**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**JOHN-112**. **THE GRAVE IN A GARDEN by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"In the garden a new tomb."*

*John 19:41 (R.V.)*

This is possibly no more than a topographical note introduced merely for the sake of accuracy. But it is quite in John's manner to attach importance to these apparent trifles and to give no express statement that he is doing so. There are several other instances in the Gospel where similar details are given which appear to have had in his eyes a symbolical meaning--e.g. And it was night. There may have been such a thought in his mind, for all men in high excitement love and seize symbols, and I can scarcely doubt that the reason which induced Joseph to make his grave in a garden was the reason which induced John to mention so particularly its situation, and that they both discerned in that garden round the sepulchre, the expression of what was to the one a dim desire, to the other a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead--that they who are laid to rest in the grave shall come forth again in new and fairer life, as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to bud.

To us at all events on Easter morning, with nature rising on every hand from her winter death, and life re-orient out of dust, that new sepulchre in the garden may well serve for the starting-point of the familiar but ever-precious lessons of the day.

**I. A symbol of death and decay as interwoven with all nature and every joy.**

We think of Eden and the first coming of death.

The grave was fittingly in the garden, because nature too is subject to the law of decay and death. The flowers fade and men die. Meditative souls have ever gathered lessons of mortality there, and invested death with an alien softness by likening it to falling leaves and withered blooms. But the contrast is greater than the resemblance, and painless dropping of petals is not a parallel to the rending of soul and body.

The garden's careless wealth of beauty and joy continues unconcerned whatever befalls us. One generation cometh and another goeth, but the earth abideth for ever.

The grave is in the garden because all our joys and works have sooner or later death associated with them.

* Every relationship.
* Every occupation.
* Every joy.

The grave in the garden bids us bring the wholesome contemplation of death into all life.

It may be a harm and weakening to think of it, but should be a strength.

**II. The dim hopes with which men have fought against death.**

To lay the dead amid blooming nature and fair flowers has been and is natural to men. The symbolism is most natural, deep, and beautiful, expressing the possibility of life and even of advance in the life after apparent decay. There is something very pathetic in so eager a grasping after some stay for hope.

All these natural symbols are insufficient. They are not proofs, they are only pretty analogies. But they are all that men have on which to build their hopes as to a future life apart from Christ. That future was vague, a region for hopes and wishes or fears, not for certainty, a region for poetic fancies. The thoughts of it were very faintly operative. Men asked, Shall we live again? Conscience seemed to answer, Yes! The instinct of immortality in men's souls grasped at these things as proofs of what it believed without them, but there was no clear light.

**III. The clear light of certain hope which Christ's resurrection brings.**

The grave in the garden reversed Adam's bringing of death into Eden.

Christ's resurrection as a fact bears on the belief in a future state as nothing else can.

It changes hope into certainty. It shows by actual example that death has nothing to do with the soul; that life is independent of the body; that a man after death is the same as before it. The risen Lord was the same in His relations to His disciples, the same in His love, in His memory, and in all else.

It changes shadowy hopes of continuous life into a solid certainty of resurrection life. The former is vague and powerless. It is impossible to conceive of the future with vividness unless as a bodily life. And this is the strength of the Christian conception of the future life, that corporeity is the end and goal of the redeemed man.

It changes terror and awe into joy, and opens up a future in which He is.

* We shall be with Him.
* We shall be like Him.

Now we can go back to all these incomplete analogies and use them confidently. Our faith does not rest upon them but upon what has actually been done on this earth.

Christ is the First fruits of them that slept. What will the harvest be!

As the single little seed is poor and small by the side of the gorgeous flower that comes from it; so will be the change. God giveth it a body as it hath pleased Him.

How then to think of death for ourselves and for those who are gone? Thankfully and hopefully.