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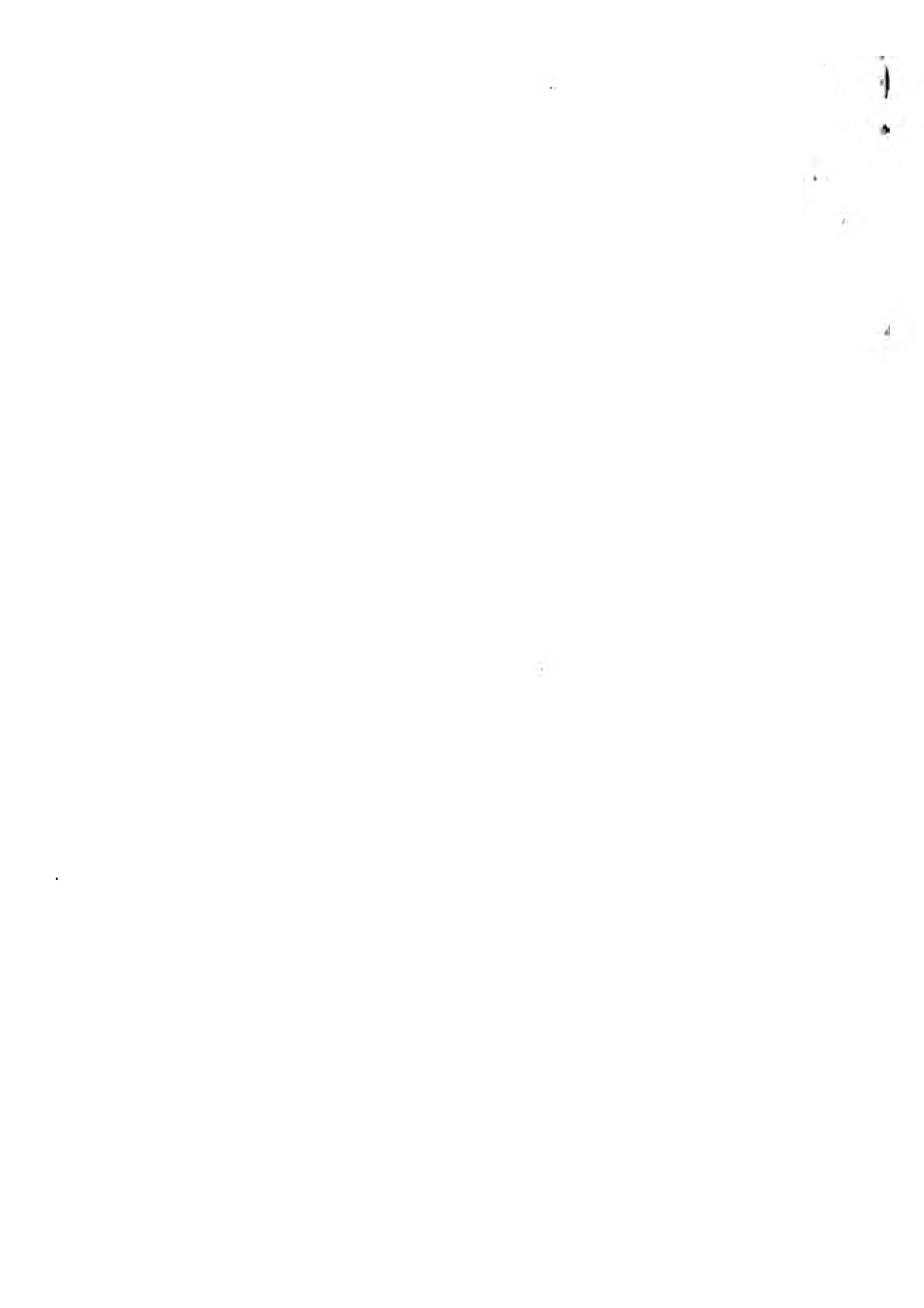
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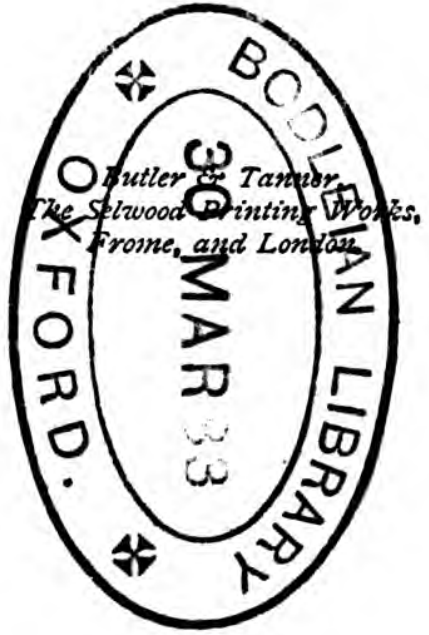


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with Death from the mere moralist's point of view, as the termination of human schemes and hopes, we Christians have nothing to do. We are believers in and servants of One who has in these senses abolished Death. Our schemes and hopes are not terminated by Death, but reach onward into a state beyond it.

Again, with that state beyond, except as one of blessedness purchased for us by the Son of God, I am not at present dealing. It is of those that die in the Lord alone that I speak.

And this being so, it is clear that the first point about them demanding our attention is, the very commencement of their state at the moment of death. And this will form our subject to-day.

We shall be guided in its considera-

betaken itself when it has left us here? One of the most painful pangs in bereavement by death is the utter and absolute severance without a spark of intelligence of the departed. One hour, life is blest by their presence ; the next, it is entirely and for ever gone from us, never to be heard of more. One word, one utterance—how precious in that moment of anguish do we feel that it would be ! But we are certain it never will be granted us. None has ever come back who has told the story. Where the spirit wakes and finds itself,—this none has ever declared to us ; nor shall we know until our own turn comes. Now in such a state of uncertainty, these texts speak for us a certain truth: The departed spirit is WITH CHRIST.

I shall regard this revelation nega-

tively and positively ; as to what it disproves, and as to what it implies.

First, then, it disproves the idea of the spirit passing at death into a state of unconsciousness, from which it is to wake only at the great day of the resurrection. If it is to be with Christ, this cannot be. Christ is in no such state of unconsciousness ; He has entered into His rest, and is waiting till all things shall be put under His feet ; and it would be a mere delusion to say of the blessed dead that they shall be with Christ, if they were to be virtually annihilated during this time that Christ is waiting for His kingdom. Besides, how then would the Lord's promise to the thief be fulfilled? What consolation would it have been to him, what answer to his prayer, to be remembered when Jesus came into His

kingdom, if these words implied that he should be unconsciously sleeping while the Lord was enjoying His triumph? Therefore we may safely say, that the so-called "sleep of the soul," from the act of death till the resurrection, has no foundation in that which is revealed to us.

It is perfectly true that the state of the departed is described to us as "sleeping in Jesus," or rather, for the words are a mis-rendering, a having fallen asleep *through*, or *by means of Jesus*. But our texts are enough to show us that we must not take such an expression for more than it really implies. Sleeping, or falling asleep, was a name current among Jews and Christians, and even among the best of the heathens, for death, implying its peace and rest, implying also that it

should be followed by a waking : but apparently with no intent to convey any idea of unconsciousness. It is a term used with reference to us, as well as to the dead. To us, they are as if they were asleep ; removed from us in consciousness, as in presence. The idea also of *taking rest* tended to make this term appropriate. But it must not be used to prove that to which it evidently had no reference.

The spirit, then, of the departed does not pass into unconsciousness. What more do we know of it? It is WITH JESUS.

We have now to consider what this implies. And in doing so we shall have further to make certain that which we think we have already proved. For first, it clearly implies more than a mere expression of safe-

keeping or reserve for a future state of blessedness. "The righteous souls are in the hand of God, and there shall no harm happen to them." This is one thing ; but to be with Christ is another. We might again appeal to the spirit of the promise made to the penitent thief in order to show this ; we might remind you that in the other text St. Paul is comparing the two states—life in the midst of his children in the faith, and death—and he says, "I have a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better," better than being with you, my Philippians.

So that more must be meant than mere safe-keeping in the Redeemer's hands. We may surely say that nothing less than conscious existence in the presence of Christ can be intended.



even short of that we have learned to prefer being simply unclothed from the body, because thus we shall be present with the Lord.

So that we may safely assume thus much, my brethren ; that the moment a Christian's spirit is released from the body, it does enter into the presence of our Blessed Lord and Saviour, in a way of which it knows nothing here ; a way which, compared to all that its previous faith could know of Him, is like presence of friends compared to absence.

Now let us take another remarkable passage of Holy Writ bearing on this same matter. St. John in his First Epistle says, " Beloved, now are we children of God, and it never yet was manifested what we shall be ; but if it should be manifested, we know that we

rate, we have gained this knowledge from St. John's words, that the sight of the Blessed Lord which will be enjoyed by the Christian's spirit on its release from the body, will be accompanied by being also perfectly like Him.

Now, here, my brethren, are the elements of an immediate change, blessed and joyous beyond our conception. Let us spend the rest of our time to-day in dwelling upon it.

And I will not now insist on the deliverance of the spirit from the infirmity, or pain or decay of the body ; because this is not so in all cases. Many a Christian's spirit is set free from a body in perfect vigour and health. Let us take nothing but what is common to all who believe in and serve the Lord. Now what is our

cessfully as we may contend with these misgivings of unbelief, yet that frame of mind which is represented by them, that wavering, fitful, unsteady faith, ever accompanies us. The distress arising from it is known to every one who has the Christian life in him. Only those never doubt who have never believed; for doubt is of the very essence of belief. But some poor souls are utterly cast down by the fact of its existence—shrink from these half-doubting fits as of themselves deadly sin, and are in continual terror about their soul's safety on this account: others, of stronger minds, regard them truly as inevitable accompaniments of present human weakness, but of course struggle with them, and evermore yearn to be rid of them.

Now, if what we have been saying

these have succeeded, because the departed spirit is "with the Lord"—companying with Him.

Before we follow out this farther, let us carefully draw one great distinction. We must not make the too common mistake of confusing this sight of the Lord which immediately follows on the act of death, with that complete state of the glorified Christian man, of which we shall have to speak in a subsequent sermon. Though greater than our thoughts can now conceive, the bliss of which we are speaking to-day is incomplete. The spirit which has been set free from the body is alone, and without a body. This is not the complete state of man. It is a state to us full of mystery—inconceivable in detail, though easily apprehended as a whole.


We must take care, in what we have further to say, that this is fully borne in mind. And, bearing it in mind, let us proceed.

This sight of Christ, this calm of full unbroken assurance of His nearness and presence, what does it further imply? As far as we can at present see, certainly as much as this. First, the entire absence of evil from the spirit. It would be impossible to be with Christ in any such sense, unless there were entire agreement in will and desire with Him. It would be impossible thus to see Him as He is, without being like Him.

Let us imagine, if we can, the effect of the total extinction of evil in any one of our minds. How many energies, now tied and bound with the chain of sin, would spring upward

into action ! How many imprisoned yearnings would burst their bonds, and carry us onward to higher degrees of good ! And all these energies, all these yearnings, can exist in the disembodied spirit. It is in a waiting, a hoping state : the greater the upward yearnings, the greater the accumulated energies for God and His work, the higher will be the measure of glory to be attained after the redemption of the body and the completion of the entire man.

Well—as another consequence, following close on the last, all *conflict*, from that same moment, is at an end. Conflict is ordained for us, is good for us, now. If it were to cease here below, we should fall back. We have not entered into rest, it would not be good for us to enter into rest, in our



ments. Time is only a relative term, even to us. A dream of years long may pass during the sound that awakens a man ; and a sleep of hours appears but a second. What do we know of time, except as calculated by earthly objects? Day and night, the recurrence of meals,—these constitute time to us : shut up a man in darkness, and administer his food at irregular intervals, and he loses all count of time whatever. Surely, then, no cavil on this score can be admitted. In that presence where the departed spirits are, one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

Let us conclude with a consideration, to a Christian the most glorious of all. The spirit that is with Christ in nearest presence and con-



the love that passes our knowledge ; contemplates things which God has prepared for them that love Him, such as eye has never seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive.

Therefore, beloved, let us be of good cheer concerning them that have fallen asleep through Jesus : and let us be of good cheer respecting ourselves. Good as it is to obey and serve God here, it has been far better for them to depart and to be with Christ ; and it will be far better for us, if we hold fast our faith and our confidence in Him firm unto the end. If to us to live is Christ, then to us to die will be gain.



inconceivably blissful, state. Of the precise nature of that state,—of its employments, if employments it has, we know nothing. All would be speculation if we were to speak of these matters.

Our concern to-day is with the termination of that their incomplete condition. When shall it come to an end? We have this very definitely answered for us by St. Paul, in a chapter of which we shall have much to say, and in a verse of that chapter which we will take for our text, 1 Cor. xv. 23. Notice, he is speaking of the resurrection of the dead: and he says, "But EVERY ONE IN HIS OWN ORDER: CHRIST THE FIRSTFRUITS: AFTERWARD THEY THAT ARE CHRIST'S AT HIS COMING."

Well then, from these words it is

then, that even if it were true, the interest of that time of His coming for every one of us is hardly lessened by its not being near us, seeing that if we be His, it will be, whenever it comes, the day of our resurrection from the dead. It is evidently the duty of every Christian man to make it part of his ordinary thoughts and anticipations—that return of the Lord Jesus from heaven, even as He was seen to go up into heaven. Now, our object to-day is to ascertain how much we know from Scripture, without indulging in speculations of our own, about this coming, and this resurrection which shall accompany it. The latter of these two we made the subject of a sermon a very few Sundays ago; but it was not so much with our present view, as to lay down the hope

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by a wrong method of reading these words. We very commonly hear them read, "will God bring *with Him.*" But thus we, as I said, lose the force of the argument, which is: If Jesus, our first-fruits, our representative, died and rose again, so will all who die in union with Jesus rise again. And in order to that, the same power of God which brings Jesus back to us, will with Him, with Jesus, bring their spirits back, in order to that resurrec-

*"This we say
of the Lord"—*

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to himself, or has any vivid expectation of, this personal coming of Christ. Think of the Christian Church as taking its faith and hope from the New Testament; and then compare that faith and hope, as it actually exists with reference to this point, with the New Testament,—and the discrepancy is most remarkable. In the days when it was written, eighteen hundred years ago, every eye was fixed on, every man's thought was busy about, the coming of the Lord. You will hardly find a chapter in the epistles in which it is not spoken of, or alluded to, with earnest anticipation and confidence. Whereas now, when it is brought so much nearer to us, it has almost vanished out of the consideration of the Church altogether. No doubt something may be said by

revelations of Scripture respecting the manner and details of His coming, and confuse them altogether in a vague popular idea of the judgment-day; none, why we should forget the mention of the landmarks which He Himself has pointed out along the wilderness journey of His Church,—and so, as far as in us lies, provide for her being unprepared when He appears.

The end of the state of waiting of the blessed dead, the end of our present state of waiting, will be that day of His appearing. Let us fix this well in our minds; and do not let us be kept from doing so by being told that there is danger in allowing the fancy to exercise itself on the unfulfilled prophecies. No doubt there is. But I am not exhorting you to exercise

your fancy on them. Faith and
are two wholly distinct things. To
my mind, there can be hardly any-
thing more detrimental to the faith of
the Church than always to be fitting
together history and prophecy, mag-
nifying insignificant present or past
events into fulfilments of prophetic
announcements. They who do this
are for ever being refuted by the
course of things; and then they shift
their ground, and come out as con-
fidently with a new scheme, as they
did with their old one. Nothing can
more tend to throw discredit on God's
prophetic word altogether; and it is
no doubt in part owing to such specu-
lations that faith in the Lord's coming
has become weakened among us. He
Himself has told us the great use of
His announcements of the future.

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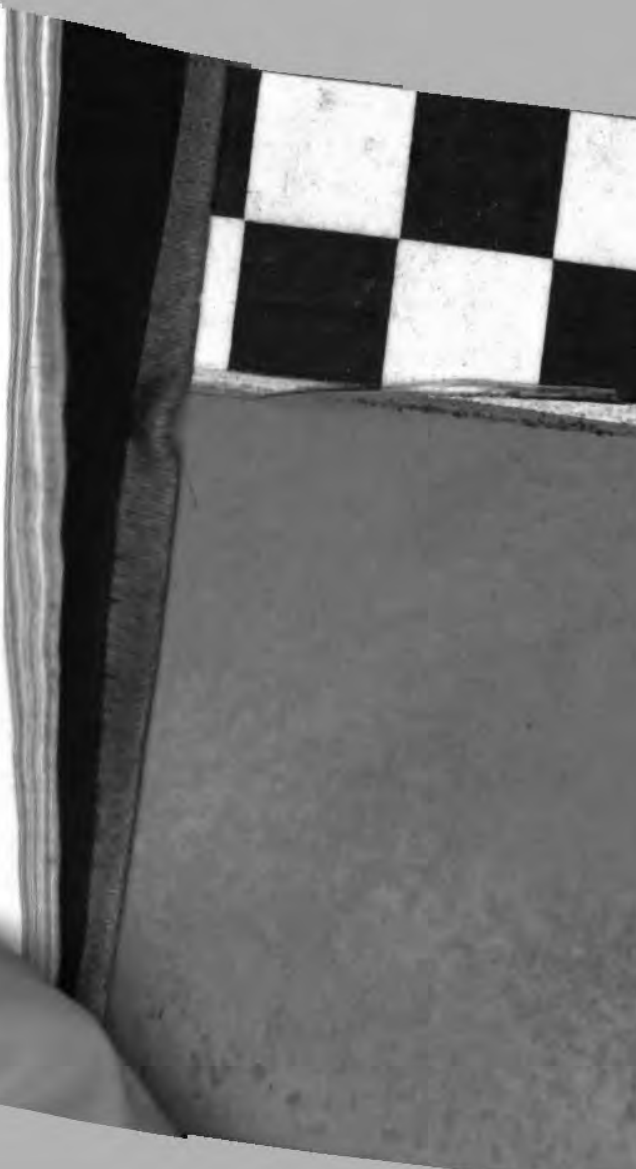
“ These things have I told you, that, when the time is come, ye may remember that I told you of them.” When and as each prophecy comes to its time to be fulfilled, just as the years of the Captivity predicted by Jeremiah were interpreted by the Church in Babylon, so the Lord's predictions, and the predictions of His apostles, will fall each into its place ; and the Church, if she endure in faith and watchfulness, will stand on her lookout, and be prepared for the sign of His coming.

Let us, my brethren, with regard to those who have left us in the Lord, let us, with regard to ourselves and our own future, be ever looking for and hasting to that day of God ; the day when that better thing which God hath provided for us shall be

The Blessing

manifested, and they with us
complete, who without us were not
perfect.

And let us not be discouraged by unpromising signs, or by prevalent unbelief. Remember what our Master has said to us in the services of this day, "Heaven and earth shall pass away; but My words shall not pass away."



III.

WE have traced the condition of the blessed dead, from their departure and being with Christ, to the glorious day of the resurrection. Their spirits are safe in His keeping, till that day when He shall call their bodies out of the graves and they shall be once more complete in manhood, body, soul, and spirit. And our present consideration is, What, in that resurrection, is the next thing that shall befall them? Now the best, because the most general, text on this matter, is that in Heb. ix. 27, "IT IS APPOINTED UNTO MEN

Nor does it exist here only. Our Lord Himself has given us one great description of the final day of judgment in His own discourses ; and another by the pen of His beloved apostle. We will take the latter first, as being, for our present purpose, the fuller of the two : and we will show in what remarkable point the two agree. In Rev. xx. 4, a message to which we made reference last Sunday, we find the first resurrection taking place, and the faithful dead rising to reign with Christ during a period known as a thousand years. And it is expressly said, "*The rest of the dead lived not till the thousand years were finished.*" Now, I am not here taking upon me to explain the meaning of this, but merely to insist on the fact that, whatever may be the precise import, it is so

stated. Well, and what
the thousand years are expired, and
when the last great victory of the
cause of God over evil has been gained,
then we read, "*And I saw a great
white throne, and Him that sat on it;
and I saw the dead, small and great,
stand before God; and the books were
opened: and another book was opened,
which is the book of life; and the dead
were judged out of those things which
were written in the books, according to
their works. And the sea gave up the
dead that were in it; and death and
Hades gave up the dead that were in
them: and they were judged every
man according to his works.*" So far
the description in the Revelation.
Now, in that given us by our Lord in
Matt. xxv. we find the Son of man
coming in His glory, and all the holy

angels with Him, and sitting on the throne of His glory, and all the nations gathered before Him. But there is this singular coincidence with the other account, that when the King comes to address those on the right hand and those on the left, He says, "*Inasmuch as ye did it (or did it not) unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye did it (or did it not) unto Me.*" Now "*these My brethren*" cannot of course mean the angels; therefore there must be some with Christ to whom the words must refer. In other words, we have here also the risen saints in glory with the Lord, as in that other account.

But we may go even further yet, and may discover more from Scripture respecting the position and employment of these the saints who are with

die, but after that the judgment ; if it be true that we all, including even the apostles themselves, shall be manifested, laid open, before the judgment-seat of Christ, how can it be also true that the believer in Christ has already passed from death into life, and therefore cometh not into judgment at all? How can it be true that while others shall rise to a resurrection of judgment, he shall rise to a resurrection of life? How can those descriptions be correct which we have been quoting, of these living and reigning with Christ long before the general judgment, and even taking part in it with Him?

I believe the answer is not difficult, and perhaps may best be found by remembering another variety of expression in Scripture respecting a kindred matter ; I mean the way in which

the saints of God are spoken of in relation to death itself. On the one hand, we know that it is appointed unto all men to die ; and that the faith and service of the Lord bring with them no exemption from the common lot of all mankind. Not only is this proved every day before our eyes, but Scripture gives us its most direct testimony that those who believe in Christ must expect it. The very expressions, "*the dead in Christ,*" "*those who through Jesus have fallen asleep,*" show that this is so. Yet again, on the other hand, some passages would almost look as if death itself for the Christian man did not exist. Christ is said to have abolished death ; we learn from His own lips that "if a man keep His word he shall never taste of death ;" He has said again, "He

held up for our adoption and guidance in Scripture. And that this is so held up, who that knows his Bible can for a moment doubt? Think of that saying of our Lord about the cup of cold water just quoted, think of the series of sayings of which it is the end, "*He that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man, shall receive a righteous man's reward,*" etc. Think, again, of that series of commands, to do our alms, our prayers, our abstinences, in secret, each ending with, "*and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.*" Think, again, of the parable of the labourers in the vineyard, where the great final blessing at the hand of the Lord is throughout represented to us as reward, or rather—for so the word used properly means—wages for

work done. And it is in vain in this case to try to escape from the cogency of our Lord's sayings by alleging that the doctrines of the Cross were not manifested till after His death and glorification. For if this were so, then the apostles themselves had never learned those doctrines. For the apostles constantly and persistently set before us the aiming at the Christian reward as their own motive, and as that which ought to be ours. Hear St. Paul saying that, if he preached the gospel as matter of duty only, it was the stewardship committed to him ; but if freely and without pay, a reward, or wages, would be due to him. Hear him again, in expectation of his departure, glorying in the certainty of his reward: "*I have fought a good fight, I have finished my*

course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but to all them also that love His appearing."

Listen to St. John, whom we are accustomed to regard as the most lofty and heavenly of all the apostles in his thoughts and motives. What does he say to his well-beloved Gaius?

"Look to yourselves, that we lose not the things which we have wrought, but that we receive the full reward."

Listen, again, to the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, that apostolic man, eloquent and mighty in the Scriptures, and hear him describing the very qualities and attributes of faith, that he who cometh to God must *believe that He is, and that He*

is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him, and saying of one of the first and brightest examples of faith, that he had respect unto the recompense of reward.

So, then, these holy dead who have died in the Lord will in that judgment have each his reward allotted him according to his service and according to his measure. Then the good that has been done in secret will all come to light. All mere profession, all that has been artificial and put on, will drop off as though it had never been ; and the real kernel of the character, the fair dealing and charity and love of the inner soul, will be made manifest before men and angels. Then, not even the least work done for God and for good will be forgotten.

How such an estimate of all holy

men will be or can be made and published, utterly surpasses our present powers to imagine. We have no faculties now whereby to deal thus truly and fairly with all men: our organs of sense in this present state, and the minds themselves to which those organs convey impressions, are too feeble and limited for the effort required to apprehend all respecting all, as we shall then apprehend it. But this need not form any difficulty in our way to believe that such a thing shall be. The power to understand it and the power to receive it surely do not dwell farther off from our matured powers now, than the full powers of a grown-up man from the faculties and conceptions of a child. In all such matters we are children now. Think we then of the

blessed dead at that resurrection, as rising sure of bliss and of their perfection in Him to whom they were united; being as though there were no judgment, seeing that they have One who shall answer for them at the tribunal; judged notwithstanding before the bar of God, and passing not to condemnation, but to their exceeding great and eternal reward.

One more thing only now is left us: to ask what we know of that last and perfected state of man—that highest development and dignity of our race, when body, soul, and spirit, freed from sin and sorrow, shall reign with Christ in light.

With that question, and its answer, we hope to conclude this course of sermons next Sunday.

that has been revealed of that glorious state, included in one simple description. The bliss of the moment after death consisted in being with Christ : the bliss of unlimited ages can only be measured by the same. Nearness to Him that made us, union with Him who redeemed us, the everlasting and unvexed company of Him who sanctifieth us ; what glory, what dignity, what happiness can be imagined for man greater than this ?

And yet it is not by dwelling upon this, and this alone, that we shall be able to arrive at even that appreciation of heaven which is within our present powers. We may take these words, "for ever with the Lord," and we may find in them, as in our Father's house itself, many mansions. In various ways we are far from the

soberly what is revealed to us about the blessed dead. Well then, again, what do we know of this body of the resurrection? In Phil. iii. 21, there is a revelation on this point. It is there said that "our home is in heaven, from whence also we expect the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change the body of our degradation that we may be fashioned like unto the body of His glory." And this change is very much dwelt on as a necessary condition of the heavenly state, in 1 Cor. xv. "*Flesh and blood,*" we are told, *i.e.*, this present natural or psychical body, the body whose informing tenant is the animal soul, *cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither can corruption, that which decays and passes away, inherit incorruption, that state where*

the mind of man could not even imagine. This last also seems to be implied by its being called a spiritual body. As here it was an animal body, subject to the mere animal life or soul, hemmed in by the conditions of that animal life, so there it will be under the dominion of, and suited to the wants of, man's spirit, the lofty and heavenly part of him.

And if we want to know what this implies, our best guide will be to contemplate the risen body of our Lord, as we have it presented to us in the gospel narrative. As He is, so are we in this world in our essence even now; and as He is so shall we be entirely there. He is the first-fruits, we follow after as the harvest. What, then, was His resurrection body? While it was a real body, and ad-

mitted of being touched and seen, and had the organs of voice and hearing, yet it was not subjected to the usual conditions of matter as to its locomotion, or its obstruction by intervening objects. It retained the marks of what had happened before death. In order to convince the disciples of His identity, our Lord ate and drank before them. We must therefore infer that these were natural acts of His resurrection body, and not merely assumed at pleasure.

With a body, then, of this kind will the blessed be clothed upon at the resurrection, and remain invested for ever in glory. Now let us see what further flows from this as an inference. We may further say, that we have implied in it a surrounding of external circumstances fitted to such

glory, thus perfected, what shall be the employ? For I need hardly press it on you that it is impossible to conceive of man in a high and happy estate, without an employment worthy of that estate, and in fact constituting its dignity and happiness.

Now, some light is thrown on this inquiry by Holy Scripture, but it must be confessed that it is very scanty. It is true that all our meditations on and descriptions of heaven want balance, and are, so to speak, pictures ill composed. We first build up our glorified human nature by such hints as are furnished us in Scripture: we place it in an abode worthy of it: and then, after all, we give it an unending existence with nothing to do. It was not ill said by a great preacher, that most people's idea of heaven was

never came within sight of this our mortal eye at all. These are only hints, it is true, which we have no power of following out : but they may serve for finger-posts to point to whole realms of possible blessed employment.

Then, again, there is more in the words "for ever with the Lord" than even this. Who can tell what past works, not of creation only, but of grace also, the blessed may have to search into—works wrought on themselves and others which may then be brought back to them by memory entirely restored, and then first studied with any power to comprehend or to be thankful for them?

Then, again, the glory of God Himself, then first revealed to them, —the redeeming love of Christ,—

