

## FOR THE DEAD.

There are some passages of Holy Writ found both in the Old and New Testament, upon which our modern, learned, pious expositors do not like to touch. They seem to feel delicate about it. You may peruse their copious commentaries, their sermons, and their theological magazines; you may run all the year round from church to church, from meeting to meeting, and yet never be able to derive any knowledge concerning certain passages in Scripture, seemingly plain enough, and yet in the present state of theological development, shrouded in dark mystery.

And when, finally, you become tired of your fruitless search at random, you form a bold resolution. You conclude to do what, possibly, you ought to have done first—you take your bible and go to the Rev. So-and-so the celebrated scholar, the great orator, the conscientious shepherd of the flock, and you ask him for mercy's sake to tell you what this or that particular passage really means. Quite so.

Did you ever try this? If not, do, and if your text is a very difficult one, you will be surprised to learn that the man really does not know; that, in fact, he is as uninformed upon the subject as you are.

Not that he would be likely to say so himself. He would not be honest enough, I fear, to commit himself to that extent. Nor would he, according to the saying of Solomon, try to appear wise by observing silence. On the contrary, he would probably have a great deal to say. He would talk to you about faith in Christ, the blessedness of heaven, the atonement, and such other subjects on which you had not questioned him at all. He would intersperse his fine speeches with quotations from Augustine, perhaps, or from Luther, or Calvin, or Knox, or anybody, and at last wind up by the remark that there were some things written, which God did never intend us to know anything about. For theologians now-a-days actually tell us that what is necessary for salvation is clear enough. About the rest we must not bother ourselves. As if God did not mean that we should be instructed by all He has written, but that He wrote certain unintelligible passages merely to show us our ignorance and His superior wisdom.

The argument of St. Paul (1 Cor., xv, 29) is one of the passages in which our theologians are at a loss to find any sense, and for which they can find no practical application. The apostle, in proving the doctrine of the resurrection, says:

"Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? Why are they then baptized for the dead?"

For the dead? That is the difficulty. The little word *for* is a veritable thorn in the flesh of the whole brotherhood of divines.

There has been a hard struggle to explain away this passage of Holy Writ. The apostle evidently refers to some practice, some doctrine, well known among the Corinthian

Christians; for else, how could he on this baptism for the dead build an argument for the doctrine of resurrection? The argument, to be an argument at all, must, of course, be founded on something known, something already granted, and about which there was no doubt. Otherwise the appeal would be void of all logical force. But what this practice in the primitive church was, that is the mystery.

It has been suggested that the word translated *for* ought to be *over*, and that the meaning would be this: Some of the Corinthian church members had been baptized over the dead, that is, on the graves or in the cemeteries, and that the Apostle refers to this fact as a proof of the resurrection. Just think of this! The Corinthians are supposed to have carried water tanks to their graveyards for baptismal purposes. and that such a quaint practice would be a proof of the resurrection of the dead! The idea is too silly to call for any serious consideration.

Then it has been suggested that the words "for the dead" really mean "in the hope of the resurrection of the dead." The whole passage of this suggestion would be to read thus: "Else what shall they do which are baptized in the hope of the resurrection of the dead, if the dead rise not at all? Why are they then baptized in the hope of the resurrection of the dead?" Of course, the words "for the dead" do not mean any such thing, and cannot by any means within the wide range of grammar, or logic, or rhetoric combined, be made to mean it. To make the word "for" stand for "in the hope of," and the words "the dead" to be synonymous with "the resurrection of the dead," is clearly an exegesis that, applied to all other passages of Scripture, would annihilate the word of God. That theologians have found themselves under the necessity of resorting to this kind of tactics proves effectually the misery of their position as blind leaders of the blind.

It has also been suggested that the common reading of the received text was corrupted, and that the apostle originally had written something else. Griesbach, in his critical edition, proposes to read "from the works of the dead," instead of "for the dead," although his reasons for so doing seem to be very weak indeed. The learned critic could evidently find no sense in the words "for the dead" (*hyper ton nekron*), and, therefore, on account of some variety in the punctuation, or some various readings, he proposes to read "from the works of the dead" (*ap' ergon nekron*), although this emendation would by no means render the passage more intelligible in the least degree. For the apostle has on his mind to prove the resurrection of the dead. Nothing else. Now, the living may be baptized from the works of the dead; that is to say, they may be baptized with a view to no more practice the bad works of the dead, and yet this fact does by no means prove that the dead will be resurrected. There is no connection between the pre-

misses and the conclusion; and any reading, any interpretation, that leaves the main question, the resurrection, out of sight, must necessarily be rejected.

The words stand there, plain enough, *hyper ton nekron*, for the dead. They mean "on behalf of," "instead of," or, "for the advantage of" the dead. They mean nothing else.

The same expression is used in Rom. viii, 26, where the Spirit is said to make intercession "for" us (*hyper hemon*). John xv, 13, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for (*hyper*) his friends." 1 John iii, 16, "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down His life for (*hyper*) us; and we ought to lay down our lives for (*hyper*) our brothers." Gal. iii, 13, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for (*hyper*) us." In these and many other passages "for" means clearly "instead of," or "on behalf of," and that is its only possible sense in the passage under consideration. The baptism *for* the dead is a baptism instead of or in behalf of the dead. To make anything else of it is to violate the simplest rules of interpretation.

How wonderful, now, to contemplate the fact that Joseph the Prophet, without hesitation, when the right time came, gave to this passage—as to all others he was called upon to expound—the precise and only correct interpretation! He had not to resort to any learned machinery of impossible intricacy to find this meaning of the word. The Spirit of God, which once dictated the words to Paul, taught Joseph the Prophet to interpret them, and the interpretation was at once consistent and clear, bearing the evidence of its truth on its very surface. If there were no other proofs of his divine mission, this one would be irrefutable.

But the work of Joseph the Prophet did not confine itself to interpretation. His was above all a practical work. And in giving us the correct understanding of the Word of God, in disclosing to us the wonderful doctrine of substitutional work for the dead, as practised among the primitive Christians, he again opened to the believers the long-closed doors of the sanctuaries of the Most High, and taught them how to perform this work. And again, through His instrumentality, God has re-united the world beyond with this, according to the declaration of the Apostle:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He hath purposed in himself. That in the dispensation of the fulness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth."—(Ephesians 1, 3—10.—*Millennial Star*.)