

SPECIAL
ARTICLES

Our Contributors

BOOK
REVIEWS

CHRIST THE FIRST FRUITS.*

Text—1 Cor. 15, last clause of 23rd verse, "Christ the first-fruits: afterward they that are Christ's, at His coming."

This chapter, as I hope every Bible reader knows, contains the fullest exposition of the resurrection of the dead. It claims our special interest not only on account of the fact, but because of the manner in which it is expounded. Viewed merely as literature, it is most remarkable and unique with its clear-cut, logical thought, and its marvelously skillful argument. We find no such eloquent arguments except in such writings as those of Demosthenes, &c. The apostle not only bears the logical thought all the way, but does more than give us the bare form as many others would do. Before taking up our text let us look at the argument in the whole chapter. It consists of three questions, which are answered clearly. In the first 34 verses the question is asked: "Shall the dead rise again?" And Paul proves logically that as Christ has risen, so must we, or our faith would be in vain.

In the next 16 verses he discusses at length: "With what bodies do the risen dead come?" What shall be the condition of those when the Master returns and shows that they shall all be changed. At the close of this wonderful chapter is the grandest peroration in sacred or profane history. As though it had been repressed during the logical argument, his soul now burst forth in "O, death, where is thy sting. O grave where is thy victory!" But Paul was an intensely practical man, and so closes with this appeal: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." Our text for this morning is an incidental statement in the argument, but it throws a great deal of light on the whole by showing the order—Christ the first-fruits—afterward, they that are Christ's. What does this suggestive figure, taken from the harvest field, imply? First, the order of time in which the resurrection will take place. Christ the first fruits, then the rest of the harvest. Christ rises first from the dead, then at His return, all they who are to come after Him. In the harvest field all the rest of the sheaves follow the first one gathered in; so with Christ and His people. But there is a great deal more implied than that Christ was first in order of time. This figure means also that Christ's resurrection was the pledge and earnest of the resurrection of all His followers. He rose, therefore His people shall rise. He lived, therefore his people shall live, for He rose, in His representative capacity. When Elijah was taken to heaven in a chariot of fire, it was in his individual capacity, not as a representative. But Christ ascended as our representative, and we too shall rise. "He can't be in glory and leave us behind." He not only represents those who are to follow Him, but He is vitally connected with them. It was fitting that the captain of our salvation should rise first, and all who are united to Him should follow. Another and important way in which Christ is the first fruits is that He is the pattern for His people. His resurrection body is the model for the resurrection bodies of His people. In Philippians we read: "We look for the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body." As I understand that verse, Christ's body is to be the model of all those who are

His, when they rise from the dead.

Many questions impossible to be answered have been asked about the resurrection body. God's word does not answer them, and we should not seek to be wise above that which is written. Is it not enough to know that our bodies shall be fashioned like the glorious body of our Lord and Master? If we need to go a little further, I think we may ask ourselves what we know of Christ's body while he was on the earth the forty days between His resurrection and Ascension. He did not lose His identity, for He asked Thomas to look at the nail prints in His hands and to feel the spear gash in His side. Whatever changes had taken place, He could certainly be identified by the friends who had known him before. So when that question is asked, "Shall we know each other there?" we can say, Yes.

Whatever changes may take place when our bodies are changed and given the glory of His body, we may be sure we shall not lose our identity because Christ did not lose His. When we visit homes which death has visited, or where disease has laid one low, we see the body perhaps with disease of a malignant or loathsome kind which the skill of the physician cannot conquer. There is the body with all its powers well nigh gone. It is sore to see the dissolution of the earthly home of the soul. But wait a little, wait till Christ returns, and the voice heard on Gethsemane shall pierce the graves and the bodies destroyed by Death. He will re-animate, will beautify them, and fashion them like His own. Wait till He exercises his power. One hour in heaven will more than atone for all the suffering we or our friends are called upon to endure here. Feeling and knowing what Christ could do, well might Paul say, "O Death, where is thy sting?" Sustained by that thought we can look Death in the face and say, "Strike mortal enemy, I fear thee not. Thou mayest destroy this body, but when Christ comes He will awake my sleeping dust." A risen Christ is the first-fruits of those that slept; but notice particularly what is said in regard to those who are to rise along with their risen Lord. It is that they are Christ's. The distinction between men is more vital than we are apt to suppose. The bodies of those who are Christ's. How singularly beautiful is this thought brought out in every relation. The union between Christ and His people. All through the epistles we find such expressions as these. He speaks of believers as being "in Him"; when they sleep, they sleep in Christ, and when they return, they come back with Christ; when they ascend, they ascend along with Christ. It would be unpardonable to pass this point without asking you, "Are you Christ's?" The resurrection body of those who have refused and rejected Christ is made immortal to endure suffering and misery. They that are Christ's He brings with Him, and gives them a resurrection body, and takes them Home and crowns them. All depends on whether we are Christ's as to whether we rise to everlasting bliss or everlasting woe, or to whether we shall hear, "Come ye Blessed," or "Depart ye cursed." We must be Christ's before He comes. It will be of no use trying to become His when He returns, for the day of probation then will be over.

What a world of comfort there is in this doctrine when a man loses his friends. A sick chamber is dark enough at any time, but how much darker it would be were it not for the light from the resurrection. It is hard to see our friends dying, or to see them growing old and realize that the day of parting is not far away, or to sit by the side of the coffin, or take the last look at the face of our dead

friend; but if we are Christ's we can say, The parting will not be for long. And when we go out to the cemetery, where the fastest growing congregation in town lies, and think of our friends who are sleeping there, let us think they are just resting till Jesus comes. He will bring them with Him, and will raise and change their bodies.

Standing on a pier at the seaside early in the morning, and watching a vessel starting out on its journey, we would find it soon lost to sight in the mist, and for a time we should hear no more of it. This is a striking illustration of when our friends die, the spirit leaves the body—we see them no more. We ask reason, science or philosophy, will they come back? and we get no reply. We ask Jesus who cheered the family at Bethany, and at once comes the prompt reply, "Yes, I will return, and will bring them again with me." Let us rejoice and be profoundly grateful to God for having revealed this doctrine to us, which we could not have known had it not been revealed to us in His Word. Let us show our gratitude to Him who has brought "life and immortality to light through the Gospel," and has told us that when He returns He will raise the bodies of them that are His, at His coming."

GLEGARRY SUNDAY SCHOOL
CONVENTION.

The 32nd annual convention of the Sunday School Association of the Presbytery of Glegarry was held in Knox Church, Lancaster, on Tuesday and Wednesday, 18th and 19th ult.

One of the speakers was the Rev. Alex. McGillivray, of Toronto, who was elected the first president of the association twenty years ago.

The president, the Rev. A. Govan, of Williamstown, presided.

The Rev. N. H. McGillivray, of Cornwall, spoke on the ardent need of prayer, the presence behind the closed door. The greatest victories are won and the greatest powers are received from behind closed doors with God alone. Men who frequent the power-house of prayer are the men who succeed.

The following officers were elected:—President—Mr. Robert McKay, Cornwall. First vice-president—The Rev. N. H. McGillivray, Cornwall; secretary—Mr. G. F. Jardine, Newington; Treasurer—Mr. J. J. Wightman, Maxville. Committee—Miss M. A. McViechie, Curry Hill; Miss A. A. Cresswell, Martintown; Mrs. I. Ostrom, Alexandria; Miss Mary McDonald, Williamstown; Mrs. Gordon Ferguson, Dunvegan; the Rev. A. McCallum, Ste. Anne de Prescott.

On Wednesday morning the Rev. Dr. Harkness delivered an address on "The evangelistic application of the Gospel by Matthew in the Sunday School." He said that the evangelist holds a distinct place in Scripture (Eph. iv., 11), and distinctly evangelistic work means presenting suitable scriptures to lead to (1) acceptance of Christ, and (2) confession of Christ.

The Sunday School lesson for next Sabbath was taught by Mr. A. McInnes of Vankeek Hill, and a very profitable half hour was spent.

Rev. J. S. Caldwell, of Woodland, gave an address on "Teaching of missions in Matthew."

Rev. J. Bate, of Lancaster, spoke on "The Laymen's Missionary Movement" and the present outlook for missions.

The closing address of the convention was given by Rev. Alex. McGillivray, of Toronto, on "The Teacher's Opportunities and Encouragements." The speaker inclosing said he came as the representative of the Assembly's Committee to thank the teachers of the Sunday Schools of Glegarry Presbytery.

The sum of \$50 was voted to the Provincial Sunday School Association.

*Synopsis of Sermon preached by the late Dr. R. N. Grant before the Presbyterian Christian Endeavor Society, and sent us for publication by an Orillia friend.