

## THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST.

### II.—VALIDITY OF THE APOSTOLIC TESTIMONY.

THE first doubt which might arise in our minds would be one bearing upon the *sincerity* of the apostles, and throwing suspicion upon their testimony as the work of imposture. Having once made the cause of Jesus their own, would they not have done all they could to support it? And if even a falsehood was needful for this end, had they not gone too far to draw back? It would not have been the first time that a pious fraud had served to prop up a losing cause.

It was by this accusation of imposture that the Jews at the moment sought to paralyse the effect of the preaching of the apostles. At the time when the first Gospel was drawn up, about thirty years after the death of Jesus, the report which had been spread abroad in the earliest times by the Sanhedrin, that the apostles had secretly conveyed away the body of Jesus and had hidden it, in order that they might announce his resurrection, was still believed by a considerable number of the Jewish people.<sup>1</sup>

But it is clear that this accusation could not have obtained any great success at the time, since it did not prevent the immediate formation, in Jerusalem, of a Church containing many thousands of believers,

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxviii. 13-15.

nor its extension throughout Palestine, and even among the heathen; so that twenty-five years only after the death of Jesus, St. Paul was writing letters addressed to Christian Churches, very numerous and very full of life, scattered through Asia Minor, Greece, and Italy. The Epistle to the Romans, written in the winter of A.D. 58-9, presupposes the foundation of the Church as already accomplished in the capital of the world. The great persecution which raged in A.D. 64—thirty years after the death of Jesus, against the Christians in Rome, and of which the heathen historian Tacitus has preserved for us the frightful picture—would of itself prove the rapidity and the power with which the preaching of the Risen One had overspread the world, and the belief which it had everywhere gained.

We thus ascertain by the help of an undeniable fact that the charge of insincerity made by the Jews against the apostolic testimony missed its aim, and produced no effect upon the minds of impartial persons all over the world. Why was this? Because the human conscience possesses the instinct of true morality, and in virtue of this instinct it has never felt itself able to attach the epithet of false witnesses to the persons of the apostles of Jesus Christ.

These men were pronounced by the judgment of their contemporaries upright, loyal, even holy men; and the verdict passed upon them by the conscience of their contemporaries who were personally acquainted with them is still confirmed by the conscience of the present age as the result of the study of their writings. Let any one read a few lines of the Epistle of James, or of the First Epistle of Peter,

and he will feel himself in a region of truth and holiness which excludes imposture.

This remark applies even more evidently to St. Paul. It cannot be said of him that he was prejudiced by his antecedents; or if he was so, it would have been in a direction exactly opposed to the gospel. To preach the Resurrection was, for him, to give the lie to the whole of his past career in his life as a Pharisee. By receiving baptism in the name of Jesus, he sacrificed all the hopes of honour, power, and wealth which he might have founded upon his great capacities and upon the influence which he had already acquired, although still so young, amongst his own people. Now, how is it possible to doubt the sincerity of a man who prefers to a future the most brilliant, the life of a simple artizan, gaining his daily living by the work of his own hands, exposed to every privation, an object of fiercest hatred to those who had before been his admirers!

We have some words written by this man at the very moment at which he was preparing himself for execution. "The time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."<sup>1</sup> Reading such words as these, the conscience of mankind will always affirm that the writer of them was, at all events, an honest man.

Moreover, the victorious energy with which Paul and the Twelve founded the Church, and which they

succeeded in infusing into her, would not be conceivable in men who had to carry with them the heavy weight of remorse, the overwhelming consciousness that they were false witnesses.

The view for which I am here pleading is so evidently true, that the most advanced modern scepticism no longer disputes it. Strauss and Baur, those two *coryphæi* of the present unbelief, both reject as morally impossible the idea of imposture on the part of the apostles. "History," says Baur, "must hold to this fact, that, according to the belief of the disciples, the resurrection of Jesus Christ was a certain truth which could not be shaken. It is only in this faith that Christianity has found a solid basis for the whole of its historic development."<sup>1</sup> "The historian," says Strauss, "must acknowledge that the disciples firmly believed that Jesus had risen again."<sup>2</sup> And again: "That the Apostle Paul had heard from Peter, from James, and others, that Jesus had appeared to them, and that they all, as well as the five hundred brethren, were fully convinced that they had seen Jesus living who had been dead, is a fact which we will not dispute."<sup>3</sup>

Anything of which Strauss feels himself unable to question the truth, must rest upon a solid basis indeed.

The suspicion of imposture having been set aside, a second hypothesis presents itself, of which some modern critics have made themselves the advocates.<sup>4</sup> Might not that which the apostles took for a resur-

<sup>1</sup> *Drei ersten Jahrhunderte*. Second Edition, pp. 39, 40.

<sup>2</sup> *Leben Jesu*, 1864, p. 289.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 290.

<sup>4</sup> Schleiermacher.

rection have been simply a reawakening after a prolonged fainting fit, a merely natural recovery on emerging from a state of trance? Jesus had only hung for six hours on the cross. Now, generally speaking, from two to three days elapsed before the criminal condemned to this kind of death finally expired. Believing Jesus to be dead, the soldiers had not broken his legs, as they had those of the two malefactors, and He had only fainted. He was laid, for dead, in the grave, where the freshness of the sepulchre combined with the reviving action of the spices with which He had been embalmed soon brought Him to Himself, and gave Him strength to reappear on the third day in the midst of his followers.

Let us first call to mind a fact which may throw some light upon the one now before us. The Jewish historian, Josephus, one day, during the siege of Jerusalem, received from the Roman general, Titus, whose prisoner of war he was, the command to act as guide to a *reconnaissance*. On his way, he saw by the roadside some of his unhappy fellow-countrymen whom the Romans had taken prisoner and crucified. Returning to the camp, he begged of Titus an order of release for three of them whom he had recognized. This favour was granted to him. Notwithstanding the most careful medical attendance, two of them soon succumbed; a method of treatment, followed for some time, saved the life of the third. We may see, by this instance, that even after having escaped that horrible death, it was no easy matter to recover life and the use of the vital powers.

Jesus, before his crucifixion, had already suffered

much both in mind and body. He had passed through death by anticipation in Gethsemane. He had undergone the terrible suffering of the Roman flagellation, which left deep furrows in the back of the victim, and which was reckoned nearly equal to capital punishment. Then his feet and hands had been pierced with nails. The small amount of strength which could still have been left to Him had been exhausted by the six hours of that fearful torture which He had already endured. Parched with thirst and wholly exhausted, He had at last uttered the supreme cry recorded by our Evangelists. A Roman soldier had, besides, driven a lance into his heart. Without food or drink, without surgical attendance or help of any kind, He had passed a day and two nights in the mortuary cave. And behold Him, on the morning of the third day, reappearing suddenly, alive and radiant! On the feet which but two days before had been pierced through and through, He walks without difficulty a distance of two leagues—from Jerusalem to Emmaus. He is so active, that during the meal He suddenly disappears from the sight of his two fellow-travellers; and by the time they return to the capital to announce the good news to the apostles, they meet Him there again! He has preceded them. With the suddenness which characterizes all his movements, He presents Himself all at once in the room where his disciples are assembled. Would these be the ways of a man who had just been taken down half dead from the cross, and been buried in a state of complete exhaustion? No; either the story is a fiction,—and then what becomes of the honesty, already recog-

nized, of those who reported it? or else it is true, and the return of Jesus to life is more than a mere convalescence. Here, once more, Strauss has done homage to truth. "Is it possible that a man half dead, who had dragged himself in languor and exhaustion out of his grave, whose wounds required careful and prolonged attention, should have left upon the minds of his disciples the impression of the Conqueror of death and the grave, the Prince of life—an impression which is nevertheless the source of all their subsequent activity? Such a return to life would only have served to weaken the impression which Jesus had previously made upon them in his life and in his death, and could never have changed their grief into enthusiasm, and exalted their admiration into adoration." <sup>1</sup>

Lastly, how could Jesus have ended a life so recovered? Withdrawing Himself from the notice of his apostles, He must have retired silently into some remote spot; and while He was dying gradually, like any other man, from sickness or old age, allowed them to publish to the world the story of his resurrection and glorious ascension! What could we think of conduct such as this? If the suspicion of imposture has been shewn to be inadmissible for the servants, is it not still more so for the Master?

That the testimony of the apostles presupposes in them a real conviction, is acknowledged even by our adversaries. That this conviction could not have been produced by the sight of a man creeping half dead out of his tomb, is also a point gained and con-

<sup>1</sup> *Leben Jesu*, 1864, p. 298.

ceded. How then, we ask once more, are we to explain the triumphant faith of the apostles in the resurrection of Jesus, without admitting the fact of the Resurrection itself? There is but one expedient left for unbelief—the third and last—that of asserting that the appearances of the risen Jesus were only internal visions, resulting from the excited state of mind of the disciples. It is into this explanation that modern unbelief has generally settled down, and it is developed as follows.

Mary Magdalene, first, thought she saw near the sepulchre Jesus risen. It was but a hallucination, an after-effect of the mental derangement from which Jesus had once cured her. This morbid state of mind propagated itself amongst the first disciples and took the form of an epidemic, especially when the apostles, on their return to Galilee where they had lived with their Master, came, at every step, upon places and objects which awoke in them memories so dear to their hearts. From this moment they thought they saw Jesus everywhere: on the sea-shore, on the road, on the mountain-top—everywhere this image haunted them. It was, then, in good faith that they believed their Master to be risen again, whilst these appearances were really only the reflection of their own preoccupied state of mind. This was the case also with the appearance of the Lord to Paul on the way to Damascus. Paul believed he saw and heard, but in reality he only saw and heard what was passing within himself.

Let us test this third explanation, as we have done the others, by the facts—I mean the facts granted even by our adversaries.



1. This explanation might appear admissible if, in the narratives of the appearances of Jesus, the apostles had spoken of contemplating a celestial figure hovering between heaven and earth. But they heard discourses, reproofs, commands, promises, proceed from the lips of Him whom they thought they saw. He said to them: "O slow of heart to believe!" again, "Go, and teach all nations;" again, "Tarry ye in Jerusalem until ye shall be endued with power from on high." Not only did He speak to them, but He ate and drank with them, and that in order to prove to them that He was neither a mere phantom nor a dream of their imagination.

Does not all this surpass the utmost possible limits of hallucination? There remains, then, only the expedient of charging the narratives with falsehood. But in that case, what becomes of the good faith of those who have filled the mind of the Church with these fictions?

2. Hallucinations, whether of sight or hearing, are a phenomenon of disease, a symptom of some grave physical or moral morbid affection—the prelude of a nervous fever for instance, or of a state of insanity. But we meet with nothing of that nature in the subsequent life of the apostles. St. Paul speaks indeed of a *thorn in the flesh*, of some suffering, the pressure of which was painful to him. But none the less does he for the space of thirty years carry on in the whole world the work of his most valiant ministry, labouring in the night to earn his living, and in the daytime to win souls for Christ, until the sword of the Roman emperor cut the thread of his life on his way from Rome to Ostia. In vain do we look

for that nervous fever which the hallucination at Damascus had led us to expect. And as to madness, read his Epistles! It were much to be wished that there were many men of sound mind who could reason with so close a logic, so well-balanced a judgment. Moreover, Paul was not the only one who saw and heard something on the road to Damascus. According to the two narratives contained in the Acts, Paul's companions did not understand the words of Him who communed with him, but they heard a voice; neither did they see the face of Him who was speaking, but they were struck down with an extraordinary light.<sup>1</sup> Call this story a falsehood—we understand you; but then we find ourselves brought back, over and over again, to the hypothesis of imposture, from which we thought we had effected our escape.

The career of St. Peter and of the other apostles lasted from thirty to fifty years, without, so far as we know, their state of sanity having been open to question. At the time of their death there existed already, spread throughout the world, a Church of about half a million believers, the fruit of their labours. With respect to Peter in particular, we know that he suffered martyrdom in Rome, during the persecution of Nero, about the year A.D. 64, after thirty years of labour. Such a ministry is certainly a sufficient certificate of sanity. But, besides, we still possess his principal Epistle, written shortly before his death; it is to be found in our New Testament. Nothing could be written more calmly and soberly.

3. But suppose we admit that the appearances of

<sup>1</sup> Acts ix. 7; cf. xxii. 9.

Jesus were the result of a hallucination of sight or of hearing in one, two, or even three of the persons who affirm that they saw Him after He was risen. This moral phenomenon, strange as it is in itself, is far from being sufficient to account for the facts. Having once admitted it in the case of Mary Magdalene, St. Peter, and St. Paul, we must do so also with regard to James, and to the two disciples at Emmaus ; although it is difficult to reconcile a walk together and a conversation of two hours with such an explanation. This hypothesis of hallucination must also be extended to the Twelve, including the sceptical Thomas, who believed he saw, heard, and even touched Him, when there was in reality nothing there ! Grant all this, if desired. But the five hundred ! Five hundred persons under a hallucination at the same moment ! Five hundred persons who all thought they saw somebody who was not really there, and heard his words and received his farewell ! Every physician would do well to make a note of this fact, without doubt unique in the annals of science.

4. When a man under hallucination thinks he sees and hears things which are really only passing in his own brain, these illusions are in the direction of his favourite ideas ; they are the reflection of the fears or desires with which his mind is preoccupied. Now this psychological condition is wanting in the case before us. The disciples had no hope, no idea of seeing that inanimate body which had been laid in the grave reappear. They charge with madness the women who first come to tell them of a resurrection. These women themselves, as they went to the sepulchre,

were so far from entertaining any such thought, that they brought with them spices for the purpose of embalming the Lord's body. That was specially the object of the expedition of Mary Magdalene to the sepulchre early in the morning.<sup>1</sup> It is easy to imagine we see and hear anything that we ardently hope for and impatiently expect. But something which we are not even thinking of—it is morally impossible!

That which the disciples seem to have hoped for was this. They imagined to themselves Jesus coming down in glory from the heaven into which they believed Him to have re-entered at the moment of his death, in accordance with the words He had said to them, "I go to my Father." It had been under this impression—a very natural one from a Jewish point of view—that the thief had said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me *when thou comest into thy kingdom;*" that is, when thou comest down from heaven as the Messianic king. Probably it was this misunderstanding amongst his followers, shutting out from their minds the idea of his resurrection, which Jesus wished to correct when He said to Mary Magdalene, "I am not yet ascended to my Father."<sup>2</sup> If, therefore, the disciples had imagined anything in accordance with the expectations of their own minds, it would have been an apparition of their Master from heaven, but certainly not a return to existence in that mortal flesh which they thought He had put off for ever.

Or perhaps some one will assert that they remembered the words in which Jesus had foretold his resurrection? Strauss was too wise to put forward

<sup>1</sup> John xx. 2, 15; Mark xvi. 1; Luke xxiv. 1, 10.

<sup>2</sup> John xx. 17.

anything of the sort. Such a confession would tell powerfully against rationalism.

In order to extricate themselves from this network of difficulties, two of the best philosophers of modern Germany, Weisse and Lotze, have acknowledged that we must indeed admit that something happened, but that this something may have been only an influence exercised by the spirit of Jesus, now returned into the kingdom of spirits, upon the spirits of the disciples, in order to give them the impression of the reality of his heavenly life, and to communicate to them the impulse which they needed in order to become propagators of his religion. This is, in other words, to substitute belief in ghosts for belief in the Resurrection. If we must choose between the two, our choice is, I think, made. If not, I would ask you to call to mind that this spirit of Jesus, which is thus said to have appeared to the spirits of his disciples, spoke, acted, ate and drank, in their presence, and with the special object of convincing them that He was not a mere spirit or ghost! Certainly this would be an instance of the trickery in which it is said spirits sometimes allow themselves.

And besides all this, we have not yet faced the greatest difficulty which besets the hypothesis of visions either imaginary or real, that is, the question, What became of the body of Jesus?

There are in this case but two alternatives open to us. Either the body remained in the hands of the disciples, or it was given up to the Jews. In the former case it is clear that in proclaiming the resurrection of their Master while they had his corpse under their eyes, the disciples would have been guilty

of an intentional and deliberate imposture. Now this supposition has been acknowledged, as we have seen, by the leaders of modern rationalism, to be inadmissible. We must therefore turn to the latter alternative, and suppose that the body of Jesus remained in the hands of the Jews. Let us grant this for a moment. But in that case we ask, How did it happen that the Jews did not produce this conclusive evidence when the apostles began to proclaim the Resurrection in Jerusalem? Why have recourse to the prison and the scourge to silence these pitiable madmen? A much more simple process may be adopted; there is the body: produce it! But no; they argue, they dispute, they imprison, they scourge; but nothing is shewn.

What answer do the adversaries of the Resurrection make to this? Baur stammers out, "As to the fact of the Resurrection in itself, that lies," says he, "outside the circle of historical investigations." How? Outside historical investigation, that fact, which, if true, is the central one in the history of the world! Strauss, the partner of Baur in pantheism, takes his colleague to task for that expression, and reproaches him justly with *eluding* in this manner the central point of the controversy.<sup>1</sup> And what does he say himself? He tells us of a corpse thrown by the Jews, after the execution, into the dust-heap, and of which it was impossible to recover the remains. But between the feast of the Passover and that of Pentecost, when the resurrection of Jesus was publicly proclaimed in Jerusalem by St. Peter and the Twelve, there had elapsed but a few weeks, and

<sup>1</sup> *Leben Jesu*, 1864, p. 288.

in that interval a corpse would neither become lost nor unrecognizable.

But why speak of weeks having passed away? It was on the morning of the third day that, according to all the narratives, and the concordant testimony of St. Paul, the disciples were convinced of their Master's resurrection. Now if the body had been thrown into the dust-heap, the friends of Jesus would have been quickly delivered from their delusion by the sight of his body in that public place.

In thus reasoning, we have for the moment assumed that the body had been given up to the Jews. But that could not be. According to Roman law, the bodies of those who had been executed were given into the hands of those who claimed them. Now, unless our Gospel narratives are forgeries, it was Joseph of Arimathea, a disciple of Jesus, who availed himself of this right, and who, having obtained the body of Jesus from the Roman governor, laid it in his own sepulchre. This account agrees with the fact that the women going to the sepulchre, did so with the object of embalming the body. They were sure therefore that it was at their disposal; which proves that it had remained in possession of the friends of Jesus. Besides, did not the Jews themselves, by the very fact that they accused the disciples of having stolen and concealed the body, confess in the clearest possible manner that it was not in their own hands?

Thus this body—this object so highly prized of the love of some and of the hatred of others—is not in the hands of any one! Friends and enemies alike seek for it and cannot find it. What, then, is become of it? The only explanation of this mysterious dis-

appearance is its reappearance as the risen body of Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

The attempt, then, to explain the fact of the apostolic testimony by suppressing that of the Resurrection itself has not succeeded in any way. The apostles did not invent the story of the Resurrection; their good faith has been acknowledged. They did not mistake one fact for another, confounding a mere awakening from trance with a resurrection; that also has been conceded. Lastly, they could not have been the dupes of their own imagination, fancying they saw and heard things which were really passing within themselves; the very nature of the appearances, the number and quality of the witnesses, the unaccountable disappearance of the body, exclude this third hypothesis. And with this the list of rationalistic expedients is exhausted.

What has been my object in this discussion of a character purely scientific? Has it been to afford a firm foundation for the faith of my readers in the resurrection of Jesus? By no means. Argument is not the foundation on which faith is built; the most that science can aspire to is to dissipate the doubts

<sup>1</sup> It has been asked of what nature was this risen body. Was it a material body like ours? If so, how could Jesus appear in a room with the doors closed? Was it a non-material body? How, in that case, could He eat, and allow Himself to be touched? In any case the fact of the Resurrection would not be compromised by the obscurity which surrounds the nature of the new body of Jesus. We are here in a region altogether beyond our experience. The whole state of Jesus was at that time one of transition. "I am not yet ascended," He says (John xx. 17), . . . "but I ascend." His body was then in process of transformation. On the one hand it still partook of the nature of the first body; on the other, it already possessed in some degree the attributes of the spiritual body, that is to say, it was perfectly subject to the spirit, and dependent upon its will. The Ascension marked the close of this development.



which it has itself raised. To awaken faith is the work of the apostolic testimony, presenting itself to our conscience in its noble, its holy simplicity. The Divine characteristics with which it is invested are at once apprehended by any one who possesses in its integrity the sense of that which is good, true, Divine. It is thus that faith is born. If afterwards she happens to meet on her way with objections raised by science which threaten to obstruct her course, she is not troubled; she waits, and leaves science to manage her own affairs. Before long this latter pulls her own work to pieces; she puts her arguments to the proof, and soon sweeps away with her own hands the difficulties which she has herself raised. When science has accomplished this task, as we have just now been attempting to make her do, faith, now seeing the way clear before her, resumes her course in peace, with the sense of one more victory gained, and of possessing still more assuredly the treasure in which her happiness consists.

F. GODET.

---

A CHAPTER OF GOSPEL HISTORY.

4.—THE CHILDREN IN THE MARKET-PLACE.—(*St. Matt.* xi. 16–20.)

“To what shall I liken this generation?” asked the Divine Critic of his age; and in reply to his own question He said, “It is like unto children.” In other circumstances Jesus represented childlikeness as the very *beau idéal* of character for all aspirants to citizenship and honour in the Divine kingdom. On the present occasion He thought of childhood on its less admirable and exemplary side, as the age of