

Our Lord's Resurrection Body.

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THE nature of Christ's resurrection body is a matter of much importance. It decides the reality of His resurrection and the nature of ours. 'If Christ hath not been raised, your faith is also vain.'¹ He 'shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of His glory.'² Yet the narratives which describe it contain many difficulties. Much remains shrouded in mystery. But the account is fragmentary, and perhaps in our present state we are incapable of fully understanding the subject. Only all is not utter darkness. Certain things in the records are sufficiently clear to be recognised as facts.

1. First of all, we may accept it as true, that at certain times, if not always, Christ's body during the forty days of resurrection life was physical, *i.e.* made of true material, ay, the very same of which it had been composed before He died.

This comes out if we look at (*a*) the evident aim of His acts on certain occasions. When the disciples had any doubt as to the reality of His body, and thought Him a ghost, He took special means to convince them to the contrary. For instance, He not only held out His hands to be felt even in the nail prints,³ but He ate a piece of fish.⁴ And it is at least possible that He ate along with His disciples at the meal He provided on the shore of the lake of Galilee.⁵

But (*β*) it becomes clearer by the interpretation which His own words supply. We find that He said to the apostles when they imagined Him the disembodied spirit of His former self, 'a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye behold Me having.'⁶ 'I am Myself!' (*ὅτι ἐγὼ εἰμι αὐτός*). The tone of all His remarks on the subject is indicative of a desire that they should trust their senses naturally, and not allow superstitious fear to cripple their intelligence.

The meaning put on His phrase, 'flesh and bones,' must, of course, be that which is applicable in the circumstances. And that precludes, spite of even such an authority as Westcott,⁷ the

idea that it is an alteration on the familiar expression, 'flesh and blood,' and was intended to indicate the bloodless, resurrection state of Christ's body. The passage has reference to the tangibility of that body; and bones rather than blood were naturally assigned in proof. The words brought before Christ's followers the fact that His body was made of stuff or material, and that the same as before. To have introduced the idea of bloodlessness would have been to hinder the impression of solid reality which He aimed at conveying. It would not only have distracted the attention to another idea, but to an idea which pointed in another direction. The hearers would not have been helped, but further confused.

The evidence becomes stronger if (*γ*) we take into account the impression produced on the disciples. Some of them, though not all, had difficulties on the subject to begin with; but after they became convinced, their evidence only becomes the more valuable.

It seems clear that Mary Magdalene, when she first met her Lord after He had risen, had no difficulty as to His being corporeal. She took Him at first for the gardener; and we may be sure that she did not think Him less a man when she found He was her Lord. Her desire to touch Him arose out of no doubt as to His reality, but out of love to Him, and out of desire for the renewal of the old communion which had existed between them in the days before He had died. This is indicated by the word He used. When the disciples had doubt as to His reality, their Lord invited them to handle Him, using the phrase, *ψηλαφήσατέ με καὶ ἴδετε*,⁸ which means grope for, or pat, or stroke. The difference in the motive of Mary Magdalene occasioned the use of a different word by Him. *Μὴ μὴ ἅπτον*⁹ said He; that is, do not grasp me. We may take it for granted that Mary Magdalene had no doubt as to the corporeal reality of the person before her when she meant to clasp or grasp Him.

The two Emmaus disciples also, however like

¹ 1 Cor 15¹⁴.

² Phil 3²¹.

³ Jn 20^{20, 27}.

⁴ Lk 24⁴³.

⁵ Jn. 21¹².

⁶ Lk 24³⁹.

⁷ *Gospel of the Resurrection*, 2nd ed. p. 159, note.

⁸ Lk 24³⁹ and 1 John 1¹.

⁹ Jn 20¹⁷.

her they failed to recognize Him, had, like her too, no doubt as to His reality whilst they walked alongside of Him and heard Him talk; they thought Him simply a man. Their wonder was that one who was so real should vanish as He did.¹

If we admit, on the other hand, as I think we must, that the disciples had sometimes difficulty in recognizing their Lord, we must also admit that the evidence which overcame their scruples should have great weight with us.

The ten disciples, and Thomas afterwards when with them, had difficulties because their Lord bodied Himself out into visibility² in a ghost-like or superhuman fashion; but they could not deny the convincing evidence which He offered.

So much was this the case, that though much later, on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, they retained the impression of some things peculiar in Him, no doubt remained in them as to His material organization. They made no further demand for evidence, for they felt no further need of it. They were sure, spite of the disturbing element, that this was no one but Himself.³

The impression produced on His disciples by Christ's appearances, actions, and words seems to have been without doubt this—that their Lord's body was truly physical, and even that it was the very same one in which He had been put to death. He certainly leaves on us the impression that He intended them to believe this as being true of Him at times, if not always.

But there is further, though accidental, evidence (8) with which to strengthen this position. Some might think it overstrained to remark that the napkin which had been bound about our Lord's head was found apart in the tomb from the rest of the swathings, and to deduce from that the solidity of the head which bore it several steps away.⁴ But the angelic evidence given just outside the door of the tomb is plain. To the inquiring presence of the women, the answer given

¹ ἐγένετο ἀφαντος; much stronger than ἀφανής. He did not become unseen by distance, but by dissolving (if the word may be used), disappearing where he was. He did not become unseen but invisible.

² ἔστη ἐν μέσῳ (Lk 24³⁶), ἔστη εἰς τὸ μέσον (Jn 20^{19, 26}), ἔστη (Jn 21⁴).

³ οὐδεὶς ἐτόλμα τῶν μαθητῶν ἐξετάσαι αὐτόν. Σὺ τίς εἶ; εἶδότες ὅτι ὁ Κύριός ἐστιν (Jn 21¹²).

⁴ Jn 20⁷.

was, 'He is not here; for He is risen; come, see the place where the Lord lay.'⁵ Of course these words cannot mean simply that our Lord was alive among all the others who had ever passed through the portals of death, and that He still had a right to His body. They can only mean that it had been resumed and again become an active part of His personality. The body was no longer in the state of death, because He had taken it again to Himself, and was living in it. It had moved out of the tomb into the open world of air and sunshine.

Let us face, then, the fact that in the gospel-narratives our Lord is represented after His death as being at times in possession of a physical body, which He looked on, and led others to believe was the very one in which He had died.

2. Let us now examine those peculiarities in the case, which, though they do not invalidate, yet do modify and limit that which we have stated as a fact, namely, the reality and identity of our Lord's resurrection body.

The main thing which impresses itself on one as novel in them, is, that though our Lord was really alive in His body, He was not dependent on it in the same way as before; it had become the servant in this new phase of life; it could not be said to be subject to the old laws of matter, but it was subject to a will higher than these.

This comes out even by the general consideration that we cannot imagine our Lord to have held His body in such a way as implied the possibility of dying in it again. It, or He in it, was above the power of death; He had submitted to that once already. We cannot in this matter imagine Him to have been dependent even on His Father's good pleasure, or to remain free from death only as a matter of grace.

This is what is brought out by such a fact as that which emerges in the interview with Thomas. When Thomas had referred to his Lord's wounds he had used language which was most irreverent, 'Unless I thrust'—βάλω . . . βάλω εἰς τὴν πλευράν αὐτοῦ.⁶ And when his Lord invited him to test the person before him He used the same coarse word, as if expressly—βάλε εἰς τὴν πλευράν μου.⁷ So that we are obliged to conclude that the wound was not a mere scar but gaping and unhealed, that what caused our Lord's death, and would have caused any man's death did not now interfere at all with the activities of life, that what ought to

⁵ Mt. 28⁶.

⁶ Jn 20²⁵.

⁷ Jn 20²⁷.

have been quivering with pain was borne with comfort.

We conclude that these marks were the proofs of our Lord's bodily identity, and yet that they were evidence to the fact that His body, as He now held it, was not subject to its old conditions. He was above these. So His life was not a mere renewal of the old one, its interrupted continuation as in the case of Lazarus and the others whom He had Himself raised; it was not raised to further weakness and death. The old one was completed and a new one begun under new and higher conditions. The body was its servant, and could not by its needs or weakness rule or even hamper.

And this was what the disciples felt though they could not describe it clearly. They felt there was some difference in Him, but too strange to define. It is not unusual to think that the change in our Lord was in His features, or in the expression of His face. This is supposed to account for the inability which some of those, who knew Him quite well, felt in recognizing Him. But the change in Him was far deeper than that of any emotion or any expression on the face. To say that the stamp of suffering was still there seems absurd, when we remember that He had entered a higher life beyond the grave; though even to admit it would not be to account for His unrecognizability in the eyes of those who knew He had suffered. To suggest that He bore somewhat of the majesty and glory of heaven on His face is just as poor as an explanation, even if it be true as a fact. He had brought none of it with Him before. 'We beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father;' and that is, He was 'full of grace and truth.'¹ Though the mere fact of having been in heaven does not seem to carry this result, at least of necessity.

The change was deeper; it was one in the life and its conditions or powers of existing. The change went down into Him further than did feelings, or, of course, the signs of them. It enabled Him to live in a way previously impossible. His vitality now rose above all the old considerations which had been its means and its limits, and survived independently of them.

This is the change which rendered Him at first unrecognizable to even His disciples, and caused any doubt in them as to Him. His features were

¹ Jn 1¹⁴.

the same. Mary Magdalene, it is true, failed to know Him because a veil of tears was in her eyes, and unbelief lay behind in her heart. The eyes of the two Emmaus disciples were holden that they should not know Him,² but that was the penalty of their faithlessness too, for they confessed their state to Him frankly, when they first met Him on the way and declared what they had been discussing. They were confused, muddled.³ 'We hoped that it was He which should redeem Israel.'

The ten, and Thomas, had no difficulty as to His features; they recognized these, else they could not have thought Him to be His own ghost. What puzzled them was that He came out of invisibility alongside of them. And though at first on the lake shore the disciples recognized Him by other than His features because of the distance, and though when they came near they still saw some change in Him, they not only saw that He was in the body, but recognized that it was Himself.

In features He was practically unchanged. Those who were not prejudiced by unbelief recognized Him at once; and though they thought Him to be His own ghost, only those who could not bring themselves to believe that He had risen failed to recognize Him. In their case too, the effect may have been helped by blinding tears or by the dusk of evening. At anyrate the change in Christ was a thing not of mere features and appearance, but of reality and life. The effect of that was what caused the difficulty which existed.

As we are told, our Lord showed Himself in another form—*ἐν ἑτέρᾳ μορφῇ*.⁴ Now *μορφῇ* is entirely inapplicable to features; were the reference to them, *σχῆμα* would be the correct word. According to Cremer⁵ the term expresses the form which belongs distinctively to some essence. Thus *μορφῇ δούλου* means the form which belongs to and evidences a servant. And *μορφῇ Θεοῦ* means the form of God, or that which embodies and expresses as its substance the *δόξα τοῦ Θεοῦ*. Both Bishop Lightfoot⁶ and Canon Gregory on the Incarnation⁷ agree that *μορφῇ* is that which marks or is

² Lk 24¹⁶.

³ *γυναῖκες τινες ἐξέστησαν ἡμᾶς* (Lk 24²²).

⁴ Mk 16¹².

⁵ *Lexicon*, p. 422, in Clark's Translation, 3rd ed. (T. & T. Clark).

⁶ *Philippians*, ed. 1868, note p. 125ff.

⁷ THE EXPOSITORY TIMES, 1897, vol. viii. p. 391.

distinctive of the personality, which shows the essential of its existence, the peculiar quality of its life. Thus here is no mere modification but a radical alteration. The Saviour had been made *ἐν ὁμοιώματι σαρκὸς ἁμαρτίας*,¹ but was risen *ἐν καινότητι ζωῆς*.² What the disciples marked as peculiar in Him were the features of this new life. Their attention was drawn from the other ones to these. The presence of these disordered their conceptions and prevented recognition. True, what attracted their attention might not be the deepest characteristics of His new life, but only those most marked in their eyes. Still these were real enough, and to the disciples these seemed to afford evidence—after they recognized Him—of the presence of something greater than they had ever known even in Him.

What they saw was all of a piece with that change which has been referred to as the example, namely, the power to live with a great wound in the side, the power to live above the old conditions to which he had been subject till death. The peculiarities which seem to have struck them were such as His power of becoming visible or invisible, of passing through material substances, or through space at an unusual rate, and His providing such things as food and clothes no one knew how. His disciples saw that their Master now moved among them according to His own will, and that he had become Lord of the conditions of that life in which they existed and He had once lived.

Thus the invisibility of His body did not destroy its reality any more than His disappearance implied His death. For after vanishing before the two at Emmaus, He made Himself visible to the ten out of the invisibility into which He had gone, and gave such evidence of His reality as scattered their doubt. His reality did not prevent Him from passing through material substances or their chinks. He rose in the body, and yet He passed through the closed door of the sepulchre and was away before the women arrived, or the angel and the earthquake rolled back the stone.³ He did

¹ Rom 8³.

² Rom 6⁴.

³ When we read Matthew's account with attention the fact becomes clear that Jesus had risen from the grave, and was therefore, I fancy, outside the tomb, before the stone was rolled away from its mouth. For the women who go to the sepulchre are surprised by the occurrence of a great tremor of the earth. The origin of that is pointed out by the word 'for' which follows. *ἀγγελος γὰρ Κυρίου, καταβάς προσελθὼν ἀπεκύλισε τὸν λίθον* (Mt 28²). The idea conveyed

not, however, lose his physical reality because of that; for immediately He appeared to Mary Magdalene and spake, and shortly after was treated by two disciples on the way to Emmaus as an ordinary man.

Though He was beyond the usual conditions on which bodily life depended, He was so really possessed of a body and so akin to men that He could adapt Himself to these at will.

Thus we see that His manhood, though like ours, was not dependent on such conditions as is ours for its existence. He of Whom it was said, *ἐν μορφῇ Θεοῦ ὑπάρχων*,⁴ and who had taken on Himself *μορφῇ δούλου*, was now seen *ἐν ετέρα μορφῇ*, not that of God or of a servant, but that of glory, *τῆς δόξης, πνευματικῆς*, the glory of which Paul speaks when he tells us *μετασχηματίζει τὸ σῶμα τῆς ταπεινώσεως ἡμῶν*,⁵ and whose *σχῆμα* is defined as *σύμμορφον τῷ σώματι τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ*. We have reached the conclusion, then, that though our Lord lived after death in the same body as before, He lived with a new life which had control of the old conditions on which the former one had been dependent, and to which it had been subject.

This gives us some aid in understanding Paul's conception of the spiritual body. We are apt to think of it as ethereal because it is described as spiritual,—and ethereal it may be to some extent, only it is never less than a material reality, a creation of God. That, however, is not its main characteristic. To say that its mark is the being less gross, or crass, or solid than our present body is nothing less than absurd. Change the

seems to be this. The angel had alighted at the spot just in front of them. He then stepped forward and rolled away the stone, at which the earth shook. But the stone was rolled back for the sake of the women and not of Christ. It was meant to meet the fears and difficulties they had expressed as they came about the largeness of the stone, and not to meet any need on Christ's part. For we read that though they were struck dumb at first by the sight of the glory of the angel, they were immediately restored by his words—'He is not here, He is risen.' The expression used is *ἠγέρθη γὰρ*; and as that indicates a past act, we must look on the resurrection of Christ as having taken place before the angel or the women came. It is of course possible in the abstract that Christ might have risen and come forth whilst the women recoiled in astonishment at the angel's presence after the stone had been rolled away; but apart from the short time allowed and the improbability of such a thing, the tense of *ἠγέρθη* precludes it. At anyrate the use of that word would in such a case imply if not deceit yet a lack of straightforwardness on the part of him who used it.

⁴ Phil 2⁶.

⁵ Phil 3²¹.

centre of gravity in the idea. Call the resurrection body spiritual because it is an organ of the spirit, the πνεῦμα of the perfected and spirit-filled person, and at once you have a different result. What you find is that a piece [of nature has become the possession of that perfect soul, as the sign and pledge to it, ay, the means of taking and using, that dominion over universal nature which is its right as the vicegerent of God. This accounts for its new power over the old conditions. It is sown in weakness, for they had mastered it. It is raised in power, because it has mastered them. The one was of dishonour; the other is to honour. The first was a natural body, the second is a spiritual body; for first is that which is natural and only afterwards that which is spiritual.

Now if that be true of the resurrection of saints in general, it is much more, because primarily, true of Him through whom it comes to them. And that is the state in which the Lord is represented during the forty days of His risen life on earth. There He is seen entering on that universal dominion in which He is made Head over all things to the Church. Nature groaning under the curse is set free by His work and in His person; she becomes, as is seen in His very body, the willing tributary of Him who is of right her ruler.

To understand the changes between visibility and invisibility and such like things found in connexion with our Lord during the life of the forty resurrection days is now possible to some extent. We find placed within our reach the answer to why these took place, as well as how. The key is found in the great fact that after Christ had died His work was finished on earth and He really belonged to heaven. His humiliation was concluded. Whatever He did thereafter He did as if from heaven, even though He did it actually on earth. Whatever He did thus was exceptional, and had a special object. It represented *συνκατάβασις*, or gracious condescension on His part. His *σῶμα πνευματικόν* which was perfectly at the disposal of His πνεῦμα, was on earth as the result of that rulership. His visibility or invisibility to certain men was the

effect of the same gracious self-determination of His will as was his existence for the time alongside them on earth. The word φανερώ is that which the narratives consistently use; for φανερώ is appropriate to the act of revealing to persons, and ἀποκαλύπτω, on the other hand, to that which is revealed. Accordingly, if locality and visibility came by His will, corporeality and tangibility, like the permission to touch and the opportunity to see, must have come by the same method. The Lord regulated his action, therefore, according to the need of those with whom he was dealing, whether Mary, or the two Emmaus disciples, or the apostles.

What His object was or what their need was, I do not enter into here, for it does not fall within the limits of my subject. But it is well to point out that the principle which explains His presence in all its forms also explains the reserve which He showed and which contrasted so with His former habit of loving familiarity. The difficulty has already been suggested by his meeting with Mary Magdalene. But the fact applies to all the forty days, for in them He remained practically unseen save for short glimpses. It enables us to understand also where he lived between the times at which he appeared. He was with His disciples always, though they knew it not; He had come to be with them, and watched the opportunities when He could best impress them. *ἔσθη εἰς τὸ μέσον*¹ is the account given of him; and *ἔσθη* is still used of Him at the Sea of Galilee.² Of course, it was necessary to His object in dealing with the two disciples on the way to Emmaus that *ἐγγίσας συνεπορεύετο*.³

By this principle we see how the Lord could appear to Stephen, or at least, certainly to Paul—*ᾤφθη κάμολ*,⁴ and that whatever state He be in at present, He is so really our Brother that He has the right to be in our body, or to assume it as His own whenever He sees fit, and that in Him we have the right to one equally glorious and shall receive it as He received His, when fit.

¹ Jn 20¹⁹; cf. Lk 24³⁶.

³ Lk 24¹⁵.

² Jn 21⁴.

⁴ I Cor 15⁸.