The Monist, Volume 11

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THE BELIEF IN THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS AND ITS PERMANENT SIGNIFICANCE.¹

INTRODUCTION.

The disciples, plunged into fear and terror by the crucifixion of their master, kept themselves concealed from their enemies during the first stages of anxiety. But after a short time they gathered again and faced the persecutions of the princes of the world with the bravery of lions. Poor fishers and men of the common people, without intellectual standing or higher culture, lacking all outward elements of power, they conquered the world solely by virtue of their faith. The Church founded upon this faith embraces to this day, or better, embraces already, one third part of mankind. All civilised races are running in the paths of Christianity, or are turning toward these paths. These are striking facts, but historically incontestable.

Now what was the content of the faith promulgated by the disciples, which for the last two thousand years has pursued its ever-widening triumphal course through the world? Jesus is risen and has been raised by God to be ruler of his kingdom and in time to come judge of the world in God's stead! Resurrection and ascen-

¹ Translated from Professor Schwartzkopff's MS. by W. H. Carruth.
sion! These from the very beginning of Christianity constitute the real content of its Gospel. It is the belief in the risen Jesus ascended to the right hand of God, which has conquered the world. There must be in this belief, therefore, an effective religious force with which no other on earth can be compared. But in what does this lie?

If we wish to obtain pure gold we must first separate the slag from it. The divine, the innermost content and highest goal of the truly human, always appears in history involved in human forms. Being more or less superficial these possess for the divine kernel at most but the significance of a hull. Their function is to preserve and transmit it. But they must be removed if we are to attain perfect clearness regarding the kernel itself. A man is crucified and laid away in the grave. He rises out of the grave on the third day and walks upon his feet. He appears to his friends, shows those who doubt his bodily reality that he is no ghost, but has flesh and bone, mingles with them and finally leads them up into a mountain. Thence he rises into the air before their eyes, and disappears behind a cloud. What a precious kernel! What a childish hull!

There are still Christians even in Germany, as recent events show, who are unable in this matter also to distinguish between hull and kernel. They accuse those who undertake to purify the gold of its slag of depreciating the gold. Shall we allow these pious but unintelligent people to persuade us to call the slag pure gold? Or on the other hand, shall we throw away the gold? It is not to be denied that the belief in the resurrected and risen Christ appeared among the early Christians in the childish conceptions of their time and people. They were not able to free themselves entirely from sense and materialism in their view of Christ's resurrection. Can we wonder at this, when it is not yet entirely possible for many Christians even two thousand years later? Yet it will be possible to show that these sensual conceptions are not really the force which has brought a world to the feet of Christianity. This power was due alone to the divine reality which was hidden under such views. And nothing but this can accomplish the same work