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ARTICLE III.

EXEGESIS OF I. CORINTHIANS 15: 35—44, AS ILLUSTRATED
BY NATURAL HISTORY AND CHEMISTRY.¹

BY REV. EDWARD HITCHCOCK, D. D., LL. D., AMHERST COLLEGE.

THE apostle, in this passage, seems to have three leading objects in view: the first, is to answer a very natural and forcible objection to the resurrection of the body; the second, to show the great difference between the natural and spiritual body; the third, to show the superiority of the spiritual or resurrection body over the natural body laid in the grave.

The objection he states in the 35th verse: *How are the dead raised up; and with what body do they come?* That is, as it has been reiterated and amplified, in every age, especially since the days of Avicenna, the Arabian physician, in the tenth century: How can the body be raised out of the grave, when all the particles composing it have been scattered to the ends of the earth, and have entered into other bodies, even the bodies of other men? Can even Omnipotence make the same particles a part of two bodies?

The language and translation of this passage require but little attention; since there is but little diversity of opinion concerning them. I shall attempt only one or two critical remarks. John Locke supposed the meaning of *σάρξ*, in the 39th verse, to be "an organized animal body," instead of flesh as the substance of the body. This opinion seems to me quite probable. The word certainly had such a meaning, not only among the later classical writers, but in the New Testament (Matt. 26: 41): *The spirit is willing; but the flesh is weak.* Now the apostle seems to be describing the difference between the various classes of animals, rather than the different character of their muscles. Or, if the latter, or com-

¹ Read by appointment before the Hampshire East Association in Massachusetts, Nov. 8, 1859.

mon interpretation be retained, it cannot be doubted that Paul meant to put a part for the whole ; that is, he meant to describe the well-known permanent differences among various classes of animals. This brings the meaning of his *πᾶσα σὰρξ* into harmony with the other objects mentioned in the passage. But if we make *σὰρξ* literal flesh, the chemist and physiologist might raise a question whether the muscle of man can easily be distinguished from that of some of the beasts.

But my chief object is to look at this passage from the stand-point of natural history and chemistry. I have no idea, indeed, that Paul or any other sacred writer used the strict scientific language of the nineteenth century ; but he does describe things in harmony with modern science. Let us look, first, at Paul's answer to the objection of the sceptic to the resurrection of the body.

I. The illustration used by the apostle, drawn from the germination and growth of a plant from a seed, completely answers this famous objection.

1. It shows that the resurrection-body need contain only an infinitesimal part of the body laid in the grave, in order to be identical with it.

A plant, in order to possess a specific identity with that from which it sprang, needs to have in it only that minute portion of the seed which begins the new stalk and root. In some species this would probably not form a millionth part of the full-grown plant. So also may it be with the resurrection of the dead ; and the spiritual body, consequently, need have in it no larger portion of the natural body. Who can doubt that such an infinitesimal germ may be preserved, by Omnipotence, amid all the decompositions and recompositions of the grave ?

2. Science goes further than this, and shows us that the identity of an organized body is preserved, in this world, though every particle of it has been changed repeatedly. To make it the same body, during the successive periods of its existence, it is only necessary that it should be composed of the same elementary matter, combined in the same proportions,

and moulded into essentially the same form and structure. The bodies, both of animals and plants, are several times entirely changed during a long life; but if, as the old particles drop out, new ones of the same kind come in to take their place, we never suspect any loss of identity. If we plant the seed of a tree in childhood, and after nursing it for a time as it springs up, leave it for years, we never doubt, on our return, that we look upon the same tree, though it may be greatly expanded, and its form and aspect somewhat changed. Nor do we suspect, because our bodies have been, perhaps more than once, completely changed during our ten or twenty years' absence, that we are not the same persons, bodily as well as mentally, who planted the tree.

Science, then, would decide that it is not necessary that the resurrection-body should contain a single particle of the natural body, in order to make them identical. If we judge from the figure employed, by Paul, to illustrate the subject, derived from vegetation, it would seem that revelation does represent a minute part of the sleeping dust as entering into the spiritual body. But whether this be so, or not, either supposition completely meets and triumphantly refutes the objection: How are the dead raised; and with what body do they come? It shows how this might be done, even though the resurrection-body should possess the same organization as the natural body; that is, consist of flesh and blood. But if the future body may, consistently with its identity, possess an entirely different organization, so as not to be composed of flesh and blood, and be as unlike the present as any plant is to the seed that produced it, still more completely does this illustration of the apostle refute an objection which, for eighteen hundred years, has hung like a venomous viper to the doctrine of the resurrection of the body. For there may be sameness of chemical composition without sameness of organization; as there is, to some extent, between the seed and the plant springing from it. We might go further than this, and say that, though sameness of chemical composition be essential to the identity of the body, at different periods in this world, yet since the composition of the seed often differs considera-

bly from that of the plants, a like difference may exist between the natural and the spiritual body.

It ought to be distinctly stated, that the object of this discussion is not to ascertain the precise nature of the spiritual body, but to show that, even though the same laws of bodily identity which prevail among organized bodies in this world, apply to the natural and spiritual body, we can vindicate the scripture doctrine of a literal resurrection. But if we admit an organization in the spiritual body different from that in the natural, the vindication becomes yet more complete.

But since the preceding views of organic or bodily identity in this world, were first made public, by myself, several years ago, at least two able writers have endeavored to prove them erroneous.

My former colleague, Prof. Haven, in his late work on Mental Philosophy, has not referred to me by name; but as he has described my theory as to identity, which no one else, so far as I know, has advanced, I cannot doubt that his remarks were intended for me. He says that "two bodies may be composed of the same chemical elements, in the same proportion, and possessing the same general form and structure, yet they are not the same body. A given piece of wood, or iron, may be divided into a number of parts, each closely resembling the others, of the same appearance, size, figure, color, weight, and of the same chemical components; yet no one of these is identical with any other." "There is no limit to the number of identical bodies which it is possible to conceive on this theory of identity."

These statements are all very true, if applied to inorganic homogeneous matter. But my theory refers alone to organic bodies. And here, too, it is easy to conceive that God might have made two, or a multitude of them, exactly alike as to composition, form, and structure; and these, of course, could not be identical. But when we come to inquire what God *has* done, we shall find that he has *not made any two alike, as to composition and structure*; and here, therefore, we have a means of identification of organic beings.

Prof. Haven, however, says that "it is only in a modified

and partial sense, that we can predicate identity of any material, organic existence. We mean by it simply, *continuity of life*, under the same general structure and organization."

I understand Edward H. Sears, the other writer to whom I have referred, to take the same ground, in his late brilliant work, entitled *Athanasia*, when he says (p. 27): "Is it a certain aggregate of particles, that constitutes the identity, and makes them at any time my body; or is it the ORGANIFIC PRINCIPLE, that belongs to my inmost life, and changes to its own purpose, all the matter it incorporates?"

Is it indeed true, that the vital principle is the essential thing in the identity of organic beings, and that there is no such thing as identity in an organic body, independent of intellect and life? I admit, indeed, that there is a mental as well as vital identity. That is, each person's mind has peculiarities which distinguish it from every other mind, and give the individual an assurance that he is the same, mentally, at different periods of his existence. Doubtless, too, the vital principle in every one, has peculiarities that distinguish it from the same principle in others; for organization results from vitality, and no two bodies among animals or plants are exactly alike, and it seems fair to impute the difference to the vital principle. But I maintain that there is also such a thing as organic identity in distinction from that of the mental or the vital principle, although resulting from the latter.

Your child or intimate friend leaves you, and returns only after years of absence. But when you meet him, must you wait to inquire about the "*organific principle*," or "*continuity of life*," before you can identify him? Suppose, what is certainly possible to Infinite Power, that his former vital principle had been taken from him, and that of another man had been substituted. You would not know it, unless the change had modified his organization or features; you would still recognize him as your child, or friend, without inquiring anything about the "*organific principle*" or "*continuity of life*." But suppose on examination you should find that his body was no longer composed of flesh and blood, but of some

other substance, say spermaceti, or India rubber. You would say at once, he is not my son — he is not my friend. You would say the same, if his form and features were so much changed that you could not explain it by time or circumstances. How clear, then, that sameness of chemical composition and peculiarity of form and structure, are the essential things that constitute organic identity.

The same tests enable the botanist and zoölogist to distinguish and describe the vast variety in the vegetable and animal kingdoms. There is something in the form of each species to mark it off from every other species; and by similar peculiarities, could each individual in every species be distinguished from every other. Or if in a few cases two individuals are so exactly alike that human penetration cannot distinguish them, we regard it as a remarkable anomaly, whose very infrequency proves the truth of my statement.

How clear, too, that in these cases the identity is not dependent on the principle of life. For it remains in the dead and dried specimens of the herbarium and the preserved animals of the zoölogical museum. The peculiarities of organic forms, on which the identity mainly depends, are indeed as in man, the result of the vital or organic principle, acting according to certain laws. These laws impress on one group of animals and plants certain characters that enable the naturalist to bring them into a certain class; on others, such characters as will form a genus; on others, such characters as will constitute them different species; and finally, on each individual such characters as distinguish it from every other individual. If these identifications could not be made out, the whole science of Natural History would be only another name for chaos.

'To maintain, then, as I understand these gentlemen to do, that there is no such thing, except "in a modified and partial sense," as bodily identity, is opposed not only by common experience, but to settled scientific principles. If it were so, science would be a chaos, and society a Pandemonium. The fact is, this identity is as certain and decided as mental or vital identity, and far easier and safer for men to follow.

Assuming its existence, I was led to inquire, in what it consisted; and I could discover, and can now discover, nothing else than "sameness of chemical composition, and peculiarity of form and structure." When I formerly adopted this conclusion, I had no idea that I was coming into collision with any metaphysical or theological systems. I was aiming only to meet a famous objection to the resurrection of the body, which in my view had never been answered. It still seems to me that the ground I took was tenable, notwithstanding the efforts of my learned friends to force me from it.

2. The second object of the apostle in this passage, as seen from the view of Natural History, is to show the great difference between the natural and spiritual body. The natural body is represented as a seed lying in the earth and undergoing the process of germination, which is partly a process of decay, and the spiritual body as the plant which springs from it. We are allowed, therefore, to suppose as great a difference between the two as between the seed and the future plant. And to the eye what can often be more unlike? True, the microscope may reveal the future plant in the germ of the seed, and so, perhaps, the spiritual body may lie coiled up in the body laid in the grave. But it needs an eye little less keen than omniscience to discern the relation. Nay, when the apostle says in relation to the plant, that God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, he may mean that the spiritual is so different from the natural body that there is no resemblance; yet it seems most probable that he would have us understand that, as the germ of the future plant is in the seed, so there is a starting point for the spiritual in the natural body.

3. The third object aimed at by the apostle in this passage is to show the superior glory of the spiritual over the natural body. He prepares the way, by first enumerating various objects differing from one another in glory, and then enters into a direct comparison, or rather contrast, at once the most brilliant and impressive which the eloquence of inspiration has given us: *It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown*

in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. And so on to the end of the chapter does the strain rise higher and higher till it becomes unearthly, and we are borne upwards to the very gates of the celestial city.

4. There is a fourth interesting conclusion which the naturalist cannot help drawing from this passage, even though the apostle may not have had it distinctly in mind. If his language implies this conclusion, even though we should have failed to see it without the aid of science, we need not hesitate to admit it into our creed, any more than we should a principle first brought to light by excavations at Nineveh. The naturalist does see in the passage under consideration evidence that there is a specific identity between the natural and the spiritual body. A vegetable physiologist of the nineteenth century could hardly state this principle more clearly and definitely in respect to plants than the apostle has done. *ὁ δὲ θεὸς αὐτῷ δίδωσι σῶμα καθὼς ἠθέλησε, καὶ ἐκάστῳ τῶν σπερμάτων τὸ ἴδιον σῶμα.* Here it is declared that every species of plant has its peculiar body, by which it is distinguished from every other plant. But why limit the apostle's language to the species? Does it not clearly extend to individual plants? Might not *ἐκάστῳ τῶν σπερμάτων τὸ ἴδιον σῶμα* be properly translated: *to each one of the seeds its own body?* He had before spoken of species, when he said: *εἰ τύχοι, σίτου ἢ τινος τῶν λοιπῶν.* If he meant nothing more by the *ἐκάστῳ τῶν σπερμάτων*, it would be tautology. Besides, we do know that each individual seed does produce a plant that may be distinguished from every other plant; or if such a translation be rejected, yet the doctrine is taught in this passage by implication at least, that each individual seed produces a plant different from that springing from any other seed of its own or any other species.

The apostle proceeds to instance other examples of fixed differences in nature in the animal kingdom, and also in inorganic nature — the sun, moon and stars. Then he adds: *so also is the resurrection of the dead.* His *οὕτω καὶ* in this phrase must embrace his first illustration of the plant spring-

ing from the decaying seed, as well as the other objects referred to. Indeed, in the beautiful contrasts which follow, he uses the same figure. *It is sown, says he, in corruption, it is raised in incorruption; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, etc.*

Now it can hardly be doubted that the leading object of the apostle, in referring to those several fixed differences in nature, is to show how easy it is for God to give the spiritual body a power and a glory vastly superior to the natural. But the naturalist cannot fail to infer from it that, if the spiritual retains such a specific and individual identity with the natural body, as a plant does with that from which it sprung; then whoever is acquainted with the natural, would recognize the spiritual body as easily as he can the different species of plants and animals that appear in the spring. It is their specific peculiarity and resemblance to the plants of the same species with which he was acquainted the previous year, that enables him to make this recognition in the spring. True, the spiritual body cannot have the same organization as the natural; for *flesh and blood, says Paul, cannot inherit the kingdom of God.* But it does not hence follow that it will be devoid of organization. Nay, its superior glory awakens the expectation that it will possess a still more exquisite organization. But this need not prevent its retention of certain appearances that will at once identify it with the body laid in the grave. Of the nature of those marks of identification, I know nothing. But it is by external resemblances, not internal organization, that we identify plants and animals as to species. "In the spring," to quote the words which I used, several years ago, in a sermon on the resurrections of spring, "every spire of grass is developed with the same form and color, and position as its progenitors; so that the Festuca is at once known from Poa and Agrostis, and the Dactylis from the Phleum. The Anemones and the Violets, the Gnaphalium, the Trillium, the Trifolium, the Hepatica, and Leontodon, are restored without the loss of a single tint of coloring, or change in the form of their leaves, their stems, or their flowers. The oak, also, and the maple, the elm and

the poplar, the willow and the birch, the Cornus and the Pyrus, the pine and the spruce, and a thousand other species of trees and shrubs, put forth the same peculiar flowers and leaves, and take the same specific shapes and colors, which they have had since first they rose out of the earth at the divine command. The same familiar voices, too, meet us from the fields and the groves. At the earliest dawn, the robin's cheerful song is heard, with the clear, rich note of the lark, the soft tone of the bluebird, the twitter of the swallow, the cooing of the dove, the clear and cheerful voice of the black-bird, and the hoarse yet welcome garrulity of the crow. In short, wherever we turn our eyes, or whenever we open our ears, forms and sounds of vegetable and animal life meet us in almost endless profusion, yet familiar to us from our earliest days; and most of them dear to us not only because of their inherent beauty and loveliness, but because they are associated with the most cherished recollections of our lives. "And when the apostle says, that *God giveth to every seed his own body*; and that *so will it be with the resurrection of the dead*; every naturalist feels sure that there will exist, also such marks of identity between the natural and spiritual body as will enable those familiar with the one, to recognize the other. I pretend not, indeed, to describe how that specific and individual identity can be preserved amid the decomposition of the grave. But I do know that the specific characteristics of plants and animals are maintained, in this world, under changes perhaps equally great; and when Jehovah declares that so it shall be in the resurrection of the dead, I joyfully acquiesce in the doctrine, because I know that Infinite Power can accomplish that which Infinite Wisdom determines."