

STUDIES IN TEXTS.

Suggestions for Sermons from Current Literature.

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IV. EASTER PAST AND EASTER PRESENT.

Text.—"This Jesus did God raise up, whereof we all are witnesses."
Acts ii. 31.

(Book of the Month: *STUDIA SACRA*.¹ = SS. Other reff. Church's One Foundation, Robertson Nicoll = COF. Hastings' Dictionary of Apostolic Church, Shaw on Resurrection, = DAC. Dictionary of the Bible = HDB.)

I. THE FACT OF THE RESURRECTION.

(a) Christianity rests upon it.

It has been called the Christian Gibraltar. "St. Paul was not afraid to make Christianity answer with its life for the truth of the Resurrection of Christ, and upon this issue the controversy between Christianity and its opponents has generally turned" (SS. 126). He, himself, had seen Him alive and that made him a Christian.

The Resurrection story was no late invention; it was, for instance, "part of the tradition which St. Paul received after his conversion, that is as early as 35 A.D." (SS. 131.). Men accepted the word of truthful witnesses whose lives were changed by seeing Christ alive, and were cheerfully laid down in support of their contention.

"In 1 Corinthians xv. how remarkable a series of witnesses is incidentally marshalled. The 'Twelve,' 'five hundred brethren,' 'all the Apostles'—('The title apostle being used in the wider meaning of an eye-witness and missionary.' SS. 135, and see Acts xiv. 14, Galatians i. 19, Romans xvi. 7. Gwatkin in HDB I. 126.) And St. Peter and St. James were, at the time of writing, the two most prominent persons in the Christian Society, St. Paul himself not being excepted" (SS. 136, 137).

(b) Christ was not expected to rise at all.

"No sayings of Jesus are better authenticated than those in which He spoke, publicly and privately, of His approaching death

¹ By J. H. Bernard, D.D., D.C.L., Archbishop of Dublin. Thirteen scholarly and suggestive essays on Baptism, the Resurrection, Virgin Birth, Bishops and Presbyters, New Testament Prophets, etc.

and the victory which was to follow ; nothing is clearer than the fact that these sayings were not believed or understood. They did not prepare the Apostles for the Crucifixion ; still less for the Resurrection " (SS. 155).

" Nothing is more certain than the hopelessness of the disciples, and it is that which gives such extraordinary weight to their witness" (COF. 135).

" In the Gospel the story of His rising is too good to be true. When they know it to be true they are full of joy and triumph " (COF. 101).

(c) *The story is explained away by some.*

(i) It is said to be a mystical way of saying that Christ goes on for ever. Mr. Sime says, " admit that when the last stroke came He fell like other men into a sleep from which there is no awakening, the legend of His love does not on that account lose its charm or its power to win men from a degrading materialism " (COF. 60). " There is a strange and not quite honest effort to accept the Resurrection of Christ in words while actually denying it. To talk of the resurrection of the spirit is preposterous. The spirit does not die, and therefore cannot rise. What is meant is that the life of Jesus is, like any other life, persistent beyond death ! But that has nothing to do with the Resurrection of the New Testament, or resurrection of any kind. The one which the New Testament knows, the one that allows language any meaning, is that of the body, which leaves the grave empty " (COF. 133, 4).

(ii) It is said the disciples were mistaken in thinking He was dead. They revived with infinite care the still frame till light once more flickered from the closed eyes. " Such a Jesus could not be the risen Conqueror and the Son of God, could by no possibility have changed their sorrow into enthusiasm, or have lifted their reverence into worship " (COF. 145).

(iii) It is said the disciples were deluded by an apparition several times repeated. " Paul did not regard the visions of the risen Christ as the apparition of a dead hero or saint " (SS. 147). Further, why should they have ceased so soon or so strangely ? " That a vision which was the product of a deep attachment to the Lord should take the form which the first believers have left on record in the story of the Ascension, is not credible from the psychological

point of view" (SS. 141). This is not a case of a vision seen by this or that individual, but of visions seen by companies of persons—the "Twelve," "the five hundred," "the Apostles" (SS. 140). "It was not upon the apparition of Christ as a spirit that the faith of the Church was built, but upon the manifestation of Christ's spiritual body" (COF. 149). "The Christian Church is not built upon mist" (COF. 148).

(iv) It is said that mental impressions were mistaken for visions. "Keim says that the living spirit of Jesus sent telegrams to the disciples, which gave them a vision bearing the likeness of the body laid in the grave, and still lying there. Well, but if this be so, we are back in the world of miracles" (COF. 148).

(v) "It has been asserted indeed that it would be 'contrary to the nature of a being appearing from heaven' that He should be touched or that He should eat. This is quite unphilosophical. If Christ were really seen there is no reason, so far as psychology can tell, why He should not be really touched and heard. We are deluding ourselves with a crude and unscientific and self-contradictory theory" (SS. 144, 145).

(d) *Faith is, however, needed for spiritual conviction.*

"It is very significant that the manifestations of the Risen Christ were made to believers alone, to those who had the faculties to discern the spiritual possibilities of a new life in Him; and it is still true that the evidences for the historical fact of Christ's Resurrection are incompetent of themselves to generate faith in the power and grace of the Risen Life" (SS. 168).

"It is better to believe in the supernatural than to believe in the ridiculous, and that is what it comes to" (COF. 150).

(A SECOND SERMON.)

Text.—"He preached Jesus and the Resurrection." Acts xvii. 18.

2. THE MEANING OF THE RESURRECTION.

(a) *It is the Origin of the Christian life.*

The fundamental fact upon which the apostolic Church rests is the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. "It is the spring of the apostolic faith. The faith called forth by the life of Christ broke into fragments under the crash of the Cross. The Resurrection re-interpreted and re-established the faith evoked by the life; for the first time gave Him His true place as Lord in their lives" (DAC. 2. 329).

"The Resurrection of Jesus Christ was not a solitary or isolated act; it is charged with consequence for all those who are 'in Christ'" (SS. 95).

"Christ's Resurrection was in its deepest meaning and purpose unique. It carried with it the victory over death of all who are 'in Him'" (SS 96, 7). "Not so much the type as the guarantee of our own" (SS. 101).

(b) *It is the key to Christ's Life.*

"Only in the light of the Resurrection can we grasp the meaning of the Incarnation" (I Cor. xv. 22, 45; Rom. v. 12). The Resurrection of Christ unlocks the inner meaning and significance of His earthly life and ministry (DAC. 2. 330).

"We obtain a direct vision of the glory of Christ. We find Christ directly in the pages of the Gospel as the Church will find Him to the end of time, for the Church receives the things of the Spirit of God, while outsiders count them foolishness" (COF. 207).

(c) *It is the Clue to all life.*

"One man has survived the shock of death, and therefore there is a world of life beyond the grave" (SS. 95). "Christ broke through the immemorial law and rule of death" (COF. 140).

"The Resurrection is the determinative principle of the apostles' view of the world and life. The long struggle between nature and spirit was concentrated in the body of Jesus, and by His bodily resurrection from death and the grave—and what other kind of resurrection could there be?—victory is shown to remain with spirit" (DAC. 2. 330).

"The empty tomb of Christ has been the cradle of the Church, and if in this foundation of her faith the Church has been mistaken, she must needs lay herself down by the side of the mortal remains, I say not of a man, but of a religion" (COF. 150).

"The belief that Jesus lives must necessarily be a more intimate possession of the soul than the belief that Jesus rose. Yet were the latter discredited at the bar of critical science, it may be doubted whether the former would continue for long to dominate the lives of men" (SS. 166. 8).

"It is on converse with the Risen Lord that the life of the saints depends. They cannot bear a broken communion. All is dark as the dead of night if Christ is silent or absent. The heart loses its happiness and craves for the lost presence" (COF. 189, 190).