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## WHY WAS NOT JESUS A WRITER?

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THE epistle of Christ to Abgarus we treat as a forgery, and claim that the passage in John viii. 3-11 has full proof of its right to the place it holds in the sacred record. Only once, then, are we told that Jesus wrote anything. He simply "stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground." What the writing was no man can know. Perhaps none ever knew, but he and the accused one, to whom he said in forgiving compassion, "Neither do I condemn thee: go and sin no more." This remarkable instance of his wisdom is sufficient to start the honest and respectful inquiry, Why was not Jesus a writer?

It may often be profitable to raise questions which can not be fully nor directly answered, for thus new truths may be elicited, or old facts presented in a new light; and these may be of greater importance than the direct answer to the inquiry raised.

We set out from the ground assumed by those who profess to accept many of the leading facts of the gospel history, but who reject the inspiration of the historians. They admit that Jesus was the best of teachers; the purest of moralists; the author of an original, profound, comprehensive and practical system of truth; the moral legislator of a new era, and for the most distant generations of the future; the founder of an organization more powerful than any other in civilization; the molder of a new form of life, individual, social, ecclesiastical, and even national; the highest example of holy living, and the noblest impersonation of justice and love, the world ever saw. They admit that his teachings are adapted and adequate to the wants of every man and every society, all nations and all ages, and that he was conscious of the vast importance of his doctrines, his

laws, his life, and his love to a world which could not afford to lose them. They admit the superiority of his wisdom, and yet are not satisfied with the method in which the record of his words and deeds was made. They assert their reverence for all that he did and declared, and they profess to be candid in their efforts to determine from the gospel history what are really his own works and his own utterances. They imagine that it is impossible to decide in the existing state of the record. On the ground of their rationalism, we ask them, How it came to pass that the great Teacher permitted the record to assume such a shape?

There were four methods by which he might secure confidence in the record.

1. By writing it himself.
2. By dictating to men writing under him.
3. By inspecting what others wrote, adopting it as his truth and setting his seal to it.
4. By qualifying certain writers by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

The rationalistic critics will not admit that the fourth method was adopted. Why then did he not adopt some one of the others? Oh that he had written a book! seems to be the secret wish of those who are not content with what is now before them.

On rationalistic grounds Jesus was shut up to authorship, dictation, or the adoption of what others wrote, over his seal and signature, if he would secure implicit faith in his teachings. They who place so much reliance on the rational judgment profess to believe all that he actually taught and did, and had he written of himself, they could have perfect faith in his gospel. If they do not assert this in words, they do in conduct, for they find no fault in what they consider the real utterances and works of

Jesus. Their contest is with the historians.

Truly, it is for them to explain why he did not take the pen, or audibly dictate to an amanuensis just what he would have recorded, or set his autographic seal to what they wrote and submitted to his inspection. Either of these last methods would have been equivalent to a personal authorship. For, on their own footing, he certainly felt that it was imperative in him to furnish the world with his teachings, and to secure a reliable transmission of them. He must have adopted some method, and felt such confidence in it that he could depend solely upon it. We are satisfied with the one which we think he did adopt, — the inspiration of four men by the Holy Ghost. The very fact that he employed no other, gives us, in this one method, the fullest confidence. Those who have not confidence in it expose themselves to the necessity of honestly admitting that they are mistaken either in their exalted views of Jesus, or their low views of inspiration. Their lofty admiration of his wisdom and high appreciation of his life and teachings amount to nothing, or they are driven to accept his mode of giving them a gospel. Let us, however, meet them where they stand, and if they will not receive in faith the gospel now in their hands, we press upon them the question, Why did not Jesus write a better one? For a perfectly trustworthy gospel was the great want of the world. If rationalism be the correct basis for a true faith, it had, eighteen centuries ago, its demands upon Jesus for his personal authorship.

Such demands as these : — It was necessary that his teachings should be *written*. They must be embodied in a "book revelation." For they would be perverted or lost by mere oral tradition. His life would be depreciated into an unworthy myth, or exaggerated into an incredible mythology. What is spoken

may die; what is written endures. If he were a mere man he could not secure inspiration to any of his followers, and he must either write, or risk the uncertainties of oral transmission. If he were the Son of God and the "Saviour of the world," he could not submit to such a risk; and if the inspiration of certain historians would not secure all that he intended, he could foresee its deficiency. If he foresaw any such deficiency, it was surely imperative for him to write his teachings, and become, in this sense, the author and finisher of a system of faith.

Not only must his doctrines be recorded, but the facts on which those doctrines are based. Not only were his deeds and words important, independently of all other writings, but they gave a meaning to all the sacred Scriptures. On them the Old Testament and the (anticipated) epistles depended for their clear interpretation, and their practical use to the human race. And the publication of these facts seemed to be needed as soon as possible after his death. Where could rationalism find one to publish them in a written form except Jesus?

It was important for men, in all time, to know just what he did and said. A mere reporter is liable to fail both in truthfulness of statement and precision of terms. This we see proved almost every day, even when the reporter is on the spot taking the words from the speaker's lips: how much more true when he must draw upon his memory, as long after their delivery as the evangelists wrote after the death of Christ. Demosthenes would not have been satisfied with a reporter's version of his orations. The rationalistic tendency is to confide in no second-hand transmission of truths which claim to be divine. Then, unless Jesus should write, how could we be sure of having his very words? What force too in his autograph, written by the very hand that was nailed to the cross!

It was accepted as a fact that the law was first traced by the finger of God : why should not the gospel be written by the hand of Christ? The manner of the great teachers, Socrates excepted, was to write. Moses, Plato, Seneca, Mohammed, were authors. They felt that their teachings were too valuable to be lost, and that they were bound to transmit them to the world by the most reliable method which they could employ. Was not Jesus, the far greater Teacher, much more conscious of the vast importance of his doctrines? He believed that on them the highest temporal and eternal welfare of the human race depended. If personal authorship was the best method of transmission, why did he not assume it?

With only human foresight he could be assured that others would attempt to set forth his doctrines and his life. He saw that he was not half understood, even by those who knew him best. Therefore, if men were left to their own guidance, as authors, they would fail to represent him in his true character, and his teachings in all their force and fullness. Must he not take the pen, and forestall their errors? If he had divine prescience, he foresaw the many writings that appeared after his death, all proving the wide demand for a written gospel. (Luke i. 1.) A vast apocrypha came forth, degrading the character and life of Jesus, and even in the very best writings which assumed to be gospels certain scholars think they find mistakes and myths. How a volume from his hand would have suppressed many of these writings, corrected or confirmed others, and put an end to all controversy!

Also, Jesus intended that his gospel should be published to all nations. The rationalists will hardly deny him such an intention. He positively declared it. (Mark xiii. 10; Matt. xxiv. 15, etc.) It should be *preached* through the ages to come. How? Only by the tongue?

Then the long line of preachers must be rendered infallible in their utterances by inspiration. We do not claim that he proposed to give inspiration to any preachers after the apostles, if indeed to them in all their *oral* teachings. (Witness Peter at Antioch.) It is enough for us to claim it for those who wrote the New Testament. But the rationalistic admirers of Jesus deny it to the apostolic preachers, even when they wrote; and if they be correct, how could Jesus hope that the gospel would be preserved from error by oral deliverances alone? It must not only be preached by the tongue but by the pen. It must be written, and who but himself seemed qualified to write it? For the writer must be one who could not err in his knowledge nor in his judgment when selecting from the great mass of facts (John xxi. 25) the proper words and deeds to be recorded. Before the writer's vision must appear the wants of the world throughout the distant future. Jesus alone assumed to have this foresight, and everything in his ministry went forward on the presumption that there would be given to the world a faithful account of his life, his labors, his doctrines, and his death. He spake, not to his disciples alone, but to the whole race of men; he lived not for his times only, but for all ages; and he believed that he was to secure infinite blessings to the perishing millions of the future.

Is it too much to say that he might have written? If Julius Cæsar had the time to write when pushing on his wars, we may reverently think that Jesus could have taken some, even the more weary, hours for the pen. He was a proper subject. He had the proper and superior qualifications. He best knew himself, his mission, and the purpose of his life and death. Authorship would seem to have been in accordance with his work and character as the Revealer and the Revelation of the Father. Why not

write the words of the Eternal Word? He needed not inspiration, as men required it, for the Spirit was not given by measure unto him. His position was peculiar. For four hundred years inspiration had been claimed for no writer. There was a long dearth of religious authorship, and that during the very age when the first flood of profane literature was rolling in upon the earth. With what majesty would a volume from him who spake as never man spake, have gone forth into the world! What unended controversies about the genuineness, authenticity, inspiration, and integrity of the gospel history would seem to have been settled. Imagine the discovery now of such a book, — one that would bear a test even more critical than Tischendorf's Sinaitic manuscript, and be pronounced genuine by the ablest scholars. Into what confusion would the schools of infidel criticism be thrown! Had such a volume been known for the past eighteen centuries, critical rationalism would not have existed in its present form, and if in any other form, it could scarcely have been worse for Christendom. To have attacked the very writings of Jesus could hardly have been worse than the present war upon the evangelists.

We have stated these seemingly imperative demands for the personal authorship of Jesus, in order to bring before us the wisdom of the plan which we believe he did adopt for transmitting to us a sufficient knowledge of his teachings, and of the facts upon which they are based. We can see good reasons why he did not write, although we do not pretend to say that they are the reasons which *he* might have given.

By not assuming authorship he manifested a character and spirit too sublime to be merely human, and nothing less than divine. Not that the pen was beneath his dignity, but it was not necessary that he should take it up. In the

modesty of his greatness, and his entire freedom from the most captivating form of ambition, he went on apparently unconcerned about the mode in which the world would know of him. This is no slight proof that the mode of transmitting his teachings to the world was already settled in his own mind. Because he did not write his gospel, we may believe that he had fixed upon a better plan, in which he could have the utmost confidence. The last age should be as certain of possessing a true record of his deeds and words as if he had written it, and the only remaining method to secure this result was inspiration.

He calmly trusted in the future inspiration of certain men who would be "moved by the Holy Ghost" to take the pen. He provided for it in the promise of the Holy Spirit. John xvi. 13, 14. He secured it, if we may believe his reported words, and the very reliance which he placed in these writers is some proof of their inspiration. Surely, then, we may have the firmest confidence in the method upon which he relied with such dignified assurance. We may be certain that we now possess all that would have been gained had he written the gospel with his own hand. There can be no disagreement between Christ and the Spirit of Christ.

He thus put honor upon the Holy Ghost, whose office it is to carry on his work. The Spirit who directed Moses in recording the events of creation, where by the Word "all things were made," and all the appearances of the angel-Jehovah in patriarchal times, could select and qualify the proper men to transmit by their pens the words and deeds of "this same Jesus." The Old Testament is, in most respects, a revelation of Christ written by men, and so should be the New Testament. The feebleness of the penmen would prove the sufficiency of the superintending power. We should trust the Holy

Ghost in "enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ," as fully as in the regeneration of our natures.

Further: Jesus thus prevented what must have occurred had he written the gospel, — the undue exaltation of his own writings above the other Scriptures. Nothing is farther from the will of Christ than for one to make an unfriendly distinction between his very words and the other inspired writings, pretending to accept just what he said, and rejecting all else. This course is at least suspicious, as if it were but an attempt to get rid of the more doctrinal, and hence equally practical, portions of the New Testament. The whole Bible stands together on the basis of divine inspiration and the testimony of qualified witnesses. A unity of method is seen throughout the sacred writings.

He also put honor upon his witnesses in every age. His plan was that men should believe in the testimony of competent witnesses. He provided for two kinds of witnesses, for all time. (1) Those inspired to write the gospel. (2) Those qualified by the inspired writings to preach the gospel. Thus writing under inspiration, and preaching what is inspired, would be not very different modes of bearing testimony to Christ. The preacher is not inspired; the gospel is; and yet we should not put too wide a

difference between the reading and the preaching of the truth.

Now, because Jesus did not give us a gospel in the only way that would make it acceptable to rationalistic minds, we conclude, from their very concessions to the high character of this great Teacher, that rationalism in every form is a most delusive error. Because, in transmitting his teachings, he employed a method which human reason would not regard as the best, we conclude that, in this all-important matter, he was governed by the divine reason which in him dwelt. Human reason should learn humility and submission. Because he adopted inspiration, we firmly believe that it was the very best mode of communicating to us the facts and teachings which he regarded as essential to our salvation. Though he wrote not his doctrines, they are not one breath less inspired, nor one jot less authoritative, nor one shade less perfect. We have all that our Lord designed to give us. Of each of the four Gospel writers we may say, "This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things, and we know that his testimony is true." To each of the four Gospels we may apply John's words, "These are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name."

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## ANTS AND THEIR COWS.

AMID all the wonders of animal life which display the wisdom and goodness of the Creator, there is perhaps none more curious than that which is represented in our engraving. It is a magnified view of the *dairy* in an ant-hill. The proprietor of the premises has gathered his herds into their fold, and is seen in the act of *milking*.

Everybody knows something of the ant, the appointed teacher of wisdom to sluggards ever since the days of Solo-

mon. Every one has watched its curious homes, where with tireless industry the ever busy little workers pursue their daily tasks, in seeming confusion, but really with the most systematic and beautiful order. Everybody knows how fearlessly they will defend these when attacked, streaming forth by thousands to repel the intruder, and repair the mischief that has been wrought. But all are not familiar with the inner life of the ant-hill, the complicated structure of the