

THE
BIBLIOTHECA SACRA.

ARTICLE I.

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST A PART OF
CHRISTIANITY.

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IT seems to have become a question whether miracles prove the truth of Christianity, or Christianity proves the truth of the miracles. To many Christian minds the principal argument for miracles is that they are a part of Christianity. They admit the need of historical evidence; but, instead of eyeing it with suspicion, they find a strong presumption on its side. Their latent syllogism is this: Christianity is the true religion; Christianity carries with it a belief in the Christian miracles; therefore, the Christian miracles are true. The agnostic adopts the same minor premise, but, with a different major, constructs his syllogism thus: Whatever religion requires a belief in miracles cannot be accepted as true; Christianity requires such a belief; therefore, Christianity cannot be accepted as true. There is a third possible syllogism in which the minor premise is denied, viz.: Christianity is the true religion; it is independent of a belief in miracles; therefore, the Christian miracles are irrelevant to the acceptance of Christianity.

Now, is the argument of the first syllogism legitimate? We should bear in mind that it does not interfere with the old and solid reasoning that miracles prove the truth of Christianity. It simply, in the superabundance of evidence afforded by Christian history, first finds Christianity true on various grounds apart from miracles, and then infers the truth of those miracles that inhere in it. Nor is this reasoning in a circle. One does not prove Christianity from the miracles and then turn round and prove the miracles from Christianity. Plainly, if both are true, and logically connected, one can reason from either to the other, provided the one taken as the premise be established independently of the other. Now it is true that many a believer has accepted Christianity because of what it is, and what it has done in the world; because it meets the wants of his nature, his soul; or even because he has been brought up in it, and breathed its atmosphere as a part of his life. Such a believer may never have investigated critically the evidence for miracles and may doubt his power to do so. He may feel that they are very distant and un-modern, but after all it seems to him that these signs and wonders are somehow bound up in Christianity. He argues from Christianity to miracles, and not from miracles to Christianity.

What we now propose is to take one—the one—of these miracles, and show why Christian believers are justified in accepting it as true without going into all the critical details of historical investigation; in other words, why the presumption in their minds should be strongly in favor of the resurrection, and should remove all antecedent improbability from the Gospel narratives. If we find this to be true of believers, we will then ask, What should be the mental attitude of unbelievers toward the received records of the resurrection?

I. Our first point is that Christianity promises a blessed resurrection to all its adherents. No one will dispute this as a matter of fact. It may be asserted, however,

that such a promise, or hope, is incidental, not essential, to Christianity. The reply is obvious and ample, viz.: The resurrection of believers—we say nothing now of unbelievers—is, throughout the whole history of our religion, completely and indissolubly interwoven with Christian faith. We do not say that it ought to be—it *is*. Not only does the New Testament *teach* man's resurrection, but, as a matter of fact, this faith and hope has always been a prominent feature in Christianity. From the *Dormit in Christo* of the catacombs down through all the ages, the liturgies and hymns and sermons of the church, and all Christian life, social and solitary, speak but one voice as to the hope of victory over death in the resurrection. This Christianity, bearing the resurrection of the dead as its crowning triumph and its glorious hope, is the only Christianity that we know of. Now our argument is this: Every believer in Christ and Christianity, inasmuch as he believes in a future resurrection, ought to find no difficulty in believing the past resurrection of the Founder of his religion: it is hard not to believe it. This argument does not rest on any particular theory of the nature of the resurrection. It simply claims that all who look forward to the resurrection of men are bound, in consistency, to have open minds and ready belief towards the great past resurrection. If any attenuate the future resurrection to a bodiless soul-existence, we have to say that their view is not a part of actual Christianity, but if their philosophy requires them to hold it, they will, of course, apply it to Christ's resurrection also, and thus they may retain the shadow of the argument, though without much of its substance. Actual Christianity holds to a bodily reappearance that in some way preserves the identity of the person. Hence the speculative difficulties in the way of believing the future resurrection are vastly greater than in the case of the resurrection of Christ. Putting such questions aside, we maintain that a Christian has a logical right to even anticipate the truth of Christ's resurrection. He

may leave to historical investigation all questions in regard to the exact time and place and surroundings. He may take the keenest interest in discussing these points, but underneath all is the strong presumption and probability that at some time, in some place, and with certain surroundings, Jesus rose from death. He need not be ashamed to say that it is easy for him to believe in the resurrection, and easy to credit the simple story of the Gospels.

The whole case may be illustrated by a well-known fact of ancient history. Hannibal crossed the Alps with an army. Livy says so, and Polybius says so; but they do not agree in details. Nor is it certain by what pass he crossed. The great majority of modern readers are incapable of criticising the ancient records of the event, but from the subsequent course of history which they have good reason to credit, they conclude that he must have crossed the Alps. If Livy and Polybius had both been silent about it, or if their discrepancies were tenfold more serious than they are, we should still know that Hannibal crossed the Alps in some way and by some pass. The surrounding history prepares our minds to believe this on even slight direct evidence. We may go on to the discussion of details, and determine, if we can, by what pass he marched, and even whether he poured vinegar on the heated rocks, and how many elephants he lost, and so on, but no one would ask us to settle these questions before admitting the main fact. Further, no one would say that we ought to take evidence on the fact as an isolated occurrence, wholly separate from previous and subsequent history.

We need not press this illustration to extremes, but it is plain that we may reasonably believe that Jesus rose from the dead, if that fact harmonizes with subsequent history, without settling such questions as why the tomb was not closed with a well-fitting door, instead of a stone,¹ and

¹ See *Nineteenth Century*, April, 1889, p. 491.

whether the four evangelists agree perfectly in relating the circumstances, and whether any ancient uncritical record whatever would be sufficient to establish such a fact in a modern court of law. Now the subsequent history with which the resurrection of Christ harmonizes, and into which it enters as a constituent part, is no other than Christianity itself as an historical fact, and a mighty force in human life ; and in the fore-front of that Christianity is the future resurrection of the dead. Why then should it be thought a thing incredible that Jesus himself should rise?

We are still considering the case of those believers who do not consciously rest their faith in Christ and Christianity on the miracles. They depend on what is called the "internal evidence," from the nature and effects of Christianity, or, still more commonly, on their own experience. We are inquiring what is their proper attitude of mind towards the historical evidence of the resurrection. We have considered the presumption arising from a single feature of Christianity, the doctrine of the future resurrection of men. We ought to glance at some of the other doctrines of our religion and see how they also imply the resurrection of our Lord. For our purpose a glance is enough.

Look, first, at the divinity of Christ. If this be disputed as a doctrine of Christianity, our answer is, that we are considering historical Christianity in its main outlines, without a hair-splitting discussion of dogmas. The Christianity of history certainly includes the divinity of Christ. Now that a divine being living on the earth should either not die or return to life after death, would seem the most natural thing in the world. No extraordinary evidence would be required to prove it. One might almost as well be expected to quibble over the statement that the sun rose on the resurrection morning as that Jesus rose. In this we are not reasoning in a circle. It is true that the divinity of Christ has been, and will be, proved by his res-

urrection, but we now have nothing to do with this or any other argument in favor of the doctrine, except to say that many of them are drawn from sources independent of the fact of a resurrection. The belief of the doctrine is a fact in the religious life of the world. The shortest argument on the subject that we remember to have heard, and from a man of intellectual force, was this: "Jesus could never be my Saviour if he were not divine." It would have been no reasoning in a circle for him to add, "it must be that such a Saviour, if he should die, would rise again."

The same general method of reasoning we might apply to the doctrine of Jesus as the judge of the world, to his intercession, to the whole doctrine and duty of prayer, and to the doctrine of the Lord's Supper, with its prophecy of a future coming, and its living presence at the table. It may be thought that the atonement, the cardinal doctrine of Christianity, does not carry with it the resurrection. But a little reflection will show that the atonement would have been a failure if it found its untimely end in the tomb of Joseph. An atonement by one who remained under the power of death would have been unpreachable. Let one imagine, if he can, the apostles proclaiming Christ crucified as a Saviour, during the interval between the crucifixion and resurrection. The words of Paul, "It is Christ that died, yea rather that is risen," express the true connection between the atonement and the resurrection.

Let this suffice for a view of the doctrines of Christianity in their relation to the resurrection of Jesus. Our

golden weddings the closets and drawers of the newly happy pair are searched for the fifty-year-old marriage certificate. Sometimes it is discovered and sometimes not. Would any be much distressed respecting the lawfulness of the marriage, if it were not found? A half century of wedded life, with its intertwining with the lives of many others, with its traditions and incidental records, ought to pass for something. No one would find fault with the historical science or the logic of the venerable couple if they should say to anxious searchers, "Don't trouble yourselves. The certificate must have been given. It's all right."

The church has celebrated many centennials. It is so old that it begins to hold somewhat lightly its early credentials. But the records have not been lost. If they are beyond minute confirmation, they are equally beyond invalidation. Christianity in its present glory and power can afford to smile at the anxious searchers after a certificate of the resurrection.

II. Our plan requires us to consider, next, the proper mental attitude of unbelievers towards the Christian belief of Christ's resurrection. It is not sufficient to say that they ought to be believers. We wish to look at the intellectual world as it is. There are many agnostics. They acknowledge the existence of Christianity as an historic force, but do not receive it as the true religion. Yet they believe in religion—a religion without miracle, without prayer, without Christ, without God. How can we approach such religionists with evidences of supernatural history? What common ground do we stand upon? Shall we start with the blindly revolving nebula of religious instinct and try to evolve logically the ideas of Deity impersonal, Deity personal, and Deity incarnate? Such might be the pathway of a logic bold and yet subtle, but our object is far humbler. We shall be content if we can induce agnostics to have a sincere respect for the logic of Christian believers though they do not indorse it. For

this purpose it may be even an advantage that they stand wholly outside of the Christian circle. Let them look on coldly if they must, but at any rate impartially. Let them look upon Christianity with the same lack of personal sympathy as upon Mohammedanism, or the polytheism of ancient Greece. Our appeal, then, to these cold, impartial, outside unbelievers is this:—

1. We ask you, first, if it is not reasonable and logical for men to be Christian believers on evidence derived from the nature and power of Christianity as seen in the world to-day, without going into any critical, historical investigations. You acknowledge a certain religious feeling in man, which often becomes one of the deepest and most powerful impulses of his life. Christianity has been found to satisfy and guide in a practical way this deep religious element. This religion seems to be, in the truest sense natural to man. Those who become believers when in mature life, do so, in a great majority of instances, because they have observed its effects in the lives of others. This is their practical logic, whatever may be the divine, or human, influences that lead them to adopt it. Having once embraced Christianity, their belief in it is strengthened by their experience. This new evidence often becomes so vivid and strong as almost to obliterate all other evidence. They have tried this religion. It has carried them safely through dangerous crises and overwhelming afflictions. They love the Christian faith. They love God. They love Christ. They try to obey the precepts of Christianity, and they enjoy its comforts, hopes, and promises; and the more they know of these the more ardently are they attached to their faith. By their side in great numbers are those who have been educated to be Christians from earliest childhood. In the case of these, the acceptance of Christianity has been based on an almost unconscious development of substantially the same process of reasoning; for every one knows that the most powerful Christianizing influence in the home is a consistent and winning example.

Now we ask you to point out wherein this acceptance of Christianity is illogical or in any way unreasonable. Do you say that such reasoning would make Mohammedans and Buddhists in countries where these religions prevail? It certainly would, and does; but the logic is not at fault. Logic is general, and does not furnish its own premises. In the absence of Christianity the people are shut up to the prevailing faith. Hence missionaries are sent to the heathen in order that this sound logic may have true premises. And the strongest arguments on mission ground to-day come from the lives of true Christians. As agnostics you value evidence from the seen and present. Christianity was offered to men in the first century on the evidence of things seen and present. It is now offered largely on evidence of things seen and present, but very different things from ancient miracles. These evidences have been usually called "internal" in distinction from the "external" or historical evidences. They might almost as well be called the "Visible and Present Evidences" in distinction from "Past Evidences." You despise the past evidences. For that very reason we ask you to respect the present.

2. The fact that certain past events have been superseded, more or less, in their evidential value, does not affect their reality or give them small importance. Take an illustration from political history. The people of the United States have been celebrating the centennial of the adoption of the Constitution. Does any one think of staking the existence and legitimacy of the present system of government on any critical discussion of the political acts of a hundred years ago? Yet no one questions the reality or importance of those acts. A convention really assembled and held memorable debates resulting in the formation of the Constitution. The Constitution thus formed was sent to the states and received the assent of one after another until at last it was adopted, and became as it now remains the supreme law of the land. At the beginning

of this century all these facts were fresh in the minds of the great body of the people; but during the last twenty-five years how many could be found who knew or cared to know the details? These things have been all quietly taken for granted; and taking things for granted is next door to forgetting them.

All this illustrates, though imperfectly, the case of Christianity. The forgetfulness of the details of its origin and early history has been prevented by the diligent study of the Bible. And this very diligence has, strangely enough, given such prominence to the beginnings of Christianity that some minds exalt unduly past evidences and forget the present. Christians have thus given needless offence to your critical feeling, and given themselves needless doubt. The facts of primitive Christianity are indeed the foundation of our faith to-day, but the critical *knowledge* of these facts is not the foundation; and the point that we now urge upon you is that it is logical and every way reasonable to hold fast to those facts that have been incorporated into the system, though they may have lost to us a large measure of their evidential force. The value of evidence depends on the character and circumstances of those to whom it is addressed, and is therefore liable to change with every generation. To the primitive believers the evidence ran, "You have seen," "Our eyes have seen," the facts of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. To us it runs, "You have some record of the evidence that satisfied the first believers, but, more than that, you have the system and power that have grown out of the facts which they believed."

Now the great body of Christians of every name and sect believe that the resurrection of Christ is one of the original and fundamental facts of Christianity. That a slain and buried Christ should never have risen from the dead, and yet should be loved and worshipped by the millions of Christendom as the ever-living Saviour, and the author and pledge of the resurrection of men, is an

historical impossibility. We do not ask you, as agnostics, to believe this, but you cannot fail to see that this belief cannot be uprooted by criticising the records in the Gospels. In doing that you are merely calling in question the evidence that was offered eighteen hundred years ago to the people of that day. You are behind the times. Confessedly your work, also, is very much in the dark, for you do not know all the evidence that appealed to the early Christians. Suppose you succeed in undermining the evidence that has come down to us. You have then merely proved that, so far as we can discover, the early Christians were not justified in accepting the resurrection of Jesus as a fact. We know that very many at that time agreed with your position and refused their assent. If all had done so, that would have been the end of Christianity. It would have died at its birth. But it did not die, and is alive to-day in great power; and prominent among its doctrines is the resurrection. If you are going to destroy this article of its faith, you must, on other grounds than historical criticism, blot out Christianity itself, as a present religion.

3. We have one word more. Consider the hold that Christianity has upon the hearts of believers by its doctrine of the future resurrection. We do not ask you to believe the doctrine, but only to mark what comfort and relief it gives in view of the awful fact of death. It is certainly one office of the true religion to comfort; and it is therefore logical, and, what is more, it is deeply human, to cling to that faith which binds up the broken heart. It has been often said that primitive religions are based on imaginary wants and fears, and that as fast as those wants are supplied by rational exertion and civilization, and those fears are proved groundless by the advance of science, the power of religion has been weakened and its sphere narrowed. But there is one great want and woe of man that has not been lessened by civilization. Men still die. An average lifetime has been slightly extended,

but the end is as sure as ever. A larger proportion of infants are brought to maturity, but all that are born, sooner or later die. Civilization itself becomes a slayer, and the provisions for production and traffic and travel and pleasure are often the terrific instruments of death. More than this, man is made sensitive by civilization. His heart-strings grow tender from refined social life. But death rends this warm throbbing social organization as grimly as it does the rudest savagery. The family as we find it in modern refined life shows us what death is—the mother holding her cold babe pressed to her heart, the husband, the wife, robbed of the light and joy of life. All this besides the solemn looking forward of the dying one, whose facing of death is not to be thought of as confined to the dim hour of dissolution, but extends back through the whole period of serious thinking. The savage, whether of to-day or of some far off day, knows little about death. Hence we say that the religion of to-day and of civilized life, if it is to be a comforter and strengthener of man, must meet the sad reality of death by a comfort that is strong and real. Christianity does this, in addition to its general consolations that apply to all life's hardships, by its doctrine of the future resurrection sealed by the resurrection of its Founder.

We beg you to consider that man's resurrection means more than a simple renewal of bodily life. That, of itself, would give substance to faith in the immortality of the soul, without which there is no religion. That, of itself, supplants the shadows of Platonic speculation by realities of human experience, and it makes the soul-existence that follows death—so poorly called the "intermediate state"—seem real. But the Christian resurrection goes much further. It means restoration and perfection,—social life restored and purified, earth's sundered love renewed, earth's wounds healed, perfect bodies, perfect souls, no pain, no sin, no sorrow. It means the ideal life, the "eternal life," to which it is an introduction.

“Have you forgotten,” you say, “the resurrection of damnation, spoken of in your New Testament?” No; but we need not dwell on that black shadow of a bright glory—a shadow cast by human unbelief. Christianity is not responsible for the darkness which it has come to dissipate. If the reception of the Christian religion were universal, there would be but one resurrection. And do you think it strange that Christians hold fast to that in this world of death? We may safely say that they will not give up the resurrection until they are ready to give up all religion; and religion they will not give up until they are ready to quench the light and crush the hope of their own nature. It is vain to urge upon them that death is in harmony with the whole system of nature. This only strengthens their conviction that Christianity is above the present course of nature. Some of them have heard of the old Stoic teaching that death is as natural as birth, but they have no mind to seek comfort in trouble by throwing themselves into the cold arms of a dead philosophy that has had suicide among its doctrines instead of a resurrection.

We drop the form of address to unbelievers, to say, in conclusion, that we would not be understood to disparage the existing documentary evidence of Christ's resurrection. Any one who takes it up in the right spirit will be struck with its abundance, its clearness, and naturalness, and beauty. We believe that it will be to the end of time, an independent source of belief in the resurrection, and through this in all the supernatural of Christianity. It were all that is necessary if it contained but one sentence declaring unequivocally that Jesus rose. But without even that, we have tried to show that the continued existence of Christianity would carry with it a belief in the resurrection. Now when we see and feel that this fact is built into the very framework of our faith, just as a constitutional article is incorporated into the framework of a government, then we can go back to those early testi-

monies of Matthew and Mark and Luke and John, and enjoy the child-like simplicity of the narratives, the transparent truthfulness of their tone, the fidelity in details, as of eye-witnesses, the pathos of that interview with the supposed gardener, the thorough-going doubt of Thomas—the patron saint of modern sceptics—and all the rest that deepens and brightens the picture in our minds of those birthdays of redemption. Even the seeming discrepancies may enhance our interest, by showing that we are reading but a part of the evidence that had a manifold presentation to the first believers. Reading the Gospels with such eyes—and Paul's Gospel with them—we are safe from the terrors of a cynical criticism. At the same time we can heartily welcome literary, historical, and antiquarian investigation. Let it be as minute and thorough as possible. Let even unfriendly hands explore the foundations if they will. They can no more disprove the resurrection than the authors of the "Critical History of America" can prove that our country was never discovered, and its Constitution never formed. This confidence we have no right to surrender; yet, in the great debate between faith and unbelief, it is possible to misplace and abuse it by claiming for the external and historical evidences of miracles a certainty that belongs only to the combined evidence of the present and the past.