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News and Notes

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The Resurrection of our Lord.

A GAIN and again we find that Muslim writers are attacking the Christian belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The attacks come from various angles. Christ did not die but someone was crucified in his place. He was crucified but did not die, was revived, and lived to travel to India and die there. Others set forth the varied theories taught them by rationalist critics of Christianity. However, much the materialistic views of the universe have been modified in the West of recent years, there are still those who would extrude what is called, for want of a better word, the supernatural from their theory of existence. Anyone thus minded must of course discount all evidence to the contrary. Such a method is quite unscientific Huxley says, "It is not on *a priori* considerations that objections to miracles can be based. To my mind the fatal objection . . . is the inadequacy of the evidence to prove any given case." From this it would appear that the occurrence of miracles must be allowed if the evidence is adequate. Modern science admits that physical nature is not the exclusive criterion of all reality. Any phenomenon of whatever nature is *a priori* possible. At the present stage of our knowledge of natural causes it would be unjustifiable for us to do violence to any scrap of evidence for the supernatural in order that our conventional opinions of what is possible might be satisfied. In this matter we should take heed lest we discount the evidence beforehand, and make it square with our preconceptions.

It must be admitted that between the Christian and the anti-Christian critics there must be a great gulf in regard to the sort of evidence which will be regarded as cogent. The Christian cannot treat the resurrection as a matter of pure history. Apart from the question as to whether there is such a thing as pure history, which we

very much doubt, we cannot treat the resurrection of Jesus Christ as such. For us it is inseparably bound up in an appeal to the spiritual nature—the Christian Gospel. Our susceptibility or otherwise to that appeal will influence our view of the resurrection. Again, no mere demonstration of the fact apart from its spiritual significance would be adequate for the Christian. It is not a mere event for the schools to wrangle about. Our interest in it is moral and religious. It belongs in our thought to the series of mighty acts of God significant for our salvation. (Acts v. 31 ; x. 42). In so far as it is an event it is history but in its character as an act of divine initiative assuring the victory of Christ it transcends history. It is not a metaphysical puzzle and the one who regards the manner of the appearances as the point of interest has the whole situation out of focus. Paul's experience had intellectual content but was definitely more than intellectual. It was personal and religious. "The great conceptions analysed were no mere abstractions, no mere dogmas applicable here and there to persons who might see their beauty and feel their force. They were parts of a religion experimentally verified and these conceptions, these religious experiences were bound up with his faith in the resurrection." Thus in approaching the evidence for the resurrection, it is inevitable that I should ask what value the resurrection has for me, what experience of mine stands related to it and what is the value of these experiences. To emphasise the moral and spiritual phenomena of Christianity in this way is not to adopt a method which violates history. Whatever may be said for the value of the Christian experience, one thing is plain, this experience is historical. The religious and moral phenomena alleged to be the direct result of the resurrection, occurred and do occur. From the first preaching of the disciples which gave evidence of their spiritual transformation, to the present day these phenomena are involved in the development of a large portion of mankind. The Christian church with its influence on two millenniums must be taken account as an *historical fact of supreme importance*.

As we variously appraise the influence of Christianity so our explanations of it will be coloured. If we hold with Nietzsche that those who hold to the Christian ethic are 'physiologically botched,' if we think the Christian experience a disease, we shall look for its origin in fraud or delusion. If we consider it the holiest, purest, most invigorating, divinest force in the world's life, we shall be disposed to find its origin in some unique and possibly mysterious experience. Is it possible to think that the Christian experience of salvation, of spiritual life through the indwelling Christ, of eternal life in the midst of time, is mere disease and delusion?

The church exists, the New Testament exists, the Christian experience exists. They demand explanation. How came they to exist? Few would venture to ascribe their origin to fraud but the Ahmadiya cannot be maintained without holding the early disciples

guilty of fraud. Most are forced to admit that the Christian ethic is of the highest type. The chief quarrel with it according to these critics is that it is impracticable. It certainly *is* impracticable without the principle of sacrifice and the dynamic of love which the Ahmadiya tends to dismiss as weakness. But when the Christian rises to the height of that ideal of sacrificial love then the world will learn that the *Christian ethic is not impracticable*. However, regard the Christian system as the greatest system of moral idealism which the world has ever known, then how can fraud be the origin of it?

Not far from this is the theory that the belief that Jesus *would* rise accounts for the statements that he *did* rise. If the message of Easter was used to bolster up the faith, then the disciples were dishonest. We know that sometimes beliefs have inspired stories, e.g., the story of Psyche and Eros which the Neo-platonist wrote to embody his belief in the immortality of the soul. But this is vastly different from concocting fictions about an historical person to support a belief. Paul's abhorrence of doing evil that good might come, shews what the Christian conscience would be likely to be on this matter.

We have further to consider whether "it is consistent with our belief in the fundamental rationality of the universe to believe that the mightiest force in human history is the result of delusion." Granted the beneficence and moral value of Christianity, is delusion an adequate explanation of its origin? Fraser, in *Psyche's Task*, argues elaborately for superstition as a conservator of human morality, inducing respect for government, human life, private property and the marriage tie. Hence he makes it appear that delusion has been a potent factor for good in the infancy of the race. Can Christianity be brought down to the same level? So far as we can see Fraser's thesis is simply an illustration of the providence of God over-ruling for good what on its merely human side often degenerates into the grossest cruelty and immorality. But Christianity does not shew such violent contrasts in its working, for the inquisition is not an illustration of the working of Christianity but of a Satanic perversion of Christianity. If we consider the value of Christianity to the world and its inherent power, beauty and truth, "so much the more inevitable it must seem that what lies behind . . . is not an illusion or a morbid experience misunderstood but the highest reality and truth which have ever told with regenerating power on the life of man."

Considering the matter historically, how did this alleged delusion arise? The orthodox Muslim explanation is that Jesus did not die at all on the cross. Another was crucified in his form. Did the disciples know of the substitution? If so then we are back at the theory of *fraud*. The negation of the resurrection is supported by the negation of the death of Christ in the manner in which it is recorded in the Gospel. When we realise the centrality of the cross in Christian teaching, if we accept this theory of what happened, then we can only

say that the whole of the story of Christ is untrustworthy. If Christ was not crucified then we can have no confidence that any of the things recorded of him are true. But supposing the disciples were ignorant of the substitution? Then they were deceived. And by whom? We have to accept the horrible idea that Christ himself kept them in ignorance. The Muslim considers that it would be derogatory to the dignity of a prophet that he should die in the manner in which Jesus died. Was it then consonant with that high dignity that he should lend himself to the perpetuation of a lie? The last alternative is that the substitution took place without the knowledge of the disciples and that Jesus himself was unable by the act of God to inform the disciples as to what had actually taken place. Is God then the author of a lie? Such a hideous idea would bring the whole moral structure of the universe toppling about us. Poor Christianity went on in its benighted path for six-hundred years before the matter was put right! Can we really consider for a moment such a scandalous hypothesis which involves the truthfulness either of God, of Christ or of the disciples of Christ?

Recently the theory of Renan has been advanced by Muslim objectors. He says that the delusion arose from the hysterical imagination of Mary Magdalene. "La gloire de la resurrection appartient donc a Marie de Magdala; apres Jesus c'est Marie qui a le plus fait la fondation du christianisme." As an explanation (?) of this statement he says, "Pouvoir divine de L'amour! moments sacres ou la passion d'une hallucinee donne au monde un Dieu ressuscite!" Renan's poetic imagination has not conceived an explanation of how a weak-minded woman could convince sceptical and despondent men and so influence them that her experiences were reproduced in them. "That so many persons of different temperament and varied intelligence should be deceived by hallucinations of sight and sound is incredible." It should also be noticed that Renan's theory violates the records by putting Mary Magdalene so pre-eminently at the source of Christian tradition of the resurrection. Paul does not include her in his list of witnesses; Luke does not mention any appearances of the risen Lord to her; and though John does so, he does not consider it important enough to count in reckoning the number of appearances to the disciples.

If neither fraud nor delusion is considered an adequate explanation, can we explain the belief in the resurrection of Christ by reference only to the life of Christ? Does "the impression made by his life led to the conviction of his immortality," afford an explanation? The whole testimony of the primitive witnesses goes to prove the contrary. They conceived the experiences which came to them as direct consequences of the resurrection and no explanation of the resurrection is adequate which does not take into consideration the significance it had for the early witnesses.

Turning to the record we have a very clear and unambiguous description of the feelings of the early disciples when it seemed that the life of their beloved Master had been cruelly ended. Luke's story of the disciples on the way to Emmaus rings true. It reflects faithfully their thoughts and feelings at the time. They are already speaking of Jesus in the past tense and lamenting what might have been. But it is said: their despair was shortlived. The incomparable moral grandeur of Jesus and his winsome grace had so captivated their hearts that his death brought but a momentary extinction of these emotions which after the shock of Calvary burst forth again with greater force. He rose again *in their hearts* and reasserted his influence and rekindled their love. This of course might be referred to in a metaphorical manner as a rising from the dead, but if such was the experience of the disciples we should hardly have expected a momentary extinction but a gradual adjustment of their thought in face of that altogether unexpected event, the death of the Messiah, a pondering on his teaching, and possibly a return to the Scriptures to find what these things could mean. All this would have taken time. The startling suddenness of the change from despair to joyful assurance seems to demand some other explanation than a pondering on the life of Jesus. Could memory account for all the facts of the Gospel? The memory of the lost usually means regret and the more attached we have been to them, the dearer they have been to us, the more poignant is the regret. Hence normally, the feelings recorded of the disciples before Easter are just what we should expect. It is the transformation which is unexpected and surprising. It is hard to see also how the death of Jesus could have been regarded as anything more than an unmitigated tragedy apart from some extraordinary event which took place afterwards. Memory of the Lord would lead to that poignant regret and despair that his life-work had been cut short, something else is required to account for the change from despair to abounding joy. If it be said that the predictions of Jesus would be sufficient to account this change, we can only reply that the non-fulfilment of the predictions would only increase the despair.

The case of Paul cannot be explained on the lines that the resurrection of Jesus was a deduction from his life. Can an influence be reasserted which has never been felt? What tender memories had Paul to recall? With this in mind we agree with Denney in his confident assertion that "No brooding of his friends on the memory of Jesus would have given to his personality that revival which they asserted when they preached the resurrection."

Nor is this all that may be said in this connection. It must be remembered that the resurrection was a new revelation. The disciples did not grasp the significance of the death of Christ till after the resurrection. Before Paul became convinced that Christ had risen "he regarded Jesus of Nazareth as self-convicted of failure, conclusively

refuted by the facts of his own experience, cursed and abhorred of God as well as men, demonstrated by his crucifixion to be the opposite of what he claimed; an idea here which has its counterpart in the Muslim idea that a prophet could not have suffered as Jesus did. Paul had held that the death of Jesus was just the divine retribution on an impostor (see Deut. xxi. 23 and Gal. iii. 13). Afterwards he regards that death in quite another way and the resurrection he regards as God's seal on the loving devotion of Christ to death and the act of God which turned a tragedy into a triumph. Note how Sanday and Headlam summarise the significance of the resurrection for Paul. It is the "most conclusive proof of Christ's divinity, . . . placed on Christ's death the stamp of God's approval . . . is the most decisive proof of the atoning value of Christ's death . . . is the strongest guarantee of the resurrection of the Christian." To the man to whom the Christian Gospel is indeed good news, the new and valuable revelation he finds to be an integral part of the New Testament faith and preaching, seems incapable of explanation by anything less than the Easter message of an event commensurate with the transforming and regenerating power which characterises that faith and accompanies that preaching.

Yet again, with reference to the experience of Paul, if it was merely a spiritual and figurative rising in the heart which was the basis of his Christian life, why should he emphasise appearances? Why does he refer to Christ's burial? Surely the rising is relative to the burial. Why does he refer to the third day? What had that got to do with the experience on the road to Damascus? Does it not on the face of it mean that Paul is referring to a datable event? Arnold Meyer tries to explain "buried" with reference to the mystical tendency in Paul, e.g., "Buried with Christ" Rom. vi. 4. This strikes us as nothing more than a ridiculous inversion. Mystical meanings would not have arisen if Paul had been unable to base them on historical occurrences.

Finally there is the strange phenomenon of so-called historical reconstructions of what happened, evolved out of the imagination of the people who invent them, while they ignore or mutilate out of all recognition the only sources of information which we have. Such are that Joseph of Arimathaea stole the body, the fiction of Toledoth Jesu which says Judas stole it, the romance of Venturini which relates that Jesus did not die but was nursed by the Essenes . . . the probable source of the Ahmadiya romance of the present day. These and many others do far more violence to history and to historical method than could possibly be alleged of the Gospel.

If we find mystery, what more can we expect? With regard to such a transcendent event, who could be adequate to explain what took place? The records do not as a matter of fact explain the mode of being in which Jesus appeared. Lake thinks that Paul's conception

involves the transubstantiation of the body of Jesus into spirit. Then the disciples saw a ghost. But Luke who stands nearest to Paul, strongly asserts the contrary (see xxiv. 37). Which should we prefer, Lake or Luke? We are not in the position to understand the "quasi-physical or fourth dimensional concomitants" of the resurrection appearances but these are not matters of primary consideration. Denney's statement that the spiritual body is not in Paul's thought a body which has been converted into spirit but one in which matter is made wholly subservient to the purpose of spirit, seems to us to be really adequate. When Christ rose, he rose in a manner suitable to the purpose he had in view, which was to convince "his own" of his acceptance by God and to lead them forth to share the victory which God has given to him. We know from the record that condescensions were made to the weak in faith. But they are not central to the narrative. What is, is the manifest triumph of Christ by the power of God which was to lead men to faith in the omnipotence of love and sacrifice, and in the abiding presence of the ever-living Christ.

J. W. S.

The Promised Comforter.

In the *Islamic Review* of September appears an article entitled "*The Mission of Muhammad.*" The writer says in the course of it:

"MUSLIMS are taught that Jesus came to redeem man, not with his blood but with the Divine Guidance that he was commissioned to impart. Unfortunately circumstances were so strong against him that he had to declare the coming of 'another Comforter' who should 'Guide you into all truth.' If *St. Paul* was to be accepted as the 'Promised Comforter,' then why should the Christian West find 'Guidance into all truth' so completely wanting in him?" This is an entirely new blunder to us.

In the same *Review* is an article on "*The Advent of the Prophet Foretold*" where the familiar claim is made that the Paraclete is the prophet Muhammad. In this the writer says "The Paraclete is repeatedly spoken of in the Bible as the 'Spirit of Truth' and it may be observed in passing that the word 'Paraclete,' can by no stretch of fancy, be twisted to fit in with the Holy Ghost, for nowhere in the Bible is the latter called the Spirit of Truth." Those who study their New Testament will know that the word Paraclete is found in the Bible in 1 John 2: 1. And if any man sin we have an advocate (*parakletos*) with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous, and in the Gospel according to St. John xiv. 16 and 26, xv. 26 and xvi. 7. In xiv. 26 we find these words: But the Comforter, *even the Holy Spirit*, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said unto you. It is plain that accuracy is not the strong point of the writer of this article.

Prayer and Praise.

OBSTACLES to the renewal of evangelistic work in Tripoli have been removed. Let us praise God for this and pray that the new work just begun may have the guidance of God's Spirit.

LET US PRAY that the wider distribution of God's Word may be fruitful and that places which up to the present have little to report of this all-important branch of evangelistic work may find devoted agents for it.

LET US PRAISE God for the consistent witness of devoted missionaries in Quetta and pray that their self-forgetfulness may win attention to their message.

LET US PRAY that a church among Urdu-speaking people may be formed in Mysore and for the work of our friends in Bangalore where new work has recently been started.

LET US CONFESS our failures and then knowing them to be lost in the abyss of Divine Mercy, press on in hope of the victory of Christ in us and through us.

Notice.

Any notification of change of address, names of new members or remittance of subscription, etc., should be sent to the Superintendent, Orissa Mission Press, Cuttack, India, and *not* to the Secretary of the League. The annual subscription to the League is Rs. 2-0-0 (English 3s. od.)

Matters of interest to members of the League, items of news and requests for prayer should be sent (if possible, early in the month) to the Hony. Secretary :—

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