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THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD

(Continued)

THE Empty Tomb did not of itself, and immediately, generate faith in the minds of the followers of Jesus that He had really risen from the dead. Mary Magdalene and the other women, who visited the sepulchre on the morning of the Third Day, seem to have thought only of the removal of the Body. Peter beholds the linen clothes lie, and the napkin that had been about the Head, but remains in doubt, and departs "wondering in himself". John, with the same tokens before him, alone attains to a nascent faith in the resurrection of Jesus. It needed something more than the Empty Tomb and the voices of angels to carry conviction to the minds of the disciples that the Lord was indeed victorious over death. To work in them full assurance of faith in this respect nothing less was required than His repeated Appearances in that body which was the body of His crucifixion, now in process of becoming the body of His glory.

This brings us to a brief review of these Appearances:—

(1) The Appearance to Mary Magdalene, recorded by John, also in the Appendix to Mark.

(2) The Appearance to the women in their flight from the Tomb, recorded by Matthew.

(3) The Appearance to Peter, recorded by Luke and Paul.

(4) The Appearance to the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, recorded by Luke, and also in the Appendix to Mark.

(5) The Appearance to the disciples on the evening of the day of the Resurrection, recorded by Luke, John and Paul, also in the Appendix to Mark.

(6) The second Appearance to the Apostles, recorded by John.

(7) The Appearance to seven disciples at the Lake of Galilee, recorded by John.

(8) The Appearance to the five hundred brethren at once, recorded by Paul. This is probably associated with the "appointed" meeting in Galilee, when the Eleven received their Commission from the Lord, as recorded by Matthew.

(9) The Appearance to James, the brother of the Lord, as recorded by Paul.

(10) The final Appearance to the Eleven, recorded by Paul. This is the meeting of Jesus with the disciples before the Ascension, recorded in the Gospel of Luke and in the Book of Acts, also in the Appendix to Mark.

(11) The Appearance to Paul, thrice recorded by Luke in the Book of Acts, also by Paul himself.

Here we raise the question : What impression of reality or historicity is likely to be produced by the records of these post-Resurrection Appearances of Jesus to His followers, upon a candid and competent mind ? The higher critics formerly treated them as wilful inventions, unconscious legends, or imported myths, and still to a considerable extent treat them thus. The Higher Criticism therein virtually assumes that the Apostolic Church had no real knowledge of its own history. But that view is untenable. The Church did not rise out of obscurity. From the first it stood in that fierce light which beats upon a despised, a persecuted, but a victorious cause. It was truly founded upon the Apostles, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone. But the Apostles were not alone. With them was a great cloud of witnesses. The Apostles naturally hold the primacy. They were themselves a large part of the events for which they testified and suffered. They were living embodiments of the great Traditions of the Church, and therefore the fountal sources of its history. These facts constituted an intellectual and moral atmosphere which was powerfully adverse to the foregoing critical theories of wilful invention, unconscious legend, and imported myth. That the Church exercised meticulous care regarding the witnesses and the witnessing to the post-Resurrection Appearances of Jesus is evident from the list of these given by Paul in 1 Corinthians xv. 3-8. It was not compiled by the Apostle ; he "received" it. It was already a Tradition in the Church. Its genuineness is beyond doubt. If Van Manen tried to discount it, Schmiedel accepted it almost with jubilation. Authorities regard it as emanating from the Mother Church of Jerusalem, and as having been received by Paul from Peter, on the first visit of the former to the city, three years after his conversion (Gal. i. 18). Using the best chronology available—that of Clemen—the year of his visit is 34, and the year of the crucifixion is 31. According to this reckoning the list of witnesses, as above, existed not later than three years after our Lord's Resurrection. This is highly probable ; but the

point here insisted on is the fact, as the list proves, that the primitive Church was in no wise at the mercy of wilful invention, unconscious legend, and imported myth, as critics assert. Schmiedel has made a firm declaration on this point: "The followers of Jesus really had the impression of having seen Him (after His Resurrection). The historian who will have it that the alleged Appearances are due merely to legend or to invention must deny not only the genuineness of the Pauline Epistles but also the historicity of Jesus altogether."

We may safely go much further and assert that the possession of a list of witnesses to the post-Resurrection Appearances of Christ *proves distinctly the existence of the historical instinct among the earliest believers*. Paul's list of witnesses represents, in typical form, "*the verified fact*," which is the goal and crown of all historical research. But it may here be said that the whole of these narratives of the Appearances of our Lord are pervaded by the supernatural, and the supernatural is the unhistorical, for miracles do not occur! That was the general dictum of the Science of the nineteenth century, but it is not the verdict of the ripest Science of the twentieth century, which allows the possibility of miracle. Those who now scout the miraculous can no longer therefore reckon themselves as in the "foremost files of time". They hold on to an antiquated view of things. Further, the sinless Christ is demonstrably the supreme moral miracle of the world; and not even the highest of the higher critics can prove the impossibility of physical miracles in this connection. Taking the subject as a whole we conclude that the narratives under review are well fitted to produce a sense of reality and historicity upon a candid and competent mind, and are eminently worthy of being received as "infallible proofs" that Jesus is the Prince of Life, most blessed for ever.

(To be continued.)

W. M. ALEXANDER.

Edinburgh.