

FRAN

BY JOHN BRECKENRIDGE ELLIS

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SYNOPSIS.



The Credibility of Christ's Resurrection

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TEXT—Acts 1:3.



Credibility refers to the appearance of a fact in a manner that serves belief. It is belief based on good authority, reliable facts, competent witnesses, and without respect to the strength, weakness, ability or unability of the authority, fact, or witnesses; it is believing too readily, and with no reason for the faith or hope. The resurrection of Christ is a fact proved by competent evidence, and deserving of intelligent acceptance and belief. It is a doctrine buttressed by many fallible proofs.

The line of proof here suggested is that from the argument of cause and effect. Certain things, conditions, or situations exist in our midst today; they are the effects of causes, or a cause; what is that cause. We may mention:

1. The Empty Tomb. The fact that the tomb was empty is testified to by competent witnesses—both friends and enemies; by the women, the disciples, the angels, and the Roman guards. How shall we account for the absence of the body of Jesus from the tomb? That it had not been stolen by outside parties is evident from the testimony of the soldiers who were bribed to tell that story (Matt. 28:11-15). Such a guard never would have allowed such a thing to take place. Their lives would have been thereby jeopardized. And if they were asleep (v. 13), how could they know what took place? Their testimony under such circumstances would be useless.

The condition in which the linen cloths were found lying by those who entered the tomb precludes the possibility of the body being stolen. Had such been the case the cloths would have been taken with the body, and not left in perfect order, thereby showing that the body had gone out of them. Burglars do not leave things in such perfect order. There is no order in haste. Then again, we have the testimony of angels to the fact that Jesus had really risen as foretold (Matt. 28:6; Mark 16:6). The testimony of angels is surely trustworthy (Heb. 2:2).

2. The Lord's Day. The Lord's Day is not the original Sabbath. Who dared change it? For what reason, and on what ground was it changed? Ponder the tenacity with which the Jews held on to their Sabbath given in Eden, and buttressed amid the thunders of Sinai. Recall how Jews would sooner die than fight on the Sabbath day (cf. Titus' invasion of Jerusalem on the Sabbath). The Jews never celebrated the birthdays of great men; they celebrated events like the Passover. Yet, in the New Testament times we find Jews changing their time-honored seventh day to the first day of the week, and contrary to all precedent, calling that day after a man—the Lord's Day. Here is an effect, a tremendous effect; what was its cause? We cannot have an effect without a cause.

3. The Christian Church. We know what a grand and noble institution the Christian church is. What would this world be without its hymns, worship, philanthropy, ministrations of mercy are all known to us. Where did this institution come from? It is an effect, a glorious effect; what is its cause? When the risen Christ appeared unto the discouraged disciples and revived their faith and hope, they went forth, under the all-conquering faith in a risen and ascended Lord, and preached the story of his life, death, resurrection, ascension, and coming again. Men believed these teachings; gathered themselves together to study the Scriptures, to pray, to worship Christ, and extend his kingdom among men. This is how the church came into existence.

4. The New Testament. If Jesus Christ had remained buried in the grave, the story of his life and death would have remained buried with him. The New Testament is an effect of Christ's resurrection. It was the resurrection that put heart into the disciples to go forth and tell its story. Skeptics would have us believe that the resurrection of Christ was an afterthought of the disciples to give the story of Christ's life a thrilling climax; a decorative incident which satisfies the dramatic feeling in man; a brilliant picture at the end of an heroic life. We reply: There would have been no beautiful story to put a climax to if there had been no resurrection of the Christ of the story. The resurrection does not grow out of the beautiful story of his life, but the beautiful story of Christ's life grew out of the fact of the resurrection. The New Testament is the book of the resurrection of Christ.

Fran arrives at Hamilton Gregory's home in Littleburg, but finds him absent conducting the choir at a camp meeting. She repairs thither in search of him, laughs during the service and is asked to leave. Abbott Ashton, superintendent of schools, escorts Fran from the tent. He tells her Gregory is a wealthy man, deeply interested in charity work, and a pillar of the church. Ashton becomes greatly interested in Fran and while taking leave of her, holds her hand and is seen by Sapphira Clinton, sister of Robert Clinton, chairman of the school board. Fran tells Gregory she wants a home with him. Grace Noir, Gregory's private secretary, takes a violent dislike to Fran and advises her to go away at once. Fran hints at a twenty-year-old secret, and Gregory in agitation asks Grace to leave the room. Fran relates the story of how Gregory married a young girl at Springfield while attending college and then deserted her. Fran is the child of that marriage. Gregory had married his present wife three years before the death of Fran's mother. Fran takes a liking to Mrs. Gregory. Gregory explains that Fran is the daughter of a very dear friend who is dead. Fran agrees to the story. Mrs. Gregory insists on her making her home with them and takes her to her arms. Fran declares the secretary must go. Grace begins nagging tactics in an effort to drive Fran from the Gregory home. Abbott, while taking a walk alone at midnight, finds Fran on a bridge telling her fortune by cards. She tells Abbott that she is the famous lion tamer, Fran Nonpareil. She is tired of circus life and wants to go home. Grace tells of seeing Fran come home after midnight with a man. She guesses part of the story and surprises the rest from Abbott. She decides to ask Bob Clinton to go to Springfield to investigate Fran's story. Fran enlists Abbott in her battle against Grace. Fran offers her services to the Gregorys as secretary during the temporary absence of Grace. The latter, hearing of Fran's purpose, returns and interrupts a touching scene between father and daughter. Fran goes fishing with Mrs. Gregory's brother. Abbott, whose retention as superintendent, is to be decided that day, finds her sitting alone in a buggy.

CHAPTER XV.—Continued.

She slipped her hand into his. "Didn't I have a mother? Oh, these mothers! And who can make mother-wishes come true? Well! And you just studied with all your might; and you'll keep on and on, till you're . . . out of my reach, of course. Which would have suited your mother, too." She withdrew her hand.

"My mother would have loved you," he declared, for he did not understand, so well as Fran, about mothers' liking for strange young ladies who train lions.

"Mine would you," Fran asserted, with more reason.

Abbott, conscious of a dreadful emptiness, took Fran's hand again. "I'll never be out of your reach, Fran."

She did not seek to draw away, but said, with dark meaning, "Remember the bridge at midnight."

"I remember how you looked, with the moonlight silencing your face—you were just beautiful that night, little Nonpareil."

"My chin is so sharp," she murmured.

"Yes," he said, softly feeling the warm little fingers, one by one, as if to make sure all were there. "That's the way I like it—sharp."

"And I'm so ridiculously thin—"

"You're nothing like so thin as when you first came to Littleburg," he declared. "I've noticed how you are—have been—I mean . . ."

"Filling out?" cried Fran gleefully.

"Oh, yes, and I'm so glad you know, because since I've been wearing long dresses, I've been afraid you'd never find it out, and would always be thinking of me as you saw me at the beginning. But I am—yes—filling out."

"And your little feet, Fran—"

"Yes, I always had a small foot. But let's get off of this subject."

"Not until I say something about your smile—oh, Fran, that smile!"

"The subject, now," remarked Fran, "naturally returns to Grace Noir."

"Please, Fran!"

"I'll tell you why you hurt my feelings, Abbott. You've disappointed me twice. Oh, if I were a man, I'd show any meek-faced little hypocrite if she could prize secrets out of me. Just because it wears dresses and long hair, you think it an angel."

"Meaning Miss Grace, I presume?" remarked Abbott dryly. "But what is the secret, this time?"

"Didn't I trust you with the secret that I meant to apply for the position of secretary as soon as Grace Noir was out of the way? And I was just about to win the fight when here she came—hadn't been to the city at all, because you told her what I meant to do—handed her the secret, like a child giving up something it doesn't want."

"You are very unjust. I did not tell her your plan. I don't know how she found it out."

"From you; nobody else knew it."

"She did not learn it from me."

"—And that's what gets me!—you tell her everything, and don't even know you tell. Just hypnotized! Answer my questions: the morning after I told you what I meant to do—standing there at the fence by the gate—sounding in you, telling you everything—I say the next morning, didn't you tell Grace Noir all about it?"

"Certainly not."

Abbott tried to remember, then said casually, "I believe we did meet on the street that morning."

"Yes," said Fran ironically. "I believe you did meet somewhere. Of

course she engaged you in her peculiar style of inquisitorial conversation?" "We went down the street together." "Now, prisoner at the bar, relate all that was said while going down the street together."

"Most charming, but unjust judge, not a word that I can remember, so it couldn't have been of any interest. I did tell her that since she—yes, I remember now—since she was to be out of town all day, I would wait until tomorrow to bring her a book she wanted to borrow."

"Oh! And she wanted to know who told you she would be out of town all day, didn't she?"

Abbott reflected deeply, then said with triumph, "Yes, she did. She asked me how I knew she was going to the city with Bob Clinton. And I merely said that it was the understanding they were to select the church music. Not another word was said on the subject."

"That was enough. Mighty neat. As soon as she saw you were trying to avoid a direct answer, she knew I'd told you. That gave her a clew to my leaving the choir practice before the rest of them. She guessed something important was up. Well, Abbott, you are certainly an infant in her hands, but I guess you can't help it."

Self-pride was touched, and he retorted: "Fran, I hate to think of your being willing to take her position behind her back."

She crimsoned.

"You'd know how I feel about it," he went on, "if you understood her better. I know her duty drives her to act in opposition to you, and I'm sorry for it. But her religious ideals—"

"Abbott, be honest and answer—is there anything in it—this talk of doing God's will? Can people love God and hate one another? I just hate shams," she went on, becoming more excited. "I don't care what fine names you give them—whether it's marriage, or education, or culture, or religion, if there's no heart in it, it's a sham, and I hate it. I hate a lie. But a thousand times more, do I hate a life that is a lie."

"Fran, you don't know what you are saying."

"Yes I do know what I'm saying. Is religion going to church? That's all I can see in it. I want to believe there's something else, I've honestly searched, for I wanted to be comforted, I tell you, I need it. But I can't find any comfort in mortar and stained-glass windows. I want something that makes a man true to his wife, and makes a family live together in blessed harmony, something that's good on the streets and in the stores, something that makes people even treat a show-girl well. If there's anything in it, why doesn't father—"

She snatched away her hand that she might cover her face, for she had burst into passionate weeping. "Why

doesn't a father, who's always talking about religion, and singing about it, and praying about it—why doesn't that father draw his daughter to his breast—close, close to his heart—that's the only home she asks for—that's the home she has a right to, yes a right, I don't care how far she's wandered—"

"Fran!" cried Abbott, in great distress. "Don't cry, little one!" He had no intelligent word, but his arm was full of meaning as it slipped about her. "Who has been unkind to you, Nonpareil?" She let her head sink upon his shoulder, as she sobbed without restraint. "What shams have pierced your pure heart? Am I the cause of any of these tears? Am I?"

"Yes," Fran answered, between her sobs, "you're the cause of all my happy tears." She nestled there with a movement of perfect trust; he drew

her closer, and stroked her hair tenderly, trusting himself.

Presently she pulled herself to rights, lifted his arm from about her, and rested it on the back of the seat—a friendly compromise. Then she shook back her hair and raised her eyes and a faint smile came into the rosy face. "I'm so funny," she declared. "Sometimes I seem so strange that I need an introduction to myself." She looked into Abbott's eyes fleetingly, and drew in the corners of her mouth. "I guess, after all, there's something in religion!"

Abbott was so warmed by returning sunshine that his eyes shone. "Dear Fran!" he said—it was very hard to keep his arm where she had put it. She tried to look at him steadily, but somehow the light hurt her eyes. She could feel its warmth burning her cheeks.

"Oh, Fran," cried Abbott impulsively, "the bridge in the moonlight was nothing to the way you look now—so beautiful—and so much more than just beautiful . . ."

"This won't do," Fran exclaimed, hiding her face. "We must get back to Grace Noir immediately."

"Oh, Fran, oh, no, please!"

"I won't please. While we're in Sure-Enough Country, I mean to tell you the whole truth about Grace Noir." The name seemed to settle the atmosphere—she could look at him, now.

"I want you to understand that something is going to happen—must happen, just from the nature of things, and the nature of wives and husbands—and the other woman. Oh, you needn't frown at me, I've seen you look that other way at me, so I know you, Abbott Ashton."

"Fran! Then you know that I—"

"No, you must listen. You've nothing important to tell me that I don't know. I've found out the whole Gregory history from old Mrs. Jefferson, without her knowing that she was telling anything—she's a sort of 'Professor Ashton' in my hands—and I mean to tell you that history. You know that, for about three years, Mrs. Gregory hasn't gone to church—"

"You must admit that it doesn't appear well."

"Admit it? Yes, of course I must. And the world cares for appearances, and not for the truth. That's why it condemns Mrs. Gregory—and me—and that's why I'm afraid the school-board will condemn you: just on account of appearances. For these past three years, the church has meant to Mrs. Gregory a building plus Grace Noir. I don't mean that Mrs. Gregory got jealous of Grace Noir—I don't know how to explain—you can't handle cobwebs without marring them." She paused.

"Jealous of Miss Grace!" exclaimed Abbott reprovingly.

"Let's go back, and take a running jump right into the thick of it. When Mr. Gregory came to Littleburg, a complete stranger—and when he married, she was a devoted church-member—always went, and took great interest in all his schemes to help folks—folks at a distance, you understand . . . She just devoured that religious magazine he edits—yes, I'll admit, his religion shows up beautifully in print; the pictures of it are good, too. Old Mrs. Jefferson took pride in being wheeled to church where she could see her son-in-law leading the music, and where she'd watch every gesture of the minister and catch the sound of his voice at the high places, where he cried and, or nevertheless. Sometimes Mrs. Jefferson could get a dozen ands and buts out of one discourse. Then comes your Grace Noir."

Abbott listened with absorbed attention. It was impossible not to be influenced by the voice that had grown to mean so much to him.

"Grace Noir is a person that's superhumanly good, but she's not happy in her goodness; it hurts her, all the time, because other folks are not as good as she. You can't live in the house with her without wishing she'd make a mistake to show herself human, but she never does, she's always right. She's so fixed on being a martyr, that if nobody crosses her, she just makes herself a martyr out of the shortcomings of others."

"As for instance—?"

"As for instance, she suffered martyrdom every time Mrs. Gregory nestled in an arm-chair beside the cozy hearth, when a Ladies' Aid, or a Rally was beating its way through snowdrifts to the Walnut Street church. Mr. Gregory was like everybody else about Grace—he took her at her own value, and that gave the equation: to him, religion meant Walnut Street church plus Grace Noir. For a while, Mrs. Gregory clung to church-going with grim determination, but it wasn't any use. The Sunday-school would have button contests, or the Ladies'

Aid would give chicken pie dinners down-town, and Mrs. Gregory would be a red button or a blue button, and she would have her pie; but she was always third—in her home, or at church, she was the third. It was her husband and his secretary that understood the Lord. Somehow she seemed to disturb conditions, merely by being present."

"Fran, you do not realize that your words—they intimate—"

"She disturbed conditions, Abbott. She was like a turned-up light at a séance. Mr. Gregory was appalled because his wife quit attending church. Grace sympathized in his sorrow. It made him feel toward Grace Noir—but I'm up against a stone wall, Abbott, I haven't the word to describe his feeling, maybe there isn't any."

"Fran Nonpareil! Such wisdom terrifies me . . . such suspicions!" In this moment of hesitancy between conviction and rejection, Abbott felt oddly out of harmony with his little friend. She realized the effect she must necessarily be producing, yet she must continue; she had counted the cost and the danger. If she did not convince him, his thought of her could never be the same.

"Abbott, you may think I am talking from jealousy, and that I tried to get rid of Grace Noir so I could better my condition at her expense. I don't know how to make you see that my story is true. It tells itself. Oughtn't that to prove it? Mrs. Gregory has the dove's nature; she'd let the enemy have the spoils rather than come to blows. She lets him take his choice—here is she, yonder's the secretary. He isn't worthy of her if he chooses Grace—but his hesitation has proved him unworthy, anyhow. The old lady—her mother—is a fighter; she'd have driven out the secretary long ago. But Mrs. Gregory's idea seems to be—if he can want her, after I've given him myself, I'll not make a movement to interfere."

Abbott played delicately with the mere husk of this astounding revelation: "Have you talked with old Mrs. Jefferson about—about it?"

"She's too proud—wouldn't admit it. But I've shyly hinted . . . however, it's not the sort of story you could pour through the funnel of an ear-trumpet without getting wheat mixed with chaff. She'd misunderstand—the neighbors would get it first—anyway she wouldn't make a move because her daughter won't. It's you and I, Abbott, against Grace and Mr. Gregory."

He murmured, looking away, "You take me for granted, Fran."

"Yes," Fran's reply was almost a whisper. A sudden terror of what he might think of her, smote her heart. But she repeated bravely, "Yes!"

He turned, and she saw in his eyes a confiding trust that seemed to hedge her soul about. "And you can always take me for granted, Fran; and always is a long time."

"Not too long for you and me," said Fran, looking at him breathlessly.

"I may have felt," he said, "for some time, in a vague way, what you have



She Had Burst into Passionate Weeping.



MARRIAGE LAW IN ITALY

Ceremony is Only Legal When Performed by Mayor of Place Where Couple Reside.

In Italy marriage by law is a civil contract, only legal when performed by the mayor of the place in which the couple who desire to be married reside, or his assessor, and it must be performed in the city chamber.

Some hotels and not a few pensions in Rome are the constant resort of needy adventurers with titles real or spurious to their names, Duke This and Prince That, who are always on the lookout for money, says the Christian Herald. Aided, it may be, by some one in the hotel or pension, they get acquainted with a rich American family with marriageable daughters. To one of these love is made and marriage is arranged.

Such have no difficulty in finding a priest to perform their ceremony. It is done. Then the adventurer deserts the girl, and she has no remedy. Some few years ago a young girl was so treated. Her pseudo husband, having secured her money, left her and married civilly and legally an Italian woman with whom he was in love. The victimized girl shot dead her be-

trayer and his wife. Recognizing the provocation she had received, she was left unpunished. Another girl similarly betrayed committed suicide.

Legal Opinion.

"A cat sits on my back fence every night and he yowls and yowls and yowls. Now, I don't want to have any trouble with neighbor Jones, but this thing has gone far enough, and I want you to tell me what to do."

The young lawyer looked as solemn as an old sick owl, and said not a word.

"I have a right to shoot the cat, haven't I?"

"I would hardly say that," replied young Coke Blackstone. "The cat does not belong to you, as I understand it."

"No, but the fence does."

"Then," concluded the light of law, "I think it safe to say you have a perfect right to tear down the fence."—New York Press.

Her Grief.

He—Why don't you give me a dance before midnight?

Young Widow—Well, you see at 11:30 tonight it will be a year since my husband's death. I must honor his memory properly, and no dance until after the year is up.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)