

ARTICLE VI.

THE NATURE OF THE RESURRECTION BODY
OF CHRIST.

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THE nature of the resurrection body of Christ has been much discussed by learned men at different times in the church. Three opinions have prevailed. One, that his body was changed as to its *substance* at his resurrection, and so became a spiritual and wholly different body in its very *essence*. Another opinion held is, that Christ had after his resurrection the same body as before, but glorified, or, as the earlier writers termed it, changed as to its *qualities* and *attributes*. The third view, and the one generally held, is, that the body with which Christ rose, was the same material body of flesh and blood which was crucified and laid in the tomb.

The first opinion is akin to the ancient error of the Docetæ, or Phantasiasts, who held that Christ was a man in appearance only; that all the actions of his life, before and after his resurrection, were a mere phantasm, without any reality whatever.

As this first opinion is mere fanciful speculation, unsupported by any evidence, and is directly opposed to the declaration of our Lord to the disciples, "A spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have," no attempt at refutation is necessary.

The second view, that Christ had the same body in *substance* after the resurrection as before, but possessing new qualities and attributes, and not subject to the laws of flesh and blood, was held by some of the early Fathers. They de-

scribed the body of the risen Lord as ἀθάνατον, ἀφθαρτον, ἀδιάφθορον, αἰώνιον, *immortala, impassibile, incorruptibile*. Irenæus, of the third century, speaks of Christ "as made incorruptible after the resurrection." The earlier Lutheran divines who believed in the ubiquity of Christ's body, described his risen body as glorious, the same in substance, but endued with new qualities, viz., *impalpability, invisibility, and illocality*. Among the moderns who have held this second view are Hahn, Olshausen, and Hengstenberg.

"This second view," says Dr. Edward Robinson, "seems not to differ essentially from the preceding one, except in the single point of identity. In both, our Lord's resurrection body is regarded as possessing like qualities and attributes; but in the former, these are connected with a different substance; while in this they are superinduced upon the same substance. That is to say, in the second view our Lord's resurrection body has a relation to his former human body; while according to the first view it has no such relation."

That the body of Christ was changed at the resurrection to the spiritual, glorified body, has been the opinion of eminent men. This was the view of Bishop Horsley, who says: "His body was indeed risen, but it was become that body which Paul describes in the fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians, which, having no sympathy with the gross bodies of this earthly sphere, nor any place among them, must be undiscernible to the human organs." Dr. Dods of Scotland says: "By the resurrection of Christ, Paul meant his rising from the grave with a body glorified, or made fit for the new and heavenly life he had entered."

The arguments adduced for this view are the following:—

1. Jesus was not recognized by those who met him. When he appeared to Mary Magdalene, "she beheld him, and knew not that it was Jesus," supposing that it was the gardener. So the two disciples going to Emmaus, though they held long conversations with him, and sat at table, and

partook of food with him, did not know him, and were surprised to find him apparently ignorant of what had occurred in Jerusalem concerning the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth.

That he was not recognized by Mary is not strange, for, in the first place, she had no idea that he would rise, and therefore was not expecting to see him. Again, her mind was so much agitated and distressed, by the removal of the body, as to lose its quick and accurate perception which she might otherwise have exercised. Further, in the twilight she could not distinctly discern his features. Then again, his dress, being probably that of a gardener, concealed his identity. All these circumstances account for Mary's failure to recognize the Lord. But no sooner does she hear the familiar voice calling her name than she recognizes him. And so far as we know, his appearance was the same as before, for it is not to be supposed that his body was again changed from the spiritual to the natural.

As for the failure of the two disciples on their way to Emmaus to recognize him, the reason is distinctly given by the historian: "Their eyes were holden so that they should not know him." That is, their vision was so supernaturally obstructed as to prevent their recognizing him. And from the fact that *as soon as* "their eyes were opened" they knew him, it is evident their failure to recognize him before was not owing to any essential change in his body. "The whole passage," says Dr. John Owen, "shows that no essential change took place in Jesus, but that the failure of the disciples to recognize him, resulted from a hindrance of some sort supernaturally produced in their vision. If it was the pleasure of Jesus to remain awhile in the company of these disciples without being recognized, he who formed the eye could easily have wrought some change in the organ of vision necessary to such a result."

Whatever the reason for not recognizing him, it is certain they understood that the person with whom they held those

conversations was a real man in a body of flesh and blood.

2. It is argued that the manner of his appearance to the women, and afterwards to the apostles—unforeseen and sudden, and also his disappearance no less sudden—would seem to show that his body had undergone a change from the natural to the spiritual. Thus, having finished his conversation with the two travelers, and blessed and broken the bread, it is said he vanished out of their sight. This language certainly implies a sudden and abrupt departure, but not necessarily a vanishing from sight as a spirit or specter might be supposed to do. When they recognized him, they were doubtless utterly astonished, and before they could collect their thoughts to do him homage, he had withdrawn himself. From the form of expression here used, which is literally, "*He was no longer seen by them,*" nothing can be determined as to the manner of his departure.

Other instances of a like kind with this before his crucifixion are recorded. Thus, when the enemies of Jesus at Nazareth were about to throw him down the precipice to which they had led him, he passed through the midst of them, and went his way (Luke iv. 30). Whether by a miracle he made himself invisible, or assumed some other form, as he had power to do, or whether he so affected their minds or eyes that they could not perceive him, we do not know. We know that he "vanished out of their sight" as he did from the sight of the two disciples. A similar occurrence is recorded in John viii. 59 in his escape from the Jews when they attempted to stone him.

Again, it is said that in the evening of his disappearance from Cleopas and his companion he appeared suddenly to the apostles assembled in a room with the doors closed (and doubtless locked or bolted) for fear of the Jews. This appearance through locked doors is said to be proof that he had a body superior to the laws of matter. Certainly it is if he entered without the doors being opened. The form of expression implies abruptness and suddenness of entrance, but

nothing miraculous. The two disciples from Emmaus had entered a short time before, when the doors were closed, but doubtless opened for their entrance, and Christ may have entered the same way. From its being said that the doors were closed for fear of the Jews, it is inferred that they were fastened. But this does not follow. They may have been closed that the disciples might not be interrupted by spies or informers, rather than from fear of violence. For surely had the Jews been evil-disposed, no bars or bolts would have prevented their entrance, breaking up the assembly, and arresting the leaders. But even if the doors were fastened, there is nothing in the narrative against the idea that Christ directed the door to be opened for him. The statement that he *stood* (in John, *came and stood*) in the *midst of them*, denotes only that he came suddenly and unexpectedly among them, but does not tell the *mode* of his entrance.

But suppose the doors were fastened, and we admit that his entrance was effected by a miracle, could not he, who, by his divine power, performed so many miracles, by the same power, have silently opened the doors, then, closing them, veiled their eyes so that they did not recognize him until he actually stood before them? This is the view of Dr. George Campbell, who says: "The words do not necessarily imply that, while the doors continued shut, he had entered miraculously. The participle for closed is more literally *having been closed*, that is before, than being closed. They may, therefore, for aught related by the evangelist, have been made by miracle to fly open, and give him access." This is the view of Calvin, Grotius, Whitby, Dick, Doddridge, and Bloomfield.

In confirmation of this view we may refer to the deliverance of the apostles from prison, when the angel opened the doors, and brought them out, the officers sent to take them reporting that they found the prison-doors securely closed, and the keepers standing without, but no man within (Acts

v. 19-23). These keepers were as ignorant of the departure of the apostles as the disciples were of the entrance of Jesus. In like manner an angel opened the prison-doors, and released Peter, the iron gate leading into the city "opening of its own accord."

Those who hold that Christ entered through closed doors the room where the disciples were assembled, and that therefore his body must have been a glorified one, hold also that he passed through the closed stone doors of the tomb with such a body. If so, we ask, Why the wonderful display of the earthquake, and the descent of the angel from heaven *to roll away the stone?* Why roll away the stone if the body of Christ glorified had already left the tomb through the closed stone door? The stone was no greater obstacle than the closed door of the upper room, and there is no more reason why the one should be supernaturally removed than the other.

3. As proof that Christ's body was changed from the natural to the spiritual at his resurrection, it is said that he left the tomb before it was opened.

This strange statement is made by Bishop Horsley. He says: "It is evident that he had left the sepulcher before it was opened. An angel indeed was sent to roll away the stone, but this was not to let the Lord out, but to let the women in." Again: "St. Matthew's women saw the whole process of the opening of the sepulcher, for they were there before it was opened. They felt the earthquake; they saw the angel descend from heaven; they saw him roll away the vast stone which stopped the mouth of the sepulcher."

But what says the narrative? Matthew, according to the correct rendering, says that when the two Marys arrived at the sepulcher, "there had been a great earthquake, and the angel of the Lord had descended from heaven, and rolled away the stone." According to Mark, when they arrived they said, "Who will roll away the stone from the door of the sepulcher?" "And when they looked, they saw that the stone

was rolled away"! Luke says: "They found the stone rolled away from the sepulcher." John says: "Mary Magdalene cometh to the sepulcher, and seeth the stone rolled away from the sepulcher."

That Jesus therefore left the tomb before the stone was rolled away, as Bishop Horsley affirms, cannot be proved. That the women found the stone removed, and the tomb open when they arrived, is manifest from the fourfold narrative.

4. It is argued that, as Christ certainly ascended in a glorified body, he must have risen from the tomb in such a body. But that does not follow. We have conclusive evidence that he was in a human body as long as he was on the earth, and we have conclusive evidence that he is now in heaven in a glorified body. When the change took place we are not told. But the Scriptures furnish some analogies which enable us to answer the inquiry. Elijah when on earth was in a human body. At the moment of his translation to heaven, his natural body, we believe, was changed to the spiritual, glorified body. Christians who are alive at the coming of Christ will not die, but their bodies will be changed, and fashioned like to Christ's glorious body. When this change takes place, Paul tells us, "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump, for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."

Now as this change takes place in the bodies of those Christians at the moment of their ascension, and as the change in the body of Elijah took place at the moment of his translation, we may with reason conclude that the body of Jesus assumed the glorified form in the very act of his ascension.

5. It is argued that, as Christ is declared in Scripture to be the earnest, pledge, and pattern of the future resurrection of his people, that could not be the case if he arose in his natural body, and they with spiritual bodies. But it is not necessary that they should rise with bodies of the same nature,

in order for Christ's resurrection to be a pledge and assurance of theirs. The great fact revealed is, that as he rose, the first-fruits of them that sleep, and entered into his glory, so they, united to him as his members, will also rise, and enter into the same glory. Christ had a mission to fulfill on earth, and, in his human body in which he rose, he fulfilled it during his forty days' sojourn with the disciples, and then ascended to heaven in a glorified body. The risen saints have no such mission, and their resurrection and ascension are simultaneous. Moreover, it was necessary that their bodies, which had decayed, should be changed at the moment of resurrection, but as Christ's body saw no corruption, it might, if there were good reason, remain for a while unchanged, until his ascension.

Having examined the arguments adduced to prove that Christ rose in a spiritual body, let us consider those advanced in support of the third view, that he rose in the same body that was laid in the tomb.

This theory is the one generally held. It was the view of Ephraëm Syrus of the fourth century, Gregory of Nyssa, Epiphanius in the fifth, Cyril, Jerome, and others. Among the moderns, Calvin and his followers have strenuously maintained this view, and it has been recently adopted among the Lutherans by Herder, Neander, Lücke, and Tholuck.

The arguments in support of this are:—

1. The language which Christ uses of himself. When he appeared to the eleven disciples and those gathered with them at Jerusalem, they were greatly terrified, and thought it was a spirit. Once before, when Christ appeared to them walking on the sea, they cried out in terror, supposing it to be a spirit or some phantom. But it was the same Jesus in the same natural body, whom they had often seen before. So now, when in their fright they thought the person so unexpectedly standing before them to be a spirit or phantom

sent to delude them, he said, "Why are ye troubled, and wherefore do reasonings arise in your hearts?"

What course now does Jesus take to reassure his agitated disciples? "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." And when he had thus spoken, he showed them his hands and his feet. Christ certainly meant by this language to convince his disciples, first, that what they saw was not a spirit or phantom; and, second, that it was the very same body of flesh and bones which they had often seen. For the truth of this he appealed to their physical senses. Handle me, not merely touch me, but *feel with the hand*, and *see*, that is, satisfy yourselves by freely placing your hands on my person, that I am a living, bodily reality, and not a spirit or specter as you imagine. But this is not all. "The pronoun I *myself*," says Dr. Owen, "is in emphatic opposition to their notions of his being a spectral appearance. It is the very form of expression employed the world over to denote the personal identity of the one making use of it. It denotes here that our Lord was the very person whom they had formerly known him to be. It denies that he had undergone any change whatever. He stood before them with the same body in all its physical properties and parts, hands, feet, eyes, mouth, which he had when he was among them as their friend and teacher."

What can be more convincing than the test which Christ presented? It was an appeal to the senses, and the argument was irresistible. The disciples were convinced of the reality of his resurrection in the same body that was crucified.

Dr. Heber Newton admits that the disciples did really believe that Christ arose, and was actually before them in his physical body, but he thinks they were prejudiced in favor of a bodily resurrection, and therefore their testimony is unreliable. But, in fact, their prejudices were against this idea. True, they had seen Lazarus come forth from the grave, the

widow's son and the ruler's daughter restored to life, and thus had proof that the dead could be made to live again in their natural bodies. Yet when Christ declared to them that he would rise again on the third day, they did not understand what the rising of the dead meant; and when Jesus appeared to them, they thought it was a spirit, instead of a material body. Though they were afterwards convinced as to the true nature of Christ's body, yet Dr. Newton thinks they were deceived. This is incredible. How could they be deceived? Could they not trust their own senses of sight and touch? Our senses may sometimes deceive, but only when they are diseased, or their functions carelessly performed, or when the object is so situated as not to be fully subjected to their test. But otherwise their testimony is infallible, and they are safe guides.

In the case of the disciples there was no possibility of deception. The result of their seeing and handling the body of Jesus, was to them a demonstration that the body before them was his veritable body of flesh and bones. Apparent difficulties must give way to proved facts.

But Thomas was not present at the first interview, and when they told him that they had seen the Lord, he refused to believe their testimony, and demanded, what to him would be the only satisfactory test, a personal examination of the body. "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe." This test Jesus graciously granted him. The result was his firm conviction that Christ had actually risen from the dead, and with joyful faith and adoring love, he exclaimed, "My Lord and my God."

In this connection let the following circumstance be noted: When Jesus met the women who had left the sepulcher to tell the disciples the wonderful news, *they held him by the feet* (*ἐκράτησαν αὐτοῦ τοὺς πόδας*) Matt. xxviii. 9. "They

could," says Dr. Robinson, "have no doubt, that the limbs, the body which they then touched and embraced, were the very same in which three days before they had seen and known the Lord."

It is easier to believe that Christ in his natural body miraculously opened the doors even if locked or bolted, than to believe that, being, as is claimed, in a spiritual body, he practiced a deception on his disciples, when he told them to assure themselves by handling his body and his wounds, that it was the very same body that had been crucified.

2. That Christ's body was unchanged in its nature when he rose from the tomb, is evinced by his acts.

At the interview with the disciples, after he had shown them his hands and his feet, to his inquiry if they had any food, they gave him a piece of broiled fish, and some honey, which he took and ate before them.

The act of eating belongs to the nature of the human body, but not to a spirit, or a glorified body. It was the common and popular belief of that day that spirits do not eat. Hence the evidence which our Lord, by eating in the presence of the disciples, gave, was not only fitted to remove all doubts from their minds of his personal identity, but also furnished proof against the Docetæ or Gnostics, who held that it was only an appearance that lived and died in Judæa. This proof is so employed by John in his first epistle (i. 1): "That which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the word of life." As Christ ate before the disciples in order to remove any remaining doubt as to his identity, they were now convinced that it was his true body of flesh and blood which they saw.

Other instances are given of his eating. On the shores of the Lake of Tiberias, where he met the disciples, he took bread and gave to them, he himself doubtless partaking with them. And Peter in his discourse with Cornelius and his

friends, said, "God raised him up, and showed him openly unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us who did eat and drink with him, after he rose from the dead," implying certainly that he ate and drank with them. The eating and drinking are presented as proof of the reality of Christ's human body.

To break the force of this argument, it is objected that the angels who came to Abraham ate and drank, and yet they appeared to the eye without corporeal substance. To this it is replied that they are expressly called men (Gen. xviii. 2). And the narrative certainly conveys the idea that they were in human bodies. They came to Abraham as travelers. He ran to meet them, brought water to wash their soiled feet, prepared a meal and set it before them, and we are told (ver. 8) they did eat. Two of the men went on their way towards Sodom, and Abraham accompanied them. They ate and drank and lodged with Lot, and when he was pressed by the crowd, they with their hands pulled him in, and shut the door. All these circumstances show plainly that the angels appeared in human bodies, and therefore eating and drinking were natural to them, as it was with Christ, and in both cases the act proves the nature of the body.

3. It was essential that Christ should appear to the disciples in the body which they had known, as they were to be witnesses of his resurrection, which would have been impossible had the body been different from the one placed in the tomb. Had the risen body been a spiritual, impalpable, glorified body, it would not have been the resurrection of the Christ who had been crucified, and who foretold that he, the very one whom the disciples saw, would rise again on the third day. They were appointed to be witnesses of his resurrection, and, it was necessary, in order that they might be able to testify the truth of his having risen, that they should have such evidence as could not be gainsaid. Such evidence

they had, and not a doubt remained in their minds as to his personal identity.

On this point Dr. Owen has the following remarks: "It was necessary to the fulfillment of his own repeated prediction, that his body would rise from the dead on the third day. Of this fact the disciples were to be witnesses. They were to have therefore the most indubitable evidence, that of the senses, of the truth of this great fact, which was to be at the very basis of the Christian religion as a cardinal point of faith (1 Cor. xvii. 1). Now what cognizance by their physical senses, such as sight and touch, could they have of a glorified body? Had any revelation been made to them as to the nature and properties of heavenly bodies? There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. Of the former the disciples had some knowledge; of the latter, none whatever, except the revealed fact that such glorified bodies exist, or were to exist in heaven. Who could believe their testimony to the resurrection of Christ, if, when they stretched their hands to touch the sacred person of their divine Lord in confirmation of their faith that he had actually risen, they had perceived only an intangible, spiritual body?" Again, "The actual, tangible, bodily appearance of our Lord, is the great and fundamental fact of the gospel, and any interpretation which regards the appearance of Jesus during his forty days on earth after his resurrection as one in a spiritual rather than in a natural body, should be regarded as leading to an error which would undermine the very foundation on which Christianity reposes. If we give up this great truth which he himself took such pains to establish by eating and drinking in the presence of his disciples, bidding them touch him, and showing them his hands and his feet, we vitiate and destroy the main proof of his resurrection."

This argument seems impregnable. If the apostles when pressed by their adversaries, instead of being able to declare with certainty, and without any qualification, that Jesus Christ

rose from the dead in that same body which was taken down from the cross, had been obliged to say that Christ's resurrection body had no blood, as Alford teaches, and could pass, an impalpable, shadowy substance, through closed doors and barred gates, their message would have been received with scorn and ridicule.

4. Another consideration in favor of the view that Jesus rose in his natural body is, that after his resurrection he remained on earth forty days, having interviews with the apostles, and instructing them in the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. He appeared to them eleven different times, and once to five hundred brethren together. We do not know where he was most of that time, nor the manner of his life. But it is reasonable to suppose that in his intercourse with the apostles for so long a time he would appear in the same body which they had seen in the three years of intimacy with him, rather than in one totally different. Among the interviews with the disciples was that tender one with Peter concerning his love for the Saviour. Is it not unreasonable to suppose that Jesus had that long, familiar conversation with the apostle in a spiritual, intangible, glorified body? Moreover, if it were necessary, in order for Christ to hold intercourse with men during his three years of ministry on earth, it was equally necessary for him to retain that nature in his intercourse with the apostles during his sojourn of forty days. But this is not all. The work for which the apostles were to be qualified, was to go forth and testify that Christ, the very one they had known in a human body, had risen in the same body. They had been "slow to believe." The report of the women that they had seen him, seemed as "idle tales," and they disbelieved the testimony of those returning from Emmaus. But when Christ showed them his hands and feet, and told them to handle him, and see that it was not a bodiless specter before them, they believed that he had actually risen. But these interviews before going into

Galilee were few and brief, and the impressions they had received of his personal identity, might have been effaced, had they seen him no more, or had he appeared to them in an ethereal, impalpable form, rather than in his natural body. To prevent this, and fully prepare them to be witnesses of his resurrection, it was necessary that they should have frequent interviews with him. And this was their privilege during those forty days. As they listened to the familiar voice, beheld the same lovely features, and heard his gracious words, not the shadow of a doubt did they have that he was the very same Saviour whom they had seen, loved, and followed.

In closing this part of the subject, it is proper to notice a peculiar view held by some concerning the change in the body of Christ. While admitting that he rose in his human body, they think that his body was gradually changed. This is the view of the German scholars Hahn, Olshausen, and Hengstenberg. They regard the process of transformation of the Lord's body from human flesh and blood into the glorified state as commencing with the resurrection, and going on gradually through the forty days, until completed at his ascension.

On this, Dr. Robinson remarks: "In respect to the idea of a gradual process of glorification going on in our Lord's risen body, for forty days, it is enough perhaps to say that there exists not the slightest warrant for it in any part of the Scriptures,—not the slightest hint, which logically or philologically can be wrested to sustain such a position. It is an airy hypothesis, without foundations, without necessity, without utility; and as unsound in its philosophy as it is without analogy in the providence and Word of God. It asserts of the body of our Lord just what he himself took pains to contradict; and what assuredly it never afterwards entered into the hearts of his disciples and apostles to conceive."

The evidence presented from Scripture in this discussion

concerning the nature of Christ's risen body clearly establishes two conclusions: one, that Christ endeavored in various ways to convince the disciples that the body which they saw was the same body of flesh and blood they had seen crucified and laid in the tomb; the other, that the disciples were convinced from the *acts* and *words* of Christ that his body was, after he rose, that very identical body, and not a shadowy, spectral, impalpable form, as they had supposed.

While fully believing that the body which rose was the same material, fleshly body that was crucified and buried, it is not questioned that there may have been some peculiar manifestations at times in his external appearance. The two views are consistent. Such was sometimes the case before his death, and it may have been so after his resurrection. Thus, for instance, at his transfiguration on the Mount his appearance was wonderfully changed. The fashion of his countenance was altered, and his face did shine as the sun. From this it appears that his body was capable of passing from one state to another without losing its identity. There was here no change in the bodily substance of the Lord, no destruction of the proper attributes of a body. He came down from the Mount in the same body in which he ascended, and in it mingled freely with the people as before. In the same body he afterward toiled and suffered. So, while affirming that his body had not been changed to the glorified condition, there may have been at times a marked change in his visage and general appearance from what it was before his passion. But no change in his visage or manner of life can invalidate the arguments presented from Scripture that the body which rose from the dead, and was seen and handled by the disciples, was the very same that had moved about in Judæa, was taken down from the cross, and was laid in Joseph's tomb.