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Chapter X

THE RESURRECTION AND SIN.

"Concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was ... declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead." — Romans i. 3, 4.

Just as one of the great proofs, if not the great proof, of the truth of Christianity is the vast fact of the world's need for it, so one grand proof of the Resurrection lies in the fact that no interpretation of Christ's teaching or Christ's life would be worth a brass farthing — so far as the actual life of suffering man is concerned — without His Death and Resurrection. That teaching might be illuminating — convincing — exalting; yes, even morally perfect; and yet, if He did not die, it would be little more than a superior book of proverbs or a collection of highly-polished copy-book maxims. That life — that wonderful life — might be the supremest example of all that is or could be good and great and lovely in human experience; and yet, if He did not rise again from the tomb, it would, after all, be only a dead thing — like a splendid specimen of carved marble in some grand museum, exquisite to look upon, and of priceless value, but cold and cheerless, lifeless and dead.

For it is a Living Person men need to be their Friend and Saviour and Guide. The splendid statue might possibly invite or challenge us to imitate it, but it could never call a human heart to love its stony features. Noble and pure as Jesus Christ's example undoubtedly was, it could of itself never satisfy a human soul or inspire poor, broken, human hearts with hope and love, or wash away from human consciousness the stains of sin. These things can only be done by a Living Person. So it is that we are not told to believe on His teaching or on His Church, but on Him. He did not say "Follow My methods or My disciples," but "Follow Me." If He be not risen from the dead, and alive for evermore; if, in short, it be a dead man we are to follow and on whom we are to believe — then we are, indeed, as Paul says, "of all men the most miserable."

I.



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But it is the life of Jesus, and the evidence of that life, in us that are really all-important. No extent of worldly wisdom or historical testimony can finally establish for us the fact and power of Christ's Resurrection, unless we have proof in ourselves of His presence there as a Living Spirit. With St. Paul, we must "know Him, and the power of His resurrection." That is the grand knowledge. That is the crown of all knowledge. That is the knowledge which places those who have received it beyond the freaks and fancies of human wisdom or human folly. That is the knowledge which cleanses the heart, destroys the strength of evil, and brings in that true righteousness which is the power to do right. That is the greatest proof of the Resurrection.

No books, not even the Bible itself; no testimony, not even the testimony of those who were present on that first Easter Day, can be so good as this, the experimental proof. It is the most fitting and grateful, and adapts itself to every type of human experience. And it is beyond contradiction! What avail is it to contradict those who can answer, "Hereby we know that we dwell in Him, and He in us, because He hath given us of His Spirit"? It is even beyond argument! For of what advantage can it be to argue with a man that he is still blind, when he tells you that his eyes have been opened, and when he declares, Whereas I was blind, NOW I SEE"?

To us Salvationists, the hope of the world, and the strength of our hard and long struggle for the souls of men, centre in this glorious truth. He is risen, and is alive for evermore; and because He lives we live also! All around us are the valleys of death, filled with bones — very many and very dry. Love lies there, dead. Hope is dead. Faith is dead. Honour is dead. Truth is dead. Purity is dead. Liberty is dead. Humility is dead. Fidelity is dead. Decency is dead. It is the blight of humanity. Death-moral and spiritual death in all her hideous and ghastly power-reigns around us. Men are indeed dead — " dead in trespasses and sins." What do we need? What is the secret longing of our hearts? What is the crying agony of our prayers? Is it for any human thing we seek? No. God knows — a thousand times, no! We have but one hope or desire, and that is "life from the dead." We want life, the risen life — life more abundant — life Divine, amid these deep, dark noisome valleys of the dead.

Here, then, is our hope. He rose again, and ascended up on high, and received gifts for men. This is the hope which keeps us going on; this is the invisible spring from which our weary spirits



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draw the elixir of an invincible courage — Christ, the risen Christ, who has come to raise the dead! "You hath He quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins." Hallelujah!

"Dead in sins!" Jesus never made light of sin. He used no disguise when He talked of it, no equivocal terms, no softening words. There is no single suggestion in all His discourses or conversations that He thought it merely a disease, or a derangement, or a misfortune, or anything of that kind, or that He deemed it anything but a ruinous and deadly rebellion against God—the great disaster of the world, and the most awful, dangerous, and far-reaching precursor of suffering in the whole existence of the universe. He said it was bad, bad all through—in form, in expression, in purpose; above all, in spirit and desire. That there was no remedy for it but His remedy. No rains in all the heavens to wash it, no waters in all the seas to cleanse it away, no fires in Hell itself to purge its defilement. The only hope was in the blood of His sacrifice. And so He came to shed it, to save the people from their sins.

That is our hope. We are of those who see something of the fruits of sin, and to whom it is no matter for the chastened lights of the literary drawing-room. We know — some of us — how deep the roots of pollution can strike into human character by our own scorched and blistered histories; and we know by our observation into what depths of black defilement men can plunge. The charnel houses of iniquity must ever be the workshops of the Salvationist. There we see of the havoc, the cruelty, the debauchment, the paralysis, the leprosy, the infernal fascination of sin. And we know there is only one hope — the Lamb that was slain, and rose again from the dead, and ever liveth for our salvation.

II.

The only really satisfactory test of any faith, or system of faiths, lies in its treatment of sin. Human consciousness in all ages, and in all conditions of development, bears witness to the fact of sin with universal and overwhelming conviction. Men cannot prevent the discomfort of self-accusation which ever follows wrong-doing. They cannot escape from the bitter which always lies hidden in the sweet. They cannot forget the things they wish to forget. Even when they are a law unto themselves, they are compelled to judge themselves by that law. It is as though some



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unerring necessity is laid upon every individual of the race to sit in judgment upon his own conduct, and to pass sentence upon himself. He is compelled to speak to his own soul of things about which he would rather be silent, and to listen to that which he does not wish to hear.

The proof that this is so is open, manifest, and indisputable. Human experience in the simplest and widest sense of the word attests it. It stands unquestioned amid floods of questions on every other conceivable subject. No system of philosophy, no school of scientific thought, no revelation from the heavens above or the earth beneath can really weaken it. It is not found in books, or received by human contact, or influenced by human example. It is revealed in every man. It is felt by all men. They do not learn it, or deduce it, or believe it merely. They know it. All men do. You do. I do.

Many things contribute to this simple and yet supremely wonderful and awful fact of human experience. One of them is the faculty of thought. Man is made a thinking creature, and think he must; and if he thinks, he must, above all, think about himself, about his future, his present, his past. A great French writer — and not a Christian writer — says on this subject: "There is a spectacle grander than the ocean, and that is the conscience. After many conflicts, man yields to that mysterious power which says to him, 'Think,' One can no more prevent the mind from returning to an idea than the sea from returning to a shore. With the sailor this is called 'the tide.' With the guilty it is called 'remorse.' God, by a universal law, upheaves the soul as well as the ocean."

And side by side with this thinking faculty, there is the further fact, that God will not leave men alone. On those unerring and resistless 'tides He sends into the human soul His messages. He visits them. He arouses them. He compels their attention. In His providence, by acts of mercy and of judgment — by sorrow and loss — by stricken days and bitter nights, He makes them remember their sin. All the weapons in His armoury, and all the wisdom of His nature are employed to bring men to a sense of guilt-to prick them to the heart — in order to lead them to recognise and to confess and to turn away from sin. If, therefore, man by any invention had found out a way by which he could escape from the consciousness of evil without putting it away, God would not let him go.



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Clearly, then, the initial proof of success in religion must be that religion can deal satisfactorily with the conscious guilt of sin. To this high test, all theories, all pretences, all promises must come at last.

What are they in their actual effect on the memories and consciences of men in relation to their sin? How do they treat with guilt? How do they meet remorse? Can they silence the clamours of the night? Can they give peace when it is too late to undo what sin has done? Do they suffice amid the deepening shadows of the death chamber — the place where ever and anon the forgotten past comes forth to demand the satisfaction so long delayed?

But these, after all, are only the fruits — some of the fruits of sin. What of the thing itself? That is the sternest test of all. The mere condemnation of sin, no matter how fully it harmonises with our sense of what ought to be, does not satisfy man. The excusing of sin is no better; it leaves the sinner who loves his sin, a sinner who loves it still. If excuses could silence conscience, or set free from the bondage of hate or passion, how many of the slaves of both would soon be at liberty!

The re-naming of evil which has often been attempted during the last two or three thousand years, and again in quite recent days, has little or no effect either upon its nature or upon those who are under its mastery. The new label does not change the poison. Its victim is a victim still. Nor does the punishment of sin entirely dispose of it, either in the sufferer, or in the consciousness of the onlooker. No doubt the discovery and punishment of sin do give men a certain degree of satisfaction, but at best it is only a relief, when what they need, and what they see their fellows need, is a remedy. Sending a fever patient to hospital is a poor expedient unless we cure the disease. Sending a thief to prison is a poor affair if he remains a thief. It is not in reality a victory over thieving; it is, in fact, a defeat.

Yes — it is a cure we need. And we know it. A cure which is not merely a remedy for the grosser forms which evil takes in men's lives, and their terrible consequences, but a cure of the hidden and secret humours from which they spring. The deceitfulness of the human heart. The thoughts



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and intents which colour all men do. The lusts and desires, the loves and hates from which conduct springs. The selfishness and rebellion which drive men on to the rocks.

The real question for us then is, Can our religion — does our religion, when tried by the test of human experience — afford any remedy for these? Unless it does, man can no more be satisfied or be set free by condemnations, or excusings, or re-christenings, or punishments of sin, than the slave can be contented with discussions about his owner's mistakes or emancipated by new contrivances for painting his chains!

III.

But what is this sin, the consciousness of which is thus forced upon all — this determined, persistent, active evil? It is not the mere absence of good—a negative gain—but it is the love of, and the actual striving after that which is flatly condemned by God, and is in open rebellion against Him. The centring of the corrupt heart upon its own corruption. Opposition to the pure will of God. Pride, falseness, unscrupulous ambition. Self-seeking, regardless of the means by which its object is obtained. Luxury, effeminacy, and sensuality. The lusts and fleshly passions. Malice, cruelty, and envy. The greed of gain. The love and thralldom of the world. There it is — the running sore of a suffering race. The outflow of the carnal mind, which is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. There is no getting away from it. "Against this immovable barrier — the existence of sin— the waves of philosophy have dashed themselves unceasingly since the birth of human thought, and have retired broken and powerless, without displacing the minutest fragment of the stubborn rock, without softening one feature of its dark, rugged surface."

And the worst of all is that sin is a wrong against God. Man sins, of course, against himself. That is written large on human affairs, so that no fool, however great a fool, may miss it. Well may the prophet say, "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself!" Men mix the hemlock for themselves! The sinner is a moral suicide!



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Man sins against his fellow. Nothing is more evident to us than that men tempt and corrupt one another. They hold one another back from righteousness. They break down virtue, and extinguish faith, and silence conscience in their neighbours. They act as decoys and trappers for each other's souls. They play the Devil's cat's paws, and procure for him the ruin of their fellows, which could not be compassed without their aid. In short, the sinner is a moral murderer!

But, after all — and it is a hideous all — the crowning wrong, and the crowning misery, is that sin is sin against God.

Unless the Bible be a myth, and the prophets a disagreeable fraud, and the whole lesson of Jesus Christ's life and death an illusion, God is deeply concerned with man. That concern extends to man's whole nature, his whole existence, his whole environment; and most of all it is manifest with regard to his sin. God puts Himself forward in the whole history of His dealings with men as an intimate, responsible, and observing Party in the presence of wrong-doing. He watches. He sees. He knows. He will consider. He will remember or He will forget. He will in no wise acquit the guilty, or He will pardon. Justice and vengeance are His, and so is forgiveness. He will weigh in the balances. He will testify against the evil-doer, or He will make an atonement for him. He will cut off and destroy, or He will have mercy. He will repay, or He will blot out.

From beginning to end of Revelation and there is something in the human soul which strangely responds to Revelation in this matter — we have a sense, a spiritual instinct, of the truth which Job set forth, "If I sin, then Thou markest me, and Thou wilt not acquit me from mine iniquity," which is confirmed by Jeremiah, "Though thou wash thee with nitre and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before Me, saith the Lord God;" and which is insisted upon by the Apostle when he writes, "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."

Yes, it is against the Lord God men have sinned, and to Him they are accountable. And they know it. Here again is something which does not come by observation or instruction, but by an inward sense which can neither be mistaken nor long denied. Sooner or later, men are compelled



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to acknowledge God, and to acknowledge that they have sinned against Him. As with David, when he cried out, "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight" — so to every man comes at last the awakening. We see, as David saw, that whomsoever else we have wronged, God is most wronged; whomsoever else we may have injured, the great evil is that we have broken His law and violated *His will*.

In the light of that experience, sin becomes instantly a terrible and bitter thing. The fact that sinners can win the approval of men, the honour of success; that they can hide iniquity; that they can for a time escape from punishment, makes no difference when God appears upon the scene. Evil starts up for judgment. Memory marshals the ranks of transgression. Retribution seems the only right thing to look for. Punishment appears to be so deserved that nothing else can be possible. In their own eyes they are guilty. Guilt is branded upon them.

It is from this realisation of having offended God that there spring the dark forebodings of punishment. Men may dread it, and be willing to make superhuman sacrifices to escape it, but they expect it all the same. Thus in all ages men have cried out less for pardon and release from penalty than for deliverance from the guilt and domination of evil. Their language by a universal instinct has been like David's: "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions and my sin is ever before me. Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned."