

The Resurrection of Life and the Resurrection of Judgment.

BY THE RIGHT REV. C. J. ELLICOTT, D.D., BISHOP OF GLOUCESTER.

'There shall be a resurrection both of the just and unjust.'—Acts xxiv. 15.

THESE words were spoken by St. Paul in the presence of the Roman governor of Judæa, Claudius Felix, in reference to charges made against the apostle by the high priest and elders, as being a mover of insurrection, and ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. The apostle repels the charge by showing that his preaching differed in no essential feature from that of his adversaries, and that both he and they had the common hope that there would be a resurrection of the just and unjust. This mention of the resurrection of the unjust was probably not unnoted by Felix. He was a thoroughly bad man, as the Roman historians of the day very distinctly tell us, and a dimly-felt sense of the possibility here or hereafter of retribution made him tremble, as we are afterwards told, when judgment to come was pressed home upon him by the imprisoned apostle.

Men, however, nowadays, even though they may be as bad as Felix, do not tremble when they hear of this resurrection of the unjust, or of judgment to come. They regard these things, and the warnings that flow from them, as belonging to an old-world theology that has now become outworn and obsolete. And though there are few who would care openly to say so, there are many, I fear, who feel a sympathy with these delusive persuasions, and either put aside the whole subject of future retribution or rest on vague hopes that all will, in some way or other, come right at last. Their inner feeling is that if men live generally honest and neighbourly lives, there will be nothing seriously to apprehend when the resurrection of the unjust as well as the just becomes one of the realities of the future.

But there are many thousands, and tens of thousands, and the number, thank God, is steadily increasing, who, when the subject of the resurrection, and especially the resurrection of the individual—the resurrection of the body—is brought home to them, are conscious of questions rising

in the soul, sober and reasonable questions, which Holy Scripture awakens, and to which Holy Scripture alone can minister the answer. Such a text, for example, as that which I have chosen, plain and simple as are its words, what thoughts it awakens as to the fundamental difference of the two aspects of the general resurrection, the resurrection of the just, and the resurrection of the unjust! Just and unjust, we know from Holy Scripture, will alike hear the voice of the Son of man, and, as He Himself has distinctly revealed, will come forth and receive their final award. And the nature of that award the Lord Himself has thus plainly set forth, 'they that have done good shall come forth unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done ill to the resurrection of judgment.' The resurrection of the just is to life, and to everything that is involved in that blessed and inclusive word, life; the resurrection of the unjust is—the change of expression is very noticeable—not to damnation, as our Authorized Version renders it, but to judgment, to a final examination upon which the final decision irreversibly turns.

We have thus from the lips of our future Judge the precise meaning of the words on which we are now meditating—the resurrection of the just; and that on which our thoughts ever anxiously rest—the resurrection of the unjust. That resurrection is a resurrection, not due to any assumed innate immortality, but a resurrection that is experienced by the unjust, for the express purpose that they may be placed before the judgment seat of Christ, and, in the realistic language of the Revelation of St. John, be judged out of the things written in opened books other than, and separate from, the Book of Life.

If such be the meaning of the second portion of our text, if the resurrection of the unjust as named by the apostle is, in the fuller and more explicit language of our dear Lord and Master

Himself, specified as the resurrection, not of sweeping condemnation, but of judgment, or, in other words, a just consideration of all the deeds and misdeeds of the past, we may endeavour to ascertain, as far as may be possible in so profound a subject, all that is involved in the first portion of our text, the resurrection of the just, or as our Lord has been pleased more distinctly to reveal it to us, as the resurrection of life; 'they that have done good,' He says, 'shall come forth unto the resurrection of life.'

For the unjust, for those that have done ill, there is reserved the resurrection of judgment; for those that have done good the resurrection of life.

Now what is exactly meant by the resurrection of life? Does it mean merely a resurrection into or unto life in the general sense of the word, or does it mean a resurrection characterized by life in its fullest scriptural sense, and in the highest meaning of that most blessed and significant word?

There can be no doubt as to our answer. The unjust have a resurrection of life in a certain and special sense; they are called forth by the voice of the Son of God, and they live; but they live only that they may stand before their Judge and hear from Him the final award. Their resurrection is, as we have already seen, a resurrection of judgment.

But the just, how will it be with them?

Here we seem to be entering into the deeper mysteries of revelation, as some at least of the holy company of the just will not come into judgment, in the sense in which the word has hitherto been used. Nothing can be more plain than the words of our Lord in the very passage on which we have been dwelling, 'He that heareth My word, and believeth Him that sent Me,' is the Lord's express declaration, 'hath eternal life, and cometh not into judgment.' And again, in an earlier passage, when our Lord was conversing with Nicodemus, and was speaking of the Son's mission into the world, the same declaration is made, 'He that believeth on the Son of God is not judged.'

We seem, therefore, perfectly justified in saying that, however we may interpret the words, this great spiritual truth cannot be explained away—that among the just some there will be, so blest and so highly favoured, that for them, when the Lord comes to judge the quick and the dead, there will be no judgment.

But how can we reconcile this momentous truth with the general tenor of the teaching of Holy Scripture in reference to the final judgment? Is there any passage in God's holy Word that appears to imply or to involve this exemption from judgment on the part of some among the general company of those who are, here and elsewhere, spoken of as the just? Can there be any other resurrection than that which is the blessed accompaniment of the Second Coming of the Lord? Yes, verily, there is a passage little heeded in the current interpretation of such subjects as those on which we are now meditating, in which an earlier resurrection is not only implied but specified. If we are willing to abide by the plain and indeed emphatic declaration of one of the closing chapters of the last book of Holy Scripture, we must admit that there is a first resurrection, and that those who are counted worthy of that resurrection will live and reign with Christ during the mystic interval, spoken of in Scripture as the thousand years, at the close of which it is distinctly said that the rest of the dead were raised again to life and to judgment. Of this first resurrection I spoke two or three years ago,¹ and I have met with nothing since that time that has led me to modify my conviction that Holy Scripture, plainly and faithfully interpreted, does reveal to us a resurrection prior to the general resurrection—a resurrection of the specially-chosen, of those who will be assessors to the Lord, and will be with Him whithersoever He goeth—the sons of the first resurrection.

We now see who those are who, as our Lord says twice most distinctly, come not into judgment, and, though indisputably present at the last closing scene of all human history, when the dead, the great and the small, as Holy Scripture expressly says, will stand before the Throne, will not then be judged, their names being already written on the pages of the Book of Life.

We have now fully considered the plain and simple words of the text, and have seen, under the explicit teaching of our Lord, what the resurrection of the just and of the unjust, or, in the language of our Lord, the resurrection of life and the resurrection of judgment, must be understood to involve and to imply.

Here we pause. The nature of the final award,

¹ See THE EXPOSITORY TIMES for June, 1898, p. 401 ff.

especially in the case of the unjust, cannot possibly be even touched upon in a short sermon like the present, but it may be of some use to have investigated the full meaning of the apostle's words, and to have obtained some further elucidation of the holy and inspiring truth that there are those who will not come into judgment, but, as our Lord Himself has said, 'are equal unto the angels, and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection.'

One question only remains. Has any revelation been vouchsafed to us of the spiritual character of these chosen and highly blest ones, these who might at first seem to belong to a standard far above anything to which we could ever hope to attain? Yes, this our Lord has been pleased fully to reveal to us, and in language so simple, that its very simplicity seems at first to fill us with amazement. In one of the two passages in which our Lord speaks of those who will not hereafter be judged, He says only that 'he that believeth on the Son of God is not judged.' In the other passage He speaks with more explicit reference to Himself, and says, 'He that heareth My word, and believeth Him that sent Me, hath eternal life, and cometh not into judgment, but hath passed out of death into life.'

What an answer then has been vouchsafed to us! How blessed and how monitory! Blessed, because the whole mystery of the future is here

disclosed to us as dependent on our relation to Him who will hereafter be our Judge. It depends solely and uniquely on faith. But how can we ever hope for a faith so great and so intense as that which will supersede even judgment? Our only answer can be that if such faith be present, He will see it and bless it. To Him are known all the inner secrets of the poor human heart, not by the insight of omniscience, but by the experience of a love that vouchsafed to take our nature, and thus, as it were, to learn all those movements of the soul which indicate the varying degrees of faith in a Saviour. He will see and know, and He will quicken and elevate. But the monitory thought must also ever arise. If such be the power of faith, how will it be with the lower powers of faith? What will be the future in the case of those who have only a conventional belief in Christ, or in the case of those who have none? To such questions we can absolutely return no answer save this,—that He who knows every secret of the human heart will be our Judge, and that faith in Him, even in its lowest and feeblest forms, will never be counted as though it were not, or never found a place in the heart.

We may sum up all our meditations in one single sentence—on faith in Jesus Christ, incarnate, crucified for us, and risen, depends all our future here and hereafter.

At the Literary Table.

THE BOOKS OF THE MONTH.

THE NEO-PLATONISTS: A STUDY IN THE HISTORY OF HELLENISM. BY THOMAS WHITTAKER. (Cambridge: *At the University Press.* 8vo, pp. 243. 7s. 6d.)

There is just one thing this fine book lacks, it lacks a good style. A good style is like good common sense, a man must be born with it. And as gifts are wisely distributed, a good style does not always go with the perseverance that makes good scholarship. We have therefore often to make our choice between Froude and Freeman. In this case, especially as the style is far from intolerable, we do not hesitate. We are glad to receive a finely touched scholar's ex-

position of a most interesting product of human thought.

The chapter that has most attracted us is the one on the Polemic against Christianity. Mr. Whittaker has worked over this subject anew, and reconstructed Julian's scheme of anti-christianity with freshness. He concludes that Julian was not concerned for polytheism so much as for philosophy, in other words, that he was less a religious man than a humanist. But perhaps the best chapter in the book is the one on the Mysticism of Plotinus. It is the most difficult, and Mr. Whittaker feels that. He leaves unsaid as much as he says. The whole subject of mysticism has