

THE WEEK.

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MR. GOLDWIN SMITH AND "THE WEEK."

To the Editor of THE WEEK:

SIR,—I see, copied by an American from a Canadian journal, the statement that I have resigned the editorship of THE WEEK. I never, as you know, was Editor, though, when in Canada, I was a regular contributor. My only reason for laying down my pen as a journalist, is that after a life of pretty hard work, I find it expedient to husband my powers. I have the satisfaction of knowing that Canada has now, in THE WEEK, a well established literary organ in good hands. I have also the satisfaction of seeing that the principle of independence in journalism has at last prevailed. My chief aspirations having thus been fulfilled, I can, without regret or misgiving, withdraw to other literary occupations.

Yours faithfully,

GOLDWIN SMITH.

March 31st, 1887.

EASTER.

THE festival of Easter is of profound interest and importance whether we regard it from a religious or an historical point of view. It is the oldest festival of the Christian Church and the most universal. It commemorates the most stupendous miracle of Christianity, a doubt about which is the destruction of faith in an historical Christ. Its antiquity is witnessed by the early disputes as to the proper day of celebrating the festival—the East alleging a tradition from S. John according to which the day of the month was kept, the West a tradition from S. Peter according to which the commemoration was to be held on the first day of the week whatever the day of the month might be. The Council of Nicœa declared in favour of the latter view, which was afterwards universally adopted. If the other view had prevailed, Easter Day would have been like Christmas Day, falling always on the same day of the month, but on different days of the week.

The importance of Easter has been shown by the manner in which it has been celebrated by Christians and assailed by unbelievers. In all ages it has been felt that here is a fact which vitally concerns the very existence of the Christian faith. It is only in our own times that the notion has been promulgated that, so long as we keep the idea of a resurrection, the need and reality of a spiritual resurrection, the fact is of comparative unimportance. Dreams of this kind may entertain the imagination of visionaries. For ordinary human beings it is sheer nonsense. Either Jesus Christ did rise on the Sunday after His crucifixion, or He did not. The first preachers of the gospel declared that He did. If He did not, their testimony is false, and the rejection of this part of their testimony is the removal of the foundation on which rests the whole fabric of Christian belief. This conviction has shown itself in the numerous "apologies" and other writings which have emanated from the Christian Church from the

days of the first Apologists in the second century down to our own days; and also in the attempts made by their enemies to discredit the testimony of the Apostles. If those first witnesses of Christ could be believed, then the enmity of the Jews and their rejection of Him who claimed to be their Messiah were to be condemned as without excuse. The first endeavour to explain the fact of the disappearance of the body of Jesus showed the plight in which His enemies were left. His disciples, they said, had stolen away the body while the keepers of the sepulchre were asleep. Such a theory could not long hold its ground, and it has seldom been revived.

Without noticing an anticipation of some modern forms of unbelief, such as that which Origen notices in his reply to Celsus, it may be interesting to say a few words on the only two theories which seem in any way defensible by those who still refuse to believe that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. They are those of the rationalistic school and of the mythical school respectively.

Before, however, stating these theories, it is necessary to note a point on which all men seem now to be agreed. It is this:—that the disciples of Jesus were not imposters. Whatever else they were or did, at least they believed that Jesus Christ had risen from the dead. Strauss, the chief expounder, if not the originator, of the mythical theory, holds it as a matter beyond all question that the Church of Christ had its origin in a belief in the resurrection of Jesus. No other theory, he says, can account for the facts. Those who, like himself, do not believe in any such resurrection, must explain how it was that the Apostles declared that Jesus had risen, and how they had themselves come to believe that which they preached.

Of all the theories which have been propounded by unbelief two only can be said to retain any number of advocates—both very improbable, and one inconceivably absurd and inconsistent with the facts. Paulus and the rationalistic school, following their usual method of allowing the historical facts while denying their miraculous character and circumstances, profess to believe that Jesus Christ was actually seen alive after His crucifixion and burial. But they explain the fact by saying that He never really died upon the cross. Now this view is not consistent with the veracity and good faith of the Apostles. But, further, it fails to account for the new faith and hope which filled the hearts of the first preachers of Christ when they went forth to proclaim the message of salvation. Strauss has put forth this objection to the theory with great power in his new "Life of Jesus." We are asked to believe, he says, that a man who crept out of the grave half dead, needing to be bandaged, tended, watched over, nursed, could work the amazing change which passed upon His disciples, so that they could believe in Him as the Conqueror of death and the grave! It is incredible and inconceivable.

As far as we know, the view of Paulus has very few advocates in the present day. A work entitled "The Fair Haven," by Major Butler, is the only considerable essay on the subject which advocates the hypothesis of the apparent death of Jesus. The writer of these lines has seen a paper, read before a scientific society and printed for private circulation, which is attributed to an eminent living scientific man, and seems to advocate the same naturalistic explanation of the resurrection. But there is little chance of its prevailing.

The view which was finally adopted by Strauss, and which has been advocated by Renan, Macan, the author of "Supernatural Religion," the author of "Philo-Christus," and others, is of much greater plausibility, and seems resolved to hold its place with those who refuse to accept the historical fact of the resurrection. According to this theory, Jesus did really die upon the cross; but He never rose from the grave at all. The disciples, under the influence of strong excitement, only believed that they saw Him alive. Probably Mary Magdalene was the first who fell under the illusion. She communicated her impression to others, and it soon spread abroad, so that the multitude of the believers had speedily convinced themselves that their Master had appeared alive before them.

It is only when we carefully examine this theory that we become fully aware of its internal improbabilities. Certainly it is not the Christian believer that is here most liable to the charge of credulity. The simple story of the evangelists and of S. Paul, set against this account, is plain history compared with the wildest romance. First of all, the disciples were not expecting their Lord's resurrection. The accounts in the gospel are internally probable—that it was at first rather difficult to convince them