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PREFATORY NOTE TO FOURTH EDITION.

Since this pamphlet was originally penned in 1867, the author of "Supernatural Religion" has in his three volumes placed a very storehouse of information within the easy reach of every student, and many of Dr. Tischendorf's reckless statements have been effectively dealt with in that masterly work. In the present brief pamphlet there is only the very merest index to matters which in "Supernatural Religion" are exhaustively treated. Part II. of "The Freethinkers' Text-Book," by Mrs Besant, has travelled over the same ground with much care, and has given exact reference to authorities on each point.

The Religious Tract Society, some time since, issued, prefaced with their high commendation, a translation of a pamphlet by Dr. Constantine Tischendorf, entitled "When were our Gospels Written?" In the introductory preface we are not unfairly told that "on the credibility of the four Gospels the whole of Christianity rests, as a building on its foundations." It is proposed in this brief essay to deal with the character of Dr. Tischendorf's advocacy, then to examine the genuineness of the four Gospels, as affirmed by the Religious Tract Society's pamphlet, and at the same time to ascertain, so far as is possible in the space, how far the Gospel narrative is credible.

The Religious Tract Society state that Dr. Tischendorf's *brochure* is a repetition of "arguments for the genuineness and authenticity of the four Gospels," which the erudite Doctor had previously published for the learned classes, "with explanations" now given in addition, to render the arguments "intelligible" to meaner capacities; and as the "Infidel" and "Deist" are especially referred to as likely to be overthrown by this pamphlet, we may presume that the society considers that in the 119 pages – which the translated essay occupies – they have presented the best paper that can be issued on their behalf for popular reading on this question. The praise accorded by the society, and sundry laudations appropriated with much modesty in his own preface by Dr. Constantine Tischendorf to himself, compel one at the outset to regard the Christian manifesto as a most formidable production. The Society's translator impressively tells us that the pamphlet has been three times printed in German and twice in France; that it has been issued in Dutch and Russian, and is done into Italian by an Archbishop with the actual approbation of the Pope. The author's preface adds an account of his great journeyings and heavy travelling expenses incurred out of an original capital of a "few unpaid bills," ending in the discovery of a basketful of old parchments destined for the flames by the Christian monks in charge, but which from the hands of Dr. Tischendorf are used by the Religious Tract Society to neutralise all doubts, and to "blow to pieces" the Rationalistic criticism of Germany and the coarser Infidelity of England. Doubtless Dr. Tischendorf and the Society consider it some evidence in favor of the genuineness and authenticity of the four Gospels that the learned Doctor was enabled to spend 5,000 dollars out of less than nothing, and that the Pope regards his pamphlet with favor, or they would not trouble to print such statements. We frankly accord them the full advantage of any argument which may fairly be based on such facts. An autograph letter of endorsement by the Pope is certainly a matter which a Protestant Tract Society – who regard "the scarlet whore at Babylon" with horror – may well be proud of.

Dr. Tischendorf states that he has since 1839 devoted himself to the textual study of the New Testament, and it ought to be interesting to the orthodox to know that, as a result of twenty-seven

years' labor, he now declares that "it has been placed beyond doubt that the original text... had in many places undergone such serious modifications of meaning, as to leave us in painful uncertainty as to what the apostles had actually written," and that "the right course to take" "is to set aside the received text altogether and to construct a fresh text."

This is pleasant news for the true believer, promulgated by authority of the managers of the great Christian depot in Paternoster Row, from whence many scores of thousands of copies of this incorrect received text have nevertheless been issued without comment to the public, even since the society have published in English Dr. Tischendorf's declaration of its unreliable character.

With the modesty and honorable reticence peculiar to great men, Dr. Tischendorf records his successes in reading hitherto unreadable parchments, and we learn that he has received approval from "several learned bodies, and even from crowned heads," for his wonderful performances. As a consistent Christian, who knows that the "powers that be are ordained of God," our "critic without rival," for so he prints himself, regards the praise of crowned heads as higher in degree than that of learned bodies.

The Doctor discovered in 1844 the MS. on which he now relies to confute audacious Infidelity, in the Convent of St. Catherine at Sinai; he brought away a portion, and handed! that portion, on his return, to the Saxon Government – they paying all expenses. The Doctor, however, did not then divulge where he had found the MS. It was for the advantage of humankind that the place should be known at once, for, at least, two reasons. First, because by aid of the remainder of this MS. – "the most precious Bible treasure in existence" – the faulty text of the New Testament was to be reconstructed; and the sooner the work was done the better for believers in Christianity. And, secondly, the whole story of the discovery might then have been more easily confirmed in every particular.

For fifteen years, at least, Dr. Tischendorf hid from the world the precise locality in which his treasure had been discovered. Nay, he was even fearful when he knew that other Christians were trying to find the true text, and he experienced "peculiar satisfaction" when he ascertained that his silence had misled some pious searchers after reliable copies of God's message to all humankind; although all this time he was well aware that our received copies of God's revelation had undergone "serious modifications" since the message had been delivered from the Holy Ghost by means of the Evangelists.

In 1853, "nine years after the original discovery," Dr. Tischendorf again visited the Sinai convent, but although he had "enjoined on the monks to take religious care" of the remains of which they, on the former occasion, would not yield up possession, he, on this second occasion, and apparently after careful search, discovered "eleven short lines," which convinced him that the greater part of the MS. had been destroyed. He still, however, kept the place secret, although he had no longer any known reason for so doing; and, having obtained an advance of funds from the Russian Government, he, in 1859, tried a third time for his "pearl of St. Catherine," which, in 1853, he felt convinced had been destroyed, and as to which he had nevertheless, in the meantime, been troubled by fears that the good cause might be aided by some other than Dr. Tischendorf discovering and publishing the "priceless treasure," which, according to his previous statements, he must have felt convinced did not longer exist. On this third journey the Doctor discovered "the very fragments which, fifteen years before, he had taken out of the basket," "and also other parts of the Old Testament, the New Testament complete, and, in addition, Barnabas and part of Hermas."

With wonderful preciseness, and with great audacity, Dr. Tischendorf *refers* the transcription of the discovered Bible to the first half of the fourth century. Have Dr. Tischendorf's patrons here ever read of MSS. discovered in the same Convent of St. Catherine, at Sinai, of which an account was published by Dr. Constantine Simonides, and concerning which the *Westminster Review* said, "We share the suspicions, to use the gentlest word which occurs to us, entertained, we believe, by all competent critics and antiquarians."

In 1863 Dr. Tischendorf published, at the cost of the Russian Emperor, a splendid but very costly edition of his Sinaitic MS. in columns, with a Latin introduction. The book is an expensive one, and copies of it are not very plentiful in England. Perhaps the Religious Tract Society have not contributed to its circulation so liberally as did the pious Emperor of all the Russias. Surely a text on which our own is to be re-constructed ought to be in the hands at least of every English clergyman and Young Men's Christian Association.

"Christianity," writes Dr. Tischendorf, "does not, strictly speaking, rest on the moral teaching of Jesus;" "it rests on his person only." "If we are in error in believing in the person of Christ as taught in the Gospels, then the Church herself is in error, and must be given up as a deception." "All the world knows that our Gospels are nothing else than biographies of Christ." "We have no other source of information with respect to the life of Jesus." So that, according to the Religious Tract Society and its advocate, if the credibility of the Gospel biography be successfully impugned, then the foundations of Christianity are destroyed.

It becomes, therefore, of the highest importance to show that the biography of Jesus, as given in the four Gospels, is absolutely incredible and self-contradictory.

It is alleged in the Society's preface that all the objections of infidelity have been hitherto unavailing. This is, however, not true. It is rather the fact that the advocates of Christianity when defeated on one point have shuffled to another, either quietly passing the topic without further debate, or loudly declaring that the point abandoned was really so utterly unimportant that it was extremely foolish in the assailant to regard it as worthy attack, and that, in any case, all the arguments had been repeatedly refuted by previous writers.

To the following objections to the Gospel narrative the writer refuses to accept as answer, that they have been previously discussed and disposed of.

The Gospels which are yet mentioned by the names popularly associated with each do not tell us the hour, or the day, or the month, or – save Luke – the year, in which Jesus was born. The only point on which the critical divines, who have preceded Dr. Tischendorf, generally agree is, that Jesus was not born on Christmas day. The Oxford Chronology, collated with a full score of recognised authorities, gives us a period of more than seven years within which to place the date. So confused is the story as to the time of the birth, that while Matthew would make Jesus born in the lifetime of Herod, Luke would fix the period of Jesus's birth as after Herod's death.

Christmas itself is a day surrounded with curious ceremonies of pagan origin, and in no way serving to fix the 25th December as the natal day. Yet the exact period at which Almighty God, as a baby boy, entered the world to redeem long-suffering humanity from the consequences of Adam's ancient sin, should be of some importance.

Nor is there any great certainty as to the place of birth of Christ. The Jews, apparently in the very presence of Jesus, reproached him that he ought to have been born at Bethlehem. Nathaniel regarded him as of Nazareth. Jesus never appears to have said to either, "I was born at Bethlehem." In Matthew ii., 6, we find a quotation from the prophet: "And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, art not the least amongst the princes of Juda, for out of thee shall come a Governor that shall rule my people Israel." Matthew lays the scene of the birth in Bethlehem, and Luke adopts the same place, especially bringing the child to Bethlehem for that purpose, and Matthew tells us it is done to fulfil a prophecy. Micah v., 2, the only place in which similar words occur, is not a prophecy referring to Jesus at all. The words are: "But thou Beth-lehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." This is not quoted correctly in Matthew, and can hardly be said by any straining of language to apply to Jesus. The credibility of a story on which Christianity rests is bolstered up by prophecy in default of contemporary corroboration. The difficulties are not lessened in tracing the parentage. In Matthew i., 17, it is stated that "the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations, and from

David until the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations, and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations." Why has Matthew made such a mistake in his computation of the genealogies – in the last division we have only thirteen names instead of fourteen, even including the name of Jesus? Is this one of the cases of "painful uncertainty" which has induced the Religious Tract Society and Dr. Tischendorf to wish to set aside the *textus receptus* altogether?

From David to Zorobabel there are in the Old Testament twenty generations; in Matthew, seventeen generations; and in Luke, twenty-three generations. In Matthew from David to Christ there are twenty-eight generations, and in Luke from David to Christ forty-three generations. Yet, according to the Religious Tract Society, it is on the credibility of these genealogies as part of the Gospel history that the foundation of Christianity rests. The genealogy in the first Gospel arriving at David traces to Jesus through Solomon; the third Gospel from David traces through Nathan. In Matthew the names from David are Solomon, Roboam, Abia, Asa, Josaphat, Joram, Ozias; and in the Old Testament we trace the same names from David to Ahaziah, whom I presume to be the same as Ozias. But in 2nd Chronicles xxii., 11, we find one Joash, who is not mentioned in Matthew at all. If the genealogy in Matthew is correct, why is the name not mentioned? Amaziah is mentioned in chap, xxiv., v. 27, and in chap, xxvi., v. 1, Uzziah, neither of whom are mentioned in Matthew, where Ozias is named as begetting Jotham, when in fact three generations of men have come in between. In Matthew and Luke, Zorobabel is represented as the son of Salathiel, while in 1 Chronicles iii., 17 – 19, Zerubbabel is stated to be the son of Pedaiah, the brother of Salathiel. Matthew says Abind was the son of Zorobabel (chap, i., v. 13). Luke iii., 27, says Zorobabel's son was Rhesa. The Old Testament contradicts both, and gives Meshollam, and Hananiah, and Shelomith, their sister (1 Chronicles iii, 19), as the names of Zorobabel's children. Is this another piece of evidence in favor of Dr. Tischendorf's admirable doctrine, that it is necessary to reconstruct the text?

In the genealogies of Matthew and Luke there are only three names agreeing after that of David, viz., Salathiel, Zorobabel, and Joseph – all the rest are utterly different. The attempts at explanation which have been hitherto offered, in order to reconcile these genealogies, are scarcely creditable to the intellects of the Christian apologists. They allege that "Joseph, who by nature was the son of Jacob, in the account of the law was the son of Heli. For Heli and Jacob were brothers by the same mother, and Heli, who was the elder, dying without issue, Jacob, as the law directed, married his widow; in consequence of such marriage, his son Joseph was reputed in the law the son of Heli." This is pure invention to get over a difficulty – an invention not making the matter one whit more clear. For if you suppose that these two persons were brothers, then unless you invent a death of the mother's last husband and the widow's remarriage Jacob and Heli would be the sons of the same father, and the list of the ancestors should be identical in each genealogy. But to get over the difficulty the pious do this. They say, although brothers, they were only half-brothers; although sons of the same mother, they were not sons of the same father, but had different fathers. If so, how is it that Salathiel and Zorobabel occur as father and son in both genealogies? Another fashion of accounting for the contradiction is to give one as the genealogy of Joseph and the other as the genealogy of Mary. "Which?"

"Luke," it is said. Why Luke? what are Luke's words? Luke speaks of Jesus being, "as was supposed, the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli." When Luke says Joseph, the son of Heli, did he mean Mary, the daughter of Heli? Does the Gospel say one thing and mean another? because if that argument is worth anything, then in every case where a man has a theory which disagrees with the text, he may say the text means something else. If this argument be permitted we must abandon in Scriptural criticism the meaning which we should ordinarily intend to convey by any given word. If you believe Luke meant daughter, why does the same word mean son in every other case all through the remainder of the genealogy? And if the genealogy of Matthew be that of Joseph,

and the genealogy of Luke be that of Mary, they ought not to have any point of agreement at all until brought to David. They, nevertheless, do agree and contradict each other in several places, destroying the probability of their being intended as distinct genealogies. There is some evidence that Luke does not give the genealogy of Mary in the Gospel itself. We are told that Joseph went to Bethlehem to be numbered because he was of the house of David: if it had been Mary it would have surely said so. As according to the Christian theory, Joseph was not the father of Jesus, it is not unfair to ask how it can be credible that Jesus's genealogy could be traced to David in any fashion through Joseph?

So far from Mary being clearly of the tribe of Judah (to which the genealogy relates) her cousinship to Elisabeth would make her rather appear to belong to the tribe of Levi.

To discuss the credibility of the miraculous conception and birth would be to insult the human understanding. The mythologies of Greece, Italy, and India, give many precedents of sons of Gods miraculously born. Italy, Greece, and India, must, however, yield the palm to Judea. The incarnate Chrishna must give way to the incarnate Christ. A miraculous birth would be scouted to-day as monstrous; antedate it 2,000 years and we worship it as miracle.

Matt, i., 22, 23, says: "Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us." This is supposed to be a quotation from Isaiah vii., 14 – 16: "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good. For before the child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings."

But in this, as indeed in most other cases of inaccurate quotation, the very words are omitted which would show its utter inapplicability to Jesus. Even in those which are given, the agreement is not complete. Jesus was not called Emmanuel. And even if his mother Mary were a virgin, this does not help the identity, as the word [–] OLME in Isaiah, rendered "virgin" in our version, does not convey the notion of virginity, for which the proper word is [–] BeThULE; OLME is used of a youthful spouse recently married. The allusion to the land being forsaken of both her kings, omitted in Matthew, shows how little the passage is prophetic of Jesus.

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