

The Evidence of Christianity.

BY LYMAN ABBOT.

The evidence: not the evidences. The one evidence of Christianity—that is, the historical evidence—is the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In this article I propose very briefly to indicate the nature of this evidence of Christianity—that is, the reasons which have led the great majority of historical students to believe that Jesus of Nazareth "suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried, and the third day rose from the dead."

Paul wrote his first Epistle to the Corinthians about A.D. 60. Its authorship and authenticity even German criticism does not question. The fifteenth chapter of that Epistle settles it that Christ's resurrection was then accepted as a fact throughout the Christian church. That was about thirty years after its supposed occurrence. A still more invincible consideration shows the universality of this belief—the change of the rest day of the church from the seventh to the first day of the week. This change was not commanded by God; there is no direct authority for it in the New Testament. It was changed because the universal church could not consent to celebrate as a festival the day on which Christ lay in the tomb, nor pass by without a memorial festivity that on which he arose from the dead. There is, then, just as strong a reason for believing that before the end of the first century the resurrection of Christ was universally accepted in the rapidly growing Christian church as there is for believing that it is now universally supposed that the Declaration of Independence was agreed upon on the fourth day of July, 1776. This universality of Christian opinion in the early church, insisted on by Gibbon, is not only admitted, but it is strenuously maintained by modern rationalistic writers. "Only this much need be acknowledged, that the disciples firmly believed that Jesus had arisen; this is perfectly sufficient to make their further progress and operations intelligible." (Strauss.) "It is an indisputable fact that in the early morning of the first day of the week following the crucifixion the grave of Jesus was found empty. . . . It is a second fact that the disciples and other members of the apostolic communion were convinced that Jesus was seen after his crucifixion." (Schenkel.)

This admitted fact, this widespread opinion must be accounted for. How?

1. Can we consider it a myth? A myth, Webster tells us, is a "tale of some extraordinary personage or country that has been gradually formed by or has grown out of the admiration and veneration of successive generations." This is so universally the genesis of the myth that he rightly incorporates it in his definition. The myth requires time for its development. Its origin is unhistorical. It comes out of a mysterious fact, no one knows exactly how or whence. Who, for instance, can give us the birthplace of Hercules, or the date of any one of his marvellous exploits? If the resurrection of Jesus Christ is a myth, it grew up in thirty years. Moreover no event was ever before submitted to such scrutiny, to such hostile criticism. We can readily understand that the Swiss would be ready to accept without much questioning the marvellous story of their own Tell, and the Greeks the legends of their Hercules, and the Jews the biography of their Samson. But the only willing believers in the resurrection of Jesus at the outset were his few disciples. The prejudices of the entire Jewish nation fought against it; the skepticism of the entire Greek and Roman scoffed it. As it was received at Athens (Acts vii. 32), so it was at first received everywhere. There was neither time sufficient nor soil and climate favorable for the growth of a myth.

II. Was it founded on a mistake?

It has been suggested—I believe the suggestion first came from some of the old Gnostics—that Christ did not die; that he simply fainted; that he was taken down for dead; and that he afterwards recovered; and that this recovery gave rise to the story of his resurrection.

This hypothesis needs to be stated only to show the curious straits to which men have been put to afford a rational (!) explanation of the resurrection. It requires us to suppose that the Roman centurion who, under Roman law, answered

with his own life for that of the criminal, was deceived; that the disciples, keen-eyed as was their love, were deceived; that the priests, whose hatred kept them watching by the cross till all was over, were deceived; that Pilate was deceived; that John's account of the spear-thrust and the blood and water—the latter a certain proof of death—was added to strengthen the deception; and, finally, that Jesus lent himself to the deception, and on it founded a religious system whose irresistible might is that of simple truth.

III. Was it the product of a fraud?

This, Matthew tells us, was the Pharisees' explanation at the time. They asserted that the disciples came by night and stole the body away. But this theory never gained respectable credence; it is now universally abandoned, not only, as we have seen, by rationalistic writers, but also by the Jews themselves. For it they have substituted the late legend, that some of the Jews, disguising themselves as disciples, and mourning with them, remained after they had departed, rifled the tomb of the body of Christ, subsequently exhibited it to the people, and then buried it in Golgotha, the ground of which they thoroughly plowed, that the corpse might never be discovered.

IV. Was it founded on a self-deception?

This is the latest and perhaps most specious theory, that of which Renan is the most eloquent exponent. He undertakes to account for the universality of the early belief in the resurrection by regarding it as the production of an enthusiastic imagination and ardent hope in the disciples—in other words, as a spiritual fantasy.

But, first, this does not account for its acceptance by those who had no such ardent hopes. And these were the immense majority. The entire body of Christ's disciples does not appear to have numbered above five hundred. How came the acceptance of the resurrection by the great body of the Christians, who had already extended into almost every quarter of the then known world before that generation had passed away?

But, in fact, the disciples had no such hopes. They were not in a state of expectancy, not in a mental condition predisposed to believe in it. On the contrary, they were skeptical critics hard to be convinced. They had as little anticipation of Christ's resurrection as they before had of his crucifixion. The women who came to anoint the body were surprised and grieved to find it gone. They thought the tomb had been robbed. When they carried back the report of the resurrection to the other disciples, "their words seemed to them as idle words, and they believed them not." The two disciples who conversed with the unrecognized Christ on their way to Emmaus had given up their faith in Christ as the Messiah, and were thunderstruck at the revelation of his presence. When he appeared to the ten, Thomas refused to accept their testimony. So marked and stubborn was their incredulity that Christ more than once upbraided them for their unbelief. The reader who is interested to see how little historical basis there is for the latest and most popular rationalistic theory of the resurrection—namely, that it was an unconscious self-deception—will find in the following, among other passages, abundant evidence that the disciples, so far from being hopeful, imaginative, ecstatic, anticipative, were stolid, despairing, unimaginative witnesses to a fact which even their prosaic natures could not finally deny: Mark xvi. 10-14; Luke xxiv. 11-20, 21, 25, 32, 37-39; John xx. 9, 11-13, 24, 25.

This article has already extended beyond the limits I allotted to it. The result may all be summed up in a sentence. Within thirty years after the death of Jesus Christ his resurrection was universally accepted as a fact by the Christian church, embracing thousands of those who were convinced of that fact in spite of native prejudice and skepticism; the faith was so universal as to change the world's religious holiday; so strong as to transform the before timid disciples into true heroes and apostles. It cannot be accounted for on the mythical theory, for there was neither time nor opportunity for a myth to grow; nor on the theory that the death was a mistake, for there was no room for error, and such an error could have given rise

to the story of the resurrection only by the fraud and falsehood of both Jesus and his followers; nor on the theory that the story of the resurrection was a fraud—a theory now abandoned by both infidel and Jewish writers; nor by the theory of a self-deception, for the conditions of self-deception were wanting.

It must, then, be a fact that Christ has risen from the dead and become the first-fruits of them that sleep.—*Christian Union*.

Newspapers by Electricity.

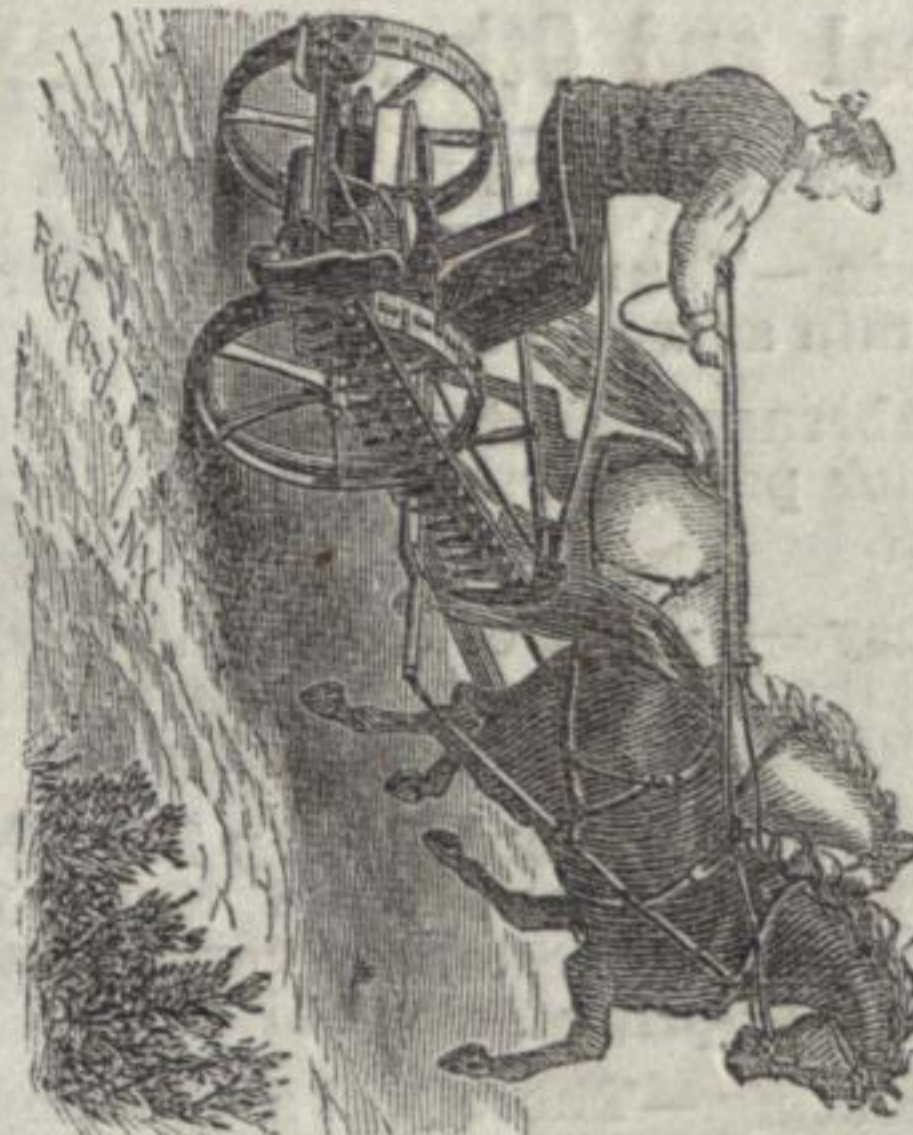
The London correspondent of the *Liverpool Courier* writes to that journal: It has been hinted from time to time that one of our wealthy London journals has "under consideration" the practicability of printing its sheets in several of the great towns simultaneously, in order to secure a distribution of its copies as early as the various local journals which are so fast depreciating the circulation and once a paramount influence of their London contemporaries. How can can this staggering feat be accomplished? The leading journal had its attention drawn some weeks ago to an electric machine in operation at the London Stock Exchange, by which the fluctuating quotations are telegraphed to a number of city officers, where an instrument, composed of moveable figures and a dial-plate, is made to record changes from hour to hour. If an electrical current can be made to manipulate moveable figures, it was conceived that a system of mechanical type-setting might be carried on simultaneously in a number of distant places, the operation being direct from a central office in London, the news being there collected from all parts of the world, and that the "copy" might be put in type at several provincial offices simultaneously by operating on an electric key-board, or a number of key-boards, controlled in the central office. This idea, like so many other inventions, is now new. Mr. Mackay, of the *Warrington Guardian*, worked upon the same line of invention about eight years ago, to my knowledge, and simultaneous type-setting by machinery was by him carried to a practical issue, though he found that his invention did not result in profit. He worked a number of type-setting machines by operating on one key-board, and proposed to set newspaper columns for any number of papers by this simultaneous process, the only difference being that the various machines could not be placed in distant places. In other words, he did not connect them with electricity. The fact remains that he actually worked some ten or twelve machines on this principle of connected action which derived its directing power from one key-board. There is no moral doubt that the same thing can be done on a wider scale by electric agency. But if done, would the game be worth the candle? I know the *Times*, or rather the manager of the mechanical department, is putting the thing to a private test in order to ascertain its mechanical practicabilities. If that can be made clear, the *Times* directors are not likely to be deterred by financial timidity from the next step in the unparalleled adventure. What a world of journalistic development the prospect opens to present eyes!

UNEXPECTEDLY MARRIED.—Two eloping couples from Kentucky were to be married at Caseyville, Ill., the other day, and when they went before the parson some dozen of their friends, men and women, "stood up" with them. The clergyman who performed the ceremony, the Rev. R. W. Jeffries by name, married the whole crowd in this fashion: "Gentlemen and ladies, do you agree to take those standing by your sides as your lawful husbands and wives?" to which they all nodded. The parties who officiated as groomsmen and bridesmaids were terribly surprised when they ascertained that not only the eloping couples, but themselves also had been joined in the indissoluble bonds of matrimony.—*Chicago Times*.

"I don't mean to say that Gen. Sherman was not a fair soldier," says Sergeant Bates, *apropos* of "the book," "but it would have looked better if he had mentioned some of the more conspicuous rank and file by name."—*Buffalo Express*.



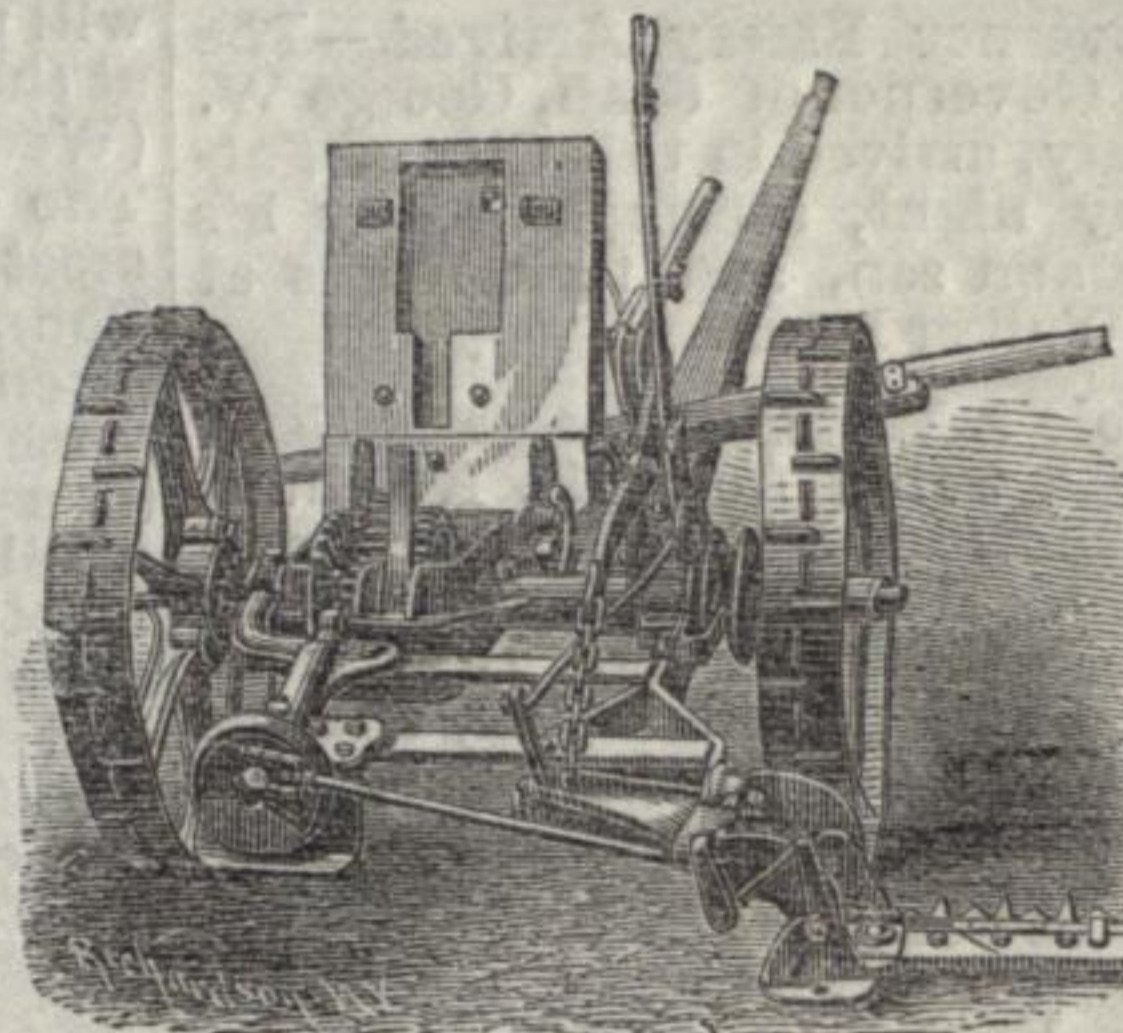
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