Theories of the Resurrection.

PROF. E. H. JOHNSON, D. D.

Paul, in his incisive way, states very well the question under consideration: "But some man will say, how are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?" I need not quote the apostle's reply; but the whole course of discussion on this subject has shown that the reply was appropriate. At the same time, I apprehend that Paul did not so much object to the questions, as to the unwillingness to believe in the fact of the resurrection, if the questions about it cannot be answered. The questions ask for a theory of the resurrection; but Paul would insist upon the fact of it.

This distinction is an important one. A theory is an attempt at an inside view; it seeks to explain the nature and the working of the thing about which the theory is offered. If a theory can be made out, it furnishes the largest extension of knowledge. But when we theorize about matters beyond our experience, we attempt to explain them by things within our experience; and the explanation is bound to be consistent, otherwise the theory fails. And the risk is that we ourselves or those who listen to our theories will confound the theory with the fact; and regard insuperable objections to the theory as sufficient objections to the fact.

It is my business to show the insufficiency of the theories concerning the resurrection of the body. But what is the fact concerning which these theories are offered? The New Testament plainly teaches that the dead, good and bad, shall rise. The phraseology, "the resurrection of the body," is not scriptural in terms, but expresses accurately enough the idea of the Scriptures. The body with which the dead shall rise will not be, in all respects, identical with the present body, "Thou sowest not that body which shall be;" but it is to have an organic relation with the present body, as "God granted to every seed its own body." The connection is to be more than organic; it is a connection, in some respects, of identity, as may be gathered from the translation of Enoch and Elijah and from the ascension of our Lord, no one of whom laid aside His body—their bodies were changed. And the possibility of this kind of identity is illustrated by the fact that the materials of our own bodies continually change, while our bodies in an important sense remain the same.

The name, "spiritual body," ought to be accepted as a description, not so much of the nature of the body itself, as of its relations to the spirit. If we understand the name to be descriptive of the substance of the future body, then the name contains a contradiction in terms; for spirit and body are at the opposite poles of existence and have no quality in common. We can say of them both only this, that both exist. So that, if the substance of the spiritual body is spirit, the spirit has not yet a body at all. But the spiritual body is the fit instrument or organ of the spirit. It is not subject to corruption or decay, to pain, nor to death. If I knew more fully what its nature is, I could declare more confidently that it occupies place; but the notion of body is itself the notion of something that may be located.

The spiritual body will be the fit instrument of our mental activity. It is by means of the bodies we now possess, that we acquire the knowledge we have of things about us; and presumably the spiritual body will be the organ to a large degree of our advancing knowledge in the future life. Some believe that as thought can speed in an instant from fixed star to fixed star, the spiritual body can move as swiftly. I would not dare to affirm that this is true, but it seems safer to say that it may be true than that it cannot be true.

The spiritual body will have an important relation to the moral activities of the blessed. Not only shall we be exempt from sensual temptations, but the spiritual body, in consequence of its healthfulness, may even stimulate the glad alacrity of our obedience; so that, instead of marring our lives by its incapacity to sustain moral effort, for here the flesh is often weak though the spirit may be willing, we may expect that the spiritual body will promote the holiness of heaven.

An interesting aspect of the doctrine of the spiritual body is its bearing upon social relations, including our relations to God. The recognition of friends in heaven is guaranteed by the very fact of the resurrection. To have bodies, is to be recognizable there, as it is to be recognizable here. But to have the spiritual bodies will be to be much more recognizable there than we are recognizable here, because the spiritual body will so much more completely display the spirit. The only hindrance which I can foresee to mutual recognition, will be that the revelation of the soul may be so complete as to be confusing. Two faces sometimes look exactly alike. They would not look alike if they were the transparent windows of the soul. I do not know whether the spiritual body will be able to discern God; I do not know whether we shall recognize the Holy Spirit otherwise than as now, through His influence upon our spirits; but we shall certainly see Jesus as He is; and in seeing Him, we shall see the great glory of God and shall be satisfied.

But we must consider the more important theories which have been ventured upon this subject. And, first of all, a venerable theory, which, until within the last one hundred years, was considered as indistinguishable from the fact of the resurrection—I refer to the theory, for it is only a theory, that the spiritual body will consist of materials now in our possession. Tertullian taught that the teeth were indestructible, and furnished matter enough to fit out the spiritual body. Augustine, on the other hand, taught that the spiritual body should contain all the matter that had ever belonged to our natural bodies, hair-clippings, nail parings, and the like. Thomas Aquinas said that the body should rise just as it was laid away, stout or lean, whole or maimed. A sermon of President Stiles, of Yale, which you will find in the volumes of sermons by American preachers, edited by Henry C. Fish, represented the atmosphere on the day of resurrection, as filled with arms and legs flying from the four quarters of the earth to rejoin the bodies that had lost them. Ludicrous as the not on seems to us, it was seriously held by the college president. Unfortunately, this theory was accepted as so much a matter of course, that objections to it were regarded as objections to the resurrection itself; and were so used, as I noticed but a few days ago, by Thomas Paine, in his "Age of Reason." The objection is familiar to all. We know that our bodies consist of materials which may have belonged, in part, to other human bodies, and certainly are derived, almost entirely, from animals and vegetables. For instance, the carbon in our bodies is furnished, directly or indirectly, by vegetation, and vegetables obtain it from the atmosphere. But the atmosphere derives its carbon, in part, from decaying matters, in part, from the exhalations of the lungs. It may easily be the case that materials laid away in the earth should be taken up by vegetation, be eaten by men, and belong to their bodies at death. In such a case, it is simply impossible that the materials which belonged to two bodies at death, should belong to both of them at the resurrection.

I am inclined to believe the period between the resurrection and ascension of our Lord was a transitional period; that the processes of it were suspended processes; and that, therefore, the body of Christ exhibited characteristics both of the natural and of the spiritual body. The ascension from the earth completed the resurrection, and was postponed only in order to assure the disciples that the resurrection was real. We are to believe that the bodies of Enoch and Elijah were transformed at their ascension. Paul teaches the Corinthians that those who are alive at the Lord's coming shall be changed; and tells the Thessalonians that they shall be caught up with the Lord in the air. The inference is easy, though I do not speak with entire confidence, that in this case the natural body becomes the spiritual body, when the living saints are caught away from the earth. In any case, we are disqualified from confidently inferring what the nature and experiences of our spiritual bodies shall be, since we know so little about what were the nature and experiences of our Lord's body during the forty days.

I understand, then, the teaching of the Bible to be that we are to have bodies, in some respects not identical, in other respects, identical, with our bodies; that the spiritual body is to be exactly adapted to the uses of the spirit, whether mental, moral or social, including our relations to God.

If we seek a theory concerning how this body is bestowed, or what its nature is to be, our inquiry is baffled at once by the fact that we have no experience of spiritual bodies. Nor have we any other materials from which to construct a theory. We cannot draw any satisfactory conclusions as to its nature from what is related of our Lord during the period between His resurrection and ascension. Grave objections may be raised to any explanation of His condition at that time. Of course, if we say that He retained the natural body, then we do not learn from Him what the spiritual body will be. But if He had the natural body, it existed under abnormal conditions, and was maintained by miracle; for there were wounds in His hands and feet, a fatal wound in His side, and He passed at will through walls or doors.

On the other hand, there are objections to believing that He then wore the spiritual body. On this supposition, two miracles are involved. But in this case the miracles are misleading. He bade His disciples to notice that a spirit does not have flesh and bones, as they saw Him to have. But we are told that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; it is difficult, therefore, to believe that the spiritual body consisted of flesh and bone. Furthermore, He ate in their presence to convince them that He was not a spirit. But if the spiritual body is supported by food, this is because it is liable to decay, for food is taken only to make up for the inevitable wastes of our physical activity. The normal use of food positively excludes normal incorruptibility.

The newspapers, a few years ago, circulated a story entitled, "Who ate Roger Williams?" The lot of the original settlers of Providence ran back from the water up the slope where the college now stands. Roger Williams was buried on the hillside of his home lot, and an apple tree grew on the spot. A few years ago, the apple-tree was removed, roots and all. It was found that one large root followed the spine, divided at the thighs, and turned up at the toes of Roger Williams. The apple tree had devoured his bones, and some one had eaten its apples. Who ate Roger Williams? This root may be seen to-day in the cabinet of the Brown University.

I need only to refer to the theory that bodies are never to be resumed, that spirits merely rise to judgment and are sent back to limbo. This purely rationalistic view has no support in the Bible.

The most popular of existing theories owes its popularity pretty largely to Joseph Cook's lecture, "Does Death End All?" It is the theory that we now possess, or shall at death possess, a body consisting of material so ethereal, so tenuous, so refined, that it cannot decay. This theory is believed to meet the scientific objections to the consciousness of disembodied spirits in the intermediate state. It contains two elements: one, that the spiritual body is to be ours at death, either because the present body is to be stripped away, as a scaffolding is pulled away from a completed building, or because it shall be bestowed as the spirit leaves its present tenement. I will not dwell upon this element in the theory, although it seems to be the natural understanding of the Scripture that time elapses between death and the resurrection. We are concerned only with the pretension of this theory to construct a scientific account of the future body. It gets its cue from the ether. Now, ether is a purely hypothetical substance. It is believed to exist because some medium is necessary for the transmission unhindered of those vibrations which furnish the effects called light and heat. If light and heat are vibrations, there must be something between the earth and the sun to vibrate. But the ether, according to the hypothesis, opposes no obstruction to the vibrations which pass through it. It cannot, therefore, be a storehouse of energy. If glass, for example, were perfectly transparent—if heat, as well as light, could pass through it unchecked, then glass could not be heated. If vegetation were not opaque, did not arrest the sunbeams, they could not cause it to grow. It is certain, therefore, that an ethereal body must be without energy. Another equally formidable objection to this theory is found in the doctrine which is the pride of modern science, the doctrine of the correlation of force, or convertibility of energy. According to this doctrine, every expenditure of energy is attained by the disintegration of material. You get heat from coal only by burning up the coal; you get muscular energy or nervous energy from your bodies, only through a proportionate disintegration of muscular or nerve fibre. If, then, the spiritual body is to consist of materials too ethereal to disintegrate or decay, it will consist of materials too ethereal to use. I wonder that objections so obvious seem to have escaped the notice of the well-informed advocates of this theory.

Only one further theory requires notice. It is based upon indisputable facts only the facts are not available for the purposes of the theory. It appeals to the fact that the soul, or spirit, in man possesses an organic power, by virtue of which it gathers materials about itself and maintains the identity of the body, notwithstanding the ceaseless change of the molecules which compose the body. There is no question about the fact appealed to. But the difficulty in seeking from it an answer to the question, "How are the dead raised up?"—for the other theories attempted only to answer the question, "With what sort of a body do they come?"—the difficulty is that the organic capacity of the human spirit is always exercised through an organism already in its possession. It employs the digestive function from the earliest period of foetal life, when the body consists, perhaps, of no more than a double cell, through its simple, but mysterious process of assimilating surrounding material, up to the elaborate digestive functions of the human stomach. But this theory furnishes no hint as to how an entirely disembodied spirit can begin the process of equipping itself with a new body. It serves the purpose, however, of assuring us that, if the organic energies of the Spirit are ever again to be in operation, they will construct a body essentially identical with the present body.

I have engaged in this process of destructive criticism for the sake of two or three inferences which I beg leave to draw.

In the first place, if we attempt to construct a theory concerning things outside our experience from things within our experience, the probabilities are that our theories will be false; and if theories of the resurrection have failed, the reason is obvious. We ought not even to expect them to succeed. The attempt to construct them is an invitation of objections from infidelity, which, hereafter, as heretofore, finding us ardently engaged in the defence of our theories will accept our own construction of the matter and bring against the scriptural *fact* of the resurrection objections which are fatal to our *theories* of the resurrection.

In the next place, the resurrection is beyond the reach of our understanding, not alone because it is outside our experience, but because it is greatly above our experience. Paul describes the resurrection body by terms which at once contradict all that we know, and affirm an excellence far above present knowledge: "It is sown in corruption;" we have experience of that; "It is raised in incorruption;" this is far above, as well as different from our experience; "It is sown in dishonor;" the longer our possession of our bodies, the larger our experience of this; "It is raised in glory;" again, a contradiction of what we know by the affirmation of that which far transcends our knowledge; "It is sown in weakness;" this we know too well; "It is raised in power;" we know naught of what Paul means by power; "It is sown a natural body," that is, a physical body, a body fitted to the animal life in us; "It is raised a spiritual body," that is a body suited to a life far above any which we can yet have led. The whole of Paul's teaching on this subject is summed up in what he wrote to the Philippians: "Christ shall change the body of our humiliation and make it like unto the body of His glory."

Will anyone venture to affirm an adequate theory of the glorified body of our Lord? Does any one of you wish to do it? Can you do it without stripping that body of its glory? Who then, would drag down the body which He Himself shall have, for the sake of theorizing about it, of telling how the dead shall rise, or with what sort of body they shall come!

Christian Life in the Present Age.

These three words, "soberly," "righteously," "godly," sum up the New Testament statement of a well-rounded life. Soberly as regards one's self, righteously as regards one's fellow-men, godly as regards one's religion—that is the complete description of the Christian life. But the apostle goes on to say that this well-rounded life is to be lived in this present age, under the conditions and with the environment of the world as it is. To him an essential part of the Christian life is its relation to its own time. It must be a life in its own world as well as a life in eternity. Would the apostle have said this if he had lived now? Is this a good time for a sober, righteous, and godly life? Can a man expect to be a man of this present age, moved by its tendencies, marked by its traits, and yet with the well-rounded Christian character? Here we meet one of the most common and most enfeebling heresies of our own time—the impression that this is not a good time for a sober, righteous, and godly life, the presupposition that the spirit of the age is against these things, the doctrine and unpropitious environment. "Business standards," it is said, "are relaxing; home-habits, loose, self-seeking, the common rule; plain living and high thinking, not the custom of the time." In such a state of mind two things seem possible. One is to yield to the pressure of the age. Accepting its inconsistency with the Christian life, one may adapt himself to standards which his conscience never can approve. That is the common worldliness of the present age, surrendering character to the social pleasure of the time. The other thing to do is to run away from the age. That is what thousands of the choicest souls have done throughout Christian history. They have thought it impossible to live a sober life in the full current of their own time, and so they have fled from its influence, hiding themselves in monasteries and peopling the desert with their caves.

No one can survey the story of these ascetics and hermits without a glow of admiration. It is a great thing that the enticements of each age which have overpowered so many souls have been powerless over a few. But none the less this whole story is not the story of a battle, but of a flight. These people were simply afraid of their own time; and they ran away and tried to save themselves, while the great body of men had to fight the battle without them. It was a flight based not on faith, but on faithlessness, on the doctrine that God had deserted His world, and that, to find Him, they must desert it also; and it was a fruitless flight. Fleeing from the world, they fled from all the chance they had to make it better. I stood once on a little point of the upper Nile, where the first Christian hermit gathered His first disciples. Among those drifting sand-hills, in rude caves and dens, once lived a thousand holy men and women, drawn from the wealth, beauty, and learning of the world, and now, as one stands there, what is there left to see of all their Christian impulses and dreams? No monument of charity, no contribution to learning, no noble church or hospital or school—nothing done to redeem the time in which they lived remains for their memorial. The traveller stands there in a vast solitude, and sees across the ocean of sand nothing but the rippled surface of their unnumbered graves.

If, then, the sober, righteous, and godly man is not to yield himself to the present age, nor yet to flee from it, what is he to do? Why, he is to use it—take it just as it is, as the God-given material out of which the Christian character fit for the present time is to be wrought. Here is a potter working in his clay. It is a coarse material, and his hands grow soiled in moulding it; but it is not for him to reject it because it is not clean, nor yet to dabble in it like a child, just for the sake of getting dirty. It is for him to take it just as it is, and to work out the shapes of beauty which are possible under the laws and limits of the clay. Precisely such material is this modern world. It is not very clean; its ways of business, its methods of industry its habits of society, are soiling to the touch; but it is not one's duty to wash his hands of it, nor yet to surrender to its evil, but to take these very conditions of the present age as the material out of which one is to mold a new type of moral beauty.

To run away from the tendencies of modern life—that is easy enough; to yield to its evil—that is still easier; but to be in the world, yet not of it, molding its material, yet not defiled by it—that is the real problem of the modern world. And here lies the new type of Christian character. The saints of the past have been for the most part those who have fled from the world; but the Christian saint of to-day is the person who can use the world. Such a person may be all unconscious that he is doing anything heroic. He is simply the man in the business world who, amid looseness and dishonor, keeps himself true and clean; simply the woman who, amid luxury and affectation, keeps her simplicity and sympathy; simply the youth who, without the least retreat from the influences which beset him in a place like this, makes them contribute to his growth of character. That is a harder thing than to be a hermit, and quite as noble as to be a saint. It is the sober, righteous, and godly life lived in the midst of this present age.—*Francis G. Peabody, D. D., in Christian Advocate.*

The Heart's Midnight.

It is not easy for us now to measure the greatness of the darkness that at one time must have rested on many of the most important events in the history of the past. The life of Abraham was made up of a series of mysterious commands. The loss of Joseph and the taking away of Benjamin were for many a day dark as midnight to Jacob. The death and burial of Christ formed a disappointment which almost shattered the faith of His disciples. "We trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel, and to-day is the third day since these things were done." Martha and Mary were plunged in greater sorrow from the apparent neglect of Jesus than from the loss of their brother; and in later times, what a contradiction to every cherished hope must the Jew have experienced when he saw the total destruction of Jerusalem and the irretrievable ruin of the nation! To say that all these failed to comprehend the meaning of what God was doing conveys a feeble idea of the sheer darkness in which these episodes were involved for those who passed through them.

And similar experiences occur in life now. There are some on whom stroke follows stroke, and from whose heart the burden of grief, disappointment and care is never for a moment lightened. It seems hard that while others enjoy summer brightness, their sky is always curtained with gloom; while others have health, they have pain and weakness; while others prosper, yet, struggle as they may, adversity is their inevitable doom. So have we seen happy homes strangely visited by sorrows so very hard as to have been the last we would have expected from the hand of a loving father. The one who could the least be spared struck down and with him the stay shattered of the innocent and helpless; the mother torn from the clinging arms of the child, or the infant, who has been as a light from heaven in the home, snatched away in its spotless beauty, and the music that was sweetest in life silenced forever! Verily, what the Lord does at such times "we know not now." It is all dark—utterly dark; and all that the faithful heart can do is to lift the eye from the mysteries of earth to that presence where all is light, where all is known, and to wait patiently on the Lord. "Though the Lord slay me, yet will I trust in Him," was the grand utterance of one who had no light as to the reasons for the divine dealing, but who knew that "beyond these voices there was peace"—that the Lord reigned in righteousness, and that all His ways were good.—*Sunday Magazine.*

— Mr. John Anderson, Grassmere, Ont., writes: "The Vegetable Discovery you sent me is all gone, and I am glad to say that it has greatly benefited those who have used it. One man in particular says it has made him a new man, and he cannot say too much for its cleansing and curative qualities."

Trust Christ.

Do not trouble yourselves unduly; for if you do so, you cannot remove sickness thereby, but you may even increase it. If I could do any good by worrying, I would worry away to my heart's content; but as it is useless, I find it best to let it alone. They tell me that if a man were to fall into the sea he would float if he would remain quiet, but because he struggles he sinks. I am sure it is so when we are in affliction. Fretfulness results in weakening us, in hiding from us wise methods of relief, and in general in doubling our pains. It is folly to kick against the pricks; it is wisdom to kiss the rod. Trust more and fear less. If you have trusted your soul with Christ, can you not trust Him with everything else? Can you not trust Him with your sick child or your sick husband, with your wealth, with your business, with your life? "Oh," says one, "I hardly like to do that. It is almost presumption to take our minor cares to the great Lord." But in doing so you will prove the truthfulness of your faith.

I heard of a man who was walking along the high-road with a pack on his back; he was growing weary, and was therefore glad when a gentleman came along in a chaise and asked him to take a seat with him. The gentleman noticed that he kept his pack strapped to his shoulders, and so he said:

"Why do you not put your pack down?"

"Why, sir," said the traveller, "I did not venture to intrude. It was very kind of you to take me up, and I could not expect you to carry my pack as well."

"Why," said his friend, "do you not see that whether your pack is on your back or off your back, I have to carry it?"

It is so with your trouble; whether you care or do not care, it is the Lord who must care for you.

First trust your Lord with your souls, and then trust Him with everything else. First surrender yourself to His love, to be saved by His infinite compassion, and, then bring all your burdens and cares and troubles, and lay them down at His dear feet, and go and live a happy, joyful life; saying, as I will say, and close:

All that remains for me
Is but to love and sing,
And wait until the angels come,
To bear me to my King."

—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

Bob Burdette's Advice to Young Men.

So you have got yourself into trouble, my son? Gone a little wrong, have you? Yes; well, that means you know you have gone clear wrong; because there is only one kind of wrong; there is no mugwumpery in morals, my boy. And you've had such a hard time getting back, that it made you a little bitter and cynical, and you think all the world is rather hard and selfish and pitiless, and especially severe on you? Well, I wouldn't feel that way at all, if I were you. I don't think I ever did feel that way, and I know more about it than you do. I've been further down the Jericho road than you. Great town for toots, from away back. It's a bad country. Never heard of but one good woman in Jericho, and she didn't move in good society.

But, my son, it isn't society's fault that you get into trouble. You knew what the Jericho road was before you went down that way. You knew there was a curse on the town. You were safe enough in Jerusalem; why didn't you stay there? Don't feel bitter toward all the world because you fell among thieves and got cleaned out. It is a kind good-natured, forgiving old world, if you give it a chance to be forgiving. True, it doesn't always look that way to a fellow in trouble, because then the fellow is apt to look at the wrong people.

You found on the Jericho road six or eight thieves—that is, half-a-dozen professionals and the two amateurs who passed on the other side—and only one good Samaritan, and naturally it seems to you that the leaven of good is utterly lost in that great mass of rascality and hypocrisy; but bless you, my son, in the great, honest, living world, in the world that is trying to lead men to better things than Jericho excursions, in the only world that really lives and cares for just such fellows as you, in the real world of men and women, who deal with the young man when his smarting wounds are deepest, the one good Samaritan outweighs a regiment of those villains who beat you, and robbed you, and passed you by the way to Jericho. Never mind the priest and Levite, my son. They were going down to Jericho, too, you remember, that's the kind of priests they were.

And one closing word, my son. Unless you are smarter and stronger than the thieves down Jericho way—and I guess maybe you are not, very few men are—why you keep off that road. You stay in Jerusalem and you'll have more money and less headache.

— A Methodist minister, telling how his father, fresh from Ireland, one day found his way to church and received a hearty shake of the hand, says the man who thus welcomed him shook whole generations into the Methodist church, and thousands of dollars into its treasury. No one can can know the consequence of one thoughtful, kindly greeting to the stranger in the church service, but when it is possible that whole families may be made happier and more useful by it, isn't it worth while to try it whenever there is opportunity?—*Exchange.*

— Our modern church methods are perilously near the danger of eliminating from Christian giving the element of self-denial. The numberless labor-saving devices for inducing Christian people to give without feeling it are a real menace to both the spiritual and financial prosperity of our churches. This age of invention has devised no better scheme for the financial management of Christian churches than the apostolic plan of giving as the Lord has prospered.—*Congregationalist.*

— There is money enough in the hands of Christian people to evangelize the world, and, if it does not evangelize the world, it will destroy the church. The salvation of our churches depends upon a revival which will cause this money to flow out for the salvation of the world.—*Selected.*

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