet sounding to celebrate the great change, one thing is evident, that he does not believe that anything more will ever be seen of the present body, but does most firmly believe that the body of the resurrection life will be spiritual. It is fair, then, to conclude that when one joins with the Catholic Church in declaring his faith in the resurrection of the body, he means that the life of the individual will continue on the other side, and that he will consist both of soul and body, a complete and conscious person, but that the body will not be this present one.

It is inevitable that we should speculate about this spiritual body, which is to take the place of the other at the resurrection and be the dwelling-place of our soul unto the ages of ages, and such speculations are most fascinating, and not altogether unprofitable, but all the knowledge that we possess is gathered from two quarters, and the first is physical science. Science suggests that as the seen universe is composed of matter, the unseen is composed of ether, and at every point of investigation we "are led from the visible and tangible to the invisible and intangible"; and science also concludes that the visible universe will in the end be swallowed up by the invisible, and this world disappear as a "species of matter out of date." The body of the future cannot therefore be material, but is likely to be ethereal, a body to which matter could offer no obstacle, and whose mobility would be incalculable. It is evident that a body of this substance would be much more akin to the soul, a more flexible instrument and a more transparent veil, so that while the body of matter hides the inner self the body of ether would be its revelation.

This suggestion of science seems to be confirmed by our only other evidence, which is the Resurrection Body of the Lord. When our Lord left the grave and showed Himself to His disciples, He was the same person that they had seen crucified, but He was living under different conditions. He appeared and disappeared at will; walls and doors were no obstacle to Him; He was indifferent to time and space. There was a certain identity between His present and past bodies, for He showed unto His disciples His hands and His feet, and He invited Thomas to thrust his hand into His side, but His new body was lifted above physical need and limitations, and He moved at liberty in an unseen world which seemed to include and penetrate the visible world and from which He could at any time reveal Himself. The physical body of the Lord must have been as much finer than ours as His soul was holier than our soul, for there was in it no taint of sin, and His body did not suffer corruption. As ether absorbs the energy of this material world and gathers it into itself, so on the Lord's resurrection His physical Body, which was incorrupt and entire, would pass into the ethereal body in which He moved and showed Himself during the days of His resurrection life on earth, and in which He ascended to the heavenly places.

As the ethereal body—if this indeed should be its form—is to be the continuation of the physical, so that the experiences of the past are to leave their trace upon it and the identity of the individual be secured, and as either penetrates matter and is in the midst of it, is it not likely that the future body is already within the present, the close envelope of the soul, and its spiritual shape? May not the soul, which has so poor a mastery over matter, and is more often mastered by its intractable environment, be gathering to itself its new dwelling-place, and out of this more delicate stuff be expressing her spiritual character? Within the coarse scaffolding of matter the nobler temple may be

growing year by year, and then some day the scaffolding will be taken down suddenly and be swept away, stuff only for the burning, and the perfect inner shrine be revealed. This might indeed be called a resurrection, as if that had risen in a moment which had been preparing for a lifetime, but it would rather be a revelation when that which was hidden had been unveiled and set free.

Should it be the case that the soul had become in this way so perfectly embodied that its covering is now its character, then the moment of death would be the moment of judgment, for the soul would carry with it as it were its whole history, and show the deeds done in the body. We have, indeed, I think, a hint and prophecy of this correspondence between body and soul when before our eyes a face of perfect shape grows unsightly through pride and lust, and a countenance that once was repulsive becomes attractive through the beauty of the soul. If the soul in her sin or in her loneliness can so far mould to her will this stubborn matter, what may she not do with a finer material? And so we may be writing our own books of judgment, recording every high endeavour and every base passion upon the sensitive and eternal body of the soul.

Should this idea of the future body be correct—that it is the envelope of the soul, to be revealed at death when the outer body is abandoned and restored to the dust—then that long and futile discussion about the intermediate state is closed, for there need not be any such place. If the soul is separated temporarily from the body at death, and the body we have had in this life is to be raised up at some future time, and the soul and the body reunited in preparation for the grand assize, after which soul and body will go either to heaven or hell, then there must be some place where the soul can be kept, neither in heaven nor hell, while it has no body, and is waiting for the judgment. What this place is Scripture does not tell us. Jesus does



not seem to have known anything about it, nor the Apostles, and theology has given so many different views of it that it is evident theologians are quite as ignorant. Whether it be a place of purification, or a place of unconsciousness, or a shadowy, dreary place of existence, nobody knows. There is something else also no one can imagine, and that is a human being without a body, and, so far as we can judge, this would mean the loss of identity, so that the person who had lived here would cease to exist. St. Paul felt deeply the burden of his earthly body, but he did not desire to be "unclothed," for then he should have been found "naked," but to be clothed upon with his heavenly house. Nothing could be more unthinkable, and no idea is more ghastly than an underworld of ghosts, where saint and sinner must wait through long ages, till the body and the soul be reunited—the souls called from the vast deep, and the bodies from the dust of the earth.

The view which any one may take of the Resurrection will be much influenced by his reading of the Second Advent. If he believes that the Lord will come literally on the clouds of heaven attended by the angels, and will literally sit upon a judgment seat with the whole human race before Him at some unknown date, then it follows that those who die before that date must be kept somewhere and somehow in preparation for the judgment. If one believes that the coming of the Lord is spiritual and for ever going on, and that we are ever standing before the judgment seat of Christ, then our death will be for us Christ's Second Advent, and our entry into His unveiled presence at our death will be our judgment, and we shall pass at once, judged and newly embodied, into our future life. Whether the literal reading with its scenic display or the spiritual reading with its intense reality, is more in keeping with the mind of Jesus and the principles of His religion, is for each Christian to decide. If he be led to accept the spiritual reading, he will be relieved

from many difficulties regarding both the Advent and the Judgment which beset reason and are a burden upon faith.

While the Bible treats the unseen state with much reserve and does not encourage a license of speculation, it takes care to give no sanction to the middle state, although art and tradition have laid out its geography and shown us its inhabitants. When the Lord was transfigured on the Mount, and two saints of the past spake with Him, Moses and Elias were not ghosts, neither to be seen nor recognised, but, on the contrary, those two great men, first of the law-givers and first of the prophets, were so perfectly embodied that the Apostles who knew their character identified the men, and they who through the past centuries had been following the history of Israel, not from the gloomy place of the dead, but from the heights of Paradise, held fellowship with the Lord and spake with Him concerning the great exodus He was to accomplish at Jerusalem. When Jesus loosed the sin of the penitent thief, and received him into the mercy of God, He did not send him to purgatory nor to the shades of the dead, but He assured him, with the seal of His "verily," that that very day he should be with the Lord in Paradise. And to say that by Paradise our Lord intended something else and something lower than the Christian heaven, seems to be a mere quibbling with words, for Jesus, with His accustomed wisdom and grace, used the language for the state of the blessed which the man would most readily understand, and He declared plainly that the man would go to the place where He was Himself, and where Christ is must be heaven. When Jesus was comforting His disciples before His departure, and bidding them be of good heart in face both of life and death, He assured them that if He was leaving them He was going to prepare a place for them, and it was hardly necessary for Him, surely, to prepare Sheol. It was His Father's House that He was

going to make ready for His friends, and He assured them that since He was going to do so much, He would do still more, for He would come and receive them to Himself, that where the Lord was His servants might also be. But it is not from the twilight of the underworld that the Lord will come, nor to its ghostly shades He will receive His disciples. When St. Stephen laid down his life for the word of his testimony and the Kingdom of God's sake, he saw Jesus standing to receive him, and Jesus was at the right hand of God. And when St. Paul, worn out "with labours and sufferings, desired to depart, it was to be with Christ," which is "far better." We know little of the other world and nothing of the underworld, but we dare to say the bars of that underworld would need to be strong if, after the Roman sword had delivered Paul from this present life, they could keep the servant at a distance from the Master whom he so loved. A swift stroke of the blade, as when one cuts a thread and the Apostle of the nations and the slave of Jesus Christ had slipped and left for ever the body of humiliation, and stood before his Lord delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God, in a body made like to the body of Christ's glory, but which would bear upon it for ever the marks of the Lord Jesus.

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