

The Quiet Hour

THE WITNESS OF THE GRAVE CLOTHES.

But Peter arose, and ran unto the tomb; and stooping and looking in, he seeth the linen clothes by themselves; and he departed to his home, wondering at that which was come to pass. St. Luke xxiv. 12 (R.V.).

The other disciple outran Peter, and came first to the tomb; and stooping and looking in, he seeth the linen clothes lying; yet entered he not in. Simon Peter therefore also cometh, following him, and entered into the tomb; and he beholdeth the linen clothes lying, and the napkin that was upon His head, not lying with the linen clothes, but rolled up, in a place by itself. Then entered in therefore the other disciple also, which came first to the tomb, and he saw, and believed. For as yet they knew not the scripture that He must rise again from the dead. St. John xxiv. 4-10. (R.V.).

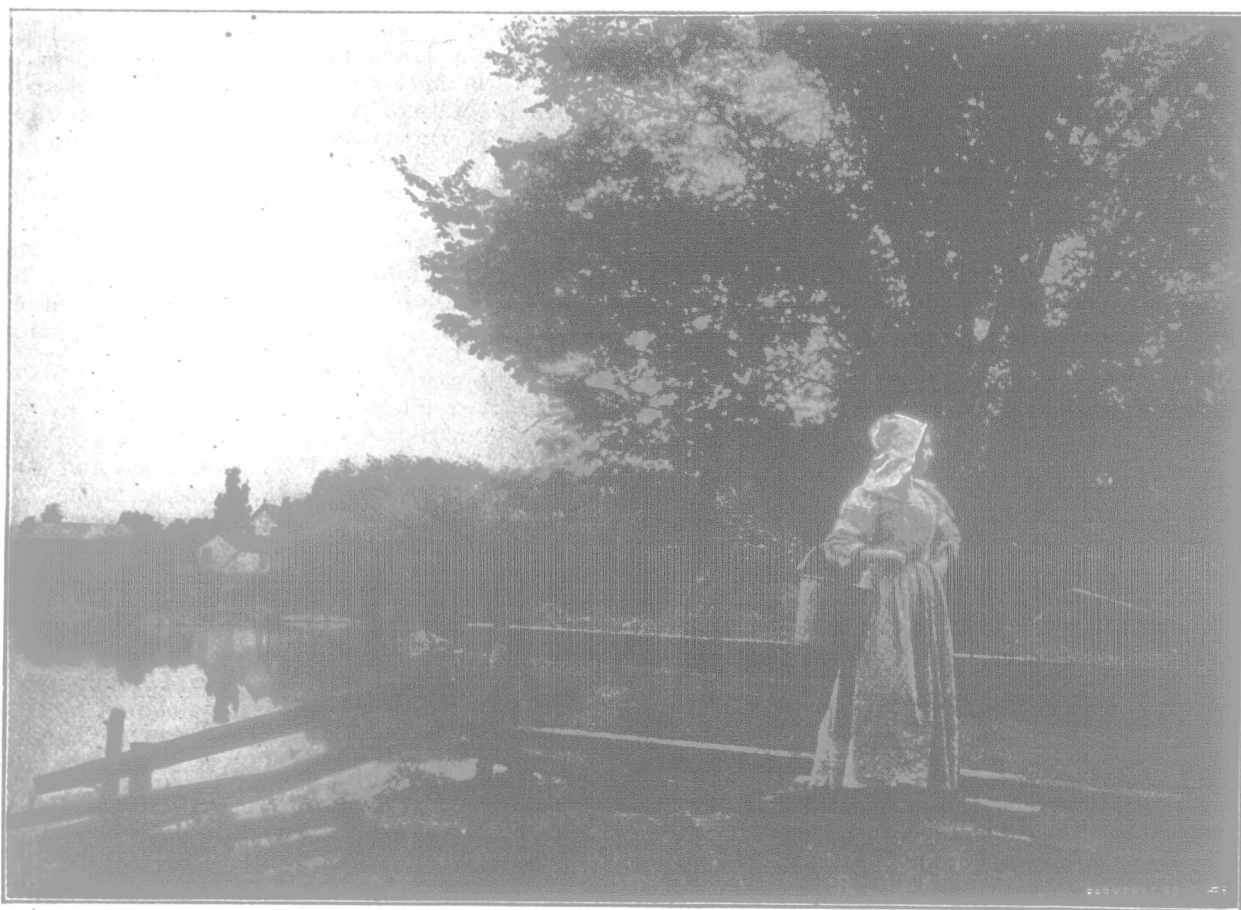
Ah! sure within him
and without,
Could his dark wisdom
find it out,
There must be answer
to his doubt.
—Tennyson.

We live in a world of progress; even the unchanging truths of our glorious religion are seen from a new point of view by each generation of men, revealing beauty which was always there, though it was veiled before. As electricity was always in the world, with all its marvelous powers waiting for men to discover and use, so many great treasures have been lying unnoticed in God's two great books—Nature and the Bible—revealing their mysteries in these latter days and coming upon us with all the freshness of new discoveries. Why should we fear the scientific study of God's word? Christianity is a religion of facts as well as of spiritual truths, and microscopic inspection is continually bringing to light facts that have been overlooked, as witnesses to the truths which can be grasped by faith alone. God does not demand a credulous belief in unattested prodigies. The true definition of faith is not that of the small boy who said that faith was "believing things we know are not true." Faith does require us to believe things that are beyond the reach of reason, nevertheless reasoning faith is the only possible kind of faith for sane people. We believe thousands of things about this physical world which we cannot understand. Who can understand how the chicken is formed in an egg, how the blossoms on the trees turn to fruit, how the food we eat turns into flesh and blood, nerves, muscles, etc.? If we cannot understand the physical world, how much less likely is it that we should entirely comprehend things spiritual and transcendent.

I have just been reading a deeply-interesting book called "The Risen Master," by Rev. Henry Latham; and, as many of our readers may not have the opportunity of reading such books, I will try to pass on a few of the thoughts contained in it. Perhaps another week I may tell you about other things in the book, but to-day we will look only at one subject, "The Witness of the Grave-Clothes."

The disciples who hurried to the tomb after our Lord's Resurrection seem to have been tremendously impressed with the appearance of the linen clothes which had been wound like bandages many times around the body. For many centuries men have passed over with scanty attention, the fact that the sacred record brings prominently into

notice that apparently insignificant detail—the position of the grave-clothes or "cloths" as the R.V. gives us the translation. Now, after nearly 2,000 years, those swathing cloths suddenly take their place as they did that great Resurrection Day among the strongest proofs of the foundation Fact of Christianity. St. John, in telling his story of his visit to the tomb, declares emphatically that when he beheld those cloths he believed that Christ was risen. He could not imagine that friend or enemy had removed the body and left the clothes behind, because their appearance showed that to be impossible. Those who have carefully studied the Greek account throw light on the mystery. The Body had been swathed in cloths, wound round and round like bandages, with a hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes strewn within the folds.



WAITING TILL THE COWS COME HOME.

These cloths were now "lying flat," without disarrangement, weighed down by the spices. They had not been unwound nor disarranged in any way. Our Lord's Body had mysteriously changed its nature, changing probably, as St. Paul expresses it, from a "natural" body to a "spiritual" body, and passing as easily as the air itself through the cloths, which immediately fell flat on the rocky slab. The napkin which had been twisted like a turban about his head, still kept its "twirled" shape—it was "wrapped together." It is also said to have been "in a place by itself." It was probably lying on a raised pillow-like slab where the head had rested, and was some distance from the rest of the cloths, for there is a considerable space between the wrappings of a corpse and the head-covering in many Eastern countries to-day. Often the face, neck and upper part of the shoulders remain uncovered. See how this fits in with various incidents of that Day. Mary Magdalene saw two angels sitting, "the one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain." The silent Sign of the Resurrection lay between these guards. No one could be allowed to disarrange that unmistakable testimony until his work was accomplished. St. Matthew speaks of an angel who sat outside on the stone and who said to the woman, "Come, see the place where the Lord lay." He was evidently inviting them inside not to see only the negative witness of an empty tomb, but to be convinced by the positive witness of the grave-cloths. They were so deeply impressed by what they saw that

they ran, with fear and "great joy," to tell the disciples. An empty tomb would not have instantly turned their grief into "great joy."

In St. Mark's account we read of a young man dressed in white who sat within the sepulchre on the right side. He drew the attention of visitors to the mysterious witness of the cloths, saying, "Behold the place where they laid Him." It was not an empty space nor a pile of disarranged cloths and scattered spices that they saw, for such a sight would not have impressed them so that they "trembled and were amazed."

St. Luke says that when the women told their story to the apostles their words seemed to them as "idle tales, and they believed them not." They had no reason to question the good faith of the women, and, if they had only said that the Body was gone, the statement would not have seemed an incredible "idle tale." But people are seldom very willing to believe a seeming impossibility, and it did appear to be impossible to believe that the Body had gone, leaving the bandages untouched. This was a new thing in their experience,

had said." If they only meant to state that the tomb was empty it was strange that they should use such a roundabout expression, which is far more positive than negative. Besides, they would hardly have seemed so astonished at finding that the tale of the women was true, if it had only been the statement that the tomb was empty. But such astounding information about the grave-clothes would certainly not be unquestionably accepted. No one but Mary seems to have imagined that the Body had been "taken away," though that would have been the natural explanation of an empty tomb. Mary probably failed to notice anything remarkable in the position of the grave-clothes on her first visit, because it would not be noticeable in the dim light of dawn. When she slowly returned, after running with her heartbroken message to St. Peter and St. John, she was blinded by tears and not likely to notice anything. The Evangelists do not go out of their way to explain why she was so despairing while the other women were filled with "great joy." They seldom go out of their way to

explain anything, being occupied with the telling of facts. There was reason enough, if Mary thought her Lord was dead and even the Body had been swept out of her reach, while the other women knew that He had risen with new life.

It is suggested that the witness of the grave-clothes was probably one great reason for the rapid increase in the number of converts from 120 to 3,000 on the Day of Pentecost, and soon after to 5,000. The wonderful news of the Resurrection would soon spread through Jerusalem, which was always crowded at the Passover. Many would visit the tomb and see the mysterious empty wrappings, and others would hear about them. The news would be carried by returning pilgrims to their homes, and so men would be prepared to believe in the foundation fact of Christianity—the Resurrection of Christ.

And what shall I say about ourselves? A man who will venture to say that anything is impossible, in these days of

marvellous discoveries, is showing a most unscientific form of mind; and, unless we take that obstinately foolish position and deny the possibility of the Resurrection, we must own that critical examination of the various records of that Event show that it was not a fabrication. Such undesigned coincidences, fitting perfectly into each other—coincidences that have passed unobserved for centuries, or at least have attracted very little attention—prove to any unprejudiced student that they are not invented. The writers were evidently telling their story in good faith. And it is a great help to us to know that the evidence for Christ's triumph over death gains instead of loses by closest scrutiny. Those who are like St. Thomas, doubting, though they wish to believe, need not fear to seek for proof. God does not force our belief, and yet He provides "many infallible proofs" for those who are earnestly seeking for them. The promise that those who seek shall "find" can be depended on. Those who do not take the trouble to "seek" can hardly expect to "find."

"Blind unbelief is sure to err
And scan His work in vain:
God is His own Interpreter,
And He will make it plain."
HOPE.

Naggus (literary editor)—"Borus, which one of the magazines is going to publish that last short story of yours?" Borus (struggling author)—"All I can tell you about it now Naggus, is that seven of the magazines are not going to publish it."—Chicago Tribune.