

## THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD

THIS subject is of perennial interest to the Church at large. It is of cardinal importance to the faith and life of all believers: If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain (I Cor. xv. 14). By the Resurrection of Jesus the Apostolic Church understood a physical Resurrection: His body was capable of being handled and touched (Luke xxiv. 39; John xx. 27). It was not the mere survival of His soul, whilst His 'ashes still lay cold beneath the Syrian stars.' The teaching of the New Testament is that the body, laid in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathæa, underwent re-animation on the morning of the third day after the crucifixion; thus re-constituting the Theanthropic Personality of our Lord in the power and glory of an indissoluble life.

A Faith, so full of marvel and surprise, to say the least, has been assailed in every age of the Church, and never more so than at the present time. The subject is now approached from novel points of view, with critical instruments of increased refinement; with a wider outlook upon ethnic religions; and with a deeper knowledge of the growth of religious myths and legends. New Christologies have been devised. New Theologies have been formulated, mostly of the "Liberal" type. New *Lives of Christ* have been published, mainly of the romantic sort. The environment of our subject has manifestly changed within a generation. The task of Christian Apologetic was never more onerous than now, yet never more hopeful; as new materials for the defence and confirmation of the Gospel lie to hand in profusion, whilst the methods and results of the Higher Criticism are by no means infallible. The following discussion of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ evades no real difficulty but attempts to meet in proper form and tone, the prevalent forms of Unbelief as follows:

### THE SWOON THEORY OF PAULUS

Briefly put, the theory amounts to this:—Jesus did not die upon the Cross. He was taken down therefrom in a state of suspended animation, and was laid in the tomb, where He recovered under the influence of "the stimulating oily fluid spices." White-robed adherents, perhaps Essenes, opened the

grave. From time to time, he appeared to His followers from Galilee to Jerusalem. Upon the waning of His strength, He ascended Mount Olivet, and there took farewell with His friends, from whom He was finally concealed by a cloud. The more flamboyant form of the theory brought out by Venturini need not detain us.

The "swoon theory" of Paulus was an absolute form of denial of our Lord's resurrection. It was adopted by Schleiermacher, Herder, Hase and a few others. It has been reproduced in recent times by C. Voysey. Yet it remains destitute of plausibility. The Jews were determined that Jesus should die upon the Cross, as one accursed of God. They followed Him to Calvary. They stood around Him in His agony. They did not leave the place of execution until they were well satisfied that He was truly dead. Pilate himself solemnly certified the death, after formally summoning the centurion to himself. The Roman soldier scrutinised the face of the Crucified One; then, to make the assurance of His death more assured, he plunged his spear into the side, whence came "blood and water," which eminent authorities such as Dr. Stroud, Sir William Turner, and Sir A. B. Simpson, regarded as proof that Jesus died, literally, of a "broken heart." In forceful terms, Strauss and Keim rejected the "swoon theory" of Paulus. Weiss, in his *New Life of Jesus*, says: "It is not worth while to dissolve this phantasy destitute of all historical meaning."

#### DID THE BODY OF JESUS REMAIN UNBURIED ?

If so, then this is another mode of denying the Resurrection of our Lord. Réville makes the Jews cast His dead body on the dust-heap. Volkmar takes up an equivocal position; asserting that the body of Jesus, like those of most executed criminals, was left unburied, or perhaps thrown into some hole, and covered with earth. Strauss and a few others deny His burial outright. Keim decisively rejects all theories of the foregoing sort as "unhistorical monstrosities, in view of the copious knowledge we possess of the customs and opinions of the Jews." The ultimate fact here is that the Roman law allowed the bodies of persons, who had suffered its extreme penalty, to be handed over for interment to relatives or friends (Ulpian *xlvi.*, 24). There is no getting away from the unanimous statements of the Evangelists and Paul, that Jesus died and was buried.

But the critics have much to say regarding the burial, pointing out alleged discrepancies or contradictions in the records; Kirsopp Lake more specially, who discusses the motive of Joseph of Arimathæa in burying our Lord—whether his discipleship with Jesus, or his membership of the Sanhedrim, in order that the Law (Deut. xxi. 22-23) might be fulfilled (*Resurrection*, pp. 169-173). But in the luminous background of the Gospels, the motive of Joseph is self-evident. We take a conjunct view of his official status and moral qualities. Thus he is “an honourable councillor,” “a rich man,” “a good man and a just,” who “had not consented to the counsel and deed” of the Sanhedrim, who waited “for the Kingdom of God,” who was “a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews.” Now came his bold discipleship. When, in the crucifixion of Christ, the worst had evidently come to the worst, Joseph, taking his life in his hands as against Pilate and the Jews, *having plucked up courage*, went unto Pilate and craved the body of Jesus (Mark xv. 43). He was not moved to action here by any paltry deference to the Sanhedrim, but by all those noble traits of status and character already noted.

The historicity of the narratives relating to the burial of our Lord is further challenged by Kirsopp Lake, who finds the accounts of Mark and John discrepant in reference to the mode of burial of Jesus:—Thus: “According to Mark, the body of Jesus was merely wrapped in a shroud, and not anointed, so that the women came after the Sabbath to supply the deficiency.” According to John, there is a full and costly burial by Joseph and Nicodemus, which takes the form of an anointing. “Both accounts cannot be correct” (*Res.* pp. 170-6.) Yet it can be shown that Mark and John are clearly in the right, and that Kirsopp Lake is in the wrong. There was no *anointing* of the body of our Lord by Joseph and Nicodemus. Under the circumstances, there could be none. The scourging had reduced parts of the surface of the body to a gory pulp; the crown of thorns had made the head a mass of lacerations; the buffeting had marred the face more than any man’s. There could be no application of an *anointment* to the body in such a woeful state. But Joseph and Nicodemus did the only proper thing: they *embalmed* the body with a mixture of myrrh and wood-aloes. Powdered the mixture must have been, for otherwise it could not be applied. There was a profusion of material—“about a hundred pounds’ weight”; amply sufficient to form a fragrant

cushion on which the body might rest (if need be); amply sufficient also for interspersing in the folds of the grave clothes. The women who came to the tomb on the morning of the third day prepared both *spices* and *ointments* (Luke xxiii. 56). These are now most notably in place, on the supposition that the body of Jesus still lay within the tomb. Here the narratives of the burial according to Mark and John are entirely correct. Here again a striking testimony to the historicity of the Gospel records.

THE WATCH AT THE TOMB—"an unhistorical legend" ?

This is the verdict of A. W. Meyer, and represents the firm conclusion of the Higher Critics. The story is related by Matthew alone (xxvii. 62-66, xxviii. 11-15). Many questions have been raised here. Did Jesus predict His resurrection on the third day? If so, was not the knowledge of it confined to the circle of the disciples? If not, would the Jewish authorities give credit to a prediction which the disciples did not believe? Would the chief priests and Pharisees break the Sabbath Law to interview Pilate (Matt. xxvii. 62)? Would the soldiers accept the stupid Jewish fabrication which confessed a fault involving the penalty of death? Do not these points amount to a cluster of things incredible and contradictory?

Nevertheless, the narrative of Matthew approves itself as soundly historical. A reaction had set in among the chief priests and Pharisees. The death of Jesus had been attended by an earthquake. To the Hebrew mind, this was no mere convulsion of Nature. It holds a significant place in the Old Testament Revelation. Wherever it occurs, it denotes: "*This is the finger of God.*" At the death of Jesus there was not only the earthquake, but its *cognate event*—the rending of the veil of the Temple. The Jewish authorities were thus driven to realise that there had been something more than ordinary in the death of Christ. Reflection gave place to fear so intense that they set aside the Law of the Sabbath to interview Pilate. Dissembling their terror, they addressed the Governor: "Sir, it has occurred to us that that deceiver said, while He was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night and steal Him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead. So the last error shall be worse than the first" (Matt. xxvii. 63-64). Our Lord's prediction of His resurrection on the third day was no

secret. Twice it had been made openly (John ii. 19, Mark viii. 32). It was mentioned in distorted form at the trial before Caiaphas, and again in the derision at the Cross. The critics therefore greatly err in failing to recognise that our Lord's prediction of His death and His rising again on the third day, was widespread. They err likewise in their assumption that the soldiers at the cross were *Roman* soldiers. Matthew does not call them such, though he speaks elsewhere of "soldiers of the Governor" (xxvii. 27). The latter were doubtless requested by the Jewish leaders from Pilate, but he refused them in the language of interjection, which may be thus correctly put: "Ye have a guard already! Go away! Please yourselves about making the tomb secure!" (Matt. xxvii. 65). The guard here referred to is the Temple Watch, consisting of Jews. The guard which fled terror-stricken from the tomb on the morning of the third day, evinces its Jewish nationality by reporting, not to Pilate, but to the chief priests (Matt. xxviii. 11). Consideration of the state of affairs in the City of Jerusalem furnishes material for a definite conclusion regarding the nationality of the soldiers at the tomb.

The Passover season in Jerusalem always caused more or less anxiety to the Roman Governors. There was a vast addition to the normal population of the City, due to the influx of pilgrims. Their number, according to Josephus, amounted to some three millions. (BJ. II. xiv. 3; VI. ix. 3.) That is doubtless an exaggeration, but the actual number could hardly have been less than a quarter of a million. During the festal season national feeling ran high between Jews and Romans. Relations were greatly strained between these parties at the period under review. At the trial of our Lord before Pilate, priests and people were on the verge of insurrection. They flouted the authority of the Governor. Whilst affairs were still in a state of crisis, there came the Jewish deputation requesting a Roman guard for the tomb; but their petition was refused; for the City still seethed with discontent. Pilate could not do otherwise. He dared not deplete the garrison of the Fortress of Antonia by a single Roman soldier to guard the burial place of one whom he regarded as a harmless enthusiast. The Watch at the Tomb therefore could not have been Roman, but must have consisted of Jews. They possibly slept on duty, as no stern law of death-penalty for such an offence hung over their heads. They might accept the excuse invented for them by their superiors, along with the "large

money" promised them. And if these things ever came to the Governor's ear, he probably treated them as a matter for ridicule. Everything therefore fits in with, and requires, the conclusion that the soldiers who guarded the tomb were not Roman but Jewish. The *Gospel of Peter* indicates that the Watch at the Tomb was mixed in character, but this source is indecisive.

The historicity of the narrative of Matthew is thus amply vindicated, and from it certain important issues flow:—The Watch could not have been set openly on the Sabbath, for that would have been an advertisement of the latent fear of the chief priests that Jesus might rise from the dead. It must have been set well after daylight had ceased, for thus only could it serve as a trap to the expected raiders on the Tomb. The women who came early to the sepulchre did not know beforehand of its existence. The Watch was on duty for one night only. Its flight into the City almost coincided with the retreat of the women from the Tomb (Matt. xxviii. 11). Both events belong to the *twilight of the morning* of the third day after the Crucifixion. What the panting "soldiers" said to the chief priests is not on record, but their demeanour alone is sufficient to show that something terrific had happened at the Tomb. The chief priests and elders find no fault with the conduct of the Watch; they make no investigation of the sepulchre. They immediately proceed to invent an excuse for the guard, saying, "Say ye, His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we slept." (Matt. xxviii. 13.) *At the bottom of this cryptic saying is the admission that the tomb is empty—the body of Jesus is not there.* The attempted evasion of this fact is a transparent falsehood; for if they slept, how could they tell what had transpired? This story becomes a kind of fixture among the Jews, being mentioned by Justin Martyr and Tertullian, and again in the *Toledoth Jeshu*. *This admission of the Jewish authorities that the tomb was empty on the morning of the third day is to be strongly emphasised.*

#### ATTEMPTED EXPLANATIONS OF THE EMPTY TOMB.

Unbelief, in its popular and in its critical forms, has been most inventive and most ingenious here. The following theories exhaust all that is really noteworthy.

(1) The Empty Tomb was a "theological inference" from the Appearances of Jesus after His death. Strauss, Keim, Arnold Meyer, Kirsopp Lake, and a host of minor critics make

the disciples' belief in the Resurrection of their Master depend on His Appearances to them. It is here pointed out that the current idea of Resurrection was *physical Resurrection*. If then Christ were really risen from the dead, then the emptiness of the tomb was a natural inference from the foregoing doctrine. But the reply to the critics is easy here:—They have boldly reversed the order of events. The four Evangelists make it perfectly clear that the tomb was found empty before there were any Appearances of Jesus to His followers. The critics have here acted in a most capricious and unwarranted manner, in the interests, not of truth, but of a pre-conceived theory. Further, the emptiness of the tomb was investigated by the women, and by Peter and John. (Mk. xvi. 1, 5; Jn. xx. 2 ff; Lk. xxiv. 22.)

(2) The Empty Tomb was a mistake on the part of the women who came to anoint the body of Jesus. Here, according to Kirsopp Lake, the women find an empty tomb, but it was not the one that was closed by Joseph of Arimathæa, but an adjacent one, in the entrance to which was a young man. Guessing their errand, he tried to show them where they laid Jesus, probably telling them they had made a mistake about the place, and probably pointing to the next tomb, saying "He is not here. See the place where they laid Him." (Res. p 250 ff.) But Lake's suggestion is too subtle. The leader of the women is that Mary who sat with Mary Magdalene over against the sepulchre, when Joseph and Nicodemus had finished their pious work. (Mk. xv. 47; Mt. xxvii. 61.) The site of the tomb was unforgettable. It formed no part of a common cemetery. It was in a garden by itself; and the garden could not be mistaken. It was near to the place of crucifixion, and was now all trodden down by the feet of the fretful multitude who mocked the dying agonies of the Crucified One. Thus, Lake's suggestion falls to the ground. He did not hold it himself, and frankly abandons it in favour of a theological conclusion.

(3) *The Tomb was empty because of the removal of the body of Jesus.*

These views are set forth:—

(a) *The body was removed by the disciples of Jesus.* That was really impossible; for the Gospels testify with one voice that the disciples did not expect the Master to rise again from the dead. They could therefore have taken no interest in any project for the removal of the body. Further, if they had

removed it, they could not have believed in the Resurrection of Jesus.

(b) *The body was removed by the Sanhedrim.* The retention of the body in the tomb was for them a necessity, because thus it furnished concrete proof that Jesus was neither the true Messiah, nor yet the Son of God, but a mere pretender and blasphemer. Had they really removed the body, they could have produced it, or could have brought to light persons who had stolen it. They felt the preaching of the Resurrection at Pentecost a grievance, but they were unable to arrest it. (Acts iv. 2.)

(c) *The body was removed by the Romans.* Two reasons have been assigned for this. Thus, Canon Streeter almost casually suggested that Pilate feared an attack (evidently between the Jews and the disciples), and therefore removed the body on the quiet of the Sabbath. (*Foundations*, 134.) That view is untenable, for, as shown already, Pilate refused a Roman guard for the tomb; thus proving that he had no anxiety in this regard. On the other hand, T. W. Rolleston asserted that Pilate had removed the body, fearing it might become the centre of a new religious cult; Lord Kitchener's treatment of the remains of the Mahdi in the Soudan being cited as a parallel. (Hib. Jo., April, 1906.) But again, there is no trace of any fear of this kind on the part of Pilate. These two theories fail entirely to account for the Empty Tomb.

Space does not allow us to discuss the alleged removal of the body of Jesus by Joseph of Arimathæa and Nicodemus, or by Mary Magdalene, or Mark, the supposed owner of the garden, or his gardener, or Galileans, or Nazarenes, or Essenes. Such stories have no foundation in fact. They are purely fanciful, having only a nominal connection with the Gospel narratives, and merit no further notice.

#### CONCLUSION.

The historicity of the Gospel records relating to the Resurrection of our Lord has been freely put to proof, and has been found to be entirely trustworthy. *The Empty Tomb is a fact as invincible as any other fact of the best attested History.* In view of it, we accept with entire assurance the message of the Angel to the women by the Empty Tomb: "He is not here, for He is risen as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay."

(*To be continued.*)

Free Church College,  
Edinburgh.

W. M. ALEXANDER.