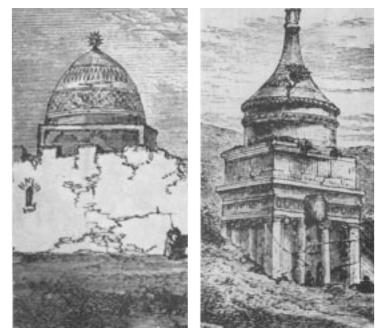
PART III

DEATH



Takht-i-Sulaiman (Throne of Solomon)



Ezra's Tomb. Tomb of Absalom in the Valley (Palestine). of Josephat (Palestine). (See pages 287, 346)

CHAPTER 9

THE PASSION

By combining the different statements in the four Gospels, the Acts and the Epistles of Paul and Peter, Christians construct an account of certain events which form the basis of their religion. They believe that Jesus died on the cross; that devout hands took his body down from the cross and laid it in a tomb on the Friday evening; that Jesus rose from the tomb on the following Sunday; that after an earthly sojourn, during which his disciples saw him on several occasions, he ascended to heaven to sit on the right hand of God.

But even a superficial examination of the texts reveals this legend to be artificially composed from contradictory fragments which have not only been compiled in utter disregard of their discrepancies, but, instead of exhibiting a sequence, are really alternative narratives.

The Resurrection of Jesus has to be considered with the Burial which preceded it and the Ascension which followed it. But to appreciate the significance, sequence and unreality of these three inseparable events, some observations are necessary, by way of introduction, on the crucifixion itself.

For the purpose of this book I am not concerned with the nature of the Jewish accusations against Jesus which resulted in his trial before the Sanhedrin; or the legality of the procedure adopted by this tribunal, or his subsequent trial before Pilate, or the episode of Pilate's sending Jesus back to Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee, who happened to be in Jerusalem. This episode is peculiar to Luke¹ only, and its futility does him scant credit. I may, however, mention that the Gospel account of the arrest, trial and condemnation of Jesus swarms with impossibilities, improbabilities and inconsistencies and is quite unintelligible from the juridical point of view.

But, before dealing with the scenes at Calvary, there are one or two matters which require our special attention. First is a comparison by Jesus of his fate with that of Jonah, the Prophet. In response to a demand of the Scribes and Pharisees for a sign, Jesus is reported to have said:

An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the Prophet Jonas: for as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.²

In Luke also this prophecy is referred to in the following terms:

This is an evil generation: they seek a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of Jonas, the Prophet. For as Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites so shall also the Son of man be to this generation.³

^{1.} Luke, 23 : 7.

^{2.} Matt., 12: 39-40.

The Biblical version of Jonah can, by no stretch of imagination, be made to support the theory of the death of Jesus on the cross, or his burial as a dead man, or his ultimate resurrection from the dead; for Jonah was cast alive into the sea by his fellow-passengers on board the ship, was swallowed alive by a whale, remained alive in its belly for three days and three nights and was vomited out alive.¹

Jesus, on the contrary, according to Christian belief, was not alive, but dead. Further, Jesus remained in the tomb for twenty-six hours only.

Secondly, only one aspect of the course of events before the Sanhedrin deserves our consideration. The proceedings adopted by this college of elders in this case were quite in conformity with the established law. The procedure against a "Corrupter" who sought to stain the purity of religion, is explained in the Talmud. A judicial ambush is therein provided as an essential part of the examination of criminals. When a man was accused of being a "Corrupter" two witnesses were suborned and concealed behind a partition. The accused was brought into a contiguous room, where he could be heard by these two witnesses without his perceiving them. Two candles were lighted near him in order that it might be satisfactorily proved that the witnesses "saw him."² He was then made to repeat his blasphemy and urged to retract it. If he persisted he was produced with the two witnesses before the tribunal and on being found guilty was sentenced to death. The narrative of the trial of Jesus corresponded with the procedure described in the Talmud, and we are also told that he was charged with "Corruption," i.e., "perverting the nation,"³ and that the chief priest and elders and all the council sought false witnesses against Jesus to put him to death.⁴ Their failure to get two reliable witnesses who would support the accusation infuriated them and they tried to get the blind man whom Jesus had cured to testify against him.5

Speaking of the atrocities of the Sanhedrin on this occasion Dean Milman says that they maltreated all partisans of Jesus with the terrible threats of excommunication, and the timid believers and his relatives, including Mary, the mother of Jesus, were put before this awful tribunal and, when questioned, refrained from saying anything lest their testimony might be used against Jesus; but they, one and all, did refer the tribunal to Jesus himself for information.⁶ The judges were thus compelled to question Jesus and he then delivered a speech "which was both a memorable speech and a masterpiece of advocacy."⁷ The reference, no doubt, is to certain passages in John.⁸

Jesus, no doubt, was condemned to death. There is no reason to suppose that the Romans did not try to execute the sentence and there is not the least ground to imagine that someone else, who in appearance was like Jesus, was put in place of him on

2. Renan, History of the Origin of Christianity, 227.

4. Matt., 26 : 59: Luke, 22 : 66.

5. John, 9 : 21-23.

- 6. Milman, History of Christianity, 272.
- 7. Lawrence, Ecclesiastical History, 201.
- 8. John, 18: 20-21.

^{1.} Jonah, 1:9-17; 2:1-10.

^{3.} Luke, 23 : 2.

the cross. It does not seem legitimate to doubt the historicity of the fact that Jesus was put on the cross, but exception can be taken to the details in the Gospel account and it can be established that he did not die on the cross.

In itself it is not unlikely that Jesus was scourged, that is to say, subjected to flagella, or the flagra as the evangelists call it, was mocked at and insulted by the soldiers and the onlooking crowd. I will omit details of the cruelty heaped on Jesus. The evangelists give them in great detail in order to move listeners and readers in the deepest possible way. For my purpose it is equally unimportant whether these things happened in Pilate's praetorium or in the house of the high priest. Of course, the Gospels differ.

CHAPTER 10

CRUCIFIXION

On the way to Golgatha, Jesus was offered a beverage which is described as of vinegar mingled with gall¹ and, according to Mark, mixed with Myrrh,² a kind of anaesthetic or narcotic, a stupefying draught which, according to the Rabbinical tradition,³ Jewish women considered it a pious deed to prepare and offer to those about to be executed, the real object being to blunt their susceptibility to pain.⁴ But Matthew gives a different object. It was the fulfilment of a prophecy. The Gospel of Matthew, curiously enough, does not contain a single line which is not a reproduction of some prophecy of the Old Testament. The soldiers cast lots amongst themselves⁵ for the division of his garments so that it might be fulfilled:

They parted my garments among them, and upon my vestures did they cast lots.6

The nailing of Jesus on the cross was, again, the fulfilment of another prophecy.7

The beverage was first given before crucifixion;⁸ the second time, after he was put on the cross, when the soldiers gave him *posca*,⁹ and for the third time, on the cry of Jesus: "I thirst."¹⁰ Matthew then refers to the wagging of heads and the scorn of passers-by¹¹ and makes the chief priest say:

He trusted in God; let Him deliver him now; if He will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God.¹²

This reference again, with material change, is nothing other than a Greek reproduction of what stands in the Psalms.¹³

The first two evangelists do not tell us that any of the twelve disciples was present at the crucifixion. It appears that they had all forsaken Jesus and fled at the time of his arrest,¹⁴ and had not followed him, and were too afraid for their own lives to be present at Calvary.

This is one of those very rare incidents in which Matthew could not see the fulfilment of any prophecy of the Old Testament; for the simple reason perhaps that, unlike Jesus, the prophets of yore must have had a few faithful disciples.

To resume the narrative, John does say that Peter and John followed Jesus, but only to the Hall of Judgement and there too only in disguise. Even John does not allege that

- 8. Matt., 27 : 34; Mark, 15 : 23.
- 9. Luke, 23 : 36.
- 10. Matt., 27: 48; Mark, 15: 36; John, 19: 28-29.
- 11. Matt., 27: 39 cf. Ps., 22: 7.
- 12. Matt., 27: 43.
- 13. Ps., 22 : 8.
- 14. Matt., 26 : 56; cf. Mark, 14 : 40.

^{1.} Matt., 27: 34.

^{2.} Mark, 15:23

^{3.} Brandt, Die Evangelische Gesch und der ursprung des Christentunis, 177.

^{4.} Dummelow, Commentary on the Holy Bible, 717.

^{5.} Matt., 27 : 35.

^{6.} Ps., 22 : 18.

^{7.} Ps., 22 : 16-18; 69 : 21.

these two disciples were present anywhere near the cross. The evangelists do mention, however, the presence of several Galilean women, including Mary, the mother of Jesus.¹

We are then told that Jesus uttered a cry. The evangelists differ as to what his last words were. Both Matthew and Mark say that he cried with a loud voice *Eli*, *Eli*, *lama sabachthani*?—"My God, my God: why hast Thou forsaken me?"² The ancient text of Mark current in the West makes Jesus also add:

Why hast Thou put me to shame?3

I pause to observe that the utterance was not an appeal from a beloved son to the Father. It was a cry of despair, the most poignant expression of the innermost feeling of a man in agony who could not but dread that even God had forsaken him and thus put him to shame. And why should Jesus have made this accusatory utterance, which must have come from his very heart? He did not wish to die, as his work was yet incomplete. The Kingdom he had foretold had yet to come. He could not understand why God, Who also knew that his work was still incomplete, had forsaken him and had not come to his help to enable him to complete his mission, and had allowed him to be stigmatized; for

He that is hanged is accursed of God.⁴

Jesus had told his disciples that:

My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death.5

And he had prayed:

Abba, father, all things are possible unto Thee; take away this cup from me; nevertheless not what I will, but what Thou wilt.⁶

And according to Luke:

And being in great agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.⁷

Now, if Jesus knew that he was to die for the sins of others and that he would be raised again to sit on the right hand of God, why was he "sorrowful unto death," and why did he pray in "great agony" to God to "take away this cup" from him? The answers are too obvious. He did not know anything except that Jews were bent on condemning him to death and that according to Jewish belief, and his own belief as a Jew, if he died on the cross he would have died the death of an "accursed of God." That is why he was in great agony and prayed to God to take away this death from him. Did not God hear and accept this prayer of Jesus, one of His Prophets, or as

^{1.} John, 19: 25.

^{2.} Matt., 27: 46; Mark, 15: 34.

^{3.} Tucker, *History of Christianity in the Light of Modern Knowledge*, 258.

^{4.} Deut., 21 : 23.

^{5.} Mark, 14: 34; Matt., 26: 38.

^{6.} Mark, 14 : 36; Matt., 26 : 39; Luke, 22 : 42.

^{7.} Luke, 22 : 44.

Christians would have it, His only begotten son? No, say the Christians, for they make Jesus die on the cross. But, to me, it is inconceivable that his prayer could have possibly remained unanswered. Jesus in the sermon on the Mount had said:

Ask and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For everyone that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son asks bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks a fish, will he give him a serpent.¹

These pictorial illustrations, in view of the climax of the increasing urgency in *ask* *seek* *knock*, show that, according to Jesus, God will never mock an earnest suppliant by appearing to answer his prayer and giving him something noxious instead of the thing prayed for. Why should God have, therefore, caused Jesus to die on the cross and not deliver him from an accursed's death as prayed for by him. But we need not speculate, because Jesus himself had said:

Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast heard me and I know that Thou hearest me $always.^2$

The prayer of Jesus was indeed heard by God, for Luke tells us that an angel of God visited him at that very time.³ Paul, however, clinched the matter when he said:

Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save him from death, and *was heard in that he feared*.⁴

If the prayer of Jesus was heard and granted, as it must have been, he could not have died on the cross. But if it was not heard and he was in fact crucified, this cry of Jesus, at a moment of extreme weakness of mind and the extreme limit of physical torture, is an everlasting answer to the blasphemous dogma of Christians that Jesus, the son of God, knew that in fulfilment of His Divine will, he was dying for the sins of others. Luke,⁵ it is true, could not find this utterance compatible with the son-God theory, and therefore replaced it with a quotation from the Psalms,⁶ but the Gospel of Peter as translated by Lake attributes the same utterance to Jesus.⁷ According to John, however, all that Jesus said was: "It is finished."⁸

In this part of the narrative the most important question is the time when Jesus is supposed to have "yielded up his ghost," as it determines the period for which he was on the cross. According to Matthew and Mark it was about the ninth hour (3 p.m.) that Jesus complained of having been forsaken by God⁹ and that it was shortly after this

- 3. Luke, 22 : 43.
- 4. Heb., 5 : 7.
- 5. Luke, 23 : 46.

- 7. Lake, *The Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus* : 156.
- 8. John, 19: 30.
- 9. Matt., 27: 46; Mark, 15: 34.

^{1.} Matt., 7 : 7-10.

^{2.} John, 11 : 41-42.

^{6.} Ps., 31 : 5.

that he "yielded up the ghost." Mark gives us the time when Jesus was put on the cross as the third hour (9 a.m.).¹ Therefore, according to these two, Jesus was on the cross for six hours. Luke fixes the sixth hour as the time when Jesus "gave up the ghost." He also mentions that the darkness lasted from the sixth to the ninth hour.² On the other hand, John says that it was about the sixth hour (12 noon) that Pilate sat in judgment over Jesus.³ Even if we assume that Jesus was put on the cross instantly after the sentence, Jesus could not have remained on the cross for more than three hours. Luke gives the same period: from the third hour (9 a.m.) to the sixth hour (12 noon).

The peculiar atrocity of crucifixion was that one could live for days in this horrible state upon this instrument of torture.⁴ The body was fixed to the cross with ropes or nails through the hands. The victim's body was supported not only by the nail through the hands but by a small piece of wood projecting at right angles, a *sedile*, on which he sat as on a saddle. Sometimes there was also a support for the feet, to which the feet were nailed.

The bleeding from the hands and feet soon stopped and was never fatal. The real cause of death was the unnatural position of the body which brought on a frightful disturbance of the circulation, terrible pains in the head and heart and frequently rigidity of the limbs. Victims with normal constitutions died, after a few days, of exhaustion and hunger. The original idea of this cruel punishment was not directly to kill the culprit by positive injuries but to expose the victim, nailed by the hands of which he had neglected to make good use, and to let him rot on the cross. William Hanna in his Life of Christ asserts that a victim almost always survived the first day, lived generally over the second day and occasionally even up to the fifth or sixth day. On the authority of Captain Clapperton, who had witnessed such occurrences in the Soudan, he says that "the wretches on the cross generally linger three days before death puts an end to their suffering."5 Similarly Stroud, while speaking of many instances of those "who having been taken down in time and carefully treated, recovered and survived," says that in many cases death was partly caused by hunger and thirst, the vicissitudes of heat and cold, or the attacks of ravenous birds and beasts and in others was designedly accelerated by burning, stoning or breaking the bones.6

The ordinary suffering incidental to crucifixion have been minutely analysed by Ritcher, the Batholines, the Grunners and others. Some of their explorations are rather fanciful and overstrained, e.g. in their laborious attempts to prove that for some time before his supposed death Jesus was reduced to a state of extreme debility, they strongly insist on the accessory or subordinate sufferings of crucifixion as materially accelerating his death. But an impartial scrutiny of the facts makes their insufficiency obvious. Stroud says:

The scourging, mockery and labour of carrying the cross were not in themselves more distressing to Jesus than to the malefactors who accompanied him;

^{1.} Mark, 15 : 25.

^{2.} Luke, 23 : 44-46.

^{3.} John, 19:14.

^{4.} Dummelow, Commentary on the Holy Bible, 717.

^{5.} Hanna, The Life of Christ, Vol. 3: 328-329.

^{6.} Stroud, On the Physical Cause of Death of Christ, 55.

his fasting and watching had not, at farthest, continued longer than from the preceding evening; his removal from place to place was not likely to be attended with much fatigue, since all the places lay within a narrow compass; and heat of climate could not have been very oppresive in Jerusalem at the vernal equinox to a native of the country; more especially when it is considered that, during the last three hours of his life, from the sixth to the ninth hour, the sun was obscured, and that in the much hotter climate of Central Africa crucified persons usually live three days on the cross.¹

Those who assert that Jesus had not died on the cross cite many instances of persons crucified who, removed in time, had been brought to life by energetic treatment.² One such instance of a crucified man has been mentioned by Josephus, and renders conceivable a resuscitation in the case of Jesus also. He says that of three crucified acquaintances of his, whose release he begged of Titus Caesar, one survived. How long this man had been on the cross Josephus does not say, but from the manner in which he connects the man with his expedition to Thakoah, by stating that he saw this man on his return from there, this man must have been crucified during this expedition; and as this, in view of the trifling distance of this place from Jerusalem, might possibly be achieved in a day, this man had hung on the cross for a day at least.

It cannot too often be pointed out that Jesus was a Jew, and as such his body had to be removed from the cross before nightfall because:

His body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him *that day;* (for he that is hanged is accursed of God); that thy land be not defiled.....³

We also know that in view of the approach of the Sabbath "executions lasting until late in the afternoon were impossible,"⁴ and, therefore, "the body could not have been removed as late as the ninth hour."⁵

Whether it was for this reason or that the next day after the crucifixion was the Sabbath, and a Sabbath of peculiar solemnity, the Jews expressed to the Procurator their desire that this holy day should not be profaned by such a spectacle. Their request was granted and orders were given to remove the three condemned ones and to hasten their death. The soldiers executed these orders by applying to the two thieves the *cru-rifragium* and broke their legs, but to Jesus they did not think it necessary as "they thought him to be dead."⁶ They could not, however, be certain as Jesus had remained on the cross only for about three hours. That death had not overcome Jesus is evident

^{1.} Stroud, On the Physical Cause of Death of Christ, 123, 124.

^{2.} The instances are cited by Paulus, *Exeg, Handb.*, 3b: S.781; Wiser, *Bible Realworteb*, I: S. 672; and Hass. S. 144.

^{3.} Deut., 21 : 23.

^{4.} Sifre, 2:221.

^{5.} The Jewish Ency., Vol. 4, 374.

^{6.} Renan, *History of the Origin of Christianity*, Book 1 : 246.

from the facts that the two malefactors were still alive when taken off the cross and Jesus had strength enough to utter a loud cry immediately before the moment which is regarded as his last. At that moment there must have prevailed a good deal of confusion particularly because of the alleged peculiar events which followed: the veil of the temple was rent in twain, the earth did quake, rocks were rent, graves were opened and many bodies of dead saints arose and came out of the graves and went into the city and appeared unto many.¹ Further, there was a darkness from the sixth hour (12 noon) to the ninth hour (3 p.m.)² the like of which had not been seen before. It was so intense that even the sun was darkened,³ or in other words the sun ceased to be visible to the naked eye, and thus there was hardly any visibility left.⁴ In these circumstances, when confusion prevailed all around, the body of Jesus was removed from the cross during *the day*, i.e., during the day-time, in compliance with the commands of the Old Testament to which I have already made a reference.

At this stage John mentions two incidents. I have already referred to the fact that the bones of Jesus were not broken. This according to John was not through any inadvertence:

For these things were done, that the Scriptures should be fulfilled: A bone of him shall not be broken.⁵

The fulfilment of this prophecy could only be beneficial if Jesus was alive, otherwise prevention of the breaking of the bones of a dead body would be devoid of any sense.

The second incident mentioned by John is even more remarkable. He says that:

One of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side and forthwith came there out blood and water.⁶

In the very next verse John represents that:

He that saw it bare record, and *his record is true and he knoweth that he saith true*, that ye might believe.

It is not curious that, realizing the difficulty which such an event would present to the Christian belief, the early Church Fathers, whose dishonesty and unscrupulousness have no parallel in human history and who never hesitated to tell lies or commit forgeries for the glory of their son-god, expunged an identical passage from Matthew. This passage now appears in the margin of verse 49 of Chapter 27 of the Revised Version.⁷

- 4. Such an occurrence, undoubtedly, as an eclipse of the Sun for three hours, is neither known to history nor can it admit of any scientific explanation. The duration of time for which it is supposed to have occurred is not only incredible but impossible. Further, an eclipse of the Sun can never occur on the 14th or 15th of a lunar month.
- 5. John, 19 : 36; *cf*. Ps., 34 : 20.
- 6. John, 19 : 34.
- 7. Revised Version, P. 1096.

^{1.} Matt., 27 : 51-53. It is noteworthy that almost all the Prophets who had preceded Jesus were buried in Jerusalem. They must have also arisen from their graves and borne testimony that the son of God had been crucified and yet the Roman soldiers, the hard-hearted Jews and the wretched disciples of Jesus, the Gospels tell us, were not convinced.

^{2.} Matt., 27: 45; Mark, 15: 33; Luke, 23: 44.

^{3.} Luke, 23 : 45.

The compilers of this Version note that, to this verse, many ancient authorities add:

And another took a spear and pierced his side and there came out water and blood.

The "blood and water" incident is also mentioned in one of the Epistles.1

Many Christian writers have tried to challenge the correctness of this incident. But, I think, it is sufficient to mention that Jesus could not have asked Thomas: "Reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into *my side*,"² if his side had not been pierced.

Before I take up the narrative, I think it would not be out of place to refer to a book which first appeared in America in 1873: *The Crucifixion by an Eye-witness*. This book is an English translation of an ancient Latin copy of a "letter written seven years after the crucifixion by a personal friend of Jesus in Jerusalem to an Essene Brother in Alexandria." In this book the events leading to the crucifixion, the scenes at Calvary and what took place subsequently were narrated in great detail. This book was withdrawn from circulation the moment it was published. All the copies were collected and burnt. "All the plates were destroyed, and it was supposed that all the published copies of the book were likewise disposed of—the official copies which were deposited with the Librarian of the Congress, in compliance with the Laws of Copyright, also disappeared. Fortunately, one copy escaped this fate." It was republished in 1907, after it had been compared with the Latin manuscript which still exists in Germany. "This old parchment was found in a house in Alexandria,—the house, it has been proved by archaeological discoveries, belonged to the Order of the Essenes. It was written by a Therapeut, the highest esteemed member of the Order." In this book we are told that

One of the soldiers struck his spear into the body in such a manner that it passed over the hip and into the side. The body showed no convulsions, and this was taken by the centurion as a sure sign that he (Jesus) was actually dead, and he hurriedly went away to make his report (to Pilate).

But from the insignificant wound *flowed blood and water*, at which John (the evangelist who was a member of the Order, as a novitiate) wondered for even John knew, from the knowledge of our Brotherhood, that from a wound in a dead body flows nothing but a few drops of thickened blood.

But concerning the wound itself, it may have been on the right or left side of the body and in any spot from the shoulder to the hip. Some have suggested that it was the pericardium which had been pierced; but for this to have happened the pierced spot would have to be in front of the chest and not on the side. Leaving these uncertainties aside, the fact remains that blood and water came out, and this can be taken as a sure sign that death had not yet taken place. It has been suggested that the blood as soon as it ceases to take part in the vital process begins to divide itself into plasma and serum, and that the separation of the blood from the water was a proof of Jesus' real death. To this I will give an answer presently. Again, it has been suggested that in case of nervous fever and suffocation the blood retains its fluidity in the corpse. But there is no justification for alleging that Jesus died of any fever and the question of suffocation must be ruled out by the fact that Jesus was able to utter a *loud cry* at the last. It has also been urged that within one hour of death the blood does not coagulate in the vessels. But surely it must have taken more than an hour for the Jews to have gone to Pilate and to return with his orders. Further, if the spear had struck one of the larger vessels, blood alone would have come out, and if he had already been dead over an hour and his corpse was in ordinary state, nothing at all would have come out, because plasma and serum are not separated in the vessels of a corpse as they do in a basin in which bloodletting is done. After taking all these facts into consideration and on good medical authority the compilers of the *Encyclopaedia Biblica* have to admit that Jesus was in fact *alive* when this wound was inflicted, for they say:

From the critical point of view we can hardly say that the fact that Jesus received the wound *after* he had breathed his last is well established.¹

In the face of these facts even Dean Farrar had to concede that when the Roman soldier thrust the broad head of the *hasta* in the side of Jesus, "he might be only in a syncope,"² and Jesus, who only appeared to be dead, had in fact fallen into a comatose state.

It may be repeated that the short time Jesus was on the cross, three hours at the most, and the uncertain nature and effect of the wound from the spear, and the coming out of the blood and water from his body leave no room for any doubt that Jesus did not die on the cross. If the soldiers and others present, in the circumstances already mentioned, thought him to be dead, it was because they could not distinguish between a deep swoon and the rigidity of syncope from real death. There is no ground for the suggestion that amongst them was anyone who was acquainted with medical science, which itself was in a low state in that age.

That there was doubt about Jesus' death at that very time is clear from the Gospels. Dean Farrar also refers to the assertion of the Docetic sect of Gnostics that Jesus only seemed to have died.³ Tertullian had his own doubts, so had Origen, and he had to invoke a miracle to explain so sudden an end. But the fact that people at that very time doubted his death can be gathered from the surprise of Pilate.⁴ Besides, the questions put by him to the centurion show that he wished to silence the doubts of his contemporaries. But the narrative of Matthew itself mentions an event which puts the matter beyond all doubt. After Jesus' body had been placed in the sepulchre the Pharisees came together to Pilate and asked him:

Command, therefore, that the Sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night and *steal him away*, and say unto the people, He is

4. Mark, 15:44.

6. Gospel of Peter, 2:8.

^{1.} Ency. Biblica, Art. Cross, Col. 960.

^{2.} Farrar, Life of Christ, 421.

^{3.} Ibid., 424.

^{5.} Matt., 27 : 64.

risen from the dead. So the last error shall be worse than the first.5

The same version is given in the Gospel of Peter.⁶ Now, what was this *first error*? Not that they had accused Jesus and found him guilty of "corruption," not that at their instance he had been sentenced to death by Pilate; not that he had been put on the cross. No, they believed Jesus to be a pretender and a false prophet: and, therefore, they could not have had any compassion for him. *The first error* could not, therefore, be any other than that Jesus had been taken off the cross much earlier than was necessary, that his bones had not been broken and as a result of these Jesus had not been, according to them, in fact "crucified" at all. This and this alone was the *first error* which would become insignificant if the apprehensions of the Jews should materialize. They, therefore, prayed that the sepulchre should be made secure and sealed so that even if buried alive Jesus should remain there and die of suffocation. They in fact, in the narrative, express their apprehensions in quite unambiguous terms:

Lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, he has risen from the dead. $^{\rm 1}$

The Pharisees did not believe in his miracles; they did not admit his Divine origin or mission, they did not even acknowledge him as the Messiah. They, therefore, could not attribute a belief to the people that, if the body was stolen and the sepulchre found empty, any one would believe that Jesus had arisen from the dead. To them, with the traditions of the Old Testament regarding raising of the dead, the securing and sealing of the tomb would have been no safeguard. It is evident, therefore, that the Pharisees and the Elders knew that through unforeseen circumstances Jesus had not died on the cross and they wanted to ensure his death by sealing and securing the tomb to prevent all possibility of his body being stolen or otherwise removed. Events regarding the burial and the subsequent visits of the women to the sepulchre, to which I will refer in detail shortly, also point to the same conclusion.

There is one very peculiar feature about the alleged death of Jesus on the cross: nowhere in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John is the positive statement of an eye-witness recorded that Jesus had died on the cross, or that he was dead when they removed him from the cross or placed in the tomb. None of the disciples was present on the spot. The Jews, as we have already seen, had their own doubts. The evangelists clearly felt the weakness of their evidence. They, therefore, were compelled to introduce the women:

Who also, when he was in Galilee, followed him, and ministered unto him, and many other women which came up with him into Jerusalem.²

They are supposed to have watched what was happening from afar, but then the real object was to guarantee by their presence the truth of what had already been, and still more of what had to be, added to the description of the scenes at Calvary. The guarantee appears to be singularly fragile as soon as we begin to examine it. No doubt, it becomes less dubious and doubtful when compared with the Johannine scheme where the object of the women, with the unknown beloved disciples, was to receive the last instructions which fell from Jesus,¹ but it represents the same anxiety to establish a testimony and is, of course, a later addition. As a matter of fact, early tradition, with or without guarantee of women, was not in a position to do anything more than assert the essential facts: Jesus was arrested, tried, condemned and put on the cross; of that alone they were certain. They could not and did not in clear and unambiguous terms assert his death on the cross because "the matter was made dubious to them."²

CHAPTER 11

BURIAL

According to the custom then obtaining in Judaea, the body of Jesus should have remained suspended on the cross until it was consumed by the weather or by birds of prey. But, according to Jewish Law, it should have been removed in the evening and interred in the place of infamy assigned to the executed. Roman Law provided for delivery of the body to those who claimed and paid for it. Consequently, we are told that Joseph of Arimathea (Ha-Rama-Thain), a *secret* disciple of Jesus,¹ a seeker after the kingdom of God,² a friend of the Lord,³ and a member of the Essenes Order,⁴ asked Pilate to deliver the body to him.

In passing, I may point out that all the evangelists introduce this Joseph here for the first time. He must have been an important man to have access to Pilate. His description by John⁵ shows that Jesus had some *secret* friends, the Essenes, unknown to his disciples or other people. I will refer to this secret organization in some detail later on. I will, however, quote a passage from the *Crucifixion:*

Joseph of Arimathea... was a member of our sacred Order and lived in accordance with our laws. His friend Nicodemus was a most learned man and belonged to the highest degree of our Order.⁵

To resume the narrative, Pilate granted the prayer of Joseph of Arimathea. The Eye-Witness gives, in the *Crucifixion*, details of the conversation which took place between Joseph and Nicodemus in consequence of which Joseph went to arrange for the linen, etc., and Nicodemus to fetch "the herbs which were useful in such cases."⁶ There was thus a sudden rush and activity, in which the women also joined, to get the spices.

According to John, Nicodemus came *secretly* by night to the sepulchre and brought spices, it is said, for the embalming of the body of Jesus, a mixture of *myrrh* and *aloes;* in the quantity of about a hundred pounds in weight.⁷ I quote again the Eye-Witness:

Thereupon Nicodemus spread strong spices and healing salves on long pieces of "byssus" which he had brought and whose use was known to our Order... Nicodemus spread balm in both nail-pierced hands.⁸

I may mention here that Jesus, as a member of the Essenes Order, knew of this treatment and had himself given an indication of it to his disciples in the parable of the man who had gone from Jerusalem to Jericho and who had fallen among thieves and had been wounded by them. Then, according to Jesus, a Samaritan came there:

^{1.} John, 19:38.

^{2.} Mark,15 : 43; Luke, 23 : 51.

^{3.} The Gospel of Peter, 2:28.

^{4.} The Jewish Ency., Vol. 4 : 250.

^{5.} The Crucifixion, 66.

^{6.} Ibid., 75.

^{7.} John, 19 : 39.

^{8.} The Crucifixion, 74.

And bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine......¹

This is exactly what was done in the case of Jesus. Dummelow, describing the manner in which the body of Jesus was treated, says:

The Myrrh and aloe wood were reduced to powder and inserted between the bandages which were wound fold upon fold.²

The body of Jesus was thus "wound" in linen.³ To use the words of Dean Farrar, they rolled "the fine linen round and round the wounded limbs."⁴ The "*neck and face* of the body were doubtless left bare,"⁵ and the body was laid in a sepulchre which was hewn in stone.⁶ All this was done, before sunset, that is before the Sabbath drew on.⁷

We are further told that the women were also anxious to provide "spices and ointment for the same purpose.⁸ They came to the sepulchre in the end of the Sabbath,⁹ i.e., late on the Sabbath day (between midnight and dawn) to embalm his body.¹⁰

The supply having been found insufficient the women had to bring more on the morning after the Sabbath when it was still dark.¹¹ The constant application of this ointment, the famous *Marham-i-Isa* – the Ointment of Jesus – to the body of Jesus healed the wounds and caused the blood to circulate freely in the body.

It may be mentioned here that this *Marham-i-Isa* is not an imaginary thing. Its prescription has been known to history and it has been mentioned by this very name in numerous ancient Oriental medical treatises. It is stated therein that it was applied to the wounds of Jesus when he was taken off the cross. I have come across some thirty-six such books; and there may be many more which I have not seen. I will, however, mention only a few, the most important of them: *Qānūn-i-Bū* 'Alī Sīna (the world-renowned Canon of Avicenna),¹² Sharh-i-Qānūn by 'Allāma Qutb-ud-Din Shīrazi,¹³ Kāmil-us-Sanā 'ah by 'Ali Ibnul-'Abbas Al-Majūsi,¹⁴ Majmū 'a-i-Baqāī by Mahmūd Muhammad Isma 'il Mukhatib Khāqānī,¹⁵ Tazkira-i-ulul-Albāb by Shaikh Dawud uz-Dzarīr-al-Antāki,¹⁶ Qarābādīn-i-Rūmī¹⁷, which was translated into Arabic from the original Greek in the reign of Caliph Ma'mun, *Umdatul-Muhtāj* by Shaikh Ahmad bin Hasan-ur-Rashīdī al-Hakīm.¹⁸

The women, to resume the narrative, could not have been preparing for a separate ritual, as has been alleged by some, in ignorance of the action of Joseph and Nicodemus, because they were present when these two men embalmed the body of Jesus.¹⁹

- 4. Farrar, Life of Christ, 420.
- 5. Dummelow, Commentary on the Holy Bible, 808.

8. Mark, 16: 1; Luke, 23: 55-56.

10. Dummelow, Commentary on the Holy Bible, 719.

- 12. Vol. 1 : 133. 13. Vol. 3 : 75.
- 14. Vol. 2 : 602.
- 15. Vol. 2 : 497.
- 16. P. 303.
- 17. Vol. 4 : 511.
- 18. Vol. 1:189
- 19. Matt., 27: 61.

^{1.} Luke, 10:34

^{2.} Dummelow, Commentary on the Holy Bible, 808

^{3.} John, 19:40

^{6.} Isa., 22 : 16 is an appropriate parallel: "Thou.... that giveth an habitation for himself in a rock.....".7. Luke, 24 : 53-54.

^{9.} Mark, 16:1.

^{11.} Luke, 24 : 1. 12. Vol. 1 : 133.

I have already mentioned that, contrary to all Jewish practice, the neck and face of Jesus were left uncovered. The tomb was not filled in or covered with earth, as was usually done by the Jews under the belief that their so doing kept evil spirits from the dead body, but only a stone, *Golal*, was rolled over the sepulchre. Why? The *secret* friends wanted to avoid suffocation of Jesus. There was another reason also. To resuscitate Jesus, they would have had to open the tomb at short intervals. Apart from being cumbersome, the digging operations would have been an open challenge to the Jews. To avoid all possibilities of any such detection a stone only was rolled over the sepulchre. The Eye-Witness gives another reason:

They then smoked the grotto with aloe and other strengthening herbs and they placed a large stone in front of the entrance so that the vapors might better fill the grotto.¹

It was for these reasons that a private garden² was selected. The pre-arranged plan was well thought out and succeeded in the end.

Now Matthew alone says that on the following day the sepulchre was sealed and a watch was placed before it. It is not clear whether the guards were within or without the garden. Then an angel appeared, clad in white shining garments, and rolled the stone away. The guards became so terrified that they became as dead³ and fled to the city and gave an account to the chief priest who, after deliberations in an assembly with the elders, decided to bribe the soldiers to tell a lie and say that the body of Jesus had been stolen by night by the disciples of Jesus.⁴ But this narrative is ridiculous on the face of it. To begin with, no mention is made anywhere else in the New Testament of the report of the soldiers to the chief priest, and in any case the soldiers ought to have reported to Pilate in the first instance. Secondly, it is unimaginable that the Sanhedrin in assembly, most of whom were Sadducees, would have believed the information so credible as to act on it. They would not have believed it and, in any case, they would not have taken any action without verifying the truth of this highly suspicious report. If they on enquiry had found the report to be true they would have charged the soldiers before Pilate for having allowed the body to be so stolen. It is impossible to believe that a college of seventy men would have officially decided on suggesting a falsehood and rewarding the person agreeing to tell a lie.

Again, it is not possible to imagine that Pilate would have readily accepted the representation of the Jews. Indeed, from what little we know of him from the Gospels he must have remained unmoved. Roman soldiers knew too well the strictness with which discipline was administered and the promises to obtain immunity would have made no impression on them. They knew that the penalty for dereliction of duty was death. In the Acts, we actually find Agrippa I sentencing to death the soldiers who had allowed Peter to escape from prison.⁵

4. Matt., 28 : 12-14. 5. Acts, 12 : 19

^{1.} The Crucifixion, 75.

^{2.} John, 19:41.

^{3.} Matt., 28 : 4.

The whole story is plainly absurd and a result of pure invention, and it was concocted to create evidence of the resurrection. Matthew in fact betrays himself by explaining that the bargain which was thus concluded in secret was not kept a secret for he alleges that:

This saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.¹

Peake in his Commentary on the Bible says:

The story arose as a reply to Jews who averred that the disciples had removed the body of Jesus.²

The compilers of the Encyclopaedia Biblica say:

The sealing and watching of the sepulchre is now very gradually given up even by those scholars who still hold by the resurrection narrative as a whole.³

And they come to the final conclusion that:

The whole story is a very late production.⁴

I have already referred to the prophetic comparison made by Jesus himself to the fate which befell Jonah. This indeed was a true comparison: Jesus was buried *alive* and he came out of the tomb *alive*. Nowhere in the New Testament is Jesus represented as asserting his resurrection in the sense Christianity understands it to be. He prophesied that he would "rise again" and so he did: for he did "rise again" out of the very jaws of death.

Before dealing with the question of the resurrection, there is one fact which I must mention: the whole of Christian antiquity was ignorant of this tomb of Jesus until it was rediscovered in Palestine under Constantine in 326 C.E. "by the inspiration of the Saviour and the result of a Divine revelation."⁵ I have mentioned this fact as it has a bearing on the resurrection of Jesus from this tomb.

3. Ency. Biblica, Col. 4065.

4. Ibid., Col. 4066.

5. Eusebius, Vita Const., 3:26.

^{1.} Matt., 28:15.

^{2.} Peake, Commentary on the Bible, 722.

CHAPTER 12

RESURRECTION

The resurrection of Jesus is the miracle to which Christians turn with the most cherished eagerness. It is the foundation on which their hopes depend, on which their faith is fixed. If the ordinary doctrine of the Bible being Divinely inspired had to be given up, Christians felt relieved of a burden often too great for them to bear. If the complete verbal accuracy of the Gospel narrative was disproved, it was orthodoxy and not Christianity that suffered because it was only the more minute and embarrassing tenets of the creed that found their foundation swept away. If the Biblical miracles were shown to be untenable, Christian theologians were comforted for having one less weak and vulnerable outpost to defend. But if the resurrection of Jesus should be proved to be a myth and Christians compelled to expunge it from their creed, they must feel that the very pivot of their faith has vanished, the very basis of their hopes has disappeared and the entire foundation of their religion has been uprooted. Says Paul:

And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins.¹

Thus even if there be no truth in the assertion, yet according to Paul, Christ must be raised. It is for these reasons that it has been said that Christianity, in all its forms, nay, the entire faith of the Church, has as its pivot the resurrection of Jesus. It is accepted as a reality without appreciating the unreality upon which it rests. We are told that the evangelists "were not recording facts," as to them "historical accuracy was neither of importance nor of consequence."² I, for somewhat different reasons, entirely agree. But I do question the assertion that "it did not please God to cause to be written a biography of His Son."3 It is the old old story. Man committed a sin, and blamed Satan for it. The Christians went a step further. They played havoc with the texts and blamed God for it. No! had a true account of the life of Jesus been handed down to us, there would have been no Christianity as it is known to us to-day. The needs of the Church, changing with the growth of Christology, had eliminated most of the authentic but inconvenient details; and introduced into the Gospels certain incidents and even whole episodes which were more appealing than historical facts. What should have happened, was made to happen; what should have been said, was represented as having been said.

The rapid expansion of, and accretions to, the Christian faith created a self-contradictory fabric of traditions wholly foreign to historical reality; but this entire fabric, so laboriously built, collapses in face of an honest enquiry. Christian apologetics are perforce reduced to a bare assertion, like the one we find in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*:

^{1.} I Cor., 15:17

^{3.} Ibid., 3.

^{2.} Scofield: Reference to the New Testament, 125.

The earliest and the strongest evidence for the Resurrection is provided by the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles of St. Paul. . . .that it was believed and preached from the beginning.¹

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This statement is as ridiculous as it is groundless. We know that idol-worship has been believed and preached from time immemorial; would this fact establish the truth of the cult? Further, the most early Christians did not believe in the resurrection. Can any one, in view of the irreconcilable discrepancies, have the audacity honestly to say that the factum of the resurrection stands established? It is obvious that the Gospels are at variance with one another. The only two facts common to all are the empty tomb and the presence in its vicinity of someone in *white garments*.

Denials of the resurrection are as old as Christianity itself. Even Paul asks his followers:

Now if Christ is *preached* that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection?²

Thus while meeting an objection to the resurrection of Jesus, Paul asserted that it should be believed because it *was preached* and made it depend upon the correctness of the resurrection of mankind generally. Many of the episodes related and many of the details given in the New Testament owe their origin and arrangements to the necessity of countering Jewish scepticism. At the same time Christian apologetics had to reply to Pagan sceptics. Thus Celsus asked whether the story of the resurrection could not be explained by a vision produced from the strong imagination of and the agitated brain of an hysterical woman, Mary Magdalene, or of the disciples.³

The discovery of the empty tomb created an unforeseen difficulty in the way of the evangelists. The resurrection of Jesus was their solution and his "appearances" and "ascension" were logical sequences and the "testimony" of his resurrection.

I must make a departure from the usual process of explaining the alleged *facts* by way of a reasonable and critical examination of the narratives and must predicate it with a statement of the various irreconcilable discrepancies in the evangelical record.

The Gospels exhibit contradictions of the most glaring kind. Peimerus enumerated ten such contradictions; but in reality their number is much greater:

1. The "seal and watch" set upon the sepulchre and of the bribing of the soldiers of the watch occurs only in Matthew.⁴ In Mark, Luke and John these features are not only missing, but they are excluded by the representation of women as intending to apply ointment to the body of Jesus; and in Mark at least as foreseeing the only difficulty in the weight of the stone; whereas Matthew has to make their object as only seeing the sepulchre.

^{1.} Ency. Brit., 14th Edn: Vol. 13: 20.

^{2. 1} Cor., 15 : 12: see R.V., p. 1272.

^{3.} Origen, C. Cels., 2:55.

^{4.} Matt., 27 : 62, 66; 28 : 11-15.

- 2. In Luke the women get the spices ready before sunset on Friday;¹ in Mark they did not buy them till after sunset on Saturday;² in John, Joseph and Nicodemus had already embalmed the body;³ while according to Matthew,⁴ Mark⁵ and Luke,⁶ Joseph had simply wrapped the body in a fine linen cloth.
- 3. The persons who came to the sepulchre on the morning of the resurrection were: in Mark, Mary Magdalene and some other women;⁷ in Matthew, only the two Marys;⁸ in Luke, the two Marys and also other women;⁹ in John only Mary Magdalene, to whom, however, are added Peter and the *beloved disciple*.¹⁰ In Luke, Peter alone went to the sepulchre.¹¹ This passage is spurious and is interpolated to harmonize with Paul.¹²
- 4. The time of the visit of the women to the sepulchre is: in Mark, when the sun was risen;¹³ in Luke, in early dawn;¹⁴ in John, early (it was yet dark before sunrise,¹⁵ but according to Matthew half a day earlier.)¹⁶
- 5. In Mark,¹⁷ in Luke¹⁸ and in John¹⁹ those who came to the sepulchre found that the stone was already rolled away; in Matthew it was rolled back by the angel in the presence of the women.²⁰
- 6. In Mark²¹ as in Matthew²² there was only one angel; and in Luke there were two, who are described as men in *shining garments*.²³
- 7. In Mark, the one angel sat within the sepulchre;²⁴ in Matthew, the one sat without the sepulchre upon the stone;²⁵ in Luke, the two came up to the women.²⁶ The appearance, however, was not until they had left the sepulchre.
- 8. As to what was seen in the sepulchre: in Mark, it was only the angel;²⁷ in Luke, at least when the women entered it there was nothing;²⁸ in John, the *beloved disciple* saw the linen clothes lying;²⁹ and Peter saw the clothes neatly wrapped up and also a napkin.³⁰
- 9. In the Synoptic Gospels the angels give information of the resurrection:³¹ in John, they merely questioned Mary Magdalene, "Why weepest thou?"³²
- 10. The discrepancies regarding the instructions given to the women are amongst the most vital in the whole account: in Mark³³ and Matthew³⁴ they were directed to inform the disciples that Jesus had gone before them to Galilee; in Luke, there is no such injunction at all and in John, we find no words which could even seem to answer to the command in Mark and Matthew.

1. Luke, 23 : 54-56.	13. Mark, 16 : 2.	25. Matt., 28 : 2.
2. Mark, 16 : 1.	14. Luke, 24 : 1, 2	26. Luke, 24 : 5.
3. John, 19 : 38-40.	15. John, 20 : 1.	27. Mark, 16 : 5.
4. Matt., 27 : 59.	16. Matt., 28 : 1.	28. Luke, 24 : 3.
5. Mark, 15 : 46.	17. Mark, 16 : 4.	29. John, 20 : 6.
6. Luke, 23 : 53.	18. Luke, 24 : 2.	30. John, 20 : 7.
7. Mark, 14 : 1.	19. John, 20 : 1.	31. Matt., 28 : 7; Mark, 16 : 6;
8. Matt., 28 : 1.	20. Matt., 28 : 2.	Luke, 24 : 6.
9. Luke, 24 : 10.	21. Mark, 16 : 5-7.	32. John, 20 : 13.
10. John, 20 : 1.	22. Matt., 28 : 2-5.	33. Mark, 16 : 7.
11. Luke, 24 : 12.	23. Luke, 24 : 4.	34. Matt., 28 : 7.
12. 1 Cor., 15 : 3-8.	24. Mark, 16 : 5.	

- 11. No less marked are the differences as to the message given by the women to the disciples: in Luke, they reported to the disciples;¹ in Matthew, they merely intended to do so;² in John, Mary Magdalene reported what she had seen;³ and in Mark, the women out of fear said nothing at all to anyone.⁴
- 12. The communication by the women produced different results: in Luke, it merely produced the unbelief of the disciples:⁵ and in John, Peter and the *beloved disciple* went to the sepulchre and came *away wondering*.⁶
- 13. In John, Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene who was not allowed to touch the body;⁷ in Matthew, he appeared to the two Marys, who embraced his feet.⁸
- 14. In Matthew, Jesus confirmed the information, which had already been given by the *angels*, to direct the disciples to proceed to Galilee:⁹ in John, Mary Magdalene was simply asked to inform his brethren that he was ascending to heaven.¹⁰
- 15. The appearance to the two men of Emmaus is known only to Luke,¹¹ although they had immediately after returned to Jerusalem and informed the disciples of it.¹²
- 16. An appearance to Peter before the evening on the same day is known only to Luke.13
- 17. None of the Gospels record the appearance of Jesus to James his brother or to Paul though Paul mentions both.¹⁴
- 18. In Luke, Jesus appeared to the disciples and drank and ate with them.¹⁵ They were commanded to remain in Jerusalem till the Pentecost (See contra 10 above). In John, the same incident is narrated without Thomas.¹⁶
- 19. Luke makes no reference to the circumstance that the doors were shut when Jesus entered any more than he does to the conferring of authority spoken of by John.¹⁷ John, on the other hand, knows nothing of Jesus having eaten anything.
- 20. John alone mentions the second visit, eight days after, to the disciples with Thomas.¹⁸
- 21. In Matthew¹⁹ and in John²⁰ the appearance of Jesus at Galilee is recorded, though at different times.

It may be mentioned here that the Apocryphal Gospels contain nothing of consequence beyond the Canonical Gospels except that an interval of eight days is placed between the resurrection and his first appearance.

It is obvious, therefore, that the Gospels agree in two facts only and in nothing else: the empty tomb and the presence of someone in *white garments*.

1. Luke, 24 : 9.	
2. Matt., 28 : 8.	
3. John, 20 : 18.	
4. Mark, 16 : 8.	
5. Luke, 24 : 11.	
6. Luke, 24 : 9	
7. John, 20 : 14-17.	

Matt., 28 : 9.
Matt., 28 : 10.
John, 20 : 17.
Luke, 24 : 13-15.
Luke, 24 : 33-35.
Luke, 24 : 34.
14. 1 Cor., 15 : 7-8.

15. Luke, 24 : 36-43. 16. John, 20 : 18-26. 17. John, 20 : 19. 18. John, 20 : 26. 19. Matt., 28 : 16-20. 20. John, 21 : 1. If we believe the Gospels; the disciples expected the resurrection because, we are told, the Old Testament and Jesus¹ had predicted it. No one has yet been able to point out to a single passage in the Old Testament which foretold the resurrection of the Messiah. The Jews never held any such belief. It is true that there are passages in the New Testament² which attribute such predictions to the Old Testament, and Paul also speaks of the resurrection as being "according to the scriptures."³ But these are mere assertions without the least justification.

In any case, it will have to be admitted by all that at the time of the Passion the disciples behaved as if they had never heard anything of the resurrection. The first and the second Gospel narrate the dispersal of the disciples at Gethsemane in very clear terms.

According to Matthew:

Then all the disciples forsook him and fled.4

And Mark says:

And they all forsook him and fled.5

Luke has carefully omitted this incident, no doubt, to keep his witnesses at hand. But the earliest tradition considered that the disciples were no longer at Jerusalem at the time of resurrection; and had returned to Galilee.⁶ There can be no doubt that the wretched disciples, driven by fear and despair, recalled to mind the words of Jesus:

All ye shall be offended because of me this night; for it is written, I shall smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.⁷

They fled because they were "of little faith,"⁸ "fools and slow of heart,"⁹ and "hypocrites."¹⁰ Jesus had truly described them in these terms and had also scornfully said of them:

Ye seek me not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves and were filled.¹¹

Knowing their real character, Jesus himself had advised them:

Let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains.12

When Jesus is alleged to have spoken of resurrection they did not understand him.¹³ We catch a glimpse of the wretched fugitives with "heavy hearts and streaming eyes"¹⁴ at their hope of the expected Kingdom being shattered to pieces. Their

1. Matt., 12 : 40; 16 : 4, 21; 17 : 9, 23; 20 : 19; 26 : 32.	8. Matt., 6 : 30. 9. Luke, 24 : 25.
2. Matt., 12 : 40; Luke, 24 : 27.	10. Luke, 12 : 56.
3. 1 Cor., 15 : 4.	11. John, 6 : 26.
4. Matt., 26 : 56.	12. Luke, 21 : 21.
5. Mark, 14 : 50.	13. Luke, 18 : 33-34.
6. The Gospel of Peter, of Huck, Synopse, 22.	14. The Gospel of Peter, 22.
7. Mark, 14 : 27.	* *

comparison of the tragedy with their unrealized anticipations is portrayed in the words of the two pilgrims of Emmaus:

But we trusted that it had been he, which should have redeemed Israel.¹

We know that whenever Jesus is alleged in the Gospels to have tried to explain the resurrection to them in advance they did not understand him.² The first announcement of the resurrection found them sceptical. From these facts, unless we admit the absurd, we must conclude that Jesus predicted nothing of the kind: but that later when faith found it impossible that Jesus should have been unaware of the fate awaiting him, it could find no better way of declaring that he had known of it than by making him predict it.

But the idea of resurrection to them would have been quite different. To them the resurrection expected at the end of the world was expected to take the form of a material restoration of the body and to be a renewal of earthly life. The resurrection of Lazarus represented their conception.

If the disciples who had "witnessed" the resurrection had written down their impressions from day to day, and their records had come down to us, much that remains obscure would have become clear. The earliest testimony available, that of Paul, was written about twenty-five years after the event and is much too vague. But the first conceptions changed rapidly, involving equally swift changes in the original reminiscences. Very soon the disciples, confused by the growing Christological distortions of their testimony, became incapable of restoring it to its original form. It cannot be too often repeated that what we find in the Gospels is the conviction of those who thought they had established the truth of facts, and *not the facts themselves*. And this unshakable conviction should not be confused with the legendary form in which it was subsequently clothed by the redactors. Says Loisy:

The accounts in the Canonical and Apocryphal Gospels do not represent the original appearances, but the way in which the belief in the resurrection of Christ became conscious, took shape and justified itself half a century and more after the birth of Christianity.³

The earliest source to mention the appearance of Jesus is Paul. He says:

For *I delivered* unto you *first of all* that which I also *received*, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and he was buried: and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: And that he was seen of Cephas, then of *the twelve*; after that he was seen of about five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also: as of one born out of due time.⁴

^{1.} Luke, 24 : 21.

^{2.} Mark, 8:31; 9:10, 30, 32.

^{3.} Loisy, La Le'gende de Jesus, 467.

^{4.} I Cor., 15 : 3-8.

Paul has no personal knowledge and he is delivering *first of all* what he *received* at Jerusalem from James and Peter.¹ The list of appearances seems to be in a chronological order, for the words *after that* suggest it. It is noteworthy that Paul does not mention any appearance to Mary Magdalene or any other women. Nor does he mention the appearance to Ananias.² He would not have omitted to mention this proof in support of the fact of resurrection if he had known of it, for he was out to establish this fact: He makes his views clear by saying:

If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching in vain, and your faith is also vain.³

It follows, as a matter of course, that James and Peter must also have been ignorant of these facts. Again, Paul speaks of Jesus having appeared to Peter by himself, but about this the Gospels are silent;⁴ and then to the twelve apostles, Judas Iscariot having killed himself, only eleven were left, as we know that the twelfth apostle, Matthias, was selected by the remaining eleven apostles by lots long after these appearances of Jesus.⁵ Again, there is no reference to the appearance to the two men of Emmaus.⁶ So evidently, Paul is wrong again in his narrative. He does not give any details of the various appearances mentioned by him. It is difficult to understand why he should not have done so, if he knew of them. He only speaks of Jesus having been seen and uses the same word regarding himself. He does not assert that he saw Jesus in person on the road to Damascus. It is now almost universally admitted that what Paul saw was a vision only; a vision to Paul alone of all the bystanders, and therefore subjective or mental only. Are we, then, to suppose that the other appearances mentioned by him were also in vision only? Further, Paul does not mention any time or place of these appearances. Had they any connection with the resurrection or ascension of Jesus, he would not have failed to specify the time and place.

Paul, therefore, is not a safe guide, for at best his knowledge is confined to hearsay, or, as he puts it, to what he had *received*.

We know that none of the evangelists witnessed the resurrection of Jesus. We have Epistles of Peter, James, John and Jude, all of whom are said by the evangelists to have *seen* Jesus *after* he rose from the dead. In none of their Epistles is the fact of the resurrection even stated, much less that Jesus was seen after the resurrection by anyone in general or the writers of these Epistles in particular. The reference by Peter in his first Epistle does not meet the case.⁷ It in fact proves the contrary. He speaks of the resurrection as a *quickening* of the spirit with a definite view to preach unto the spirits in hell. Nowhere does he assert that he saw the Risen Lord. And it is noteworthy that the Gospels do not cite anyone saying: "I saw the Risen Lord."

I will now proceed to consider and analyze the significance of the various appearances as recorded in the Gospels. I have already mentioned in detail the discrepancies

3. 1 Cor., 15 : 14.

it is not from Peter himself.

^{1.} Gal., 1 : 18, 19.

^{2.} Acts, 9:10, 15.

^{4.} The only reference is found in Luke, 24 : 34, but

^{5.} Acts, 1 : 26.

^{6.} Luke, 24 : 13-31.

^{7.} I Peter, 3 : 18-22.

found in the different versions: and will endeavour to avoid, as far as possible, any repetition.

It is, to begin with, evident that the women were present besides the sepulchre when the angels appeared, for they got their information from them that Jesus had risen, and they had further invited them to see the tomb for themselves. The angels also instructed them to direct the disciples to proceed to Galilee, to which place Jesus had gone. But Jesus, knowing his disciples, realized that this second-hand information might not be considered by them to be trustworthy, so he had to appear himself before the women and give the same instructions.¹

The manner in which the news was conveyed to the disciples, as already mentioned, is different in different Gospels. It is a peculiar fact that on getting this extraordinary news, none of the disciples took the trouble of going to the sepulchre. Luke goes on to give the reason:

And these words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not.²

Luke, however, makes an exception in favor of Peter³ and John appends to Peter another disciple "whom Jesus loved," who also went to the tomb and found it empty, and *they returned wondering*.⁴ John, throwing overboard all the alleged prophecies of Jesus regarding his resurrection, which he is supposed to have made in the presence of his disciples, gives an explanation:

For as yet they knew not the scriptures that he must rise again from the dead.5

I may mention here that the passage in Luke dealing with the visit of Peter to the tomb is another pious forgery of the early Christian Fathers;⁶ and John, who is alleged to have gone with him, must also disappear. None of the disciples, therefore, went to the tomb.

The first appearance after the resurrection was to Mary Magdalene, an hysterical woman out of whom Jesus had cast seven devils, and whom he found weeping.⁷

In Mark, directions are given to the women to inform the disciples that they should proceed to Galilee where they shall see him.⁸ Matthew says the same.⁹ This was in keeping with the prophecy of Jesus:

After I am risen again. I will go before you into Galilee.¹⁰

In keeping with this prophecy Matthew describes Jesus' second appearance at Galilee to the disciples.¹¹ Mark, however, mentions certain appearances which must have been at Jerusalem.¹² John, like Mark, knows nothing of the directions to the

- 4. Luke, 24 : 9.
- 5. John, 20:9.
- 6. Dummelow, *Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 768. See also Peake's *Commentary on the Bible*, 741.
- 7. Mark, 16:9; John, 20:14.
- 8. Mark, 16 : 7.
- 9. Matt., 28 : 7.
- 10. Matt., 26 : 32; Mark, 14 : 28.
- 11. Matt., 28 : 16-18.
- 12. Mark, 16 : 12-14.

^{1.} Matt., 28: 6,7, 10.

^{2.} Luke, 24 : 11.

^{3.} Luke, 24 : 12.

disciples to go to Galilee. In Luke not only is there no trace of an appearance at Galilee, but in fact Jerusalem, with its environs, is made the sole place of his appearance. Not only this, but Luke puts into the mouth of Jesus, when he appeared in the evening after the resurrection, a direction to the disciples at Jerusalem:

Tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.¹

And in the Acts Luke expresses it more definitely though in a negative form:

That they should not depart from Jerusalem.²

Now, how could Jesus direct his disciples to journey to Galilee, and undertake the longest journey which a Jew could make within his own country, and yet at the same time have commanded them to remain in Jerusalem until Pentecost? And how could Jesus ask them to meet him in Galilee when he himself had the intention of appearing before them that very day in Jerusalem? Wolfenbuttle Fragmentist suggests that if Jesus appeared to his disciples at Jerusalem on the day of his resurrection and commanded them not to depart thence until Pentecost, then it is false that he commanded them also within the same period to go to Galilee.

To this a very simple, but a very significant, answer has been given by a Church apologist. He says that Jesus originally intended to go to Galilee and directed his disciples to do the same. They were ignorant of, and doubted, his resurrection and being in hiding did not bestir themselves. Jesus was, therefore, forced to postpone his departure and had to appear before them at Jerusalem.³ I cannot controvert this assertion: but it does appear strange that either the "son of God" did not really know his disciples or could not foresee the future. However, when he did appear to them:

They were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit.⁴

And to dispel their doubts, Jesus had to say:

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.⁵

We are further told:

And when he had thus spoken, he showed them his hands and his feet. And while they yet believed not *for joy* and wondered, he said unto them: Have ye here any meat? And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and honeycomb. And he took it and did eat before them.⁶

But in spite of these demonstrations, some doubted him.⁷ I need hardly mention that the words *for joy* are a later Christian interpolation.⁸

3. Dean Whitney, Resurrection of the Lord, 31.

5. Luke, 24 : 39.

- 6. Luke, 24 : 40-43.
- 7. Matt., 28 : 17.
- 8. Revised Version, p.1167.

^{1.} Luke, 24 : 49.

^{2.} Acts, 1 : 4.

^{4.} Luke, 24 : 37.

Mark gives a version, similar to that of Luke, under somewhat different circumstances, but it has now been universally admitted that from Verse 9 onwards Chapter 16, in which this narrative appears, is another pious forgery. The translators of the Revised Version content themselves by remarking:

The two oldest Greek MSS., and some other authorities omit from Verse 9 to the end. Some other authorities have a different ending to the Gospel.¹

If we turn to John, we find that Jesus first stood behind Mary Magdalene as she was running away from the tomb. She did not recognize him, and took him for the gardener until he called her by name. He directed her to inform his disciples. And the same day:

When the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in their midst, and saith unto them, "Peace be unto you." And when he had so said he showed unto them his hands and his side.²

Thomas, however, was not present on this occasion. When the other disciples told him of this appearance, he replied:

Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of nails, and thrust my hand into his side. I will not believe.³

Thus Jesus was compelled, eight days later, to appear again and had to invite Thomas to see his hands and thrust a finger into his side.⁴ I might here mention that the phrase put into the mouth of Thomas: "My Lord and My God"⁵ could never have come from the mouth of a Jew. It was an expression of astonishment and not that he addressed Jesus as such.

The episode related in John⁶ is much more interesting. It is a kind of appendix, inserted by another hand, to the Gospel. It is in fact a secondary and tendentious addition, clumsy and inconsistent. It upsets the whole plan of the Gospel, which clearly ends with verses 30 and 31 of ch. 20, and was probably added to make the Gospel acceptable to the Church which adhered to the Synoptic version. The author of the Gospel accepts the appearance at Jerusalem, while the interpolator follows the tradition of the appearance at Galilee. The juxtaposition of Chapters 20 and 21 discloses an inexplicable contradiction, except in the light of extra information thrown in for the benefit of believers. Ignoring the contradiction in the fourth, seventh and twelfth verses, the entire chapter is of a legendary character. The last two verses and the talk of Jesus with Peter could not have been from the pen of the author of this Gospel. The words "we know" clearly disclose that this chapter was appended to the Gospel by the Ephesian elders "who first put it in circulation." The basis that the author of this Gospel was "the beloved disciple" is derived from verses 20-24. Peake, in his *Commentary on the Bible*, gives cogent reasons for holding that the entire chapter was a subsequent addition.⁷ Dummelow describes it as "an appended addition at a later time."⁸

^{1.} Revised Version, p.1123.

^{2.} John, 20 : 19-20.

^{3.} John, 20: 25.

^{4.} John, 20 : 27.

^{5.} John, 20:23.

^{6.} John, 20: 28.

^{7.} Peake, Commentary on the Bible, 764-765.

^{8.} Dummelow, Commentary on the Holy Bible, 810.

This chapter introduces a sudden and a complete change of scene. The disciples, we are told, had taken to their former life in Galilee, when Jesus appeared to them in the morning twilight at the sea of Tiberias.¹ As usual his disciples knew him not and were afraid, and none of them dared ask him "Who art thou?"² Once again, he could only dispel their doubts by distributing bread and fishes and asking them to eat,³ no doubt himself partaking of same.

It is often alleged that Jesus did not appear to his disciples in a physical body. But Ignatius in his Epistle to the Church at Smyrna wrote:

I know and believe that He was *in flesh* even after the Resurrection, and when he came to those with Peter he said: "Take, handle me and see that I am not a bodiless phantom."

Origen quoted a similar passage from the *Gospel of Peter*. It has also been quoted and relied upon by Jerome and Eusebius. In the *Gospel according to the Hebrews* it is recorded:

Now James had taken an oath that he would not eat bread.... (And the Lord said: Bring a table and bread; and he took the bread and blessed and broke; and afterwards gave it to James and said to him, my brother, eat thy bread for the son of Man has risen from *the sleep*.⁴

James was sceptical and Jesus said:

Take hold and handle me and see that I am not an incorporal spirit.5

Now, either it was a natural and perfectly human life and body which accordingly continued to be subject to physical and organic laws, or his life was already of a higher super-human character and his body was transfigured. The human form in all its aspects, the continuance of the marks of the wounds, the human speech, the acts of walking and breaking bread are incompatible with a heavenly corporeality; but all doubts must be set at rest in face of the fact that Jesus consumed earthly food and allowed himself to be touched. Further, we observe in him precisely the same progress as might be expected in the gradual cure of a severely wounded man. In the first hours after getting out of the tomb he was obliged to remain in the vicinity of the garden. In the afternoon he had strength sufficient for a walk to the neighboring village of Emmaus, and only later was he able to take the more distant journey into Galilee. Again, he took as much time, nay longer, to reach Galilee, for his appearance there was after the arrival of his disciples. Then again, there exists the same remarkable gradation in his allowing others to touch his body. Immediately after the resurrection his wounded body was yet tender and sensitive and he asked Mary Magdalene not to touch him; eight days after he himself allowed Thomas to touch and feel his wounds.

3. John, 21 :13.

^{1.} John, 21 :1.

^{2.} John, 21 :12.

Andrews: Apocryphal Books of the Old and New Testaments: Gospel According to the Hebrews.
Ibid.

The fact that Jesus, after his supposed resurrection, was so seldom with his disciples, and for so short a time, is a proof that his natural human body, weak with wounds, did require longer rest after some exertion. His absence thus shows, that he was conscious of the real position. Had he been resurrected from the dead he should have shown himself to his enemies also and thus convinced them of his Divine origin. But he did not do so. In fact he did not wish to face another trial and ordeal, and so he used to disappear as suddenly as he used to appear. It may be urged that if he needed bodily rest he should have remained with his disciples who would have attended him with love and care. But Jesus could not run the risk of another betrayal: he had already had a foretaste of it, and his disciples even after his appearances were wondering and doubting. The question then arises: where did he live during the long intervals between the appearances in the wilderness or in the mountains? The answer to this could only be furnished by the two men in white garments, or perhaps the members of the secret Order, the Essenes. In his peculiar circumstances there could be no suitable abode for a suffering man like him except among his secret colleagues of whom even the disciples knew nothing and from whom he could come as and when he liked. I will, a little further on, discuss in detail this aspect of his life.

It may be objected that the coming of Jesus into rooms with doors shut indicates that he did not have a physical body. But did he pass *through* the doors, for it is nowhere said that he passed *through* the wooden boards. Peter is said to have come out of a closed prison.¹ No one has ever suggested that the gates of the prison were closed and yet he got out. Now, the gates had to open even though of their own accord.² It would have been superfluous, perhaps absurd, for the evangelists to have stated that the door was opened. It must be taken for granted, unless it is stated that it was shut and continued to remain shut and Jesus passed *through* the wooden boards. I might mention here that the removal of the stone from the sepulchre clearly shows that Jesus had got out of the tomb in his earthly body and that the *angels* who were seen there were also in physical bodies. Again, the *first* information conveyed by the women was "that he (Jesus) was alive,"³ which absolutely negatives any idea of a spiritual resurrection. That is why the doctrine of Resurrection was expanded in the Fourth Article of the Religion of the Church of England in the following words:

Christ did truly rise again from death and took upon his body, with flesh, bones and all things appertaining to the perfection of man's nature; wherewith he ascended into heaven and there sitteth until he return to judge all men at the last day.

Paul, it is true, spoke of the nature of the resurrected body and asserted that it had changed from one of flesh and blood to one spiritual, incorruptible and immortal, in such a way that there was no trace left of the corruptible body of flesh and blood which had been laid in the tomb. This really amounted to the acceptance of the Jewish cosmogony whereby it was believed that all dead souls had to descend into Hades.

^{1.} Acts, 12 : 16.

^{2.} Acts, 12 : 10.

The death of Jesus therefore, involved for him, as for other men, according to the Jewish belief, the same journey. To prove the death of Jesus, therefore, he was made to descend into Hades. In the New Testament the references to Jesus' descent to the underworld are only incidental. The post-Pauline Epistle of Peter tells us that Christ:

Being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: by which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison.¹

And a little further on that:

For this cause, was the Gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.²

But according to the Jewish belief the soul of the dead person remained near his body for three days, at the end of which it departed and corruption set in. Therefore three days and three nights were fixed for his sojourn in hell, and a comparison was made with the prophecy of the Prophet Jonah,³ though by doing so the following prophecy had to be overlooked:

After two days will He revive us: in the third day He will raise us up, and we shall live in His sight.⁴

But Jehovah had promised:

For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.⁵

The Acts, therefore, attributed to David a saying:

Seeing this before, spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption.⁶

It is obvious that these contradictory assertions are the result of confusion. In the Apostolic or Sub-Apostolic Age no one felt impelled by dogmatic consideration to insist on the descent of Jesus into Hades as an Article in the Baptismal Creed. Harnack has suggested a solution. According to him the empty tomb complicated matters and confused the traditions. Some took Jesus to hell, others to heaven.

The Synoptic tradition is no better informed, and so it had to assert that Jesus departed from his disciples in whatever body he had resurrected and went up into heavens in the same body to sit on the right hand of God.

4. Hos., 6 : 2 5. Ps., 16 : 10. 6. Acts, 2 : 31.

^{1. 1} Peter, 3 : 18-19.

^{2.} I Peter, 4 : 6.

^{3.} Jonah, 1 : 17