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~ Sermons ~

IMMORTALITY.

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Because I live ye shall live also.—JOHN xiv., 19.

LIFE, death, eternity—how vast, how deep, how solemn these three words, so familiar to us all! Who can measure, who can fathom their meaning? In the midst of life we are surrounded by death and confronted by eternity with its boundless prospects of weal and woe. Life on earth ends in death, and death is but the dark door to another life which has no end. Astronomy cannot tell whether this visible universe has boundaries or not, and what lies beyond. Theology cannot determine the locality of that invisible universe from which no traveller returns, nor the direction and length of that lonely passage which carries the disembodied spirit from its present to its future abode. But this we do know—and it is enough for our comfort—that in our Father's house are many mansions, and that our Saviour has prepared a place for all His disciples. There is an abundance of room for all even within the limits of this universe, and for aught we know, the spirit world may be very near and round about us. There are exalted moments in our life when we see the heavens open and the angels of God descending and ascending. Life is a mystery, a glorious mystery with a heaven beyond, but a terrible mystery with annihilation or endless punishment in prospect.

The immortality of the soul is a universal instinct and desire of the

A CONSECRATED CHURCH.

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There is a picture in all the synoptists of which Raphael caught the true plan and spirit, and gave an abiding copy in his last great work, "The Transfiguration." In it two other worlds than ours touch. From above ransomed spirits come to the man Christ Jesus and the disciples. From below tormenting demons, mysteriously permitted to enter by the doors of natural disease, afflict the children of men. Satan shall not be able to plead that he was taken unawares, and had no opportunity to muster his forces, as the reason for his kingdom and works being destroyed. The Saviour comes from the mount, where Moses and Elias afforded him congenial companionship, to the plain below to a spectacle that wrings from His human heart the exclamation, "How long shall I be with you? How long shall I suffer you?"

But that spectacle is all too often reproduced on earth. These five elements entered into it: An absent Lord; application for relief from terrible evil; a weak body of disciples; a cavilling group of scribes; and a fickle and excitable crowd, largely influenced by mere curiosity. Here we have, even to-day, the counterpart. "Jesus is gone above the skies." Dreadful sin and misery afflict men. Intemperance, iniquity, murder of purity and life, too general indifference to the best things—these cry out, and harass and torture their victims. The Church seems unequal to the task of dealing with them. The sophists, and the whole tribe of cavillers, point to the inability and dispute with the disciples. And a great crowd, moved by little deeper feeling than that with which a pedestrian contest or a rowing match is eagerly followed, is treated as judge and arbiter. One longs for a repetition of the original episode, when the Master came to the scene somewhat as a general appears to inspire confidence in a wavering wing of his army

on the battle-field. Indeed, the longing for the "premillennial advent" is a natural outcome of human feeling, and it is not wonderful that it has given color to the interpretation of many passages of the Divine Word, "What question ye with them?" said the divine and authoritative Teacher. "Here am I. Now deal with me. I shall meet your objections." But they had nothing to say. It was left to the father of the miserable boy to break the silence and renew the application for relief.

Perhaps disciples now would do well to catch the spirit of the question, and say to the scribes of our time, "We are weak disciples; we did not originate this plan of redemption. It is not our workmanship. What is the use of disputing with us, with standards of your own and the public for a jury? We only carry the Master's message. Settle the dispute with Him. Go to Him in His Word, at His throne of grace, as you must go to His throne of judgment. He can answer you." In other words, it is worth considering if the Church should not argue less, and work, pray and testify more. She did not invent the message; may be as little able to defend it as the telegraph operator to defend the message he conveys, and for the correct transmission of which alone he is answerable, and should not, perhaps, feel the obligation to do it at the bar of secularists. She can deliver it in the spirit it implies, and wait for the time when the Master will interpose with His silencing word, "What question ye *with them?*" It will not be the first time for His Church's foes to be speechless.

When alone with Him we may well say, with these disciples of old, in relation to the devil and his multitudinous forms of tottering human victims, "Why could not we cast him out?" There had been but lately in their hands the power

—received, of course, from Christ—to do this. “Lord, even the demons are subject unto us,” they had truly said; and no wonder, for He said to them, “Cast out devils.” How is it that they are impotent now? Well, we can see something of their condition, throwing light on the point. He had told them of the coming atoning death. They had looked for a triumphant secular advance. They were bent on that—so bent on it that they could not take in the spiritual view of the enterprise to which they were committed. They dreamed of thrones, powers, banished Romans, and re-established Davidic conquests and glory. They would not awake to facts, even though Christ declared them—the fact of His absence, their being alone, their power being that of the Spirit sent from Him. And now the Master is absent. So are the strongest characters among their own band—Peter, James and John. They are not under the power of the world to come, and so, when they are confronted with this mystery of evil, they cannot do as they had once done, and cast him out. So much we can ourselves surmise.

But hear Christ's reply to their question. “This kind”—not surely meaning this kind of evil and dumb spirit, nor probably even this kind of spirits generally, but “this aggravated, long-seated, malignant form of evil, goeth not out but by prayer.” It will be noticed that “and fasting” is left out in the revised New Testament, as is the entire verse in Matthew (xvii: 21), while Luke is silent on the subject. Indeed, our Lord has, neither by precept nor example, given any distinct countenance to regulated or periodical fasting. The New Testament enjoins nothing on the subject, and the

Old far less than is loosely supposed. But even if “and fasting” had been uttered by the Lord, the meaning could only have been that these forms of evil can only be grappled with by a Church, by disciples thoroughly in sympathy with the Head, accepting His teaching, living by His Spirit, and consciously working in the power of an invisible but ever-present Captain for spiritual ends. “Prayer is the Christian's vital breath.” If the breathing is bad and the atmosphere is tainted the Christian is feeble. So is the Church. Let there be little prayer, and let there be breathed an atmosphere of secular ambition, worldly success, or the wisdom of this world, and there will be impotence. The Church will fail to deal with the problems evil thrusts into the world, and the scribes, who are mighty in “law” and ill-disposed to Christ, and even to a personal God, will be apt to scoff at the humiliating helplessness.

What, then, are we to do? Accept the situation. We have no such splendid success before us as we dream of. We shall never get the world, *as the world*, to be subject to Christ. Its shows, theatres, “poms, and vanities” we can never consecrate. It only remains to do in actual life what one branch of the Church does in the infant by proxy—namely, renounce them. The world is not to be reformed and elevated into holiness. It has to be converted. If we would be able to cast Satan out of it we must live in that close fellowship with God, that healthy spirituality, that utter reliance on the power of the Spirit, which always honors God, and which he always employs and honors.

TRAINING IN TEXTUAL CRITICISM.

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There is no study of vital importance to the pastor in which his training is likely to be so defective as in that of New Testament textual criticism. Of course there is an increasing knowledge of the facts, and also a more sensible and

honest appreciation of their bearing upon the great questions respecting the purity and integrity of the New Testament records. But information is not training; knowledge does necessarily create skill; curiously reading about the great