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JOURNAL OF
THE TRANSACTIONS
OF
The Victoria Institute,
OR,
Philosophical Society of Great Britain.

EDITED BY THE SECRETARY.

VOL. XXXVII.



LONDON :

(Published by the Institute, 8, Adelphi Terrace, Charing Cross, W.C.)

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1905.

ORDINARY MEETING.*

LIEUT.-COLONEL G. MACKINLAY IN THE CHAIR.

The following address was given by the Author :—

THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST. By Rev. Canon GIRDLESTONE, M.A.†

THE subject is one that we shall all have in our minds on Easter Day, and perhaps if we look at it from a historic point of view it may help us when we want our own mind clear on this great fact. In one of the sermons by the celebrated Dr. Arnold, formerly Head Master of Rugby, a sermon called "The sign of the Prophet Jonah," there is a sentence which goes to this effect: "I have been in the habit of studying historical events for many years, and it is my firm conviction that there is no event of history so sure and trustworthy as the resurrection of Christ from the dead." That as coming from a man with a free mind is very strong and very encouraging, and it was one of several things that set me investigating the whole subject a good many years ago. I may say that I date my own personal investigation of it to the year 1860, when I spent Easter in Jerusalem and heard a sermon from the late Mr. Crawford on a text in the 1st chapter of Acts, where we read that Christ showed Himself alive to His followers by many infallible proofs.

* Monday, April 17th, 1905.

† Owing to the sudden withdrawal of another paper, this address had to be given at only a few minutes' notice. Hence its lack of completeness: and many aspects of the question were left untouched.—R. B. G.

Now I want to remind you of some of the phenomena connected with the history of this marvellous event. First, what are our materials? We have the four Gospels; the records and the speeches contained in the Acts; certain passages in the Epistles, notably 1 Cor. xv, and some passages of importance in the last book of the Bible, the Apocalypse; and then we have the moral and spiritual side of proof in the deportment of the Apostles and their followers, their courage, their success, and the way in which belief in the crucified and risen Saviour overcame the old religions of Rome and Greece. And of course beyond these there are personal experimental convictions which it is not my business to-day to say anything about. I will not go into the age and authenticity of the books in question, but for the purpose of to-day it is enough to say that I take them as first century productions, and written by Apostles or apostolic men, and therefore to be taken as the highest possible authorities for the fact in question.

Before you can really go into the question of the Resurrection of Christ, it is of vital importance to prove that He actually died. The Mohammedans, as you know, deny that our Lord died, and some people have thought that He was in a state of coma, and that in the coolness of the tomb He recovered. But if He recovered in the coolness of the tomb after all He had gone through, even supposing that the Apostles and the women who loved Him so tenderly had charge of Him, what happened to Him afterwards? and how is it that the Apostles, whose faith in Christ must have been rudely shaken, boldly preached the Gospel of the Resurrection a few days afterwards? You see that a great deal hangs upon the death of Christ; consequently you investigate the materials and see what is said on the subject. You examine the actual words. They are very like one another. St. Matthew and St. Mark, rendered literally, say "He expired"; St. Luke, "He committed His spirit or breath to the Father"; and St. John, "He breathed His last." To expire is to breathe your last. Many of you have stood by a death-bed and watched that last breath, the last sighing out of the soul from the body. The testimony of all the four gospels is that Jesus breathed His last. Pilate was surprised that He had breathed His last so early, but the soldier who had gone to accelerate the death of the other two who were crucified with Him, found that He was dead already. How did they know it? They judged—they were not of course professional men—but they judged from considerable experience. They could tell by what they saw that He was a dead man. But one of the

soldiers, to make certainty doubly certain, with a spear pierced His side, and there came forth blood and water; and you will remember the curious expression of St. John's with regard to it. He might simply have told his story and let it alone; he does not do that. He adds this verse, St. John xix, 35, "And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he" (referring to himself) "knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe." It is evident from that verse being inserted that he considered it of very great importance that we should know what had been done by the soldier and what the consequence was of the piercing of the heart of Jesus. Dr. Stroud and others in later days have discussed the physical cause of Christ's death, and they agree that He died not of crucifixion but of a broken heart. I must not say anything more about the death of Christ. It is proved as much as anything can be proved.

But now I go to the resurrection. And the first thing that strikes me, on carefully examining the four gospels, is that not one single person saw Christ rise. They saw Him after His resurrection, but no one saw Him rise. I think if any forger had written an account of the Resurrection, witnesses would have been produced who professed to have seen the Lord rise; and I daresay it was often a wonder to the early Christians that no one had seen the Lord rise. When you survey the speeches in the Acts which deal with the subject you find it still the case. They say, We are witness of His resurrection; but they did not see Him rise. They ate and drank with Him after His resurrection, which is very different. What was the meaning of it? We shall see a little later; but what a marvellous fact is this silence of the witnesses of the gospel upon this particular point!

Now we come to St. John's extraordinary testimony which we have in the xth chapter. There we find Peter and John running a sort of race to see the tomb. John (he perhaps is a little the younger) outran Peter and got first to the tomb. He stooped down—I imagine (though some still doubt) that the tomb was of the nature of a cave—and looked in. He saw the linen clothes in which Christ had been wrapped lying, but did not go in. A natural feeling overcame him, a shrinking from going in; he just looked in. Peter had no such shrinking. He got there very rapidly, and went right in. What did he see? He saw the linen clothes lying and the napkin which had been about the head of the Lord, not lying with them in a sort of heap together, but coiled round in a separate place. "Then went in also that other disciple which came first, and

he saw, and believed." What did he believe? Was it what the women had said, "They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid Him?" No, they did not believe that; for this reason, if people had taken the Lord away they would have taken Him with the wrapping, for it would not have been possible for them to have taken Him out of the wrappings in the sepulchre. There would not have been room. Besides there was a 100 lb. weight of spice, and it would have been all sticking together. Then there was a smaller coil for the face to keep the jaw from falling. The two coils were *in situ*, but the body gone! Peter and John had gone through a good deal of experience, but they had never seen such a thing as that. So that we have two extraordinary facts; first, that no one saw Christ rise, and secondly, that the Lord's burial garments remained empty but *in situ*. That was the phenomenon which these two men saw and which caused them to believe something which they had never taken in before, for as yet they knew not the Scripture of the Old Testament, and so dull were they that they had forgotten what the Lord had promised. So they just went home with this phenomenon on their minds:—"He has gone through some great change; He has vanished from the coil in which His body was wrapped."

Many people must have speculated as to what had happened. One thing was plain; there were the empty wrappings. Consequently the Roman soldiers could not have taken the Lord out of the sepulchre. Their story was a lame one, but it was passed about as an excuse, as there was nothing else to say. Prof. Gardner of Oxford has brought out a book called *Exploratio Evangelica*, in which he says the greatest crux in history is this, "What happened to the body of Christ?" That is a very remarkable confession from a man who is a free handler of the scripture.

Now we have another very remarkable phenomenon; all the four Gospels give instances of the doubts of the Lord's followers. They were in a sceptical frame of mind; they were not prepared straight off to accept the dictum of anybody, and it took that whole day to remove the doubts of some; others still doubted up in Galilee. The Apostle Thomas doubted for a week. He wanted demonstration, and he got it. It is very noteworthy that the four Gospels all candidly tell us of these doubts. All uncertainty, however, vanished before the Day of Pentecost. By that time Christ's followers were all one heart and soul, and they then got the final demonstration.

Then there is yet another phenomenon in the four Gospels. While each of the Evangelists gives two very long chapters, about seventy verses each, to our Lord's crucifixion, and to all the circumstances that led to it, they are uncommonly short in the account of the resurrection. Most of us have puzzled over this. How is it they are not more detailed? I can only suppose details were not thought to be so necessary in the one case as in the other. St. Paul in writing to the Galatians says in the beginning of the third chapter: "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth—depicted—crucified among you?" It seems to have been the custom of the Apostles to give a most careful account of what happened to Christ in the hours which preceded His crucifixion, but they do not go into the account of the resurrection in the same way. This was partly because no one saw Him rise; and partly because they were recording and not defending. Two, if not three of the Evangelists had seen the risen Lord; and others had seen Him too. That was enough. Most of us probably have wondered at the order in which Christ selected the persons to whom He would appear on that first Easter day, and that His mother should not be named.

We must now revert to a certain phenomenon which has already struck us as extraordinary. In order to find a solution of the facts observed by Peter and John you must go to Paul. Bear in mind that up to that time there had been nothing similar to the resurrection of Christ. Jairus' daughter and Lazarus and the rest simply returned to their old life, and their physical condition was very much the same as it had been before, only, I suppose, they were in very good health. But in the case of Christ it was not a return to the old life. It was an advance to another condition, and the body of Christ was no longer a frame-work animated by the soul, but was now more directly under the spirit. It had been sown an animated body; it was raised a spiritualised body. There had been a great advance and change, perhaps not in the tissue or texture, but still such a change that He was able to appear and disappear in a moment as easily as some little creatures in the water rise up to the surface and go down again in a moment, that change perhaps answering to what we may call materialising and de-materialising, which a spiritual body is capable of for certain reasons. Probably all the appearances of angels in the history of Israel prepared the way for this extraordinary series of events which happened during the great forty days.

In 1 Cor. xv, we have the matter laid bare; now we understand what Peter and John saw. They saw the result of the resurrection, namely, that the body of Christ had been dematerialised and had removed itself from the coil of clothing without disturbing it; the wrappings consequently fell together; nothing more was needed. It used to be said that the clothes had been wrapped up to show that God loves order. I do not quite believe that to be the reason, nor did I understand the reason till I put together 1 Cor. xv, and St. John xx. Peter and John give the facts; Paul gives the solution. The Lord's body became a risen body, and consequently a spiritual body. Let us not think of Christ's resurrection as a recurrence to the old type. Christ is the first-fruits, and it is the new type of humanity which he inaugurated, which we all hope to share if we live with Him now.

There is just this other point: It is often said it is contrary to nature for Christ to have risen. What do we mean by nature? Do we mean only the physical nature, the law of matter? Do we mean plant nature, which introduces new forces? or animal nature, where consciousness steps in? or human nature, which implies moral and intellectual force as well? All these forces are combined in a man. So far nature tells us what *is*, but it may be that God makes provision for what *will be*, and what is preternatural now will be natural hereafter. We always have to take in the element of divine appointment, and the divine aim and purpose has always been not to have such ordinary mortals as we are now, but something of a higher type physically and that dominated by the spiritual. In the resurrection of Christ we come to the realisation of the divine plan, the solution of the divine purpose, or, as it is called by St. Paul, the first-fruits of the divine promise. Christ risen is the earnest of a better type of humanity, which is divine in scale. Man is to be at the top of the scale of creation.

DISCUSSION.

The CHAIRMAN.—We are grateful to the Canon for this most interesting and thoughtful address. It is a difficult subject to discuss and there may be a difficulty in discussing it, as we have not had our minds just lately concentrated on this subject. If any

person should like to take part or ask the author to further elucidate any point, it will all add to the interest of our gathering this afternoon.

Mr. ROUSE.—With regard to the main subject I should like to say that the Jews had all power on their side when the number of disciples in Jerusalem was very small and feeble, and therefore it is perfectly certain that if it had been a fraud on the part of the disciples that the Lord had risen from the dead, the Jews would have been able to produce His body or to compel the disciples to do so. Again, not only is there no outside record of their having done so: no record that has come down to us, but no book so far as we know was written by the Jews to dispute the fact of the resurrection. We are indebted to the Bible itself for the idle report which was spread that His disciples came and stole Him away while the guards slept; and yet the fact that so great a benefactor Who did wonders which the Jews do not deny (though they attribute it to the wrong cause), Who did mighty cures amongst them and Who was a good man (which they do not deny), that they should have put to death this man, and that His disciples should preach all over the Roman world that He was God manifest in the flesh, that He did not linger in the tomb but was risen in a more glorious body, remains as an historical fact. This was a slur upon the nation—that this should go forth to all the world and be told abroad. And yet the Jews of that generation or their children never took the pains to deny that which happened in their own time; that they never took any pains to write a book on the subject is a thing incredible. Judgment goes by default. Christ must have risen from the dead or we should have had some book in which the Jews denied that fact. Within thirty years of that crucifixion the story of Christ's resurrection, and of the blessings that were to flow from it, covered such a vast number of miles, that some 1,500 or 2,000 miles from Jerusalem, in the city of Rome, multitudes, as we know from the testimony of Tacitus, were submitting to suffer death rather than give up their belief in Christ. What could have convinced them except that they either saw the resurrection with their eyes, or believed the abundant testimony of those who did?

Professor ORCHARD.—We shall all agree in heartily thanking Canon Girdlestone for his most valuable address. The doctrine of the resurrection is the substantial truth of Christianity; take that

away and our faith is vain, and we are yet in our sins. It has always seemed to me that the negative argument drawn from the question, What became of the body ? is one which could never be answered by the infidel. The Canon's idea about the clothes—I do not quite agree that the clothes were left exactly as they were worn ; I think I remember the expression that the napkin which was about His head was not lying with the linen clothes but was put in a place apart.* This seems to show that the Lord rose with deliberation. There was no kind of hurry about the matter. One of the proofs I suppose may be that the Lord appeared at different times of the day to different classes of people, and that He appeared not to one sense, as sight, but to other senses, as hearing, and handling, touch. I cannot think that that was a spectral body which could speak and eat and drink and argue and so forth with the disciples on the way to Emmaus.

We all thank the Canon for his valuable address.

Rev. JOHN TUCKWELL, M.R.A.S.—I should like to join with others in expressing my sense of indebtedness to Canon Girdlestone for this very powerful and admirable address which he has given us. It comes at a time when our thoughts are very much directed towards that great event which has been described as the fundamental fact of our Christian faith. Of course it raises many questions which it is not possible for us to answer ; many questions that await solution.

It does not militate against the reasonableness of our faith in supposing that the body of Christ did rise from the dead. The apostle's language, "It was sown a natural body and raised a spiritual body,"† shows us that there must have been a great and fundamental change which took place. I apprehend we are to understand that from that passage that Christ's resurrection body was the first-fruits of a wide resurrection which is still to take place in the case of all men who have died since humanity existed upon the face of the earth. What our resurrection bodies will be we do not know. There are many speculations upon the subject but most of them are worthless. The only evidence and testimony we have is that of Scripture. Away from that we flounder about in unfamiliar regions.

There is one point which the Canon might have occupied more

* John xx, 6, 7.

† 1 Cor. xv, 44.

time in dealing with, and that is the ministry of the Apostles and others of the resurrection of Christ. As you look through the book of Acts you find continually that in the ministry which the Apostles bore to the world, that fact is the fundamental part of their ministry of salvation. Even when the apostle Paul was preaching among the Greeks at Athens he proclaimed Jesus and the resurrection. If there be no resurrection our faith is vain; we are yet in our sins. The resurrection understood in the ministry of the apostles is an actual resurrection. The body was sown a natural body, it was raised a spiritual body. The body in which He had lived and died was raised again from the dead. There were the marks indeed of the nail-prints in feet and hands. He was able to eat and drink with the disciples at their morning meal on the shores of the lake of Tiberias. If you ask how this was done you have no answer. We have to wait for the solution; but that the body was not a mere phantasm is shown. "A body hath not flesh and bones as ye see Me have." It was the body that had been used by Christ in His earthly life and which was taken on by the spirit at His resurrection subsequently.

Then there is another important fact that may serve to establish our faith. Ever since apostolic times and down to the present day no ministry of the Gospel has been of any effect that has omitted the doctrine of the resurrection, and we see it continually going on. We must bear in mind the fact that the pledge of the reality of the resurrection and the reality of the ascension into heaven was that extraordinary phenomenon that took place afterwards in the gift of the Holy Ghost, and we are witnesses of a phenomenon of that nature that cannot be accounted for on any other grounds than these. Perhaps some of you have been in Wales and have seen the things taking place there. What is taking place is inexplicable on any other ground than that the Gospel record is true. If the Gospel record be untrue, then all we can say is that untruth is more blessed and more mighty and more effective upon men's characters than truth. But it is impossible for anyone to believe that error and falsehood can effect these wonderful changes which are taking place in the character and conduct of men.

The Gospel records are essentially records of truth, or these results could not be attained among every class of society, and among all nations wherever it is spoken.

Colonel ALVES.—I would like to ask Canon Girdlestone if outside the Bible there are any allusions in ancient history to the crucifixion of our Lord. There can be no doubt that the disciples went to look for the body of our Lord and that body they did not find, but they found the clothes which He could not have got out of in the sepulchre, that He must have passed through them with a body that was not subject to the limitations that we are subject to. We do not know all the laws of matter.

The risen body of our Lord was not subject to these limitations, but that it was the real body I suppose there can be no doubt. Anybody who reads Scripture honestly cannot dispute the fact that it was a material resurrection of His substantial body.

The SECRETARY.—Before this interesting meeting closes I wish to return thanks to two individuals in the meeting. It is not often we have opportunities of returning thanks to two persons for the part in which they have taken; but we have in the first place to give our very sincere thanks to the venerable gentleman who is now present with us, Dr. Peebles, for his kindness in withdrawing the paper which was down in his name, and which some of you have read, at the request of the Council. I feel sure that it must have been rather a shock when I did my duty in informing him, in the best terms I could command, that the Council wished him to withdraw his paper, which he had taken such pains to write, which is really full of a great deal of fine reasoning and enthusiasm, and which breathes a very strong Christian spirit on the part of the writer. It does not follow, however, that we all agree in everything that an able Christian writer will write.

Having therefore rendered this tribute to Dr. Peebles for the very kind manner in which he fell in with the views of the Council—some men would have protested and given a great deal of trouble and annoyance, but it was not at all what Dr. Peebles has done—the question was who was to fill the gap, and fortunately we had in the Council Room one who is amongst our most leading and learned members, Canon Girdlestone, who very kindly consented, on it being suggested to him, to give an address on the Resurrection of our Lord, a subject most suitable for the season, and for which he was fully prepared when called upon at any time to deliver. It has been one of the clearest expositions on the subject that I have ever listened to or read, and I feel

sure we shall all go away greatly benefited and enlightened on this most wonderful and mysterious and most glorious event, the Resurrection of our Lord, on which our faith depends for the present and for the future.

There is only one point which he, or any speaker, has not alluded to, that is, the Ascension. The Resurrection and the Ascension go hand in hand. Our Lord went into heaven in the presence of His disciples, probably on the Mount of Olives, and they saw Him go up into heaven and a cloud received Him out of their sight. That was the body which rose from the resurrection grave and which is now living in the heavens, where we hope to join Him.

The CHAIRMAN.—Professor Hull has anticipated me in proposing thanks to Canon Girdlestone.

The instances given of the doubts are very valuable. Such are very evident tokens of authenticity, the doubts of the disciples are recorded. These incidental proofs are given and are very valuable. The fact that no one saw the Lord rise, the fact that the doubts of very large numbers of people are recorded, and also the fact that only Christians saw Him at all. These points seem to me valuable and only to be obtained by a little search beneath the surface. We are all most grateful to the Canon, and now I will ask him to reply to those questions which have been asked.

Canon GIRDLESTONE.—A question was asked about the old authors referring to our Lord's crucifixion and resurrection. Of course Tacitus refers to the subject in quite clear words and he mentions Pontius Pilate in connection therewith. It is the crucifixion which is referred to. I do not think the resurrection could have been referred to except by a Christian.

Then came the very obscure question, what became of the real flesh and blood of Jesus Christ. In the first place we have a very interesting testimony of St. Peter, making use of Psalm xvi, "Christ saw no corruption." All Jews believed that corruption set in after the third day. Of Lazarus it is said that on the fourth day symptoms of corruption were beginning to show themselves. Therefore we have to think not of a body lying dead, but of a human frame in good working order so far as all its structure was concerned, only dead through injury to the heart.

We have to consider the case of the body and blood separately. In the case of blood one asks, what is the use of blood? what is the

object of the heart with all the system? Well, the lungs are mainly used to aerate the blood, and the blood is simply to convey the sustentation to the parts. The blood is a carrier, and it carries the small corpuscles which furnish the nutriment of the whole system. In the risen body the system does not seem to need that method of nutriment at all.* What is the nutriment of the angelic frame? We read in the Psalms that men did eat angels' food. Do angels eat food? How little we know.

It is evident that the Lord was able to reproduce for the benefit of witnesses the very same aspect, the height and colour, and the tone of the voice, which had been known before. He had but to utter one word, "Mary," and she turned round and said, "Rabboni." There was no possibility of doubting that Jesus was the same person she had known before. When the two disciples were going to Emmaus they walked beside Him with burning hearts but did not know Him, but presently, at the breaking of bread, He was revealed. So it was in other instances.

What happened to the Lord's flesh at the Resurrection? I have often watched the process of an acorn's growth. One sees the development of the germ, and the manifestation of little rootlets, and then the parts of the acorn that seemed more important, perish; yet the essence remains in the rootlet and the shoot. But in Christ's case, so far as I can judge, the whole of the material was used up in the resurrection body. It was all turned to account. That body which had been a pure temple of a pure soul, and had never been injured in the way we so often injure our bodies by wrong-doing, that body in its pristine purity at the age of 33, was consigned to the grave, and the whole of the material of the body—apart perhaps from any remaining blood, if there was any, which may be doubted—the whole was turned to account in the resurrection body. It was sown in one condition; it sprang up in another condition. I do not think one is able really to say more on that subject. I notice some one said it was resolved into its elements. I would have liked to hear Professor Lionel Beale on this. He has

* It has been suggested to me that sin caused incipient decay, and that much less food would have been needed for the supply of waste tissue if it had not been for the constant antagonism with corruption to which we are subjected at present.—R. B. G.

often told us here of the germ in its original cell parting, parting, parting ; there might be a vestige of an original cell of Adam in every one of us, and it might be there is that *residuum* in the resurrection body that secures its identification with the body that now is. But I dare not speculate on this subject. I will only add that death is abnormal ; Christ is the Prince of Life ; and if any one were to start a new human Race in its perfection and in full life, it would be that Being Who has done so much for the moral and spiritual welfare of the Race as it now is.