

RESURRECTION HOPE IN CONTRAST.

We learn that Julius Caesar boldly averred, in a speech made in the Roman Senate, that man had nothing to fear, or hope for, after death. Speaking of death he says: "Concerning punishment we are enabled to speak confidently, as to what may pertain to it, that for the grieving, and miserable, death brings a state of absolute repose from all affliction, and not a state of excruciating agony. It sets mortals most absolutely free from every form of evil; and beyond it there is no place for either trouble or enjoyment."

M. Portius Cato, an illustrious philosopher of the Stoic School, gives these sentiments of Caesar his unqualified approbation in these words: – "Caesar a very short time ago reasoned in a happy pertinent style, in this particular manner, concerning life and death. In making his estimate of what is commonly narrated about the dwellers in the nether world he says, I believe it all false that the wicked make a diverse journey, from that made by the good, to hideous, waste, foul, and horrible abodes."

In the opinion of those two eminent Romans death ended all. And this was the opinion of whole schools of heathen philosophers. With these, misery has its end in the eternal insensibility and unconsciousness of the grave. To what Caesar and Cato have said we will only add, at this time, the expression of another Roman of distinguished eminence. The Elder Pliny, speaking of the death-state, says: – "From the last death-day the same state will be for all as it was before the first birth-day. Onward from death there will never more be either bodily sensation or mental consciousness any more than there was anterior to our birth." Pliny thus makes our human existence a brief hour of sensation and unconsciousness between two eternal nights. [Plato's philosophy had not yet gained general acceptance amongst Romans]. Leaving now the ancients let us see how this latter thought of Pliny was draped in figure by one of our English ancestry. Green, in

his history of the English people, informs us that an aged Ealdorman once addressed Eadwine, king of Northumbria, in the following manner: – "So seems the life of man, O King, as a sparrow's flight through the hall when a man is sitting at meat in winter-tide with the warm fire lighted on the hearth, but the chill rainstorm without. The sparrow flies in at one door and tarries for a moment in the light and heat of the hearth-fire, and then flying forth from the other vanishes into the wintry darkness from whence it came. So tarries for a moment the life of man in our sight, but what is before it, what after it, we know not."

Then speaking of Christianity, which was then just being introduced into Britain, [R1061 : page 8] he says: – "If this new teaching tell us aught certainly of these let us follow it." The mysteries of life and death were pathetic themes for the bards. The language of one of these poets of the olden time warns the living in these words: – "Soon will it be, that sickness or sword-blade shear thy strength from thee, or the fire ring thee, or the flood whelm thee, or the sword grip thee, or arrow hit thee, or age o'ertake thee, and thine eye's brightness sink down into darkness." With them life and death were controlled by "weird" or destiny. "Strong as he might be, man struggled in vain with the doom that encompassed him, that girded his life with a thousand perils and broke it at so short a span." Life had its work of "doomed deeds," closing in the fateful "weirdness" of death and the tomb. It was a "sparrow-flight through a warm light room" from an eternal winter-night out into the self-same, eternal winter-night again – into endless darkness and nothingness.

How ardently we should prize the glorious gospel through which "life and immortality are brought to light." In order to this let us read, in contrast to the words above quoted, some few of the triumphant expressions of the ancient worthies, who walked in the light of divine revelation, and spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. Says Job: – "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body,

yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me." David says: "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness." Speaking of the living God, Isaiah says: "He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall be taken away from off all the earth; for the Lord hath spoken it." And again: "Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing ye that dwell in dust; for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead." We close the contrast with the glowing words of Paul who lived shortly after Caesar and Cato, and who was contemporary with Pliny. "Behold I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Jesus Christ is "the resurrection and the life," and he will raise up all his people at the last day. Death, to the believer, is only the briefest suspension of conscious activities, and the grave-sleep a short, deep, undisturbed and unmeasured repose, during which the unmanifested life is hid with Christ in God. "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

– *The Restitution.*

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