

THE FADING LEAF.



How fast the leaves are falling! The trees have lost their bright, fresh green, and are all clothed in the sober tints of Autumn. As we pass through the fields, or walk in our gardens, or along the country road, almost every step we take we tread on fallen leaves. A few more frosts and storms, and the trees will all be quite bare.

Have you ever thought, reader, that those fallen, withered leaves are an emblem of yourself? They are such, and so God himself teaches us to regard them; for He bade his prophet Isaiah to remind us that "we all do fade as a leaf."

For the most part, the leaves fade gradually. The sap no longer circulating with the vigour of summer or spring, the leaf first loses its freshness, and becomes yellow and shrivelled, its hold on the stalk becomes weaker and weaker, till at length the lightest breeze shakes it from its branches, and it

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drops silently to the ground. In the same way, men often fade very gradually. A solitary grey hair appears here and there among the darker ones; the sight fails slowly; the man does not feel himself equal to efforts which were once a pleasure; and, whether he is aware of it or not, others see that old age is creeping on. Then, perhaps, some sharp disease attacks him, or the powers of life die out, and he drops into the grave.

Yet all leaves do not live till Autumn. In Spring the buds are nipped by the untimely frost, or blighted by the keen east wind; or the Summer's tempest tears the leaf from its branch just when it has reached maturity. So it is with human life. The babe lives just long enough to entwine itself around its parents' hearts, and then it is smitten with fatal sickness. The young maiden dies in the bloom of her early beauty. Or the strong man is cut down in his prime, leaving his wife a widow and his children fatherless. Nothing is more uncertain than life.

But sooner or later the leaves *all* fade. The leaves of some trees flourish longer than those of others, but the leaves of even the hardiest evergreens fade at last. Perhaps, as you looked up into a tree long after the rest of its leaves had fallen, you saw one solitary leaf clinging to its stem. You would look for it in vain the next spring-time. So, now and then you see an old man who has outlived all who began life with him. It is long since he passed the allotted term of human life, and he has exceeded his eightieth, perhaps even his ninetieth year; but you will very soon hear of his death; and then you will wonder that he lived so long. If you were to go through the whole earth you would not find a single survivor of all those who, a century ago, took an active part in the business of the world. And, in like manner, you and all this generation will pass away like every generation of the past. "We ALL do fade as a leaf."

Still, the likeness between the fading of the leaf and the fading of man is only partial. The leaf dies completely. There is no living principle in it which survives its decay. It is a piece of wonderful mechanism—so wonderful as surely to carry home the conviction to every unprejudiced mind that its Creator must be a being of boundless wisdom and skill; but it is nothing more. Tear it—it does not feel; speak to it—it does not hear; it has neither remembrance nor hope; and there is nothing in it which will live when it has crumbled into dust. It is not so with man. His body is “fearfully and wonderfully made;” but the most wonderful thing about him is the thinking, immaterial spirit, which allies him with angels and with God; and that survives the death of the body and lives for ever. Whilst “the dust returns to the earth as it was, the spirit returns to God who gave it.” Though we fade like the leaf, still, unlike the leaf, the nobler part of us, the spirit, will still live, and live for ever.

Of all the countless millions of leaves which perish year by year, not one is destined to resume its form, and in that form to live again. That identical leaf which falls will appear no more. There will be others so like it, that if you could see them side by side, you would be unable to distinguish the one from the other; but the leaf itself will never be restored. But in every case, whether a man be good or evil, the body will be refashioned. “Marvel not at this; for the hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice”—that is, the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Sovereign Judge—“and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.” Whatever death you die, you will rise again, and stand before the judgment-seat of Christ.

Does it gladden you to know that your spirit will thus survive the dissolution of your body, and that your body itself will be raised at the last day?

We can tell you how these great certainties may become the occasion of unutterable joy.

The Lord Jesus Christ assures you, that if you truly repent of sin, and believe in the great sacrifice which He offered for lost men on the cross, your sins are all freely forgiven, and that not one of them will be remembered against you any more for ever. He promises too the gift of his Holy Spirit to renew your hearts, so that the power of sin shall be broken, and your whole nature shall reflect the Divine image. Thus forgiven and renewed, you will become a child of God and an heir of heaven.

Then, when your body dies, He will receive your spirit to Himself. You will "depart and be with Christ, which is far better." Yourself a perfected spirit, you will join "the general assembly and church of the first-born," and "the spirits of just men made perfect," and you will celebrate with them before the throne the praises of redeeming love.

We are not told with what kind of body others will be raised; but nothing could be more glowing than the description the apostle Paul gives us of the resurrection-body of the believer in Jesus. It will be spiritual, glorious, immortal, superior alike to disease and suffering, and death, and sin. It will be fashioned like the glorious body with which the Lord Jesus Christ himself is seated on the throne of heaven. Then, in the completeness of your whole perfected nature, you will render to God in Christ a service of love which will know no weariness and which will never end.