

[FOR THE CHRISTIAN OBSERVER.]

## AN ESSAY ON THE FIRST RESURRECTION.

Nothing is so cheering to the mind of the zealous and devoted Christian, who is praying without ceasing, and labouring continually to promote the Divine glory, and the best interests of his fellow men, as the assurance that his prayers shall be answered, and his labours crowned with the desired success. He reads in the Holy Scriptures of a coming period, when Israel and Judah, now the subjects of spiritual blindness, shall all know the Lord, from the least of them unto the greatest of them; when the Lord will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more. He reads of a period coming, when "from the rising of the sun even until the going down of the same, my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the Lord of Hosts." These two classes, in scripture phraseology, include the whole human race; and the assurance, from the mouth of God, that these, without exception, shall be brought to the knowledge and worship of himself, presents us with the delightful prospect of a converted world.

But many pious characters are saying, "We shall not see this. Before this takes place, our earthly sun will have gone down in the shades of death; our eyes will be closed in the darkness of the grave." It is to relieve such characters of the effects which this painful thought produces, that attention is requested to the following essay:

Many hundred years before the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, the saints of God were given to understand that in their resurrection state, there would be a marked and a striking distinction between the state of the saints who will live in resurrection glory, and those who will then live in the body. Of the former class, the author of the Apocryphal Book of Wisdom says, "In the time of their visitation, they shall shine; and run to and fro like sparks among the stubble: they shall judge the nation, and have dominion over the people, and their Lord shall reign for ever." And Paraphrast, Jonathan, in his Chaldee paraphrase of Hosea xiv. 8, says of the Jews, "They shall be gathered together from out of the midst of their captivity; they shall dwell under the shadow of their Christ; and the dead shall live; and good shall grow out of the earth: and there shall be a memorial of their goodness fructifying and never failing; as the remembrance of the sound of the trumpets over the old wine, which was wont to be offered in the sanctuary."

The doctrine, that the restoration of the scattered tribes of Israel, and the resurrection of the pious dead, are simultaneous, runs through the theology of the ancient

Jews, and also through that of the Greek and Latin Fathers of the Christian Church. Both were to take place before the millennial reign of the Messiah. The risen saints were to reign in glory, with their Lord, over all the nations of the earth: and the Jews were to be placed at the head of the nations of the earth. On these subjects there seems to have been little or no difference among ancient writers. But without despising these good men, or lightly discarding their opinions and teachings, the Christian must have higher authority for the ground of his hope and confidence, than the judgment and wisdom of men. It is, therefore, a proper question, What does God teach on this subject? Has he spoken on the subject? if so, *what* is it that he has said? Let us have his judgment in the matter, and know *what it is*, for which he requires his people to prepare and live.

By turning to the Holy Scriptures, we find abundant testimony on this subject; and it is clear and plain. It is true, that this testimony is obscured in a great measure, by our having adopted that neological mode of interpretation to the prophetic parts of Holy Writ, which is adopted by German writers, in relation to the doctrines and miracles of the New Testament. Let us, however, endeavour to bring our minds to believe that the God of Truth speaks plain truth on these subjects, in a true way, and our difficulty will be at an end. It should be also remembered, that the spiritualizing system of interpretation, now unhappily so common, originated with the Rev. Daniel Whitby, D.D., who wrote a Commentary upon the New Testament as far as the Book of the Revelations. But, on coming to this part of the inspired records, he says, "I confess I do it not (write on this book) for want of wisdom; that is, because I neither have sufficient reading nor judgment, to discern the true intendment of the prophecies contained in that work. But yet, conceiving that I either found the true sense of those words (Rev. xx. 4.) which usually are alleged as the foundation of the supposed Millennium, or resurrection of the martyrs, to reign with Christ a thousand years, or *have said what is sufficient to shew it it is not necessary to understand them in a PROPER sense*, I have comprised my sentiments of that controversy in the ensuing treatise: which I submit to the judgment of the reader." Here we have the origin of the doctrine of a spiritual Millennium, and of a spiritual kingdom of Christ. The good man did not understand the Apocalypse; but believed he had written enough to shew that when God speaks, his words are not to be taken in a PROPER sense. In other words, he had written enough to shew that when the Divine Being reveals his purposes and will, his words are neither to be believed nor understood.

This is the inevitable consequence of the Doctor's theory; for if we are not to take the words of God in their own proper signification, we either reject them altogether, or take them in an improper or false meaning. In either case, of course, the meaning of God is lost to us. The late Rev. Edward Bickersteth, whose reading on this subject was extensive, says, "I have not discovered the idea of a spiritual Millennium uncommenced before Dr. Whitby's 'New Hypothesis.' It was published in the year 1718; and is now very widely received, and zealously maintained, by professing Christians and theological writers.

But let us not take the words of God in an improper sense. Let us not charge the Holy one with speaking falsely. Let us not suppose that we are at liberty to set aside the plain meaning of the words of God, and to give them such a meaning as suits our own inclinations, or those of other men; but let us take them in that meaning in which we should take them if used by any reputable human writer, and examine the following passages of Holy Writ:—

"Therefore the ungodly shall not stand (rise again) in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous." Ps. i. 5.

The word *stand*, is, in the original, *rise again*. It is the same word that is translated in Isaiah xxvi. 19, "Thy dead men shall live; together with my dead body shall they arise." It is also the same word in the Septuagint that is used the New Testament to signify rising from the dead. In this view it would mean that the ungodly should not at the time of the judgment and gathering of the righteous, be made partakers of the resurrection; and is further collateral proof of the doctrine of the *First Resurrection*." (Invest. of Proph. vol. v. p. 16.) Here we are taught, that when the righteous rise, sinners will remain, for a time, under the empire of death.

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## A NEW YEAR'S SALUTATION

From the author of the articles on Unfulfilled Prophecy.

This is the season of mutual salutations. Will you allow one whose acquaintances with you is for the most part through the pages of this paper, to address to you his New Year's Salutation; and, in doing so, I would greet you in the words which are hereafter to be heard "in the land of Judah, and in the cities thereof," when God shall bring again their captivity: "THE LORD BLESS THEE."—(Jer. xxxi., 23.) If the Lord, bless thee, surely the New Year will be a happy one—its beginning happy, its progress happy, its close happy. And it will be happier still if it bring you quite through your journey, into the mansions of the blest.