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THE  
DEAN OF RIPON

ON THE  
PHYSICAL RESURRECTION OF JESUS,  
IN ITS BEARING ON THE  
TRUTH OF CHRISTIANITY.

BY  
THOMAS SCOTT.



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THE REV. DR HUGH M'NEILE  
ON THE  
RESURRECTION.

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TO THE EDITOR OF THE "TIMES."

SIR,—There is one passage in the "Bennett Judgment" on which I desire, with your permission, to publish a few observations. It is this—After discussing the terms "corporal," "natural," "true," as applied to the body of Christ, their Lordships say :

"The matters to which they relate are confessedly not comprehensible, or very imperfectly comprehensible by the human understanding ; the province of reason as applied to them is, therefore, very limited, and the terms employed have not, and cannot have, that precision of meaning which the character of the argument demands."

The subject-matter referred to is the risen body of Christ, and I wish to call attention to the nature of the proof we have of the resurrection of His body. It is needless to comment on its importance. Without the historical fact of the resurrection of Christ's body, Christianity crumbles into a myth.

We learn from St Luke that Christ showed himself alive after his Passion by many infallible proofs (*τεκμηρίους*). These are recorded by the Evangelists.

He said, "Behold my hands and my feet that it is I myself. Handle me and see, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have." "Sic hæ actiones, loqui, ambulare, edere, bibere *τεκμήρια* sunt."—*Beza*. All such proofs were addressed to the senses of the Apostles, and the result was a process of clear and conclusive reasoning. The human mind is not capable of clearer proof on any practical subject than that which is derived from the testimony of the senses, and the consequent deductions of the reason. Such was the proof, satisfactory, and, as far as human consciousness is concerned, infallible, which was given of the Resurrection of Christ. Before his death, his flesh was similar to ours. "Forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same" (*αὐτὸς παραπλησίως μετέσχε τῶν αὐτῶν*). His flesh, then, was an object of sense, concerning which men might fairly reason—concerning which reasonable men could not but reason.

If, after his resurrection, his flesh had been something altogether different—if it had been something not comprehensible, or very imperfectly comprehensible by the human understanding—if the province of reasoning as applied to it had been, therefore, very limited—if the terms employed to describe it had not, and could not have, that precision of meaning which a proof of his resurrection demanded—had this been so, how could his resurrection have been proved, and if his resurrection be not proved, reasonably and conclusively proved, where is Christianity itself?

But his flesh after his resurrection was appealed to as matter of sense and argument and proof, and,



therefore, it was quite comprehensible by the human understanding, and, therefore, the province of reason as applied to it was perfect, and therefore the terms employed to describe it had, and could not but have, the precision of meaning indispensable for establishing the fact that he was indeed risen from the dead.

Deny the clear and conclusive province of reason as applied to the risen flesh of Christ, and you cannot prove the resurrection of his body.

Admit the clear and conclusive province of reason as applied to the risen flesh of Christ, and you cannot prove any presence whatever of his flesh in the Lord's Supper. Nay, you can prove its absence, for human reason is altogether competent to the conclusion that what cannot be seen, or felt, or tasted cannot be flesh, whatever else it may be, and the question here is not about something else but about flesh.

All this is made clearer still by contrast. Let the subject under consideration be "The Trinity." Here we can have no infallible proofs. We may have, indeed, and we have, clear revelation, reasonably attested to be revelation, and therefore entitled to acceptance on authority, as little children accept on authority; but the subject-matter is confessedly not comprehensible, or very imperfectly comprehensible, by the human understanding. The province of reasoning as applied to it is, therefore, very limited, and the terms employed in revealing it have not and cannot have that precision of meaning which an argument between man and man demands.

Acute controversialists of the Church of Rome have propagated much deception by treating as analogous the mystery of the Trinity, and what they call the mystery of the Sacrament. Under

cover of this assumed analogy, strange bewildering phrases have been introduced and applied to flesh and blood—"spiritual," "supernatural," "sacramental," "mystical," "ineffable," "supralocal."

But there is no ground for this. The mode of the Divine existence is, indeed, a mystery, far beyond the province of human reason; but flesh and blood are not so, and bread and wine are not so; and there is not the slightest intimation in Holy Scripture of any mystery connected with the Lord's Supper. But ecclesiastical tradition? I willingly leave to others the task of exploring that troubled sea, which does indeed "cast up mire and dirt," but I may cordially and devoutly embrace the definition of mysteries as applied to the Lord's Supper in our Book of Common Prayer—"pledges of His love and for a continual remembrance of His death, to our great and endless comfort."

I am, Sir,

Your obliged and obedient servant,

HUGH M'NEILE.

The Deanery, Ripon, June 25.

## DR M'NEILE ON THE RESURRECTION.

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IN the number of the *Times* for Thursday, June 27, of the present year (1872), there appeared the preceding letter on the Bennett Judgment, addressed to the Editor by Dr Hugh M'Neile, Dean of Ripon. To this letter I desire to call the special attention of those who may wish that our religion, whatever it may be, shall rest on the basis of solid fact or ascertained truth. It would be scarcely possible to exaggerate the importance of the issue which the Dean of Ripon has most pertinently raised, or to lay too much stress on the propositions by which he believes, or appears to believe, that he has solved the problem satisfactorily. Like many other clergymen of the Church of England, and more especially like many others of the party to which Dr M'Neile is supposed to belong, he has been disturbed by that Judgment of the Judicial Committee of Privy Council which, acquitting Mr Bennett of formal heresy, seems in his opinion to undermine the very foundations of the faith of a large majority of English churchmen. It is well to know what these foundations are, and Dr M'Neile has exhibited them in the clearest possible light. For the Judgment itself, it is enough to say that it regards the whole subject which furnished the ground of prosecution for Mr Bennett's assailants, as wrapped in dense, if not in impenetrable, mists. Mr Bennett,

believing with them that Jesus Christ has ascended into heaven (seemingly a local heaven above Mount Olivet,) with that body which was nailed to the cross and laid in the grave, believes also that he is sensibly present in the Sacrament of the Altar, and that being thus present, he is there to be adored under the symbols of the bread and wine which have been converted into his flesh and blood by the consecration of the priest. Christ, therefore, who is sensibly in heaven (for in the words of the Fourth Article he has ascended into heaven with flesh, bones, and all things appertaining to the perfection of man's nature) is also present sensibly at the same time upon a thousand altars. The proposition, if not actually heretical, looks much like a contradiction in terms: but as it does not formally controvert or contradict any positive statement of the Thirty-nine Articles, the defendant is entitled to an acquittal. Had this sentence of acquittal been pronounced without further comment, Dr M'Neile and they who go with him would have suffered much less distress, or perhaps would not have been distressed at all. But the Judicial Committee was probably not sorry to avail itself of the opportunity of enlarging the basis for the clergy by admitting as much vagueness as possible in their engagements; and the means which it adopted for this purpose was the assertion that the subject was one which can never be really comprehended by anybody, and that, therefore, a precise definition of the terms employed in the treatment of it is an impossibility. "The matters to which they relate," the Judicial Committee insists, "are confessedly not comprehensible, or very imperfectly comprehensible, by the human understanding. The province of reason as



applied to them is, therefore, very limited, and the terms employed have not, and cannot have, that precision of meaning which the character of the argument demands."

The plain inference of all indifferent persons must be that the Judicial Committee of Privy Council regards the subject as one which it is better not to speak about, and therefore also not to think about, or, at the least, as one on which no churchman should censure or tease another. To argue upon it requires that the terms used should carry with them a precise meaning: but, as the Judicial Committee holds, from the nature of the subject they cannot be thus accurately used, and consequently the time spent in thinking or speaking about it must be time wasted. It is, of course, significant that the highest tribunal of the Church of England should thus mark as useless or unprofitable the doctrine of the nature of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. But the declaration of this tribunal is of greater importance in its bearings on the traditional theology of the Christian Church and of particular sects or parties in it. It is not to be supposed that the large and powerful section in the English Establishment, known popularly as Evangelicals or Low Churchmen, should fail to see the danger into which some of the most important articles of their creed are drawn; and we can understand the eagerness with which Dr M'Neile comes forward to repel this assault on what he regards as the very foundations of the Christian Faith.

For myself, and for the cause I strive to serve, I am rejoiced that the Dean of Ripon has, in such clear and unequivocal language, summoned his

brethren, and, indeed, all Christendom to the fight. There is now some prospect that ages of talking and disputing may be followed by a grave and calm discussion of the point at issue, and, as that point is alleged to be an historical fact, by a final determination whether it be indeed a fact or not. To those who are simply anxious to ascertain the truth of facts, it is a matter of supreme indifference how the issue comes to be raised. The Apostle of the Gentiles was thoroughly aware that some preached Christ from motives which were anything but creditable; but, so long as Christ was preached, he was content and glad; and I confess a satisfaction not less complete on learning that the Judicial Committee of Privy Council have been enabled by a few passing remarks to accomplish that which the most outspoken of liberal thinkers thus far, it would seem, have failed, with all their efforts, to achieve. Whether the trepidation excited by these remarks is due in any measure to the position occupied by the highest ecclesiastical tribunal of the land, I do not care to ascertain. It is enough that, by some means or other, the great question between the traditionalists and their opponents should be put in a fair way towards final settlement. I readily avail myself, therefore, of the opportunity furnished by the letter of Dr M'Neile to the *Times*, and, as it is of paramount importance that his general argument should not be misrepresented, I shall take his statements seriatim, so that my readers may at once see all that is involved in them.

But at starting it may be said, without any fear of wronging the Dean of Ripon, that all his statements resolve themselves into the one proposition



that the foundation of his religion is a certain fact on which the human reason can be fully exercised, and which must be ascertained and accepted on similar grounds to those on which we accept any historical facts whatsoever. With this proposition there can be no tampering; its value is gone if it has to undergo any modification. We are not to take the fact as meaning at one time one thing and at another time another thing; if a term which we employ denotes a thing which, so far as all history tells us, is subject to certain conditions, we are not to take it as denoting something which exhibits very different conditions. If we do, our conclusions cannot possibly rest on evidence, and, if they do not rest on evidence, they are worthless. Now Mr Bennett, following a large, indeed by far the largest, portion of that which is called Christendom, asserts that the risen body of Christ (his flesh and his blood) is present in the sacrifice of the Eucharist; and the Dean of Ripon maintains that this proposition strikes at the very root of Christianity as he understands the term. If it may be maintained that the actual body of Christ, that body with which he was crucified and was laid in the grave, and with which he rose again, is present in a hundred or a thousand places at the same time, what proofs, he asks, have we that he was ever raised at all? It must here be remarked that Dr M'Neile summarily casts aside all those more or less ingenious methods by which some interpreters and commentators have endeavoured to accommodate their positions to the character of the evidence which they have at their command. He will have nothing to do with the theories which tell us that we do not really know what flesh and blood are, and which imply or

affirm that our knowledge cannot possibly determine whether or not a body of flesh and blood may become visible and invisible at will, may pass through rocks or closed doors, may be free of the law of gravitation, and may or may not be present in many places at the same time. Thus much certainly may be said for the commentators who frame such theories, that, if they are justified in forging the first links of their chain, there is no reason why they should not add the last. If a body of flesh and blood can live without food or drink, and without the discharge of any of those bodily functions which we are disposed to regard as essential to life, there seems to be no sufficient warrant for denying that it may be present at the same time in more places than one, or even that it may be ubiquitous. But, if this be so, it also follows that we know nothing whatever of flesh and blood and body, and that we are using terms with an elastic meaning, which may be stretched and modified at our will. But the nature of the argument, if it is ever to satisfy the human mind, requires that the terms should be used with precision; and, if this cannot be done, then it is obvious that no reasonable belief can possibly issue from it. |

Against the methods of such commentators Dr M'Neile enters, therefore, an emphatic protest. With him terms are not to be modified and altered to suit the needs of theological arguments. We know what flesh is and what blood is, and we know what is meant by a body of flesh and blood; and when we speak of any of these bodies, we are not to predicate of them conditions of which human experience can furnish no example, for it is obvious that the

human mind cannot possibly have proof of these conditions except from experience. If there may be a hundred or a thousand conditions of bodily existence of which human experience gives us no information, it is self-evident that the whole subject is removed beyond the province of human reason. Thus far experience seems to show that a human body cannot be in more places than one, cannot pass through solid matter, cannot live without food, and without the waste which is implied in the need and the assimilation of food ; but if, nevertheless, such a body can be ubiquitous, or live without food, or walk on the sea, or float in the air, there is absolutely no warrant of reason why it should not be present at the same moment on all the altars of Christendom. If this is what is meant by terms which seem to speak of the risen body of Christ, it is clear that we have and can have no *evidence* of his resurrection. We may receive the assertion on faith, but it will be to us an assertion with regard to which human reason can have no function, and with reference to which there can therefore be no conviction. Such an assertion Dr M'Neile rejects with abhorrence. His mind, his human reason, must be thoroughly satisfied. He is certain that the Divine Being never meant that it should not be satisfied. That which God needed was the free assent of the human mind, and this assent cannot be given to statements which that mind is obviously unable to test.

Dr M'Neile is speaking, of course, of historical facts, not of dogmas which may possibly refer to eternal truths, which are confessedly incomprehensible. He is careful to contrast the one with the other. "Let the subject under consideration," he

says, "be 'The Trinity.' Here we can have no infallible proofs. We may have, indeed, and we have clear revelation, reasonably attested to be revelation, and therefore entitled to acceptance on authority; but the subject-matter is confessedly not comprehensible, or very imperfectly comprehensible, by the human understanding. The province of reasoning as applied to it is therefore very limited, and the terms employed in revealing it have not and cannot have that precision of meaning which an argument between man and man demands."

If I were criticising the Dean of Ripon's letter as a whole, I might point to the strange conclusions involved in these words. His own opinion is clear enough, but it is scarcely in accordance with some facts which are certainly historical. One of these facts is that a large majority of Christendom has for an indefinite length of time held that the subject of the Trinity in Unity may undergo the most minute dissection and be mapped out in terms employed with a scientific accuracy of meaning. Each of the three Divine Persons may in himself be incomprehensible: but it is nowhere said that the doctrine propounded concerning them is incomprehensible also. On the contrary, no document can be pointed out which is in form more severely technical than the Athanasian Creed. There is no sort of intimation that the terms employed in it have not and cannot have that precision of meaning which an argument between man and man demands. It may not be easy to see what attestation there can possibly be for this revelation beyond the authority of those who drew up and imposed this symbol on Christendom; but it is something to know that in spite of this rigid outlining of the whole of this



subject, which can come only from the most perfect familiarity, the Dean of Ripon confesses that, while in some way or other he believes the dogma, he cannot comprehend it at all, or that at best he comprehends it very imperfectly; and, moreover, that in spite of the seeming precision of the several terms used in the Athanasian Creed he cannot ascribe to them any such character. In short, he admits that his own notions on the subject are altogether misty, and that from the nature of the subject it is impossible that they can be anything else but misty. It follows that the dogmas of the Incarnation, of Atonement, Mediation, and Justification must all be placed in the same class. For none of these can we have any infallible proofs. The very gist of the arguments urged by Dr M'Neile and the theologians of his school or party generally is that the unaided human reason could never have worked its way to those doctrines: that their subject-matter is not comprehensible, or very imperfectly comprehensible, by the human understanding; and, therefore, of those dogmas also our notions must remain misty. In other words, the whole system of doctrines which are popularly regarded as the essential characteristics of Christianity, relates to subjects on which it is impossible to use terms with any such precision of meaning as is absolutely demanded by arguments between man and man, and about which, therefore, by the confession of the Dean of Ripon there is not much use in thinking or in speaking.

But clearly it would never do to admit that the doctrines of Christianity are inaccurate or incomplete statements of matters in themselves unintelligible, and to leave it at the same time to be supposed that Christianity is represented by a misty fabric resting

on no solid foundations. It is the special complaint of Dr M'Neile against the theologians of the Roman Church that they really cut away such foundations "by treating as analogous the mystery of the Trinity and what they call the mystery of the Sacrament." In the latter he holds that there is really no mystery at all. In the Eucharist there is no presence of any flesh or any blood, and he protests therefore against the process by which "under cover of this assumed analogy, strange bewildering phrases have been introduced and applied to flesh and blood, 'spiritual,' 'supernatural,' 'sacramental,' 'mystical,' 'ineffable,' 'supralocal.'" We come, therefore, very near to the point of supreme importance in these words of Dr M'Neile. The mode of the Divine existence may be a mystery far beyond the province of human reason: but he insists emphatically that flesh and blood are not so, and that bread and wine are not so. In other words, flesh and blood, bread and wine, are things about which we can use terms with a precision of meaning which leaves no room for the fancy that flesh is bread, and blood wine, or *vice versâ*. When we speak of flesh and blood, we speak of things whose nature has been ascertained by the whole experience of mankind, and about which that experience has never varied; for if it has varied, then unless the extent of that variation has been ascertained, precision of meaning is gone. If, in spite of our supposed experience to the contrary, water may sometimes assume the qualities of fire or wine, it is clear that we cannot apply with any scientific accuracy the terms used in defining water. Hence with regard to flesh and blood, bread and wine, we can trust to no assertions except such as are attested by human experience;



and hence, finally, the general experience of mankind that flesh cannot be ubiquitous, and must, in fact, be strictly local, furnishes an insuperable objection to the dogma which represents the flesh of Christ as present on a thousand altars at once.

On this point Dr M'Neile has not the faintest shadow of a doubt. He stakes everything on the issue with the most unhesitating confidence. The flesh of Christ after as before his resurrection was and is flesh, subject to precisely the same definitions as those which we apply to all other flesh; and he insists that if this be not so, "Christianity crumbles into a myth," for, apart from this, we can have no evidence whatever of the fact of the physical or material resurrection of his body from the grave. But I am concerned for the present not so much with the results of his arguments as with the arguments themselves; and I certainly have no temptation to weaken the stress which Dr M'Neile in his intense earnestness lays upon them. Far from attempting to disguise the fact that, unless the physical or material or bodily resurrection of Jesus is as well attested as the battle of Hastings or the surrender of Paris to the German armies, he is left without any real foundation for his faith, he asserts again and again that this must be so, not only for himself, but for all who call themselves Christians, and that the statement is, in fact, a self-evident proposition. He holds it as incontrovertible that a rational demonstration of the bodily resurrection of Jesus is essential to a reasonable faith in Christianity. It is impossible that a more momentous issue can be raised for the traditional theology of Christendom; and it is happily a tangible one. Unless we have adequate historical

evidence for the resurrection of Christ's body, Christianity, Dr M'Neile insists, crumbles into a myth. No room, I must here remark, is left for any misunderstanding. In that significant, yet, for the traditionalists not very satisfactory, book by which Butler sought to establish the analogy between revealed religion and nature, no stress whatever is laid on the physical reanimation of the body of Christ; and the whole argument for human immortality with which the work begins seems altogether to exclude the idea of any such reanimation. Butler's one point is that no living power is liable to destruction; his argument (strange as it may appear,) is that the body is a living power, and therefore that it cannot be destroyed. Butler is careful to distinguish most clearly this living power from the material particles which we are in the habit of speaking of as the body. The man who has lost his arm or his leg makes use of a wooden or a metal substitute; these limbs, therefore, have no indispensable connexion with the living power; but not only this,—the material particles which make up the outward and tangible form are in a state of perpetual flux, and no particle remains in this sensible frame for more than six or seven years. Hence the particles which compose a man's brain or stomach have been assimilated by the living power, and been rejected by it many times over in the space of sixty or seventy years. That event which we call death is, therefore, in one main feature, only a sudden accomplishment of that which is being done by slow process during that which is called life; and as the living power which assimilated these material particles was in no way affected by the gradual loss of them, so there is no reason to sup-

pose that it is affected by the sudden deposition of the whole. The living power by the very necessity of the case lives on; and as it has made use of an infinite series of particles, and as the resumption of all these particles is a manifest absurdity and impossibility, it follows that the particles which are thrown off from or by the body are thrown off once and for all. It follows further, and as a self-evident inference, that if the human entity be a living power, and if no living power can be destroyed, then there is no such thing as the death of the body, and therefore that there is no such thing as a resurrection of the body in the sense of a reanimation of that which has been for a time inanimate. Butler's argument is, therefore, absolutely opposed to the notion of a resurrection of the flesh, except in a sense which they who believe in the resurrection of the flesh would regard, and justly regard, as explaining it away. Before it can be brought within Butler's system, flesh must be made synonymous with body, and body must be defined as the living power which can make use of material particles for a special purpose, but which is quite independent of them, being itself altogether impalpable, invisible, inapprehensible by the senses. It has been absolutely necessary for me to bring out this clearly in order to show that Dr M'Neile is not maintaining the same system. In truth, he could not do so, for, although Butler nowhere denies in terms the physical resurrection or reanimation of the body of Jesus, all that his argument can do is to prove that the reanimation of the flesh was and is confined to the one instance of the resurrection of Jesus, and that therefore his resurrection is wholly unlike the resurrection which alone can

be predicated of ordinary men whose material forms, not being speedily revived, decay. Butler has, indeed, an Anastasis; but it is a rising up, not a rising again; and, as his argument gains nothing by proving historically that in one instance a dead body was, after a short time, reanimated, so he makes no attempt to prove it. It must, however, be remarked that, scientifically, his argument does tend to prove that the so-called resurrection of Jesus, if it occurred, was the revival of a man who has been in a swoon. According to Butler, a material particle which has been rejected by or has passed from the body, has been rejected or has passed from it for ever. At the moment which we call death, it deposits all material particles, and does this for ever; it follows then that, as this may not be said of the body of Jesus, the event called death had not, in this instance, taken place, and that it was, therefore, simply a case of suspended animation in the form of coma or swoon. I am not concerned here with the truth or the falsehood of Butler's argument, which philosophically acquires great strength from the fact that it makes body, mind, soul, and spirit to be one and the same thing, and thus, exhibiting in the fullest light the absolute indivisibility of man, makes his immortality depend on this indivisibility, inasmuch as living power cannot be destroyed. This may be true or not true; but it is of the utmost consequence, in dealing with the letter of the Dean of Ripon, to show that not all Christians can be regarded as upholding his position that, "without the historical fact of the resurrection of Christ's body, Christianity crumbles into a myth." As a matter of fact, a book which is approved and taken up for university and ordina-



tion examinations is found to uphold the thesis that the reanimation of the body of Christ is not in the least necessary for the existence of Christianity, and to imply further, that such a reanimation cannot throw the least light on the nature of human life and so-called human death, or on the rising upwards to a higher and better state of that living power which, for a time, has been content to manifest its existence by means of an assemblage of material particles, which, by a constant process, it assimilated and has thrown off.

This process manifestly cannot be stated as an historical fact occurring at a definite moment; and Dr M'Neile would doubtless regard this mode of looking at the resurrection of Jesus as not less abominable than a blank denial of it. His terminology and the terminology of Bishop Butler have both alike the same merit of being perfectly clear; and the latter excludes the idea of a physical reanimation of so-called dead bodies as much as the former asserts the reanimation of the body of Christ to be the sole and indispensable foundation of Christianity. If I may seem to state the same proposition more than once, it is because Dr M'Neile himself exhibits his own convictions from as many points of view as he can, in order to shut out all possible misconceptions. Hence he fastens with especial earnestness on the phrase used in the Acts in speaking of the several Christophanies after the resurrection. "We learn from St Luke," he says, "that Christ showed himself alive after his Passion by many infallible proofs (*τεκμηρίους*)." It is well known that the word *τεκμήριον* denotes absolute demonstrative evidence, or at least the very strongest kind of proof of which any given thing is

susceptible; and it is precisely such evidence as this which he thinks that the Evangelists have left to us of the Resurrection. Hence without the least misgiving that a link or links in the chain of reasoning may be wanting, he cites the words which Jesus is said to have uttered, "Behold my hands and my feet that it is I myself. Handle me and see, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have," and with these he quotes the words of Beza: "Sic hae actiones, loqui, ambulare, edere, bibere *τεκμήρια* sunt," winding up with some sentences of such extreme importance that I give them here in full.

"All such proofs were addressed to the senses of the Apostles, and the result was a process of clear and conclusive reasoning. The human mind is not capable of clearer proof on any practical subject than that which is derived from the testimony of the senses and the consequent deductions of the reason. Such was the proof, satisfactory, and, as far as human consciousness is concerned, infallible, which was given of the resurrection of Christ. Before his death his flesh was similar to ours. "For as much as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same, *αὐτὸς παραπλησίως μετέσχε τῶν αὐτῶν*. His flesh, then, was an object of sense, concerning which men might fairly reason, concerning which reasonable men could not but reason."

If these words mean anything, they mean that we may predicate of the risen or reanimated body of Jesus everything that may be predicated of human bodies generally, or, in other words, of all flesh and blood, and by parity of reasoning that we may not predicate of it anything which cannot be predicated



of flesh and blood generally ; for, if this be allowed, the matter is at once removed beyond the province of reason and the senses, within which the Dean of Ripon insists that it is to be retained. Now, there are certain things which must be predicated of the bodies of all men. If we speak of them as eating and drinking, we presuppose the processes and phenomena of digestion and excretion ; if we speak of them as walking or moving, we presuppose not merely exertion and consequent weariness, but exertion and motion under certain definite and invariable conditions. If any one comes and tells us that a man, like the cow in the nursery rhyme, jumped over the moon, or that he walked through a six-foot thick wall, or that he could show himself and vanish at will, we should say at once that his statements might possibly be true so far as his report of what he thought he had seen was concerned, but that if it was true, then the creature who did these things was not made of flesh and blood, but had an organisation so entirely different from man, that no points of likeness could be traced between the one and the other. If we were told that Mr Disraeli had on a given day spent many hours in walking round and round Landseer's lions in Trafalgar-square, we might think it strange ; if we were told that he had done this without hat, coat or boots, we might think it still more strange, but we need not resort to any further supposition by way of explaining the occurrence than that he had lost his senses. But if we were told that he had leaped up from the back of one of these lions to the top of the Nelson column and had repeated this exploit *ad libitum*, we should have no hesitation in either dismissing the story as an impudent lie or saying that the person who did

this was neither Mr Disraeli nor any human being; and that, as no such being had ever yet come within the range of human experience, we must not only disbelieve the tale, but even disbelieve our own senses if we fancied that we saw any such thing as this. It is altogether more likely that we should be mistaken or that by some means or other we should be made the victims of an optical delusion, than that a creature who had a man's body could perform acts which all the results of human experience would forbid us to predicate of any man. In short, if we speak of a man, we speak of a being who eats and drinks in order to renew the waste of the bodily tissues and whose eating and drinking is invariably followed by the process of digestion and by its results; who cannot go through solid substances or walk on water or float in the air; who cannot make himself invisible or visible by any act of the will, but who must come and go, and in either case must remain visible until he passes beyond the range of vision or unless some object cuts him off from the view of the spectator. So long as our predication follows these laws or results of human experience, we can treat it as a strictly reasoning process which appeals directly and absolutely to our senses. But, according to Dr M'Neile, there can be no reasoning process, and consequently no reasonable conviction, where these laws or conditions are not observed; and thus he adds with emphatic earnestness:

“If, after Christ's resurrection, his flesh had been something altogether different,—if it had been something not comprehensible, or very imperfectly comprehensible by the human understanding,—if the province of reasoning as applied to it had been,

therefore, very limited,—if the terms employed to describe it had not, and could not have, that precision of meaning which a proof of his resurrection demanded,—had this been so, how could his resurrection have been proved, and, if his resurrection be not proved, reasonably and conclusively proved, where is Christianity itself?"

I am not here concerned with the answer to this question; but the extreme importance of the argument compels me to repeat that, in Dr M'Neile's judgment, the province of reasoning with regard to the risen body of Jesus is not very limited, that the subject is not imperfectly comprehensible by the human mind, and that we may, therefore, demand such reasonable and conclusive proof of the fact as is in harmony with the whole course and character of experience,—nay, that, in the absence of such proofs, we are mere fools if we give credit to it.

To avoid all possibility of misconception or injustice, I give the rest of Dr M'Neile's argument in his own words, and without breaking in upon them with any comments:

"But his flesh after his resurrection was appealed to as matter of sense and argument and proof, and, therefore, it was quite comprehensible by the human understanding, and, therefore, the province of reason as applied to it was perfect, and therefore the terms employed to describe it had, and could not but have, the precision of meaning indispensable for establishing the fact that he was indeed risen from the dead.

"Deny the clear and conclusive province of reason as applied to the risen flesh of Christ, and you cannot prove the resurrection of his body.

“Admit the clear and conclusive province of reason as applied to the risen flesh of Christ, and you cannot prove any presence whatever of his flesh in the Lord's Supper. Nay, you can prove its absence, for human reason is altogether competent to the conclusion that what cannot be seen, or felt, or tasted, cannot be flesh, whatever else it may be, and the question here is not about something else, but about flesh.”

With this theological issue as between Dr M'Neile and the Sacerdotalists I have nothing to do. My business is with the propositions involved in his words; and among these are (1) that the risen flesh of Christ is quite comprehensible by the human mind; (2) that the province of reason as applied to it is *perfect*; (3) that unless we can predicate of that risen flesh all that we can predicate of any other flesh, and nothing more, the human reason cannot be exercised upon it at all, and therefore that on this subject there can be no clear and reasonable proof, and therefore no solid and reasonable conviction, inasmuch as by the change of definition we have substituted something else (whatever that may be) for the thing defined,—and thus we should find ourselves in the present instance professing to speak about flesh while in reality we are speaking about that which (whatever it may be) is not flesh at all.

Now nothing can be clearer, and to the human mind and reason more satisfactory and conclusive, than this. Certainly, if it be necessary to the definition of flesh that it should be capable of being seen, felt, and tasted, then the Sacerdotalists cannot without absurdity and falsehood maintain that the flesh of Christ is present whenever the sacrifice of



the Eucharist is offered, that is, in hundreds or in thousands of places at once. But here we make one more step in advance. Dr M'Neile's argument is here the same as that of the notification given to weak brothers at the end of the Communion Office in the Book of Common Prayer, that although the elements are to be received by communicants kneeling, yet no adoration is thereby intended to be done to them on the score of any corporeal presence of Christ in the Sacrament, inasmuch as it is against the truth of his natural body that it should be present in more places than one, and his body, being in heaven, cannot also be upon the earth. Hence we are to conclude that the compilers of the Prayer Book shared the conviction of Dr M'Neile, that the risen body of Christ is subject to the laws and conditions to which other fleshly bodies are subject, and that if we predicate of it that which may not be predicated of other fleshly bodies, we either deny its existence or convert it into something else, and thus put it beyond the province of reason,—which is not to be done without cutting away at the same time the very foundations of Christianity.

Without entering into the question of historical fact, we may here ask whether this position, eminently satisfactory though it be to the human reason, is altogether in accordance with the statements in the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles. Neither from Dr M'Neile nor from the compilers of the Prayer Book have we received any technical definition of flesh and body; but we have already seen that there are sundry things which cannot be predicated of human bodies, or of any flesh and blood with which we are acquainted. Thus, for instance, so far as human experience has gone, it is as much

a contradiction of fact to say that they can fly, or go through a solid mountain, as it is to say that they can be in more than one place at a time. So, again, we should be bound to say that a being who could subsist without food, or who could receive food without being further subject to the processes of digestion, could not possibly be a man, and that the substance of which his body or form was composed, whatever else it might be, could not possibly be flesh. But without going further than the Prayer Book, we have not merely the statement already cited that it is contrary to the truth of Christ's natural body that it should be present in more than one place, but the assertion in the fourth Article that he ascended into heaven with the same body which was crucified and raised again from the grave, and that this body consisted of flesh, bones, and all things appertaining to the perfection of man's nature.\* We cannot even conceive of living flesh apart from blood; indeed, to use Dr M'Neile's formula, living flesh without blood, whatever it may be, is certainly not that which we understand by the term, and is a something or other utterly incomprehensible by the human mind, and therefore altogether removed beyond the province of reason. Further, if any physiologist were asked to name the various things appertaining to the perfection of man's nature, he would give to blood a place quite as prominent as that of flesh and bones,

\* It has been urged by some, that the word *blood* has been omitted in this article by a somewhat disingenuous evasion, in order to avoid a formal contradiction of the expression of Paul, that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." All that I have to do is to insist that blood is necessarily included under the phrase "all things appertaining to the perfection of man's nature."



and, as of equal importance with these, he would reckon perfect action of all the organs,—a perfect action of the brain for the exercise of the highest thought, and a perfect condition of the digestive functions for the conversion of food into blood. Other things may be not less necessary; but without these he would say that human nature cannot exist, and that together with these there must be certain conditions within which man must by his very organisation be fettered. Thus he is formed for walking or running on his feet, not for flying; he may swim in the water, but he cannot walk upon it; he may leap for a few feet in the air, but he cannot rise through it except in a balloon. Now when in the fourth Gospel we are told that after Mary and two of the disciples had taken up their position at the door of the sepulchre, she saw two angels in white whom she had not seen on entering, it may be imagined that the angels had come through the solid rock or earth; for no one has contended that the bodies of angels consist of flesh, bones, and other things appertaining to the perfection of man's nature. But the body of Jesus after his resurrection can appear and vanish at will. This is so far common to all the Christophanies, that it is unnecessary to specify instances. It can also go through closed doors, for it is an evasion, from which Dr M'Neile would doubtless shrink with horror, to say that anything else can be meant when in the Johannine narrative we read that "when the doors were shut, where the disciples were assembled, Jesus came and stood in the midst." It is ridiculous, if not profane, to suppose that one who had just burst the barriers of the grave should have to knock at the door to ask for admission, and if the doors were

open, it cannot be said that they were shut. Again, his risen body, which moves by mere volition, may be seen and handled; but human experience certainly knows nothing of any man capable of walking about while through his hands and his feet might be seen the perforations caused by the nails used in crucifixion, and with a wound in his side so large that a human hand might be thrust through it. Further, unless he ascended into heaven with these perforations and this wound, it must be supposed either (1) that he had the power of putting on the appearances of these wounds at will, so that they would thus be pretences rather than realities; or (2) that these wounds were gradually healed in the interval between the resurrection and the ascension, if according to the Acts we are to assume that forty days passed between the two events. Yet more, the body of Jesus can eat and drink; but the narratives which speak of his doing so manifestly ascribe the acts not to any need of the sustenance, but simply to the desire of showing to the disciples that he can eat and drink,—to prove, in short, that he is not a ghost (whatever this may be),—a fact which at other times he bids them to test by handling him. Here already we have a number of acts predicated of the risen Jesus which could not possibly be predicated, according to all human experience, of any man whatsoever. Any one of them would be held universally to interfere with the very definition of man, of flesh and of blood. Lastly, the body of which these acts, utterly impossible according to human experience and the conclusions of reason, are predicated, and which before the crucifixion has walked on the water,

leaves the earth from the top of a hill, and rises into the air, until at last a cloud veils him from the sight of his disciples, who are told by the two men in white apparel who then appear, that he has gone away into heaven.

Thus, far from having in the risen body of Jesus a subject perfectly comprehensible by the human mind and reason, the province of reason as applied to it being *perfect*, we have something which utterly baffles the human mind, and with regard to which the province of reasoning is so limited as to preclude altogether that precision in the use of terms which an argument between man and man demands. I perfectly agree with Dr M'Neile that the question is about flesh and not about something else ; nor have I the slightest doubt that, "the human reason is altogether competent to the conclusion that what cannot be seen, or felt, or tasted cannot be flesh, whatever else it may be." But, if I am to trust my reason at all, I am equally sure that a being who can live without food, or who can receive food without digesting it, who can come and vanish and go through closed doors at will, who can so modify his form and features that those who have known him best fail to recognise him, who can walk on water and float through the air to a local heaven, is certainly not a man with a body of flesh organised with everything appertaining to the perfection of man's nature, whatever else he may be. He is thus a person with regard to whom the province of reason is very limited, and, indeed, cannot be said to exist at all ; and as, where the reason cannot be exercised there cannot be reasonable proof and reasonable conviction of a bodily resurrection, it follows, according to the Dean of Ripon, that Christianity has crumbled into a myth.



Thus, without entering on the question whether the Gospels or the Acts are historically trustworthy, my task is accomplished. The Dean of Ripon insists that all arguments between man and man require complete precision of meaning in the terms employed; and we have seen that every one of the terms employed in speaking of the risen body of Christ is used in the Gospels and the Acts with as little precision of meaning as any of those which, when used by Sacerdotalists who maintain the doctrine of transubstantiation or any kindred dogma, Dr M'Neile rejects as inaccurate and worthless. We have also seen that there is no ground or warrant in the New Testament for the assertion of Beza that the actions of speaking, walking, eating, and drinking are physical and sensible proofs that the risen body of Christ was the body of a man, a body of flesh and blood. Were we, I repeat, to see before us now a being who could eat and drink, but who needed not to do either and in whom these acts would not, or need not, be followed by any process of digestion, who could walk as men walk, but who could do so on water and in the air as well as on land, and who could pass through solid substances, we should say that, whatever else he might be, he could not be a man, and that his body could not possibly be composed of flesh, blood, and bones like our own. We should say this, even if we saw such a being with our own eyes; but how much time would it take before we could convince ourselves that we were not under a delusion, or cheated, or duped, and how much longer would it be before we accepted any such descriptions and gave credit to them as facts on the testimony of others? If we heard any persons bear



witness to the existence of such a being, how would this differ from the evidence of those Homeric persons who saw Venus and Mars mingling in the battles of men, and saw not the blood but the ichor streaming from their wounds? We have no need, therefore to examine the testimony, if any such there be, unless we abandon the position which Dr M'Neile insists that we are bound to maintain. We are dealing, he says, with things which come strictly within the province of reason; and we have seen that the various actions attributed in the Gospels to Jesus after the resurrection, and indeed before it, show that, whatever his body may have been, it was a body which was essentially not that of a human being.

But Dr M'Neile pleads that his flesh after his resurrection was appealed to as matter of sense and argument and proof. We have seen that if it was appealed to, the appeal was made to something not more really identical with human flesh than the "corpus Christi" after the bread has in the Eucharist undergone consecration. But what knowledge have we that any such appeal was made? It is singularly significant that, although in the apostolic discourses in the Acts the fact of the resurrection of Jesus is asserted, no reference is made to any of the incidents which in the Gospels and in the first chapter of the Acts are said to have accompanied the crucifixion, the resurrection, and the subsequent Christophanies. Of only one man have we at first hand the statement that he had "seen the Lord." That man is Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles; but we know that the instance to which he refers was a vision, and we might be justified therefore in inferring that the other Christophanies of which he speaks belong to

events of the same class. But of what use in any case is his testimony to Dr M'Neile, seeing that Paul is the one who emphatically asserts that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, and that, therefore, we shall all be changed, in other words, that we shall pass into conditions with regard to which the terms employed cannot have the precision which arguments between man and man demand? But how will it be, if for a moment we suppose that Paul meant to refer to historical events? The narrative of the Acts states that at some period soon after the ascension the whole number of disciples was 120; it also says that the Apostles as they gazed upwards from Mount Olivet learnt from the two men in white apparel that the Jesus whom they had seen ascending should descend again in like manner for the final judgment, the inference indubitably being that in the interval no earthly eye should ever see him, except possibly in trance or vision. In fact, the coming of the Comforter, which was declared indispensable to their spiritual life and growth, was made dependent on his absence. But Paul, while mentioning certain Christophanies, some of which may possibly be among the instances mentioned in the Gospels, says that in one case he was seen by above 500 brethren at once, thus implying that the whole number of the disciples considerably exceeded 500, and adds that he was after this seen of James, then of all the Apostles. In other words, these manifestations took place after the ascension, *i. e.*, after an event subsequent to which the Apostles were told that there would be none until the final manifestation for judgment; or else they were mere visions. Hence, as I have been obliged to maintain in my 'English Life of Jesus,'

“either Paul’s statement in an undoubtedly genuine epistle is delusive, or the narrative in Acts I is a credulous imagination, and from this dilemma there is no escape.” (P. 334.)

But the book of the Acts is the only one from which we obtain any information about the so-called witnesses to the resurrection.\* I need not here go over the proof, which I have fully given in the ‘English Life of Jesus,’ that we have not the evidence of any of them. All that we have is a number of traditions or narratives, written by whom we know not, and the composition of which even Dr Tischendorf cannot carry back nearer than fifty or sixty years to the period of the crucifixion. But, as I have been compelled to show, it would make no difference if he could take them further. The narratives are themselves inconsistent, contradictory, and in many instances (and these the most important of all) mutually exclusive, and therefore unhistorical. We are therefore, by the canons laid down by Dr

\* Of one sentence in Dr M’Neile’s letter to the *Times* I have, thus far, taken no notice. It is that in which he says, that “we learn from St Luke that Christ shewed himself alive after his Passion,” &c. The meaning of this phrase is, that the book of the Acts was written by the author of the third gospel. On any showing, however, Luke, if he wrote the third gospel, was not one of the Twelve, and there is nothing but a mere popular tradition which speaks of him as one of the seventy. The statement seeks to arrogate for the third gospel and for the Acts an authority which they do not possess. There is no evidence that Luke wrote either: nor is it necessary for me to do more than to cite the passage relating to this alleged fact in my ‘English Life of Jesus:’ “To assume identity of authorship from the similarity of two prefaces in an age when pseudonymous writings were as numerous as falling leaves in autumn, is an excess of credulity. The gospel of Luke bears no resemblance, in point of style, to the preface to that gospel, and the preface to the Acts is not much in harmony with the language of the book which follows it. A conclusion



M'Neile, driven to the conclusion that for the physical resurrection of Jesus we have absolutely no evidence whatever.

That this conclusion is the death-blow of Christianity, I am really not at all concerned by the argument to say. It may be fatal to Christianity as conceived by Dr M'Neile; but the term is unfortunately, or fortunately, an elastic one, and, as in the case of flesh, body, blood, &c., we need an accurate definition of the term. It is possible that in a sense which to others, and perhaps hereafter to himself, may be very real, Christianity may continue to exist apart from a foundation which is seen to be one of imagination, not of fact. Certain it is that the Christianity of Butler's Analogy does not need it; and by the side of the English Bishop of Durham

just as plausible (if not more reasonable) would be that some writer quite distinct from the author of Luke and Acts, has prefixed some verses of his own before two books which, up to that time, exhibited no signs of identity of authorship. However this may be, when two alleged histories are proved to be not histories, it matters nothing whether they are said to come from one or from two authors."—Pp. 328, 329. I can but repeat here that the line of argument which Dr M'Neile has chosen to follow, in his letter to the editor of the *Times*, has made it altogether unnecessary for me to enter into the historical investigation of the authorship and the trustworthiness of the gospel narratives. But in that department, until my conclusions are refuted, and the evidence on which they rest is shown to be inconclusive or erroneous, I may legitimately regard my task as already accomplished. This evidence and these conclusions I have set forth with the utmost care in my 'English Life of Jesus,' and it only remains for me to challenge the attention of Dr M'Neile, and of all who in any measure share his convictions, to a work treating of matters which Dr M'Neile regards, or professes to regard, as indispensably necessary to the existence of Christianity itself. Above all other men, he is bound by the terms of his letter to the *Times* to give to the pages of that work the most patient and serious consideration. I trust that I may not have cause to ascribe to him, as to the Christian Evidence Society, a disingenuous and cowardly evasion of a plain and an imperious duty.



I may place the Swedish Bishop Tegner, who puts into the mouth of the priest of Balder in his poem of 'Frithiof' the following words :

A Balder dwelt once in the South, a virgin's son,  
Sent by Allfather to expound the mystic runes  
Writ on the Nornas' sable shields, unknown before.  
Peace was his war-cry, love to men his shining  
sword,  
And Innocence sat dove-like on his silver helm.  
Pious he lived and taught, until at last he died,  
And 'neath far-distant palms his grave in glory  
shines.

The heathen priest goes on to say that his doctrine may one day come to Norway; but the Christian bishop clearly thinks that a man may have a fair and true idea of Christianity, even though he regards Jesus as one who never rose physically from the grave, and who, moreover, died a natural death.

Such a conception of Christianity certainly involves none of the difficulties with which Dr M'Neile struggles in vain, and which the so-called Christian Evidence Society deliberately and persistently ignores.

Am I to conclude that this conception is at once the doctrine of the Church of England, and the belief of English Churchmen in general ?

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