

HARD SAYINGS OF CHRIST.

IV.

"But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead but of the living."—Matt. xxii., 31-32.

This saying of Christ as an argument for the resurrection against the Sadducees, is represented as filling the multitude with astonishment at His doctrine, and it so completely covered the Sadducees with confusion, that no more puzzling questions came from that quarter as long as He was in a position to appeal to the general public for a verdict. We may assume, therefore, that they must have found the argument a clear and cogent one from their point of view.

Now, we must be exceedingly thankful to have this saying preserved to us, for it indicates, as does almost no other that fell from our Lord's lips, His position on the subject of the resurrection, and it is certainly one of those clear flashes of truth which justify the statement that He brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel. So far as it expresses His own teaching on the subject, we have no difficulty with it. But as an argument from the Old Testament Scriptures, the force of it is by no means apparent, and it has proved one of the great stumbling-blocks of exegesis in every age.

The difficulty is a twofold one. In the first place it does not appear to bear on the matter of the resurrection at all, but rather on the certainty of a continued existence after death. Neither Abraham nor Isaac nor Jacob had been raised bodily from the dead even at the time when Jesus was speaking, much

less at the time when God addressed Moses from the bush. Even if the argument is valid, it proves only the continued existence of the patriarchs, not the resurrection of the body. And the two things are by no means identical. The second difficulty is as to the validity of the argument, to prove even the doctrine of immortality. Strauss, Hase and others treat it as a specimen of rabbinical dialectics—a pure scholastic sophism, having no force except to those who had adopted erroneous principles of interpretation. Let us look at these two difficulties in turn.

1. The former need not detain us long. It is perfectly true that the argument bears primarily upon the continued existence of the soul after death, rather than upon the resurrection of the body. But there was a good reason for choosing that point of attack rather than the other, because that was really the point at which the Sadducees stumbled. In the account which Josephus gives of the sect, he makes no mention of the resurrection whatever, but only of their denial of immortality. "The doctrine of the Sadducees is this: that souls live with the bodies."—*Antiq.* xviii., 1, 4. "They also take away the belief of the immortal duration of the soul and the punishments and rewards in Hades."—*Jewish Wars* ii., 8, 14. Of course the denial of the resurrection necessarily followed this, but it shows that they were guilty of the far more serious error of denying the immortality of the soul. Had they received this, it is not at all probable they would have made much difficulty about the prevalent doctrine of the resurrection. However important the hope of the resurrection is to the imagination, and as a comfort to