THE RESURRECTION OF DEAD SOULS.

BY ALEX. MACLAREN, D. D.

"God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ."—Eph. 2: 4, 5.

Scripture paints man as he is, in darker tints, and man as he may become, in brighter ones, than are elsewhere found. The range of this portrait painter's palette is from pitchiest black to most dazzling white, as of snow smitten by sunlight. Nowhere else are there such sad, stern words about the actualities of human nature; nowhere else such glowing and wonderful ones about its possibilities. This Physician knows that He can cure the worst cases, if they will take His medicine, and is under no temptation to minimize the severity of the symptoms or the fatality of the disease. We have got both sides in my text; man's actual condition, "dead in trespasses"; man's possible condition, and the *actual* condition of thousands of men—made to live again in Jesus Christ, and with Him raised from the dead, and with Him gone up on high, and with Him sitting at God's right hand. That is what you and I may be if we will; if we will not, then we must be the other.

So there are three things here to look at for a few moments—the dead souls; the pitying love that looks down upon them; and the resurrection of the dead.

I. First, here is a picture, a dogmatic statement if you like, about the actual condition of human nature apart from Jesus Christ. "Dead in trespasses."

The Apostle looks upon the world—many-colored, full of activity, full of intellectual stir, full of human emotions, affections, joys, sorrows, fluctuations—as if it were one great cemetery, and on every gravestone there was written the same inscription. They all died of the same disease—"dead through sin," as the original more properly means.

Now, I daresay many that are listening to me are saying in their hearts, "Oh! Exaggeration! The old gloomy, narrow view of human nature cropping up again." Well, I am not at all unwilling to acknowledge that truths like this have very often been preached both with a tone and in a manner that repels, and which is rightly chargeable with exaggeration and undue gloom and narrowness. But let me remind you that it is not the evangelical preacher nor the apostle only that have to bear the condemnation of exaggeration, if this representation of my text be not true to facts, but it is Jesus Christ too; for He says, "Except ye eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of Man, ye have no life in you." And I think that, divine or not divine, His words about the religious condition of men go so surely to the mark that a man must be tolerably impregnable in his self-conceit who charges *Him* with narrowness and exaggeration.

At all events, I am content to say after Him, and I pray that you and I, when we accept Him as our Teacher, may take not only His gracious, but His stern, words, assured that a deep graciousness lies in these, too, if we rightly understand them.

Let me remind you that the phrase of my text is by no means confined to Christian teachers, but that, in common speech, we hear from all high thinkers about the lower type of humanity being dead to the loftier thoughts in which they live and move and have their being. It has passed into a commonplace of language to speak of men being "dead to honor," "dead to shame," "dead" to this, that, and the other good and noble and gracious thing. And the same metaphor, if you like, lies here in my text—that men who have given their wills and inmost natures over to the dominion of self—and that is the definition of sin—that such men are, *ipso facto*, by reason of that very surrender of themselves to their worst selves, dead on what I may call the top side of their nature, and that all that is there is atrophied and dwindling away.

Unconsciousness is one characteristic of death. And oh! as I look round these pews I know that there are tens, and perhaps hundreds, of men and women listening to me to-night who are all but utterly unconscious of a whole universe in which are the only realities, and to which it becomes them to have access. You live, in the physical sense, and move and have your being in God, and yet your inmost life would not be altered one hair's breadth if there was no God at all. You pass the most resplendent instances and illustrations of His presence, His work, and you see nothing. You are blind on that side of your natures; or, as my text says, dead to the whole spiritual realm. Just as if there was a brick wall run against some man's windows so that he could see nothing out of them; so you by your persistent adherence to the paltry present, the material, the visible, the selfish, have reared up a wall against the windows of your souls that look heavenwards; and of God, and all the lofty starry realities that cluster around Him, you are as unconscious as the corpse upon its bier is of the sunshine that plays upon its pallid features, or the dew that falls on its stiffened limbs. Dead, because of sin. Is that exaggeration? Is it exaggeration which charges all but absolute unconsciousness of spiritual realities upon worldly men like some of you?

And, then, take another illustration. Another of the signatures of death is inactivity. And oh! what faculties in some of my friends listening to me to-night are shrivelled and all but extinct! They are dormant, at any rate, to use another word, for the death of my text is not so absolute a death but that a resurrection is possible, and so *dormant* comes to express pretty nearly the same thing. Faculties of service, of enthusiasm, of life for God, of noble obedience to Him—what have you done with them? Left them there until they have stiffened like an unused lock or rusted like the hinges of an unopened door; and you are as little active in all the noblest activities of spirit, which are activities in submission to and dependence upon Him, as if you were laid in your coffin with your idle hands crossed for evermore upon the unheaving breast.

There is another illustration that I may suggest for a moment. Decay is another characteristic and signature of death. And your best self, in some of you, is rotting to corruption by sin.

Ay! Dear brethren, when we think of these tragedies of suicide that are going on in thousands of men round about us to-day, it seems to me as if the metaphor and the reality were reversed; and instead of saying that my text is a violent metaphor, transferring the facts of material death and corruption to the spiritual realm, I am almost disposed to say it is the other way about, and the real death is the death of the Spirit; and the outer dissolution and unconsciousness and inactivity of the material body is only a kind of parable to preach to men what are the awful invisible facts ever associated with the fact of transgression.

There are three lives possible for each of us; two of them involuntary, the third requiring our consent and effort, but all of them sustained by the same cause. The first of them is that which we call life, the activity and the consciousness of the bodily frame; and that continues as long as the power of God keeps the body in life. When He withdraws His hand there comes what the senses call death.

Then there is the natural life of thinking, loving, willing, enjoying, sorrowing, and the like, and that continues as long as He who is the life and light of men breathes into them the breath of that life. And these two are lived or died largely without the man's own consent or choice.

But there is a third life, when all that lower is lifted to God, and thinking and willing and loving and enjoying and aspiring and trusting and obeying, and all these natural faculties, find their home and their consecration and their immortality in Him. That life is only lived by our own will, and it is the true life, and the others are, as I said, but parables, and envelopes, and vehicles, as it were, in which this is carried, that is more precious than they. In the physical realm, separate the body from God, and it dies. In the natural conscious life, separate the soul, as we call it, from God, and it dies. And in the higher region, separate the spirit, which is the man grasping God, from God, and he dies; and that is the real death. But the others are nothing in comparison with it.

It may co-exist with a large amount of intellectual and other forms of activity, as we see all round about us, and that makes it only the more ghastly and the sadder. You are full of energy in regard to all other subjects; but smitten into torpor about the highest; ready to live, to work, to enjoy, to think, to will, in all other directions, and utterly unconscious and unconcerned, or all but utterly unconscious and unconcerned, in regard to God.

Oh! a death which is co-existent with such feverish intensity of life as the most of you are expending all the week at your business and your daily pursuits is among the saddest of all the tragedies that angels are called upon to weep over, and that men are fools enough to enact. Brother! If the representation is a gloomy one, do not you think it is better to ask the question—Is it a true one? than, Is it a cheerful one? And I lay it upon your hearts that he that lives to God and with God is alive to the centre as well as out to the finger tips, and circumference of his visible being. He that is dead to God is dead indeed whilst he lives.

II.—Now, notice, in the second place, the pitying love that looks down on the cemetery. "God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us."

Thus the great truth that is taught us here, first of all, is that the divine love of the Divine Father bends down over His dead children and cherishes them still. Oh! you can do much in separating yourselves from God through selfishness, selfwill, sensuality, or other forms of sin, but there is one thing you cannot do, you cannot prevent His loving you. If I might venture without seeming irreverent, I would point to that pathetic page in the Old Testament history where the king hears of the death, red-handed in treason, of his darling son, and careless of victory and forgetful of everything else, and oblivious that Absalom was a rebel, and only remembering that he was a boy, burst into that monotonous wail that has come down all over the centuries as the deepest expression of undying fatherly love. "Oh! my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Oh! Absalom, my son, my son!" The name and the relationship will well up out of the father's heart, whatever the child's crime. We are all His Absaloms, and though we are dead in trespasses and in sins, God, who is rich in mercy, bends over us and loves us with His great love.

The apostle might well expatiate, in these two varying forms of speech, both of them intended to express the same thing—"rich in mercy" and "great in love." For surely a love which takes account of the sin that cannot repel it, and so shapes itself into mercy, sparing and departing from the strict line of retribution and justice, is great. And surely a mercy which refuses to be provoked by seventy times seven transgressions in an hour, not to say a day, is rich.

That mercy is wider than all humanity, deeper than all sin was before all rebellion, and will last for ever. And it is open for every soul of man to receive if he will.

But there is another point to be noticed in reference to this wonderful manifestation of the Divine love looking down upon the myriads of men dead in sin, and that is that this love shapes the Divine action. Mark the language of our text, in which the Apostle attributes a certain line of conduct in the Divine dealings with us to the fact of His great love. Because "He loved us" therefore He did so and so. Now about that I have only two remarks to make, and I will make them very briefly. The one is, here is a demonstration for some of you people that do not believe in the Evangelical doctrine of an Atonement by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ; that the true Scriptural representation of that doctrine is not that which caricaturists have represented it—viz., that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ changed in any manner the Divine heart and disposition. It is not as unfriendly critics (who, perhaps, are not to be so much blamed for their unfriendliness as for their superficiality) would have us to believe, that the doctrine of Atonement says God loves because Christ dies. But the Apostle who preached that doctrine and looked upon it as the very heart and centre of his message to the world here puts as the true sequence—Christ died because God loves. Jesus Christ said the same thing, "God so loved the world that He sent His Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should be saved."

And that brings me to the second of the remarks which I wish briefly to make—viz., this, that the Divine love, great, patient, wonderful, unrepelled by men's sin, as it is, has to adopt a process to reach its end. God by His love does not, because He cannot, raise these dead souls into a life of righteousness without Jesus Christ. And Jesus Christ comes to be the channel and the medium through which the love of God may attain its end. God's pitying love, because "He is rich in mercy," is not turned away by man's sin; and God's pitying love, because he is rich in mercy," quickens men not by a bare will, but by the mission and work of His dear Son.

III.—And so that is the last thing on which I speak a word—viz., the resurrection of the dead souls.

They died of sin. That was the disease that killed them. They cannot be quickened unless the disease be conquered. Dear brethren, I have to preach—not to argue, but to preach—and to press upon each soul listening to me tonight the individual acceptance of the death of Jesus Christ as being for each of us, if we will trust Him, the death of our death, and the death of our sin. By His great sacrifice and sufficient oblation He has borne the sins of the world and has taken away their guilt. And in Him the inmost reality of the spiritual death, and its outermost parable of corporeal dissolution, are equally and simultaneously overcome. If you will take Him for your Lord you will rise from the death of guilt, condemnation, selfishness, and sin into a new life of liberty, sonship, consecration, and righteousness, and will never see death.

And, on the other hand, the life of Jesus Christ is available for all of us. If we will put our trust in Him that life will pass into our deadness; He Himself will vitalize our being, dormant capacities will be quickened and brought into blessed activity, a new direction will be given to the old faculties, desires, aspirations, emotions of our nature. The Will will tower into new power because it obeys. The heart will throb with a better life because it has grasped a love that cannot change and will never die. And the thinking power will be brought into living, personal contact with the personal Truth, so that whatsoever darknesses and problems may still be left, at the centre there will be light and satisfaction and peace. You will live if you trust Christ and let Him be your Life.

And if thus, by simple faith in Him, knowing that the power of His atoning death has destroyed the burden of our guilt and condemnation, and knowing the quickening influences of His constraining love as drawing us to love new things and make us new creatures, we receive into our inmost spirits the law of the spirit of life which was in Christ Jesus, and are thereby made free from the law of sin and death, then it is only a question of time, when the vitalizing force shall flow into all the cracks and crannies of our being and deliver us wholly from the bondage of corruption in the outer as well as in the inner life; for they who have learned that Christ is the life of their lives upon earth can never cease their appropriation of the fulness of His quickening power until He has "changed the body of their humiliation into the likeness of the body of His glory according to the mighty word whereby He is able to subdue even all things unto Himself."

Brethren! He Himself has said, and His words I beseech you to remember though you forget all mine, "He that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live, and he that liveth and believeth in Me shall never die. Believest thou this?"

Religion For Every Day.

If there be any one thing which is clearly set forth in the Gospel of Christ, it is the very important truth that true religion is a matter for use every day in the week. This seems to be very simple as an abstract statement, and yet it is one of the profoundest of all the practical truths of New Testament teaching. It appeals to the exercise of the strongest and staunchest faith which a Christian is capable of exercising. It is a comparatively easy thing to be religious on the Sabbath, especially in those communities where the general morals are pretty thoroughly permeated with Christian principle and sentiment. And even where the average morals are considerably below the proper standard, it is easy to be devout and devotional on Sunday. It is during the week, amid the perplexities of business, and in a close contact with godless men, that one's religion is put to the stress. There are thousands of professed Christians who can pass through Sunday in quite a religious sort of mood, and feel that they have made a success of their faith and virtue; but, when they get into Monday, and thus into a realistic touch with the jostling activities of the worst sides of human nature, they find that what seems to be a success on Sunday, in an easy sort of way, is well-nigh a failure and harder to do. Now, I do not mean to say that a person cannot be just as good a Christian on Monday as he can be on Sunday, for I certainly believe that he can. But I mean to say that it is more difficult to be a thorough going Christian on Monday than it is on Sunday. And, moreover, I insist that a Christian should be as devoted to the cause of Christ on a week-day as on the Sabbath. Indeed, there is a greater need of his being religious in the most practical way on Monday than on Sunday, because he comes more directly in contact with ungodly people on the week-day, and they need his good influence and help. Christ's religion is for every-day use and blessing.—*Rev. C. H. Wetherbe.*

TEST OF PREACHING.—An admirer of the late Horatius Bonar has said: "We never heard him deliver a sermon that had not gospel enough in it to save a soul." One moment's serious thought upon the true aim of preaching will show that Dr. Bonar's example in this particular is worthy of imitation. Indeed, the messenger of the cross, in so far as he discards this essential principle in any pulpit-effort, is unworthy of his high calling. He may not always announce it in just so many words; he should never make the statement of it trite or tedious; but the fact that he comes forth from the secret place of the Most High to show dying men the way of salvation, should always be manifest in his Christ-like demeanor, in his prayerful spirit, and in his evident acceptance of holy truth.

The Way We Helped Our Minister to Write Good Sermons.

BY JAMES FREEMAN CLARKE.

One evening (it was Monday) I stopped at the post-office after the school was out, to get my papers, with a secret hope also, I admit, that I might find a letter in a fair female hand. The mail was not sorted; and, while waiting, I listened to a conversation which was going on in the office.

"That sermon yesterday was too bad," said young Townsend, the lawyer. "I really think I shall leave off going to meeting. It does me no good. I feel so vexed and ashamed that I should be better at home."

"What was the matter with the sermon?" said Father Haystack. "I was sick on Sunday, and stayed at home."

"The whole parish will be sick on Sunday, soon," replied Townsend. "Matter? Nothing was the matter: that was just it. There was no matter in the sermon at all. It was a perfect phenomenon, it was so empty."

"Then it illustrated Bishop Berkley's theory of the world,—not substantial, only phenomenal, said young George Classic, who was spending his college vacation among us. No one seemed to notice his remark, however.

"I should not mind much the sermon's being empty," said Dr. Hunter, "if that was all, I could go to sleep. But the minister put such odd things into it, which have nothing to do with the subject. He tells us the stories we have just been reading in the newspapers."

"And tells them as if he had half forgotten them," added another.

"He seems half asleep all the time," continued Hunter. "Then he must needs be always thinking about slavery,—a thing we have nothing to do with. I have no doubt Squire Merrimac, who owns so much factory stock, and whose son is married in Georgia to a planter's daughter, will leave the society before long."

"My friends," said a quiet voice from behind me, "it is our fault that our minister does not write good sermons. We do not help him write good sermons. We do not help him write them, as we ought."

I looked around and saw Deacon Herbert. The deacon was a man whom everybody loved and respected. They loved him for his familiar, affectionate interest in the whole community, and for his perpetual usefulness. He was always doing some good thing, and inducing others to join him in his good enterprises. He was respected for his keen sagacity and sterling sense. He was apt to put things in rather a paradoxical way, and no one knew always at first whether he was speaking seriously or ironically. But this drew attention; and he was sure to show before he had done speaking that there was a button of gold deposited by his analysis at the bottom of the crucible. So we all turned round to hear the deacon.

"How can we help him write good sermons, deacon?" said Townsend.

"Not the way you are doing now. This talk of yours will make them five per cent. worse. The next time you go to church you will all feel bound, for the sake of consistency, to find fault with something; and so the sermon will seem worse than ever. And they will be worse, too; for he will feel your want of sympathy, and that will freeze his thoughts. No; if we want good sermons, we must help write them ourselves.

I thought it the minister's duty to write the sermon, not ours," said Townsend.

"So it's your business to argue in court for your clients. But suppose they should not care a copper whether you won their case or not, and should not furnish you with the facts, and should sometimes give you wrong information on the subject. Suppose the jury should go to sleep and yawn during your argument, and the judge read the newspaper. What sort of an argument would you make then?"

"But we pay our minister a good salary, and he has nothing to do but to write sermons, and ought to write interesting ones," said Dr. Hunter.

"The citizens of this town might pay you five thousand dollars a year to attend them when sick," returned Herbert; "but if they would not tell you their symptoms, nor take your medicine, would the five thousand dollars help you cure them?"

"But still," said Townsend, "I do not see how we can help the minister write any better. If a man has no talent we can't give it to him."

"I would take," said the deacon, "the worst candidate who ever came from Andover or Cambridge, and, provided he wished to be useful I would agree he should become so, with such society as I can conceive of to help him preach. But our minister is not the worst, even in our neighborhood. He is not wanting in talent, and you all admit that he is a well-informed, kind-hearted and industrious man. Better still, he is a man of real piety. On the other hand, we are not such a society as I could imagine; but, such as we are, if we do our duty, I will engage that within a year he shall preach good sermons, that will satisfy you all. Will you try the experiment?"

"Decidedly we will," said Dr. Hunter. "And we will give our minister not one, but three years in which to improve himself. He was three years at the theological school; he may study now three years more with his parish."

"Good!" said the deacon. "What are the faults you find with him?"

"First," answered Townsend, "his sermons have nothing in them."

"Secondly," said the doctor, "his delivery has no animation; thirdly, he fills them with stories which have nothing to do with his subject; and, finally, he keeps up a constant talking about slavery and politics, and such matters."

"Very well," returned the deacon; "all these faults grow out of the first, and that is your fault as well as his. He will never have anything interesting to say to you until you let him know your spiritual needs, and make him your confidant, and so furnish him every week with facts and subjects of living interest on which to exercise his mind. If he has nothing interesting to say, his delivery will inevitably be inanimate. If you do not furnish him with illustrations from your own lives, his illustrations will be far-fetched, and he will take his subjects from politics or from anything else that really interests him."

"Still," said the doctor, "I do not see what we are to do. You are not going to tell him, I suppose, that we propose to interfere in his sermon-writing."

"Why not?" said the deacon. "I do not read Goethe, but I have seen one line quoted from him which I should like to have engraved in gold letters upon every pulpit in the land,—

'Between us, at least, let there be truth.'

If there cannot be truth between a minister and his people, where can it exist? If the people have not enough confidence in the humility and devotion of their minister to tell him what they think would improve his public services, the relation between them is a failure. No; I shall go to our minister and tell him of this conversation, and propose to him to meet his people every week on Monday evening, and have free and familiar conversation on a series of subjects of practical Christianity. I shall tell him that we wish him to know what our doubts, obscurities and troubles are in reference to these matters, before he preaches upon them. I shall tell him that we think this will make his services more directly useful to us all. I have no doubt he will gladly assent to it; for whatever your opinion may be, I think him a man who really wishes to do us all the good he can."

"So do I," said Townsend. "But you need not tell him what we have been saying about his sermons."

"Ah, Brother Townsend," replied the deacon, shaking his finger at the lawyer, "before you speak again in a public place of a good man's follies or faults, ask yourself whether you would be willing to repeat to his face what you say behind his back."

Our minister entered warmly into the plan; and it is extraordinary how well it succeeded. To be sure, we had some difficulty in persuading many persons to express themselves at these social discussions; but the deacon made everything easy by his familiar way. Instead of having the subject opened in a formal manner, we found ourselves talking about it before we knew the discussion had begun. Even the women would sometimes become so much interested that they would begin to speak, and speak remarkably well, when they had only intended to ask a single question. Sometimes the conversation was very tender, and some deep experiences would be artlessly expressed by one and another. Next Sunday we were sure to have something in the sermon applicable to what had been said, and all were more ready to attend to it on account of the previous conversation. Our minister never wanted subjects now to speak of; and he was obliged to put off for eight months, and finally to postpone entirely, a sermon he had half-written on the "Moral Influence of Steamships." His subjects usually were "Providence," "Prayer," "Repentance toward God," "Faith in Jesus Christ," "The New Birth," "Family Devotion," "Honesty in Business," "Family Duties," and the like. The sermons were not only more interesting on account of the previous meetings, but the meetings were more interesting because of the sermon which we knew was to follow.

Our minister once told me that, on Tuesday morning, he was always seated at his desk by candle-light; and that by Tuesday noon the greater part of his sermon was written for the next Sunday. "But," added he, "I study harder than ever. So many questions are started in my mind by our Monday evening conversation that I am searching in all my books for light concerning them till the end of the week. Moreover," said he, "my pastoral visiting is much easier, for I always have something to talk about. Formerly, I would sometimes visit my parishioners and spend a quarter of an hour in talking of the weather, crops, etc. Now I always find them with something in their mind which they did not wish to say to me, but had no opportunity of saying it on Monday evening. They attend to my sermons a great deal better than they did before, and our church is increasing both in numbers and in a good religious spirit."

This was the way we helped our minister to write good sermons. And, for my own part, I heartily wish we had a deacon Herbert in every church in the land. —*Christian Register.*

— A man's besetting sin is the one that jumps with his inclinations. Does he love mirthfulness? Then he must be careful lest he run into excessive levity and play the harlequin. He will be tempted to make jests of sacred things. A minister ought not to be a monk; but neither should he be a social comedian. Does a man love ease? Then he always interprets those providences in his own favor which allow him to shirk hard work and swing in his hammock. Does he love flattery and eclat? Then he is tempted to seek applause, and to imagine that he is serving God when he is only burning incense on the altar of self-worship. The worst enemy is the one which wears an honest disguise. Look out for selfishness. It is the "old Adam" lurking behind every hedge. It will always keep pace with you if you give it the upper hand. Keep no league with it; for Christ will never abide in the same heart with that subtle and greedy tyrant. A Christian is never safe, never strong, never true to Christ, unless he is constantly "collaring" every sinful and selfish passion, and forcing it into unconditional surrender.—*Dr. T. L. Cuyler, in Examiner.*

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