

*ST. PAUL'S DOCTRINE OF THE RESURRECTION.*

(A STUDY OF 1 CORINTHIANS XV.)

ST. PAUL'S doctrine of the Resurrection lies behind his teaching in every Epistle. It governs his thought throughout, but the fullest presentation of it is given in the fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians. The reasoning is so difficult and so intricate, that it challenges the attention of every reader, and suggests all kinds of grave questions. Many commentaries have been written upon it, but it is not superfluous to attempt to restate it afresh. For, even though nothing novel can now be said, it is always worth while to examine a great argument of this kind from different points of view. And as every man must approach it from his own angle, no honest attempt to grapple with its difficulties can be quite without suggestiveness to others.

I.

In any profitable study of 1 Corinthians xv. we must realize, in the first place, what St. Paul's postulates are, and what it is that he wishes to prove. He does not attempt to prove here that Christ rose from the dead. That was not disputed by his correspondents. The fact of Christ's Resurrection is, in fact, the pivot of his argument. But he seeks to give an answer to sceptical persons who doubted of their own resurrection. Just as some people say now "Miracles do not happen," so some people said then "Dead persons do not live again" (v. 12). It is this universal negative of despair which he wishes to refute. His argument is not addressed to those who rejected the Revelation of Christ. It is addressed to members of the Corinthian Church (*ἐν ὑμῖν τινές*, v. 12), all of whom had received the Gospel which St. Paul had preached (*ὁ καὶ παρελάβετε*,

v. 1). Belief in a life to come may seem to us an essential part of the Christian Faith. But this article was not found in that brief profession of belief which St. Paul rehearses at the beginning of his argument (vv. 3-7), to remind his correspondents what is their common starting-point. "The Life Everlasting" was, indeed, believed in by many, both Jews and Greeks, and the great majority—we cannot doubt—of the early Christian converts accepted it as part of the teaching of Christ. But its necessary connexion with the faith in Christ Risen was not obvious until it was pointed out; and some of the new disciples at Corinth had not perceived it. It is to these persons St. Paul addresses himself, and he begins, as is natural, by a statement, in words that had already become stereotyped by repetition, of the Death, Burial, and Resurrection of Jesus. For them, as for him, this was the foundation of the Gospel message.

We are not, then, to think of vv. 2-11 as an attempt to prove the Resurrection of Christ. That was not in question. Nor, accordingly, is it legitimate to regard the list of Christ's appearances after His Resurrection as comprising *all* the appearances of the Risen Lord known to St. Paul.<sup>1</sup> It is not in his mind to give an exhaustive list. It is even conceivable that he is here repeating a traditional summary of these wonderful occurrences,—a summary which may have been as familiar to his correspondents as the Apostles' Creed would be in our day to the members of a Church only a few years reclaimed from heathendom. One must begin somewhere, and St. Paul begins here.

<sup>1</sup> It is important to note this, for the plausibility of much of Dr. Schmiedel's argument in the *Encyclopaedia Biblica* (s.v. "Resurrection," col. 4057), rests upon his assumption that the Resurrection of Christ had been doubted at Corinth, and that St. Paul "presents every possible argument" in reply. This is to misunderstand the aim of 1 Corinthians xv.

## II.

We enter upon the argument proper at *v.* 12. It is a fourfold argument of the kind described by logicians as *reductio ad absurdum*. "If this, which you lay down, is true, then an absurd consequence follows—a consequence which you would be the first to repudiate. Therefore your statement was not justified, and the proposition you laid down is false." The proposition in question here is "Dead men do not rise"; there is no Resurrection of the Dead (*ἀνάστασις νεκρῶν οὐκ ἔστιν, v. 12*). St. Paul puts in four pleas against this, in *vv.* 13, 16, 29 and 32 respectively, each of which proceeds, "If dead men do not rise, then . . . something follows which you recognize as absurd." We must go through these separately, and be specially careful to distinguish the first of these pleas (in *v.* 13) from the second (in *v.* 16), for they are often confused by hasty readers.

I. *vv.* 13–15. If dead men do not rise, then Christ did not rise, for He was Man, and therefore comes under your universal negative. But if He did not rise, our preaching (*κήρυγμα*) and your faith (*πίστις*)—that which we preach and which you believed when you were converted (*οὕτως κηρύσσομεν καὶ οὕτως ἐπιστεύσατε, v. 11*)—are alike empty (*κενόν, κενή, v. 14*). The "witnesses of the Resurrection" are liars. The traditional summary of the Gospel which has been recited (*vv.* 2–8) is *void* of its kernel. But you accept this Statement of Belief, and therefore *totidem verbis* you recognize an exception to your arrogant universal negative. Christ rose, as you confess. Christ was Man. Therefore you cannot say generally "Dead men do not rise." You can build nothing upon this universal negative, for in fact it is not true.

It will be recognized (*a*) that the point of the argument rests in the acceptance of Christ's Resurrection by those

against whom St. Paul is arguing ; and (b) that this answer does no more than indicate the *possibility* of human resurrections. Christ appeared after death. Death, therefore, is not necessarily the end. There is another world beyond. Whether we shall ever reach it or not, at all events there is another sphere of existence beyond the grave. And the demonstration of this is the first and most obvious consequence of the Appearances of the Risen Christ. If the argument stopped short here, all that could be said would be that as Christ has shown by His Resurrection that death is not necessarily the end of life, there *may* be a sphere of activity for us beyond the grave, as there demonstrably was for Him. The universal negative of the sceptically minded may be set aside ; but by this train of thought we do not get further in affirmation than a "Great Perhaps."

II. The second plea begins like the first ; it bases itself on the same postulate ; but it is more profound, and more subtle.

If dead men do not rise, then Christ did not rise ; and if that be so, your faith is *vain*. St. Paul has already shown that it would be *empty* (*κενή*) ; he now shows that it would be *useless* (*μάρτα*), and that in three ways. For, if Christ did not rise, (a) "ye are yet in your sins" (v. 17) ; (b) "Those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished" (v. 18) ; (c) "If in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most pitiable" (v. 19). The Corinthians whom Paul addressed would not accept any of these conclusions, and therefore the premiss from which they all proceed must be erroneous.

(a) *ἐστὲ ἐν ταῖς ἁμαρτίαις ὑμῶν* (v. 17). Part of the Creed which the Corinthians professed was that Christ "died for our sins" (v. 3). They accepted the efficacy of His Atonement, which implies the Resurrection as

well as the Passion. "He was delivered up for our trespasses, and was raised for our justification," as Paul expresses it elsewhere (Rom. iv. 25). No Corinthian convert would have allowed that he was "yet in his sins"; by denying a future life in general terms he did not mean to deny the justifying virtue in regard to sin of Christ's Death. Yet this denial would follow as a necessary consequence "if Christ be not raised," and if His Death, therefore, had been like that of other men.

(b) "Then they also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished." If "dead men do not rise" be a universal maxim, it must apply to the dead in Christ as well as to others. But this would be entirely inconsistent with that great conception of Christ as the Second Adam, which he proceeds to expound (*vv.* 20-28).

"By man came death." It was a recognized tenet of later Jewish belief that death was the consequence of Adam's sin (cf. 2 Esdras iii. 21, iv. 30, vii. 48). But "by Man came also a Resurrection of the Dead." "As in the Adam all die, even so in the Christ shall all be quickened." In the history of the race, the Fall of Adam was a crisis where a new departure was made. So in the history of the race was the Resurrection of Christ a crisis where a new departure was made. The Fall of Adam was not a solitary and isolated act; it affected all his descendants; it was charged with consequences for all those who are "in Adam." So the Resurrection of Christ was not a solitary or isolated act; it is charged with consequences for all who are "in Christ."

Those to whom St. Paul writes admitted the Resurrection of Christ to have been a fact. He has argued above (I.) that this shows that at any rate one Man has survived the shock of death, and that therefore there is a world of life beyond the grave. But this argument does not *necessarily*

connect the Resurrection of the Christian with the Resurrection of Christ, for all that is true of Him is not true of us. He was conqueror of Death in His own case; but it might be asked, How does that give consolation to us, who are not as He was? And so we have here, II. (b), Paul's palmary argument for the future life of the Christian. Rightly understood, Christ's Resurrection carries ours with it. It was not, e.g., like the Vision or Reappearance of Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration, which could prove nothing for other men except that two members of the race had in some way survived death. That would be consolatory, in a measure, but it would not be conclusive as to the fate of others. But Christ's Resurrection, if in one aspect—as already hinted in I.—it is *like* the Resurrection of all men, in another aspect it is utterly *unlike* all other Resurrections. Just as Adam's sin was in one aspect like any other man's sin, but in another aspect quite unique, in that it carried consequences such as cannot be ascribed to any other act of sin, so Christ's Resurrection was, in its deepest meaning and purpose, *unique*. It carried with it the victory over death of all who are "in Him." He is the ζωοποιός, the Giver of Life, to all who share in His Life. This is the Pauline reflection of the great pronouncement, "I am the Resurrection and the Life," which the Fourth Gospel records of Christ.

It should be observed, before we proceed with St. Paul's reasoning, that he does not here contemplate (vv. 20-23) the future lot of any except those who have fallen asleep *in Christ*. His argument is to show that the arrogant maxim "dead men do not rise" cannot be trusted, because, in the first place, Christ rose, and, in the second place, this Resurrection of His involves the Resurrection of those who share His life.

"In the Christ shall all be quickened" (v. 22). But

we are to observe that this "quickenings" is a gradual and orderly process. First came the Quickening of Christ Himself; the next stage shall be the Quickening of His living disciples at the time of His Second Coming (v. 23); and then (and not until then) shall be manifested the Quickening of the Dead in Christ (v. 24). The Final Consummation shall be this Conquest of Death, the Last Enemy. Then the words of the Psalm shall receive fulfilment, *He put all things in subjection under His feet* (Ps. viii. 6)—all things, except, to be sure, the Eternal Father Himself (v. 27), to whom even the Christ shall be, "subject" (v. 28). The verses 23–28 are, as it were, parenthetical, and explanatory of the time of the Quickening, which is the theme of the argument of vv. 20–23.

One significant word must be noticed here. The Risen Christ is described twice (vv. 20, 23) as the ἀπαρχή, the Firstfruits, of the future harvest. This word introduces a quite new thought, which is, however, only suggested and is not developed until vv. 36 ff. The thought is that of the Evolution of Humanity as a growth, like the growth of a seed which issues at last in leaf and blossom and fruit; the consummation of man's growth is the harvest of the seed implanted in him at the first. Of this harvest, the Risen Christ is the Firstfruits; the rest of the harvest will be reaped at His παρουσία (vv. 23, 24).

II. (a) and II. (b) have now been disposed of. We shall see that II. (c) is treated under IV.

III. v. 29. If dead men do not rise, what is the meaning of the ceremony of Baptism for the dead (ὕπὲρ τῶν νεκρῶν)? Some of you observe this rite, and thus your own practice shows that you do not really believe in the utter extinction of life at death, which your sceptical negation implies.

Much has been written upon the nature of this Baptism for the Dead, but the evidence is not forth-

coming as yet which would enable us to speak with confidence about it. For our present purpose, it is not necessary to determine this obscure question. Whatever the practice was, it involved belief in a future beyond the grave, and therefore St. Paul's *reductio ad absurdum* provided a cogent and relevant argument. εἰ ὅλος νεκροὶ οὐκ ἐγείρονται τί καὶ βαπτίζονται ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν ;

(IV.) *vv.* 30-34. This is the completion of the argument suggested in II. (c) (*v.* 19). Its kernel is in *v.* 32. If dead men do not rise, why then "let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die," as the prophet represents the careless Jews saying (Isa. xxii. 13). If dead men do not rise—if there is no future, *carpe diem* is the best maxim for life; Epicureanism the true philosophy. But you do not accept this base conclusion; you recognize that there are higher interests than the bodily wants of the present hour, and thus you virtually give the lie to the assertion that there is no future, no resurrection of the dead. The philosophy of Hedonism is well described in the Book of Wisdom, where the foolish reasoners are represented as saying, "Come and let us enjoy the good things that now are; and let us use the creation with all our soul as youth's possession" (Wisd. ii. 6). But that is not our philosophy. Men do not neglect the pleasures and attractions of this present life unless they look for another. They are not content to endure hardness, unless some future gain is in store.<sup>1</sup> Those who "painfully serve the Most High . . . are in jeopardy every hour," as Esdras the prophet expresses it<sup>2</sup>; and St. Paul uses the same phrase to describe his

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Cicero: "Nemo unquam sine magna spe immortalitatis se pro patria offeret ad mortem" (*Tusc. Disp.* i. 15).

<sup>2</sup> The Greek is not extant, but the Latin version runs: "In eo tempore commoratae servierunt cum labore, altissimo et omni hora sustinuerunt periculum, uti perfecte custodirent legislatoris legem." (2. Esdr. vii. [89]). The parallels between St. Paul and the Apocalypse of Esdras are so



own strenuous life. "Why stand we in jeopardy every hour? . . . I die daily . . . I fought with beasts at Ephesus . . . but what advantageth it me if the dead rise not?" (*vv.* 30-32). One who lived such a life of pain and toil, without any hope of a future, would indeed be "of all men most wretched" (*v.* 19).<sup>1</sup> The sanctions supplied by the belief in a future are necessary, he argues, if men are to exercise self-control, self-denial, self-sacrifice. And none of those to whom he appealed would be willing to adopt in its integrity the cynical maxim of Hedonism, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die."

Of the four pleas which have now been examined, the first (*vv.* 12-18) rests upon the admitted fact that Christ was seen alive after His body had been consigned to the tomb. The information thus given about the spiritual world is comparable with, and in some respects similar to, the evidence which, it is alleged, is afforded by psychical manifestations in our own day. The Easter Epiphanies, if this were all, would be the most signal examples in history of post-mortem appearances or visions of the departed; but they would not be any more than this, except in so far as the circumstances of Christ's post-Resurrection intercourse with men point to His being not only a "spirit," but still in the "body." "A spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye perceive me to have" (Luke xxiv. 39). But, apart from this, the mere fact that Christ was seen alive after death does not provide a revelation of the spiritual world differing in kind from any other vision of the departed, although the evidence for it be more cogent in degree than can as yet be produced by the Society for Psychical Research.

close as to suggest a direct literary connexion; but this is not the place to inquire which is the earlier writer.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Apocalypse of Baruch* (xxi. 13): "For if there were this life only, . . . nothing could be more bitter than this."

But when we proceed to St. Paul's second plea (*vv.* 16-29) we find that he introduces an entirely new conception of the Resurrection, which he now represents not so much as the *type*, but as the *guarantee* of our own. Here is the characteristic feature of Christian belief about the world beyond the grave; a future life is not only *possible* and *desirable*, but is *involved*, for Christians, in the Resurrection of Christ, who is Himself "the Resurrection and the Life." The Risen Christ is not only the Firstfruits of the harvest of Humanity; He is the ζωοποιός, the Life-giver.

To this thought, then, as fundamental in his exposition, he returns at *v.* 35, after incidental mention of two arguments *ad hominem* against his sceptical correspondents, which are, perhaps, not of equal importance. Whatever was the nature of "baptism on behalf of the dead" we do not practise it; and in view of the strenuous and devoted lives of many serious men—Agnostic, Pantheist, Materialist—who have looked for no future reward, it is difficult to lay stress upon the apostle's argument in *vv.* 31-34, however fully we may recognize its practical effectiveness, not only in his age but in our own. And so we may resume the examination of his conception of Christ as the ζωοποιός, for this is the heart of his reasoning.

### III.

In *vv.* 35, 36, he faces the inevitable question, "How are the dead raised? With what body shall they come?"<sup>1</sup> It is somewhat surprising that his answer should ever have been interpreted as suggesting the identity of the post-resurrection "body" with the corpse of the departed saint. The revivification of the body of flesh and the reincorporation of the material particles of which it is composed

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Apocalypse of Baruch* (xlix. 2): "In what shape will those live who live in that day?"

did not, indeed, seem incredible in an unscientific age. The Baptismal Creed of the Church still professes belief in "the Resurrection of the *flesh*," a form of words which may be defended but which would certainly not be deliberately chosen now, were the Creed being compiled for the first time. The scientific difficulties of such a conception are obvious, and they were noted very soon after Christianity came into contact with Greek culture. For the body of flesh which is buried in the earth is resolved into its elements, and the ultimate particles of which it is composed are diffused again throughout nature in other forms. The process of corruption is a process of transformation into other living organisms. These, in their turn, die and in their turn are resolved into their elements; and so the process goes on, unceasingly. The particles—to use the popular phrase—which formed the body of Augustine or Dante or Luther have served many purposes and may have been incorporated in many human bodies during the centuries which have elapsed since those great men passed away. Who is to be their owner in the future world? To whose "body" shall they be assigned, for many owned them in the earthly life? Considerations such as these were pressed by pagan critics—by Celsus upon Origen, and by others upon Gregory of Nyssa; and once they were formulated, it was felt by the best intellect of the Church that they were unanswerable, and that the crude theory of a literal resurrection of the flesh was incredible.

To be sure, this theory, difficult as it is to accept when explicitly stated, has always had adherents; and to the present day it strengthens the opposition that is offered to cremation as a substitute for sepulture, as a means of disposing of the corpses of the Christian dead. For it is vaguely surmised by uneducated people that a body which is burnt is destroyed, while a body which is placed

in the kindly earth is preserved until the day of resurrection. There are other motives which operate, no doubt, one being due to the half-formulated conviction that it is less respectful to the body which in the lifetime of its departed owner was "the temple of the Holy Spirit," to burn it than to bury it. But whatever other causes may affect modern custom in the matter—and this is not the place to enlarge upon them—the most potent is that gross conception of a literal reinstatement and revivification of the flesh which Origen<sup>1</sup> and Gregory of Nyssa<sup>2</sup> found themselves obliged to repudiate.

It is not surprising, perhaps, that such a theory should have prevailed among uneducated people in a simple age; but it is remarkable that it should have claimed the authority of St. Paul's name. For, as we shall see, the discussion in 1 Corinthians xv. 35 ff. is inconsistent with the opinion that there is material identity between the earthly and the heavenly "bodies." The seed is not identical with the fruit. "That which thou sowest is *not* the body that shall be" (v. 37) is a sufficiently clear statement.

What does St. Paul intend to illustrate by the image of the sowing of the seed? This is a crucial question; for the prevalent misconceptions of his doctrine of the Resurrection of the body may, as it seems, be traced to a misinterpretation of this figure. Most commentators, both ancient<sup>3</sup> and modern,<sup>4</sup> have assumed that the apostle

<sup>1</sup> c. *Celsum*, v. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Gregory's words are remarkable: *ὑπόλοιπον σκοπεῖν εἰ ὡς περ τὸ νῦν, καὶ τὸ ἐλπιδόμενον ἔσται—ὅπερ. εἰ ὅτως εἴη, φευκτὸν εἶπον τοῖς ἀνθρώποις τὴν ἐλπίδα τῆς ἀναστάσεως, εἰ γὰρ οἶα, ὅταν λήγεται τοῦ ζῆν τὰ ἀνθρώπινα σώματα, τοιαῦτα πάλιν ἀποκαθίσταται ἄρα τις ἀτέλεστος συμφορὰ διὰ τῆς ἀναστάσεως—τί γὰρ ἄν ἐλεεινότερον θέαμα ἢ ὅταν ἐν ἐσχάτῳ γῆρα καταρριγνυθέντα τὰ σώματα μεταποιηθῆ πρὸς τὸ εἰδεχθῆς τε καὶ ἀμορφον (*De anima et resurrectione*, col. 137, ed. Migne).*

<sup>3</sup> E.g. Chrysostom.

<sup>4</sup> Three representative English commentators—Ellicott, Evans, Wordsworth—may be named as supporting the equation sowing=burial. I

means to illustrate the burial of a corpse by the figure of the sowing of a seed. Even Bengel takes this view. Of *σπείρεται* he says, "verbum amoenissimum *pro sepultura*." And the association of St. Paul's words with the sublime Office for the Burial of the Dead in the Church of England has done much to confirm this interpretation of his language. It may seem presumptuous to express doubts as to the value of an exegesis which can claim such varied authority. But, in fact, there is no single allusion to the act of sepulture from the beginning to the end of 1 Corinthians xv. ; nor does St. Paul lay the slightest stress upon burial, or upon any other means of disposing of the corpses of the departed.

Let us look into the language he uses. His opening words, when scrutinized, will be seen to forbid any exegesis which equates *sowing* with *burial*. "That which thou sowest is not quickened except it die" (v. 36). In the world of nature, that is, there are three stages in the transformation of a seed, viz. *Sowing, Dying, Quickening*; and they succeed each other in this order. The seed is sown *before* it dies, and it dies *before* it is quickened. *Sowing precedes* death in the operations of nature. But the burial of a corpse comes *after* death. There is no analogy between the sowing of a seed which *goes before* the death of the seed, and the burial of a human body which *comes after* the death of that body. We must then put out of our minds the idea that the burial of the dead is comparable to the sowing of the seed, if we are to comfort ourselves with the splendid words, "That which thou sowest is not quickened except it die." St. Paul's image is the same as that which is presented in the saying of Christ to

do not know, indeed, of *any* English commentary which explicitly repudiates this opinion; although Dr. Charles, in his *Eschatology*, has stated the more natural interpretation, as I have observed since this article was written.

the Greeks, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it beareth fruit" (John xii. 24); but in neither passage has the image anything to do with sepulture or burial of the dead, and in both passages the central thought is the same, that the true life of the seed of human faculty can only be reached through death.

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*(To be continued.)*

### *HE THAT CAME BY WATER AND BLOOD.*

THE idea from which the apostle starts in this passage (1 John v. 6-8) is that of the victory of faith. Who, he asks, is he that overcometh the world but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? So to believe makes us partakers in Jesus' own victory (John xvi. 33). In faith, however, the object is everything; if we are really to overcome, we must be very sure of Christ. To convey such an assurance is the apostle's aim in the passage. He seeks to show that Jesus is evinced or demonstrated to be the Son of God by the most conclusive tokens; and when he has summed up what may be called the external evidences by which we identify Him as what He is, he clinches them by adding, He that believeth hath the witness in himself.

It is from this point of view that we must read the opening sentence, This is He who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ (or perhaps Jesus the Christ). The past tense makes it quite clear that the reference is to the historical Jesus, and that the water and the blood allude to incidents and experiences of His life on earth in which His character as Son of God, the object of a world-subduing faith, is revealed. Looking to the Gospel and the Epistle of John as a whole, it can hardly be doubted what the incidents or experiences in question are. Jesus came