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*THE HISTORICAL VALUE OF THE FOURTH  
GOSPEL.*

VI. THE RESURRECTION. (1)

THE Gospels give us no account of the resurrection. What they tell of is the empty tomb and appearances of the risen Jesus to His disciples singly or in groups. The nearest approach we have to anything which can be called an account of the resurrection itself is that in Matthew, who says, "Behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone, and sat upon it. His appearance was as lightning, and his raiment white as snow; and for fear of him the watchers did quake, and became as dead men."

We have here an attempted explanation of the way in which the stone came to be rolled away from the mouth of the tomb, and, perhaps we may add, of the reason why the guard was unable to hinder the exit of Jesus from the tomb. It is not part of our present purpose to investigate the historical probability of this statement made in Matthew. It may or may not be substantially true. It is an obvious criticism to make that a large circular stone rolling in a horizontal groove is not exactly a thing on which the angel could have sat. And indeed I confess that I am sceptical about this statement as a matter of history, because it is difficult to see what the evidence for it can be. I believe, however, that it is a well-attested fact that the stone was rolled away, and this apparently by no human hands, and that the body of Jesus, which had been laid in the tomb two days before, was gone.

It will be necessary in the present paper and the next following, in order to vindicate the historicity of the Fourth

Gospel, to consider the whole evidence for the resurrection. For it seems to be thought by many people at the present day that this evidence is of so conflicting a nature that it can no longer be accepted as trustworthy by men of honest mind. We shall then have to examine it with some care and minuteness in order to decide its true nature and value. We shall have to compare the story given in the Fourth Gospel with the accounts of all the Synoptists, and to take account too of the evidence afforded us by the statements of St. Paul in 1 Corinthians xv.

First of all, it will be well to consider the narrative of the Fourth Gospel by itself. For I take it that the writer, if not a personal disciple, at any rate writes as if he were, and he is prominent in the events which he describes. It seems desirable, then, to show that the accounts given in the last two chapters of this Gospel form a consistent whole, explicable on the theory of the Johannine authorship of the book. Afterwards we shall have to examine the relation of the Johannine story with the other accounts of the appearances of the Risen Lord.

Now if St. John be the author of the Fourth Gospel, it is clear that we have in its last two chapters evidence, in the strictest sense of the word, for the resurrection. Even though his Gospel be the latest of all in point of time its value as affording evidence of the resurrection may far exceed that of the Synoptists. We have certainly no right to start with the hypothesis that the Synoptists are here to be preferred to the Fourth Gospel. We ought first to examine St. John on the supposition that it is evidence, as it claims to be. If its claim is supported by consistency and probability, then we shall be able to give our Evangelist a fair hearing when we compare his story with that of the Synoptists.

We shall therefore proceed now to the examination of the contents of the twentieth chapter, and I think we shall find

reasons for believing that we have here the evidence of an eye-witness and not a tradition, and most certainly not a concocted story.

In this chapter, then, we have the account of three appearances of the Risen Jesus, the first to Mary Magdalene and the other two to the assembled disciples, the first time when Thomas was absent and the second time when he was there. Of two of these appearances the Evangelist, supposing him to be St John, was himself a witness ; of the other he could not of course be a witness, but he gives, I believe, substantially the account that Mary Magdalene herself gave of her own experience. The object of the writer seems to be to give in a straightforward way the steps by which he himself came personally to know of and to believe the fact of the resurrection.

He begins by telling of the visit of Mary Magdalene to the tomb which she found empty. She at once reported the fact to Simon Peter and to 'the disciple whom Jesus loved': "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb and we know not where they have laid Him."

Now we may remark in passing that the Fourth Gospel does not say that Mary Magdalene had gone alone to the tomb. It is necessary to insist on this point, for it has been urged as an objection to this Gospel that it is not in agreement with the Synoptists as to the number of the women. If it is not stated explicitly by our Evangelist that there were other women with Mary Magdalene, it is at any rate plainly implied that she had not gone alone to the tomb, for she uses the plural number in making her announcement: *We* know not where they have laid Him. If it be asked why the Evangelist does not explicitly state that other women had gone to the tomb with Mary Magdalene, I should say that it was not essential to his purpose. He is recording primarily his personal experiences in the matter. He tells them, first of

all, how he came to know that the tomb was empty. This he learnt from Mary Magdalene, not from the other women, whom, therefore, it would have been irrelevant to mention.

The Evangelist next goes on to tell of his visit to the tomb in company with Simon Peter and what they saw there. The story is very graphically told, and we can follow each detail of it. The younger disciple outruns the elder and comes first to the tomb, and stooping and looking in he sees the linen cloths lying ; yet entered he not in. Simon Peter, therefore, also cometh following him, and entered into the tomb ; and it is as if the Evangelist were recording how Peter, speaking from within, had described the appearance of the tomb. He beholdeth the linen cloths lying, and the napkin that was upon his head not lying with the linen cloths, but rolled up in a place by itself. Then, he adds, entered in the other disciple which came first to the tomb, and he saw and believed.

Believed what ? Some, with St. Augustine, have thought that the Evangelist meant only that he believed what Mary Magdalene had said, that the body had been taken away and laid elsewhere. But this is an interpretation of the passage which seems to me most unlikely. Much more probable is it that the arrangement of the grave-cloths in the tomb was such that the Evangelist saw that the body could not have been taken away as Mary had supposed. He believed that the appearance of the empty tomb indicated resurrection, of which the Lord had spoken before His death. The disciples had not understood His words, nor did they as yet, the Evangelist says, know the scripture that He must rise again from the dead.

The two disciples then returned to their home. Then follows the account of the appearance of Jesus to Mary Magdalene. If the view we take of the matter be right, then the Evangelist had the story from Mary's own lips, for she

came and told the disciples, "I have seen the Lord," and she told how He had said these things to her. We have, I believe, in these verses (11-17) substantially Mary's own story as she told it to the disciples and as the Evangelist remembered it. She told them how she had seen two angels in the tomb who had said to her, Woman, why weepest thou? how she had answered: Because they have taken away my Lord and I know not where they have laid Him. Then she had turned and saw one standing whom she thought to be the gardener—this, if true, could only have come from Mary herself—and to him she had said: Sir, if thou hast borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. Then came the sound of her name, by which she recognised the Master. Then the refusal to let her cling to Him—those strange words which seem to me to have the mark of genuineness—"Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended unto the Father, but go unto my brethren, and say to them, I ascend to my Father and your Father, and my God and your God." It is easier to believe that this happened as is here stated than that the story was invented.

The Evangelist now goes on to relate how Jesus appeared to the disciples when they were met together that same evening with closed doors for fear of the Jews. There is no attempt at explanation. He merely says what happened, what he himself had witnessed. Jesus came and stood in the midst and said to them, Peace be unto you. And when He had said this He showed them His hands and His side. Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord, who now spoke to them, giving them their commission: As the Father hath sent me, so send I you. He then breathed upon them and said: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whosoever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven unto them; whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained."

Next comes the story of Thomas, who had been absent

when Jesus appeared the first time. And then follows the statement that these appearances did not stand alone : " Many other signs did Jesus in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book ; but these are written that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that believing ye may have life in his name." So ends the twentieth chapter, which, according to our view, gives us the stages by which the Evangelist knew the fact of the resurrection.

We note that all these appearances recorded in St. John xx. took place in Jerusalem. And they are rejected by some critics on this very ground. For it is said that the earliest tradition places the post-resurrection appearances in Galilee, and that a choice must therefore be made between the two. But then the Fourth Gospel does not stop at the twentieth chapter, and the concluding chapter tells of an appearance in Galilee at the sea of Tiberias. Some have thought that this last chapter is not really a part of the Gospel, but is an addition by a later hand. The majority of critics, however, even those opposed to the historicity of the Gospel, do not support this view. And the internal evidence is all in favour of an identity of authorship.

Is the discrepancy, then, between the earlier and later Gospels in the matter of the post-resurrection appearances all that it has been made out to be ? May there not after all have been appearances both in Jerusalem and in Galilee ?

Now we observe at once in reading the Synoptists that it is certainly not the case that they know only of appearances in Galilee. St. Luke says nothing of appearances in Galilee, but he has a good deal to say of such in or near Jerusalem. But then St. Luke is said to belong to a later stage of the tradition which transfers the appearances in Galilee to Jerusalem, a process which, it is said, is continued or repeated in the Fourth Gospel. But we have already seen that the

Fourth Gospel, while it records appearances in Jerusalem, knows certainly of one appearance in Galilee. It has indeed been said that the last chapter of the Gospel was added by the writer for the purpose of bringing his work into accord with the early tradition which placed the appearances of the risen Jesus in Galilee. But such a theory proceeds from a presupposition that there were no appearances in Jerusalem, a presupposition which, as I shall now go on to show, is not justified by the so-called earliest tradition.

For where is that tradition to be found? The answer would be: In the Gospel according to Mark. But then it must be borne in mind that the original ending of Mark is missing; and there is nothing in the abrupt ending that we possess to justify us in concluding that there could have been no appearance in Jerusalem. That the conclusion of the Gospel in its original form did go on to tell of an appearance in Galilee I am not prepared to deny. The words of the young man arrayed in white and sitting in the tomb are (ver. 6) "Be not amazed; ye seek Jesus, the Nazarene, which hath been crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him! But go, tell his disciples and Peter, He goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him as he said unto you." Now these words have a place in Matthew also, and there it is told that the eleven disciples did go into Galilee, unto the mountain where Jesus had appointed them, and there they saw Jesus, for it is written: "When they saw him they worshipped him, but some doubted." It seems then most probable that Mark also went on to tell of this appearance in Galilee—the account of this being a part of the missing conclusion of that Gospel.

And honesty requires that we should not omit to mention the fact that St. Luke gives a different version of the words of the angel to the women. In St. Luke there is mention of



two angels—or rather two men in dazzling apparel—who say to the women : “ Why seek ye the living among the dead ? He is not here, but is risen. Remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, saying that the Son of Man must be delivered up into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.” Here we have mention of Galilee, but it is in a different connexion. In Mark and Matthew the disciples were told to go to Galilee, where Jesus would come to them, but here in St. Luke it is to words that Jesus had spoken *when in Galilee* that reference is made. St. Luke, it has been said, changed the reference to Galilee to conform with his view that the appearances took place in Jerusalem and not in Galilee. And this change of meaning in the words of the angel has been thought to render unreliable St. Luke’s story of the appearances at Jerusalem. If he could thus twist the reference to Galilee, may he not have twisted the history too ? I am not able to take this view, for I believe that the simplest way of explaining all the documents is to suppose that there were appearances also in Jerusalem. I allow, however, that St. Luke’s version of the words of the angel differs substantially from that in Mark and Matthew.

Returning now to these two Gospels, we see that Matthew does record an appearance in Galilee, and there is every reason to suppose that Mark did so too. But it must be carefully noticed that Matthew expressly records an appearance in Jerusalem too, before that in Galilee, for he tells how, as the women were hastening from the tomb to bring the disciples word, behold, Jesus met them saying, All hail. And they came and took hold of His feet and worshipped Him. Then said Jesus unto them, Fear not : go, tell my brethren that they depart into Galilee, and there shall they see me.

Whether or not a similar account had a place in the missing

verses of Mark we cannot of course say. But here it is plainly said in Matthew that Jesus appeared to the women on their way from the tomb to the city.

It is difficult, however, to reconcile this account of the appearance to the women with the narrative of St. Luke, who puts into the mouth of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus these words (xxiv. 22) : " Moreover, certain women of our company amazed us, having been early at the tomb ; and when they found not his body, they came saying that they had also seen a vision of angels which said that he was alive. And certain of them that were with us went to the tomb and found it even as the women had said ; but him they saw not."

Now this account would certainly seem to imply that the women had not seen Jesus. It is true that the subject of the sentence, ' him they saw not,' refers to those who had gone to the tomb in consequence of the words of the women, and not the women themselves. But the whole context suggests that neither had the women seen him ; it was only a vision of angels that they had had.

Are we then to exclude the statement in Matthew that Jesus appeared to the women as unhistorical ? But, if so, on what principle ? We cannot reject it on the ground of St. Luke's narrative, if at the same time we are not prepared to give credence to him in the rest of his account of these things, and if we are going to accuse him of romancing on the subject of the post-resurrection appearances in transferring them to Jerusalem.

For my own part, I am prepared not exactly to exclude the statement of Matthew about the appearance to the women but to interpret it as a not very exact statement of what actually happened. And this seems to me to be an important distinction which we must make in all these narratives. That is to say, we must distinguish between what is sub-

stantially true, and what is accurately expressed. I consider the statement in Matthew that Jesus appeared to the women to be substantially true because we know from St. John's Gospel that Jesus did appear to one of them, namely, to Mary Magdalene. But I find myself quite unable to put the post-resurrection narrative of Matthew on a level with that of the Fourth Gospel for accuracy of statement, because I believe the Fourth Gospel to be first-hand evidence.

Now the statement in Matthew that Jesus appeared to the women may be compared with another made by the same Evangelist, who says that the two robbers crucified with Jesus joined in the reproaches and revilings directed against Jesus upon the cross, whereas, according to St. Luke, one of the two reproved his companion for so doing. It is substantially true that the robbers did revile Jesus, for they did so in the person of one of them ; but I can see no reason, apart from prejudices of verbal inspiration, not justified by the facts, to suppose, as has been done, that both robbers had at first joined in the taunts, and that the one of them afterwards changed his tone. Had he done so, he could not have rebuked his companion as in St. Luke he does.

While, then, it is substantially true that the robbers reviled Jesus, the fact is not accurately expressed in Matthew. And so it is, I think, with the statement respecting the appearance to the women. This, as it stands, will not agree with St. Luke's narrative, and, if there is one story of the post-resurrection appearances in the Synoptists which carries upon its face the impress of historical truth, it is that of the appearance of Jesus to the two disciples going to Emmaus. It seems to me that we have here not merely substantial truth, but also an accuracy of statement of great historical value. It may be said that this is a purely subjective judgment and needs justification. If any question the judgment,

I should ask for an explanation of the extraordinary particularity of statement in the story. So marked is this that I cannot but believe that the Evangelist had the story from one of the actors in the scene, if not from his lips, then from his pen.

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