

The Atheistic Platform.

IX.

THE MYTH  
OF THE  
RESURRECTION.

BY

ANNIE BESANT.



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232.S.BES

The spiritual squabble over the Northwich paupers has ended in a victory for the Church. The clergy would not coöperate with the Nonconformist ministers, and the Board of Guardians has appointed a regular workhouse chaplain. The Church triumphs, the parish loses £50 a-year, and the paupers gain—What?

August 11/89

A writer on "Atheism and Anglicanism" in the Catholic *Weekly Register* seeks to make out that Anglican Protestantism leads to scepticism. He says, "The teachings of the English deists were spread through Europe by Voltaire—" That is right enough; "who learned them from Lord Herbert of Cherbury—born and bred an Anglican." This is incorrect. The deists who influenced Voltaire were Shaftesbury, Chubb, Woolston and Bolingbroke. It is doubtful if he even read a line of Lord Herbert.

The Catholic writer continues, "What did we see last year at the Manchester Church Congress? Anglican ministers expressing doubts as to the genuineness of the gospel narrative, and this in the presence of Anglican Prelate. The Rev. Sir George Cox, surely a rationalist in his principles, continues to officiate in the Anglican Church. Why should he not? Many of the most prominent of the Anglican clergy are mere sentimental deists. Under the very eyes of the Archbishop of Canterbury a committee of clergy at Lambeth have adopted pretty well all the exploded sophisms [sic] of the German neologists; while the Bishop of London confessed the other day that he had come across several clergy who denied the Resurrection."

— August 1889

- 3.—"THE GOSPEL OF EVOLUTION." BY EDWARD LUTHERY, D.Sc.
- 4.—"ENGLAND'S BALANCE-SHEET." BY CHARLES BRADLAUGH.
- 5.—"THE STORY OF THE SOUDAN." BY ANNIE BESANT.
- 6.—"NATURE AND THE GODS." BY ARTHUR B. MOSS.  
*These Six, in Wrapper, Sixpence.*
- 7.—"SOME OBJECTIONS TO SOCIALISM." BY CHARLES BRADLAUGH.
- 8.—"IS DARWINISM ATHEISTIC?" BY CHARLES COCKBILL CATTELL.

24c <sup>100</sup> Blessed the Bread Break and gave it then after the Resur  
re<sup>39</sup>rection

Luce 24c Ver 39<sup>100</sup> They his fish + Bread

" " 43 + Eat Honey Comb + Broiled <sup>fish</sup> <sub>been</sub>

The contradictory statements as to time of Crucifixion  
Mark XV-25 Spring Hour  
John XIX-14<sup>th</sup> Sixth Do

## THE MYTH OF THE RESURRECTION.

FRIENDS,—All over the world the members of the Christian Churches celebrate, as each spring returns, the "feast of the Resurrection." Yearly they weep over their dying God: yearly they rejoice over his resurrection from the dead. The belief in this resurrection is the very cornerstone of their creed. "The central miracle of Christianity is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead"—so say those who believe in the Christian religion. In these or in similar words, Christian preachers in every century have re-echoed the words of Paul: "If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable" (1 Cor. xv., 17-19).

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And this resurrection is alleged to be no myth, no symbol, no allegory, but an absolute historical fact. On this very earth of ours a man was put to death, was buried, lay dead for a night and a day and part of a second night, and then rose from the tomb which enclosed him, once more a living, breathing man, with normal flesh and bones: "Handle me, and see," the risen Jesus is reported to have said, "for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have" (Luke xxiv., 39). Indeed, this revived corpse had a digestive apparatus, for "they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb. And he took it, and did eat before them" (*Ibid.* 42, 43). The miracle is a sufficiently stupendous one—nothing less than the raising to life of a

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232.S.BES

A Russian telegram announced that at Bokhara seven hundred and two persons, exclusive of children, died July last. The Optimists who think that everything is arranged for the best in the best of all possible worlds not live in Bokhara. Professor Baldwin, who drops from the clouds in a parachute, says there is one thing better called a sky-pilot.

THE ATHEISTIC PLATFORM.

UNDER this title is being issued a fortnightly publication, each number of which consists of a lecture delivered by a well-known Freethought advocate. Any question may be selected, provided that it has formed the subject of a lecture delivered from the platform by an Atheist. It is desired to show that the Atheistic platform is used for the service of humanity, and that Atheists war against tyranny of every kind, tyranny of king and god, political, social, and theological.

Each issue consists of sixteen pages, and is published at one penny. Each writer is responsible only for his or her own views.

- 1.—“WHAT IS THE USE OF PRAYER?” By ANNIE BESANT.
- 2.—“MIND CONSIDERED AS A BODILY FUNCTION. By ALICE BRADLAUGH.
- 3.—“THE GOSPEL OF EVOLUTION.” By EDWARD AVELING, D.Sc.
- 4.—“ENGLAND’S BALANCE-SHEET.” By CHARLES BRADLAUGH.
- 5.—“THE STORY OF THE SOUDAN.” By ANNIE BESANT.
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And this resurrection is alleged to be no myth, no symbol, no allegory, but an absolute historical fact. On this very earth of ours a man was put to death, was buried, lay dead for a night and a day and part of a second night, and then rose from the tomb which enclosed him, once more a living, breathing man, with normal flesh and bones: "Handle me, and see," the risen Jesus is reported to have said, "for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have" (Luke xxiv., 39). Indeed, this revived corpse had a digestive apparatus, for "they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb. And he took it, and did eat before them" (*Ibid.* 42, 43). The miracle is a sufficiently stupendous one—nothing less than the raising to life of a

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man dead about thirty-six hours. "Death" is the word which represents the sum of the changes in the tissues of the body which follow on the cessation of respiration and of circulation. Every muscle, during that thirty-six hours, would have changed in condition, optically, chemically, electrically, etc. Every nerve would have changed, in similar fashion. In short, every part of the body would have passed through the earlier of that series of retrograde changes through which the organic passes back into the inorganic. These changes are not, in their beginnings, visible to the naked eye, and therefore to an ignorant age they are non-existent. "To raise from the dead," before absolute and visible putrefaction had begun, seemed so easy a thing ere the microscope, the reagent, the galvanometer, had revealed the important changes which precede visible decomposition: "Thou shalt not suffer thy Holy One to see corruption," sang the Psalmist. "He, whom God had raised again, saw no corruption," declared Paul. It would be unfair to demand from the half-barbarian Hebrew prophet, or from the scientifically ignorant Paul, a physiological knowledge unattainable in the ages in which they lived. They could not tell that it would be quite as easy to roll back the waves of organic change after corruption had appeared, as after coagulation of the muscles had supervened. There are no stages in the miraculous; no ordinary experience can measure the supernatural.

It is absolutely claimed then, as a dry matter of fact, that this extraordinary resuscitation of a man, dead for about thirty-six hours, really took place about the year 33 A.D. Nor is any sense shown of the extraordinary nature of the event. In the "Scriptures" in which it is related are the records of several other resurrections, so that the resurrection of Jesus is not even unique. Elisha stretched himself on a dead child till it "sneezed seven times," and "opened his eyes" (2 Kings v., 35). A dead man, touching Elisha's bones, "revived, and stood up on his feet" (*Ibid.* xiii. 21). A dead man belonging to the city of Nain was bidden arise by Jesus, "and he that was dead sat up and began to speak" (Luke vii. 15). A girl's "spirit came again" (*Ibid.* viii. 55), at a similar summons. Lazarus had been dead four days, and had become evidently decomposed (see John xi. 39), yet at the call of Jesus "he that was dead came forth" (*Ibid.* 44), while

Resurrections

contemporaneously with the rising of Jesus there was a sort of small general resurrection, or rehearsal of the last day, and "the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept, arose, and came out of the graves" (Matt. xxvii., 52, 53). Even Peter was able to raise the dead, and presented Tabitha alive (Acts ix., 41) after she had been dead for some little while. It must have been a very interesting society, that of Judea between A.D. 30 and 35, with so many revived corpses in it, and it is a pity that so little advantage was taken of the exceptional circumstances. We know no more of "the world beyond the grave" than if all these dead folks had remained quietly in their shrouds.

Now, it is a sound rule of criticism that the more unusual an event, the stronger should be the evidence supporting it. A statement which contradicts the whole mass of human ordinary observation and experience must, if it is to be believed, be supported by indubitable testimony. If anyone tells us: "The sun rose this morning," we do not challenge an assertion for which we are prepared by the antecedent universal testimony of the human race to the daily orderly rising of the sun. If anyone tells us: "In India there are serpents with legs," we should require reiterated corroboration from trustworthy naturalists, because the assertion is contrary to the hitherto observed facts respecting serpents. If anyone tells us: "The cow jumped over the moon," we decline to believe the statement, because the muscles of no cow known to man have elasticity sufficient for the performance of such a leap, because the lungs of the cow are not adapted for breathing outside the terrestrial atmosphere, and, generally, because no previous bovine performance has prepared us for a manifestation of such enormous acrobatic agility. We conclude that the speaker is either impudently endeavoring to deceive us, or that he is himself deceived. The latter explanation would be accepted, if we have had reason to believe that he was an honest weak sort of man. In either case his assertion would be met with "the blankest scepticism." In face of the miraculous, Hume's argument always stands good: That it is far more likely that individuals should have been deceived than that an event has occurred which contradicts all human experience. We are constantly meeting in the world both charlatans and simple-

*Peter  
Raising the  
Dead*

*note*

tons. Either, or both, may start the story of a miracle, and then it passes from mouth to mouth, growing as it travels, and, believed by a superstitious and ignorant people, it gradually attains the rank of history, and sometimes becomes the foundation of a religion.

The truth is—and on this it is well to be outspoken—that to the educated thinker the miraculous is the incredible. While men are ignorant all that happens is the unforeseen and the non-understood, and there is nothing more impossible in withering a fig tree with a curse than in the sprouting out of green leaves from an apparently dead and dry branch. Until a regular sequence is observed and appreciated irregular interruptions have about them nothing strange. Therefore it is that miracles always occur among superstitious peoples, and not among enlightened—among the ignorant, not among the educated. But once start a miracle among a superstitious population, and it will fly from house to house, from village to village, becoming more circumstantial with every new narrator, until the myth becomes a reality, and he is an infidel who doubts or disbelieves.

Among the great mass of English Christians now-a-days a miracle must be old if it is believed. Brand new miracles find no acceptance among us. Also, they must be of Jewish manufacture. No Gentile can manage a good miracle. The English Protestant turns up his nose at the Popish miracles at Lourdes and at Knock, although they are a good deal better authenticated than those at Nain and at Bethany, and are much easier to investigate. He does not even condescend to verify them, but merely pushes them contemptuously on one side as incredible. Yet when I treat his miracles in exactly the same way he flies into a fury, and declares that I shall be damned for not believing that miracles happened in Judæa, while the Papist will be damned for believing that they are happening in France.

However, as so many people do believe in the miracle of the resurrection, it is worth while to examine the evidence offered in support of the story, and to see whether that evidence is coherent, rational, and consistent.

And, first, what evidence is there outside the sacred books of the Christians? The coming to life again of a dead man is not an event so ordinary as to pass without notice. Jerusalem was not a mere village, but was the



*Notice*

seat of a Roman governor, the capital city of a province. It had its learned men, its writers, its thoughtful citizens, and it had also within its walls a number of Roman soldiers likely to feel personally interested in the sudden return to life of a Jew crucified by their own hands as a rebel claiming royal honors inconsistent with their own authority. What evidence of the resurrection has been left by any of these? Absolutely none. Not one solitary record has come to us from governor or centurion, from scribe or from pharisee. The Romans remained indifferent to the return of the crucified "king of the Jews," dangerous leader as such a risen corpse would have proved. The Jewish aristocracy of intellect showed no sign of fear at the triumph over death of the detested agitator to whose pretensions they had so completely and, as they imagined, finally, put an end. Is it credible that a man who had proved his stupendous power, his absolute invincibility, by rising living from a tomb in which he had been deposited dead, should have created no stir in the city which had seen his crucifixion and his ensepulture? Either from love or from fear every knee in Jerusalem would have bent to him; no one would have been mad enough to dispute with the conqueror of death, the burster of the tomb; Pilate and Herod, Caiaphas and Annas, would have been prostrate before the risen Christ; priest and soldier, pharisee and sadducee, would have fallen at the nail-pierced feet which had trodden into helplessness the last great enemy of man.

If it be argued that Jesus, after his rising, hid himself from all Jerusalem save from a few selected disciples of his own, our answer is that if he did not face investigation then he cannot expect credence now. A hole-and-corner resurrection, of which no evidence is forthcoming save from prejudiced parties, has no claim on our belief. We ask for impartial, fair, straight-forward evidence of the rising of this man from the dead, and none is offered to us. There is not one scrap of evidence for the resurrection outside the Christian records.

Let us now turn to these, and see what sort of proof we can obtain from them. I pass over—for lack of time—the overwhelming mass of evidence against the authenticity and credibility of the books of the New Testament, reminding you only of the significant fact that none of the Gospels can be traced to within one hundred and thirty years, at

least, of the supposed date of the resurrection, and that it is even then impossible to verify them individually. One hundred and thirty years for a miracle-story to grow! One hundred and thirty years for a report to pass from mouth to mouth! One hundred and thirty years of additions, of exaggerations, of embellishments, of pious frauds! But I leave you to imagine how a myth might expand in one hundred and thirty years among an ignorant and superstitious people, and I come to the records, such as they are, left by some Christian writers, of this "central miracle of Christianity."

And first, it is a most remarkable fact connected with the "witnesses" of the resurrection, that no one comes forward and says: "I saw the resurrection"; or, "I saw Jesus dead, and afterwards I saw him alive." *There is no direct testimony.* None who saw that dead man issue living from the tomb, none who met him and conversed with him after he had left the grave, has told the world: "My eyes saw this great sight. My tongue spoke to this dead man who became alive again. My hands touched this body which was a corpse but which returned to life." Search through the New Testament, and no one who writes says: "I saw." The writers report what others say, but never once give their own experience (obviously because they have none to give). It is all hearsay, from beginning to end. No message has come down to us from those who watched by that sealed stone, that the "Son of man," with pierced hands and feet, came forth alive from the tomb in which he had been laid for dead. No word from any of the women, from his mother, from Mary Magdalene, from his brothers. When we come to the direct evidence of those who saw Jesus after his supposed death, we find it very weak; in Matthew we read: "Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw him they worshipped him; but some doubted." Of these eleven, Matthew was one, and the only testimony that this Matthew—the supposed writer of the gospel—gives, is that "they worshipped him, but some doubted." Was Matthew, the supposed writer, among the worshippers, or among the doubters? How is it that Matthew, one of the eleven, writing of the "central miracle" of the Christian faith, does not indignantly protest against the doubters, and affirm his own undoubting

faith? "Some doubted." The doubt has floated down the centuries, and if some of his own apostles, his closest friends, doubted when "the risen Christ" stood face to face with them, are we to be blamed if, eighteen centuries afterwards, we decline to believe without proof that which they believed not when the alleged proof was under their very eyes?

Mark and Luke do not pretend to be eyewitnesses, so their testimony is admittedly hearsay. Luke distinctly says that his account of the "things which are most surely believed among us," was only "as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses" (Luke i., 1, 2). For the moment we will pass these, and come to John, "the beloved disciple." Here—by making the unwarrantable assumption that this John was the author of the fourth gospel—we should arrive at the solitary unsupported testimony of an ignorant man, that he saw Jesus after his supposed death. We can scarcely believe so stupendous a miracle on the uncorroborated testimony of a single unknown fisherman, belonging to a grossly ignorant and superstitious race. Surely never did a miracle hang on a less trustworthy link. And when we remember that it is generally admitted that the fourth gospel is of Alexandrian origin, and is confessedly at variance, on a large number of important points, with the three synoptics, we are better able to appreciate the utter worthlessness of the "evidence" of "the apostle John."

Passing, however, over the deficiency of evidence at first hand, let us examine the hearsay evidence, on which we are driven to reply, *faute de mieux*. Is this, at least, consistent and coherent throughout, so as to leave on the mind an impression of careful accuracy and painstaking on the part of the writers?

How many accounts have we, leaving out mere references to it scattered through the books of the New Testament? The value of the "general Christian belief" in it we will deal with later. We may take six; those in the four gospels, the account of the actions of Jesus after the resurrection, given in Acts i., and the brief summary in 1 Cor. xv. If these six accounts supported each other, they might be of some value, secondhand as they are; but being utterly incompatible the one with the other, they become utterly worthless as evidence. Only those who are determined to

believe, with or without proof, can accept the resurrection myth on the contradictory and incoherent testimony of our six witnesses. But let us examine them one by one, and then try to summarise the evidence.

The writer of the first of the six stories bears the name of Matthew in the authorised version of the Bible. He gives the following account of the Resurrection :—

As the dawn was breaking of the first day of the week, two women, Mary Magdalene and "the other Mary," went to the sepulchre in which Jesus had been buried. On their arrival, an angel came down and rolled away the stone from the mouth of the tomb, and sat thereon, and speaking to the women, he told them that Jesus was risen, invited them to "see the place where the Lord lay," and bade them go to the disciples quickly, and tell them that they should see their risen Lord in Galilee. As they ran to carry their message Jesus met them, and they held him by the feet and worshipped him. Jesus repeated the command that the disciples should go to Galilee, promising that they should see him there. "Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw him they worshipped him: but some doubted."

Comparing this with the account given in Mark, we find one woman added to the company, by name Salome. The three, instead of the two, reach the sepulchre, and instead of seeing an angel descending and rolling away the stone, they find the stone already rolled away. As no angel is there to invite them to enter, they go into the sepulchre without an invitation, and they find inside a young man, sitting on the right side. He speaks to them in almost the same words as did the angel who rolled away the stone, according to Matthew, but the women, instead of running to bring the disciples word, fly trembling from the sepulchre, "neither said they anything to any man, for they were afraid." They do not meet Jesus, nor is anything more recorded as far as Mary and Salome are concerned. At this point a new account seems to commence in Mark, for it begins again by saying: "Now when Jesus was risen early, the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene." According to Matthew, Mary Magdalene and "the other Mary" were together, and they both met Jesus, and worshipped him. Mary Magdalene



*Ascension Day is His Coronation Day.*

(6) The Apostles saw Him begin His ascension (Luke xxiv, 50); the angels attended Him on His passage through the heavens (Acts i, 10); and in Psalm xxiv, 7-end, we seem to have their anthem of triumph. Daniel prophetically records the scene of His reception in Heaven, and formal induction into His Kingdom (Daniel vii, 9-11).

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in Matthew, meets two of them in the country, and appears to the eleven as they are at meat. After a brief conversation, in the words of the Evangelist, "then after the Lord had spoken unto them," "he was received up into heaven," the ascension apparently occurring on the very day of the resurrection.

We turn to Luke:—

The number of women has increased again: we have now Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Joanna—of whom we have not heard before—and "other women that were with them." They do not see the rolling away of the stone, nor the angel of Matthew, nor do they find sitting inside the sepulchre the young man of Mark. But as they are puzzling themselves about the empty state of the sepulchre, two men stand by them, and make remarks very similar to those of Matthew's angel and of Mark's solitary young man. They leave the sepulchre, and tell "all these things to the eleven." Peter then visits the sepulchre, and departs wondering. On "that same day" Jesus appears to "two of them," and these return to the eleven with the story, and while they are speaking Jesus appears. After a brief speech, he "led them out as far as to Bethany," and was "carried up into heaven"— Luke, like Mark, apparently regarding the ascension as taking place on the day of the resurrection.

We now turn to John:—

In this account Mary Magdalene goes by herself, "early, when it was yet dark." She is alone, and her visit is not, like that in Mark, made with the others "at the rising of the sun." The stone has been rolled away before she reaches the sepulchre. She runs straight off to Peter and John, having seen no angel, no young man, no two men, and Peter and John run off at once to the sepulchre. They both go in, but see only the linen clothes in which the dead body had been wrapped. (I have often wondered what clothes Jesus wore after the resurrection, for his own clothes were taken by the soldiers, his body was wound in linen, and this he left in the sepulchre.) Peter and John believe, although we are distinctly told that the account of the resurrection seemed "as idle tales" to the apostles

+ J.C. ascension to Heaven Mark XIV-7-19

Luke XXIV-50 — Acts I-9-10

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of Christ denounces Hypocrisy Matthew XXII

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(Luke), among whom were Peter and John, and that Jesus upbraided the eleven (Mark), of whom Peter and John were two, for their unbelief, "because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen." In John no woman except Mary Magdalene goes near the sepulchre at all, but she remains there, and sees first two angels sitting inside—who speak to her—and then Jesus himself. At first she does not recognise him, but supposing him to be the gardener, she asks if he has taken Jesus away. The information given by the angel, or man, to herself and the other women—according to Matthew, Mark, and Luke—is here omitted, and she knows nothing about the resurrection. Jesus says, "Mary," and she recognises him, and is not allowed to touch him, although in Matthew she holds his feet. She then goes and tells the disciples that she has seen Jesus. On the same evening Jesus appears to the disciples, and instead of upbraiding them with their unbelief he greets them with "Peace be unto you." Eight days later he appears again, still in Jerusalem, afterwards he meets them casually at the sea of Tiberias, and works a miracle. John seems to know nothing about the ascension.

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X In the "Acts of the Apostles" we learn that Jesus remained on earth forty days, instead of ascending on the day of his resurrection, and that he gave "many infallible proofs" that he was alive. Unfortunately none of these have come down to us.

In 1 Cor. xv. we hear nothing of the women, but are told that he was seen of Cephas (Peter)—an interview not elsewhere recorded—"then of the twelve;" "the twelve" included Judas, and except in Corinthians we never hear that the betrayer remained in the company of his former comrades; on the contrary, we read in one account (Matthew) that "he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself," while in a second (Acts) he uses the money to purchase a field, and falls headlong in it and bursts. Whichever of these contradictory accounts may be true, neither is compatible with his forming one of "the twelve" and seeing Jesus. "After that he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once;" this is quite new, and is a little puzzling, for we are told that after the ascension (Acts) the number of the disciples was "about an hundred and twenty." "After that he was

seen of James, then of all the apostles." James was one of "the twelve," and the apostles are identical with "the twelve." On the whole, the account in Corinthians is rather mixed, and in no single respect agrees with that of the gospels; we are told emphatically by John that the meeting by the sea of Tiberias was "the third time that Jesus showed himself to his disciples, after that he was risen from the dead." But this coincides with none of the meetings recorded in Corinthians, and must be at least the sixth meeting if Corinthians is right.

To sum up the contradictions, leaving Corinthians on the one side, as hopelessly erratic:—

While it is yet dark, though the sun is rising, Mary Magdalene alone, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, Mary Magdalene, Mary and Salome, Mary Magdalene, Mary, Joanna, and some "other women," goes, or go, to the sepulchre. They find the stone closing the tomb; but an angel comes down, rolls it away, sits on it, and talks to them. They also find the stone not closing the tomb, but rolled away, and see no angel sitting on it, but only a young man sitting inside. They see no angel, no young man sitting, but two men suddenly appear standing by them. They see no angel, no young man sitting, no two men standing, but two angels sitting. After this, they run away, and tell the disciples; but, at the same time, they say nothing unto any man. The apostles do not believe, but two of them do believe. The women meet Jesus, and do not meet him. Mary Magdalene holds him by the feet, but is not allowed to touch him. He meets his disciples for the first time in Galilee, in a mountain, but has seen them twice previously in Jerusalem, and a third time by the sea of Tiberias.

And it is this incoherent, self-contradictory mass of statements which we are offered as proof of a most stupendous *lie* miracle! Taking it at its highest, it is the hysterical and conflicting babble of an indefinite number of terrified and superstitious women, and is absolutely worthless as evidence.

It is often argued that the wide reception of a belief is a proof of its truth, and therefore that the resurrection of Christ must be true. But if this be so, many utterly false statements ought to be accepted as reliable. The belief that the earth was stationary, and that the sun moved round it, was at one time universal; ought we, therefore,

Contradictory Evidence

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to accept the universal error as an indubitable truth? The belief that Jesus would return to judge the earth in A.D. 1000, was universal in Europe; the fields were left untilled, all work was suspended, yet the lie was given to the universal belief by the non-appearance of the judge. Mahomet's teaching has been widely received, but is it therefore true? If truth is to be measured, not by reason, but by the multitude of the believers, then Buddhism must be received in preference to Christianity, for four hundred millions of Buddhists face one hundred and seventy millions of Christians.

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danger

But why, say the Christians, should the apostles and early disciples have faced danger and death in order to preach a falsehood? In the first place there is no proof that anyone who was personally acquainted with Jesus ever faced danger and death in support of the allegation that Jesus rose from the dead. The obscurity which surrounds the inception of the "New Testament," and the lives of the earliest Christian teachers, effectually shrouds all evidence on this head. There is no evidence outside the utterly unreliable Christian records, until we come to some doubtful martyrdoms towards the end of the second century. But martyrdom does not prove the truth of a belief; it proves only the sincerity with which it is held. There are martyrs of every creed; men have died as joyfully for Mahomet as for Christ, for Buddha as for Mary. Christian, Hindu, Mahomedan, Pantheist, Atheist—all face loss and peril with equal willingness for the truths in which they severally believe. Martyrdom testifies to the grandeur of self-devotion in man to his ideal, not to the truth of his theories about God.

death

Justice

Supposing that there is any truth at all in the allegation that in the first century after the supposed date of the death of Christ a rumor was current that he had risen from the dead, it is very easy to understand how such a rumor may have been started. Before his death he talked vaguely about his return, about his disciples seeing him again; after his death some women have a "vision of angels which said that he was alive" (Luke xxiv., 23), and from these the myth spreads. Two men walk with him, but do not recognise him, until in the dusk of evening "they knew him, and he vanished out of their sight" (*Ibid.*, 31). Unrecognised in daylight while they can scrutinise him, he is

recognised when he disappears in the dusk! He comes through shut doors (John xx., 19 and 26), and behaves generally in airy conjuring fashion; and these vague, childish, contradictory tales are to be the proofs, forsooth, of the resurrection of a dead man, proofs that cannot even be traced to their supposed authors.

As a matter of fact, the Myth of the Resurrection is far older than the first century, and has roots that strike far deeper than into the tomb of Joseph the Arimathean. It has come down to us out of the twilight of history, one of the most venerable myths of the older world. The Resurrection, the eternal Easter Day, is the ever-recurring spring equinox, in which, year after year, the Sun-God triumphs over the death of the winter-cold, and Nature rises from her ice-bound grave in the abounding life of her vernal youth. Wherever the cycle of the seasons is found, there the resurrection is repeated with every spring. It is a natural truth, wide as the world, old as the history of man.

Of this truth spoke the passover of the Jews, the passover which became the Christian sacrifice of Calvary. For does not the sun pass over the equator in March, and thus mark the triumph over the past wintry months? Full of significance, too, is the struggle between the calf of the Egyptians and the lamb of the Israelites, for the Egyptians clung to the venerable sign of Taurus, the sign in which the sun had been for the vernal equinox, while the innovating Israelites proclaimed the lamb, as the true passover offering, since the sun had passed into Aries for the supreme triumph.

In the Jewish and the Christian scriptures the lamb is the sign of the sun in its spring resurrection. "His head and his hairs were white like wool" (Rev. i., 14), says the writer of the great astrological allegory of the Bible; "in the midst of the throne . . . stood a lamb" (*Ibid.*, v. 6), and the song of praise was: "Worthy is the lamb" (*Ibid.*, 12). Why this deification of a brute save for symbolical meaning? Now-a-days the Christians commit an anachronism in their Easter homage to the lamb, for the sun is in the sign of Pisces at the vernal equinox, and they should cry: "O Fish of God!" Twenty-six thousand years ago Oannes, the fish, was God. Now his turn has come round again, and the lamb is a usurper in the Church.

Note that the feast of the Resurrection is a moveable

feast. It falls on the first Sunday after the full moon on or after March 21st in each year. Christ's rising is celebrated not on a definite date, like a historical event, but on a date which follows the full moon—that is, which depends on the relative positions of the Sun-god and the moon. In a word, it is the celebration of a natural allegory, not of a past event.

Every year has its real Easter. Every year the fair fresh beauty of Nature wakes from the winter sleep, and rises radiant from the bare furrows and the dried forest trees. The branches smile into leaves; the soil laughs into blossoms; breaths of wild roses make fragrant the breezes, and sighs of the nightingale make musical the dusk. Earth's Easter-Day dawns for us in each spring-tide, and outshines the paleness of the Galilean star.

And more glorious yet is the Easter-Day of the mind, when the brain rises from the death of ignorance and bursts forth from the tomb in which it has been buried out of the sunshine of knowledge and of truth. Each human mind and heart have their own Easter-Day, save those on whose tomb the priests have rolled the stone of fear.

But for these also an Easter-Day shall dawn, and the morning of the Resurrection shall break into day. Long has Humanity slumbered in the tomb in the rich man's garden; long has she lain there with the corpse-clothes round her, and the priests have made her sepulture sure, sealing the stone and setting a watch. But O my friends, my fellow-workers, believe me, she is not dead, but sleepeth. Yet shall the cry go out to her: "Humanity, arise!" And whenever you slay a lie or proclaim a truth, whenever you strike down a hoary superstition or cradle a new-born verity, you are as the mighty angel who rolled away the stone from the door of the sepulchre, and your work shall join in the mighty chorus which shall soon ring forth on earth: "Humanity is not here; she is risen from the dead;" and you yourselves are in very truth the first fruits of them that sleep.