

The Open Court

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and the
Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea

Editor: DR. PAUL CARUS.
Assistant Editor: T. J. McCORMACK.

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VOL. XVI. (NO. 4)

APRIL, 1902.

NO. 551

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THE RESURRECTION.

BY FRA ANGELO.

Frontispiece to The Open Court.

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EASTER, THE FESTIVAL OF LIFE VIC- TORIOUS.

BY THE EDITOR.

EASTER, the festival of Spring celebrates the triumph of life over death and the resurrection of nature from her wintery slumber, involving the hope of an immortality of the soul.¹

EVANESCENCE.

The vanity of life springs from the evanescence of things,—a truth which is preached by philosophers, insisted on by poets, and represented in art by painters.

Karl Gerok, a Protestant prelate of Germany and one of the most famous hymnologists of modern times, has written a famous poem on the transitoriness of things, which has been translated by Mr. E. F. L. Gauss, as follows:

1 PET. i. 24.

For all flesh is as grass
And all the glory of man as the flower of grass.

As in a dream while lost in meditation
I came upon this garden's desolation ;
Who owns this field, this verdant soil I tread ?
—"The dead."

Why tarriest thou, my foot, before this wicket ?
Behold the blooming flowers in plat and thicket !

¹ *The Open Court* is devoted to the establishment of the Religion of Science, and of all religious problems that await a scientific solution, the nature of man's immortality is the most important. The solution of *The Open Court* has been presented time and again, and lately in the editorial of our February number, entitled "Whence and Whither." We trust that in the course of time progressive Christianity (so far as it admits science as the test of truth) will substantially accept our view which in spite of the radical ground upon which we stand is positive and affirmative.

Whence comes this fragrance rising in sweet waves ?

—“ From graves.”

See here, oh mortal, where thy paths are ending,
Though snake-like through the world their course they're wending
It rustles at thy feet midst waste and rust :

—“ In dust !”

Where are they all, men's ever changing chances,
The fickle fortunes which this earth advances ?
These crosses preach the fact to every eye :

—“ Gone by ?”

Where are the hearts which in their days' brief measure
So faintly beat in grief, so high in pleasure ?
Which once so ardently by love and hate were swayed ?

—“ Decayed !”

Where are the thoughtless who with health were brimming
And through this world like butterflies were skimming ?
What lies here covered by these mossy stones ?

—“ But bones !”

Where are the strong ones who through life were scouring,
And heavenward their haughty schemes were towering ?
With croaking voice the ravens cry it flurried :

—“ They're buried !”

Where are the dear ones whom, when death did sever
Love swore their memory should last forever ?
The cypress-trees the answer have begotten :

—“ Forgotten !”

And saw no eye which way all those are thronging ?
And spans the grave not the most fervent longing ?
The gloomy firs, lo, shake their crowns forever :

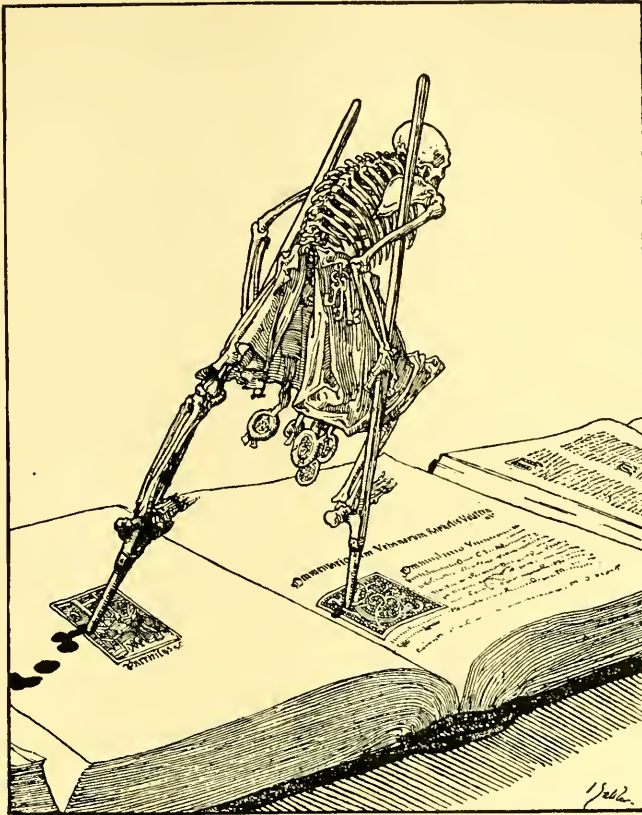
—“ No, never !”

The evening winds in anguish I hear screaming,
My spirit lulls in melancholy dreaming,
The sky grows dim, its glow sends the last ray :

—“ Away !”

An impressive illustration of evanescence is given here in Joseph Sattler's ingenious drawing called “*Wurmstich*,” which shows us Death in the act of producing the worm-eaten holes in a book. While the truth of the evanescence of all things is thus drastically brought home to us in the instance of a dust-covered book, we feel at the same time the puniness of the action of death, and have an

assurance that in spite of all decay life will continue and rise again from the ashes of the past.



Mephistopheles, in Goethe's *Faust*, representing the spirit of negation and destruction and having praised the primordial nothing, says:¹

That which in contrast to the Naught is set,
 This awkward Something, called the world, has yet
 With all that I have undertaken
 Not been by me disturbed or shaken.
 From earthquake, tempest, wave, volcano's brand
 Back into quiet settle sea and land.
 And how with endless tribulation
 The human race I have not worried !
 How many have I buried,
 Yet there's a youthful blood always in circulation.
 It makes me furious to behold

¹ Goethe's *Faust*, Act I., Scene III.

How many thousand germs unfold
 From water, earth, and air,
 And they grow everywhere,
 In the dry and wet, in the warm and cold.

Transiency is the nature of time, but time is eternal. Evanescence is the character of life, but life is constantly renewed. And it is not life in general that reappears, but the form of life is preserved and reproduced. Form is the essential feature of life; it is that which constitutes personality and individual preference.

The triumph of life over death is expressed in Christianity as in other religions in the doctrine of immortality, and found its expression in the story of Christ's resurrection which is celebrated on Easter.

THE PASSOVER.

The death of Christ fell on the last day before the Jewish Passover; and so his resurrection was celebrated on the first day after the great Sabbath; but this coincidence with the Jewish Easter is not purely accidental.

Jesus visited Jerusalem on account of the feast, and the city was overcrowded with visitors, many of them fanatics, and Josephus informs us that the Galileans were the greatest zealots among the Jews.¹ It is on this account that Pilate, who resided in Cæsaræa, decided to go at that time to Jerusalem to watch the celebration of the Passover as a most dangerous event, where the slightest mistake of the Roman authorities might provoke the outbreak of a rebellion.

Thus, the arrival in Jerusalem of Jesus, who came with many other pilgrims to celebrate the Passover and was hailed as Messiah by the Nazarene sect, necessarily coincided with the Jewish Easter, and in the face of the dangerous attitude of the Jewish fanatics in the overcrowded Jewish capital we cannot doubt that the Roman governor was prepared for the prompt and energetic suppression of any national uprising. It is natural that all those who were believed to be messiahs as well as those who abetted their claims rendered themselves liable to end their lives on the cross.

Jesus was not recognised as a messiah by the whole Jewish people; he was a Nazir,² and the Nazir sect was by no means regarded as orthodox by either the conservative Pharisees or the liberal Sadducees. On the contrary, the priestly classes were jealous of the sectarian leaders and Jesus gave offence to both parties in

¹ Josephus, *De bello Jud.*, VII. 8, 1 and 10, 1.

² Also called *Nazarene*.

many ways but especially by denouncing the practice of barter at the temple gate.

We do not doubt that upon the whole the report of the Gospel account is correct, which ascribes the cause of the condemnation of Jesus to a collusion of the Roman governor with the Jewish priests.

SUNDAY.

But we do not celebrate Passover, we celebrate Easter, and Easter is a pagan festival.

Easter is a festival of the return of the sun; it is a spring festival, and we hail the reawakening of nature to new life.

Even to-day Easter is celebrated with eggs, the symbols of reproduction, and the animal sacred to the Easter festival is the hare or the rabbit, famous for its fertility and a favorite of the goddess Aphrodite.

It was due in part to the symbolism of ancient pagan rituals that the festival of the resurrection of Christ is celebrated on Easter.

Christ's resurrection is celebrated on Sunday, and Sunday was the festival of the sun.

In the Acts² a sect is mentioned, "the disciples," who seem to have been scattered over Asia Minor, and we learn of them that they came together on the first day of the week to break bread, and Paul preached to them and found them so sympathetic that he easily gained them for his doctrine. Perhaps they were the Zabians, the Baptisers, which was the sect to which John the Baptist belonged.

Sunday is frequently regarded as the Christian Sabbath. But closely considered, these two days are similar only in being religious days; they differ greatly in one essential point: the Sabbath is a day of rest, of utter inactivity, and Sunday is a day of edification.

It appears that Sunday was the day of religious communion among the Gnostics, the Therapeutae and kindred sects who believed in the new dispensation, and the day may have been chosen under Mithraic influence. We must remember that the Nazir sect,



APHRODITE WITH EASTER
RABBIT.

Relief from the Villa Albana.¹

¹ Müller-Wieseler, *D. a. K.*, pl. 24, n. 257. Röscher, I., p. 399.

² Acts xx. 7.

and also the Essenes, had adopted many habits and beliefs from Persia, and so it is not impossible that Jesus himself celebrated Sunday as the day of religious edification.

Jesus died on Friday night, and according to a prophecy which is ascribed to Christ himself, he should have stayed three days and three nights in Sheol. We read in Matthew xii. 40 :¹

“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.”

The Jew Christians may have continued to keep the Sabbath day, but the Apostle Paul attached a special significance to Sunday, and so he declared that Christ had risen, not after three days and three nights, which would have brought the event down to Monday night, or perhaps to Tuesday in the early morning, but “on the third day,”² which is after one day and two nights, viz., on Sunday.

Considering the sanctity that was attributed to Sunday among the Gentiles, especially the disciples and similar sects, it was natural that Easter Day, the festival of Resurrection, should have been celebrated on the first Sunday after the Passover.

The burden of the Christian Gospel as preached by St. Paul is the message of the resurrection of Christ, in which the apostles implicitly believed.³ Whatever we may think of the accounts of it in the New Testament we must grant that the doctrine of immortality is the quintessence of the Christian religion, which was the cause of its final triumph. The oldest account in the Gospel according to Mark makes the simple statement that the grave was found empty, and this suggested at once to his followers the idea that Jesus must have risen from the dead. The immediate result were visions of the departed master. He was seen by Mary Magdalene,⁴ by St. Peter, by the eleven apostles, then by more than three hundred brethren, and finally by St. Paul.⁵

One of these visions (that of St. Paul) lies within the pale of historical investigation, and, in spite of the contradictions discovered in the several versions of the event, offers nothing that seems improbable or inexplicable.

The history of the Gospel stories of the Resurrection has been traced by the higher critics, and we may briefly state that later reports, superadded to the original account in Mark of the empty

¹ Compare Luke xi. 29.

² Cor. xv. 4.

³ It is not our intention to enter here into a discussion of the several problems connected with the resurrection of Jesus.

⁴ John xx. 14; Luke xxiv. 10; Mark xvi. 9.

⁵ Cor. xv. 5-8.

grave, show the spirit in which the early Christians regarded the idea of Christ's resurrection. Paul's Christ is a spiritual presence, while the Christ of a later writer, hankering after a corporeal immortality, is a bodily presence who makes doubters touch him and parades his corporeality by eating in the presence of witnesses. Finally he is reported to have departed from the earth by ascending to heaven.

Perhaps the most beautiful conception of the risen Christ (incomparably nobler than the crude materialistic notion of a corporeal



CHRIST AMONG THE DISCIPLES OF EMMAUS.

By Paul Veronese.

resurrection) is reflected in the tale of the disciples of Emmaus, where Christ, the departed master, speaks out of the mouth of a stranger whom they meet on the way and with whom they break bread together. They knew him not until he was gone. And how did they know him? His words were the words of Jesus, and the way in which he broke bread and spoke the blessing reminded them of their beloved master. Who will deny that in this sense Christ has proved a living presence ever since and is still so even unto the generations of these latter days?