

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.

Associates:

{ E. C. HEGELER.
MARY CARUS.

VOL. XXI. (No. 4.)

APRIL, 1907.

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THE MONIST

A QUARTERLY MAGAZINE

Devoted to the Philosophy of Science

DR. PAUL CARUS
EDITOR



ASSOCIATES } E. C. HEGELER
MARY CARUS

"The Monist" also Discusses the Fundamental Problems of Philosophy in their Relations to all the Practical Religious, Ethical, and Sociological Questions of the day.

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EROS ON THE SHIP OF LIFE.
The Carpaneto Monument in the Campo Santo in Genoa.

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Frontispiece to The Open Court.

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DID JESUS PREDICT HIS RESURRECTION?

BY ROBERT M. DODGE.

TO one who accepts the Gospel narratives as accurate, the answer to this question is perfectly obvious. The first three gospels contain such predictions of Jesus, not in vague terms of speech, but in definite words. In one passage after another distinct statements of his resurrection in three days are joined to predictions of his sufferings and death.

But it is evident that such statements may be questioned by the student of the Gospels; they may be considered, not the genuine words of Jesus, but the beliefs of later years attributed to him by the writers. Perhaps it is impossible to decide with certainty which view is correct. It may seem, indeed, unimportant. The question appears to be merely speculative, and as such unworthy of especial study. Yet one fact is sure: it is impossible that both the affirmative and the negative answer should be true. Even if we can not decide which answer is the more probable, it may be of interest to notice some suggestions and conclusions concerning the resurrection to which the one or the other alternative leads.

1. If we accept the Gospel records as on the whole reliable, then it is evident that at the death of Jesus there was every reason for a belief among his followers in his rising from the dead after a brief interval. So widely known were the predictions of such an event that the Jews were led to ask for a Roman guard to watch the tomb. And this means that the very air was electric with possibilities; that conditions were most favorable to the outburst of a new faith such as did result, if only the least incident should occur to give to that faith its initial impulse. To state, as writers on the subject have often done, that visions of the risen Master were un-

likely and even impossible because the disciples were left at Jesus's death with utterly crushed hopes and without the least thought of a resurrection, is to deny the accuracy of the Gospel narratives.

2. We may, however, choose the other alternative, and say that later writers attributed to Jesus words regarding his resurrection which he never spoke; that at least he never stated definitely that after his death he would rise in three days. Then this is sure: that the body of Jesus was laid in an unguarded tomb; that the story of the Roman soldiers appointed to keep watch over the sepulchre is a legend, a tale which grew up in later years and was repeated by one and another until it was generally believed. Unless there were at least rumors of a predicted resurrection all reason for a guard of soldiers was lacking. So careful a commentator as Meyer believes this was the case; he concludes that the record of the guard of soldiers lacks historical basis. (*Meyer's Commentary on the New Testament*: Matt. xxvii. 65.)

If this is true, then the tomb was accessible to any one; then the body could have been removed by either friend or foe who might have reason for such an action.

To follow out these alternatives with suggestions of what may have taken place is, of course, mere speculation. Yet speculation is not always a useless thing. It may be worth while to trace in the barest outline some of the possible conditions or events which could have given impulse, under the one or under the other of the above alternatives, to faith in the bodily resurrection of Jesus. The possibilities are many; only a few of them need be suggested. It is evident that in either case the event most likely to arouse so great an excitement would be the disappearance of the body laid in the tomb by Joseph of Arimathea. How was that possible?

Returning in our thoughts to the first alternative, we accept the idea of a tomb guarded by Roman soldiers. Most unlikely of all suggestions that those men would prove false to their trust! Little probability indeed that they would through neglect let the disciples or any others steal the body! The thought is next to impossible. And if that is so, what could have taken place except such a supernatural event as the Gospels relate?

We are not looking for the most probable thing at present; we are concerned with possibilities; and however unlikely at first thought the suggestion may seem, who will deny the possibility that the body was removed secretly by the guard itself at the order of Pilate? We need not search far for sufficient motives for such an order. Pilate had been deeply angered at the Jews because of their

attitude through the entire trial of Jesus; he had been forced to a decision against his own conviction and desire. His irritation had been only deepened by the request for a guard over the tomb. He had thought the disagreeable matter ended at last; was it to be continued even after the death of the innocent victim? If so, the best thing would be to remove the body to some secret resting place where it could no longer be a cause of contention or even the possible occasion of disturbance and riot. A Roman governor would hardly hesitate to take such action if it seemed necessary. And another motive might easily have been in his mind. He had heard rumors of the resurrection; it was because of these rumors that he had granted the guard. He had replied to the request of the Jews with the brusque words, "Take a guard. Make the sepulchre as safe as you can." Is it possible that those last words, "as safe as you can," or "as you know how," contain a hidden irony? To have the body disappear in spite of the elaborate precautions of the Jews was a means of revenge which would appeal to his nature. He was not only angry at the Jewish leaders; he despised them as bigoted and superstitious men. He would do much to annoy and frighten them. His contempt for them, his ironical spirit, had shown itself in the inscription placed over the cross, "the King of the Jews." That same spirit of contempt would be an additional motive for the removal of the body; if that should arouse the superstitious fears of the Jews, so much the better. Little could he realize to what the act might lead; perhaps he never knew, for he was then near the end of his term of office, and not far from the end of his life.

Or we may take the other alternative as the more likely. Then we accept the idea of an unguarded tomb, accessible to any one. But who would remove the body? It is evident that the familiar statement is true, that the disciples were not deceivers; they were not the men to practice a deliberate fraud. The thought is impossible. But, we are told, the enemies of the disciples could not have committed the act, for in that case they would have produced the body as evidence against the resurrection. Who then could have taken it? What but a miracle can explain the empty tomb?

Yet the possibilities are many. The suggestion already made is perhaps less likely, and yet not impossible, that Pilate himself had the body removed to avoid all further disturbance. But there are other possibilities. There is a suggestion in the Gospel according to John, that the tomb in which the body was laid was meant only as a temporary place for it. The place was chosen because "it was nigh at hand," and time was short before the Sabbath. (John xix. 41-42.)

Workmen may have removed the body to another place immediately after the Sabbath, as Mary thought it was likely at first, (John. xx. 15) and the empty tomb would then give rise to the report of a resurrection. Or suppose that the very men who brought about the death of Jesus took a farther step in the depth of their rage. Sometimes passion is only intensified by success in accomplishing its purpose. The fury of those who shouted "Crucify him" may have been unsatisfied with that result. The honorable burial of the body, contrary to the regular custom in the case of criminals, and so contrary to their expectation, may have aroused these men to fresh anger. Was it beyond their depravity to pay some poor wretches to take the body out from its place of honor and convey it to a place of dishonor? The act once done could not easily be undone. The body might have been lost beyond recovery; or if these men had found and produced it they would have confessed their guilt in the matter and exposed themselves to punishment. There is something repulsive in the whole thought, yet there is also something not inappropriate. What more fitting culmination of all the indignities heaped upon a pure and innocent victim than the last indignity to the lifeless body? What action more in accord with the words of the old prophet, "They made his grave with the wicked"? (Is. liii. 9.) And so far as what is essential in Christian faith is concerned, what matters it what became of the physical form? "Flesh and blood doth not inherit the kingdom of God"; "It is the spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing." Such truths the Church needs to learn and emphasize. And such truths would be emphasized only the more strongly under this supposition.

To the writer it seems most likely that Jesus did predict his resurrection, not indeed in the clear manner stated in the Gospels, but in more vague and poetical terms. He saw clearly the approach of opposition and persecution; he saw that his own death was not unlikely as a result. He spoke of these things calmly and frankly. And what was more natural than that he should follow these statements with the comforting thought, couched in the picturesque language of the Orient which Jesus knew and loved so well. that he would come back to them; that he would live again after his death. He may have quoted the words of Hosea, "After two days will He revive us: on the third day He will raise us up, and we shall live before Him." (Hosea vi. 2.) Such statements were not understood by the disciples; they were half forgotten, and yet kept dimly in the memory, like many other utterances of the Master. Such memories were revived by the events following the death of Jesus,

whatever those exact events may have been. Out of them grew the tales and hopes and visions such as the Gospels record, full of inconsistencies and contradictions, yet sincerely believed and earnestly proclaimed. From them arose the strong faith in the bodily resurrection of Jesus, a faith strengthened by opposition. And so arose and spread like a fire the faith in the risen Lord.

And then it was all a mistake? Then all is false, and Easter is a deception? No: for what is outwardly false may cover and preserve an inward truth. That truth within may be far greater than the false form without. And the faith of the disciples was essentially true, not false. Their Master did rise from the dead. He still lives: more than ever is his life known and felt. He rose from the dead in just the way that he possibly predicted, though his disciples did not understand him. And perhaps—no, probably—the form which that faith took, false as it was, was the very form necessary to preserve that inward truth in ages of crude thought. It has been said that the worship of the Virgin Mary, false as it seems to all Protestants, was of value in the Middle Ages. It preserved a respect for womanhood in those rude times. It concealed an essential truth within. And so, only in far greater measure, has belief in the bodily resurrection of Jesus preserved truth. It cherished a faith which otherwise might have perished, faith in a living Christ, faith in the life eternal.