

Our Contributors

Easter Day.

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Easter Day! a veritable Red Letter Day! So let there be high and holy gladness. Let Church bells, Church organs, Church choirs, give forth their strongest, purest and sweetest music, in celebration of the triumph of our Lord over Death and the grave!

He who died on the cross, and was buried "Is Risen" and lives for evermore. Such is the brief but pregnant story which Easter Day repeats from year to year.

But is this *true*—or is the story a mere myth or legend born of, and perpetuated by credulous superstition—or is it a fable framed by crafty men to cheat the simple herd? If so, it is high time that Easter Day jubiliations should cease.

It is well then to look into this matter closely and carefully—a reverently thoughtful examination cannot fail to deepen and strengthen conviction of the reality of the resurrection of Christ.

The late Dr. Arnold—great in scholarship and saintliness has said, "I have been used for many years to study the history of other times and to examine and weigh the evidences of those who have written about them, and I know of no one fact in the history of mankind which is proved by better and fuller evidence of every sort to the mind of a fair enquirer, than the great sign that God has given us, that Christ died and rose again from the dead."

These are weighty words, abundantly justified by the faith of the case.

The evidence of the truth of the Redeemer's resurrection is twofold—*direct* and *indirect*.

On the line of *direct* evidence, there is the fact that early on the morning of the third day the grave was found to be *empty*—this is beyond question, if the gospel narratives be genuine—when the Roman soldiers appointed to guard the sepulchre, informed the chief priests that the grave was empty, great was the consternation in their ranks. Hastily summoning a Council, they set about devising some way of accounting for the absence of Christ from the grave and of enabling them to deny His resurrection. The plan which they adopted was to bribe the soldiers with large sums of money and to instruct them to say that the disciples came by night and stole the body while they slept. A more clumsily concocted story there surely never was. It carries, on the surface, its own refutation.

What then is the *true* explanation of the empty grave? Just that which was given by the Angel to the devoted women who came early to the grave and fully expected to find the body there—"Be not affrighted," said the Angel, "He is risen—He is not here—behold the place where they laid Him."

"He is risen"—that is why the grave is empty. Well what did the risen Saviour do during the interval between His resurrection and His ascension? Did He withdraw Himself entirely from human field, carefully withholding any manifestation of Himself? Nay. He first showed Himself to Mary, and after, by many "infallible proofs," to the Apostles whom He had chosen.

We have a record of not less than *ten* distinct appearances, and it is specially noteworthy that these appearances were made at *different times, in different places, and in widely different circumstances.*

The assertion that the resurrection of Christ, was an event, not in the material, but in the moral world, and that the evan-

gelical narrative is only a material representative of a spiritual fact, is *utterly falsified* by the gospel narratives—the Evangelists speak of Him not simply as *living* on beyond the grave, and showing Himself from *Heaven* as in the case of Stephen and of Saul, but as presenting Himself on *Earth* to the sight, and hearing and touch of His followers. Matthew records that Jesus came suddenly upon both the Marys together—that the *eleven* disciples in a body saw Him, and that He drew near to them and spake to them.

Luke states that Jesus joined Himself to two of the disciples on their way to Emmaus, walked along with them, talked and supped with them, that He was seen by Peter and that He presented Himself alive after He had suffered death, being seen by them for forty days. Paul testifies that He was seen by Peter, then by James, then by *all* the apostles and then by more than five hundred—most of whom were alive in His time and therefore in a position to confirm his statement. In view of this direct testimony, which might be greatly enlarged, it is difficult to understand how the most sceptically disposed can hesitate to admit that in *some way or other* Jesus did appear alive. Volkmann says "It is one of the most certain facts in the history of the world that Jesus of Nazareth soon after His death upon the cross, appeared to his disciples as risen again . . . whatever conception we form of this appearing and even though we cannot understand it at all."

Baur says "To the faith of the disciples the resurrection of Jesus became the firmest and most incontestable of certainty . . . Treat the thing itself as an objective or as a subjective one, still we must hold fast to the certainty that these disciples were fully convinced of its occurrence as having all the reality of an historical fact."

It is, of course, open to an objector to say that the disciples, though perfectly honest in their belief, were deceived—or rather deceived themselves.

Optical illusions there have been and still are. Strange and wild fancies have seized human minds and do so still, but a large and indeed, unwarrantable demand is made upon our faith when we are asked to believe that these men were the prey of illusion. If the risen Saviour had shown Himself but once or twice, there might be some ground for suspicion. He however showed Himself *repeatedly*.

If the disciples had been predisposed to believe in the resurrection, there might be some ground for suspicion, nothing however is more certain than that they were *not predisposed*—quite the reverse. They did not, in the least expect His resurrection. When He died, they took for granted that all was over—their hopes were buried when he was buried—hence when Mary and the other women first brought the news of His resurrection—we read that their words seemed to them as idle tales—when Peter and John had actually looked into the sepulchre and saw the linen clothes lying and no Jesus there, it is said "that they knew not the Scriptures that He must rise again from the dead." Thomas declared that he would not believe unless he was permitted to see and feel the pierced hands and wounded side.

Never were men less disposed to believe in anything than these men were to believe in Christ's resurrection and yet the evidence furnished was so overwhelming that at length they were as fully convinced of its *reality*, as they were of their own existence. So much for the *direct* evidence.

The *indirect* evidence is, if possible, more

significant. After the death of Christ a marvellous change took place in the mind and conduct of His *foes* and His *friends*.

How to account for this is the problem now before us.

A great change took place in the *foes* of Christ. It will be remembered that during His brief ministry and right down to its close, His bitterest and most persistent enemies were the Pharisees—speaking broadly the Sadducees were indifferent onlookers—disposed probably, to regard Him as a fanatic deserving their silent contempt. But according to the early chapters in the Book of the Acts, something had occurred which completely altered the attitude of these two sects for the Sadducees instead of being utterly indifferent and contemptuous as heretofore, became deadly opponents and persecutors of the Saviour; whereas the Pharisees—old enemies—not only sometimes defended them, but in many instances became their converts.

"As they were speaking to the people the Sadducees came upon them, Acts 4: 1. "The High Priest rose up and all that were of his way of thinking, which is the sect of the Sadducees and laid their hands on the apostles," Acts 5: 17.

While the Sadducees were thus active and remorseless persecutors, we read that there stood up in the Council, a Pharisee whose advice was that they should refrain from these men, lest they might be found fighting against God. When Paul was brought before the Council and perceived that one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out "Men and brethren. I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question" whereupon "there arose a discussion between the Pharisees and the Sadducees and the Pharisee section put in a plea in Paul's behalf saying "we find no evil in this man." Manifestly a great change had taken place in these two parties—the Sadducees who had treated our Lord for the most part, with contemptuous indifference, now became filled with malignant hate. The Pharisees who had been ceaseless in their hostility were now more or less favourably disposed to the disciples of the new religion. There must have been some cause for this remarkable phenomenon—what was it? It is to be found alone in the *resurrection of Jesus*. But for it the Sadducees would probably have continued as they were before. As far as they were concerned the disciples might have preached, without let or hindrance. Jesus was one who went about doing good and who eventually was slain. When however they preached Him as risen from the grave, the fiercest indignation of the Sadducees was stirred up, for one article in their creed was that there is no resurrection—whereas the Pharisees confessed it.

Great as was the change in the mind and conduct of the *foes* of Christ after His death—a change not less great took place in His *friends*.

When Christ died, the idea of His over-coming death did not for a moment enter into the minds of His disciples—hence they gave themselves up to dismay and despair. All they could think of was that they had been grievously deluded and betrayed. "We trusted that it had been He who should have redeemed Israel"—so they spake. There is a touching plainness in the words. They express the pain-fullest disappointment.

The Pharisees with the shrewdness so characteristic of them anticipated the possibility of the removal of the body from the