

**CONSOLATION IN BEREAVEMENT
THROUGH PRAYERS FOR THE
DEPARTED: A PLEA FOR THE
REASONABLENESS OF THIS
METHOD OF CONSOLATION**

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Consolation in bereavement through prayers for the departed: a plea for the reasonableness of this method of consolation by Alfred Plummer

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METHOD OF CONSOLATION

BY THE REV.

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PREFACE

THE first three papers in this little volume, and the greater part of the fourth paper, have already appeared in the pages of *The Churchman* (March, April, May, June, 1916); the concluding portion of the fourth paper, and the whole of the fifth and sixth are new. The genesis of the whole is of some interest; for the first impulse was given, without the writer being at all conscious of it, on the other side of the globe, in the Diocesan Synod of Bathurst, New South Wales, by the Bishop of that See. It was not until some weeks later that I heard of what had taken place.

At one of the sessions of the Diocesan Conference which immediately precedes the Annual Synod, the Sub-Dean was to have read a paper upon "The War and Prayers for the Departed." A few days before the Conference met the

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Sub-Dean was struck down with typhoid fever. To meet the emergency the Bishop read from the chair what I had written some twenty-five years ago in the volume on the Pastoral Epistles in *The Expositor's Bible*, and commended that statement of the question very cordially to the clergy for their consideration. A report of this part of the proceedings of the Conference was published in the *Melbourne Church of England Messenger* of October 22, 1915, and led to controversial discussion. I received a courteous letter from a clergyman who took part in this controversy, in which he informed me that he could not agree with the view taken in the volume on the Pastoral Epistles, and asked me whether I still held the views which were stated there. The reply to this letter contained a re-statement of the case which is similar to that in the fourth paper in this volume, but was a good deal more brief. The knowledge that the question was attracting a good deal of attention on this side of the globe, owing to

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the long lists of deaths that appeared almost daily and struck thousands with sorrow, induced me to expand the argument in the letter into an article for a magazine. The editor of *The Churchman* consented to accept such an article, and asked that it might be extended to a discussion of the whole subject in a series of articles. Hence the four papers in that magazine on "The War and the Other World."

It is specially with the desire to give consolation to the bereaved that these four papers have been published, and that they are republished with additional material now. Even when there are no wars to carry off men by the thousand, one of the sad thoughts which frequently arise in the hearts of those who have lost one who is very dear, is this: "To render service to him has been one of the chief joys of my life; and now I can do so no more." And too often there is the still sadder thought: "There were so many services that I might have rendered to him, and did

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not ; and now it is too late." For more than twelve hundred years the whole of Christendom declared with no uncertain voice that both these thoughts are founded on error ; and the vast majority of Christians, since there has been a division of belief on the subject, declare so still. " You *can* go on rendering service ; it is *not* too late ; you can render the highest service by praying for them." It is only Protestants, and by no means all of them, who have scruples about praying for the departed ; and the number of those who have scruples, and even more than scruples, is (it would seem) diminishing day by day. It is a significant fact—to mention only one instance—that a Congregational Minister last year preached an eloquent sermon on the subject, which he afterwards published. It is well worth reading ; *Praying for the Dead*, by the Rev. B. J. Snell, Independent Minister at Brixton. He urges " that under the stress of passionate emotion we cannot help ourselves. The instinct is there. It is a true instinct,

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God's message written in our hearts." He bids us beware of adding to the number of the good impulses which we have repelled to our own great hurt. "If in bereaved hour there arises this longing to pray for your own, do not let it be quenched by reason of controversies long buried. Let your heart have its way."

He quotes some fine lines, with which this Preface may close.

"How can I cease to pray for thee? Somewhere
In God's great universe thou art to-day.
Can He not reach thee with His tender care?
Can He not hear me when for thee I pray?
What matters it to Him who holds within
The hollow of His hand all worlds, all space,
That thou art done with earthly care and sin?
Somewhere within His ken thou hast a place;
Somewhere thou livest and hast need of Him;
Somewhere thy soul sees higher heights to climb;
And somewhere, still, there may be valleys dim
That thou must pass to reach the hills sublime.
Then all the more, because thou canst not hear
Poor human words of blessing, will I pray,
O true brave heart, God bless thee, wheresoe'er
In His great universe thou art to-day."

BIDEFORD,

Trinity Monday, 1916.