

THE RESURRECTION, A HYPER - HISTORICAL FACT.

BY THE EDITOR.

THE Rev. Dr. William Frost Bishop's criticism of the article on the Resurrection by Mr. Allen, a brother clergyman, is to me a renewed evidence of the change in our philosophical world-conception which has set in among the progressive portion of mankind. Young men who have attended universities and have there become acquainted with other religions; who have had the opportunity of comparing their own thoughts with those of others; and who, above all, have had a thorough training in science (especially the natural sciences, physics, biology, psychology, zoology, etc.) can no longer accept uncritically the traditions of religion. They have acquired a knowledge of cosmic laws; they are familiar with the evidences of evolution; they know how religion develops; they are incapable of accepting any statement of miraculous events without an inclination to doubt and to investigate; and a mind trained in this modern mode of thinking will naturally modify the Christian faith as it has been handed down to him from parents and grandparents.

There is only one resource left for the old orthodoxy, and that is a reverently resigned agnosticism which is but very poor comfort indeed. Any attempt at explanations merely reveals the untenableness of the traditional view; and it is dangerous to enter into details, for it will be difficult to make the physiology of the risen body appear sufficiently attractive to render its immortality desirable.

Naturally enough there are still many people left who have remained untouched by the negativism of the *Zeitgeist*, and, sometimes not without great effort, have succeeded in resisting the inroads made by higher criticism and other influences injurious to implicit confidence in their religious doctrines. Dr. Bishop is one of these;

and we are glad to let him state his position on the resurrection which will come more and more to be recognized as the fundamental question in affording a test by which the old and new thought may readily be distinguished.

The new views of church doctrines and the later interpretations of the Bible are not primarily due to the discovery of new facts, either in the domain of biology, because there a general acquiescence in the acceptability of the theory of evolution has become established; or in the domain of archæology where the excavations in Bible lands help us to gain an historical insight into the development of the people of Israel. The new phase in our religious life is rather the product of a change in our entire world-conception, which has been brought about by a gradual growth of mankind, favored, no doubt, by new discoveries, but ultimately due to a more systematic conception of the old and well established data of human experience.

Though the writer is a representative of the new view, he is ready to concede that the reluctance is quite justified which some of us show in accepting the new way of thinking even where the old may have become positively untenable. In the popular comprehension of the world the old conception is intimately interwoven with all our moral maxims and spiritual aspirations. Accordingly it is not uncommon to find that in many cases where it is superseded a general upheaval follows in which all stability, all character, all ethical valuation is lost. Character has fallen with the former views of life and cannot be quickly rebuilt upon the foundations of the new. But it is easy to overlook the fact that the old view contains the truth in figurative and allegorical language. Though the dogmas of Christianity may have become untenable in their literal interpretation, they possess a significance which should not be rejected, and it is this significance which we should carefully sift out and preserve as the good and true.

The difference between the old conception and the new was driven home to me when I read a review of Professor Cornill's books on Old Testament history and prophecy. Professor Cornill is professor of Old Testament theology at the University of Königsberg. He is an authority in the line of his work and the results of his labor (at least in their general character) have been accepted as much as those of his co-workers by all who are familiar with the problems involved and with the arguments on which the fabric of our higher criticism is based. But in addition to the scientific qualification of Professor Cornill, we must add that he is personally of an extremely devout temperament and we know that he has

reached many of his conclusions against his own wishes. Yet, in the minds of those unacquainted with the real problems of the Bible he figures as a rankly destructive critic, and we read in a review of his *Prophets of Israel* by a writer of the old school the following humorous passage:*

“When Dr. Cornill gets to heaven, and hears Moses and the Prophets praising the Messiah they foretold in the sublime strains of their inspired prophecy, he will wonder that he wrote this book.”

This is apparently not meant for a joke and we are even surprised at the breadth of the reviewer who grants the possibility that Professor Cornill may meet Moses hereafter and be sent to a different destination.

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Among the dogmas of Christianity no one is so doubtfully established as that of the resurrection. The early disciples believed in it, but their views as to its nature and the facts upon which their belief was based are quite contradictory. The early Christians insisted on the resurrection of the body, and the apostolic confession of faith incorporates the hope of a resurrection of the flesh for all men. Let us briefly review the canonical statements concerning the resurrection of Jesus.

The apostle Paul bases his evidence on the vision which he had on the road to Damascus, that to him is identical to an actual meeting with Christ. On account of this vision he considers himself an apostle who has been called by the Lord himself; and he avoids meeting the apostles at Jerusalem (Gal. i. 17) to learn anything concerning the Christian doctrine from any of the others who had seen Jesus in the flesh, in order to be able to say that he “neither received it of man, neither was he taught it,” but had it by “the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

Among the four Gospels, that of Mark has been commonly recognized as the oldest, and it is peculiar that its conclusion is a later addition. The original conclusion has been lost or, as seems plausible, has been suppressed because it did not agree with the dogmatic views of the Church. It seems to have been in too obvious contradiction to the other records, especially that according to John. The original argument of the resurrection in the Gospel of Mark is expressed in the words of the angel: “He is risen; he is not here; behold the place where they laid him.” The evidence is negative, being based simply on the statement of the empty tomb.

* *The Post-Graduate and Wooster Quarterly*, Jan., 1896, p. 170.

The account in Matthew is an amplification of the simpler story of Mark. There we read of an earthquake; an angel descends; rolls away the stone and sits upon it—all in view of the women visiting the tomb. The words of the angel are the same in each instance, but the motive of the visit of the women to the tomb is different. According to Mark they went to anoint the body, while according to Matthew they only visit the sepulchre. Perhaps the author of the later text deemed it doubtful that in an Oriental country an attempt should be made to anoint a body on the third day after death.

No reference is made by Mark to soldiers who should act as keepers of the grave. This feature of the story obviously belongs to a later period in its development, when unbelievers made the suggestion that the body might have been stolen.

According to Mark and Matthew the women remain outside the tomb; but according to Luke they enter, and while they are perplexed at not finding the body of Jesus, "behold, two men stood by them in shining garments," who preached a little sermon on the subject, "Why seek ye the living among the dead?"

While Matthew records one single appearance of the resurrected Jesus in Galilee (xxviii. 16-20), Luke also reports only one, but in Jerusalem (xxiv. 36-43).

The meeting with the disciples on the road to Emmaus belongs obviously to a later period. It is a most beautiful expression of the Christians' belief in the living presence of their master, but though an occurrence of the kind described is quite probable in itself, it contributes nothing that could be regarded as historical evidence. The two disciples, Kleopas and his companion, discuss with the stranger on the road the passion of Christ and the reports of the women who claim that he has risen, and afterwards they have the impression that it must have been Jesus to whom they were talking because he broke bread and gave thanks in the Nazarene fashion.

The story of the resurrection reaches a further phase in its development when skeptics offer the objection that Christ's appearance may have been an unsubstantial vision. In answer, such stories were produced as the account of Thomas whom Jesus bids "handle me and see, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as you see me have."

The criticism that he may have been a mere ghost or spiritual presence, is further refuted in a story in Luke (xxiv. 41-43) in which the resurrected Jesus goes so far as to prove his bodily reality as to eat in the presence of his disciples in order to convince them of his actual existence: "And while they yet believed not for joy, and

wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat? And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish and of an honeycomb. And he took it and did eat before them."

Obviously there are five stages in the development of the resurrection story: in the first stage, the appearances, as St. Paul states, belong to the domain of the sense of sight; in the second phase they extend to the sense of hearing; in the third place the sense of touch is added; fourth the resurrected one is made to eat; and finally he rises to heaven. This last and fifth stage completed the development of the legend, and was added in order to dispose of the skeptical query as to why Jesus did not continue to show himself on earth.

In all accounts we have narratives adapted to special dogmas of the Church, and we can see a development toward a more and more materialistic conception of the resurrection which is exactly suited to the materialistic spirit of the early Church.

The gradual development of the resurrection legend can scarcely be considered a matter of opinion, but is a text-critical fact which remains true whether or not Christ rose from the dead. Even the most orthodox theologians do not deny that the oldest account closes abruptly with the discovery of the empty tomb, and the original conclusion seems to be hopelessly lost.

Prof. H. J. Holtzmann, the greatest authority in New Testament criticism and well known and respected by theologians of all parties in Germany, says on page 304 of the first volume of his *Hand-Commentar zum Neuen Testament* (a learned work and perhaps the most complete in summing up all results of New Testament textual criticism):

"There is within the range of the synoptic gospels, no event whose narration is so full of contradictions. . . .

"At any rate the appearances at Jerusalem are so told that those in Galilee become impossible, and those in Galilee are so told that those in Jerusalem are excluded. . . .

"That gospel which can be depended upon, whenever contradictory references appear (viz. the Gospel according to Mark) breaks off suddenly here (Mark xvi. 8)

"Not less apparent are the contradictions concerning the way in which the life of the risen one is received. On the one hand tangible proofs are offered for the bodily identity of the risen one with the crucified. Yet while sensible tangibility and physical nutrition (Luke xxiv. 15, 16, 31, 36, 51) are attributed to him, other features do not show him as a man who has awakened from his

former life, but as a supernatural being who is worshiped (Matt. xxviii. 9, 17), whose face is only gradually recognized (Luke xxiv. 16, 31) even by his disciples, whose sudden appearance and disappearance (Luke xxiv. 31, 36, 51), cause his disciples to imagine that they see a ghost (Luke xxiv. 37) or to doubt the identity of his person (Matt. xxviii. 17). In general, the mode of existence of the risen one has thus early reached a stage which endows him in a certain measure with the omnipresence attributed to him in later days."

At present the tendency among theologians is toward a more spiritual conception of the resurrection; and the belief in the resurrection of the flesh is replaced by a belief in the immortality of the soul.

The early Christians were recruited from people in the lower walks of life. It is perhaps natural that to them the Pauline conception was too spiritual, since they would not care for an immortality unless their very bodily existence was reanimated. They were like the Esquimaux who insisted that if they could not have cod-liver oil in heaven they would not care to go there. Man is naturally materialistic and sensual, so he represents his natural longing for a preservation of himself beyond the grave in the form that is most suited to his taste, and we may deem it a symptom of the purification of our religious life if the doctrine of the reanimation of the corpse is abandoned for a nobler, more spiritual idea of immortality.

Present theology so far as it reflects the views of leading (I might even say orthodox) circles, differs from the old rationalism in this important point: that the old rationalists simply rejected in a spirit of contempt or ridicule the record of miracles and especially the miracle of the resurrection of Jesus, as an old woman's tale; while now our leading theologians recognize that the origin of legends is the natural effect of a great personality upon his disciples. The truth that the martyred leader of the Nazarenes who had died on the cross remained a powerful presence in the minds of his disciples, necessarily took shape in their hearts in such a form as was adapted to their state of culture and views of life. We realize very clearly now that ideas can not be disposed of by the death of those who hold them. Anarchists cannot abolish monarchies by slaying kings, and reforms can not be quenched by burning the reformer. The souls of the martyrs live on and march triumphantly in the progress of the age. Legends of a budding religion are the poetical expression of the faith that is in its devotees. It characterizes the bloom of religious growth, and far from despi-

sing the poetical form which religion assumes, we learn to appreciate it even though we may analyze its structure and mode of development. In this sense, men like Holtzmann do not denounce passages that reflect the enthusiasm of the growing Church in such a way as to be without foundation in fact, as spurious or fraudulent impositions, but regard them as hyper-historical truths.

Theology (as we have said in previous articles)* has become a science, and as a science it is bound to search for and state the truth; but the statement of the truth can be and should be made with tact and discretion and it is highly desirable that we should gradually learn to employ towards other religions that charity which we also need to practice at home. Comparative religion will not attain its full significance, until we can treat other religions with the same fairness with which we should treat and are beginning to treat our own.

* *The Monist*, Vol. XII, 544; XIII, 24.