

Although at first sight, the idea that we are immersed in a medium almost infinitely denser than lead might seem inconceivable, it is not so if we remember that in all probability matter is composed mainly of holes. We may in fact regard matter as possessing a bird-cage kind of structure, in which the volume of ether disturbed by the wires when the structure is moved is infinitesimal in comparison with the volume enclosed by them. If we do this there is no difficulty from the great density of the ether; all that we have to do is to increase the distance between the wires in proportion as we increase the density of the ether.

Prof. J. J. Thomson.

Chapter IV: Why Is the Resurrection Judged Credible?

We return to ask a second time the question put to King Agrippa by Paul: “Why is it judged incredible with you, if God should raise the dead?” The absence of good reason for unbelief is here clearly intimated. The grounds for acceptance of the resurrection of Jesus as a fact and appropriate action in the light of the fact are suggested by Paul to be most substantial.

Almost without realizing it we are face to face with one of the most outstanding and compelling reasons for belief in the Easter message. It is this, that Paul the Apostle believed it. On it he rested his Easter faith. Can there be any doubt about his conception of the relation of the Easter message and the Easter faith to each other? Verify, if you will, by restudy of the four great letters of his concerning which

the boldest criticism has not even suggested doubt; viz.: The letters to the Corinthians, and the Epistles to the Galatians and the Romans. Remember as you do this that these letters all were written less than thirty years after the death of Jesus to companies of Christians living in the three distinct and distinctive regions bordering on the north of the Great Sea, Asia Minor, Greece, and Italy. Remember also that they were written by a man who formerly had most bitterly opposed both the message and the faith of Easter.

It will be helpful to clarity of thought and consequent fairness of judgement to be keeping in mind Professor Harnack's position as we proceed. This position represents the most up-to-date, the only and final, stand which can be taken by those who reject the Pauline teaching concerning the resurrection. Professor Harnack's belief, we repeat, is that the Easter message, which consists of the empty grave and the appearances of Jesus in His resurrection body, must be distinguished from the Easter faith. The message, he affirms, we can no longer hold. Without it, however, he maintains that we must hold the faith, which is that Jesus is alive. In the words of another, Professor Harnack's position is adopted thus: "I don't believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus.—Jesus alive? Yes. But I just can't believe in the bodily resurrection."

It is thus clearly seen that the Modernist boldly rejects the documentary evidence. We frankly accept it, not blindly, but with fairly complete knowledge of the situation. Instead of accepting the statement of the Modernist to the effect that "every scholar knows" his (the Modernist's) position to be true, we are able to go only so far as to affirm that "some scholars think" the Modernist position true. It should not be forgotten for a moment that the rejection of the evidence is made critical and not on judicial grounds. The documents already referred to (the letters to the Corinthians, the Romans and the Galatians), as well as the remainder of the New Testament are received in courts of civilization as reliable and trustworthy testimony. The

judges of the earth have not considered themselves justified in proceeding as far as the critics of the Church.

We fain would pause to ask in all candor which “on the face of it” is the more reasonable, the Biblical position, or that of Professor Harnack. The Biblical records proceed upon the basis that the Easter message and the Easter faith belong together. The every-day, common, and usually safe judgement of mankind, we believe, will continue to think that the Easter faith cannot exist without the Easter message, any more than a house can stand without a support of some kind under it, or that a tree can bear fruit without roots. How can a tree be a tree at all, without its underground counterpart?

The organizing centre of our answer to the question, Why accept the Easter message? is the fact that the first generation of Christians believed it. This fact of belief on the part of the Apostolic group and the first century Christians we are confident can be adequately accounted for only on the basis of the resurrection as a fact.

Leading up to this answer in somewhat fuller form, let us closely examine selected representative portions of the Biblical record that we may grasp clearly its own way of conveying the Easter message.

The Empty Tomb in the Gospel by John

The empty tomb is in evidence in each of the four Gospels. The account, most challenging, and offering opportunity for direct, intensive, first-hand, psychological testing by any reader, is found in the first ten verses of the twentieth chapter of St. John. That this record can be a fabrication is to me unthinkable. Please follow in the study of it and judge for yourself.

The account reads as follows (see John 20:1-10):

“Now on the first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, while it was yet dark, unto the tomb, and seeth the stone

taken away from the tomb. She runneth therefore, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we know not where they have laid him. Peter therefore went forth, and the other disciple, and they went toward the tomb. And they ran both together: and the other disciple outran Peter, and came first to the tomb; and stooping and looking in, he seeth the linen cloths lying; yet entered he not in. Simon Peter therefore also cometh, following him, and entered into the tomb; and he beheld the linen cloths lying, and the napkin that was upon his head, not lying with the linen cloths, but rolled up in a place by itself. Then entered in therefore the other disciple also, who came first to the tomb, and he saw, and believed. For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead. So the disciples went away again unto their own home.”

Observe carefully as we proceed and use your historical imagination freely in order to picture the scene accurately in all its details.

1. The tomb is the centre of attention in the account. Note, “unto the tomb,” “from the tomb,” “out of the tomb,” “toward the tomb,” “to the tomb,” “into the tomb,” “to the tomb.”

In this new tomb the body of Jesus had been placed. A great stone had been rolled against the door. Upon the stone had been put the seal of the Roman Empire. Watchers had been on guard to keep the tomb from being disturbed.

2. This tomb is approached by three different people, Mary Magdalene, Peter, and “the other disciple who Jesus loved.” Mary came to it (presumably walking). From it she went *running*. The other two *came* running. For awhile after they started they ran together. One of them, the younger, running faster than the other, reached the tomb first.

3. The reason why Mary ran from the tomb to which she came walking, was because she saw something which led her to jump to an

exciting conclusion. What she saw was that the tomb was open. The stone which had been rolled against the door of the tomb had been taken away. “She saw the stone taken away.” The inference was that somebody had taken away the body of Jesus. In this she was mistaken, but fast as her feet could carry her, she went to the disciples and told them what she believed, namely, that the body of Jesus had been removed from the tomb. Imagine the excitement with which she informed these men, and the promptness with which they must have started toward the tomb. The account gives me the impression that they became more eager as they proceeded, and if possible ran faster and faster. One was younger than the other and consequently could run faster. He reached the tomb first, but was not the first to enter. There is psychology here which fits perfectly the collection of records concerning the events and persons involved.

4. “The other disciple” is the second one in the account who is said to have seen something. Mary was the first. She saw *from without* the tomb the stone rolled away, and inferred what was not true from what she saw. “The other disciple” saw *from without* the tomb also, but from near the tomb—he was near enough to look inside. He saw the linen cloths lying. These were the cerements or grave wrappings which had been about the body of Jesus. In verses at the end of the nineteenth chapter of this Gospel by John we are told that the body of Jesus was bound in linen cloths wrapped with about a hundred pounds of spices brought by Joseph of Arimathæa and Nicodemus, the two men who buried Jesus. Note that the record so far mentions these linen cloths only. These cloths “the other disciple” in a stooping position saw as he looked into the tomb from without. Nothing is said about the effect which this sight had upon him. We are not told how long he stooped looking in. So far, as respects the tomb, we note (1) that it is open, (2) that the linen cloths are there with the spices a hundred pound weight. These would occupy space enough to suggest the size of a man. The cloths with spices distributed in between the layers

would constitute bulk enough to attract and hold the gaze of a looker-in. In what form were they? Let us observe as we proceed.

5. Peter, the disciple of onset, entered the tomb, passing by the one (the disciple of insight) who stood stooping and looking in from without. What did he see? A different word for see is introduced here. Note it carefully. Our Revised translation is “beholdeth.” It has the meaning sometimes of to gaze upon inquiringly—to look with eyes wide with intent and great desire to understand. Wonder and amazement may easily be read into it here. What did Peter gaze upon? The linen cloths *and the napkin that was upon His head not lying with the linen cloths but rolled up in a place by itself.*

The prominence of this napkin is striking—One-tenth of the whole story is given to it at first mention. It must have some special significance. What can it be? Wait until we know what next occurred. “The other disciple” went into the tomb “and saw and believed.” What did he see? Evidently what Peter was gazing upon—the *linen cloths and the napkin that was upon His head not lying with the linen cloths but rolled up in a place by itself.* What did he believe? What do you think he believed? If you are not clear about how to answer, pause a minute to note that we have now a third Greek word used for see. It is *perceive*. Mary saw (v. 1) the stone and made a wrong inference. “The other disciple” from the outside saw (v. 5) the linen cloths. The same word (βλέπει) is used there as in v. 1. Peter beheld (θεωρεῖ) the linen cloths and the napkin that was upon His head not lying with the linen cloths but rolled up in a place by itself. “The other disciple,” looking upon the same objects upon which Peter was gazing wonderingly and with eager desire to understand the meaning of, *perceived, saw through, understood* (εἶδεν). A third Greek word for see is here employed.

What now do you think he believed? Was it not that Jesus was alive? Is not this clearly the intent of the author of this story? Surely, “according to the scriptures” the body of Jesus came out of those grave wrappings in a supernatural manner.

The first seer (Mary) made a wrong inference from what she saw. The last seer, the disciple of insight, made a correct inference from what he saw, as was proved by subsequent experiences.

This conclusion is confirmed by the quietness of mind which the closing verse of this matchless paragraph indicates in contrast to the nervous excitement with which it begins.

Pause a moment to review the scene with special reference to the location in the tomb of the grave cloths and particularly the position and form of the napkin that was about the head. The body had been placed either on the left side or on the right side of the entrance and lengthwise. The head had therefore four possible positions, two near the door, one on one side, the other opposite; and two at the far end of the tomb, one on each side. What would be the result of stooping and looking in from the outside? Would it not be likely that only the cloths (the bulky part) which had enveloped the body would be observed? If the head had been toward the door, no matter on which side, the rolled-up head wrapping would not likely be seen from without. It would be hidden by the side wall. If the head had been furthest from the door, no matter on which side, the same effect would result. From without, one would be likely to observe only the linen cloths. This would be likely because of both the position and size of the napkin that was about the head. From within, one would see both the linen cloths and the napkin that was about the head. One is profoundly impressed by the detailed accuracy of this account.

Some reader may wish to know that the original word, describing the shape of the “napkin that was about his head,” indicates that it was “rolled up.” The word is **ἐντετυλιγμένον**, meaning wrapped or twirled. One who has seen an East Indian man’s headgear will have an idea of the shape in mind. Only, instead of the wrapping being about the crown of the head, it would be about the entire head. It would have much the shape of a hollow ball with an opening at one side having the diameter of the neck. Many have the mistaken idea that this

“napkin” was folded up by Jesus Himself after He rose from the dead and laid on the shelf where His body had been, very much as a table napkin is folded and laid beside one’s plate. This is sometimes cited as evidence of composure of the part of the risen Saviour, and a proof of leisurely departure from the tomb! Such thought is certainly far from the meaning conveyed to the women and the disciples as they looked upon the place where the Lord lay.

The Empty Tomb in the Gospel by Matthew

“His own new tomb, which he had hewn out in a rock,” are the words used (Matthew 27:60) to describe the resting place of the body of Jesus, which Joseph of Arimathaea had provided. Having wrapped the body “in a clean linen cloth,” he laid it in place. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and departed. There is enough difference here to indicate independence of the account in the Gospel by John, but no difference which is so great as to constitute departure from accuracy in either.

Two of several women who observed this burial were Mary Magdalene and “the other Mary.” Other accounts (see Mark and Luke) make it obvious there were several women with them (see also Matthew 27:55). These were those who had ministered to Jesus when in Galilee, and had followed Him to Jerusalem. It is altogether natural for us to suppose that together they planned to visit the tomb as early as possible after the Sabbath. What would have been more likely? Let us follow them carefully.

By the authority of Pilate, on request of the chief priests and Pharisees, the tomb had been sealed and a guard had been furnished to prevent robbery. These enemies remembered the statement that Jesus had made about rising from the dead after three days. Strange that the disciples had forgotten? Yes and no. There is the profoundest psychology here. Real life presents the most unexpected contraries. Work it

out sometime for yourself. How can we believe this story to be a fabrication? Who would weave out of imagination such a combination of ideas?

The account is as follows (Matthew 28:1–8):

“Now late on the Sabbath day, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from Heaven, and came and rolled away the stone, and sat upon it. His appearance was as lightening, and his raiment white as snow; and for fear of him the watchers did quake, and became as dead men. And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye; for I know that ye seek Jesus, who hath been crucified. He is not here; for he is risen, even as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly, and tell his disciples, He is risen from the dead; and lo, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him; lo, I have told you. And they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring his disciples word.”

Keep in mind the presence of the guards as we proceed. It is day-break on Easter morning. The group of women who had watched the burial approached the tomb. It is sealed. As they draw near, there is an earthquake. All are greatly frightened. Their fear is increased by the sudden opening of the tomb. An angel rolls the stone off to the side and sits upon it. His appearance is like lightening and his raiment as white as snow.

The guards fall to the ground as dead men. In great excitement Mary Magdalene, her attention being concentrated upon the open door of the tomb, suddenly turns and runs to bring the disciples word. She reported to Peter and John in the words: “They have taken away the

Lord out of the tomb, and we know not where they have laid him” (John 20:2).

The other women of the group hear the angel say: Do not be afraid. I know that you seek Jesus. He is not here. He is risen. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.

What is here involved of interest on the question of the resurrection body? Two things especially. First, that the resurrection body left the tomb *before* the stone was rolled away! It was not necessary that the door be opened before the Lord of Life could come forth from the grave. It was impossible to imprison His body of glory. Bindings of head, hand and foot, walls, the seals, guards, a great stone at the door—these were nothings to Him who had been raised in power. The stone was rolled away not to let the Saviour out, but rather to let the women and the disciples in! Why enter? For evidence therein of the fact of resurrection. The angel bade them enter, calling especial attention to the place where the Lord lay. What was on that stone shelf to observe? The grave wrappings were there, in such form, as we have learned, as to indicate the departure of the body therefrom without disturbing them. They lay there mutely but conclusively testifying to the fact that the body had not been violently removed, but rather of its own volition had leaped through and out of the cerements and through the walls into the fresh air of the new Easter morning. This is the only appropriate manner of action for the Prince of Life in the initial instant of entrance into victory over death.

This interpretation is consistent with and important consideration respecting the guards in relation to the approaching testing time about the preaching of the resurrection. There is thus no period of time, not even the shortest, after the tomb is opened, when witnesses representing both enemies and friends are not present to verify the facts. The guards on the one hand and the women on the other, both witness the opening of the grave. No room is left for controversy about what happened or concerning the contents of the tomb. The body was there

when the tomb was sealed. It was not there when the seal was broken. The linen cloths were there and spoke their own message, confirming the word of the angel.

Certainly there was continuous provision during those stirring, exciting hours against misrepresentation of the truth. It is gratifying to discover that it was this company of devoted ministering women from Galilee who were the first to hear the angel say: “He is risen,” and to receive the invitation to verify his statement by inspection of the tomb. Favored Galilee of the Gentiles! To thee in darkness came the light of life. Honored handmaids of the Lord of Glory! We hail you among the blessed, and follow the story of that first Easter with eager interest.

The Empty Tomb in the Gospels by Mark and Luke

Eager desire is present to indicate points of harmony in these two accounts which go a long way toward assurance that the records are not only reliable, but also accurate when each is regarded from its own angle of vision, and its particular objective in narration. But limited space requires the greatest brevity. One point only therefore is noted. Both of these accounts refer to the inside of the tomb and particularly to the place where the body had been laid. In Mark the angel specifically directs attention to “the place where they laid him.” In the Luke account, we read: “They entered in and found not the body.... But Peter arose, and ran unto the tomb, and stooping and looking in, he seeth the linen cloths by themselves.” The women were “perplexed” and Peter “wondered” at what was seen. Thus all four evangelists recognize the significance of the evidence of resurrection presented *within the tomb*.

Suggestion: Study carefully this company of women from Galilee, who are present on the evening of the crucifixion and on the morning

of the resurrection. It is confidently believed that as they approached the tomb they saw it opened; as they entered the tomb they witnessed evidence which the grave cloths afforded, that the body had not been violently removed. On the contrary, they were face to face with proof that the body had supernaturally left the winding sheets intact. Even the head roll remained in its original shape. It had only fallen back in a place by itself when released by the body of Jesus at the instant of its change from a dead body to the resurrection body. Then on their way from the tomb, Jesus himself met them and said, All hail! Again we are constrained to exclaim: Blessed among women, O early rising company from Galilee! Your eyes have seen in succession what no other human eyes have beheld—the new tomb, the closed tomb, the sealed tomb, the tomb opened, the open tomb, within the open tomb. Your testimony concerning it brings comfort to many even in this time remote from your day.

The Appearances: A Condensed Survey

No particulars are recorded concerning the appearance of our Lord to James and Peter individually. Paul names them both (in I Corinthians, fifteenth) as having been favored as individuals. Paul's own experience is related in the book of the Acts. The first chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Galatians is suggestive here. We wonder what he, Peter and James talked about during those two weeks spent together at Jerusalem. We may be reasonably sure that they visited the tomb together and that Paul eagerly questioned them both concerning their personal experience with the risen Lord.

Easter Morning

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Our Lord appeared to Mary in the garden. Read the account in John, twentieth chapter. It is not necessary to believe, as some assert,

that Jesus was dressed in the garb of a gardener. This may have been the case, for in His new mode of existence He was capable not only of appearing and disappearing, but also of appearing in different forms. Mary was weeping. Her tears may have partially blinded her eyes. Moreover, she was not expecting to see the Lord and she was painfully preoccupied. We often have seen intimate friends whom in fact we have not seen. Our eyes have been holden by thought. Mary's recognition of her Lord was met by a word of Jesus which is usually given a strained and unnatural interpretation. Why not make the statement, "Take not hold on me, for I have not yet ascended unto the Father," fit into what follows, and understand it to mean merely this: Do not try to detain Me here, Mary, in the fear that you will never see Me again. I am not immediately ascending to My Father. You will see Me again. Do not remain here longer now, but go unto My brethren, and say to them, I ascend unto My Father and your Father, and My God and your God. This is in perfect harmony with other directions given to the disciples to meet the Lord in Galilee.

Towards Easter Evening

The story of the two on the way to Emmaus may be allowed here to furnish only two of many most interesting observations. These men, slow of heart to believe the Easter message, although on their own testimony they had heard that He was alive, became men of the burning heart as Jesus Himself opened to them the Scriptures concerning Himself. The body of the resurrection according to this account, was capable of appearing in such a fashion as to escape identification for the time being; to make itself recognizable at will, and at will to vanish out of sight!

The Evening of Easter

The appearance to the ten (John 20:19-23) is significant for our present purpose in one respect especially. The record indicates that the doors were securely fastened. The original language is significantly strong here. The disciples feared the Jews, and with special care had made fast the door. This fact adds interest to the statement that Jesus “came and stood in the midst and said: Peace be unto you.” He proved to them that the body of the resurrection was the same body in a real sense by showing them His hands and His side. He proved to them that it was different in a real sense by coming into the room in a supernatural manner.

A Week Later

The doors were bolted a second time. Thomas was present with the ten. Again Jesus comes into the room in His resurrection body. It is consequently different from His body before His death. Yet it is identifiable as the same, for the wounds are there both in His hands and feet and also in His side.

The wounds of our Lord in His new body, which remain forever to tell the story of redemption procured by the sacrifice of life, suggest the appropriateness here of the following striking, challenging statement of the social significance of the body.

“The Christian doctrine of the resurrection gives the most important emphasis to the social significance of the body. We need to look more closely at the structural meaning of the saint’s glorified body. It is, on the one hand, a spiritual repetition of the body of his temporal probation. Thus comes the accentuation of the distinct person himself. Never is he to lose connection with his own past. Not only by memory, but by his very objective life itself,

he is to be reminded that he is the same man who lived that life on earth. Most seriously I urge you to work out the wholesome-ness of this thought, that the line of identity is everlastingly sacred, that no man, in all the solemn eternities can begin all over again.

“Not only so, but this repetition of the earthly body is a perpetual objective insistence upon the fact that every redeemed man once belonged to that old Adamic race which was broken up by death and because of sin. Thus, the entire social life of the new race will ever suggest the sad history of the old race. No saint can ever make a gesture, or look into the face of another saint, without projecting large hints of the story of a costly redemption. Indeed, the whole objective life of the saints in glory is so planned that it has memorial force, like a great Sacrament.” (Curtis, *The Christian Faith*.)

“Driving a Stake”

Our thesis is that the Easter faith and the Easter message are inseparable. They stand together or they fall together. We believe there is good reason for accepting the Easter message as true, and in consequence exercising the Easter faith.

Let the nature of the message be clearly apprehended. We have had it defined by Professor Harnack who rejects it. It is the empty tomb together with the appearances of Jesus in the body of the resurrection according to the Scriptures.

A certain very successful Bible class teacher became well known and popular because of his method of “driving a stake” in each lesson. By this is meant that he seized upon a great fact or truth each time and held to it, driving it home in the minds of the members of the class, and relating up to it every other part of the lesson.

Let us follow his example and “drive a stake” in our study of the resurrection. The fact to begin with, to stay with, to go from, to return

to, to be always in sight of, and in the light of which to decide, is the fact that the first Christian community was convinced that Jesus Christ was alive from the dead in His resurrection body. The fact of belief in the resurrection by the first generation of Christians (and by resurrection according to the Scriptures is always meant the reunited spirit and body, the body being both the same and different, not a resuscitated body but a resurrected body)—the fact of belief in the resurrection of Jesus by the early Christians is almost the most obtrusive feature of the New Testament. Certainly it is regarded as the most important fact there recorded. It is the cardinal doctrine there found. The four Gospels reach their climax in the announcement of it and the citation of the evidence of it. The book of the Acts teems with testimony to the same effect. The Epistles are full of resurrection assurances, and the Apocalypse everywhere records the conviction that He who was dead is alive forevermore.

The problem of the rejectors of the message is to account adequately for this fact of belief on the part of the first generation of Christians—those living, say, from 30 to 70 A.D. Charles Reade remarks that “to accept an inadequate explanation of an undeniable fact is credulity in one of its worst forms.” We agree with this principle.

This fact of the belief in the resurrection of Jesus by the first Christian community is the more remarkable because of certain accompanying facts. It is the chief fact of a heap of facts. Consider that the resurrection, as this first group believed it, was not anticipated. Jesus died on the cross, and His disciples had given up hope. Nor was the resurrection believed when first reported. The story appeared to them as an idle tale. “Some doubted” even after they saw Him. The records give us the impression that the people of those times were quite cautious about accepting as true reports of great happenings, especially of this particular event in question. There were bitter opponents. Those who believed suffered for their belief. Some of them went to death on account of it. All were enthusiastic about it and

sought successfully to persuade others to believe it. The company rapidly increased in size. Many believed. Among them were unlikely ones. Priests, the most difficult to persuade, are mentioned as having become members of the Church in large numbers. Then there is Paul. He was not expecting the resurrection. He rejected it. He became convinced of it. He was revolutionized by it. He preached it. He suffered for it and died a martyr to it. His life demonstrated the power of it. He insisted that he and his fellow Apostles were first-class liars or the resurrection was true. Paul was a first generation Christian. He must have had a sufficient basis for his belief. Will the theory of fancy, or the theory of fraud, or the phantom theory, explain it?

Keep Driving the Stake

This pivotal fact of belief that Jesus rose from the dead, on the part of the first generation of Christians is undisputed.

Strauss says: “Only this much need we acknowledge, that the Apostles firmly believed that Jesus had risen.” He also says: “Without the faith of the Apostles in the resurrection of Jesus, the Church would never have been born.”

Schenkel, a most scholarly rationalist, says: “It is an indisputable fact that on the early morning of the first day of the week following the crucifixion, the grave of Jesus was found empty. It is a second fact that the disciples and other members of the Apostolic Communion were convinced that Jesus was seen after the crucifixion—we will admit this; it is all we have to admit.”

Dr. Schmiedel agrees with Strauss and Schenkel. He starts with the one fact of which he is sure, that the followers of Jesus believed that they had seen Him. He even believes that some of the disciples believed they saw and felt in reality the wounds which Jesus received on the cross.

The testing sentence of Charles Reade is certainly in place here. “To accept an inadequate explanation of an undeniable fact is credulity in one of its worst forms.” We repeat:

What is undeniable fact? It is that the first Christian community—the believers from 30 A.D. to 70 A.D. were convinced that Jesus WAS ALIVE FROM THE DEAD.

Dr. Fairbairn truly says: “We reach the conclusion that on the terms fixed and defined by Modern Criticism, there is, on the supposition that Christ did not rise, no sufficient explanation of the origin of our belief. It is impossible to account for it and save the honesty and rationality of the men.”

Dr. James Orr agrees also by saying: “The fulcrum is still wanting by which this fundamental conviction of the earliest Christian community can be lifted from its place.”

Professor T. R. Glover, of St. John’s College, Cambridge, in an article in the *Constructive Quarterly*, on *Immortality and the Person of Christ*, uses the figures of a tunnel to describe a certain gap in our knowledge of the Church’s history. He calls our attention to the fact that the group of men we meet in the Epistles and the Acts are the same we meet in the Gospels, but they are greatly changed. The train passed through a tunnel. We saw it before it entered and after it left. The same people were in it before and after; but something happened in the tunnel. We must, if we are to remain honest, admit that something very exceptional and very signal happened, for it has changed the history of the world.

Bases of Rejection



We maintain that those who deny the fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ as reported in the Scriptures, as well as those who in the present time do so, are without justifiable grounds for such denial.

One of the best short discussions of the grounds for accepting the resurrection as a fact is found in the eighteenth chapter of Dr. A. M. Fairbairn's *Studies in the Life of Christ*. He mentions four explanations which have been offered of belief in the resurrection of Jesus on the part of the first Christian community. To aid the memory they may be called:

The Theory of Fancy,
The Theory of Fraud,
The Theory of Phantom,
The Theory of Fact.

The Theory of Fancy, more commonly known as the Swoon Theory, is that actual death did not occur; that Jesus by some unexplained means appeared to His disciples after He was supposed to have died, and that from this arose the report that He was risen from the dead. This theory was made prominent by the adherence of Schleiermacher. Paulus also was an exponent of it. Strauss, the noted rationalist, to the satisfaction of most people, demolished the theory by his well-known passage from which I quote the following:

“A half-dead man, crawling about, sickly, in need of a physician and a nurse, could never have made upon the disciples the impression of his being the Lord of life, nor changed their mourning into exultation.”

It is very interesting to observe how the Gospel narratives emphasize the fact of the real death of Jesus. It would almost seem that the attempt to account for the belief by the Swoon theory was anticipated by the guiding Spirit of God when the records were made.

The Theory of Fraud, which is to the effect that the disciples stole away the body by night and gave out the report of the resurrection, has been abandoned as absurd. It is mentioned in the twenty-eighth chapter of the Gospel by Matthew. Variations on this, affording illustrations

of the strange extremes to which credulity will go for the purpose of explaining away facts which do not fit theory, are seen in Oscar Holtzman's suggestion that Joseph on reflection removed the body to another tomb, and Kirsopp Lake's idea that the women went to the wrong tomb and a young man who happened to be near said to them: "Over there, not here!" In this connection, we recall that sentence of Carlyle: "O man, great is thy infidel faith!" We recall also the words of Sir Robertson Nicoll: "It is easier to believe in the supernatural than in the impossible."

There remain the two theories—the Phantom Theory and that of Fact. The Phantom Theory in one or another of its forms is the favorite and last resort of rejectors of the fact.

The theory of Keim, who invented the expression "Telegram from heaven" is a variation of the Phantom Theory. It is to the effect that when the disciples believed that they had seen Jesus, they did not really see Him, but only a visionary image. "The visionary image," says one in reviewing Keim's theory, "was produced in their souls immediately by God, in order that they might be assured that Jesus was risen." Holders of this theory of course believe that the body of Jesus remained in the tomb.

Dr. Schmiedel in his article on the Resurrection and Ascension in the *Encyclopedia Biblica* says: "Any attempted explanation presupposes an insight into the subjective experiences that can perhaps never be completely attained; it demands, therefore, the greatest caution. It cannot, however, be left unattempted.... For all that has been said in the foregoing paragraphs, the most that can be claimed is that it proves the possibility—the probability if you will—of an explanation from subjective visions."

The difficulties manifestly attending such an explanation are great. The explanation presents greater difficulties than it removes. They have led the rejectors of the fact of the resurrection to attempt

generally no explanation at all, but to take refuge in the general assumption of the impossibility of the supernatural.



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