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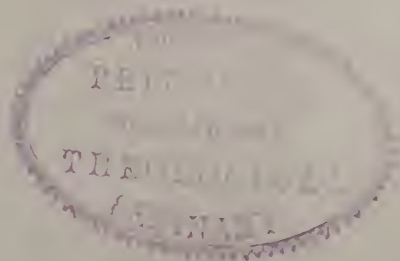
By Whom, all things; for Whom, all things.

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THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST: THE TEST OF CHRISTIANITY.

IF I could believe the resurrection," said Spinoza, "I would become a Christian at once." The great Jewish philosopher was right. The resurrection of Christ and the existence of Christianity must stand or fall together. The Christian Church rests on the resurrection of its Founder. Without this fact the church could never have been born, or, if born, it would soon have died a natural death. If Christ was raised from the dead, then all his other miracles are sure, and our faith is impregnable; if he was not raised, he died in vain, and our faith is in vain. It was only his resurrection that made his death available for our atonement, justification, and salvation; without the resurrection his death would be the grave of our hopes; we should be still unredeemed and under the power of our sins. A gospel of a dead Saviour would be a contradiction and wretched delusion. This is the reasoning of St. Paul, and its force is irresistible.

The resurrection of Christ is therefore emphatically a test question upon which depends the truth or falsehood of the Christian religion. It is either the greatest miracle or the greatest delusion which history records. Ewald makes the striking remark that the resurrection is "the culmination of all the miraculous events which are conceivable from the beginning of history to its close."

Christ had predicted both his crucifixion and his resurrection, but the former was a stumbling-block to the disciples, the latter a mystery which they could not understand till after the event. They no doubt expected that he would soon establish his Messianic kingdom on earth. Hence their utter disappointment and

downheartedness after the crucifixion. The treason of one of their own number, the triumph of the hierarchy, the fickleness of the people, the death and burial of the beloved Master, had in a few hours rudely blasted their Messianic hopes and exposed them to the contempt and ridicule of their enemies. For two days they were trembling on the brink of despair; but on the third day, behold! the same disciples underwent a complete revolution from despondency to hope, from timidity to courage, from doubt to faith, and began to proclaim the gospel of the resurrection in the face of an unbelieving world and at the peril of their lives. This revolution was not isolated, but general among them; it was not the result of an easy credulity, but brought about in spite of doubt and hesitation; it was not superficial and momentary, but radical and lasting; it affected not only the apostles, but the whole history of the world. It reached even the leader of the persecution, Saul of Tarsus, one of the clearest and strongest intellects, and converted him into the most devoted and faithful champion of this very gospel to the hour of his martyrdom.

This is a fact patent to every reader of the closing chapters of the Gospels, and is freely admitted even by the most advanced sceptics.

The question now rises whether this inner revolution in the life of the disciples, with its incalculable effects upon the fortunes of mankind, can be rationally explained without a corresponding outward revolution in the history of Christ; in other words, whether the professed faith of the disciples in the risen Christ was true and real, or a hypocritical lie, or an honest self-delusion.

There are four possible theories which have been tried again and again and defended with as much learning and ingenuity as can be summoned to their aid. Historical questions are not like mathematical problems. No argument in favor of the resurrection will avail with those critics who start with the philosophical assumption that miracles are impossible, and still less with those who deny not only the resurrection of the body but even the immortality of the soul. But facts are stubborn; and if a critical hypothesis can be proven to be psychologically and historically impossible and unreasonable, the result is fatal to the philosophy which underlies the critical hypothesis. It is

not the business of the historian to construct history from preconceived notions and to adjust it to his own liking, but to reproduce it from the best evidence and to let it speak for itself. Facts in history, as phenomena in nature, are stubborn and must overrule speculations and conjectures.

1. The HISTORICAL view is presented by the Gospels, believed in the Christian church of every denomination and sect, and is incorporated in the institution of the "Lord's day," which commemorates the resurrection of Christ as the crowning miracle and divine seal of his whole work, as the foundation of the hope of believers and the pledge of their future resurrection. According to this theory the resurrection of Christ was an actual tho miraculous event, in harmony with his previous history and character, and in fulfilment of his own prediction. It was a reanimation of the dead body of Jesus by a return of his soul from the spirit-world, and a rising of body and soul from the grave to a new life, which, after repeated manifestations to believers during a short period of forty days, entered into glory by the ascension to heaven. The object of the manifestations was not only to convince the apostles personally of the resurrection, but to make them witnesses of the resurrection and heralds of salvation to all the world.

Truth compels us to admit that there are serious difficulties in harmonizing the accounts of the evangelists, and in forming a consistent conception of the nature of the resurrection-body, hovering as it were between heaven and earth, and oscillating for forty days between a natural and a supernatural state; of a body clothed with flesh and blood and bearing the wound-prints, and yet so spiritual as to appear and disappear through closed doors and to ascend visibly to heaven. But these difficulties are not so great as those which are created by a denial of the fact itself. The former can be measurably solved, the latter cannot. We do not know all the details and circumstances which might enable us to clearly trace the order of events; but among all the variations the great central fact of the resurrection itself and its principal features, as Dr. Meyer, one of the fairest and ablest exegetes, observes, "stand out all the more sure." The period of the forty days is, in the nature of the case, the most mysterious in the life of Christ, and transcends all ordinary

Christian experience. The christophanies resemble in some respects the theophanies of the Old Testament, which were granted only to few believers, yet for the general benefit. At all events, the fact of the resurrection furnishes the only key for the solution of the psychological problem of the sudden, radical, and permanent change in the mind and conduct of the disciples; it is the necessary link in the chain which connects their history before and after that event. Their faith in the resurrection was too clear, too strong, too steady, too effective to be explained in any other way. They showed the strength and boldness of their conviction by soon returning to Jerusalem, the post of danger, and founding there, in the very face of the hostile Sanhedrim, the mother-church of Christendom.

2. The THEORY OF FRAUD. The apostles stole and hid the body of Jesus, and deceived the world.

This theory was invented by the Jewish priest who crucified the Lord, and knew it to be false (Matt. 27 : 62-66 ; 28 : 12-15). The lie was repeated and believed, like many other lies, by credulous infidels, first by malignant Jews at the time of Justin Martyr, then by Celsus, who learned it from them, but wavered between it and the vision-theory, and was renewed in the eighteenth century by Reimarus in the *Wolfenbüttel* Fragments. More recently Salvador, a French Jew, has tried to prove that Jesus was justly crucified, and was saved by the wife of Pilate through Joseph of Arimathæa or some Galilean women; that he retired among the Essenes and appeared secretly to a few of his disciples.

This infamous lie carries its refutation on its face: for if the Roman soldiers who watched the grave at the express request of the priests and Pharisees were asleep, they could not see the thieves, nor would they have proclaimed their military crime; if they, or only some of them, were awake, they would have prevented the theft. As to the disciples, they were too timid and desponding at the time to venture on such a daring act, and too honest to cheat the world. And finally a self-invented falsehood could not give them courage and constancy of faith for the proclamation of the resurrection at the peril of their lives. The whole theory is a wicked absurdity, an insult to the common-sense and honor of mankind.

3. The SWOON-THEORY. The physical life of Jesus was not extinct, but only exhausted, and was restored by the tender care of his friends and disciples, or (as some absurdly add) by his own medical skill: and after a brief period he quietly died a natural death.

This theory was ably advocated by Paulus of Heidelberg (1800), and modified by Gfrörer (1838), who afterwards became a Roman Catholic. We are pained to add Dr. Hase (*Gesch. Jesu*, 1876, p. 101), who finds it necessary, however, to call to aid a "special providence" to maintain some sort of consistency with his former advocacy of the miracle of the resurrection, when he truly said ("Leben Jesu," p. 269, 5th ed. 1865): "The truth of the resurrection rests unshakably on the testimony, yea on the existence of the apostolic church."

Josephus, Valerius Maximus, psychological and medical authorities have been searched and appealed to for examples of such apparent resurrections from a trance or asphyxy, especially on the third day, which is supposed to be a critical turning-point for life or putrefaction.

But besides insuperable physical difficulties—as the wounds and loss of blood from the very heart pierced by the spear of the Roman soldier—this theory utterly fails to account for the moral effect. A brief sickly existence of Jesus in need of medical care, and terminating in his natural death and final burial, without even the glory of martyrdom which attended the crucifixion, far from restoring the faith of the apostles, would have only in the end deepened their gloom and driven them to utter despair. Strauss and Keim have admirably and effectually refuted this theory of the older Rationalism which the Germans call the "rationalismus vulgaris."

4. The VISION-HYPOTHESIS. Christ rose merely in the imagination of his friends, who mistook a subjective vision or dream for actual reality, and were thereby encouraged to proclaim their faith in the resurrection at the risk of death. Their wish was father to the belief, their belief was father to the fact, and the belief, once started, spread with the power of a religious epidemic from person to person and from place to place. The Christian society wrought the miracle by its intense love for Christ. Accordingly, the resurrection does not belong to the

history of Christ at all, but to the inner life of his disciples. It is merely the embodiment of their reviving faith.

This hypothesis was invented by Celsus, a heathen adversary in the second century, and soon buried out of sight, but was again suggested in a more respectable form by Spinoza in the seventeenth, and after a second burial it rose to a new life in the nineteenth, under the lead of Strauss and Renan, and spread with epidemical rapidity among sceptical critics in Germany, France, Holland, and England. It is now the favorite hypothesis, altho there are indications within the Tübingen school in its latest developments that it will soon share the fate of its predecessors. Among English writers the anonymous author of "Supernatural Religion" (which is already passing through the seventh edition) is its chief champion, and states it in these words: "The explanation which we offer, and which has long been adopted in various forms by able critics" [among whom, in a foot-note, he falsely quotes Ewald], "is, that doubtless Jesus was seen ($\omega\phi\sigma\eta$), but the vision was not real and objective, but illusory and subjective; that is to say, Jesus was not himself seen, but only a representation of Jesus within the minds of the beholders." Renan ascribes to Mary Magdalene the chief agency in creating and spreading this delusion, and says with shocking profanity, "*La passion d'une hallucinée donne au monde un Dieu resuscité!*"

The advocates of this hypothesis appeal first and chiefly to the vision of St. Paul on the way to Damascus, which occurred several years later, and is nevertheless put by him on a level with the former appearances to the older apostles (1 Cor. 15: 8). The next support is derived from supposed analogies in the history of religious enthusiasm and mysticism, such as the individual visions of St. Francis of Assisi, the Maid of Orleans, St. Theresa (who believed that she had seen Jesus in person with the eyes of the soul more distinctly than she could have seen him with the eyes of the body), Swedenborg, even Mohammed, and the collective visions of the Montanists in Asia Minor, the Camisards in France, the spectral resurrections of the martyred Thomas à Becket of Canterbury and Savonarola of Florence in the excited imagination of their admirers, and finally the apparitions of the Immaculate Virgin at Lourdes. The author of

“Supernatural Religion” calls to aid even Luther’s vision of the devil on the Wartburg, when the reformer threw the inkstand at him, and Lord Byron’s appearance after his death to Walter Scott in clear moonshine!

Nobody will deny that subjective fancies and impressions are often mistaken for objective realities. But with the exception of the case of St. Paul—which on closer investigation turns out to be, even according to the admission of the leaders of sceptical criticism (such as Dr. Baur), a powerful argument against the mythical or visionary theory—these supposed analogies are entirely irrelevant; for, not to speak of other differences, they were isolated and passing phenomena which left no mark on history; while the faith in the resurrection of Christ has revolutionized the whole world. It must therefore be treated on its own merits as an altogether unique case.

(a) The first insuperable argument against the vision-theory and in favor of the objective reality of the resurrection is the empty tomb of Christ. If he did not rise, his body must either have been removed or remained in the tomb. If removed by the disciples, they were guilty of a deliberate falsehood in preaching the resurrection, and then the vision-hypothesis gives way to the exploded theory of fraud. If removed by the enemies, then those enemies had the best evidence against the resurrection, and would not have failed to produce it, and thus to expose the baselessness of the vision. The same is true, of course, if the body had remained in the tomb. The murderers of Christ would certainly not have missed such an opportunity to destroy the very foundation of the hated sect.

To escape this difficulty, Strauss removes the origin of the illusion away off to Galilee, whither the disciples fled; but this does not help the matter, for they returned in a few weeks to Jerusalem, where we find them all assembled on the day of Pentecost.

This argument is fatal even to the highest form of the vision-hypothesis, which admits a *spiritual* manifestation of Christ from *heaven*, but denies the resurrection of his body. This form is advocated by Ewald, Schenkel, and Keim, but is admitted by Keim, and quite recently also by Schenkel (in his *Christusbild der Apostel*, 1879), to be a mere hypothesis which by no means solves all the difficulties of the problem.

(*b*) If Christ did not really rise, then the words which he spoke to Mary Magdalene, to the disciples of Emmaus, to doubting Thomas, to Peter on the lake of Tiberias, to all the disciples on Mount Olivet, were likewise pious fictions. But who can believe that words of such dignity and majesty, so befitting the solemn moment of the departure to the throne of glory, as the commandment to preach the gospel to every creature, to baptize the nations in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and the promise to be with his disciples alway to the end of the world—a promise abundantly verified in the daily experience of the church—could proceed from dreamy and self-deluded enthusiasts or crazy fanatics any more than the Sermon on the Mount or the Sacerdotal Prayer! And who, with any spark of historical sense, can suppose that Jesus never instituted baptism, which has been performed in his name ever since the day of Pentecost, and which, like the celebration of the Lord's Supper, bears monumental testimony to him every day as the sunlight does to the sun!

(*c*) If the visions of the resurrection were the product of an excited imagination, it is unaccountable that they should suddenly have ceased on the fortieth day (Acts 1: 15), and not have occurred to any of the disciples afterwards, with the single exception of Paul, who expressly represents his vision of Christ as "the last." Even on the day of Pentecost Christ did not appear to them, but, according to his promise, "the other Paraclete" descended upon them; and Stephen saw Christ in heaven, not on earth.

(*d*) The chief objection to the vision-hypothesis is its intrinsic impossibility. It makes the most exorbitant claim upon our credulity. It requires us to believe that many persons, singly and collectively, at different times, and in different places, from Jerusalem to Damascus, had the same vision and dreamed the same dream; that the women at the open sepulchre early in the morning, Peter and John soon afterwards, the two disciples journeying to Emmaus on the afternoon of the resurrection-day, the assembled apostles on the evening in the absence of Thomas, and again on the next Lord's day in the presence of the sceptical Thomas, seven apostles at the lake of Tiberias, on one occasion five hundred brethren at once, most of whom were

still alive when Paul reported the fact, then James, the brother of the Lord, who formerly did not believe in him, again all the apostles on Mount Olivet at the ascension, and at last the clear-headed, strong-minded persecutor on the way to Damascus—that all these men and women on these different occasions vainly imagined they saw and heard the self-same Jesus in bodily shape and form; and that they were by this baseless vision raised all at once from the deepest gloom in which the crucifixion of their Lord had left them, to the boldest faith and strongest hope which impelled them to proclaim the gospel of the resurrection from Jerusalem to Rome to the end of their lives! And this illusion of the early disciples created the greatest revolution not only in their own views and conduct, but among Jews and Gentiles and in the subsequent history of mankind! This illusion, we are expected to believe by these unbelievers, gave birth to the most real and most mighty of all facts, the Christian Church, which has lasted these eighteen hundred years, and is now spread all over the civilized world, embracing more members than ever, and exercising more moral power than all the kingdoms and all other religions combined!

The vision-hypothesis instead of getting rid of the miracle only shifts it from fact to fiction; it makes an empty delusion more powerful than the truth, or turns all history itself at last into a delusion.

Before we can reason the resurrection of Christ out of history, we must reason St. Paul and Christianity itself out of existence. We must either admit the miracle, or frankly confess that we stand here before an inexplicable mystery.

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