

STEPHEN'S DYING PRAYER.

"And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God (R.V. "the Lord"), and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep." – Acts 7:59,60.

As usually understood, the "spirit" referred to by the persecuted saint, is an immortal part in man, which, in the case of the pious, is borne aloft to the nightless world at the final hour. About to die, it is assumed that the martyr committed himself, or his spirit, to the Savior, in hope of enduring happiness as soon as liberated from the tenement of clay. A pleasing representation, no doubt; but one encompassed with difficulties we dare not overlook.

This common view it is diametrically opposed to our Lord's testimony in the hearing of his Apostles immediately before his crucifixion: – "I go to prepare a place for you." – John 14:2. At the conclusion of their toils and pains were they appointed to go thither – as orthodoxy assures its disciples now? It seems not (v. 3) – "And if I go, and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself, that where I am, there ye may be also:" words which may be regarded as explanatory of 13:33-36. When he rose in sublime majesty from the mountain top, the attending angels said to those who were spectators of his removal: – "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner" – that is, quietly and unknown to the world – "as ye have seen him go into heaven;" – Acts 1:11. The doctrine of Scripture then is, there is no such thing as going to him at death; not one saint will be privileged to behold his face till he revisits this world, according to his promise.

The Apostle Paul understood the Divine plan and ordination perfectly, and therefore anticipated neither reward nor inheritance till the Lord should be manifested a second time without a sin-offering

unto salvation: – "I am now ready to be offered," he says, "and the time of my departure," – that is, from life – "is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me" – at death? No! – "At that day" – when he returns; "and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." – 2 Tim. 4:6-8. Was not Stephen educated in the same grand, errorless, spiritual school? Knew he not that the Deliverer in whom he trusted had spoken in this manner: – "I will come again and receive you unto myself?"

Following his hours of agony on the hill of shame, and when the last moment had arrived, the Man of Sorrows, after crying with a loud voice, closed his utterances with these words: – "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit; and having said thus, he gave up the ghost" (literally, out-breathed); that is – died. – Luke 23:46. According to Matthew 27:50, He "yielded up the ghost" (literally, dismissed his spirit); i.e., drew his last breath, or ceased to live. Stephen, the earliest martyr among the disciples, appears to have imitated his Master in the closing scene. Jesus said, "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit." When the stones were cruelly battering his quivering form, Stephen appealed thus: – "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

The original word used by the dying Lord, and by his dying servant, is *pneuma*, translated "spirit," and both passages are given in Robinson's Greek Lexicon of the New Testament as illustrations of the term, when indicating "the principle of life residing in the breath;" turning our thoughts back to the old record: – The Lord God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul. – Gen. 2:7.

Taking this as undoubtedly correct, the right interpretation of this expiring witness' devout language is not hard to find. He called on his exalted Lord to receive back the life-giving breath, or to accept his life which he rendered up as a sacrifice on the altar of Christianity. Very

different from the popular view, but quite in accord with the general teachings of Scripture, and the rest of this narrative itself. After exclaiming, – "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" – did he pass upward to the heavenly abode? As a spirit, winged he his flight to the Redeemer's presence? No, verily: "He kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, – Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep." He was stoned to death, he returned to the dust. For him there was no release till the "dead in Christ," during his presence and by his power, burst forth in the bloom and blessedness of immortality.

– *Selected.*

