

*With the Authors Compliments*

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*The Historical Evidence of the  
Resurrection of Jesus Christ.*

**A Lecture**

**PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF THE CHRISTIAN EVIDENCE SOCIETY,  
AS A SUPPLEMENTARY LECTURE TO THE COURSE DELIVERED  
AT THE HALL OF SCIENCE, OLD STREET.**

BY THE

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**London:  
HODDER AND STOUGHTON,  
27, PATERNOSTER ROW.**

**MDCCCLXXIII.**

*Price Twopence.*



## *The Historical Evidence of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.*

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**T**HE writers of the New Testament have directly staked the truth of Christianity on the actual performance of a single miracle, the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. If this cannot be established as an historical fact, it is a mere useless waste of time and trouble to attack any other of the miracles of the Bible, or to attempt to prove their truth. If Jesus Christ did not rise from the dead, all the other miracles in the New Testament would not avail to prove that Christianity is a Divine revelation. If He did, this one alone would prove it, and support the weight of all the rest. As, then, this miracle forms the very key of the Christian position, I challenge unbelievers to join issue on its truth or falsehood.

I shall treat this subject precisely as I would any point of secular history. I shall not ask you to believe that the New Testament is inspired. I shall make use of the Gospels as I would any other memoirs. I shall claim no other authority for the letters of St. Paul than I would for the letters of Cicero. You on your part



must not object that miracles are impossible ; for, whether they are, or are not, is a philosophical question which lies beyond the regions of historical enquiry. In this lecture I can only deal with historical evidence.

I am now going to prove that the truth of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ rests on the highest form of historical evidence. In doing so I shall take for granted that no one who reads this lecture will deny the truth of certain *facts*, which all the learned unbelievers of Europe who have studied this question admit to be *facts*. To attempt to prove what they allow to be true would be pure waste of time. I shall take it for granted that what such men as Strauss, Renan, Baur and the whole Tubingen School admit, they will not deny. I shall assume therefore,

1st. That Jesus Christ existed ; that He collected round Him a body of followers, who believed in Him as the Messiah ; and that He was crucified by the authority of the Roman government.

2nd. That the first three Gospels were published, in the form in which we now read them, not later than A.D. 110 ; and that one of them was composed at least ten years earlier.

3rd. That the four most important letters of St. Paul, viz., that to the Romans, the two to the Corinthians, and that to the Galatians, were unquestionably written by St. Paul himself ; and that the latest of them cannot have been written at a later date than twenty-eight years after the crucifixion.

4th. That before the end of the first century, or less than seventy years after the crucifixion, Christian churches were to be found in all the great cities of the Roman Empire.

If any unbeliever refuses to concede these points,



I appeal from his judgment to that of all the eminent unbelievers of modern Europe, and say, Do not ignorantly deny as historical facts what all your own great men affirm to have been so.

The first point in my proof is, that the Christian Church has existed as a visible institution, without a single break in its continuity, for a period of more than eighteen centuries, and that it can be traced up to the date which is assigned to its origin, by the most unquestionable historical evidence. The Christian Church asserts, and ever has asserted, that the cause of its renewed existence, after the death of its founder, was not the belief in a dogma or a doctrine, but in a fact, that Jesus Christ rose again from the dead.

Now, observe the importance of the fact that the Christian Church is, and ever has been, a visible community. All communities must have had an origin of some kind. The supposed designs of its founder were cut short by His being executed by the authority of the Roman Government. Yet it is certain that the institution was set agoing again after His death. The belief in the resurrection formed the ground of the renewed life of the community. The Christian Church asserts in all its documents, that the sole cause of its renewed life was not that *His followers found a new leader*; but that *they believed that Jesus Christ rose from the dead*.

But observe further; if Jesus Christ rose from the dead, or his followers were firmly persuaded that he did so, this forms a rational account of the origin of this great institution. If the fact is denied, unbelievers are bound to give a rational account of its origin. We affirm that no other theory can account for it.

Let me illustrate the importance of the calling into



existence of a great historical institution, and its continuous life, as a proof of a fact. Take the instance of Mahomedanism. Like the Christian Church, the Church of Mahomet has existed as a visible community since the seventh century. It claims to owe its origin to the peaceful preaching of Mahomet at Mecca, followed by his being acknowledged as prophet and sovereign at Medina. The facts as reported by his followers are adequate accounts of its origin, and the continuous existence of the Mahomedan Church, from the time of its foundation to the present day, affords the strongest possible corroboration to the truth of the fact, as handed down by its first historians, that its institution was due to Mahomet, and that certain events in his life were the causes of its existence. These events are adequate and philosophical accounts of it.

Unbelievers have adopted a summary way of disposing of the entire question of the historical character of Christianity. They tell us that the three first Gospels consist of a bundle of myths and legends, united with a few grains of historic truth, which were slowly and gradually elaborated between A.D. 30 and A.D. 100. About that period three unknown persons reduced them into their present form. These accounts gradually superseded all the other stories, and became accepted by the Church as the only true account of the actions and teaching of Jesus. All the miraculous stories in the Gospels gradually grew up in the form of myths and legends in the course of the seventy years which followed the crucifixion. They are, in fact, a growth formed by the imagination of the early Church. The fourth they assert to be a late forgery.

My answer involves a distinct issue. Let it be fairly met. There is *one of the miraculous narratives in the*



*Gospels*, which certainly did not originate in this manner. This is the miracle of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, which, whether it occurred as a fact, or was invented as a fiction, was believed in by the Church shortly after the death of its founder. This belief was the foundation on which the Christian society was erected, and the cause of its renewed vitality.

As it is allowed to be an historical fact by all the distinguished unbelievers of Europe, that an eminent Jew, named Jesus, collected a number of followers, who believed in Him as the Messiah of Jewish expectations, I shall not waste your time in proving it. It is evident that His public execution must have extinguished their hopes that He could ever fulfil the expectations which they had formed. Such being the case, the community which He sought to found must have gone to pieces, unless a new leader could be discovered who was capable of occupying His place. But as its existence to the present hour proves that it did not perish, it is certain that it must have made a fresh start of some kind; something must have happened, which was not only capable of holding it together, but which imparted to it a new vitality. It is no less clear that this was not due to a new leader, who stepped into the place of its original founder, but to a new use made of the old one. Our histories tell us that this new impulse was imparted by a belief that Jesus had risen from the dead. Whether this belief was founded on a fact or a fiction, it is evident that it is one which could not have occupied many years in growing; for while this was taking place, the original community founded by Jesus must have perished from the want of anything to sustain it in being.

This being clear, I now draw your attention to the



fact that we have the most unimpeachable historical evidence that this renewed life of the Church rested on the belief that its founder, after He had been crucified, rose again from the dead. The evidence of this will be derived from the four letters of the apostle Paul, which all the eminent unbelievers of modern Europe admit to be His genuine productions. As these letters form historical evidence of the highest class, I must draw attention to their importance.

It is often urged by unbelievers, that we have no contemporaneous historical documents. The first three Gospels, they say, are by nameless authors, which cannot be proved to have been in existence until seventy or eighty years after the events narrated in them, and the fourth is a forgery. I reply, that if for the sake of argument I suppose this to be a true statement of facts, which it is not; yet we are in possession of letters written by one who was a contemporary, and such contemporary letters are the most valuable of all historical documents. We have an example in those of the great Roman statesman and orator, Cicero, which were collected and published after his death, somewhat about a century before St. Paul wrote his. They still exist; and it is not too much to say that they form the most important documents we possess, for giving us an insight into the history of Rome between B.C. 100 and B.C. 50. They contain a continued reference to current events, in which the great statesman and orator was himself personally engaged, and to the times during which he lived; and enable us to estimate the secret springs of the events of the time, and the agencies which brought them about, in a manner which we should fail to do if we had nothing to trust to but the ordinary histories of the period. It is



is true that we could not compose a perfect history from them alone. Their allusions to current events are incidental ; but the general facts of the history being known from other sources, they form the most important means of enabling us to estimate its true character. Cicero's letters form the most important historical document handed down to us by the ancient world.

A similar historical value attaches to all collections of contemporaneous letters. The modern historian is continually hunting them up, as the best means of throwing a clear light on the history of the past. They are far more valuable as a means of discriminating truth from falsehood, than even formal histories which have been composed by writers contemporaneous, or nearly so, with the events. Such are frequently written under a bias, as, for example, Lord Clarendon's history of the Rebellion. But the incidental allusions in letters frequently put us in possession of facts and motives which have been carefully concealed from the world, especially when they are the confidential communications between friends. They form the highest description of historical evidence.

It is impossible to over-estimate the importance of the concession made to us by learned unbelievers, that we are in possession of four documents of this description, carrying us up to the earliest days of Christianity. The latest date which can be assigned them is *twenty-eight years after the crucifixion*. They put us into direct communication with the mind of the most active missionary of the infant Church. Their character is such that they depict the whole man before us ; what he did, what he thought, what he believed, with a freshness and vigour which is scarcely to be found in any other letters in



existence. By means of them we can hold direct communion with the man himself. There are hardly any letters in existence which bear on them so distinct an impression of the individuality of the author. It is of no little consequence that these four letters, thus admitted to be genuine, are the most important of those which have been attributed to the apostle.

I shall rest my argument on these four letters only. At the same time let me draw your attention to the fact that Renan, who is one of the most eminent unbelievers of modern Europe, admits the genuineness of four more,\* and has very little doubt about that of two others.† By their aid he has written a Life of the Apostle, so vivid in details as to vie with that which has been pronounced to be the first of biographies—Boswell's Life of Johnson. For some reason our English unbelievers, while they could not make too great haste in translating into English this writer's Life of Jesus in a cheap form, have not yet seen good to exhibit his Life of St. Paul in an English dress. Why do they not publish it?

Having pointed out the value of contemporary letters as witnesses to historical events, I now draw your attention to the fact that these four letters of St. Paul were written within that interval of time from the date of the crucifixion, which the most rigid canons of criticism lay down as within the most perfect period of historical recollection. There is no possibility of dating them eighty or ninety years after that event, as unbelievers for their own convenience date the first three Gospels, in order that they may get time during which it might have been possible

\* The two to the Thessalonians, that to Philemon, and the Philippians.

Those to the Ephesians and Colossians.



for a number of fictions to have grown up in the bosom of the Christian Church. Not only was the latest of them written within *twenty-eight years* of the crucifixion, by a man whose activity as a missionary of Christianity had extended over the preceding *twenty years*, but who was of such an age that his historical recollections were good for at least fifteen years earlier. Although he had not seen Jesus Christ before His crucifixion, he must have conversed with multitudes who had done so. In reading these letters, therefore, we are in possession of a contemporaneous record of the highest order, according to the strictest rules laid down by Sir George Cornwell Lewis, in his great work on the credibility of early Roman history. In this work Sir George has rigidly analysed the value of historical evidence. As it is on a subject purely secular, and is considered to be very rigid in its demands for historical evidence, I appeal to it with confidence.

Let us now test, by our own experience, the value of historical recollections which are only twenty-eight years old. The repeal of the corn laws took place at exactly this interval of time from the present year. Those who are forty-five years old must have a clear recollection of the events by which it was brought about ; and while they continue alive, it will be impossible to encircle the chief agents in it with a mass of fable, so as to hide the real character of the events. Two years later occurred the revolution in France, which expelled Louis Philippe. Our recollections of that event are so fresh as to render it impossible that we could become the prey of a number of legendary stories respecting it. Such stories can only grow up after the lapse of considerable intervals of time, when the recollection of events has lost its freshness, and the generation which witnessed them has died out.



Observe, then, that St. Paul was separated from the crucifixion when he wrote these letters by the same interval of time which lies between us and the two events in question.

Having pointed out the value of these letters as historical evidence, I now state the chief facts which can be distinctly proved by them, and the nature of the evidence which they afford of the historical truth of the Resurrection.

1. It is clear that not only did St. Paul believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ as an historical fact; but that he considered it as the foundation on which the revived Christian community was erected. He received it as the one only ground of the existence of the Church. Whatever may be said of his references to other miracles, his references to this one are of the most unimpeachable character. They are too numerous to be quoted in proof of this in a lecture of the length of the present one. One will be sufficient. In the fifteenth of the first letter to the Corinthians he expressly asserts that if the resurrection of Jesus Christ is not a fact, Christianity is a delusion.\*

2. His mode of reference to this event proves that he not only himself believed in it as a fact, but that he had not the smallest doubt that those to whom he wrote believed in it as firmly as he did. He refers to it in the most direct terms; he refers to it also in the most incidental manner, as the foundation of the common faith both of himself and of those to whom he wrote. He evidently calculates that they would accept his statements without the smallest hesitation. Now nothing is more valuable than a set of incidental references to an event. They prove that both the writer and those to whom he writes know all about them, and have a common belief in them. Now observe how

\* See Appendix.



this is exemplified in the ordinary letters which we write. When we are of opinion that our correspondent is fully acquainted with an event, we simply allude to it, without entering on a formal description of it. We feel sure that our view of the fact will be accepted by him. Such is the manner in which St. Paul refers to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, throughout these letters,\* with the exception of 1 Cor. xv. and 1st and 2nd of Galatians, where his reference is for purposes directly historical and controversial.

3. There are circumstances in these allusions which render this testimony stronger than any other in history. Party spirit raged fiercely in two of these churches, to whom these letters were written. In the Corinthian Church there were several parties who were more or less adverse to St. Paul. He names three of them; an Apollos party; another which designated themselves by the name of Peter; and a third which used the name of Christ as their special designation. Besides these, he specifies a party which was especially attached to himself. One of these parties went the extreme length of denying *his right to the apostolical office, on the ground that he had not been one of the original companions of Jesus*. No small portion of the second Epistle is occupied with dealing with this party, and defending his own position against them.†

Such being the state of affairs in this Church, it is obvious that if the party in opposition to his apostleship had held any different views respecting the reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from himself, the demolition of the entire defence which he puts in for it was certain. He puts the question, "*Have I not seen*

\* See Appendix.

† See Appendix.



*Jesus Christ our Lord?*" I do not quote these words as evidence that he had really seen Jesus Christ, but as a proof that if his opponents had not been firmly persuaded that the resurrection was a fact, the moment this letter was read, they would have instantly denounced him as a falsifier of the Gospel; and declared that his claim to apostolical authority, based on his having seen the risen Jesus, was worthless, because he had not risen. It is evident, therefore, that as far as the fact of the resurrection was concerned, St. Paul and his bitterest opponents were agreed as to its truth.

4. The evidence furnished by the Epistle to the Galatians is yet more conclusive. Here was a strong party, who not only denied St. Paul's apostleship, but who had so far departed from his teaching, that he designates their doctrines by the name of *another gospel*. This party had been so successful, that they had drawn away a large number of St. Paul's own converts. No one can read this letter without seeing that the state of things in this Church touched him to the quick. It is full of the deepest bursts of feeling. Yet the whole letter is written throughout with the most entire confidence, that however great were the differences between himself and his opponents, there was no diversity of view between them and him, that the belief in the resurrection of Jesus was the foundation stone of their common Christianity. Hear his words at the beginning of this letter. "Paul, an *apostle* (not of man, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, *who raised him from the dead*,) and all the brethren who are with me, to the churches of Galatia. . . I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ *unto another gospel*: which is not another;



but there are some which trouble you, and would subvert the gospel of God." If St. Paul's belief, and that of his opponents on this point, had not been at entire agreement, no man in his senses would have thrown them down such a challenge as is contained in these words, and is continued in the strongest terms throughout the entire letter.

5. But the evidence furnished by this letter goes far beyond the mere belief of the Galatian churches at the time it was sent to them. It involves the testimony of two other churches, viz., that of the great Church at Antioch, which was the metropolis of Gentile Christianity, and that of the mother Church of Jerusalem, and carries it up to a much earlier date. St. Paul's opponents were Judaizing Christians, who professed themselves to be the followers of St. Peter and St. James. St. Paul, in the second chapter, asserts that his teaching was in substantial harmony with that of these two great chiefs of the Jewish Church. St. Paul's opponents were Christians who belonged to the most extreme Juadizing party in the Church, and who maintained that the observation of the law of Moses, with all its rites and ceremonies, was an integral portion of Christianity. Yet this party was at one with Paul in believing that the resurrection of Jesus was a fact. If so, the whole Jewish Church, even its most extreme members, concurred in that belief. The second chapter makes it plain that the whole Church at Antioch did the same at the period when St. Peter and St. Paul jointly visited it, and involves the fact of St. Peter's direct testimony to the truth of the resurrection. This alone is sufficient to prove that the belief, that Jesus Christ rose from the dead, was no after-growth, but was coincident



with the renewed life of the Christian Church immediately after the crucifixion.

6. Let us now look into the evidence supplied by the Epistle to the Romans. If it be urged that St. Paul had founded some of the other churches, and that even his opponents some way or other had adopted his views on this point, this was a Church which he had neither founded nor visited. It had evidently been in existence years before he wrote his letter to them. This Church was so large and important, that he felt that he was not in danger of being misapprehended, when he stated *that their faith was a subject of conversation throughout the whole world*. It contained a large Jewish element; and from the number of strangers who visited that city, there can be no doubt that among its members were representatives of every variety of Christian thought. Yet he addressed this Church with the full confidence that its members held the same views respecting the resurrection as he did himself. Not only is all his teaching based on the supposition of its truth, and the fact again and again reiterated; but the opening of the letter declares that Jesus Christ was marked out as the Son of God *by the resurrection from the dead*, and that on it was founded his claims to be an apostle.

We have thus firmly established the fact that within a period of less than twenty-eight years after the crucifixion three large Christian Churches, who were separated from each other by hundreds of miles of space, were all of the same mind in believing that Jesus Christ had risen from the dead, and that this belief was the sole ground of the existence of the Christian community. Consider how long it would have taken for such a belief to have grown up in Churches thus widely



separated. We have found that similar was the belief of the Jewish Church, and of that at Antioch, and proved that it was believed in by those churches from their first origin. We may therefore safely infer that it was the belief of the entire Christian body wherever situated. It is useless therefore to assert that the belief in the miraculous stories of the Gospels grew up very gradually during the first century, and for the purpose of enabling them to have done so, to put off the publication of the first three Gospels to its close or the first ten years of the second. On the contrary, we have indisputable evidence that the greatest of these miracles was implicitly believed in within much less than twenty-eight years after the crucifixion.

6. This belief was evidently not one of recent growth. The mode in which allusion is made to it proves that it was contemporaneous with the first belief in Christianity on the part of those to whom St. Paul wrote. As we have seen, many of them were Jewish Christians, who must have been very early converts themselves, or who must have derived their faith from those who were. The allusions in the letter to the Galatians plainly include the testimony of St. Peter and St. James. We also find, by a most incidental allusion in the letter to the Romans, that there were two members of that Church who had embraced Christianity before St. Paul. The allusion is so incidental, that it is worth quoting. It occurs in the midst of a large number of salutations, "Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellow-prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me." Yet they were all agreed on this point. St. Paul had believed it from his conversion, *i.e.*, within less than ten years after the crucifixion. Andronicus



and Junia believed it still earlier. Peter, James, and John also believed it from the first ; for St. Paul states that he communicated to them the gospel which he preached among the Gentiles ; and that they generally approved of it ; and in the fifteenth to the Corinthians he expressly affirms that Peter and James had seen Jesus Christ after He was risen from the dead. Let it be observed that in the Epistle to the Galatians he informs us that he paid Peter a visit of fifteen days, three years after his own conversion ; and that during this visit, he had an interview with James. We cannot err, therefore, in asserting that we have here the direct testimony of these two men, that they had seen the risen Jesus. It follows, therefore, that the belief in the Resurrection was that on which the Church was reconstructed immediately after the crucifixion.

7. St. Paul makes, in the fifteenth to the Corinthians, a very definite statement as to a number of persons who had actually seen Jesus Christ after He had risen from the dead. He tells us that on one occasion He was seen by more than five hundred persons at once, of whom the greater part, *i.e.*, more than two hundred and fifty, were still living when he wrote. Now consider how St. Paul, in making this assertion, put himself in the hands of those opponents who denied his apostleship. If the resurrection was not generally believed to be true, the discussion between them might have been put an end to then and there, by a simple exposure of the falsehood of such a statement. But if these five hundred persons really thought that they had seen Jesus Christ alive after He was crucified, how is it possible to account for so singular a fact, otherwise than on the supposition of its truth ?



8. But further: in the Corinthian Church there were persons who denied the possibility of a resurrection, after the body had been dissolved into its various elements (1 Cor. xv. 14, 25), and who affirmed that all that was meant by the future resurrection was a great spiritual change. Yet, with defective logic, they admitted that the resurrection of Christ had been a bodily one (see 1 Cor. xv. 12—17). The apostle presses them with the following reasoning, How can you deny the possibility of a bodily resurrection hereafter, when you admit that Christ actually rose from the dead? If this latter point had not been the foundation of the faith of the Church, they might have made short work of the apostle and his logic by simply denying the truth of the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. This circumstance also proves that there were persons in the Church to whom this letter was written who were far from being disposed readily to believe in a story of a resurrection from the dead. In one word, they were not over-credulous.

We are now in a position most positively to affirm that the story of the resurrection of Jesus Christ was no fiction which slowly grew up during the latter half of the first century, but that it was a fact, fully believed in by those who gave the new impulse to the Christian Church after the crucifixion of its Founder. I have not quoted the testimony of the Gospels to prove this, because my opponents deny its validity. I have simply deduced it from historical documents, which they allow to be genuine. It is evident, therefore, that one miracle narrated in these Gospels is not a late-invented myth. It remains for me to inquire whether this belief could have rested on a delusion. But before doing so, I will sum up briefly the points I have proved on the highest historical evidence.



1. That within twenty-eight years after the crucifixion, the Christian Church, without distinction of party, believed that the one ground of its existence was that Jesus Christ had risen from the dead.

2. That at that period there were more than two hundred and fifty persons living who believed that they had seen Him alive after His crucifixion.

3. That it is an unquestionable fact that the whole Christian Church believed in the resurrection of its Founder as the sole ground of its existence, within less than ten years from the date of the crucifixion.

4. That the belief in the fact of the resurrection was equally held by St. Paul and his most violent opponents.

5. That at least three of the original apostles asserted that they had seen Jesus Christ alive after His death.

6. That a belief that He had risen from the dead was the cause which imparted its renewed vitality to the Church.

Such having been proved on unquestionable evidence to have been historical facts, it remains for me to examine whether they are consistent with any other assumption, than that the belief in them was founded on a reality.

There are three, and only three possible alternatives :—

1. The resurrection of Jesus Christ was a fact ; or,

2. The belief of the Church in it was the result of a fraud, deliberately and consciously concocted ; or,

3. The original followers of Jesus were the victims of a delusion.

I shall deem myself exonerated from the necessity of examining the second of these alternatives, because it has been abandoned as untenable by all eminent modern unbelievers.



*Resurrection of Jesus Christ.*

ELIOTHECA  
CHRISTIANA, OXFORD.

Two alternatives have been suggested to account for the belief in the resurrection, on the ground that it originated in a delusion, of which the followers of Jesus Christ were the prey. The first of these is, that they were intensely enthusiastic and credulous; that some one or more of them fancied that they saw Jesus alive after His death, and succeeded in persuading the others that it was a fact. Of these theories, that of Rénan is a fair representation, that Mary Magdalene, in the midst of her grief and emotion, mistook the gardener for Jesus; thought that He had risen from the dead, and communicated her enthusiasm to the rest.

The second is, that Jesus did not really die, but was taken down from the cross in a swoon, from which He awoke in the sepulchre; that He managed to creep out in an exhausted state, lived in retirement, and died shortly afterwards.

To this last supposition I will reply first. I allow that it was possible for a man who had been suspended for some hours on the cross, if taken down and carefully treated, to recover. This, as we are informed by Josephus, happened to one of his friends, though it was the exception, for two out of three died under cure. But in the case of Jesus, we have to meet the fact that He was in the hands of His enemies, who would have seen to His burial as a criminal who had been publicly executed; and thus have put the possibility of recovery out of the question. It is true that our Gospels assert that Pilate gave His body to His friends. But my opponents affirm that the whole account is unhistorical. If, however, they accept the statements of the Gospels on this point, they are bound also to accept their further



assertion, that Pilate took care to ascertain that the body was dead before he resigned it, and that it was interred, and left in a sepulchre closed with a large stone.

But as after the crucifixion He disappears from history, except in the supposition that He rose from the dead, those who propound the theory that He was taken down alive are obliged to admit that He died from exhaustion shortly afterwards. Now it is certain that if He left the grave alive, He must have been kept in concealment out of the way of His enemies; for those who had succeeded in crucifying Him would not have allowed Him to remain undisturbed. It is also evident, that if He lived in concealment, His followers had access to Him, or they had not; if the former was the case, it would have been impossible to have mistaken a wounded man, dying from exhaustion, for the Messiah of Jewish expectation, or to have magnified this into a resurrection from the dead. But if they never saw Him, then the belief in His resurrection resolves itself into the case of simple credulity and fanaticism.

But a Messiah who crept out of His grave, and died from exhaustion shortly afterwards, was not one who could have satisfied the exigencies of the community which had been crushed by His crucifixion. They had expected Him to reign as the Messiah; and, lo, a cross was the only throne allowed Him. Yet it is the most certain of historical facts, that the Christian community commenced a new life immediately after its original foundation had been subverted by His execution. Nothing but a resurrection, or one which was mistaken for a reality, could have served the purpose. Something had to be done, and that quickly. Without it the Church must have perished in the grave of its founder.



As there is not a single trace in history that the place of Jesus was taken by a new leader, who assumed the position of the Messiah, which had been rendered vacant by the crucifixion of Jesus, or even by His retirement, it is evident that some event must have taken place, which enabled Him to occupy the place which He originally assumed in the opinion of His followers. It is certain that if He was supposed to be alive, living in retirement, this would have never succeeded in revivifying the Church. The Church had before it the alternative of finding a Messiah or perishing. If it be urged, that if Jesus succeeded in creeping out of His grave, and living in retirement, after an interval of time this might have grown up into the idea of His resurrection, the requisite time is not to be had ; for while the idea was growing, the Church would have become extinct, and I have proved that the belief in the resurrection can be traced up to a very short interval after the crucifixion, so that the requisite time cannot possibly be found.

I now proceed to examine the question, whether it was possible that the original followers of Jesus could have been deceived into a belief of His resurrection by means of their enthusiasm and credulity. Nothing is easier than to assert that some one of them fancied that he had seen Him alive, and communicated his enthusiasm to the rest ; and that others got into their heads similar fancies, and mistook them for realities. But in practical life such things are not easy nor possible ; for they contradict all the facts of human nature.

I will, however, assume, for the sake of argument, that the original followers of Jesus were men of the most unbounded credulity and enthusiasm ; only observing that we have not one atom of evidence for the assumption.



Let it be observed, however, that the profoundest credulity has certain limits, which it has never yet been known to overstep. A belief in a certain round of supernaturalism is one which has been widely diffused among mankind; and a large number of marvellous stories are readily accepted by them, on little or no evidence. It is comparatively easy to get men to believe that they have seen ghosts, still easier that others have seen them. But there is one marvel which human credulity has not been induced to accept, that a man who has actually died, has been seen and conversed with in bodily reality. I believe that no case can be found in history in which a man has asserted that he has seen with his own eyes a human body revived after it was actually dead. The old Pagans, who accepted supernaturalism enough, would have scoffed at such a belief as lying beyond the bounds of the possible. I am aware that a few old Pagan stories exist about men who were brought back from the other world; but they belong to poetry, and were wisely placed by the poets in the remotest ages of the past. Evidence that a man ever existed, who really believed that he had seen and conversed with one who had been raised from the dead, wholly fails. Celsus scoffs at the idea.

If, then, it is a most difficult thing to get a single person who is in possession of his reason, to believe that he has seen and held communications with one who has been actually revived, what shall we say as to getting a considerable number, not to speak of the five hundred persons mentioned by St. Paul, to believe in such a fact. Yet considerable numbers must have believed this fact before the Church could have commenced its renewed life. Such beliefs are only possible when they



have become reports at second hand, or after a long interval of time. This latter condition is absolutely necessary. But as I have proved that the belief in the resurrection of Jesus must have originated within a very brief interval after his crucifixion, it is useless to discuss any supposition which renders it necessary to invoke the aid of a long interval of time to bring it about. There is no such interval at our command in the present case. The historical evidence is overwhelming, that the belief in the resurrection of Jesus was the starting-point of the renewed life of the Church.

It is evident, therefore, that, under any conceivable view of the case, a belief in a resurrection, if entertained by any considerable number of people, must have taken years to grow. No amount of credulity can account for its rapid dissemination. How long would it take to persuade one hundred of the most credulous persons in London that a man who had been executed at Newgate, and buried in the custody of the authorities, had not only appeared alive again, but had actually conversed with some of them, and to unite them into a community on the basis of this belief? It is obvious that such a belief, if possible at all, could only grow up after a considerable number of years; and only then among persons who did not profess to have seen the dead man actually revived. Before it could have been possible, memories must have faded, and events must have been removed into the obscurity of the past. I put it to my opponents to say how many years they think that it would require to render such an operation possible. Would ten, fifteen, or twenty suffice? Until this had taken place no development of the Church was possible. Yet the Church spread immediately. But with respect to the resurrection



of Jesus Christ, I have proved, on the most indisputable historical evidence, that it was believed by the entire Church, as the foundation on which its existence rested, within a brief interval after the crucifixion.

But observe further : the belief in the resurrection was no idle belief, like that in a common ghost story, or an ordinary marvel. Such beliefs begin and end in nothing. But this had an energy and power sufficient to reconstruct the Church. It was not the mere belief entertained by individuals, but one which sustained the weight of an institution. This belief went on spreading itself until within less than seventy years it had firmly established itself in all the great cities of the Roman Empire, and had long before shown itself capable of standing the test of martyrdom. It must, therefore, have been a profound conviction, and not a sentimental dream. Where in history will you find a rapidly progressing community, or any institution at all, which has been founded on the belief that a man, who had been dead, rose again from the dead? Let us consider the state of things during the days, or weeks, or even months, which must have followed the crucifixion. The devoted followers of Jesus had brought themselves into a belief that a new kingdom of God was about to be established in His person. His public execution must have extinguished the hope that it would be established by Him. Could all the enthusiasm and credulity in the world have thought otherwise? Suppose, even, that a fanatic woman had reported that she had seen Him alive some hours, days, or months afterwards : would His depressed followers have been satisfied if He did not appear to them? Would such a report set them to reconstruct a blasted institution, which had no ground of existence except in its Founder's life?



But further: the followers of Jesus must have immediately resolved on a change of tactics. A visible Messiah was the one which they wanted, not an invisible one after the old type. It must have been evident that Jesus would be a visible one no longer. He appeared no more in public, either as a teacher or worker of miracles. An entire change of front was therefore necessary, before it was possible to reconstitute the Church. Was the mere report of a credulous enthusiast, that He was risen from the dead, likely, under these circumstances, to have been accepted, while He withheld His presence from His own personal friends?

One solution, and one only, is adequate to account for the renewed life of the Church, that Jesus verily appeared alive to those persons who asserted that they had seen Him, and that He afforded them such evidence of the truth of His resurrection as is recorded in our Gospels. If this event is an historical fact; if Jesus gave His followers evidence of His resurrection, by allowing them to see Him with their eyes, and to touch Him with their hands, this gives a rational account of all the phenomena. No other supposition will. That the faith of His followers was revived in Him as the Messiah within a short interval after His death, is a fact for which I have adduced the strongest historical testimony. His resurrection was believed in by multitudes, while historical recollections continued of the freshest character. His appearance would have imparted to His followers a faith which gives a rational account of their subsequent conduct. Nothing else can explain it on rational principles. It was a moral power adequate to effect the great change.

I have hitherto withheld from quoting the narratives



of the Evangelists as a portion of the evidence of the resurrection. My reason for having done so is, that those with whom I am reasoning assert that they are unhistorical. I have therefore only employed data which they concede to me ; from these data I have shown that the resurrection of Jesus Christ has the highest evidence as an historical fact. No event in past history has a stronger attestation. It was believed in by the whole Church as the ground of its existence. The Church was torn by parties. The most adverse parties in the Church believed it. It was believed in by churches widely separated from one another ; it imparted to them all their vitality. It was believed in by the original Jewish Church ; it formed the sole ground of its renewed existence. If a fact, it fully accounts for it. Peter asserted that he had seen Jesus Christ after He had risen from the dead ; so did James, so did all the apostles, so did more than five hundred others. Paul believed that he had seen Him also ; and this belief of his changed him from a persecutor into a preacher of Christianity, and caused him to devote the whole of his life to the most self-denying labours in its service.

Such being the case, I am now in a position to restore the Gospels to their proper place as historical documents. With these facts proved, it is useless for unbelievers to affirm, as far as the resurrection is concerned, that they were written by nameless authors long after the events which they profess to record. The truth of the resurrection of Christ can be proved independently of their testimony ; but their statements respecting that event are strictly in conformity with the facts which I have proved to be historical. They fully corroborate them, and offer a rational explanation of them. The fourth Evangelist asserts that on three occa-



sions he saw the risen Jesus, in such a manner as to leave no doubt of the truth of His actual appearance. The accounts of the three others are fragmentary, but afford substantial narratives of facts. They describe several appearances of Jesus Christ after He was risen from the dead, at which He afforded to His disciples the means of testing the reality of His resurrection by their bodily senses.

It will be asserted that their accounts contain narrations which are difficult to reconcile with one another in their minute details. I admit that such is the fact, and that it results from the peculiar form of writings to which the Gospels belong. They are not regular histories, but religious memoirs ; as such, they do not profess to furnish us with a complete and continuous narrative. But they agree in all their great features according to the conditions of the case. The events of the day of the resurrection must have thrown the followers of Jesus into the greatest excitement. The accounts, as we read them in the first three Gospels, are exactly such as we should expect from men and women under similar circumstances. They are broken, disjointed, without any attempt being made to weave them into a complete whole ; yet, in all the main facts, their testimony agrees. This is what they should be, if they contain the reports, not of forgers, not of myths or legends, but of genuine witnesses. We may not be able to reconcile the various details ; of this difficulty unbelievers have made the most they can. Let them hear and attend to one of their greatest authorities. The *Westminster Review* tells them that the habit of carping at small minor details is useless. All histories contain variations, or, if you like to call them, contradictions, on



minor points. This, says the *Review*, has been the case with every history which has ever been written from Herodotus to Mr. Froude.\* Let unbelievers therefore join issue in the main facts of the gospel history, just as they would with any secular history, and we will meet them. Above all, let them not carp at minor details about miracles ; but join issue in the truth or falsehood of the resurrection of Jesus Christ ; with the truth of which miracle the writers of the New Testament affirm that Christianity stands or falls.

\* See the number for January, 1873



## APPENDIX.

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I SUBJOIN the most important passages in these Epistles, in which reference is made to the Resurrection, with such observations as are necessary for pointing out their historical value.

Rom. i. 3-5 :—"Concerning His Son, who was made of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, *by the resurrection from the dead.*"

Here the reference, occurring as it does at the opening of the epistle, proves that the writer was firmly persuaded that those to whom he wrote were equally persuaded of the fact of the resurrection as he was.

St. Paul concludes a long argument with these words :—

Rom ii. 16 :—"In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men *by Jesus Christ*, according to my gospel."

The reference here is inferential and indirect, and therefore most valuable. The position assigned to Christ as future Judge, shows that the whole Church accepted the fact of His resurrection as one beyond all question.

Rom. iv. 24, 25 :—"To whom also it shall be imputed, if we believe on Him *who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead*, who was delivered for our offences, and was *raised again* for our justification."

Such a doctrinal use of the resurrection proves that the fact had long been accepted by the Church, as it would have been impossible to have used it in this way if it had been a recent invention. Let it be remembered that this Church contained a Jewish and Gentile element, and had been planted quite independently of the apostle. It follows, therefore, that the resurrection must have been accepted as the foundation of Christianity by the founders of this Church.



Rom. v. 10:—"For if when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more being reconciled, we shall be saved *by his life*."

The reference here is incidental, and therefore a strong evidence of the universal acceptance of the fact.

Rom. vi. 3-11:—"Know ye not, that as many of us as were baptised into Jesus Christ were baptised into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death, that, like as Christ *was raised from the dead* by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His *resurrection*. Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he who is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also *live with Him*. Knowing that Christ *being raised from the dead* dieth no more; *death hath no more dominion over Him*. For in that He died, He died unto sin once; but in that *He liveth, He liveth* unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

This passage is one of great importance. It refers to the fact of the resurrection both directly, incidentally, and inferentially. The parallel between Christ's death and resurrection as exhibited in baptism, the reference to its moral power as a resurrection to holiness in those who cordially accept the fact, and its pledge of future life hereafter, all imply that the belief in it, was the very foundation of that Christianity which had been accepted by the Roman Church, and was a part of the original Christian teaching from which they had derived their faith.

Rom. vii. 4:—"Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ, that ye should be married to another, *even to Him who is raised from the dead*, that we should bring forth fruit unto God"

The apostle's argument is here very peculiar, as any one will see who reads the entire context. The allusion to the resurrection shows that that fact was never absent from the writer's thoughts, and proves that he was of opinion that it was little less so from those to whom he wrote.

Rom. viii. 10, 11:—"And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the spirit is life because of righteousness; for if



the spirit of Him *that raised up Jesus from the dead* dwell in you, *He that raised up Christ from the dead* shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you."

Rom. viii. 17 :—"And if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ, if so be that we suffer with Him, that we *may also be glorified together.*"

Rom. viii. 33, 34 :—"Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, *that is risen again*, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."

These three references are entirely incidental. Nothing was further from the writer's thoughts than the intention to make direct assertions about the resurrection of Christ. He is treating throughout the chapter on some of the deepest subjects of Christian thought. Yet his references to the resurrection are at once distinct and natural, and prove that the belief in it was interwoven into the very texture of his own thoughts, and, as he considered, into those to whom he wrote.

Rom. x. 6-9 :—"But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (*i.e.*, to bring down Christ from above :) or, Who shall descend into the deep? (*i.e.*, to bring up *Christ again from the dead.*) But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thine heart, (*i.e.*, the word of faith which we preach). For if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath *raised Him from the dead*, thou shalt be saved."

The reasoning in this passage is difficult, owing to the fact that it contains allusions to passages in the Old Testament, which none but those who were familiar with them would catch the meaning of. It proves that the writer calculated that those to whom he wrote were very familiar with them. Of a precisely similar character are the two references to the resurrection, and they would have been without meaning, except to persons who admitted their doctrinal value.

Rom. xiv. 7-9 :—"For none of us liveth unto himself, and no man dieth unto himself; for whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: for to this end Christ both died *and rose*, that He might be Lord both of the dead and living."



In the context the apostle was speaking of the observance of particular days, and similar subjects which deeply interested the minds of the Christians of that time. For all questions of difficulty and duty, he had one solution, and only one, the relation in which the Christian stood to his risen Lord. *He died and rose*, that those who believed on Him might live and die to Him. This was the solution of every duty to the believer. It is impossible to conceive of any allusion to the resurrection, which would more plainly show its all-commanding influence on the Christian conscience, or its more universal reception as a fact.

The earlier references in the First Epistle to the Corinthians are all incidental or inferential. The later ones are of the most direct character.

I Cor. i. 7, 8 :—“ So that ye come behind in no gift ; waiting *for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ* : who shall also confirm you to the end, that ye may be blameless *in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ*.

These references to His future coming, imply the prior acceptance of the fact of His resurrection. The reasoning of the remainder of this chapter presupposes the same fact. Similar remarks apply to the two following passages.

I Cor. iv. 5 :—“ Therefore judge nothing before the time, *until the Lord come*, who will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the hearts.”

I Cor. v. 4, 5 :—“ In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, *with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ*, to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh that the spirit may be saved *in the day of the Lord Jesus*.

I Cor. ix. 1, 2 :—“ Am not I an apostle ? am I not free ? *have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord* ? are ye not my work in the Lord ? If I am not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you,” etc.

The whole of this chapter is addressed to the party in this church which denied Paul's right to be an apostle. It is obvious that this party must have fully believed in the resurrection of Christ, as the ground of their Christianity. Had it been otherwise, nothing short of madness could have induced the writer to write as he has done throughout the entire chapter.

I Cor. xi. 23-26 :—“ For I received of the Lord that which I also delivered unto you, how that the Lord Jesus, the same night in which He was betrayed, took bread,” etc. “ For as often as ye eat



this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew forth the Lord's death *till He come.*"

Here we have a direct account of the institution of the great rite of the Christian Church, which was to be celebrated in perpetual memory of Christ's death. The constant celebration of it in the Church of Christ, by a succession of continuously repeated acts, carries us up to the very period of the crucifixion by one of the highest forms of historical testimony. Yet the whole passage proves that while this institution was designed to preserve a perpetual memory of the death of Christ, it was indissolubly united with a belief in His resurrection, thus carrying up the historical testimony of that event to the period directly following the crucifixion.

I Cor. xv. 3-20 :—"For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures ; and that He was buried, and that *He rose again* the third day according to the Scriptures ; and that *He was seen* of Cephas ; then of the twelve ; after that, *He was seen* of above five hundred brethren at once ; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, *He was seen* of James ; then of all the apostles ; and last of all, *He was seen* of me, as of one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. Now if Christ be preached unto you that *he rose from the dead*, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead ? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then *is not Christ risen*. And *if Christ be not risen*, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God ; because we have testified of God, that *He raised up Christ*, whom *He raised not up*, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then *is not Christ raised*. And *if Christ be not raised*, your faith is vain ; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also who are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is *Christ risen from the dead*, and become the first fruits of them that slept."

I have already remarked in the body of the lecture on the high historical value of this passage. I need not repeat what I have there said. I shall only add, that it seems to me impossible to read it, and to entertain a doubt that the fact of the resurrection was not only accepted by all the parties into which this Church was



divided ; but that it was the foundation on which the Church was reconstructed immediately after the crucifixion.

2 Cor. i. 2 :—“Grace be to you, and peace from God the Father, and *from the Lord Jesus Christ.*”

2 Cor. ii. 10 :—“To whom ye forgive anything, I forgive also ; for if I forgave anything to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it *in the person of Christ.*”

2 Cor. iv. 10, 14 :—Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that *the life also of Jesus* might be made manifest in our body. Knowing that He that *raised up the Lord Jesus* shall raise us *up also by Jesus*, and shall present us with you.”

Here we have a mixture of direct and indirect references, all proving that the fact of the resurrection was the foundation which underlay all Christian thought.

2 Cor. v. 13-15 :—“For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God ; or whether we be sober, it is for your cause. For the love of Christ constraineth us ; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead ; and that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but *unto Him that died for them, and rose again,*” etc., etc.

In this passage the resurrection of Christ is set before us as the foundation on which Christian self-sacrifice rests, and as the new great spiritual power which has been created by Christianity.

2 Cor. xi. 3-5 :—“But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he that cometh *preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached ;* or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or *another gospel, which ye have not accepted,* ye might well bear with him. For I suppose that I was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles,” etc., etc.

This passage is a very remarkable one, and the argument is carried on throughout the remainder of the epistle. In it the apostle comes face to face with the party in this Church in opposition to himself. The careful reader will see that he very often uses the strongest irony in dealing with them. Yet, in the passage I have cited, he distinctly avers that the Jesus whom they preached differed in no substantial point of historical outline from his own. The reader should observe that by the expression “He that cometh,” the apostle evidently means his Jewish opponents, who professed to represent the views of



the apostles of the circumcision. We have here a distinct testimony that they must have believed from the first in the resurrection. If it had not been so, St. Paul would have placed himself in the power of his opponents, when this letter was read to the Church.

2 Cor. xii. 8, 9 :—"For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And *He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.* Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

2 Cor. xiii. 3, 4 :—"Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me which toward you is not weak, but is mighty in you. For though He was crucified through weakness, yet *He liveth by the power of God.* For we also are weak in Him, but *we shall live with Him* by the power of God toward you."

Nothing can be more incidental than such allusions.

The first and second chapters of the Epistle to the Galatians contain the strongest historical proof that the belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ constituted the one sole and only ground of the renewed life of the Church. To quote them partially would weaken the force of the historical evidence which they supply. You must carefully read them for yourselves. I will, however, enunciate in as many distinct propositions the facts which they assert, and the inferences following from them.

1. St. Paul begins by distinctly affirming that the fact of the resurrection was the ground of his claim to the apostleship.

2. A party existed in the Galatian Churches who were most adverse to his claims.

3. This party did not dispute the fact of our Lord's resurrection.

4. They professed to represent the views of the Churches in Judæa, and those of their chief men.

5. St. Paul professed to have derived his gospel, not from human teaching, but by express revelation from Jesus Christ.

6. His belief in the resurrection as a fact, converted him from a persecutor of the Church into a preacher of the gospel.

7. Three years after his conversion he visited Peter and James at Jerusalem for a period of fifteen days, but saw none of the other apostles. These two apostles must therefore have agreed with Paul in believing in the resurrection as a fact.

8. Fifteen years after he visited the Church at Jerusalem, and explained to its chiefs the gospel which he preached among the



Gentiles ; and received the approbation of James, Peter, and John, the three most important members of that Church.

9. The Church at Jerusalem must therefore have believed in the fact of the resurrection immediately after the crucifixion.

10. The fundamental facts of Christianity were accepted alike by the different parties in this Church. The ground of their disagreement respected not the facts themselves, but the doctrinal inferences to be drawn from them.

11. The differences which arose in the Church at Antioch were respecting the obligations of Gentile Christians to observe the Jewish rites, and had nothing to do with fundamental facts.

12. The words which St. Paul addressed to St. Peter prove that both apostles were at agreement as to the fact of the resurrection, and the Churches of Antioch and Galatia with them. The conclusion of them is very remarkable, "I am crucified with Christ : nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me ; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me."

Each of the subsequent chapters contains incidental and inferential references to the resurrection as the common belief of St. Paul, and of those to whom he wrote, of the same nature as those which I have already deduced from the Romans and Corinthians.