

Foreword, Chapter 1, and Chapter 2 from

Wilbert W. White, *The Resurrection Body
“According to the Scriptures”* (New York:
George H. Doran, 1923), vii–27.

FOREWORD

Rofus Choate is reported to have said of John Quincy Adams that he always had an unerring instinct for the jugular vein. By this, of course, he meant that Mr. Adams went directly to the vital part of any matter. In attack, presumably, he would leap for the vulnerable spot. It was an unerring instinct for the jugular vein which led Lord Lyttleton and Gilbert West years ago to agree that if they could explain satisfactorily on naturalistic grounds the resurrection of Jesus and the conversion of Paul, they would be able to prove the whole system of Christian belief to be without substantial foundation. This they attempted to do. The result was that the one wrote a valiant defence of the fact of the resurrection, while the other published an equally strong argument for the reality of the conversion of Paul.

The pivotal relation of the resurrection to the Christian system has been generally acknowledged. It is the cardinal fact of Christianity. Everything hinges on it. Strauss, one of the great leaders of modern unbelief declares the resurrection to be the “centre of the centre, the real heart of Christianity as it has been until now.” The Elder Delitzsch in his commentary on Genesis says that, while it is true that the present upheaval in the field of criticism is well calculated to perplex the conscience and entangle weak faith in all manner of anxiety, if, however, in this labyrinth there remain for us this one assurance,

CHRISTUS VERE RESURREXIT (Christ was truly raised from the dead,) we shall possess the Ariadne-thread to guide us out of it.

Dr. David Cairns says: “In belief in the resurrection is the spring of that new life of faith of which to-day the Church stands so much in need.”

This comment by Dr. Cairns, discovered after the manuscript of this little volume was about completed, summarizes the conviction of the author, who is not without earnest expectation that multitudes, in the near future, through prayerful perusal of the source books of Christianity, will come to believe in their hearts that God raised Jesus Christ from the dead, and in consequence will exhibit lives that shall reveal Him in resurrection power.

In this study, effort has been made to be true to facts rather than to present a harmonized theory and full explanation. We stand with Swete of Cambridge, who discerningly says that the narration of exceptional events is likely to present parts which do not fit. That they do not fit may be evidence that the non-fitting factors were really seen. And if, on a deeper examination of such events, it is found that the peculiarities exhibit one underlying law, the natural inference is the narratives are true.

We desire to be understood as fully and heartily in sympathy with all scientific investigation and advance of knowledge. Of some of the new knowledge we are not by any means sure. We are compelled sometimes to substitute for the words, “Every scholar knows,” these more conservative ones, “Some scholars think.” Our conception of Biblical truth leads us to rejoice in every new real discovery and in every assured result of experiment. We do not believe that religion and science are enemies. There must be something wrong either with my science or your religion if they are not true friends.

As for evolution—there are many kinds of evolution. The word calls for definition. Let those who dispute be sure they understand each other’s terms. We have not the slightest fear that the teaching of the

Bible, respecting Jesus Christ in general and concerning His resurrection in particular, is inconsistent with the true findings of science. So we are not afraid of science. In these days of undreamed of marvels, with the knowledge of man yet conspicuous for its limits, who will venture denial of the mystery of the resurrection as presented in Holy Scripture?

The message of the following pages is addressed particularly to those who are in perplexity about their faith, and to those who sorrow because of the vanished hand. May Easter be a season in which with reverent fear and great joy we shall turn from the tomb to Him who is the resurrection and the life. “Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead.”

W. W. W.

The attitude of science toward the notion of a supersensual universe, or series of universes, interacting with the material fabric we know—a concept fundamental to any logical theory of immortality—has ceased to be the hostile or indifferent one it was. On the contrary, it might almost seem that the theory of a universe of finer and infinitely more potent substance is almost ready to be announced by our scientific thinkers as an inevitable conclusion from recent discoveries.

CHARLES KASSEL in *Immortality and the New Physics*,
 “North American Review,” October, 1922.

Chapter I: With What Body Do They Come?

“The body of the resurrection is nothing other than God’s volitional repetition of the body of the grave—with *splendid additions*.” Thus affirms Professor Olin Curtis, in *the Christian Faith*, where may be found a very remarkable discussion of the mystery of the resurrection body.

We should ever keep in mind that the distinctive teaching of Christianity about the future is not that the soul is immortal. Paganism teaches that. It is, that there is the resurrection of the body. We are to be human beings the world to come. A disembodied spirit is not a complete human being. A human being consists of an embodied spirit. The body of the future will be the resurrection body. “The new man in Christ is made complete only by the resurrection body.”

Let us be clear in our thinking about the word resurrection. Reanimation is not resurrection. Reanimation, which is the same as resuscitation, means bringing back to life. Resurrection is more than this. It involves newness of life. It means reunion of spirit and body. It means more than reunion of spirit with the old body. It means reunion of spirit with a new and different body, yet a body which is the particular person’s own body under the law of identity; a body which can be traced back to its conditioning clue, namely the body which was that one person’s during life. So, while it is true that the body of the resurrection is a

different body, it is equally true that it is the same body. This is one of the several paradoxes of the Christian faith.

The Scriptures furnish a perfect illustration of what we are saying. Lazarus was reanimated. Jesus was resurrected. The stone was required to be rolled away to permit Lazarus to come out of the tomb. Jesus did not require the stone to be rolled away in order that He might come forth. The angel rolled away the stone from the door of the tomb to let the outsiders in, not to let Jesus out. In that tomb were evidences of the resurrection which it was desirable the disciples should see. The winding sheets spoke as eloquently and convincingly of entrance into new life, as the empty shell of the chrysalis speaks of the flight of the butterfly. Lazarus brought with him out the tomb the wrappings of the grave that were about him. Jesus came forth from the tomb without the winding sheets of death. He did not need to be loosed and let go. He was the Prince of Life. It was impossible that He should be holden of death. What of the cerements provided by Joseph of Arimathæa, and the one hundred pounds of spices brought by Nicodemus? Concerning them, more later in exposition of John 20:1-10, but a brief word is called for here. The usual interpretation, to the effect that our Lord Himself with deliberation unwrapped the grave cloths from His body and placed them in carefully arranged order on the stone shelf where His body had been resting, and then folded “the napkin that was upon his head,” laying it in a place by itself, is unscriptural. The resurrection body became such within the winding sheets. At the word of God, who raised Him from the dead (Acts 2:24; Ephesians 1:20), He sprang in His new, powerful, spiritual body out of the wrappings, thus evidencing Him to be the Son of God with power (Romans 1:4). He left them intact, except for the head-roll which, when released, naturally fell back to a place by itself; and then on through the walls of the sealed tomb He proceeded into the free atmosphere of that first Easter morning.

The question which we all ask, With what body will our departed come? We believe should be answered in terms which provide reply to this other question, namely, With what body did Jesus come from the grave? He is the first fruits. We shall be like Him when it is manifest what we shall be. Following as faithfully as possible this clue, we are clear already that the resurrection body is not the body reanimated. It is not a mere return to life in the same corruptible, weak, fleshly, natural body of the grave. Ours will not be. Paul makes this very clear in his great chapter on the resurrection—I Corinthians, fifteenth. He tells us that we sow not the body that shall be, when we sow wheat or oats or barley. But we sow bare grain, and in the strange, mysterious new life which succeeds death, God gives it a body as it pleases Him, to each seed its own body.

In the chapter to which reference has just been made the great Apostle recognizes the fact that a true and complete human being is an *embodied* spirit, not a disembodied spirit. He answers the question, With what body do they come? The answer is: God gives it a body, a suitable body. It will be a body perfectly adapted to the new order of nature in which it is to live. It will be an incorruptible body. It will be a body conformed to the body of His glory (Philippians 3:21). It will be a powerful body. It will be a spiritual body, whatever that means, but it will be a body. A spiritual body means a body adapted to the spiritual existence into which entrance is gained by the resurrection. Perhaps light is thrown on the meaning of the word “spiritual” by expressions found later in the chapter: “Now I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot enter the Kingdom of God.... We shall be changed.... The dead shall be raised incorruptible.... This mortal must put on immortality.” The word “spiritual” is a modifier of body, so that there is a body involved. Disembodiment is furthest from the Apostle’s mind. Westcott challengingly interprets thus: “When the laws of our existence are hereafter modified, then we, because we are unchanged, shall find some other expression, truly the *same* in relation

to that new order, because it is not the same as that to which it corresponds in this.”

It should also be observed that this masterly discussion of the resurrection by St. Paul recognizes the stability of nature under the God of this mysterious universe in which we live, in that each order of life remains in its category. “To each seed a body of its own There is one flesh of men, and another flesh of beasts There are celestial bodies and bodies terrestrial.” It is made clear that in the life to come human beings will continue to be such. They will not pass into creatures of different orders wither below or above them. The use of this portion of Scripture with those who profess to believe in transmigration of souls has been found interesting.

The thoughtful reader will perhaps be stimulated to re-examine the Bible, especially the New Testament, for its emphasis of the value of the body and the duty of paying it all due respect as well as of giving it all due care. It was under the influence of this teaching that a great theologian and Christian pastor, as he followed the bier of an only son, spake kindly to the bearers saying, “Tread softly, young men, you carry a temple of the Holy Ghost.”

It was doubtless the same consideration of the body that prompted Archbishop Whately, when someone quoted the King James Version of Philippians 3:21 in his hearing, using the expression, “who shall change our vile body,” to seize the book and render it as the Greek demands: “We wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall fashion anew *the body of our humiliation*, that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, according to the working whereby he is able to even subdue all things unto himself.”

Christianity honors the body. It recognizes it as a place where the great God desires to dwell. It has been supremely honored by the incarnation of the Son of God. Being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also highly exalted Him. To His servants it

is given to be like Him and with Him in glory. “St. Paul’s expression of Christian hope,” says Chancellor Bernard, “is not deliverance from the body, but redemption of the body. The redemption of the body is the last stage in the great process of adaption (*υιοθεσιας*) by which we are made ‘sons of God.’” Who should not bow in humble and thankful adoration for the high calling to which mankind has thus been summoned?

Who knows how it is that the mind, as we are familiar with it, moves at its will the fingers of the hand? This—our familiarity with the phenomenon aside—is a veritable miracle. We are as ignorant of its final cause as we are of the primary cause of electricity, or as we are ignorant of gravitation in its first cause, or of heat, or light, or even of the thing that makes a seed grow. These things are, despite our inability to understand them, and it is no strain upon the reason to suppose that the like may be true with bodies of ether, or of some higher, more transcendent substance which surpasses the ether in its properties and uses it as we use the electric and magnetic forces that lie in nature.

CHARLES KASSEL in *Immortality and the New Physics*,
“North American Review,” October, 1922.

Chapter II: How Are the Dead Raised?

There is no better brief comprehensive reply to this question than that given by St. Paul (I Corinthians, fifteenth chapter): “God giveth a body as it pleaseth him.” In further answer to the questions: How are the dead raised? and, With what body do they come? I adopt and employ the statement of Dr. Olin Curtis as the best of those I know. It is as follows:

Negatively speaking, God, in the resurrection of the dead, does not produce the new body by the development of an indestructible *germ* which is within the body of this life. Nor does He produce it by a *natural force* which in some way belongs to the body of this life. Neither is the body to be an ethereal body which before or at the time of death was within the physical body as the kernel is within the husk of a nut. It is not the literal body of the grave reconstructed, whether by using all, or many, or a few or even one of the old material atoms. All this chasing through the universe to get the identical particles of matter, or enough of them to constitute a “proper identity,” is not only an absurdity in philosophy, but a serious misinterpretation of St. Paul.

Further, it is not the result of any natural law, any habitual divine volition, such as brings the buds and blossoms of spring.

Speaking positively, the body of the resurrection *is* a purely spiritual body (not bound by the laws of this world); made by the direct and new intention of God; but so made as to be conditioned by the body of the grave. Every glorified body is in occasional connection with a single physical body just as really as my body to-day is in occasional connection with the body of my childhood. The child's body conditions the man's body—is the start, the initial indicative, the determining fundament, in God's own process of identity. The body I have now is what it is because the body of my childhood was what it was. I have lost every old particle of matter, times and times, but I have remained in my own category of identity. Not for an instant has my body leaped into another man's category. Precisely so, a man's body of glory is his own body under the law of identity, and can be traced back to its conditioning clue, namely, the body which that one man had at the time of death. Every abiding element, the entire intrinsic plan and meaning of the material body, is by the resurrection brought again into fact and made glorious. Indeed, were it feasible to enter into a thorough philosophical discussion to show what matter actually is, such a discussion would, I believe, make it evident that the body of the resurrection is nothing other than God's volitional repetition of the body of the grave—*with splendid additions*.