

*PROFESSOR HARNACK ON OUR LORD'S  
RESURRECTION.*

THE recently translated lectures<sup>1</sup> of Dr. Harnack on the Essence of Christianity have excited profound interest in this country and in America, partly because of the remarkable position the author holds as an authority in the world of theological scholarship, and partly because his discussions touch and offer judgments upon almost every disputed point in the origin and history of the Christian faith. All students and teachers of religion owe an immense debt of gratitude to one who has with justice been called "the Mommsen of contemporary theology." His researches in early Church history, and his application of scientific methods to the rise and development of doctrine, have led to a modification in traditional opinion, and have opened up fresh and promising fields of inquiry. His calling as a specialist of the first rank gives a more than ordinary significance to his words, when he leaves "the recondite learning" and "scholarly folios" of the academy and aims at giving "a short and plain statement of the gospel" to the man in the street. Many who admire Dr. Harnack most, and have been stimulated alike by his spoken and written word, will deeply regret to find him here committing himself to views which seem to them reactionary, and incapable of satisfying their religious and reflective needs. And their regret is all the deeper when they see parties of a purely negative tendency, shelter themselves behind his honoured name, and exploit his reputation in the interests of a merely critical rationalism. One thing is clear: if the essence of Christianity, as Dr. Harnack believes, allows us no longer to speak of Christ as in a unique and unparalleled sense the Son of God, or of his life and death as the ground of our redemp-

<sup>1</sup> The passages cited are from the translation under the title: *What is Christianity?* by T. B. Saunders. The references to the German are in brackets.

tion, or of His resurrection as a genuine fact of history, then the Church from the days of the Apostles has been mistaken, and the gospel which it preaches is not the actual message which Jesus brought into the world, but one substituted for it woven out of the fears and hopes and fancies of men. This is a conclusion which should give us pause. Ere we accept it, a careful examination of the author's premisses, and of the presuppositions that lie behind his handling of the evidence, would seem to be a necessity.

We turn, then, with special interest to Dr. Harnack's treatment of what we are accustomed to consider one of the unshakable bases of Christianity—the resurrection of Christ from the dead. We do not indeed to-day conceive this event in the unspiritual and external way of Paley and his "twelve men of known probity," but we feel that, as Ritschl remarks, "we would give up the whole Christian conception of things, if we gave up this key to our religious standpoint with the argument that the restoration of a dead man to life would contradict natural law."<sup>1</sup> Every historian of religion has to face the problem: Can the belief of the first Christian age that Christ rose from the dead be explained naturally without the acceptance of the objective reality of the resurrection? Let us see how Dr. Harnack solves the problem. In accordance with his acknowledged purpose to separate the "kernel" from the "husk" in Christianity, he distinguishes between the "Easter faith," which is the "kernel," and the "Easter message," which is the "husk." We were accustomed to think that the distinction between the Easter message and the Easter faith lay in this, that it was through the former that the latter was called forth. The belief in the resurrection was evoked by the testimony that on Easter morning the grave was found empty, and that Jesus showed Himself alive by "many infallible proofs" to his disciples. This is not Dr.

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Ecke in his *Die Theologische Schule Albrecht Ritschls*, p. 198.

Harnack's view. On the contrary, he proposes to show how the Apostles gained the "Easter faith," that is, "the conviction that Jesus Christ passed through death," that "He lives as the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep";<sup>1</sup> while at the same time the record of the historical manifestations of the victory of Christ over death may be set aside as so much poetry and legend. In other words, the apostolic conviction was valid, but the apostolic testimony was invalid.

"The Easter message," he says, "tells us of that wonderful event in Joseph of Arimathæa's garden, which, however, no eye saw; it tells us of the empty grave into which a few women and disciples looked; of the appearance of the Lord in a transfigured form—so glorified that His own could not immediately recognize Him; it soon begins to tell us, too, of what the risen one said and did. The reports became more and more complete, and more and more confident."<sup>2</sup>

It is clear that Dr. Harnack does not believe that on the third day the grave was really empty. Yet one of the extreme radical school lays it down that "the point of departure in every discussion touching the resurrection of Jesus is the material fact that on the morning of the Sunday which followed the crucifixion, the tomb in which His body had been laid was found empty."<sup>3</sup> And in this judgment a brilliant English disciple of Dr. Harnack agrees,<sup>4</sup> and is forced to add: "In my opinion the empty grave offers us a problem which objective history can never solve." The German historian, however, does not resign himself to this agnostic despair of history, but offers us an explanation. The theory would seem to amount to this: A few women and disciples "glanced into" (*hineingeblickt*) the grave and believed mistakenly that it was empty, though no one had seen

<sup>1</sup> p. 163 (102)

<sup>2</sup> p. 161 (101).

<sup>3</sup> A. Reville, *Jesus de Nazareth*, vol. ii. p. 453.

<sup>4</sup> Dr. Percy Gardner: *Exploratio Evangelica*, p. 255.

Christ's body leave its resting-place. This mistake would naturally give rise to a belief that He was risen, and this belief would soon embody itself in visions which in turn would react on the belief, making it more intense and certain, and giving to it an apparent foundation. Hence the empty grave gradually lost its significance for the disciples: what was all-important for them as for St. Paul was "not the state in which the grave was found, but Christ's appearances."<sup>1</sup>

Now we may pass by the Renan-like touch about "the women" as unsatisfactory witnesses of the empty grave, inasmuch as Dr. Harnack himself admits that some of the disciples themselves shared the responsibility for the report. But our earliest source tells us that the first visitors to the grave "entered in,"<sup>2</sup> not merely "glanced in"; and St. Luke, whose source for the closing sections of his narrative is an admittedly good one, tells us that the Apostles treated the report of the women as "idle tales," and that certain of the disciples "went to the sepulchre and found it even so as the women had said."<sup>3</sup>

The disciples did not come to the grave expecting to find it empty: they came to prove the truth or falsity of what had been told them by the women. This certainly makes against the notion of a blunder in observation. Again, Dr. Harnack's repetition of Strauss's objection that the resurrection had no eyewitness is somewhat unfortunate, for it is capable of being turned against the theory that legend had much to do with the apostolic belief. The contrast between the silence of all the Gospels as to the actual condition or mode of the resurrection, and the attempt of the apocryphal Gospel of Peter to describe it, shows that in the former we are dealing with serious history. If the tradition of the empty tomb had a purely legendary origin, then might we not expect that the sober limits of the Gospel narratives

<sup>1</sup> p. 161 (102).

<sup>2</sup> St. Mark xvi. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Chap. xxiv. 22.

would be overstepped, and a highly coloured and popularly striking account be given of the actual emergence from the tomb of death's Conqueror? Once more: as to the waning importance attached to the empty grave in the Apostolic witness, it is worth noting that the appearances of Jesus which, according to Dr. Harnack, were the all-important thing for St. Paul and the early disciples, necessarily implied that His body had left the tomb. On the contrary supposition, it would follow either that He assumed a new body or continued to exist as a disembodied ghost—and either alternative is inconsistent with our sources. That St. Paul shared the belief of the first disciples in the empty grave is certain—is proved, first, by the statement which he had "received" that "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that *He was buried*, and that He rose again *the third day* according to the Scriptures";<sup>1</sup> and secondly, by his whole argument for a bodily resurrection at the last day as guaranteed by the resurrection of Christ. And in emphasizing Christ's manifestations he at the same time, by implication, emphasized the fact of the vacant tomb. But how does Dr. Harnack deal with St. Paul's account of the appearance to him of the Risen One? "Paul," we are told, "based his Easter faith upon the certainty that the 'Second Adam' was from heaven, and upon his experience, on the way to Damascus, of God revealing His Son to him as still alive. God, he said, revealed Him 'in me'; but this inner revelation was coupled with a vision overwhelming as vision never was afterwards."<sup>2</sup> Now it would be truer to the thought of the Apostle to say that he based his certainty that the second Adam was from heaven on his Easter faith, and not, as Harnack will have it, the reverse. For St. Paul starts with the conception of Christ as risen and glorified, therefore as One exalted to Messianic sovereignty. His death, then, was not the death of a sinner

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 3, 4.

<sup>2</sup> p. 161 (102).

whom the grave could have held as its rightful prey, but the vicarious death of a sinless Mediator which had a quite cosmical significance, and constituted the ground of our redemption and reconciliation. But what must these facts demand save that a person holding such relations to God and to man should have His ultimate origin, so to say, in the fundamental realities of the universe, in the timeless being of God? It was the light shed by the glory of the Risen One, that for the Apostle seemed to make clear the mystery of His person. Nor can we accept Dr. Harnack's view that St. Paul's vision of the risen Christ was of the same order as his later ones, differing only in its greater intensity. For the Apostle makes it one of a series of appearances<sup>1</sup> to which the highest objectivity is attached. "And last of all He was seen of me also as of one untimely born" — words which imply, as has been said, "on the one hand that he conceived the appearance to himself to have been like the rest constituting the series; and on the other hand that the series itself was not an unbroken one distributed evenly over the considerable period between the Passion and his own conversion."<sup>2</sup> As has already been indicated, St. Paul gained a conviction of the saving efficacy of Christ's death through the knowledge not merely that Jesus lived on after death, but that he was the Risen One who, because He bore a burden not His own, could not remain in the power of the grave. The revelation of the Divine Sonship of the Messiah was mediated by the appearance of the Messiah as risen. Of course Dr. Harnack objects to the validity of the appearances that "a clear account of them cannot be constructed out of the stories told by Paul and the Evangelists."<sup>3</sup>

Here again the argument is double-edged. For had there been no discrepancies there would be reason for believing

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 5-8.

<sup>2</sup> J. V. Bartlet: *The Apostolic Age*, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> p. 162 (102).

that we were dealing not with a transcript from experience but with an artificially harmonized and concocted narrative. It may be frankly admitted that there are difficulties which are, perhaps, insoluble as to the order of the appearances and the scene of their occurrence. But all the more certain does the fact stand that the Apostles believed they had seen Him, and through this belief became sure of God and of eternal life, and were prepared to yield their lives in defence of this faith. It is idle to demand a clear account of something which in part belongs to the unseen order that transcends experience. Thus the contradictory phenomena which the documents reveal are a proof rather than a refutation of their historical fidelity.

Having thus disposed of the Easter message, Dr. Harnack would have us still hold to the Easter faith, and claims the New Testament on his side in so doing. "The story of Thomas is told for the exclusive purpose<sup>1</sup> of impressing upon us that we must hold the Easter faith even without the Easter message: 'Blessed are they that have not seen yet have believed.' The disciples on the road to Emmaus were blamed for not believing in the resurrection even though the Easter message had not yet reached them. The Lord is a Spirit, says Paul: this carries with it the certainty of His resurrection."<sup>2</sup> All this will prove to most readers that a man may be a brilliant historian and yet a very indifferent exegete. We note, first of all, what seems to be a strange confusion of ideas. For the history tells us that St. Thomas had heard the Easter message. "But Thomas, one of the twelve called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord."<sup>3</sup> What our Lord

<sup>1</sup> "Singulière exegèse! Car enfin qui ne croirait que saint Jean avait pour but dans ce récit de fournir le témoignage précis d'un homme d'abord peu disposé à croire à la réalité corporelle de la résurrection?"—M. Lagrange in *Revue Biblique Internationale*, January, 1901, p. 113.

<sup>2</sup> p. 160 (101).

<sup>3</sup> John xx 24.

reproaches him with is not his refusal to believe, even though he had not received the Easter message, for, as a matter of fact, he had received the message, but his refusal to believe the message on the testimony of others. In other words, when our Lord says, "Blessed are they that have not seen yet have believed," He does not demand the Easter faith in the absence of the Easter message, but He does demand belief in the Risen One where physical tests are no longer available, and He implies that a special blessedness accompanies such a belief. If St. Thomas had accepted the Easter tidings as corroboration of a faith born of his intercourse with Jesus during His earthly ministry, then the painful state of spiritual confusion, the inner turmoil of a soul not at peace, would have been impossible. Such an acceptance would have shown his sensitiveness to "the link of the seen and the unseen orders." The same thing is true to-day. We do not believe in Christ's resurrection simply because others have reported it, but because our knowledge of Him in the gospel story, and our experience of Him as a saving and redeeming power, recognize in the resurrection, when the message of it comes to us, the fitting crown and climax of His career. The faith within us that such an One could not be holden of death presses forward to welcome and rejoice in the external witness of history.

Once more: as to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, they were *not* "blamed for not believing in the resurrection, even though the Easter message had not yet reached them," but for failing to believe the Easter message which *had* reached them, interpreted, as it ought to have been, in the light of Old Testament prophecy. They had heard of the empty tomb, but the crucifixion had obscured everything, so darkened their whole inward world that the tidings could evoke no response. Their hope that He was the Messiah was wellnigh quenched by the tragedy of the Cross. Their Messianic programme, in spite of all that



Jesus had told them, had no room for suffering crowned by a shameful and ignominious death. Hence the task of the stranger was to lead them to a revision of that programme in accordance with a spiritual view of the Old Testament Scriptures which would find in the Cross not the defeat of the Divine purpose, but rather its glorious accomplishment. And so hope revived and faith was born anew. The lesson for us would seem to be not that we should have the Easter faith in the absence of the Easter message, but that the message should awaken and confirm a faith produced by the Divine revelation in the history of humanity, and more particularly in that of ancient Israel.

Perhaps the arbitrariness of Dr. Harnack's exegetical methods appears nowhere more marked than in his bold identification of the Lord and the Spirit on the basis of 2 Corinthians iii. 17. "Der Herr ist der Geist, sagt Paulus, und in diese Gewissheit war seine Auferweckung mit eingeschlossen." But the many passages in which Christ and the Spirit are distinguished—and there is a notable one at the end of this very Epistle—suffice to bar out the identification here assumed. The Apostle does not say, "The Lord is a Spirit," but "the Lord is *the* Spirit." That is to say, for the purpose which St. Paul has in hand, that namely of showing how, when the heart turns to Christ, the Spirit enters into it and dwells there, the influence of Christ and the influence of the Spirit may be spoken of as synonymous. In other words, we are not here dealing with any depositions as to the *person* of our Lord. It is the nature of His *influence* in the hearts of believing men that is under discussion. That influence is spiritual, persuasive, and makes its appeal to the springs of our inner life, in contrast with the influence of the older order, which was legal, coercive and externally binding. "The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life."<sup>1</sup> What is this Spirit? It is the Lord Himself,

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. iii. 6.

whose Spirit is a Spirit of liberty. Thus with the fall of Dr. Harnack's exegesis there falls also his claim that St. Paul is his ally in the advocacy of a merely spiritual resurrection.

As one reviews Dr. Harnack's discussion of the evidence for the Easter message, he cannot help asking what is the presupposition which lies behind the historian's handling of the sources? The answer is found in the statement that "we must either decide to rest our belief on a foundation unstable and always exposed to fresh doubts, or else we must abandon this foundation altogether, and with it *the miraculous appeal to our senses.*"<sup>1</sup> This means that the evidence is approached with an unjustified metaphysical assumption. And how does this mode of procedure agree with the repeated assurances that the subject is approached in a purely "historical" spirit? The historian as such cannot say *a priori* what can or what cannot happen. The moment he does so he exchanges his rôle for that of the philosopher—without, however, submitting to the task of justifying his philosophic conviction. The terms "miracle," "order of nature," "supernatural" are really question-begging ones, and do not advance us a step toward a true and satisfying view of the universe. An unreasoned conviction does not help us here at all; while it is certain to bias us in our treatment of historical matters.

So far the Easter message.

If Dr. Harnack's words up to this point have been chilling and depressing, nothing can exceed the enthusiasm and glow of spiritual feeling when He comes to speak of the Easter faith. That faith is the conviction "that the Crucified One gained a victory over death; that God is just and powerful; that He who is the firstborn among many

<sup>1</sup> p. 162 (102); cp. p. 26 (12). "We are firmly convinced that what happens in space and time is subject to the general laws of motion, and that in this sense, as an interruption of the order of Nature, there can be no such thing as miracles."

brethren still lives." <sup>1</sup> And again: "This grave was the birthplace of the indestructible belief that death is vanquished and that there is a life eternal." <sup>2</sup> And yet again: "Jesus Christ has passed through death, God has awakened Him, and raised Him to life and glory." <sup>3</sup>

What precisely does this mean? Not of course that Christ rose from the dead in the sense accepted by the New Testament writers, for "interruptions of the order of nature do not happen," but in the sense that Christ achieved an inward victory over death in virtue of some "divine power" which enabled Him to "encounter" that order in "such a way that everything was for the best." The idea is that Christ submitted to death as part of His vocation, and in virtue of His confidence and hope in God gained an inward triumph over it and thus robbed it of its terrors. This is true, but does not seem quite to the point. For this victory was achieved not on Easter Day, but in the instant and article of dying, when with His last breath He said, "Father, into Thy hands I command My spirit." But how is this conquest of the last enemy to take its place amid historical realities so as to endue men with the conviction of eternal life if it remained a secret transaction within the soul of the Redeemer, known only to Himself and the Father? How could the disciples be certain that Jesus had passed unscathed through death, if all historical manifestations of that stupendous achievement had been wanting? Dr. Harnack replies, "By the vision of Jesus' life and death, and by the feeling of His imperishable union with God." But the answer bears all the marks of modern reflection, and is out of harmony with what we know to be the disciples' state of mind after their Master's execution. A philosophic thinker of our own time might indeed assure himself that the spiritual might of Christ could not be broken by a fact in the physical order, but in attributing

<sup>1</sup> p. 161 (101).

<sup>2</sup> p. 162 (101).

<sup>3</sup> p. 163 (102).

such a conception to the disciples in the first century are we not really reading into their depositions our own ideas? For what was their mental attitude after the crucifixion? A clue is found in the utterance of the two disciples on the journey to Emmaus: "Jesus of Nazereth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people . . . But we trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this to-day is the third day since these things were done."<sup>1</sup> It is clear then that the disciples did not expect His death, or if they did, their thought was that He would enter the heavenly world and come forth immediately as the victorious Messiah. Hence they did not look for His resurrection. What they anticipated was His return in glory to set up His kingdom visibly in the world. For the Christ was a "prophet"; but, as Beyschlag remarks, "They thought the Messiah was concealed under the prophet garb, and that some day He would assume His kingly functions."<sup>2</sup> And now the Cross had paralysed that hope, and made an end of their theocratic dreams. If then they had no evidence that He rose again, how could they have gained their Easter faith, and in the strength of it have faced a hostile world? The Cross had not for them as it has for us a halo of glory. It was the sign of all that was unspeakably terrible in human experience, of a curse so awful that God Himself seemed impotent to remove it. Too sadly clear was it that Calvary could afford no hope that He who died there had won His way to eternal life. He had been a "prophet" indeed—that faith had survived the universal wreck; but as for His Messiahship it was a noble dream rudely scattered by the ruthless forces of man's crime and passion. What was it that transformed the climate of their souls, endued them with a joyous and unshakable confidence, and nerved them to

<sup>1</sup> Luke xxiv. 19, 21.

<sup>2</sup> *New Testament Theology*, vo ii. pp. 303, 304, Eng. trans.

martyrdom? There is no evading that problem, unless we are prepared to give up the origin of the Christian faith as absolutely insoluble.

We can all agree with Dr. Harnack when he says: "This grave was the birthplace of the indestructible belief that death is vanquished, that there is a life eternal." But could that "indestructible belief" have originated in a grave where lay mouldering the body of Jesus? Was it not because the grave was empty on the one hand, and because the Lord manifested Himself on the other hand, that the Easter faith was born? Nay, were the Church to-day convinced that she has made an age-long blunder, that

Now He is dead. Far hence He lies  
In the lone Syrian town,  
And on His grave with shining eyes  
The Syrian stars look down,

where would be her certainty of eternal life? What message would be hers beyond what Plato and the religions of Persia, and later Judaism have delivered to the world? If Christ did not rise again, then, so far as immortality is concerned, we are precisely where we were before His advent. And that means that anxious and sorely questioned hope we may have, but certainty we cannot have. What connexion is there, on Dr. Harnack's showing, between Christ's immortality and ours? None, so far as we can see. For Christ's immortality depended, we are told, on His imperishable union with God, preserved in life and in death. Be it so; but where is the link between sinful humanity and Christ so that His immortality guarantees ours? The race through moral evil is alienated from God, does not stand in union with Him, and is therefore "without hope in the world." Nor can Christ help men here. The most He can do is to achieve immortality for Himself. He stands apart from us on the shining heights of goodness:

His life and death serve only to throw into relief our guilt and shame : His entrance into glory but gives us a glimpse into the Paradise from which we are shut out for ever.

Dr. Harnack calls his critical method the sundering of kernel and husk. Strauss warned the adherents of this method in his day of the danger attending their craft of "emptying out the child with the bath." The warning is still needed.

S. McCOMB.

## SCIENTIFIC LIGHTS ON RELIGIOUS PROBLEMS.

### IX.

#### THE SCIENTIFIC BASIS OF PRAYER.

WHAT has been the most prominent product of organic development? It is a question not of philosophy, not of metaphysics, not of speculation, but of simple fact. And yet it is probable that, if such a question were proposed to a public school, no two of the examination papers would agree in the answer. Of course there would be universal agreement as to the general trend of the development ; all would admit it was the working out of a *mental* process. But when the answers dealt with details, when they came to state what *phase* of mind is that which has most widened its borders, the diversity of view would appear. Let me look at one or two of the hypothetical answers.

Some would say that the manifestations of mind had increased in *wonderfulness*. I do not think they have. So far as mere *wonderfulness* is concerned, I do not think reason has any advantage over instinct. Nay, if we keep to the range of marvel, the latter has the pre-eminence. I once heard the criticism passed on a public orator, "He speaks above his talent." Is not this just the criticism