

The Resurrection Body of our Lord.

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IN the glorious Liturgy of the Eastern Church for the great Paschal Festival the one ever-recurring thought is of the Saviour's resurrection as unlike all other resurrections, in being a victory over the grave, not incomplete, isolated, temporary, but a triumph over the whole power of death finally and universally. Again and again, after each reiterated response, the choir bursts in with the same troparion which tells that Christ hath so risen from the dead that in that rising death by death is trampled under foot. (*θανατῷ θάνατον πατήσας*) "The everlasting bars which held men chained" are shattered, Hell is "spoiled," Death's might is "abolished," the Mighty Conqueror hath so wrought Death's destruction (*θανατώσας τὸν θάνατον*) that through His "life-giving resurrection" the sons of men are free. "We celebrate," they cried, "the death of death, the overthrow of Hades, the firstfruits of another endless life." The Passover has risen and Redemption is secure. "In new beauty from the tomb" as from a bridal chamber, passing the seals and leaving them "unbroken," the Resurrection and the Life has shone forth. It is no mere Resuscitation, and no mere Bodiless Victory over death we have here.

I.

When we turn to the Gospel records to find out how far this exalted idea of our Lord's resurrection—the staying power of the Eastern Church through ages of discipline and sacrifice—is true, we find that, even examined in the fullest light of modern criticism, it does not pass one whit beyond the facts recorded there. The objective reality, the spiritual uniqueness, the representative character, the quickening power, the transfigured beauty of our Lord's manifestations are quietly and consistently affirmed. There are the marks at one and the same time of sobriety, historicity, naturalness, correspondence, a variety

which springs out of a basic unity, and confirms and enlightens faith.

St. Mark comes first in order of time, and affirms the fact of the Resurrection and the empty tomb. Two further features in the Appendix (xvi. 9-20) give us the impressions of the Early Church that His appearance was a "manifestation" (xvi. 12, 14), and that, on one of these occasions (the journey to Emmaus) it was "in another form" that He appeared. St. Matthew, undoubtedly second in order of time, records the visit of Mary Magdalene and "the other Mary," the message of the angels that He was going before to Galilee, the first actual meeting with Jesus when (*cf.* John xx. 17) they "took hold of His feet and worshipped Him" (see Matt. xxviii. 1, 7, 9). He records also the manifestation on the mountain in Galilee, and the fact that, "when they saw Him they worshipped Him (a significant fact), but some doubted," *ἐδίωρασαν* (xxviii. 17). Already we have features in the Risen Lord which did not belong to Him before, which on the one hand inspire awe and adoration, and on the other suggest perplexity by their mysteriousness. Then we pass to St. Luke. Here we meet with several additional features. The state of the linen cloths for some reason fills Peter with "wonder" (xxiv. 12, 13). We are plainly told in the Emmaus story of the subjective limitations, and their removal, which hinder the vision of the glorified Lord: "their eyes were holden," "their eyes were opened" (xxiv. 16, 31). The whole story is full of this. For several miles He walked and talked with them, and afterwards actually ate and drank with them and was unrecognized. It is suggested here, as more than once in other manifestations, that the recognition, when it took place, was due to action on His side rather than mere bodily resemblance. They reached the joy of Easter "by no sort of sensible perception but by the way of faith."¹ He was "known of them in the breaking of the bread" (xxiv. 35). Then follows the first record, in order of time, of the appearances in the Upper Room (xxiv. 36-49). We note

¹ Steinmeyer's "Passion and Resurrection of our Lord," p. 349.

that He "stood in the midst of them," though another evangelist tells us that "the doors were shut" where they were assembled; that, instead of welcoming Him, "they were terrified (*lit.* 'scared') and affrighted, and supposed that they were gazing at a spirit"; that at first they were "troubled," and "reasonings arose in their hearts"; that He bade them "handle Him and see to convince themselves entirely of His bodily reality and identity, an invitation which St. John's words (1 John i. 1, ἐψηλάφησαν) show they accepted; that He then "showed them His hands and His feet," doubtless, as in St. John, that they might behold the print of the nails; and now, instead of terror, they "disbelieved for joy" and wondered—a matchless psychological touch of St. Luke which aids us in accepting his testimony as real; and that He "took" the food they gave Him and "did eat before them." One other important feature emerges before we leave this memorable scene. He speaks of His intercourse with them, not as renewed, but as having already ceased—"While I was yet with you" (xxiv. 44). The story of the Ascension follows, much as in the Acts, but briefer, with His final bodily separation from them.

St. John adds to these features his thrilling account of the visit of St. Peter and St. John to the empty tomb. St. John, arriving first, stoops down and gazes into the sepulchre (*βλέπει*). The Lord is not there, and nothing beyond that fact claims his attention. St. Peter bursts in and "stares" (*θεωρεῖ*) at the linen cloths, something about them arresting and startling him. Then St. John, perhaps aroused by this attitude of his companion, also enters, and, with the spiritual intuition which always enabled him quickly to grasp (*cf.* xxi. 7) the significance of an objective fact, he "understood" (*εἶδε*, and see *οἶδα* in Gospels and Epistles, especially John iii. 11, xii. 41) and "believed." What had they seen? The linen cloths lying flat (*κείμενα*), undisturbed, though a body had passed through them; the napkin about the head twirled up in roll-form still (*ἐντετυλιγμένον*), as though the head which had once filled it had never been removed. The whole scene must have recalled the Trans-

figuration which those very Apostles had witnessed. It was "the Parable of the Grave clothes" which foreshadowed the character of His resurrection-life.¹ St. John goes on to tell us of the first manifestation in the Garden to Mary Magdalene. When she saw Him standing "she knew not that it was Jesus," and even "supposed Him to be the gardener." It was, again, here, as in previous instances, His action, rather than any passive resemblance, which aroused her faith. "Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turneth herself and saith unto Him, Rabboni, which is to say, Master." As she attempts to clasp His feet He forbids her, with the announcement that "He is ascending," implying that already, without waiting for the final withdrawal from sight, He belongs rather to Heaven than earth. St. John gives his own beautiful and heart-stirring narrative of the two manifestations on successive Sundays in the Upper Room. Jesus "came," with His sorely needed benediction of peace. To the features in St. Luke we now have the added bodily features that "He breathed on them," and thus, as a "quickening spirit" bestowed the Holy Ghost. To St. Thomas "for the more confirmation of the faith," He offered the touch-test already offered to the rest, and we note clearly now that the Body so offered bore still, in hands and feet and side, the everlasting scars of His victory over death (xx. 25). And Thomas answers, not as he would have responded to even the most wonderful of past miracles, with words of adoring reverence which span the whole space between earth and Heaven, "My Lord and my God."

St. John has one "manifestation" more to tell of, beside the Galilean lake (xxi.). The narrative here in every feature is full of wonder and stillness and suggestiveness. It has for background the shadowy hills, the quiet shore, the lonely boat, the breaking dawn. The Lord is again unrecognized at first. "The disciples knew not that it was Jesus." When He is recognized it is again by His action. The sense of mystery, of a certainty somehow convincing to faith rather than sense, of an

¹ See Latham's "Risen Master," pp. 1-90.

unusual awe even in the midst of homely surroundings which something must have inspired, is present with us in the whole narrative. We seem to stand, throughout, on the threshold of another world. "None of the disciples durst ask Him, Who art Thou? knowing that it was the Lord" (xxi. 12).

Thus are we brought to the final narrative in the Acts, with the fact of the Ascension. St. Luke describes His appearances during the forty days as so many "presentations" of Himself (i. 3, marg.) to "witnesses chosen before of God." The word *συναλιζόμενος* suggests (see marg., i. 4), instead of "being assembled with them," the words "eating with them." It was certainly at some social gathering that He made His last commands known. Either sense would imply that His manifestations did not become more ethereal and unearthly as the time of departure drew nigh. Then, as they looked, He was "taken up" — "received up in glory" (1 Tim. iii. 16), and "a cloud received Him out of their sight."

II.

What impressions have we gathered from these simple and convincing narratives of fact? What conclusions as to our Lord's risen body and our own future state did the primitive Church derive from them? The answer seems quite clearly twofold: First, if accepted, they establish the fact of His continued identity and of His bodily resurrection; secondly, the Resurrection they record is plainly no mere resuscitation to a former life, but an entry into a new world of being under utterly new conditions.

1. It is plain that the manifestations are put before us by the witnesses as both revelation and proof. Less of detail would have sufficed as evidence of His resurrection. The detail springs from the desire to acquaint us with the transfigured life of the Glorified Lord. "The history is not a history of the Resurrection, but of the manifestation of the Risen Christ."¹ And it is quite evident, on the one hand, that the features of

¹ Westcott, "Revelation of the Risen Lord," p. 4.

Identity and Continuity are present in our Lord's resurrection state. He is known and recognized. They see and hear and handle Him and feel His living breath. He "shows them His hands and His feet." The prints of the nails are in them and the sword-thrust is in the side. He "eats and drinks with them." He has "flesh and bones" such as no mere spirit possesses. He recalls by her personal name the passionate love of the Magdalen. He speaks alone words of pardon to broken-hearted Peter. He gives His new commission to His Church. He answers the doubt of despairing Thomas by accepting his challenge. He meets His disciples beside the lake, reinstates Peter, directs their failure to success, spreads the feast for weary and hungry men. For, of all the unwarranted assumptions made by a certain kind of critic, surely the view of Professor Schmiedel's,¹ that there were no auditory or tactual experiences, has the least to support it. Finally, it is as "this same Jesus" that He is announced to return. In every respect He seems to be fulfilling His original promise, "I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice." The formula, or law, which preserves essential personality, is still the same.

2. Yet, withal, we are conscious of a change. That change is prominent in all the narratives, including the earliest. It is present in the Gospels, but it is equally present in all the allusions to the risen Christ in the Epistles. And the picture presented, in spite of its contrasts with all one might expect, or all that the disciples could have expected, is not inconsistent, impossible, fantastical; but harmonious, self-correspondent, consistent throughout, and to after-ages it alone stands in harmony with all the facts. Our Lord has been "raised"—not, as Lazarus was raised, to die again. Death is not robbed; "Death is swallowed up in victory." The words associated with the last of all the manifestations in the New Testament, recorded by the latest witness years after the first, give the impression which the first brought home—"I am . . . the Living One, and I was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore, and have the keys of

¹ Article, *Encyclopædia Biblica*.

death and of Hades" (Rev. i. 17, 18). It is the same aspect of the Resurrection which St. Paul emphasizes: "He was declared" (*ορισθέντος*, determined) "to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection of the dead" (Rom. i. 4). "Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death no more hath dominion over Him" (Rom. vi. 9, R.V.). By death He "has brought to nought death," and "brought life and incorruption to light." The truth of such statements as these is confirmed by the narrative of the facts which the Gospels give us.

It has been objected that such a revelation is "quite inconceivable," and its stages "cannot be represented" to the mind. But the limits of our present experience cannot be taken as the boundary-line of all truth and experience; otherwise we should be soon landed in a universal negation which would destroy science itself. Even the supernatural is becoming more and more, with our deeper knowledge of nature, merged in the under-world of the natural. It is with great truth that Carlyle has written: "What are the laws of nature? To me, perhaps, the rising of one from the dead were no violation of these laws, but a confirmation; were some far deeper law, now first penetrated into and by spiritual force (even as the rest have been), brought to bear on us with its material force."

(a) They make it plain that *His life is a transfigured and glorified life*. "He is seen to be changed," writes Bishop Westcott, "yet none the less He is seen to be essentially the same. Nothing has been left in the grave, though all has been transfigured."¹ The Body of the Lord is utterly transformed, though it retains its connection with the past. There is "the image of the heavenly," but there are the marks of the nails as well. The Body has gone from the grave, yet it is no mere resuscitation that we see. Gathered up into a richer, fuller, more glorious life are the old familiar physical elements, which death has not annihilated, but transformed. There is no breach of continuity. The mortal has been "clothed upon," and its "mortality swallowed up of life." It has "put on incorruption"

¹ Westcott, "Revelation of the Risen Lord," p. 9.

—transfused, sublimated, transfigured with “the power of an indissoluble life” (Heb. vii. 16, marg.). Mere resuscitation, exposed as it is to a hundred scientific objections, finds no place in the Gospel narratives of the Resurrection.

The identity with His former body lay not in any material continuity of particles, or in identity of physical form, but “rather, as Origen and the Alexandrians maintained, in the continuity or permanence of the spirit which gives the law (λόγος) of its constitution, and moulds or fashions it to be the fitting vehicle of its manifestation under varying conditions.”¹ “It had become the pure and transparent vehicle of spiritual purpose.”²

The parallel with what happened at the Transfiguration at once occurs to us. The significance of that fact, recorded by all the Synoptists, has been too often missed, because its foreshadowing of the Resurrection has been lost sight of. “God appeared in Jesus,” writes Didon, “at His transfiguration, as He will appear in us at the end of time.” “When the spirit and soul of man is bathed in the glory of God; when the soul, pervaded by God, envelops the body which it quickens with its own beauty; when matter, pervaded by the Spirit through all its kingdom, suffers a glorious transformation which renders it a worthy habitation for the sons of God, then the Kingdom of Heaven shall be consummated.” “Jesus,” he goes on, “wished to show to all mankind the glorious goal which He should reach through suffering and death. Sorrow and death are but the way; the end for Him, as for us, is the transfiguration of our whole being into the splendour of God.”³ Hence the glory and mystery of His risen life, which at first staggers and bewilders the disciples. Even with the help of the Transfiguration they cannot at once comprehend it. “They were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit.”

(b) Thus already *His life belongs to Heaven*. His relationships with the world have ceased. “The world seeth Me no more.”

¹ See Article, *Expository Times*, Rev. J. M. Shaw, vol. xxi., pp. 544-547.

² Gore, “Body of Christ,” p. 127.

³ Father Didon, “Jésus Christ,” i. 475.

His intercourse with His own is transformed. The disciple sees Him now rather by faith than sense. He shows Himself at will, and He withdraws at will. "He conforms to the laws of our present life, yet He is no longer subject to them."¹ "He speaks of a time 'when I was yet with you.' His attitude, when He comes, has a strange aloofness. He stands, as it were, apart from them, above them. He calms their troubled hearts, but He does not identify Himself with them. The former intimacy is past for ever."² He "belongs to two worlds, that of sense and that of spirit."³ "The sensible" is "hidden as within a veil of the supersensible; or, shall I say, the supersensible" is "veiled in a robe of the sensible" ?⁴ Such statements as these all describe the reality of the change which has passed over Him. There is nothing to imply that the disciples were less conscious of the uniqueness of such facts than we are ourselves; it is all the other way. Their astonishment is the testimony to their genuineness and scientific accuracy in recording a perfectly new series of manifestations.

(c) *Yet His life is a bodily life still.* The human body has become at last the absolute servant of a human will. He can equally veil and reveal His presence, "stand in their midst" and "vanish from their sight." "We see," writes Steinmeyer, "side by side the newness and identity of His bodily life."⁵ He has a spiritual body, and is become a quickening Spirit. The revelation of His Person now is "the revelation of a victorious spiritual life."⁶ The bodily life retained is no longer the limitation, but the expression, the instrument, the unimpeded manifestation of spirit. It is "the clothing of the spirit with a spiritual body." There is no contradiction with nature here. "Spiritual facts," writes Illingworth, "are not complete until they have expressed themselves; and matter, as we call it, is their language, the

¹ Westcott, "Gospel of the Resurrection," p. 163.

² Forrest, "The Christ of History and of Experience," pp. 148-149.

³ Nolloth, "The Person of our Lord," p. 248.

⁴ Loofs, quoted in Nolloth, p. 248.

⁵ Steinmeyer's "Passion and Resurrection of our Lord," p. 301.

⁶ Forrest, "Christ of History," p. 138.

medium of their expression."¹ And "the risen body of Christ was to His disciples this expression—the exhibition, the manifestation, and therefore the assurance, of the spiritual triumph which it revealed."² It was no mere passing concession to the weakness and ignorance of His followers. It was, as far as we know humanity and life, the necessary, inevitable, and abiding expression of His fulness of Personality. "The whole doctrine of the Incarnation," Sir Oliver Lodge has written, "recognizes and illustrates . . . an interaction between the spiritual and material aspects of reality."³ Even love itself, our most spiritual possession, has, he affirms, "a sacramental or material side, wherein the flesh and the spirit are inseparably united, and where neither can be discarded without loss to the other."⁴ Our whole knowledge of Personality affirms the vital association of soul and body from the first moment of life. No satisfying proof exists so far of the transmigration of souls. Normally, neither can be thought of apart from the other. Our whole relationship with others and the world at large is by the body. It is our only vehicle of communication. If we speak of the spirit-world we use images which are necessarily material. Even a ghost must appear in the likeness of men, and will usually have garments like other beings. "A purely spiritual agency may be active—and the activity may be guessed at or inferred, and may be believed in—but the only evidence that can be adduced is the manifestation of that activity through matter, and the only moments when a glimpse can be caught of its activity are the moments at which action on matter occurs."⁵ The correspondence or connection between matter and spirit seems, therefore, "a symbol or sample of something permanently true."⁶ It is strange that in face of this, and of our Lord's bodily resurrection, Christianity has so often fallen back upon the old and mischievous dualism which has emphasized their contrasts rather than the affinity between them. The true

¹ Illingworth, "The Doctrine of the Trinity," p. 228.

² *Ibid.*

³ Sir O. Lodge, "Man and the Universe," c. viii., s. 1.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 280.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 270-281.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 292.

contrast to spirituality is not immateriality, but carnality—the attitude of the ego towards that aspect of its life which is its means of self-expression and self-fulfilment. “Christianity postulates a supersensually appreciable vehicle or mode of manifestation,” after death, “fitted to serve the needs of future existence as our bodies subserve the needs of terrestrial life.”¹ We have absolutely no right to assume that the terms “material” and “spiritual” “answer to a real distribution of God’s world into two compartments, when in fact they are merely convenient provisional notions for enabling us to contemplate certain phenomena in this world in a more methodical way.”² Is there any insuperable difficulty in a transfiguration through death which changed the particles of His earthly body, when we recall how, in His transfiguration on the mount, even “His travel-worn and peasant garments” became garments “white as the light,” “glistening,” “dazzling” in their glory, the inner splendour of His Personality bursting through all seeming hindrances? The recent view in “Foundations” of the Resurrection which would rob the “body” of Jesus of all materiality, does not, as the writer of “Some Loose Stones” points out (pp. 68-85), account for all the facts, and sets aside a great deal of positive evidence. Besides, “if it was an immaterial body in which He appeared to them,” how, he asks, were they to know it was not a spirit?

(d) *The essential characteristics of Personality* are identity, permanence, and power of self-expression. All these, in spite of these unique changes, are preserved *in the Person of the Risen Lord*. The “law” or “formula” which governed His personal life is fulfilled, not thwarted, by His “exodus” (Luke ix. 31) out of death. That spiritual body which is “the ideally perfect utterance of spirit” will be His to the end of time. It is to be hereafter the vehicle of His “manifestation,” His “epiphany,” to His adoring saints. Some hold the view that His appearances during the forty days give no clear indication of what He is to-day, or what we shall hereafter become in Him. They

¹ Sir O. Lodge, “Man and the Universe,” p. 280.

² Latham’s “The Risen Master,” p. 70.

were concessions to the weakness of His "friends." During this period He hovered on "the borderland of flesh and spirit."¹ The later manifestations were less bodily in character than the earlier. "The beginning of the final change which transforms the natural body into the spiritual" is discernible.² "The image of the heavenly" is "already upon Him." He "hovers on the borderland of two different worlds, and partakes of the characteristics of both, just because He is revealing the one to the other."³ "His body," writes Professor Banks, "was in process of spiritualization. He had not yet the complete spiritual or glorified body of the heavenly life, but was on the way to it. The final, permanent transfiguration was going on."⁴ What warrant have we for such statements from the records? Some access of glory when He passes into the heavenlies we may expect, and such we find in the later manifestations. But this is indicated as a matter of degree, not kind. There is nothing in the records of the forty days to justify the view of a gradual transition to another state. The intercourse on the morning of the Ascension is marked with less of mystery than the walk to Emmaus, or the scene in the Upper Room on Easter Day itself. Precisely the same conditions of recognition and intercourse on both sides are present in the later as in the earlier scenes. The words at His first interview with the sorrowing Magdalen rather suggest that, *in its personal aspects towards Himself*, the Ascension took place that very day. The definite promise of His continued identity at His return is expressly associated with the very moment of His departure.

III.

Will our resurrection life be like that which He showed His disciples during those forty days? The terms in which the New Testament writers depict it encourage us to believe that as He was during that first Eastertide so shall we, "quickened through His spirit that dwelleth in us," become. For we are

¹ Swete, "The Appearances of our Lord," etc., p. 50. ² *Ibid.*, p. 59.

³ Forrest, "Christ of History and of Experience," p. 150.

⁴ Banks, Article in *Expository Times*, vol. xxi, pp. 419-421.

“united with the likeness of His resurrection” (Rom. vi. 5, marg.), and He is “the firstfruits of them that sleep.” “The body of our humiliation” shall be conformed to “the body of His glory” (Phil. iii. 21). We shall all be “changed.” The “natural body” shall give place to the “spiritual body,” and “death” be “swallowed up in victory.” “We shall be clothed upon with our habitation which is from heaven.” We shall prove and possess “the adoption, to wit, the redemption of the body” (2 Cor. v. 2; Rom. viii. 23). The material world will know and share “the liberty of the glory of the children of God” (Rom. viii. 21). Bring all such passages together, and it is one harmonious picture which they present: A bodily life, from which the old features of sin and death are wholly gone, in which the body is the perfect vehicle, the perfect instrument, the perfect expression of spirit, gathering up into itself its complete individuality, knowing others and itself known at will, inheriting its past, yet utterly lifted out of it, proving the “power of His resurrection” in constantly fresh ways, ascending with Him to behold His glory (John xvii. 24; 1 John iii. 2), knowing fully face to face (1 Cor. xiii. 12), and sharing with Him eternally “the power of an indissoluble life.” Such is the splendid goal of which the Easter Day is the beginning.

So, with eyes full open, we can answer Browning’s question with the Old Grammarian—“Wilt thou trust death? Yes.” We can stand, as Browning himself did, by the brink of the newly-covered grave of our beloved, and say, “Death is life,” looking “the Arch-Fear” bravely in the face unabashed, “tasting the whole of it,” “bearing the brunt of it,” paying thus “life’s arrears of pain, darkness, and cold,” and knowing all the time that Death, great Death, is dead.

“For sudden the worst turns to best to the brave,
 The black minute’s at end,
 And the elements’ rage, the fiend voices that rave,
 Shall dwindle, shall blend,
 Shall change, shall become first a peace out of pain,
 Then a light, then thy breast,
 O thou soul of my soul, I shall clasp thee again,
 And with God be the rest!”