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'Thy dead shall live.' Isaiah 26.19

St Paul's, Easter 1915

Isaiah 26,19. Thy dead shall live; my dead bodies shall arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in the dust; for thy dew is as the dew of lights, and the earth shall cash forth the dead.

The 25th and 26th chapter of Isaiah, which probably belong to the later, post-exilic portion of the book, contain perhaps the clearest anticipation of Christian hope that are to be found in the Old Testament. The sun of Easter has not risen, but it has begun to gild the clouds in mythical

the eastern sky. And This is no ^ doctrine of the future life, borrowed from Babylonia or some other foreign nation; it is a spontaneous flash of inspired insight, a glorious hope such as 'man's inconquerable mind', exalted by faith in a good and just God, projects upon the blackish clouds and clears them through and through. Let me try to give you the train of thought in this 26th chapter. It is not easy, for the prophet writes with such tension of feeling that he is almost incoherent.

a of the nation The hope of the resurrection ^ has already broken out in found utterance

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the preceding chapter. God will destroy in this mountain face

(on his own holy hill of Zion) the veil of the covering that is cast over all peoples, and the veil that is spread over all nations. He hath swallowed up death for ever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces.' Then he fills up the picture of the joyous restoration. But – the thought suddenly clutches him-What of Israel's <u>dead</u>? What of all her true-hearted sons and daughters who have died in exile-died in faith, not receiving the promise? Are they to be left deliverance

out when the day of restoration comes? 'The dead rise

not; the deceased rise not- shades do not live. It must be that Thou visiteth and destroyeth them, and makest all their memory to perish? They are gone: they have ceased to exist; there is none to tell them that 'Thou hast increased the nation, O Lord, thou hast increased the nation ; Thou art glorified; Thou hast enlarged all the boundaries of the land.' And they, our beloved dead, who prayed so earnestly when thy chastening was upon them, are left out of it all; they are forgotten. So intelorable is

3 3 the thought, that the moral claim upon God's goodness and justice, which God himself has taught us that we may make, takes the form of a prohecy or rather a vision. The nation speaks; returned Israel makes answer [to] herself, 'Thy dead shall live! My dead bodies shall arise!Awake and sing, ye dwellers in dust; for thy dew is a dew of lights (shed, it probably means, by the heavenly light which outshines the sun), and the earth bringeth forth the dead.' The Sun of righteousness shall arise, and the thirsty ground shall sparkle everywhere with the life-giving dew.

This wonderful passage, then, is primarily a vision of the dead Israelites, whose lives have ended in sorrow and captivity, being raised to share in the joyful restoration of the people to their own land and to the favour of God. The Jews were very slow and backward to believe in a future life, much more backward than the surrounding nations. They thus escaped the superstitions about death and what

peoples follows death, which are common among barbarous nations-; and they only adopted the belief when it was forced upon them, as it were, by an alternative which was morally intolerable.

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And what helped them to it was their disinterested love and ^ a foreign land sympathy for their brethren who had died in exile Belief in the fondness of God, and human affection, are still the two great supports of our be hope of immortality. Christ himself, I feel sure, would have it so. He knew that those who hear not Moses and the prophets would not be can persuaded, though one rose from the dead.' Nor indeed could it be much comfort to us in bereavement to know that that

the body of Lazarus and ^ of Christ himself, was restored

a brief interval four to life after two & three four days ^ since our dead remain in their graves: The first apostles said simply that Christ overcame death, 'because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.' It was a moral impossibility that the soul of Christ should be left in Hades. As a modern poet has said of his friend: 'Peace, I loved him; the dead are not dead, but alive.' The stronger our faith in God, and the warmer our affections, the more confident we shall be that death is not the end.

There are thousands of English parents, and young widows, and young orphans, who on this Easter Day are thinking sadly of

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the hastily made graves in a foreign land, where their dearest lie sleeping. When the day of peace and restored safety dawns for England, as please God it will before very long, what of them? Will they be left out of it? Is their day over and done, while the struggle was still undecided and the victory uncertain? How can God refuse them the happiness they have so well earned, of showing in our rejoicings over the peace? I have just read a very beautiful little poem on this subject,

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a sonnet by a young poet-who will, I venture to think, take rank with our first poets- so potent is a time of trouble to evoke genius which might otherwise have slumbered. A young soldier speaks thus :-

If I should die, think only this of me; That there's some corner of a foreign field That is forever England. There shall be In that rich earth a richer dust concealed; A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware, Gave once her flowers to love, her ways to roam, A body of England's breathing English air, Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.

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And think this heart, all evil shed away,

A pulse in the eternal mind, no less Gives back somewhere the thoughts by England given; Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day; And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness, And In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.

The enthusiasm of a pure and elevated patriotism, free from hate, bitterness, and despair fear, has never found a nobler expression. And yet it falls somewhat short of Isaiah's vision, and still more of the Christian

hope. It is a worthy thought, that the dust out of the

which a dead soldi happy warrior's body was once compacted is consecrated for ever by the cause for which he died. Yet is there not a tinge of materialism in such an idea? The spirit of heroism and self sacrifice knows no restrictions of this kind. When it has once shown itself in action, it becomes the part of the whole world's spiritual wealth. The earth is a better place beacuse such things have been done in it. The spirit of the

martyr-patriot is everywhere near, where there is a man to

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say, 'This is how I should like to live and ^ die.' And a Christian will hardly be quite content to think of the soul

brave man's 'heart' as exists living on only as 'a pulse would

in the eternal mind.' Some will be satisfied, and more than satisfied, with such a promise, but the Christian hope of immortality is not impersonal. We believe that each life represents a distinct, and in a sense an unique, value in God's right; and it is this meaning and value which constitute the personality which we believe will exist for ever, in the blessed light of God's prescence, but not merged in this existence. The Easter Message is not the indestructible life of the divine Word, the Logos ; it is the victory over death won by him who was crucified for our salvation. And the hope that we are to derive from the resurrection is that there is a real immortality for the living and above all for the loving, personality, the man or woman whom we have known on earth. The Church of Chirst cries, like the Spirit of Israel in Isaiah : 'Thy dead shall live;

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my slain shall arise.' As a dew of lights is the dew which waters their graves; it sparkles with the uncreated light, the light that never was on sea or land. Our loved and honoured dead, whom are alien, but never again an unfriendly soil conceals, will one day join us in the triumph when the kindgom of God shall be established not in word but in power. In the words of this glorious chapter of the evangelical prophet: The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their

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heads; they shall find gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away'