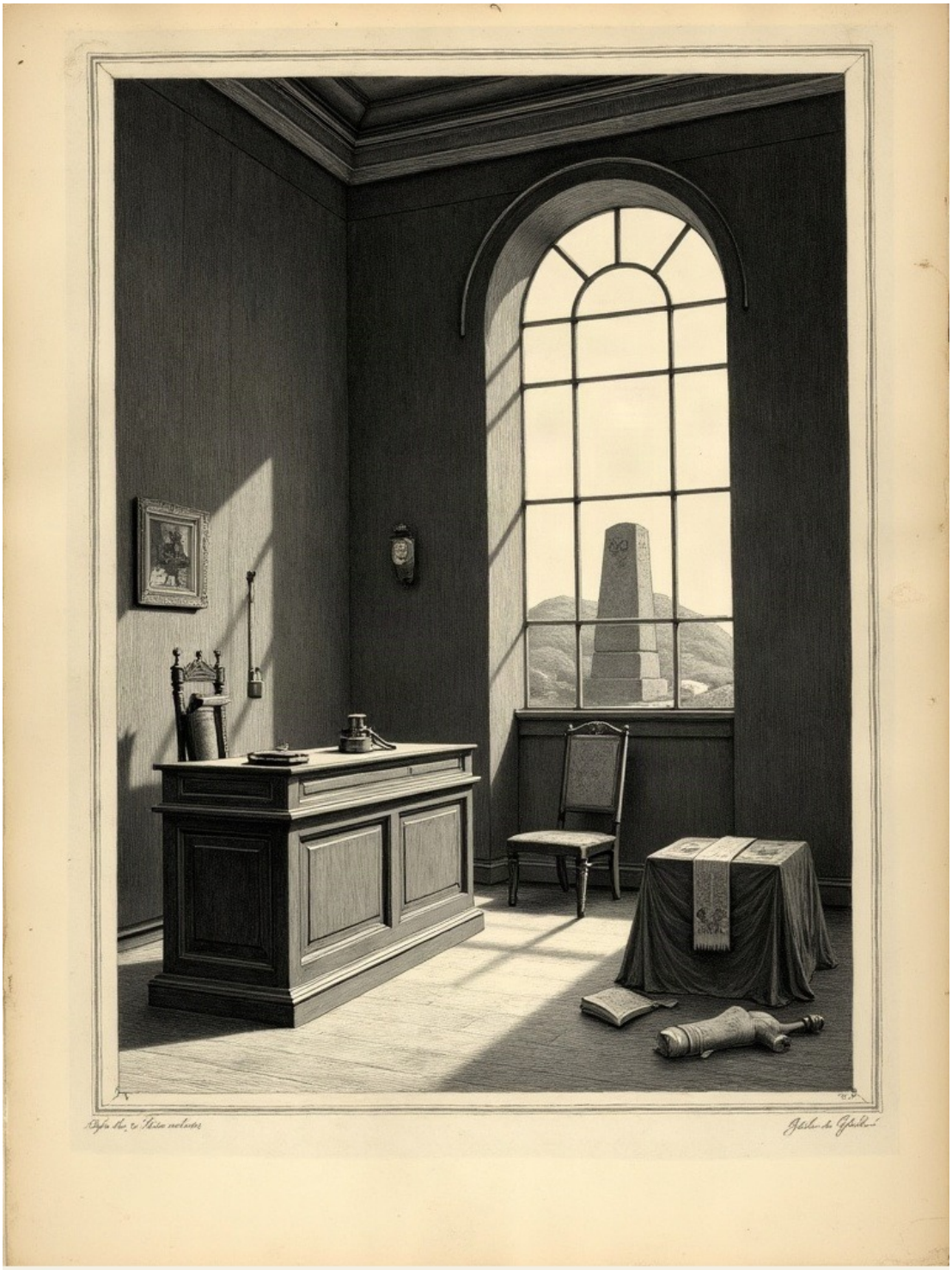


The Tryal of the Witnesses

of the Resurrection — by Thomas Sherlock, 1729

The Tryal of the Witnesses of the Resurrection of Jesus

by Thomas Sherlock

A Condensed Modern-English Edition

by Thomas Sherlock

Originally published in 1729

Prepared for the
Wednesday Evening Bible Study
Church of Christ

A Note on This Edition

This is a condensed companion to the full modern-English edition of Thomas Sherlock's The Tryal of the Witnesses of the Resurrection of Jesus, originally published in 1729. It is meant for a reader who wants Sherlock's case in a sitting rather than the complete book: every one of his main arguments and every objection-and-answer pair is kept, in the order he gives them, but repetition, secondary examples, and lengthy rhetorical asides have been trimmed to about a third of the full edition's length.

Nothing has been added, and no argument has been cut outright — only compressed. Where a point is condensed, Sherlock's own reasoning and his strongest evidence for it are kept; what falls away is restatement, not substance. Readers who want the complete, unabridged case, with every illustration and aside Sherlock offers, should turn to the full modern-English edition.

Scripture quotations follow the King James Version, matching Sherlock's own practice and the version most familiar to this congregation.

The book remains, as Sherlock wrote it, a mock trial: a judge, a jury, and two opposing counsel — "Mr. A" arguing that the resurrection was fraud, and "Mr. B" defending the evidence. That trial format and the speakers' original labels are preserved here exactly as in the full edition, including the frame narrative's opening and closing scenes.

This edition is a companion to the condensed editions of Gilbert West's Observations on the History and Evidences of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ and George Lyttelton's Observations on the Conversion and Apostleship of St. Paul, both originally published in 1747 — Sherlock's Tryal, written nearly two decades earlier against the same controversy, is in many ways the forerunner of both.

Not long ago, several gentlemen of the Inns of Court were together, men well enough acquainted that no one's presence kept anyone else from speaking his mind freely. The talk ranged widely, and among other things we fell to discussing Woolston's trial and conviction, which had taken place a few days before, and debated whether the law ought to intervene at all in controversies of this kind. One man, who took Woolston's side, showed a strong liking for his writings against the miracles of Christ, and seemed to think his arguments unanswerable. Another replied, "I'm surprised that someone trained in a profession that teaches us to weigh evidence could hold that opinion. I'm sure you'd be unwilling to decide a property dispute over five shillings on evidence you now consider sufficient to overthrow the miracles of Christ."

This opened the door to a great deal of argument, touching on nearly every point in Woolston's writings. At last one of the company said, good-humoredly, "Gentlemen, you don't argue like lawyers. If I were judge in this case, I'd hold you closer to the point." The company called for the case to be reheard with him as judge. The gentleman who had argued against Woolston begged off from taking up so weighty a controversy, but was told the argument would be limited strictly to the nature of the evidence for Christ's resurrection, and on that understanding let himself be talked into it, promising to meet the company and their newly appointed judge a fortnight later. Woolston's counsel objected to bringing the case on any sooner: "Consider, sir—this gentleman will have to draw his authorities not from Littleton, Plowden, or Coke, but from Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and a fortnight is little enough time to grow familiar with new acquaintances." Then, turning to the gentleman: "I'll call on you before the two weeks are up, to see how reverend an appearance you make, with Hammond on the New Testament behind you, a concordance in one hand, and a folio Bible in the other." "You'll be welcome, sir," the gentleman replied, "and perhaps you'll find company more to your taste there too—I'll have your friend Woolston, T——l, and C——s on hand to entertain you." On this we parted in good humor, all pleased with the arrangement—except the two gentlemen who were to provide the entertainment.

The Second Day

The company met at the appointed time, but word of the meeting had spread, and the gentlemen who were to debate found they had a larger audience than expected. The one who was to argue for the resurrection began excusing himself as unprepared, until the strangers offered to leave—which he would not allow, saying he'd rather throw himself on their good judgment than be so rude as to force them out. At this, one of the company said, smiling, "It's fortunate our numbers have grown. We appointed a judge last time but entirely forgot a jury—and now I think we have good men and true enough to make one." This raised some laughter and restored the easy good humor natural to gentlemen's conversation.

The judge, sensing the company was in the right mood, called out, "Gentlemen of the jury, take your places," seated himself at the head of the table, and called on Woolston's counsel to begin.

Mr. A. Counsel for Woolston, addressing the judge, said: May it please your lordship, I believe the gentleman on the other side ought to begin, and lay out his evidence, before the court. Until that's done, there's no point in my raising objections.

Judge. Mr. B. What say you to that?

Mr. B. My lord, if this evidence were some new claim, the gentleman would be right. But it is old; it's a matter of record, and I've long been in possession of everything I claim under it. If the gentleman has anything to dispossess me of it, let him produce it. No man is required to produce the title to his possession; it's enough if he defends it when called into question.

Mr. A. Surely the gentleman mistakes the case. I can never admit that I am out of possession of my own understanding and reason. Since he wants to dispossess me of that, and compel me to accept incredible things on the strength of his evidence, he ought to set out his claim—or else leave the world to be guided by common sense.

Judge. Sir, you'd be right if the truth of the Christian religion itself were at issue. But the question before the court is whether Mr. Woolston's objections carry enough weight to overthrow the evidence for Christ's resurrection, which is taken as a given on both sides. Go on, Mr. A.

Mr. A. My lord, I submit to the court's direction. But I note that the gentleman didn't forget to lay claim to prescription—perhaps the very strength of his case. I grant he maintains nothing but what his ancestors maintained before him; but prescription cannot run against reason and common sense, and if length of time cannot establish an unreasonable custom touching only one poor village's right of common, shall it prevail where all mankind's happiness is at stake? And if prescription is allowed here, what will you say to the ancient Persians and their fire-altars, or the Turks, who have been in possession of their faith long enough to plead—

Mr. B. I beg pardon for interrupting, but it's to spare him the trouble: he's heading into his favorite stock argument, and if he keeps on we'll end up following him around the globe. To save that journey, I'll give up any advantage from the antiquity of the resurrection, and treat it as a fact that happened only last year.

Mr. A. I suspect some art in this concession: one main reason people believe this history is that they can't imagine anyone succeeding at such a scheme on mere human cunning—and it would be worth going round the globe to remove that prejudice by other examples of the same kind. But I stand corrected, and go directly to the point.

Mr. B. The gentleman has slipped into another of his favorite stock arguments, one that won't hold up where its defender can be questioned. Christ Jesus declared himself a prophet, and staked his mission on this: that he would die openly and publicly, and rise again the third day. This was the hardest plot in the world to carry off—if there is even one instance of this kind, let it be produced.

Mr. A. There has hardly been a false religion that hasn't furnished an instance like it. Didn't Pythagoras and Numa both claim to converse with the gods?

Mr. B. This only shows revelation is the best foundation for religion—which is why every impostor claims it. But can a man's hiding in a cave for some years be compared to dying and rising again? You and I could do the first; no man can do the second.

Mr. A. Surely going to heaven and coming back down again is as great a feat as dying and rising again. This is exactly what Mohammed claimed, and his followers believe it. Can you deny this?

Mr. B. Deny it? No. But who went with Mohammed, or witnessed it? What seals and credentials did he have? None—all you have is his own word, and no man ever told a lie without having his own word for it. And how was his story accepted? Wasn't every man converted with a sword at his throat, where every witness to the resurrection was in hourly danger of death? There is one case closer to home: the French Prophets staked their mission on the resurrection of Dr. Emmes, and gave public notice of it in advance. The gentleman may use that instance if he likes.

Mr. A. It serves my purpose this far: it shows to what lengths enthusiasm can carry people. Why couldn't the same have happened at Jerusalem? The apostles simply managed the affair with more skill than the French Prophets did, so that Christ's resurrection gained credit while theirs sank under ridicule. That's the whole difference.

Mr. B. A very wide difference indeed. In one case, everything happened fitting to convince the world; in the other, the outcome exposed the whole thing as a cheat. And you call that "the whole difference"?

Judge. Gentlemen, you're forgetting you're in a court. The evidence for the resurrection is before the court, recorded by Matthew, Mark, and the others. You must take it as it stands. These witnesses stand accused of giving false evidence; come to the point.

Mr. B. Shall the objections be argued all together, or one at a time?

Judge. I'll leave that to the jury.

The Foreman of the Jury. We'd like them argued and answered separately, so we judge better with the answer fresh in mind.

Judge. Go on.

Mr. A. I am now going to lay before you a scene more surprising than any other. The resurrection has long been believed throughout every age of the church, and this widespread belief creates a presumption that it rests on good evidence; but here the evidence is simply assumed on the strength of the credit the story has gained. I wish the Jewish books written against Jesus had not been lost, for they would have given clear insight into this scheme. But fortunately the very account given by the supposed witnesses is enough to destroy its own credibility.

The resurrection was not contrived for its own sake, but to serve larger purposes, which I must lay before you first.

The Jews were a weak, superstitious people, who from old prophecies had built up the belief that a great victorious prince would arise among them and make them masters of the world. Under the Roman yoke, this hope hardened into firm expectation, which tempted bold men to pass themselves off as that prince—and several such impostors rose up, and perished along with their followers.

But Jesus, knowing that victories cannot be faked, and having no hope of standing against Rome, took upon himself the role of the prince foretold by the prophets, then insisted the prophecies had been misunderstood—that they pointed to a kingdom of heaven, not of this world, and that the Messiah was to be a suffering prince, meek and lowly, riding on a donkey. In this way he secured the foundation every new revelation needs: an earlier one to build on.

To carry this out, he chose twelve men of no fortune or education, so limited in understanding that there was no risk they'd see through the plot—and while their master preached the kingdom of heaven, these men still expected him to declare himself king, and quarreled over who would be his chief minister, which kept them faithfully attached to him.

The Jews also chased after wonders, and Jesus skillfully set himself up as a worker of them; his disciples saw, or thought they saw, strange things, and spread reports of them far and wide. This had the success he wanted: the people concluded he must be their expected prince, once trying to make him king, and on another occasion escorting him in triumph into Jerusalem. Had things gone on, the kingdom of heaven would likely have become a kingdom of this world; but the design failed, owing to the crowd's impatience, which alarmed the Jewish leaders and the Roman governor alike.

Once Jesus saw he could not escape death, he declared the prophets had foretold that the Messiah would die on a cross and rise the third day—the

foundation for keeping the plot going after its author's death. This was his legacy to his followers, who managed it so well it has finally produced a kingdom indeed: a kingdom of priests, strong enough to defy kings and emperors. But the ancient prophets are still with us, and since no such prophecies of the Messiah's death and resurrection are found in them, they stand as permanent evidence against the story. Just as he expected, he died on the cross, and carrying the scheme forward was left to his disciples.

Mr. B. My lord, since the gentleman has carried his account down to the death of Christ, I think he's reached a natural stopping point, and I should now be allowed to answer.

Judge. Let's hear it.

Mr. B. My lord, you've had a scheme laid before you, but not a single piece of evidence for any part of it. The gentleman is sorry the old Jewish books were lost—but how does he know there ever were such books, or, lost as they are, what they contained? It would be answer enough simply to call for the evidence his suppositions rest on.

He begins by expressing amazement that the resurrection has been believed in every age of the church. If you ask him why, his answer must be: because the account is a forgery. So this stems from confidence, not amazement, and amounts to this: he's sure there was no resurrection. I'm equally sure that's no evidence there wasn't one.

His observation—that widespread belief creates a presumption of good evidence, so people follow their fathers without examining the matter—is true, but does nothing for his case, since he grants the resurrection was believed from the very time of the resurrection onward. So what persuaded those who first accepted it? That is the real question. It's been cleverly said that the priest only carries on what the nurse began—but every man first learns from his nurse that two and two make four, and Sir Isaac Newton built a great structure on that nursery learning. There has never been a religion, true or false, held anywhere without children hearing of it from those around them; since this is true regardless of whether the religion is true, it's absurd to lean on it when the question is the truth of any religion.

We come now to the merits. Here the gentleman began with the Jewish people, the ones originally affected. They were, he says, a weak, superstitious people who expected a victorious prince, and so were exposed to pretenders —several of whom did arise and ruin themselves and their followers. I don't dispute these facts; it's enough for his argument if I grant them.

With this foundation laid, it was natural to expect the gentleman would show Jesus seizing this opportunity and declaring himself that prince. But it turns out to be far from the case: the charge is that he took the opposite course, setting himself against all his country's prejudices and prophecies,

and by his teaching took away all hope of the deliverer they wanted. I don't see how to reconcile his premises with his conclusion. If the surest way for an impostor to succeed is to build on popular prejudice, then surely he could choose no worse method than opposing it entirely. What could be expected from this but hatred and persecution—and did Christ meet any other treatment? Yet when he found he was bound to perish, did he change his tune? No one claims he did. In any other case this would be taken as a sign of great honesty, or great foolishness. Here alone it's taken as art and scheming.

But, apparently, Jesus didn't dare set himself up as the expected prince, because victories cannot be faked. I hope it was no crime that he refused to exploit the people's credulity. Since he opposed their worldly notion at the risk of his life, with plainly the truth on his side, the natural presumption is that it was for the sake of the truth.

No—we're told he wanted the foundation a new revelation needs: an older one to build on. But it's plain that in the course he actually took, he had no such advantage. This foundation is supposed necessary so a teacher can plant himself in the people's existing prejudices. Did Christ seek any such thing? The people expected a victorious prince; he told them they were mistaken. They held the elders' traditions sacred; he told them these nullified God's law. They prized themselves as God's peculiar people; he told them people from every corner of the world would sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They were strict about the Sabbath; by their own reckoning, he broke it repeatedly. Their hand-washing rituals and public prayers were rebuked by him, and the outcry grew that he had come to destroy the Law and the Prophets. What advantage did he gain from this supposedly necessary foundation? If anything, holding to the old revelation in a sense the people did not accept was the greatest difficulty he faced. What could have driven him to take on so many needless difficulties, if not a pure regard for the truth?

We're told that, to carry on this plot, Jesus next chose suitable persons as disciples. I'll only note that this differs from every plot I've heard of: impostors generally choose cunning, capable men, but here Jesus opposed every popular notion, and chose simpletons.

But what design was being pursued all this while? The very thing he disclaimed—the temporal kingdom—was, we're told, the real aim. We're still in the realm of the marvelous. We're told it was aimed at a kingdom; were the means likely to achieve it? Yes, says the gentleman, because the people would have made him king. Why wasn't he king, then? He refused the offer and withdrew until the crowd dispersed—perhaps judging the time not yet right. The government grew alarmed, and he saw his death was settled, so he pretends to prophesy it—men don't normally play tricks at the point of death, but this plot had nothing ordinary about it. Yet after foretelling his death, he still had it in his power to make himself king once more, and again refused: he entered Jerusalem in triumph, the people strewed his path and were entirely

at his command, the authorities held back out of fear of the crowd. Why wasn't this opportunity seized? For whose benefit was he willing to die? He had no wife or children; his disciples weren't even fit to be trusted with the secret.

And yet, we're told, a kingdom did arise from this plot—a kingdom of priests. But it arose some hundred years after Christ's death, against his express will. It can hardly be suspected he died to create popes and cardinals; changes in the doctrines and practices of churches since Christianity's founding are beside the point when the question is the truth of the religion itself, since Christ and his apostles foretold and warned against corrupt teachers.

One more observation. Jesus appealed to ancient prophecies that the Messiah was to die and rise again; those books are still with us, and, the gentleman says, no such prophecies are in them. Whether he can find them isn't material: it's granted Christ foretold his own death and resurrection. If the resurrection was fraud, Christ himself was party to it, since he foretold the very fraud to come. Disprove the resurrection, then, and we need not discuss prophecy further. By foretelling it, he staked the proof of his mission on whether it came true—so there's no doubt he is not the Messiah if he did not rise, since by his own prophecy he made that part of the Messiah's defining character. Foretelling his own resurrection, and giving such public notice in advance, carried the strongest mark of honest dealing. Had it sprung merely from enthusiasm, the dead body would simply have remained in the grave, and that alone would have disproved the claim. But since the body was carried openly to the grave, watched and guarded there, and yet could never afterward be found, there must necessarily have been, in this case, either a genuine miracle or a great fraud. Enthusiasm dies with the man and has no power over his dead body. There is no middle ground: you must either admit the miracle or prove the fraud.

Judge. Mr. A., reply or continue, as you choose.

Mr. A. My lord, the gentleman concluded there must be a real miracle or a great fraud in which Jesus was complicit in his lifetime. I beg to differ: why couldn't it have been enthusiasm on the master's part, and fraud on the servants' part?

Mr. B. My lord, this is new matter, not a reply. He originally presented the whole affair as fraud from start to finish; now he supposes Christ an honest enthusiast and only the disciples cheats.

Judge. Sir, if you introduce new matter, counsel on the other side must be allowed to answer it.

Mr. A. My lord, I have no such intention. We have only brief accounts of this affair, passed down through friends and parties to the plot, so it's enough

if we can form some idea of the probable motives. But the gentleman has rightly observed that if the resurrection is fraud, every claim meant to rest on it comes to nothing. So I'll go on to prove this fraud.

Jesus, during his lifetime, foretold his death and that he would rise on the third day. The first part came true: he died on the cross and was buried. I won't trouble you with the crucifixion itself—it's a well-known story.

Mr. B. I'd like to know whether the gentleman alleges any fraud in this part—perhaps that Christ merely faked his death.

Mr. A. No, no. He wasn't crucified by his own disciples, but by the Romans and the Jews, and they were in deadly earnest. I'll prove beyond contradiction that the dead body was laid in the tomb—and you'll do well if you can get it back out again just as honestly.

Judge. Go on with your evidence.

Mr. A. Once the crucifixion was over, the body was carried to a tomb. But the Jewish authorities remembered Jesus had said he would rise on the third day—a prediction so full of presumption that it carried its own refutation. But they had reason to be on guard: the people had very nearly been fatally deceived in the supposed raising of Lazarus, and had narrowly escaped the consequences. Should a similar fraud succeed this time, the consequences would be worse. So they asked Pilate for a guard to watch the tomb until the third day; it was granted, and a guard was posted.

That wasn't all—the chief priests sealed the door besides. Consider why anything is sealed at all: so that all parties can be satisfied, on return, that things remain as they left them—as Darius sealed the lions' den, to satisfy himself no trick had kept Daniel safe. A seal used this way amounts to a covenant: if you hand someone sealed documents and he accepts them, your delivery and his acceptance imply an agreement they'll be returned with the seal intact—no special agreement is even needed; it's a compact men are bound by through common consent.

Now, since the seal implied a covenant, who were the parties? None other than the chief priests on one side and the apostles on the other—one concerned to see the prophecy fulfilled, the other to prevent fraud in its fulfillment. Their agreement was naturally this: that the seals would be opened at the appointed time, so all parties could see for themselves whether the body had come back to life.

What would any reasonable person expect from this? That the chief priests and apostles met at the appointed time and settled the matter together. But see how it actually happened: the seals were broken, the body stolen in the night, and none of the chief priests present or even summoned to witness it. The guards, questioned, confessed they had fallen asleep, and that

meanwhile the body had been stolen by the disciples—which, together with the secretive way the seals were broken, provides sufficient proof of fraud.

There's another circumstance of equal weight. Though the seals didn't prevent the trick, they did give the lie to the prediction. Jesus was to rise on the third day, when the chief priests intended to be present, probably with a crowd. This made tricks impossible then, so the apostles were forced to move up the timetable—the resurrection happened a day ahead of schedule, the body buried Friday and gone early Sunday morning. These are plain facts, drawn from the very accounts of those who believe in the resurrection.

Mr. B. My lord, I'll now turn to the part the gentleman leans on most. He has proved that Christ died and was laid in the tomb, since, when the Jews sealed the stone, they made sure the body was actually there. He has also proved that Christ's prediction of his resurrection was publicly known, since this is what prompted the precautions against fraud. If this open prediction implies fraud, the evidence favors him; but if it is, as I say, the strongest mark of sincerity in the whole affair, the evidence remains just as strong, only its weight falls the other way.

Next, he's at a loss why the chief priests gave any credence to a prediction he thinks too absurd to deserve regard. I agree entirely—so why were they concerned about it? Not because they'd discovered him a cheat; that discovery would only have convinced them of the folly of the prediction, not worried them. It must be that something in his life made them take seriously, in his case, a prophecy they'd have despised from anyone else—what, except the secret conviction, produced by his many miracles, that he possessed extraordinary powers? This vigilance over his dead body is a lasting testimony to the mighty works he performed while alive.

But the gentleman says they'd uncovered a plain cheat in the case of Lazarus, and so feared another. There's not the slightest hint anywhere that there was any cheat in that case, or that anyone suspected one. Lazarus went on living afterward; and at Christ's own trial, where they accused him of plotting against the temple, undermining the law, and blasphemy, not a word was said about fraud in the case of Lazarus.

But take the case exactly as he states it: the fraud was found out. What should follow? In every other instance, exposed impostors become hateful and incapable of further harm. Was it so here? No: the Jews, we're told, were more careful that Christ not cheat them again—a most peculiar case. When the people thought him a prophet, the chief priests sought to kill him, supposing his death would end his claims; when they'd found him a fraud, they thought him unsafe even dead, afraid he might yet rise as he predicted. A needless, preposterous fear.

Next, the gentleman tells us how proper was the chief priests' care, handing the tomb to Roman soldiers and sealing the door besides, the seal

implying a covenant that things remain as they were until the parties agree to open them. Let that stand. What follows? Why, it seems, the apostles and chief priests were under a covenant that there'd be no resurrection until they met to unseal it together. But when Christ was seized, his disciples fled for fear of death, and after his death they didn't even believe the resurrection would happen—their whole concern was to keep hidden from the chief priests. Can any man believe the disciples, in these circumstances, entered into such a covenant? I think the gentleman doesn't believe it himself, which is why he says seals imply a covenant even without any special agreement—but then the apostles had no more to do with these seals than any other man in the country.

The simple, plain account best answers all these suspicions. The Jews were anxious, which is why they got a guard from Pilate; and once they had one, they were still suspicious their own guards might deceive them, so they sealed the door, requiring it returned sealed exactly as it was—a necessary precaution, since you may post guards, but who is to guard the guards themselves? If the seals were broken and the body gone, seek satisfaction from your guards; the disciples had no more to do with it than you or I.

The guards, we're told, confessed they were asleep, and that the disciples meanwhile stole the body. I wish they were here in court; I would ask how they came to be so precise about what happened while asleep, or how they knew it was the disciples, since by their own confession they saw nothing. I would ask the gentleman whether he can cite any case where a man was admitted as a witness to a fact that occurred while he slept.

As this story has no evidence, neither has it any plausibility. The gentleman has described the disciples as weak, ignorant men. Is it likely such men would undertake so desperate a scheme, defying the combined power of Jews and Romans—and what hope of success? A dead body cannot be removed by sleight of hand; it takes many hands, and the great stone had to be rolled away, which could hardly be done quietly—hardly possible the commotion wouldn't have woken the guards even asleep.

But suppose it practicable—the disciples, consistent with their own beliefs, could not have undertaken it. They continued, even after his death, to expect their master would become a temporal prince. For what purpose, then, steal his body—to make a king of it, or raise it to life themselves? On any view, it is absurd. The gentleman supposes they meant to carry on the scheme for their own benefit—but this strips them of their whole character at a stroke: the earlier disciples were weak, simple men full of their country's superstitions; these would have to be bold, shrewd schemers, scorning the very prophets they claimed to fulfill.

But let us see how the real evidence stands. Guards did their duty—but what are guards against the power of God? An angel of the Lord opened the sepulcher; the guards saw him and became like dead men. This is the account

they gave the chief priests, who, still stubborn, bribed them to tell the contradictory story instead.

I cannot help pointing out that all these circumstances, so heavily suspected, were necessary if the resurrection is true. The seal was broken, the body came out, the guards were posted in vain—granted; but did the seal put God under covenant, or prescribe to him a method for this great work? If not, the breaking of the seals is evidence not of fraud but of the power behind the resurrection, and the guards have nothing to answer for except that they were not stronger than God.

As for the resurrection coming a day sooner than predicted, supposedly to beat the crowds expected at the appointed time—this is inconsistent with the very supposition that the resurrection was managed by fraud, not force, since force would have destroyed any claim to it. The guards, sufficient to prevent or expose fraud, were present throughout regardless of timing—were they not at the door when he came? What other satisfaction could you have had, had he come a day later? And the objection rests on a misunderstanding of Jewish reckoning, which counts both first and last day toward a total: he was crucified Friday, lay in the grave through Saturday, and rose early Sunday—the third day by this reckoning, just as every male child was circumcised on the "eighth day" counting the day of birth as one, however late in that day he was born.

I have now gone through these objections. But it is plain they had no credit when first put about, for the very people who spread the story of the stolen body did not believe it themselves. Soon after, the disciples appeared publicly in the temple and testified to the resurrection before those who had murdered Christ. The chief priests seized, threatened, and scourged them to stop their mouths—but why, having them in their power, did they not charge them directly with the blatant fraud of stealing the body? This would have served their purpose far better, yet not a word of it is said; their orator Tertullus, who could hardly have passed over so fine a charge had there been the least ground for it, contents himself with charges of sedition and heresy. And we know the question did come under debate: Festus tells King Agrippa that the Jews had questions against Paul concerning one Jesus, who was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive; and Agrippa, hearing Paul, would hardly have said, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian, had he suspected any fraud.

Consider, too, the most solemn deliberation the Jewish council ever held on this. The apostles, seized and brought before them, said in their defense: The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. In anger, the council's first impulse was to kill them all. But Gamaliel stood up, recounted impostors who had come to ruin, and concluded: If this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God. The council agreed, and released the apostles. Could Gamaliel have given this advice,

supposing the hand of God might be with them, had he known a fraud had been exposed? I rest here.

Mr. A. My Lord, a few words in reply. The gentleman thinks the exposure of fraud in Lazarus's case should have made the Jews unconcerned about Jesus. He's right—supposing their concern had been only for themselves. But rulers must also protect the multitude from frauds, and it was for the people's sake, not their own peace of mind, that the chief priests took these precautions.

As for the seal: the gentleman thinks it guarded against the Roman soldiers. But they were not disciples of Jesus, only servants of the governor; I leave it to the court whether the Jews guarded against their friends or their enemies. But if the seal really did guard against the soldiers, then its breaking is proof the guards were corrupted—which easily explains how the body was removed.

As for the disciples, the gentleman says my account requires an unaccountable change in their character. It won't be long before he himself needs just as great a change, for these same weak men were soon employed converting the world, appearing before kings in their master's name. The only difference between us is that I date this change a little earlier.

The last point concerns Agrippa and Gamaliel. Agrippa certainly meant very little, and never did become a Christian. Gamaliel likely saw great numbers zealously engaged for the apostles, and thought it prudent to let the matter pass rather than push to extremes—a common case in every government, where leaders escape punishment not because they don't deserve it, but because it isn't prudent to exact it.

I pass over these lightly, because the next point contains the great question for us who live at this distance: for whatever reason the Jews had to believe the resurrection means nothing to us, unless it's been conveyed upon evidence sufficient to support it.

My Lord, we come now to the main article: the nature of the evidence itself. Why was it not placed beyond all exception? Many of Christ's miracles were performed in full public view; nothing of the kind is claimed here. We have Peter's own confession that Christ appeared not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God. Why pick and choose witnesses more than in any other case? Doesn't this suggest the case could not bear the light of public scrutiny? And why did Jesus not appear openly to the chief priests and rulers, whom his commission especially concerned? Suppose an ambassador made his public entry through the city, and at last refused to show his letters of credence to the king—what would you think of him? You must think the same here.

But let us take the evidence as it is. The first witness is an angel, or angels, who appeared like men to some women at the tomb. If they appeared like men, on what grounds do we take them for angels? Here is one apparition used to support another, grounded only on the women's superstition and fear. The next witnesses are the women themselves—if the wisest men can hardly guard against fears born of superstition, poor, simple women must surely make unimpeachable witnesses! They were, at least, frightened beyond measure, which I leave to the court to weigh.

Jesus then appears to two disciples on a journey, conversing with them at length without their knowing him—until, at supper, he breaks bread, and immediately they know him, and immediately he vanishes. What will you call them, eyewitnesses? Their eyes were open when they didn't know him, so to that extent they witness that it was not him. On what grounds do you reject their senses before the bread was broken, and trust them after—and why vanish the moment he was recognized, more the air of an apparition than a man restored to life?

Cleopas then finds the apostles; Jesus appears among them; they think they see a ghost; he invites them to handle him, examine his wounds. But what body was it—the same that came in when the doors were shut, that vanished from the two disciples, that the women were not allowed to touch—a body quite unlike a human one? What could their hands or eyes tell them? And is it credible God would raise a body still bearing the very wounds of which it died? Further appearances are open to the same objections; and it's surprising enough that a matter of this importance rested on evidence like this, more surprising still that other nations who received the gospel had even less—every country its single apostle, the faith received on his word alone.

One more observation: though we act daily on human testimony, the reasoning differs here. In ordinary affairs, a reasonable degree of evidence persuades, because the thing is probable. But when the thing is contrary to the order of nature, what evidence can overturn the constant evidence of nature herself? If a man tells me he's been to France, I need a reason not to believe him; but if he tells me he's come from the grave, what reason can he give me to believe him? Since the risen body differed from ordinary bodies, how can I be sure the apostles' senses even qualified them to judge whether it was the same body? This seems a case exempt from human evidence altogether. When men speak of things beyond the reach of sense and reason, we must set aside our own if we are to believe theirs.

Mr. B. My Lord, I must change the order of the gentleman's objections. He began complaining Christ did not appear to the Jews, as if more evidence would have settled it, but concluded that no evidence can ever be sufficient here—that a resurrection is impossible to prove at all. If so, why demand more evidence? I must deal with this first.

The gentleman would admit testimony only in matters that appear possible to us. But take a man in a warm climate who has never seen ice: by this reasoning he ought, on no evidence, to believe rivers freeze in cold countries—yet we know this a plain fact, witnessed by men well qualified to report it. Nothing is more absurd than making a witness's honesty depend on the hearer's ignorance. It's true men don't easily believe improbable things, but the reason is that the hearer's preconceived opinion casts doubt on the reporter, not that the fact admits no evidence at all.

Suppose a man told you he'd come back from the dead: what would you suspect? Not that he's alive now, since you see and feel him; you'd question whether he'd ever truly been dead—a plain matter, provable by testimony, admitted constantly in courts. Or suppose you saw a man executed and buried, and were then told he'd come to life: you wouldn't doubt he'd been dead, since you saw that yourself, but you'd wonder whether he's alive now. Would you say this excludes all testimony, that men cannot tell living from dead? A man rising from the grave is an object of the senses, giving the same evidence of life as any other; a resurrection, as a fact to be proved, requires no greater ability in witnesses than to distinguish a dead man from a living one.

I allow such cases need more evidence than ordinary ones; but that's not the same as admitting no evidence at all. The difficulty is that such cases seem contrary to "the course of nature"—but every man forms his notion of nature from his own limited experience, and calls contrary to it whatever contradicts that experience. If everything contradicting that notion were impossible, water could never freeze, which is false; "the course of nature," so used, really means our own prejudices. We know by experience that men die and rise no more, and so call a resurrection contrary to the settled course of things—certainly it is. But to call it therefore impossible is to argue without foundation from either sense or reason. Consider how I live now: my heart beats without my consent, my blood moves in ways contrary to known laws of motion—the preservation of my life, every moment, is as great an act of power as raising a dead man would be. Whoever owes his life to a superior power must grant that the same power which gave life to senseless matter at the beginning can restore life to a body once dead.

As to the nature of Christ's risen body: every account assures us it was seen, felt, and handled by many, called by Christ himself to do so, so they'd be assured he had flesh and bones, not a mere ghost, as they first imagined in their surprise. The passage about Mary Magdalene—Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to my Father—does not imply his body couldn't be touched; thousands say "touch me not" daily without meaning any such thing. The natural sense is that she clung to his feet, and he told her not to linger, since she would see him again, but should go quickly with his message.

The road to Emmaus, where two disciples conversed with him at length without recognizing him until he broke bread: is there anything unnatural here? Their very conviction he was dead kept them from recognizing him, met as he was on a journey in different clothing; at supper, with lamps brought in, they knew him. The gentleman demands why we trust their senses after recognizing him but not before. I once knew a gentleman who met his own sister, by chance, in Paris; they spent much of a day together without recognizing one another, until at last she cried, "Oh, my brother!" Would you say she was as good an eyewitness that he was not there as that he was, because she failed at first to know him?

As to his vanishing, and coming in when the doors were shut: the apostles claim less than the gentleman supposes. "He vanished out of their sight" means only that he ceased to be seen, and it is nowhere said he came through the door or the keyhole—he might have entered as any man does, unnoticed until he stood among them. Is there no way for a real body to disappear? Put out the candles, and we all disappear. It does not follow that a body is unreal because I suddenly lose sight of it. I need only show these passages don't imply his body was unreal—not that nothing miraculous was involved. I'm surprised the gentleman didn't press his argument further, to prove Christ had no real body even before his death—for when a hostile crowd meant to throw him from a cliff, he went through their midst, unseen. Nothing after the resurrection is more inexplicable than that; if the argument holds, it proves there never was such a man as Jesus at all.

As to Thomas and the wounds—Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and thrust thy hand into my side—it is nowhere stated Thomas actually did so, or saw the wounds open and bleeding; it is merely supposed. Thomas had said he would not believe except he put his finger into the print, that is the scar, of the nails—which, in ordinary speech, does not mean piercing through to the internal organs. On this natural reading, the objection disappears; and even granting the gentleman's reading, Christ's words are plainly a rebuke for his unbelief, throwing his own extravagant terms back at him.

Now to the evidence itself. Why were witnesses chosen rather than shown to all? Where there are witnesses enough, no judge or jury complains for want of more; if three credible men attest a will, as the law requires, would anyone ask why the whole town wasn't called to sign it too? Choosing proper witnesses removes suspicion in every other case—why does it become, in this case alone, the most suspicious thing of all? The Jews, of all people, had the fullest evidence: their own guards witnessed the empty tomb, and afterward they had not one apostle but all of them, testifying before the council and confirming it with open miracles.

It's further argued that, since Jesus held a special commission to the Jews, he ought to have appeared to their rulers, like an ambassador who refuses to

produce his credentials. But Jesus held two offices: Messiah to the Jews, and high priest of the world. Of the first, he said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and forbade his apostles to go among the Gentiles. This office he discharged until rejected by the Jews, taking his leave at last with: Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord—words marking the end of that mission at his death. What further credentials could be demanded, once rejected? To appear to them after the resurrection would have contradicted his own prediction.

The resurrection founded his new commission, extending to the whole world: all power was given to him in heaven and earth, and he sent his disciples to teach all nations. Since this commission extended equally to the whole world, what grounds for demanding special evidence for the Jews alone, any more than for the Roman Senate? Nothing is more unreasonable than to despise the sufficient evidence before us, and turn the absence of imagined evidence into an objection against a truth well established. Nor were the chosen witnesses the only ones who saw him risen—St. Paul says Christ was seen by five hundred people at once, many still living when he appealed to their testimony.

As for the angels and the women: we believe them angels on the evangelist's authority, not the women's report, and the women, silly as supposed, had eyes and ears, and so far from credulous, didn't even believe their own report at first. The evidence of the men is no worse for women having seen the same thing. And if you question the witnesses' sincerity: they lived and died wretchedly for this truth, and what greater evidence of sincerity can anyone require?

But there is another evidence the gentleman passed over. He says a resurrection is too extraordinary for human evidence to support—and I think he may be right, because in this case the credit was not entrusted to mere human evidence alone. Christ declared: The Spirit of truth… he shall testify of me. And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning. He forbade the apostles to begin their work until they received power from on high—the power of wisdom and courage to stand before rulers, and the power of miracles, even raising the dead, convincing the world God was with them, as St. John says: If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater.

It was objected that the apostles scattered to different countries, so belief rested everywhere on one witness's word. But did that witness travel alone, accompanied by the powers of heaven? Was not every healed man a fresh witness to his report? If the same happened in our own time—men reporting one raised from the dead, and before our eyes curing the blind and lame, enduring poverty and scorn, and at last dying for the truth of their report,

every country receiving the same account, sealed with the witnesses' blood—I should like to know what reasonable man would dismiss such evidence.

Judge. Have you finished, sir?

Mr. B. Yes, my lord.

Judge. Go on, Mr. A., if you have anything to say.

Mr. A. My lord, very little. First, as to the apostles' sufferings as proof of their testimony: there is not a false religion in the world that cannot produce the same credential—Papists have suffered for popery, Protestants for their religion, every sect its martyrs. Not all these sufferers had truth on their side, yet they'd have an equal claim to this argument. Nor does suffering prove sincerity beyond dispute, as if no man could dissemble at the point of death: how many have denied facts plainly proved, even with the rope at their necks?

Another observation: it's been insisted the resurrection is a matter for the senses—so why is this proper evidence now given up for an improper one? Every miracle is itself an appeal to the senses, and there's no connection between a miracle this year and one last year; it doesn't follow that because Peter cured a lame man, Christ rose from the dead. And even granting everything the gentleman demands—what is that to us? Those who had the witness within themselves may have done right to trust it; but how am I, who lack it, any the better for it?

Judge. Very well. Gentlemen of the jury, you have heard the proofs on both sides; it is now your task to give a verdict.

Here the gentlemen whispered together, and the foreman stood up.

Foreman. My lord, the case has been long, and consists of several points; the jury hope your lordship will give them some direction.

Judge. No, no; you are quite capable of judging without my help.

Mr. A. My lord, consider that you appointed this meeting and chose this office for yourself. Mr. B. and I have each done our part, and have some claim on you to do yours.

Mr. B. I must join in that request.

Judge. Every honor carries a burden, it seems, even one I conferred on myself. Since it must be so, I will call the debate to mind and lay its substance before you.

Gentlemen of the jury, the question is whether the witnesses of the resurrection are guilty of giving false evidence, or not. Two kinds of objection are brought: one charges fraud in the transaction itself, the other charges the evidence as insufficient to support so extraordinary an event. Three periods

are to be considered: Christ's ministry, ending at his death, when the fraud is supposed devised; the time from his death to his resurrection, when it is supposed carried out; and the time from the resurrection onward, when the apostles' evidence to the world is the chief consideration.

As to the first period, the charge rests on no evidence at all; all the reported facts stand against it. You were told the Jews expected a victorious prince, and impostors traded on this, from which it's inferred Christ built his scheme on the same prejudice. But on examination, Christ made it his central aim to correct these very prejudices, and fell into disgrace for it; so far from seeking worldly power, he refused it when offered, and called his disciples to take up the cross, warning them of coming hardship—hardly the conduct of a man then contriving fraud. Yet since Christ had foretold his own resurrection, the plot, if fraud, must have been laid in his lifetime; and it's improbable he'd contrive such a fraud without motive, and still more improbable he'd give public notice of it beforehand, putting everyone on guard. Mr. A., aware of this difficulty, was inclined to make Christ an enthusiast and only his disciples cheats—a notion not properly argued, and I pass over it, noting only that enthusiasm is as foreign to Christ's character as fraud, and that, if there truly was a resurrection, it answers the charge of enthusiasm besides.

As to the second period: it is agreed Christ died and was buried—so far, no fraud. The chief priests, fearing the disciples would steal the body and pretend a resurrection, obtained a guard from Pilate and sealed the stone. The guards reported that an angel had removed the stone, and they became like dead men; the chief priests then bribed them to say the disciples had stolen the body while they slept. Counsel for Woolston maintains this bribed story true, but cannot explain why the Jews would heed Christ's prediction at all if they knew him an impostor—his answer, that they'd earlier found a fraud in Lazarus's case, has no foundation in history, and was never once raised at Christ's own trial, where it would have served admirably. Nor is there any evidence for an agreement between the Jews and the disciples over the seal; the plain account—that the Jews sealed the door against collusion among their own guards—rules out other suppositions. As to the timing, the disciples neither were nor could have been present at the tomb, being scattered in hiding; and hastening the plot would have served no purpose anyway, since the guards were present throughout, sufficient to detect fraud had any been used. The reckoning of days, counting both first and last toward the total, is confirmed by the two disciples who, on the very day of the resurrection, told the unrecognized Christ, "today is the third day since these things were done."

Mr. B. tried further to show, from the Jews' own later conduct, that they did not believe the bribed story: they never charged the disciples with this fraud even in their power, though this was plainly their intention; Agrippa's words to Paul, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian," could hardly have been spoken to a man known to be carrying out a fraud; and Gamaliel's

advice to the council—lest they be found fighting against God—assumes the hand of God might possibly be at work, which he could never have said had the resurrection been a known fraud.

The last period begins at the resurrection, and concerns the evidence itself. Counsel for Woolston raised a difficulty that, if sound, would exclude all evidence whatsoever: that a resurrection, being outside the course of nature, cannot be outweighed by any human testimony. In answer it was said that a resurrection is a thing judged by the senses, since we can always tell a living man from a dead one; that it contradicts no principle of reason, since whoever grants God gave man life cannot doubt his power to restore it; and that appealing to "the course of nature" refers the matter to men's prejudices, which vary endlessly, as when men in warm and cold climates judge water-freezing unnatural or natural by their own limited experience. A further objection concerned the reality of Christ's risen body; it was answered that several of these rest on mistaken readings of the passages concerned, and that the rest prove nothing against the body's reality, since such things could happen in ways consistent with a real body, as happened once before his death as well.

It was objected that Christ did not appear publicly to the people, especially the chief priests. It was answered that his particular commission to the Jews had expired at his death; that since the whole world had a stake in the resurrection, evidence suited to the whole world was needed, not particular satisfaction to the Jewish rulers; and that the chosen witnesses were not the only ones who saw him risen, many others besides, chosen only as fit persons to testify to the world—a choice that removes rather than raises suspicion. The angels, similarly, were not witnesses but ministers of God, and the women, however called silly, had eyes and ears, and did not even believe their own report at first.

Counsel for the apostles further urged that they gave the fullest assurance of sincerity by enduring hardship and death for their testimony. Counsel for Woolston replied that every religion, true or false, has had its martyrs, proving suffering no evidence of truth. But consider: the apostles had the fullest evidence themselves, through forty days with the risen Christ, and what they suffered for was the truth of a plain matter of fact they had seen with their own eyes, not a mere doctrine—as St. Paul said, if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Where a man reports an uncommon fact and I disbelieve him, it is not his eyes I doubt but his sincerity, and willingly suffering for the truth is at least proof of that. It was further objected that men have died in stubborn denial of facts plainly proved—true, but such men suffer against their will, hoping for pardon, whereas the apostles could at any time have saved their lives by denying the truth, and chose death instead.

The last and weightiest consideration is the evidence of the Spirit—the power of miracles given the apostles to confirm their testimony. It was objected that this shifts the resurrection from the evidence of the senses to an improper kind, since one miracle is no evidence of another. It was answered that a miracle proves only that a cause exists equal to the effect, and becomes proof of a proposition only through the authority of the person it confirms—so the apostles' miracles confirmed their authority as eyewitnesses, rather than directly proving the resurrection. It was further objected that this evidence, however good for those who had it, is nothing to us who lack it. It was answered that this was evidence displayed in visible works, handed down to us on unquestionable authority, and that to grant it good for the first ages but not for ours contradicts the plain rules of reasoning.

Gentlemen of the jury, I have laid before you the substance of what has been said on both sides. It is now for you to consider it, and give your verdict.

The jury conferred together, and the foreman rose.

Foreman. My lord, we are ready to give our verdict.

Judge. Are you all agreed?

Jury. Yes.

Judge. Who shall speak for you?

Jury. Our foreman.

Judge. What say you? Are the apostles guilty of giving false evidence in the case of the resurrection of Jesus, or not guilty?

Foreman. Not guilty.

Judge. Very well. And now, gentlemen, I resign my commission, and am your humble servant.

The company rose and began paying their compliments to the judge and counsel, but were interrupted by a gentleman who went up to the judge and offered him a fee. "What is this?" said the judge. "A fee, sir," said the gentleman. "A fee to a judge is a bribe," said the judge. "True, sir," said the gentleman, "but you have resigned your commission, and will not be the first judge to leave the bench without any loss of honor. Now, Lazarus's case is to come on next, and this fee is to retain you on his side." A confused babble of voices followed, all speaking at once to persuade the judge to take the fee; but since the trial had run on longer than I expected, and I had let the time slip for an appointment on business, I was forced to steal away, and whether the judge was prevailed upon to undertake the cause of Lazarus or not, I cannot say.

FINIS