

THE EXPOSITOR.

THE IDENTITY OF THE LORD JESUS AFTER HIS RESURRECTION.

AFTER his resurrection the Lord Jesus took pains to satisfy his friends of his corporeal identity. The fact which it was important to establish by "infallible proofs" was not simply that He had re-assumed a body which was no phantasm, but possessed of material properties and organs. It was also this, that the body in which He re-appeared was the very same which had suffered on the cross and lain in the sepulchre. In many ways, indeed, his resurrection body differed widely from the body of his humiliation and passion. It was not ordinarily dependent on the same sustenance. It did not always travel to and fro by the same method of locomotion. It came and went, appeared and dissappeared, in a way which baffled explanation. Sometimes it seems not to have been recognizable even by those who had previously known Him well. There was much to tell of change wrought by death, or after death by resurrection, upon the familiar body which the Virgin bore, which had toiled and rested, by day and night, like that of other men, which rough hands had stripped and cruel blows had torn, which some

of his friends had so lately swathed with bands of perfumed linen. Plainly, He had done more than come to life again. He had entered a different sphere of existence. Out of the company of mortal men He had passed into some higher state, where the physical conditions were altered and the body's powers enlarged; where its materials had become less gross and its wants less incessant, or, perchance, less mean. Yet, however considerable might be these changes produced upon the constitution of the Saviour's body, it was not a new body which He now inhabited, but the same one as before. The change had not destroyed identity. Physically He was the very same man He ever was. His scars proved it. He shewed the disciples his hands and feet, and bade them observe that they carried recognizable marks. "Behold them," He cried, "that they are my own hands, my own feet." They touched the stigmata; they searched his side; they knew Him by his wounds.

There is something, however, of still graver moment than corporeal identity: I mean the continuous or unaltered identity of our risen Lord in all mental and moral characteristics. So long as He dwelt among us here, men like ourselves knew Him for a friend. They were familiar with his habits of thought, his turns of speech, his mien and gesture, his principles of conduct. They could trace in all He did his own stamp, and say of each utterance or action that it was like the Man. This mental and moral physiognomy of Jesus was in fact so sharply lined, as well as consistent and of one piece, that even the records we possess of Him do not fail to preserve a quite unique and distinctive individuality. From the Four Gospels

the world has always felt sure that it knew this Man. No one could palm off on us a fifth gospel. Hardly a single sentence could be put into his mouth, or an anecdote about Him invented, without the literary public being able to decide whether or not it were like the Jesus of our Bible. If our scanty documents reproduce a character so original as to be inimitable, let the reader conceive how that lovely life must have burned its image into the souls of men and women who lived with Him, travelled with Him, watched Him, studied Him, month after month, with hearts that loved and eyes that adored Him! Now this Man was dead. What change is wrought by death on the bodily frame we know, and we shudder to know it; but what change it may work on the higher part of a man, on the thoughts, affections, habits, tastes, loves, or hates, of our vanished friend, who can tell? Much of the pathos of death lies just here, that it is our friend's farewell to everything which was wont to give shape or colour to his existence. He has left all familiar things behind him, to pass into a state obscure and undiscovered—a state so withdrawn from our investigation that we have no data for even guessing what he will be like, or how he will find himself there, or through what alterations he may pass under the pressure of new conditions. If only we knew a little of that other life! But how far can we count on our dear one remaining the same whom we loved on earth—the same in himself or as dear to us—when now there is no more any earthly life for him, nor any light of the sun, nor voice of friends, nor aught left unchanged within all the circle in which, somewhere out of sight, he moves and has his novel unimagined being?

The Christian teaching that believers are at death made perfect in holiness is only credible on the assumption that death does profoundly modify character. It presupposes that the conditions into which the dead are brought will powerfully re-act to depress one side of character and strengthen another, to modify the current of thought and give ampler scope to desires which in this life find no sufficient satisfaction. In the case of Jesus, it is true, there was no imperfect, to be exchanged for a perfect, holiness. The atmosphere which even on earth He had always breathed had been like an air of heaven. For Him to leave this world was to go home. He said it was a return to the Father whence He came. Yet in such a return from the human world, where men knew and could observe Him, to that celestial state of glory, might there not lie a change which would prove fatal to all the friendships they had formed with Him below? Unless He carry back into the world of the Immortals the same moral character we have learnt to admire and prize on earth, and retain after death the same close warm tie of relationship to his sinful brothers; unless, in short, death does nothing to sunder the confidence and familiarity which were engendered by years of earthly converse, of what use will it be that we have gone in and out with the Son of God and He has called us "friends"? Jesus of Nazareth we know; Him we can confide in: but who will tell us that Jesus is to be the same to us after death has snapped the bonds of flesh and resurrection has restored Him to the society of the glorified and deathless?

If there were time for such misgivings as these to arise in the hearts of the disciples, the first hour of resumed intercourse with Him who had been dead must have sufficed to dissipate them. They had more tests for judging of his identity than we have ; and tests, too, which were both more sensitive and more trustworthy. A friend returns to us after many years of tropical exposure have bronzed and oldened his features, or after some terrible accident or fiery sickness has effaced the old familiar look from his countenance. What do we first recognize him by? By this, that he retains his former opinions or exhibits similar traits of disposition? No; that comes out only after prolonged intercourse with him. It is rather by some indescribable trick of voice or manner, some trifling unconscious gesture. These little traits would tell nothing to a stranger, but they instantly make us sure of our friend. Now, it is certain that the disciples knew their risen Master first by signs like these. Mary recognized Him by the tone in which He pronounced her own name. John detected the methodical hand of his Friend in the arrangement of the napkin in the sepulchre. The Two at Emmaus perhaps had their eyes opened by his way of dividing the loaf at their frugal supper. Judged even by minute tests like these, the Man was in no wise altered. Such personal characteristics, however, are of no use to any subsequent generation. What *we* have to study is only what He is reported to have said and done after his resurrection. Can we trace there the same mental habits, a mind that works along the same line, a moral nature wearing the identical character, a

heart beating with just such emotions as the unslain untransfigured Man whom Pilate sent to the cross ?

Each reader will answer this question best after studying it for himself, since the impression produced by such evidence of personal identity is one which can scarcely be conveyed by one student to another. It needs to be received from immediate contact with the historical data. I can only indicate how some of these data appear to me to bear upon the question.

Almost the earliest words of our Lord after He rose¹ were those which He spoke to Mary Magdalene at the door of the tomb (John xx. 17). They betray, in combination, two of the most characteristic features in the previous character of Jesus. They imply a certain peculiar sense of brotherhood with other men, not as a thing to be taken for granted, but as something to which attention needs to be called ; and along with this they reveal a profound consciousness of a peculiar relationship to God, such as set Him apart from other men. Both these elements are admitted to form striking peculiarities in the Jesus of the Gospels, especially of the Fourth Gospel. I think they are nowhere present more characteristically than in these solemn words of the newly-risen One: "Touch me not: for I am not yet ascended to the Father ; but go to my brethren and say unto them, 'I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and my God and your God.'"

¹ The precise order of the incidents on the resurrection morning is difficult to fix. Our Lord's meeting with the other women (Matt. xxviii. 10) may have preceded his appearance to *Mary* of Magdala, notwithstanding the early tradition preserved in ~~the~~ doubtful text—Mark xvi. 9.

A few hours later followed our Lord's walk to Emmaus (Luke xxiv. 13-35). In his conversation with Cleopas and his companion we find no decay in the full and ready memory, charged from boyhood with texts of the Old Testament and prompt throughout his public teaching to suggest them. Nor is there the least change in his exposition of Messianic prophecy. During his previous lifetime Jesus had taught that the ancient predictions indicated a suffering Messiah, who should enter into glory only after passion.¹ This interpretation He now repeated (verse 26), apparently with ampler illustrations than before, and once more He is reported to have pressed it upon a larger company of disciples later on the same evening (Luke xxiv. 43-46). The very form of rebuke with which He opened his address to the two travellers: "O fools and slow of heart," recalls similar expressions which recur so frequently in his life that they may be called characteristic.² The general impression which I gather, is that the old themes of conversation betwixt Jesus and his followers were quietly resumed after He rose, just as if no chasm of death had been interposed. It is as though the path which led Him to the edge of that gulf had simply been continued on the other side, at the same level, and with the same associates. He began again just where He had left off to die.

One interesting instance of this is found in the assignation for a meeting in Galilee. That had

¹ Compare the following passages from Luke's Gospel alone : ix. 22 ; xviii. 31 ; xx. 17 ; xxii. 22, 37.

² Compare, *e.g.*, Matt. xv. 16 (Mark vii. 18) ; Matt. xxiii. 17, 19 ; Luke xi. 40 ; xii. 20.

been expressly arranged a few hours before his betrayal: "After I am risen," said He, "I will go before you into Galilee" (Matt. xxvi. 32; Mark xiv. 28). How natural that one of the first messages sent to the Eleven on the resurrection morning should be, "Go, tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me" (Matt. xxviii. 10). It is true that the stupor and incredulity into which most of his adherents had fallen made it necessary for Him to grant more than one interview for their satisfaction before they left Jerusalem to meet Him at the original rendezvous on a Galilean hill. But for his own part the returned Master simply assumes that the arrangement holds which He had made with them before He went away.

Other examples of former topics resumed or referred to will occur to careful readers. On the Thursday evening He had promised them a new advent of the Holy Spirit as one comfortable consequence of his decease.¹ On the Sunday evening He repeated that promise in symbol, and began to fulfil it by breathing on them, saying: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost" (John xx. 22). Originally He had conferred upon the Eleven, far away in Galilee, some six months before, a faculty to declare in his name forgiveness of sins. In very similar words He now renews that characteristic and unexampled commission.² He repeated by the Lake one of the most significant of his early miracles—the draught of fishes—under circumstances which lent it a parallel significance;³ and what touched the weary Seven most in

¹ See John xiv. 16, 17, 25, 26; especially xvi. 7 ff.

² Compare Matt. xviii. 18 with John xx. 23.

³ Compare Luke v. 1-11 with John xxi.

the morning meal upon the beach (John xxi. 9) was surely this, that He was acting the part of purveyor or householder, where often before He had shared with them a boatman's early breakfast of roasted fish and barley cakes. In the restoration to office of his first apostle, which immediately followed (John xxi. 15-19), no one has ever missed the pointed allusion to Peter's three-fold denial; but neither can we fail to catch in the words, "Follow thou me" (verse 22), a more distant echo of the first call with which, years before, He had on that same shore summoned Simon from his nets. (See Matt. iv. 19.)

Besides such distinct references after resurrection to incidents which occurred previous to his death, there is a distinct variety of evidence, not less valuable though less easily explained, which merits the most careful study. I refer to the moral resemblance in the treatment of his several followers by our Lord before and after the great change. We find Him, in the narratives we possess, coming into close spiritual relations with at least three strongly-marked individualities, besides his treatment of groups of disciples together. He has to handle the womanly love of Mary of Magdala, the matter-of-fact incredulity of Thomas, and the shame of the disgraced boaster, Peter. Let any one sufficiently at home in the manner of Jesus, as it may be gathered from his dealings with men in the earlier sections of the Gospels, weigh candidly these three interviews after He rose again, and say whether they are not in perfect keeping. Is it credible that after the moment of Jesus' death, when next the curtain rises, we have a different Person before us? Is it not the same

skilful and tender hand which is at work carrying on the education of these disciples as if no change had passed upon Him? To my own mind this is the subtlest and therefore the surest evidence of all. It is plain to me that I touch the very same heart as formerly. Death and re-entrance into life have wrought no alteration in the most personal attributes of this well-known Man. He is the same to his friends as ever. He stoops to their feeble faith with equal gentleness. He rebukes with the old tender gravity. He mingles faithfulness and considerate love in the old way. Changed as He is into incorruptible life, with heaven's crown hovering already over his brows, and eyes that are soon to burn like suns; lending only fitful and ghost-like visits to the homes of men ere He takes his flight for the radiant home of the Eternal; what word does He speak, or what act do, in which we cannot recognize the heart of our own earthly Jesus, so as to whisper with delighted awe like John's: "It is the Lord"? (John xxi. 7.)

Such proofs that the personality of Jesus survived unaltered the shock of death and the more mysterious transformation which we call his resurrection, are no less precious to us than to the first disciples. For one thing, the other world, the great dim realm of Hades, is not now, as it used to be, *all* obscure and shadowy. Enough there still is to make our heart sit silent and awe-struck when we see our dear ones go away from beside our warm firesides to a region unvisited, whence no human speech returns to tell us how they fare, and whether they retain in that Place Beyond any knowledge of this

Hither-world, any pensive recollection of the hours which they and we spent together, or any natural yearnings after us, such as we cherish after them. It is a sad and a silencing thing to see dear ones die! Only here is one illumined spot amid all that uncertainty and gloom. One figure, at least, is no pale spectre, no hovering disembodied phantom of a friend, flitting before the mocked eye without intelligible voice for the ear to catch. Here is a Man—the Man of all others most human and most real—a Man who was dead like our dead once, but is alive again for evermore, and is not less distinct to our eye, nor less warm to our hand, nor less homely and brotherly to our heart, than before death touched his brow and set on it an aureole of immortality. When we think of that After-world of the dead, we think of Him as its centre and its King. When we bid our departed farewell, we only yield them up into the nearer presence of One whom they know and we know. When we ourselves come to face this awful going hence, we shall not peer into the shadows of a sunless Hades, nor fear to lose ourselves among the flitting ghosts of the countless dead. We shall fix a steady gaze upon one firmly-traced Form, most human and familiar, and say, like Paul, We go to be with Christ. Surely that is a needless fear which always haunts the timid heart as to what shall be found on the other side. Here was at least one Man who went through the river, as we have to do, and reached its further strand; yet when He came back to speak to us, He was as human and as much our own as ever. The stream of death had proved no Lethe to Him, washing out earthly memories in a doleful

forgetfulness. Why, then, should death change our friends so that we shall not know them, or make them more strange to us than they were before? It is not such a very dreadful thing, this dying; for Jesus died. It cannot work any ghastly alteration upon human hearts, or blot out human recollections, or rend the delicate threads of love: Jesus was not thus altered. The unseen world cannot be so remote, uncertain, chill, or strange as we deemed it was. It is just a world of whose population our own risen Jesus forms the type, and of whose habitations He holds the key: "I go to prepare a place for you."

Nor is it only in the world of the dead that we now find a clear spot of certain knowledge. All our spiritual conceptions, and especially our thoughts about God Himself, have been made more sharp, and definite, and homely. The world with which religion has to do is still, no doubt, a world unseen; but it can no longer be termed a world unknown. Peopled as it is with superhuman forces which man cannot guide, and intelligences whose acquaintance he cannot make, that celestial angel-haunted land—resplendent home of God—holds at least one heart on whose beats may be laid the touch of a human finger. The vision of the Seer in Patmos was a vision, it is true; but the fact at the root of it is beyond question. Wherever God's throne may be set, or whatever ministers, radiant and crowned, may encircle it, or however unspeakable by us may be the songs in which the beatified extol his praise; at least there must be, somewhere at the centre of all that inaccessible court, that temple untrodden

by mortal foot, one Man whom the eyes of men have beheld and the hands of men have handled. Down upon his bosom a human head can still be laid to rest. Up into his pure sweet eyes a man can look with trustful gaze. Of the angels we know next to nothing. The Father is very pitiful, but Him hath no man seen at any time. Faith gropes about among "heavenly places" till it can touch a hand that bears a nail-mark in its palm, and having touched that hand, it grasps it and is still.

Nor need any one be afraid to trust the Godhead, since at the heart of it there dwells, unchanged, Jesus of Nazareth. So long as He walked on the earth, it is certain, there was something about Him which wonderfully drew men's affection. Not the good only, nor the rich and great, came about Him or monopolized his care : but just as much the very sad, and the very poor, and the very sinful ; broken-hearted fallen women and pure-minded little children, and anxious mothers and amiable youths ; weeping funeral guests and pale faces of the long sick ; frank gallant soldiers and hardy fishermen ; with grey-bearded senators and bandits of wild life. This Man's fascination drew all sorts of people and won the confidence of all. Surely it is something to know that this kindest and most trustworthy of the sons of men, who while He lived on earth made it beautiful by the acts of sweet ministry He did in it, has taken up to the throne and heart of God the same unchanged nature, home of all lowly charities and patient kindness. Is God, then, a blank to us any longer ? a blind force ? a postulate of the reason ? a something, we know not what ? God forbid ! Never

have men seen or imagined a character which it would have been better worth their while to detain on earth, if they could, age after age, to be a fountain of health for our worn humanity. *It is certain that this very Man lives on, unchanged, in God.* To Him, therefore, will we still pray. Not now from the pebbles of an earthly beach through the scant light of dawn does his figure loom or his voice reach us where we toil disheartened like the Seven. But when we faint at our long task and look up like them, or when we kneel heart-broken for sin, or when we lie crushed and weeping in utter loneliness, how often does there come floating down across the wide spaces, and past the close array of the pure and blessed, the same familiar Voice that used to speak on earth,—“Fear not: it is I. Thy sins are forgiven thee. Let not your heart be troubled.” And our heart whispers back again, “It is the Lord!”

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THE STRENGTH OF WEAKNESS.

2 CORINTHIANS XII. 9.

WHAT St. Paul's “thorn in the flesh” was, or, rather, what his “*stake* in the flesh” was,—for so the word ought to be translated,—it is still impossible to determine. The Fathers of the early Church concluded it to be some bodily ailment, as, for instance, “a severe headache.” Some of the later Fathers supposed it to be the opposition he encountered from the enemies of the faith, such an opposition as they themselves had constantly to brave. The monks of the Middle