

EASTER THOUGHTS.

FROM THE MINNESOTA MISSIONARY.

In primitive times it was a practice among Christians to greet each other on Easter morn with this glad salutation: "Christ is risen!" to which the response was made, "Christ is risen indeed!" This beautiful custom is still observed in the Greek Church, where we find many of those good old customs which have been lost in this ever-changing West.

But even among us, on this "queen of festivals," this "day of days," though the lips be silent, the heart echoes the joy-bringing words "He is risen!"

Even greater than the joy of Christmas is the joy which this Easter greeting brings to the Christian heart. "Christ is born!" does not thrill the soul with half the joy that "Christ is risen!" does. The declaration that Christ has come to redeem mankind does not bring half the gladness that the declaration that His work of redemption is accomplished does.

And why is it that Easter brings so much joy to the hearts of all true believers? Is it simply because Christ, their Easter, overcame death on that day and rose to spend a few more days here on earth? Is it because by His resurrection He proved to be true all that He had declared, by it verified all the teachings of the Gospel? No. It is because Christ's resurrection assures us of the reality of the general resurrection of the whole human race. Assures us that we, too, one day shall rise.

For long centuries men had asked the question, "If a man die shall he live again?" But no one was ever able to answer it.

Philosophers and sages had declared their belief in the immortality of the soul. They felt, that that which could rise so far above all earthly surroundings, and which had in it the desire and longing for eternity, must be immortal.

Cicero could say—"When I consider the wonderful activity of the mind, so great a memory of what is past, and such a capacity of penetrating into the future, when I behold such a number of arts and sciences, and such a multitude of discoveries thence arising, I believe I am firmly persuaded that a nature which contains so many things within itself cannot be mortal. But if I err in believing that the souls of men are immortal, I willingly err, nor while I live would I wish to have this delightful error extorted from me; and if after death I shall feel nothing, as some minute philosophers think, I am not afraid lest dead philosophers should laugh at me for the error."

But all this was merely speculation, with nothing on which to base a proof. Not till Christ rose from the dead was the immortality of the soul cleared of uncertainty. When Christ's soul was again united to His body and He rose from the dead, the immortality of the soul was shown to be a truth and not merely a dream of the wise.

The resurrection of Christ made known to us something which neither philosophers nor sages ever surmised.

It proved not only that our souls were immortal but also that *our bodies* shall rise to a life immortal; that the bodies of all those who are laid away in the grave shall rise and be reunited with their immortal souls and their persons restored so the perfect completeness of their former nature—to that perfection of united soul and body which they had before their death. Yes through the resurrection of Christ it was revealed to us that these very bodies in which we are tenanted in this life, though they be laid away in the grave and return to their mother earth still shall rise again and become once more the habitation of our immortal souls. This was something which had not been revealed to the world before. Some among the Jews, it is true, seem to have had faint glimpses of this truth, but it was no article of their faith, and its truth

by a very large part of them was denied. It was only through Christ's resurrection that its truth was at all confirmed; and here we have the strongest proof. Yes, more than a proof, for we have a demonstration of the fact itself. In His resurrection Christ gave us, as it were, an illustration of the truth of the resurrection of the body. His resurrection leaves us no chance to doubt the possibility of such a thing, or of God's power to perform it. In Christ's resurrection we see an *example* of what he declares to be a fact and *this* assures us of its reality as nothing else could. Christ has arisen, so we have confidence that we also shall rise. Christ rose in His human body, so we know that in our human bodies we also shall rise.

It is on the strength of Christ's resurrection that we are assured that, "As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." Christ in His resurrection, we are told, has become the *first fruits* of them that slept. Nothing could be a clearer assurance of the general resurrection than this image which the Apostle here uses, for when the first fruits of the harvest were offered to God in the Jewish Temple the fields were ready for the sickle and were about to be reaped. The harvest was ready and followed the offering of the first fruits for a certainty, so too, since Christ is the first fruits of the resurrection, the general resurrection of all mankind, the great harvest of souls at the end of the world when Christ "shall send his angels, and shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of earth to the uttermost part of heaven," shall also take place.

What a change has this certainty of the resurrection made in our thoughts of the grave—that place which before looked so dark and unpromising. Christ's resurrection has changed the grave from a place of doubt and despair to a place of rest, Christ having lain there and returned to life again, we now can look into its dark abode with the assurance that it will not be an eternal abiding place, but merely one where the body shall remain until the voice of our Risen Lord shall call it to life again, again, "for the hour is coming in which all that are in their graves shall hear His voice and shall come forth." No longer now need we dread to lay away those most dear to us, in the grave, where Christ hath lain. No longer need we, if we are Christians, fear ourselves to go where our blessed Redeemer went before us, for we too, in time, shall leave the dark abode and rise to an immortal life.

Oh, what is there which can bring greater joy to the hearts of all the sons and daughters of sorrow than the promises which Easter morn brings with it! O, all you who are bowed down with grief-bereaved of friends loved and dear, what is more welcome than the assurance that they are not forever lost to you; the hope that you may again enjoy their company in a better world? And O, how grateful is the tidings to all of us who are fast wending our way to the dark valley of death. What would death and the grave be to us if it were not for the hope which is brought to us by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead! The light which from that first Easter morn shines into the tomb, dispels the gloom which once so thickly hung about it. Well may we joyfully cry, "O, Death, where is thy sting? O, Grave, where is thy victory?" Death has lost its sting, for "the sting of death is sin," and Christ hath "put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." The grave is robbed of its victory, for Christ "hath loosed the pains of death." He hath "gone up on high, and led captivity captive." And now, when we think of death and the grave we are able to look past these to that great day "when Christ, who is our life, shall appear," when "we also" shall "appear with Him in glory."

In the midst of our Easter joy, there is one thing which we must ever remember, if we are to rise to a new life of joy and happiness with Christ in the world to come, there must be a death and resurrection for us in this life; we must "*die unto sin and rise again unto righteousness*" here in this world, if the voice of Christ is to raise us "unto the resurrection of life." The stone must be rolled away from the door of our hearts, as it was from the Saviour's tomb, not, though, to let Christ out, but to let Him in, that we may rise to a new and holy life here, if we would rise to a joyful and heavenly life at Christ's second coming.

Great joy, indeed, must the sight of that empty tomb near Calvary have brought to those who beheld it, early on that first Easter morn; but how much greater will be the joy of their hearts who behold the empty tombs on that last great Easter morn, if only their lives here have been given to the service of Him, who is the Resurrection and the Life who at the grave of Lazarus said,—“He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.”

EASTER.—GOOD FRIDAY.

As a matter of fact, any hard antithesis between Easter and Good Friday, any notion that the one subverts the other, is not only superficial but false. We do not really leave the Cross, as we pass from Calvary to the open tomb; rather we there find its real meaning and significance. Easter does not repudiate Good Friday but explains it. "The Resurrection is God's justification of the Crucifixion."—"It behooved Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead."—His rising carries forward and illustrates the victory wrought by His death; it declares that self-renunciation is not a blunder, but the highest wisdom; that it is not failure, but success. The sacrifice of Calvary was not a passing incident, to be forgotten and thrust out of sight as soon as it was over; it is the great event, timeless and eternal. The Easter lilies must not hide the Cross; that Cross symbolizing the entire yielding up of self to God; and in Him to the needs of a world-wide humanity is still, in the radiance of Easter, as amid the shadows of Holy Week, the "glory of the Christian name." It is the sign of the follower of Jesus Christ. He taught His disciples: "He that loseth his life for My sake shall find it." In His own death and Resurrection he proves it." Easter, then, takes up Good Friday into itself; confirms it, continues it. We find no higher way of keeping the Paschal Feast than by that act in which we "show the Lord's death till He come." On the afternoon of the day of the Resurrection we hear Him saying, "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things?" and before the evening is over we find Him standing among His disciples and saying, "Behold, my hands and my feet." Even in those splendors of which our Easters are but a brief and broken foretaste, the centre of the heavenly worship is still "The Lamb as it had been slain." Evermore brightly break the waves of joy, but the rivers of the flood that make glad the City of God flow from the foot of Calvary's tree.—*The Churchman, N.Y.*

Bring flowers to the shrine where we kneel in prayer;
They are nature's offering, their place is there
They speak of hope to the fainting heart
With a voice of promise they come and part.
They sleep in dust thro' the wintry hours,
They break forth in glory—bring flowers, bright
flowers.