

*D. Begin,*

*With the Compliments of the Author.*

A SERMON

Preached in St. John's Church, Cornwall,

ON THE OCCASION OF THE LAMENTED

DEATH

OF THE LATE MINISTER OF THAT CHURCH,

THE REV. HUGH URQUHART, D.D.,

BY

THE REV. NEIL MACNISH, M.A., B.D.

*Minister of St. John's Church.*

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*Published by request.*

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*If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept.—I COR. xv: 19-20.*

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PERHAPS the greatness of the Apostle of the Gentiles shines nowhere to better advantage than in the chapter from which our text is taken. The reasoning which he here employs is masterly, is irresistible. A rare comprehensiveness is breathed in every sentence. There exists no nobler, more convincing argument in support of the resurrection from the dead. Even the casual reader may perceive, that it is no ordinary man who handles a subject so sublime, in a manner telling, calm, exhaustive. It will not be without advantage to ascertain from the sayings of Paul himself wherein the essence of his preaching consisted. As standing on Mars' hill, in full view of Athenian splendour and Athenian art, Paul mentioned the fact that God had raised Jesus from the dead, we are told that when the men of Athens heard of the resurrection of the dead, "some mocked, and others said, we will hear thee again of this matter." On another important occasion, the fearless admission of the apostle was, "I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question." In his defence before Agrippa and Festus, Paul used this clear language, "why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead? Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which

the prophets and Moses did say should come; that Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles." Among the Corinthian converts erroneous views were circulated regarding the resurrection from the dead. With fanciful sophistry, some maintained that this doctrine merely implied a renovation of nature, a change of life, a reformation of character. It was sought by artful means to explain the truth away, "that Christ is risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept." With that zeal and faithfulness for which he is so celebrated, Paul in the opening verses of the chapter of which our text forms a part, arranges the evidence whereby the resurrection of Christ from the dead is substantiated. After enumerating the occasions on which, and the persons by whom, Jesus was seen after His resurrection, the apostle makes a noble reference to his own case. After adverting to evidence so strong and varied, Paul with peculiar appropriateness asks the question, "Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?" The apostle then dwells with painful sadness on the fearful consequences to which a disbelief of the doctrine in question would inevitably tend. Were this the case, were it established beyond a doubt that there is no resurrection of the dead, there could be no difficulty in perceiving and acknowledging that Christ was not risen, that the preaching of the apostles was groundless and the faith of the Corinthians without foundation. Nay more, the monstrous allegation could not be avoided, that the apostles themselves were false witnesses, incurring dangers and braving persecutions in propagating what they could not but know to be an erroneous doctrine. Further, the hopes entertained by many regarding the dead who died in the Lord, would thus be overthrown, would thus be blasted. Woeful to the Cor-

inthians, woeful to the apostle himself, woeful to Christians of every age would the consequences be, if the doctrine of the resurrection from the dead could be invalidated. By having regard to the consequences to which the apostle so clearly adverts, the truth will readily flash across our minds that if the resurrection from the dead were denied or could be overthrown, no other conclusion could be drawn than that which these words present to us, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." For why should he, the nobly energetic apostle, in common with others lead a life of ceaseless anxiety, endure privations, sufferings, persecutions? Why should he, in those homes of classic elegance and refinement, endeavour to do violence to opinions and prejudices that had on their side the accumulated voices of centuries? Why, like other men, should not the apostles enjoy the ease and luxury of life's little day, careless of the future, regardless of the mysterious occurrences that lie beyond the confines of the grave? It is impossible to resist the force of an argument so masterly, so convincing, so lucid. Did the matter rest here, were the apostle's hope in Christ confined to the horizon of the present, how could the conclusion be withstood, "that of all men they were most miserable?" The words fall upon our ears with a brightened beauty and a cheering melody, as the apostle, after presenting the case in all its bearings, with pardonable triumph and joy exclaims, "but now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept."

In the olden time, the Jews with gladness of feeling presented the first sheaf, the harbinger of the coming harvest, the sure indication that the waving corn would soon be ripe. The analogy here presented is true, is beautiful. As the Jewish husbandman was directed to make choice of a sheaf as an indication of the coming harvest, so may the glorious truth be affirmed in reference to Christ, that, inasmuch as He is

risen from the dead, His resurrection is a guarantee strong, comforting, that those who have fallen asleep in Him, have not perished, but will rise again. "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."

By directing our attention to the information we may gather from external nature as to the resurrection from the dead, we shall perceive how largely, how entirely we are indebted to revelation for this assurance, for this glorious hope. In beautiful succession the seasons of the year perform their allotted task and pass away. The calmness and cheering suns of summer fade gradually, yet perceptibly, before the march of autumn. Autumn's yellow leaves are scattered on the ground by the blasts which are the harbingers of winter. While the cold of winter lasts, nature is enjoying a temporary repose, until the revolving months bring round an increase of heat and sunshine. Spring unlocks the icy fetters of winter, and the labours of the year are begun anew. Soon the fields resume their grassy covering, and the industry of man is loud and busy as before. The promise of the God of heaven and earth, uttered in a distant past, knows no alteration; "while the earth remaineth, seed time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease." The case is otherwise with the dwellers in the narrow house. Silence, unbroken and undisturbed, characterizes the spot where the mortal remains of some once venerable form have been laid. Be it husband, wife or friend, whom sorrowing relatives carry to the tomb; be it the aged general or the matchless statesman, whom countless voices deplore; be it the faithful ruler or the affectionate, zealous servant of God; in all cases it happens that nature, seemingly impassible and unimpressible, shows no emotion, maintains the same stern, sullen, stolid indifference. To hearts sorely saddened because some valued friend has passed away, no comfort comes from nature, no solace is written on her

countenance. Whether the condition of one's home be prosperous or adverse, joyous or cheerless, on nature's brow the same unsympathetic feeling is written ; from nature's voice no assuring whisper comes. Not least among the many things for which our truest gratitude should ascend to the God of heaven and earth, is the assurance that " Jesus Christ is the resurrection and the life, that He is risen from the dead and become the first fruits of them that slept, that the dead who die in the Lord are blessed." Like the pole-star in the midnight gloom to which the storm-tossed mariner may always direct his anxious gaze, and ascertain whither his shattered barque is drifting ; so sorrowing friends may gather from the declarations made by Jesus and His Apostles, hope, encouragement regarding one beloved, revered, whose earthly life is ebbing fast away. Not inaptly has this sentiment been paraphrased :

" Take comfort, Christians, when your friends  
In Jesus fall asleep ;  
Their better being never ends ;  
Why then dejected weep ?

" Why inconsolable, as those  
To whom no hope is given ?  
Death is the messenger of peace,  
And calls the soul to heaven.

" As Jesus died, and rose again  
Victorious o'er the dead ;  
So His disciples rise, and reign  
With their triumphant head."

It seemed necessary to say so much in order to elucidate the apostle's reasoning, and to call attention to the certainty of the resurrection from the dead.

But to advert to the melancholy fact which is fresh in the memory of all who hear me,—I mean the removal from time into eternity of that venerable man, who, for almost half a century, devoted his life and raised his prayers in behalf of

this congregation. A peculiar sacredness attaches to friendship. It is with peculiar pain that the emigrant casts a farewell look on the home of his youth and the graves of his fathers. A thrill of strong emotion is experienced by him as he shakes hands, in all likelihood for the last time, with the companions of his youth. When one by one, the associates of our earliest years pass away; when friendships, contracted and deepened on the village green and in the village school, are severed by the ruthless stroke of death, what man is there who does not feel a pang of sorrow running through his heart? Friendship, pure, real, cannot part with one faithful and true, without heaving a sigh and cherishing a strong regret. The beauty of some mountain-side is largely intensified by the gigantic oak which, rearing its head aloft and spreading its massive branches, has braved the furious onset of many a stormy blast. As it totters and finally falls, a crash is heard, a moan is raised, as if nature lamented the decay of the gigantic tree. When a once friendly voice is hushed, and a once brilliant eye is forever closed; when a once honest countenance shows no longer a look of love, and a once manly form has fallen, surviving hearts are pained, are weighed down by genuine sorrow; still, in view of all the consoling disclosures with which the word of God is replete; in view of the elevating, refining influence exerted by friendship on the feelings and affections; in view of the many enjoyments and endearments which genuine friendship carries with it, there is a beauty and truthfulness in the language of our sweetest modern poet:

" I hold it true, whate'er befall;  
 I feel it when I sorrow most;  
 'Tis better to have loved and lost,  
 Than never to have loved at all."

By the death of that venerable man whose mortal remains have been recently deposited in the narrow house, domestic

ties have been severed, friendships of long standing have been broken, the endearing relationship of minister and people has been terminated. Many there are in my hearing, who, in their earliest years received the blessing of the venerable man, and had with him almost a daily acquaintance. He has passed away! No more shall we gaze on that form with which we were so familiar: no more from this place will his voice be heard as before, counselling, instructing, warning; no more will his prayers ascend from this earth in behalf of his flock and friends. He has passed away, and throughout the length and breadth of our church in this country sorrow prevails, because the Rev. Dr. Urquhart of Cornwall has gone to his long home.

It will be impossible in the time at our disposal to do anything like justice to a life so long, so useful and so varied. We must be content with a rapid sketch of him who has so recently passed away. Born in Scotland, his youthful years were spent amid the romantic scenery for which that country is renowned. His success in life was largely owing to the fact, that he possessed many of those sterling qualities and much of that honest independence for which the occupants of his native land are celebrated. He was educated at one of the ancient Universities of his country. Gifted with talents of no common order, he, by assiduous application, gained a highly respectable position as a scholar of rare attainments, of refinement and elegance. Nearly half a century has rolled away since the venerable man, who is now no more, came to this country. If we send our thoughts back to that period, and endeavour to form some adequate idea of the condition of our still youthful country, it will readily appear that difficulties, embarrassments, anxieties were *theirs* to whom the early shaping and guiding of the National life was committed. Many were the avenues through which, at that time, a momentous, beneficial influence could be exerted on

the prosperity and excellence of coming generations. No one can hesitate to acknowledge that, in moulding the youthful existence of our country; in giving it a lively, healthful impulse, whether in a political, a religious or an educational point of view,—the greatest caution was needed; the truest, most patient thoughtfulness was of importance; a far-reaching wisdom was demanded. The energies of the venerable man who has just left us, were directed towards the educational interests of the country. For the first few years after his arrival in this country, he taught a private classical academy in Montreal, in connection with one for whose memory he ever cherished the truest affection.

Forty-four years have all but sunk into the past since he came to Cornwall, and undertook those labours which have gained for him a reputation that is great, and an affectionate remembrance that is very gratifying indeed. For some sixteen years of his residence in this town, he energetically strove to perform the duties of Minister and Teacher. While his attention was largely given to this congregation, he likewise honourably and successfully discharged the duties of Grammar School Teacher. Under his training many were reared who are now an ornament to the learned professions, and are in many ways exercising a useful influence in the community where they reside. It pleased him immensely in the evening of his days to find, that men whose character he was largely instrumental in forming, *were* and *are* successful in developing the resources of our country, in devising plans for increased prosperity as well as in carefully meeting those emergencies which must ever arise in a rapidly progressing country.

When this congregation attained that importance which rendered it expedient, if not necessary, that undivided attention should be given to it, its late Pastor saw the

propriety of discontinuing his connection with the Grammar School, and of devoting his aim and earnestness to the interests of his people. In that very year he ably and gracefully discharged the duties of Moderator of Synod. At that time questions of most momentous consequence were convulsing the Church of Scotland, and the tide of ecclesiastical warfare which flowed with a rare earnestness and bitterness in that country, found its way—unnecessarily it is true—across the Atlantic. When the combatants were few, and the religious interests of this country deserved the most delicate handling, it were to be expected that one who presided over the earliest efforts of our church in Canada, should come manfully and seriously to the front in order to meet the coming storm, and pilot the church of his affections through the dangers that gathered around her. The documents that convey to us—the men of another generation, the discussions that then prevailed, also inform us that our venerable friend acted a prominent part, and tendered his wisest counsel. In short—in managing the affairs of our church; in endeavouring to promote her welfare and extend her usefulness; in seeking to gain for her that respectable prominence to which, as the daughter of an illustrious and time-honoured mother, she is justly entitled; the venerable man whose loss we mourn, toiled faithfully, thought carefully, prayed earnestly. That his opinion was always correct; that his judgment was always the soundest and the best; that he was largely free from the frailties of human life, were an expectation too high, too unearthly, to be seriously entertained. No one would more readily make this acknowledgment than himself; nor could it be said regarding him that, whenever a wiser course or a better suggestion was brought before him, he showed any undue hesitation in accepting it.

That his friendship was true, abiding, pleasing, is well

known to those who enjoyed it. It is delicate, perhaps, to say much from this place in reference to his domestic relationship. The bounds of propriety, however, will not be transgressed by the assertion that, as husband and father, he invariably exhibited that affection, that happiness, that considerate attention, which goes far to adorn the Christian character, and place before us in pleasing beauty true gentlemanly bearing.

Through his long and useful life, he made himself familiar with the current phases of theological inquiry and scientific speculation. Until the arrival of that painful illness which laid him low, he retained the freshness of a youthful thinker, and the ardour of a student who is entering on his career. Increasing years, it is true, tend strongly to make impressions that are permanent, that are not easily changed. Rarely has it happened that a man, whose head was white with the snows of more than seventy winters, has preserved that liveliness of thought, that charity, that candour, that regard for truth, in whatever garb it might chance to be presented, that delicate sensibility, which our lamented friend possessed. He was liberal, he was kind, he was candid, he was modest in advancing his own opinions. Than he few possessed a higher idea of the dignity, the importance, the peculiar responsibilities of the Christian Minister. Long will those who were associated with him remember his affable manner, his dignified demeanour, his unswerving regard for the respect and reputation of the Servants of God.

It is almost needless to advert to the piety which ran through his life. Quiet and unobtrusive was his deportment; deep, solemn, affecting, was the manner in which he regarded the most precious consideration of human life. Than he no one more humbly lamented his shortcomings in the sight of God; than he no one more honestly and persistently disclaimed every thought of personal worth and godliness: his hopes

for time and for eternity rested on Him "who is the Way, the Truth and the Life."

I need only direct your attention to the large procession which followed his remains to the tomb, to produce the conviction that, as a gentleman, he never lost sight of the kindly consideration wherewith all men are to be treated. While firmly and conscientiously maintaining his own honest convictions, he never lost sight of the splendid truth, that worth wherever found is to be respected, and that the honest opinion of others is to be kindly and tenderly regarded. Through the glide of many years, he lived on terms of intimacy with those whose religious belief differed widely from his; still, in the mournful throng that followed his mortal remains to the grave, many there were of other denominations, whose hearts were sad because a good man had passed away, and the pleasing smiles of a long friendship had ceased to gladden as before.

The labours of the venerable man are ended: his earthly race is run. No more will his aged form be seen in this place that knew him so long and so well! no more will his presence impart solemnity and grace to the services of the sanctuary. He has gone, neither in the morning of his days nor in the infancy of his worth and usefulness; he has gone, neither in the noontide of his strength nor in the summer of his intellectual vigour; he has gone, neither in the spring of life when the seeds are scattered in the fields nor in the early autumn when the first sheaves are harvested; he has gone, neither when hoary locks first indicate old age nor when faltering footsteps tell of gradual decline; he has gone, the venerable man and minister, as he all but sighted four score years, full of honour, full of fame, full of joyous hopefulness. His sun went down, not in his youthful brilliancy, not in the meridian of his splendour, not in the early lessening of his rays: unclouded, mild, without a gloom or shadow, peaceful,

calm, collected, his sun went down beneath the earthly horizon, to brighten, let us fondly hope, with a more brilliant light in that land where joy and blissfulness for ever dwell. He passed from time into eternity, surrounded by loving relatives to whom his fondest affection was turned, and in whose welfare he ever took the liveliest interest. He passed away, breathing a blessing on his flock and uttering a fervent prayer to Almighty God for our prosperity and success. He has gone, the kind and venerable man, as we fondly hope, to join "the company of the redeemed;" to join "those who have come out of great tribulation and have washed their robes and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb;" to reside "in that city which hath no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of the Lord doth brighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof." *Amen.*