

Victory Over Death.

BY CHARLES S. ROBINSON, D. D.

Virgil tells us that when the pious Aeneas visited his father, Anchises, in the Elysian Fields, and had to cross the Styx at fabled Charon's Ferry, the frail boat, accustomed to carry only the tenuous forms of departed spirits, now receiving the heavy figure of a living man, writhed and creaked through all its sewed seams.

This was only a poet's conception, according to his light, of what the apostle gives us under inspiration, concerning the relations of the future life to the grossness of this: "Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption."

We feel confident that no corporeal substance has place in a purely spiritual state. Yet what a purely spiritual state is really, it would be impossible for us to tell. It may be well to remember that death influences our human lot only as an intellectual notion. There is nothing in it which strikes back upon the fiber and substance of our existence. It is not like a blot of ink fallen in an open book, that it should stain the previous pages closed carelessly upon it; it bears on the future alone. If we could and would keep it out of mind, it would not render us unhappy. The animals all around us die, just as we do; but they give no evidence of being affected by the melancholy prospect.

A lamb goes dumb to the slaughter, because it has no sense of apprehension. It is our idea of death which brings us our horror. The imagination invests it with its dreadful gloom.

Hence the Scriptures attack the idea; they do not appear to try to disturb or rearrange the facts. The endeavor of the apostle's argument, in the epistle to the Corinthians, is directed towards the removal of an emotional feeling which he calls the sting of death. So he advances bravely to meet the issue, challenging a sharp attention by the admission that there is a fearful something, standing at the extreme limit of human life, which needs explaining: "Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality."

The parallel to this passage is found in the epistle to the Thessalonians, some expressions in which need always to be laid alongside of it. Indeed, the popular mistake, that makes us shudder at this "mystery," is better indicated in the verse: "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope."

Here are three things: ignorance, sorrow, hopelessness; it would be impossible to find stronger terms by which to outline the universal thought, which Paul deprecates so earnestly.

"I would not have you to be ignorant." The moment that a simple want of information limits our progress, our imaginations begin to fashion for themselves and construct a future,—just as ostriches run along the beaten road until they reach a ravine mist-covered, then they set out to fly among the clouds.

There is in the picture which ignorance draws a sense of ineffable loneliness. One spot there is now on the earth somewhere, waiting for us; one pathetic little reach of land, six feet by two, which is to grow solemn with the charge of our dust lying in it in expectation of the final judgment. "There are no bands in their death." One moment there is drawing nearer on the dial, which is to be

awful with the weight of our solitary experience, when it is to bear away the last breath from our nostrils.

Then there is in the picture an appalling terror as to final agonies,—an inexplicable alarm concerning what may be the experiences of the change we must meet. Of the old moralist, Dr. Johnson, his biographer tells us he was all his life in bondage, through fear of death. "His intellect resembled a vast amphitheater; in the center stood his judgment combating, like a mighty gladiator, those apprehensions, which, like the beasts of the arena, were all around him in the cells, ready to be let out any moment. After a conflict, he would sometimes drive them back into their dens; but not being able to kill them, he was ever and anon assailed again." Thus we all live, tortured by our terrors.

There is also in this picture a dread of disclosures beyond. The ship departs; that is bad enough,—but, oh, where is it going to? When will it touch shore again? Providences are intricate; they do clear, however: the path winds more than ever here,—alas! where does its untrodden length lead? So we repeat Job's words: "Are not my days few? cease then, and let me alone, that I may take comfort a little, before I go whence I shall not return, even to the land of darkness, and the shadow of death; a land of darkness, as darkness itself; and of the shadow of death, without any order, and where the light is as darkness."

Now Lord Bacon has somewhere said that "true fortitude consists in not letting what we do know be disturbed by what we do not know." And he speaks wisely; for that is the precise thing which poor human nature finds most difficult to accomplish. Ignorance proves nothing; but our outlook is full of nameless horrors, because we have nothing else to fill it with—outside of the Bible.

Next to this comes grief: "That ye sorrow not," adds the apostle. Men even in deepest distress cannot be made to see Death as a friend. In the old fable we used to read at school, the aged woodman fairly grew desperate as he cast his load of fagots from his sore shoulders: "Sitting down, he prayed for Death to come to his relief." Suddenly Death did come, and inquired what he needed. "Nothing," answered the frightened creature, hustling up on his feet; "nothing, only to have some one help to put my bundle once more on my shoulder!"

There is in this sorrow a sense of bereavement; we must go away from those we love. The Romans had thirty epithets for death; and all of them were full of deepest dejection. "The iron slumber," "the eternal night," "the mower with his scythe," "the hunter with his snares," "the demon bearing cup of poison," "the merciless destroying angel," "the inexorable jailer with keys," "the king of terrors treading down empires,"—some of them were these, the bitterness of which is indescribable.

Then there is a sense of laceration. We must tear ourselves away from the hills and the homes that know us. The more we have cared for the world, the more it keeps it hold upon us. There is a sort of injured feeling rankling in our hearts, as if somebody had cheated us out of a right, or deceived us in a prospect.

Worst of all, there is in this sorrow a sense of failure. A consciousness of unfinished work, of incomplete accomplishment, is filling us with dissatisfaction. It happens that we have this all written out for our inspection under inspiration in one notable instance; it is worth reading over as a revelation of human nature.

"The writing of Hezekiah king of Judah, when he had been sick, and was recovered of his sickness: I said in the cutting off of my days, I shall go to the gates of the grave; I am deprived of the residue of my

years. I said, I shall not see the Lord, even the Lord, in the land of the living; I shall behold man no more with the inhabitants of the world. Mine age is departed, and is removed from me as a shepherd's tent; I have cut off like a weaver my life; he will cut me off with pining sickness; from day even to night wilt thou make an end of me. I reckoned till morning, that as a lion, so will he break all my bones; from day even to night wilt thou make an end of me."

The third element of popular experience which the apostle indicates is despair: "I would not have you as others which have no hope." Here now enters the working of conscience. At this point there is apparent a notion of guilt: "The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law."

Hence, this hopelessness includes a sense of ill-desert. No man is free from it. Even wise old Socrates sacrificed a cock for an offering before he dared to die; and he was what we call a sage! Scientific men keep opening ancient tombs nowadays; and it is astonishing what treasures they find,—gifts all packed up for the departed creature to make his way on with when he should get into immortal necessities of explanation and apology for a misspent life.

There is also a sense of inexorable justice. Something mysteriously forces the conviction on the minds of us all, that there is one court in this universe where decisions are rendered in accordance with facts and principles of law. We clap our hands when we hear a popular poet sing out energetically, "Thank God, man is not to be judged by man." But that implies that he is to be judged by God; and such a conclusion brings to most men an uneasiness. Solemn moment is that in which any soul reaches the full consciousness of approaching arraignment before the bar of Jehovah!

There is in this hopelessness also a sense of risk. It will interject itself into all our computations, this thought of something left unarranged at death. I cannot get myself ready. I am not master of the position enough to know what to do more. There are peradventures on ahead in that darkness that it is useless for me to try to meet. I must just take my chances as I am. The last word of one of the most courageous of all the famous infidels that have been watched as they died, was, "It is a leap in the dark!"

This, then, is the popular, and necessary conception of death, up to that last great moment when the revelation which the New Testament furnishes breaks like beautiful sunshine through the unutterable gloom. Our Lord Jesus came to bring life and immortality to light in the Gospel. So the trustful believer is taught to sing, while his heart is swayed by the hopes of another life in view:

"In death, peace gently veils the eyes;
Christ rose, and I shall surely rise."

That is to say, into this confused and melancholy state of things Christianity enters with a direct challenge and absolute contradiction of reversal. To real mourners there is only left a single comfort that will prove satisfactory. We may reason and argue, but all in vain. No assurance about its being better for the friends we have lost to be where they are; no chilly philosophy as to manly fortitude or womanly endurance; no professions of sincere sympathy counseling courage—nothing is sufficient for our terrible bereavements, except the calm declaration: "Thy brother shall rise again." We insist upon the certainty that some time we must be reunited to the hearts we regret and remember with our tears.

Just there the Scripture meets us positively: "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him." We cannot take away death, but we can take the

sting out of death. We must enter the conflict with the last enemy: "But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ." At last there comes something authoritative. The moment we read a verse of inspiration like these we are studying, we feel as we do when we see a great meteoric stone,—we say this is a piece of another planet. Just mark these opening words of the apostle: "For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive, and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore, comfort one another with these words."

So much, then, "by the word of the Lord." How this covers at once all the particulars we have mentioned! This lonely spot away in a damp graveyard that makes us shudder,—why, it is only a cemetery, after all; and a cemetery is a sleeping-place. We shall remain in it only until sunrise. Then, too, this sense of failure in life; Paul says there is no mistake or loss: "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." No labor can be in vain which has God's glory for its end. So of the nameless and indescribable fears that make us shudder; this revelation of divine love simply takes a lamp and bears it into the mysterious shadows ahead of us, as a mother goes on before into a bed-room which her timid child had been filling with weird horrors. Oh, how exquisite is that description of the New Jerusalem, which calls it "the mother of us all!"

The sense of bereavement is banished in the same way. It is the departed who are safe. Those we think we have lost are the very ones we have most securely. The sense of despair yields to the blessed certainty of hope. We shall find our old friends in heaven; we shall know them when we see them. The new life will be occupied partly in "knitting severed friendships up." And as for that awful dread of divine justice, it will be displaced by a wonderful peace; for we can rest implicitly in God's justice when Jesus the Savior stands by, with the sure pardon in his hands!

Very beautiful, therefore, rises this picture of the apostle upon our spiritual vision, and very inspiring is the song which floats through the air as we look at it: "So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"

"The night is far spent; the day is at hand." We have as yet some few confusions, for the twilight shadows are hanging heavily over us; but it will all be right in the morning:

Thus all through the world, by ship or by shore,
Where the mother bends over the cradle,
The tenant of which has just gone on before—
Where the lonely tread on in the aisles of woe—
Where the brave fight their foes and their fears—
Where the funeral winds, or the dirge marmure low,—
Where the eyes of the lover, through dimness and tears,
Look aloft for the loved—oh, whatever the word,
A welcome, a wail, or a warning,
This is everywhere cherished, this everywhere heard—
"It will all be right in the morning!"

—S. S. Times.

The Influence of Religion.

People talk about religion being a restraint upon men. In some senses, it is a restraint. But this is not its chief idea. There are in men certain destructive tendencies,—passions, appetites and inordinate affections which need the curb; and religion operates as a curb upon these and reigns them in. But it has other and larger uses than this. Fetters and cords and gags do not represent it. It plants more than it uproots. When the work of correction is ended, it has only just begun its operations in the soul—operations which will continue in force eternally. Negatives do not express religious duty. We love to think that religious life means the growth of all the faculties, and not a slow strangulation of them. Religion no more cramps a man than wings do a bird, or fins do a fish. Piety is not a ship at anchor on a level sea; it is a ship in motion, with every sail set and swelling with wind and the waters around it crested with white. Christianity makes a man active, vibrant, tense. Great injury has been done religion by teaching people to regard it as a mild form of slavery, in which people consent to be tied up that they may not hurt themselves or others. But there is no such religion as this, at least in the New Testament. The Gospel Christ taught, is a Gospel of liberty. It is a stimulant to man's energies, not a narcotic. It makes him a doer, not a hearer.—*Secleted.*

Rosewood.

It has puzzled many people, says a contemporary, to decide why the dark wood so highly valued for furniture should be called "rosewood." Its color certainly does not look much like a rose; so we must seek for some other reason.

Upon asking, we are told that when the tree is first cut the fresh wood possesses a very strong, rose-like fragrance—hence the name.

There are half-a-dozen or more kinds of rosewood trees. The varieties are found in South America, and in the East Indies and neighboring islands. Sometimes the trees grow so large that planks four feet broad and ten feet in length can be cut from them. These broad planks are principally used to make the tops of pianofortes.

When growing in the forest, the rosewood tree is remarkable for its beauty; but such is its value in manufactures as an ornamental wood that some of the forests where it once grew abundantly now have scarcely a single specimen. In Madras the government has prudently had great plantations set out, in order to keep up the supply.

The Spelling Class.

Stand up, ye spellers, now, and spell.
Spell Phenakistoscope and Knell.
Or take some simple word, as Chilly,
Or Ganger or the Garden Lily.
To spell such words as Syllogium,
And Lachrymose and Synchroism,
And Pentatuech and Saccharine,
Apocrypha and Celandine,
Lactiferous and Cecity,
Jejune and Homoeopathy,
Paralysis and Chloroform,
Rhinoceros and Pachyderm,
Metempsychosis, Gherkins, Basque,
Is certainly no easy task.
Kaleidoscope and Tennessee,
Kamtschata and Dispensary,
Diphthong and Erysipelas,
And Etiquette and Sassafras,
Infallible and Pylalism,
Allopathy and Rhenmatism,
And Cataclysm and Belaguer,
Twelfth, Eighteenth, Rendezvous, Intriguer,
And hosts of other words are found
On English and on Classic ground.
Thus Behring's Strait and Michaelmas,
Thermopylae, Cordillera,
Suise, Homorrhage, Jalap, and Havana
Cinquefoil and Ipecacuanba,
And Buppahaan ck Shenandoh,
And Schuylikill, and a thousand more,
Are words some-prime good spells miss.
No one need think him—if a scroyle
If some of these his efforts foil.
Nor deem himself undone forever
To miss the name of either river,
The Dnieper, Seine, or Gaudalquivir.

—We must answer for everything we possess, but nothing which we possess can answer for us.