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# The Evangelical Quarterly

APRIL 15th 1940

## REDEMPTION AS HISTORY AND REVELATION

### I

It is the common boast of the Christian theologian or apologist that his religion at least is squarely grounded upon the sure facts of history. Pagan faiths may trace their origins earlier, dating from the very mists of antiquity, but the incarnations and deifications which they put forward cannot be substantiated by historical proofs, and are, in the main, untenable in the face of serious historical investigation. With Christianity, however, the ground is more solid and the fear of overthrowal much less real. The facts of Christianity are facts of history, as well attested as any other such facts. If we doubt such well-supported events as the death of Jesus upon the Cross, the empty tomb or the Resurrection appearances, then we call in question the credibility of all historical witness.

This stress upon the historicity of the Christian faith is particularly strong in an age drawn to the study of history on the rigorous principles of exact science. Indeed were it not for this historicity, there is little doubt but that Christianity would quickly be relegated by all qualified students to the mythological lumber-room of religious and ethical thought. This historicity is basal. Without an historical back-ground, Christianity can afford us no more than a sublime programme of ethical conduct. As a distinctive revelation of God it is totally discredited. The claim to be historical is part of its very nature as a faith. Jesus the Messiah, the anointed Saviour, was not a mere creation of psychological fancy, existing only in hypothesis and imagination. He was a man who really lived with other men, a man of flesh and blood who was seen and heard and touched by His contemporaries:

That which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld and our hands handled<sup>1</sup>— a man whose death was enacted before a multitude of witnesses, having its place, not a very important place, but nevertheless a real one, in the annals of Jewish and even of Roman history. More than that, His tomb was really empty and He Himself after His death was seen alive again, appearing to above five hundred brethren at once,<sup>2</sup> as well as to smaller groups and to individuals at many times and in many places.

From the very first Christianity was proclaimed as a faith resting upon sure and incontrovertible facts<sup>3</sup>; that is why the office of the Apostle in the New Testament is primarily the office of a witness: And ye shall be my witnesses.<sup>4</sup>

True, the drama of Calvary and the garden was not staged in the centre of the known world, in the full glare of imperial publicity. But although the scene was laid only in the capital city of an outlying province, this was not done in a corner.<sup>5</sup> Jesus did live within the world-Empire of Rome, on an important trade-route, and in fairly close proximity to many of the largest cities of the Near East. His death took place at a time when Jerusalem was crowded with Jews, not only from every town of Judea, but from every province and every important city of the Mediterranean world. Within twenty years of His reported death and resurrection His Name had been proclaimed in almost every town of real size and standing within the Empire. Had there been any serious dispute about the facts, the way of investigation, even of interrogation, was still open. There were still hundreds of people alive who could give the lie to the story of Jesus had He never truly lived and died. There were still hundreds of first-hand witnesses available, men who had been brought up with Him, who had heard His preaching, who had watched and benefited from His works of mercy, who had seen Him lifted up on that Roman Cross, who claimed to have seen Him alive again. At a time when the whole political and religious power of the Jewish state, with the tacit backing of Rome, was united in an attempt to crush the new faith, it is surely significant that there is no record of any serious questioning or refutation of the fact, with the solitary exception of doubts as to the bona fides of the empty tomb.<sup>6</sup> That Christianity is a

<sup>1</sup> 1 John i. 1.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians xv. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Peter's Speech, Acts ii. 22. 24.

<sup>4</sup> Acts i. 8.

<sup>5</sup> Acts xxvi. 26.

<sup>6</sup> Matt. xxviii. 11. 15.

religion of history, deeply rooted in historical fact, is not open to serious challenge.

More important still, Christianity must be a religion of history, as a theological necessity. This is a point the importance of which has not always received due attention. Most scholars are agreed that for apologetic reasons historical trustworthiness is essential, but not all appreciate the similar need theologically. The very corner-stone of Christianity, however, is that by the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ redemption was purchased for fallen man. God was not an aloof God, administering justice and granting pardon abstractly in Heaven. God was not a psychological God, operating only in the individual mind or feelings. God came to man, came to him in the very depths of his plight, came and lived with him, as one man among other men, came and died for him, bearing his sin. God entered the sphere of history, the human sphere. God showed to man His salvation: For mine eyes have seen Thy salvation.<sup>1</sup> The Word was, and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.<sup>2</sup>

God was determined that there should be nothing left in doubt. His revelation was not to be purely subjective, varying with the individual mind or the varying mood. It was to be objectively realised in time, taking its place in the historical process, open to investigation and analysis, capable of historical substantiation. Had God left revelation something merely of mood and moment, something of the mind only, then there would always have been the recurring doubt: Is it real? Has it more than a psychological existence? But when the revelation manifests itself in history, then all such questioning is removed by the simple, double statement: Jesus died and Jesus rose again. The grounding is not within, but without. If it were not so, if there were no historical facts to act as a focus-point for faith, there could be no final assurance of salvation. Admittedly, God could pardon; atonement could be made by an act in the heavenly sphere; but there could be no real knowledge that it was so, since at no point would it touch the ordinary life of man. Historicity is not essential solely on apologetic grounds; it is also an underlying theological necessity. The Emmanuel, God with us,<sup>3</sup> is the whole form and content of revelation.

<sup>1</sup> Luke ii. 28. 30.

<sup>2</sup> John i. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. i. 23.

## II

If historicity is a theological necessity, however, the danger is that this necessity may lead to the gravest distortion of the Gospel. Only too easily the step is made from a necessary underlining of the historical facts to a disproportionate stress upon them at the expense of the revelational element. This supremely has been the tragedy of our own generation. At no period was the historical element in the Gospel sifted with greater care. At no period was its vital nature more clearly recognized. At no period was its broad historical trustworthiness more triumphantly vindicated. From a standpoint of pure history, it is doubtful whether the facts of Christianity were ever better known or more surely grounded. We have more reason to-day than at any other time to believe that Jesus did exist, that He really did die, that His tomb was empty and that after His death He was seen alive by large numbers of people. The question has been investigated with greater care, and the conclusions more solidly based than ever before. But this gain in historical accuracy has meant a corresponding loss in spiritual apprehension. The temptation is great, but it is a mere delusion, to imagine that as a result of our greater and more certain knowledge we are to-day truer believers than the men of a previous age, or that we have any greater grasp, or clearer understanding of the Gospel.

The contrary is rather true. The more perfect historical understanding has only been purchased at the expense of spiritual understanding. This is the hard and bitter lesson which will have to be learned again before the Gospel is proclaimed once more in fulness and in power. In no way does historical knowledge mean real apprehension. Revelation is history, and it may be studied as history. But revelation is not only history, nor is history alone revelation. The true significance of God's redeeming work is to be sought beyond the historical facts, and here historical acumen is of no avail. The drama of salvation had to be and was played out in the sphere of history, but it is not as history that it has its real importance. The historical facts as such, the life and death and empty tomb of a good-living Jewish prophet, are not to the historian of any imaginable importance for the redemption of fallen man from sin. They are the necessary manifestation of revelation, and

as such they may be studied from the point of view of history and assessed. But taken in themselves, viewed with the eye of reason and knowledge alone, they are of no more relevance to sinful man than the life and death and even reported resurrection of the good man of any other age or race. That is the reason why our modern research, in teaching us more of Jesus, has yielded us a prophet, a great teacher, a religious genius, an heroic martyr, the propagator of a great ideal, but somehow has failed to give us any deeper knowledge, and even any knowledge at all, of Jesus the Christ, the Son of God, the Coming One, the Sin-bearer, the Author of a great salvation.

This does not imply that such research is useless. On the contrary, it is a legitimate branch of historical science. Even from the theological point of view it may and does produce many valuable results, not the least of which is a reaffirmation of the historical trustworthiness of the facts of Christianity. If the dangers are here pointed out, it must not lightly be assumed that disparagement is intended. Nor must the conclusion be hurriedly drawn that on this account the historical could in the last resort be done away with as an unnecessary encumbrance, as the Extremists of certain schools have wished to think.<sup>1</sup> This criticism is merely a recognition of the vital distinction which exists between the knowledge of God's redemption after the flesh, as history, and the knowledge of that same redemption after the Spirit, as revelation. The taunt levelled against those who with Barth and Brunner have sought to correct the distortion by again underlining this distinction, the taunt that they are calling in question the historical facts themselves, and thus removing one of the strongest props of the Christian faith, is one which serves to show how completely this distinction has been glossed over and forgotten.

Yet this distinction, this double knowledge, is clearly to be seen in every great age of faith. It appears already in the days of Paul, when the historical problem was perhaps at its acutest, those who had never seen the Lord feeling themselves inferior to those who had actually lived and talked with Him and heard His gracious words. Paul clearly sees and enunciates the truth. He points out the difference between earthly wisdom and heavenly wisdom.<sup>2</sup> He sets before us the two ways of

<sup>1</sup> Notably Bultmann, the radical Form-critic and Barthian.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. i. 18ff.

knowing Jesus, after the flesh and after the Spirit,<sup>1</sup> and although any man may in some sort know Jesus after the flesh, it is to know Him after the spirit which is life. The student with his books and ancient documents may by dint of laborious effort arrive at a clearer and exacter conception of the man Jesus, of some aspect of His life and teaching, but it is not by such methods that the Living Christ is known and the voice of the Saviour heard. History is history, but no more. Revelation manifests itself in history, but it is not history. It cannot be apprehended as history. It is history, but it is also the other side of history, *Urgeschichte*,<sup>2</sup> to borrow the phrase of Barth, eschatological history, history *sub specie aeternitatis*, God's history. And as such it can be apprehended neither by scholarship nor research, it cannot be taught or handed down, it is apprehended only as the Spirit of God chooses to declare it to the mind of obedience and in the life of faith.

The truth of this distinction can best be realised, and its importance brought out, by a study of the two great facts of Redemption, the Cross and the Resurrection. If the Cross is considered, it will be found first of all, and obviously, that this is a fact of history. The historical event is the surface aspect which is everywhere visible. As a fact of history, the Cross may be investigated like any other such fact. The student may occupy years studying its various problems, assigning the responsibility, probing the motives, laying bare the characters, discussing the many political and social implications, testing the evidence, fixing the date, investigating the mode of execution, weighing up a hundred and one matters of historical importance. As an historical fact, the Cross falls naturally into the process of all other historical facts. It has certain curious features—the conduct of the prisoner, the vehemence of feeling, various natural phenomena. Again, it has had an amazing result, seemingly quite disproportionate to its real importance. Even from the historical point of view its significance is not negligible. But as history it has no greater significance than this. History can fix its setting in time and circumstance, but it can do no more. It can teach us nothing of the real significance of the Cross which is known only to the believing soul.

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. v. 16.

<sup>2</sup> A constantly recurring phrase.

## III

If we would learn what the Cross really means, that is to say, in our own lives, then we must turn from the Cross as history, and we must view it as something more. Then it will be remembered that although history could afford us no explanation of this fact, Jesus had said, and many people since have upheld this view, that by the Cross atonement was being made for the sin of mankind, that He died upon the Cross as the spotless Son of God winning redemption for a fallen race. Nothing in the historical facts warrants us drawing such a conclusion. There is hardly anything even to suggest such an idea. The historical facts as such are sure enough, but in no way do they bear on this tremendous truth. This is something which transcends history, which cannot be known as history, even whilst it is enacted in history. At the most, the study of history can only point us to the fact that this was a conception which Jesus and His followers held with regard to His death, but history itself can give to us no apprehension of the truth. The picture of the Son of God dying for individual sin is not a picture of history. It is a vision of revelation. To say: the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me;<sup>1</sup> to say this, not parrot-wise, as a lesson learned from tradition or as a conception handed down through history, but from the heart, in the assurance of personal knowledge, is to utter something which can be taught by no research and which cannot be learned from a study of any facts, but which is given only by the revelation of God.

The valuelessness of the facts in themselves, divorced from God's revelation, their valuelessness, that is to say, for faith, is demonstrated to the full by the example of the people of Christ's own day, who knew the facts at first hand (the disciples themselves included). There were in Jerusalem hundreds of men and women who had heard the claims of Jesus Christ and who had heard Him prophesy His own death as an offering for sin, in fulfilment of the Old Testament scriptures. To them the death itself was a fact of history quite incontrovertible. Before their very eyes this prophet had died in agonies upon the Cross. They had heard His cries and seen His body thrust through by the brutal spear. Yet in spite of what they had heard and seen,

<sup>1</sup> Gal. ii. 20.

as far as their own redemption went it was all meaningless. They knew and were persuaded that the Cross had really happened. But it carried to them no message of salvation. They were spectators only. Their view of it was non-existent, as Barth has taught us to say; the detached view of those whose own existence was nowhere vitally affected. Of course they had their own opinions of it. Some were worldly and saw only the political expedience. Others misrepresented Jesus, as good men are always misrepresented, and saw His execution as just. Many no doubt deplored it secretly, and were disappointed that there had been no act of power from Heaven in vindication of the truth. But such repercussions as there were, were only the repercussions of one historical event amongst others. None felt that the Cross had any bearing upon the pressing problem of personal guilt, the forgiveness of sins, and eternal life or eternal death.

This point is even more clearly illustrated, however, when we consider the case of the disciples. If the historical fact alone was of importance, if salvation could be taken for granted once that fact was assured, then surely the disciples, those who had known Jesus most intimately, those who had had the benefit of His teaching, those who had been privileged to know the mysteries of the Kingdom,<sup>1</sup> those who had glimpsed His Messiahship,<sup>2</sup> those who had seen the visible tokens of that body broken and that blood outpoured a ransom for many,<sup>3</sup> surely they ought to have realised that this bitter, shameful Cross meant to them Forgiveness, Redemption, New Life, that this historical event was the open fulfilment of the promises and the purpose of God. Quite naturally in the case of the disciples the Cross was bound to have a considerable personal effect. In one sense they could not be just spectators in this drama; their fortunes were too closely identified with those of the One who hung there bleeding and dying. And yet in spite of all that, the disciples, too, viewed this historical phenomenon non-existent-ally. They had no eye for the eternal aspects. They saw in the Cross only the defeat of a great cause and the loss of a noble leader. As far as individual forgiveness went, their eyes were holden. They were fools and slow of heart.<sup>4</sup> The historical fact alone, with all its implications, could bring them no assurance

<sup>1</sup> Mark iv. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Mark xiv. 22f. Also Matt. xxvi. 26 and Luke xxii. 19f.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. xvi. 16, etc.

<sup>4</sup> Luke xxiv. 25.

of the long-awaited salvation accomplished. Even in the case of these intimate eye-witnesses of the Cross, it was only as the Holy Spirit illumined the stark facts and revealed that other gracious, eternal aspect, that they knew the forgiveness of sins and learned to rejoice exultantly in the victory of this sorrowful defeat.

The Cross is history. Thus far there can be no disagreement. But we cannot deduce from history anything for the salvation of man. If the Cross is only history, then its significance for the sinner is small. It is only another crime, illustrative of the wicked, desperate, deceitful heart of man.<sup>1</sup> It brings no hope. It bears no message of salvation. It is a horrible, revolting, savage story, striking terror to the heart, disillusioning the spirit, enfeebling all better resolve. At the most it may inspire to martyrdom, but even that martyrdom is useless and purposeless. The only place that we can occupy with the good man Jesus is that of the thief receiving the due reward of his deeds.<sup>2</sup> The Cross as history can mean only this. But then the sinner approaches the Cross again. The fact still remains sure, but he is no longer looking at the historical event. Certainly he is not deducing impossible hypotheses from it. He is looking at the Cross, but not now with the eyes of the flesh, horizontally; now he views it with the uplifted eyes of faith, as an event in another world. And now the historical picture which is the basis fades. Instead of a good man murdered, he sees the Lamb of God slain;<sup>3</sup> and time and circumstance are no longer of any account; it is the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world.<sup>4</sup> Most wonderful, most gracious of all, it is the Lamb of God slain for me. The event in history is also an event in the history of Heaven. It means the release of a burdened soul. It concerns the individual, no longer as a past spectacle in the history of the nations, but as a vital present fact. It is revelation.

#### IV

For every Christian believer the Cross has this double aspect, and although the historical aspect is important it is the revelational alone which has significance for faith. This is the truth which so needs re-emphasis in all our thought and preaching.

<sup>1</sup> Jer. xvii. 9. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Luke xxiii. 41.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Peter i. 19.

<sup>4</sup> Revelation xiii. 8.

The Cross is a fact in this world. It is a truth to which we can appeal, and which cannot be gainsaid. It is real. It really did take place. It is not a mere day-dream, the invention of a sin-burdened conscience, the tortured deception of a power-drunk priest-hood. It belongs to time and place. If our salvation is bound to the Cross, it is bound to something outside ourselves, objective, concrete and real. But if the Cross is a fact in this world, it is also an event in the world of God, a fact which can only be known as it is revealed. The true significance of the Cross cannot be gleaned from historical investigation or proclaimed by historical assertion. It is the revelation of God to the guilty soul as it cries out for forgiveness and cleansing. Only the sinner who comes before God bowed down and seeking mercy can know the inward meaning of the fact that Jesus died. He still sees the historical event, but he sees it transfigured in the glory of God's loving purpose of redemption. As a scholar he can still investigate time and circumstance; as a sinner he sees that the real significance is beyond, and that time and circumstance are only of incidental account. The earthly drama is seen to be but the portion of a heavenly. Where once he was a spectator of the earthly, now he is an actor in the heavenly. He it is, the sinner, for whom that good man died; he it is whose guilt was laid upon Jesus the Saviour; he it is whose stains were washed white in that cleansing flood; he it is whose soul was delivered from that land of eternal bondage. To save sinners, of whom I am chief:<sup>1</sup> this is always the cry of him that knows the true meaning of the Cross.

The Cross has become a heavenly drama of vital and urgent concern to the individual soul. But this heavenly drama is not concluded at the Cross. The crowning act has yet to be played. And what is true of the Cross is to an equal, some would say a greater extent true to that crowning act, the Resurrection. With the Resurrection as with the Cross it is at first only the facts of history which appear. There is, of course, the historical aspect. Just as Jesus was known to have died upon the Cross, so also it was known, and it could not seriously be questioned, that His tomb was empty, and that certain people were convinced that they had seen Him alive again. Just as there were those who had seen Jesus die, and could point to the very spot, and recall the exact time, so there were those who had

<sup>1</sup> Tim. i. 15.

seen the empty tomb and had talked with the men who had seen Him. This is the historical event, an empty tomb and a series of appearances. This is the phenomenon which must engage the attention of the historian. He must estimate the various factors in the situation, weigh the evidence, study the consequences, assign some place in the process of history. As an historian he must view it with complete detachment, as one phenomenon amongst others. He must not be prejudiced by, he must not stop to consider whether there is any inward significance in his own personal life.

Again, as in the case of the Cross the historian is quite at liberty to suggest various interpretations of the facts at his disposal. The Cross can and has been interpreted in many different ways as an historical event; it may be viewed as a wanton crime, a political necessity, an overthrow of righteousness, an heroic martyrdom, even a vindication of law. So also it is with the facts of the Resurrection. The leap from Cross to Atonement is not necessary, or even logically possible. So it is with the leap from empty tomb and appearances to Resurrection. At this point, however, there is one important difference which must be borne in mind. Although it has been noticed that there are certain curious features about the death of Christ, the situation in general was not abnormal. The doing to death of a good man is not unique, not even unusual, in the annals of history. But with the facts of the Resurrection the very opposite is the case. An empty sepulchre is definitely abnormal, and so are appearances on the scale hinted at in the Gospel narrative. And this abnormality first of all compels a more rigorous examination, and secondly greatly restricts the possible range of interpretations. The wise historian, in the face of such facts, will either acknowledge that something extraordinary must have happened, the exact nature of which he cannot determine; or else he will seek to explain the facts in terms of ordinary life, which is, in effect, to explain them away; or else, if he is truly wise, he will suspend judgment altogether for lack of wider evidence.

Two facts must be noticed, however. The first of these is that the historian as such is quite at liberty to put any bearable interpretation upon the facts. It is often customary amongst apologists and theologians to condemn outright as wicked atheists those who suggest the taking away of the body, with

psychological hallucinations as the obvious solution. But it must be remembered that into the question as history the matter of belief or scepticism quite simply does not enter.<sup>1</sup> The explanation may be inadequate, and open to criticism on the ground of inadequacy, but as one interpretation of the facts at our disposal it is quite legitimate. Indeed, as we shall see in a moment, it is the first and obvious reaction to facts so unusual as the ones in question. Moreover, it must be borne in mind that the only facts in question are the empty tomb and the appearances, not a witnessed Resurrection. It is the prerogative, more than that the duty, of the historian to explain or interpret these facts in any possible way, and the fact that such an explanation or interpretation may be inadequate, or even the fact that it is not the explanation and interpretation of faith, must not be confused, for purposes of criticism, with a dogmatic denial of the Resurrection.

The second fact is that in no case can Resurrection logically and inevitably be deduced from the facts. The utmost that can be said, and in this the Resurrection is unlike the Cross, is that the facts, being abnormal, do point to something which admits of no easy, normal explanation, something which must be akin to Resurrection, and which can hardly be mere survival. But even where the scholar is forced into this hypothesis as the only possible interpretation of the facts, it does not mean that he is a believer in, or that he has any true knowledge of, the Resurrection, and it is always with the escape clause that perhaps the facts themselves have been distorted. The truth is that the Resurrection cannot be known as a deduction from observed data. In the New Testament, and always, the knowledge of the Resurrection is the knowledge of the Risen Lord. The saying is true that even if the facts of the Resurrection could be established on unassailable evidence and even if no explanation but Resurrection were left open, it would not mean the conversion of a single soul, since the Risen Jesus would not thereby be known in the heart. The Resurrection, like the Atonement, is a fact of God which may be apprehended only by revelation. It is not something which may be known detachedly and theoretically, but existentially and concernedly; it is known, not by the man who can invent no more plausible hypothesis, but

<sup>1</sup> This criticism cuts both ways: the sceptic is just as prone to brandish his historical explanation as a triumphant alternative to faith.

by him who knows that his whole being is here set in question, that for him this is the very crisis of eternal life and eternal death.

Here again the dual aspect is most firmly established by the example of the first believers. The women, Peter and John, the disciples, these people all first knew the Resurrection as historical fact alone. They saw the empty tomb, and they judged it non-existentially, as history. They did not as yet know the Resurrection itself, and their reaction was the common reaction of the historian. The thought at once sprang to their mind, and they propounded it as the obvious solution: The body must have been removed or stolen. They have taken away my Lord and I know not where they have laid Him.<sup>1</sup> Further reflection might have served to modify that first judgment, or to expose its futility, but it could not lead them beyond. It was only as they heard the voice of the angel and saw the Risen Lord that they knew the other, more glorious, more significant explanation of that empty tomb.

What is true of the empty tomb is equally true of the appearances. When the first appearances to the women were recounted to the disciples, again they reacted exactly as the witness of the fact alone, eye-witness or historian, must always react. They could not deny the appearances, but they could scoff and explain. There was nothing at all extraordinary. It was merely a psychological phenomenon, the result of overwrought nerves, hallucinations.<sup>2</sup> The disciples may not have been versed in modern psychology and its peculiar jargon, but their explanation was the same as that which is so familiar to-day. No doubt upon greater thought they would have revised this first hasty judgment, but not all the thought in the world would or could have led them from a knowledge of the earthly facts to an apprehension of the heavenly. Revelation alone could do that. Only as the angel proclaimed: He is risen;<sup>3</sup> only as the Risen Christ appeared; only as the Living Lord was known in the individual life; only then did the historical facts take on their real and staggering significance. Without revelation there was the alternative of explaining away or an insoluble mystery, scepticism or agnosticism. With revelation it was realized that Jesus the Saviour had died for sin and that God had raised Him from the dead.

<sup>1</sup> John xx. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Luke xxiv. 11, etc.

<sup>3</sup> Luke xxiv. 6, etc.

## V

Still to-day it is the eye of faith which sees that the Resurrection, like the Cross, is a deed of God. It was God who raised Jesus from the dead, just as it was God whom it pleased to bruise Him.<sup>1</sup> The Resurrection has its outward manifestation, facts about which the scholar may argue and theorize, but the real significance is to be sought elsewhere. It is not by a study of these facts that a man knows the Risen Lord. The facts are important. They stand as the objective witness. But they in themselves prove nothing. By them nothing is known of the deed of God. It is only as the Risen Christ comes to us by faith, it is only as the revelation of God instructs us through the written or the spoken Word, that the scales fall from our eyes, that Resurrection ceases to be an historical hypothesis or a dogma of tradition, and becomes a personal assurance, that behind the earthly story of the empty tomb and the men who walked again with Jesus we see the glorious culmination of the heavenly drama of redemption, the Son of God who suffered once for sin risen victorious over death.

This is not a minimizing of the facts, nor is it a denial of their importance. Certainly it is no attempt to dispense with them altogether, as some would imagine. When God has pleased to reveal himself in human history, when God has chosen time and place for the objective outworking of redemption, when God has chosen to interweave Atonement and Resurrection into the story of mankind, it is not for us to cavil at it. But it is the correcting of a false perspective. It is the readjustment of complementary parts. It is the reminder that the apprehension of the historical facts is not the apprehension of God's facts. It is the recognition that at these two points, the death of Christ and His Resurrection, we see by the outward eye events which have their roots in another world; and that where the outward eye sees the surface, the deeps can be plumbed only by the eye of faith. The mode of expression is startling, but there is truth in the conception of Barth, that the work of Jesus is the work of an incognito. We see a man; a man who is puzzling to the historian, but who yet can be fitted naturally into the historical process: except by revelation it cannot be known that this is more than a man. We likewise see a death: but except by the

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah liii. 10.

eye of faith it cannot be seen that that death is a death for sin. We see an empty tomb and hear of appearances: but except by the Spirit of God it cannot be grasped that that empty tomb and those appearances mean Resurrection, New Life, the overthrow of sin and death, and the triumph of the Kingdom of God.

The Cross and the Resurrection are both history, and it is well for us to contend earnestly for their trustworthiness as historical fact. But the complementary truth must always be kept in mind that to know them as history alone is to know them only on the surface. It was Paul who once knew Jesus after the flesh. Perhaps he had heard Him preach, and seen Him die, and even inspected His empty tomb; certainly he had heard others proclaim their faith in His atonement and Resurrection. And so we too may read and study the facts, the words He spoke, the death He died, the tomb He left, the witness of those who trusted and still trust in Him. But then the living Jesus meets us on the Damascus road, and the history is also the revelation; it is the gracious Christ that we know: manifested in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, received up in glory;<sup>1</sup> and in Him we have our redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of His grace.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Tim. iii. 16.

<sup>2</sup> Eph. i. 7.