

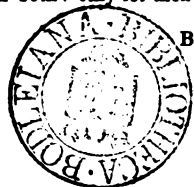
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Let no man, upon a weak conceit of sobriety or an ill-applied moderation, think or maintain that a man can search too far, or be too well studied in the book of God's word, or in the book of God's works; divinity or philosophy; but rather let men endeavour an endless progress, or proficience in both: only let men beware that they apply both to charity.



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VINDICATION OF THE SERIES OF CHAPTERS BY A LAYMAN,  
ENTITLED "ECCLESIASTICAL FORGERIES."

SIR,

MAY I request the favour of you to insert in your Magazine the subjoined remarks in reply to your correspondent W. J., [pp. 74—80,] relative to the series of chapters entitled "Ecclesiastical Forgeries."

W. J. says, "It is easy enough to start a dozen surmises off-hand on so difficult a subject as the authenticity and integrity of ancient authors. . . . The legitimate province of fair and dispassionate criticism is to sift the ancient witnesses which we cite to our tribunal, not to vilify them." If these words are *not* intended to apply to the "Ecclesiastical Forgeries," they are *à propos* to nothing,—quite true, but quite irrelevant; if they *are* so intended, I deny the insinuation. I have *not* dealt in "*surmises*:" my criticism has *not* been otherwise than "*fair and dispassionate*:" nor have I "*vilified*" any man or any writing. I have indeed often had occasion to *censure*: but I have always striven to exercise temper and moderation, and have always submitted to the reader's judgment the statements and reasonings upon which my conclusions are founded. These statements may have been erroneous, and the conclusions unsound; but I challenge proof of the other charges seemingly implied in the above extract. I also expect W. J. will adduce examples of "many exaggerations calculated to mislead the judgment."

W. J. says I "have not proved the undoubted forgery of any ancient book not before rejected." Nor did I write for that purpose. In the first chapter, I professed to "give a sketch of some of the principal ecclesiastical and theological *forgeries* and *fictions*," and to inform my readers on a point which has been *studiously kept out of sight, that fraud and dishonesty* have been employed to an unparalleled extent, (and their use justified by fathers of the church,) from very early times, in the defence and propagation of Christianity. Forgeries, adulterations, frauds, fictions and credulous narrations, are so intimately connected, that it is difficult to treat them as distinct subjects, especially in such casual and fugitive papers as those which I have contributed to the Christian Reformer. I acknowledge that the heading, "ECCLESIASTICAL FORGERIES," is not always a correct index to the contents of the paper; but I adopted it at the outset, for convenience and brevity's sake; and if the whole of the chapters followed continuously, in one essay, I conceive the general title would not be inappropriate.

From the words of W. J., that the authenticity of the various writings ascribed to the Christian fathers may be said to have been thoroughly discussed and settled, and that those who desire to know the results must have recourse to the voluminous Catholic and Protestant critics who have written on the subject, I almost suspect that W. J. would prefer that the question should not be mooted at all. Few libraries contain the ponderous authors alluded to by W. J., and to refer ordinary readers to this source of information, is practically to exclude them from all knowledge of the matter. If it is inexpedient to enlighten common persons on the malpractices and enor-

mities of early theologians, let such lore be locked up in the expensive, bulky and somewhat rare collections of the affluent. A contrary impression, as to the desirableness of popularizing this branch of literature, led me to make the humble attempt of condensing and digesting some of the materials which I met with in the course of my reading; not with a view of instructing those who had access to the same stores as myself, but of imparting information and stimulating inquiry among that class of readers who might not possess the same advantages.

The intimate connexion which subsists between the Christian and Jewish religions, is more than a sufficient apology for taking some notice of Jewish writings, both canonical and apocryphal. I have not asserted that any of these books are *forgeries*, according to W. J.'s definition; but I have adduced internal evidence and external authority to shew that many of them are grossly *interpolated*, and that they were *not written*, in many instances, *by the persons to whom they are attributed, or whose names they bear*. So, in the case of Josephus, I have shewn by his example, corroborated by the testimony of Prideaux and Du Pin, that the *school of romance and forgery was antecedent* to the Christian era. If this is a well-established fact, it is idle to pass it over, as a matter of no importance, on the plea that "it does not belong to *Christian ecclesiastical forgeries*." I contend that it is a question well worth examining, viz. when this trade and business of wholesale forgery, or of petty interpolation, commenced; and the answer to this question is not to be lost sight of in assigning probable dates to the early Christian forgeries.

I admit the full accuracy of one important passage in W. J.'s letter—"Eusebius was somewhat credulous, and in the age in which he lived, the marvellous and miraculous were rather too much in vogue." I accept this solution of the fabulous gossip which is found in the pages of Eusebius; but I must also be permitted to apply the principle universally, and to believe that the same causes uniformly produce the same effects. Knowing the character and habits of thought, the credulous expectations and ignorant mistakes, prevalent in the country and in the age of infant Christianity, I should expect, *à priori*, to find the stream of fable flowing onward with uninterrupted course. *Given*, in any people, a miraculous and marvellous tendency, a fondness for or expectation of the supernatural,—and the miracles, or what is the same thing, tales of miracles, will be generated as surely and as fast as flies in summer.

In the world's history, however, it seems, there has been one favoured century wherein this weakness of human nature has ceased to operate. Fictions, forgeries, romance and credulity, were rife every where till about A. D. 30; and Judea, it may be proved, had its full share of these elements. But then, it seems, there was a sudden suspension of credulity, and, with it, of fictitious and marvellous relations: TRUTH, without alloy, reigned triumphant for about a hundred years, when her old enemies, FRAUD and SUPERSTITION, recovered their ancient dominion, and drove her from her throne!

In opposition to W. J., I maintain the strict relationship between credulity and forgery, between fiction and imposture. The same state of mind disposes to the *reception* and the *generation* of fraud:

and if credulity has not the boldness to *invent*, neither has it the power to *detect* imposture. I will presently shew this to be the case by examples from Eusebius.

W. J. denies the truth of an assertion made by me, that "spurious and forged matter comes thickest across the reader's path as he comes nearest to the apostolic age." Among other arguments, W. J. says that "the writers of the N. T. do not complain of such forgeries." I infer from these words that our difference arises from the different ideas we attach to the phrase, "apostolic age." W. J. seems to limit this period to A. D. 64, or to the end of the first century. But by ecclesiastical writers, this age is brought down to a much later date. Hegesippus, for instance, is said to have been "*in the first succession of the apostles*," and is styled "an ancient and *apostolical* man;" yet he did not flourish till A. D. 173. (Euseb. E. H., II. 23; Lardner, I. 356, 4to.) So Polycarp is called by Eusebius (IV. 15), "the admirable and *apostolical* Polycarp;" yet he lived till A. D. 167; and Archbishop Wake carries down the series of "apostolical fathers" to this date. Justin Martyr, who died about 168, is called "*a man not far removed from the apostles in time or virtue*" (Lardner, I. 342); and Irenæus (A. D. 178—190) speaks of the Apocalypse as written "*almost in his own age*." (Lardner, I. 364.) If I had said that forgeries came thickest, as we came to the *heart* and *centre* of the apostolic age, W. J. might justly controvert the position; but the phrase, "as we come *nearest* to the apostolic age," necessarily excludes the apostolic age itself: and the only way in which W. J. can prove my statement to be unfounded is by shewing that the "apostolic age" terminates at the limit which he assumes. If this point be established, then not only is *my* error proved, but Hegesippus and Polycarp must be disfranchised of their title of primitive and apostolical fathers, and the most learned men will share in my ignorance or mistake. But, indeed, I did but echo the sentiment which I found in Du Pin, who says, "It is surprising to consider how many spurious books we find in antiquity, *nay even in the first ages of the church*." The same learned author shews that the practice of forgery commenced, if it did not arrive at maturity, in the very age of St. Paul. "*The first that practised this artifice was a certain presbyter, and a disciple of St. Paul, who being inflamed with a false zeal for his master, forged, under the name of St. Luke, the Acts of Paul and Thecla, and was convicted of this imposture by St. John, as we are assured by Tertullian, and after him by St. Jerom.*"\*

I grant that it is an exceedingly difficult thing to *prove* when and by whom the early forgeries were composed. But no less difficult is it to *prove* when and by whom the four canonical Gospels were written. The two first, Matthew and Mark, are mentioned for the *first* time by Papias (about A. D. 110); and from his silence about the other two, one would suspect that he knew nothing of them. It was not till the time of Justin Martyr (A. D. 150) that we find any direct quotations from written gospels or "memoirs;" and by this time the Sibylline Verses also had acquired such a celebrity, that

\* Du Pin's Eccles. Hist., I. p. 4.

Justin appeals to their authority with as much assurance as he does to the four evangelists.

There is internal evidence in Matthew's Gospel that it was not written before A. D. 70. In Matt. xxiii. 35, we read, "That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, son of Baruchias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar." Now Josephus (B. J., V. I.) gives us the particulars and the date of this murder of Zacharias. "There was one Zacharias, son of Baruch, a man of the first rank, a friend to all good men and an enemy to the wicked, a man of great authority and virtue. . . .so they (the Zelots) resolved to take his life. . . .two of these ruffians fell outrageously upon Zacharias, and murdered him in the middle of the temple." This event occurred during the siege of Jerusalem by the Romans, or A. D. 70. We read, indeed, in 2 Chronicles xxiv. 21, of one Zacharias being killed by the Jews in the temple; but that cannot be the Zacharias referred to by the author of the first Gospel, for *he* was the son of Jehoiada, and was killed 850 years before Christ. The instance of Abel is selected as the *earliest* murder on record, and of Zacharias, evidently, as the *most recent*. But where is the appropriateness of an example of a *recent* murder taken from the *remote* history of the Jews? How could "*all* the righteous blood shed upon the earth," be brought home to the Jews, if the last murder with which they were chargeable took place nearly 900 years before the time of the speaker?

With this forcible difficulty in my way, I cannot assent to the probability expressed by W. J., that the "four Gospels were in existence so early as A. D. 64." Indeed, the very supposition that John's Gospel was written at this early date, is quite *novel*, and contradicts all ecclesiastical tradition. Irenæus, the intimate friend of Polycarp, who was John's disciple, informs us that his Gospel was not written till after his return to Ephesus, or A. D. 97.\* I am aware that later writers have assigned an earlier date—some to A. D. 68 or 70. But if Irenæus did not know the matter, how shall *we* presume to guess?—and if Irenæus was mistaken on this simple point, how shall we rely on his testimony in other things, or on any remote testimony whatever?

It is no wonder, then, that as we are all at sea respecting the dates of so many *canonical* books, the same uncertainty should prevail as to those which are forged and interpolated.

Before leaving this subject, I must remind W. J. that by adopting the theory of one original anonymous document, from which the other four Gospels were derived, he takes the authorship at once from these evangelists, and makes them the servile copyists of a history ready-made to their hands. I do not mean to deny the great probability of some such primitive narrative; but what becomes of the *genuineness* of the four evangelical records, upon this hypothesis? And to what do we reduce the boasted testimony of eye-witnesses and disciples? The preface to Luke's Gospel is certainly adverse to this theory. For how could he profess to undertake a history from new

\* Cave's Antiq. Apost., p. 159.

and credible sources, when, after all, he was meditating only to follow in the beaten track of some predecessor, whose words he transcribes without stint and without acknowledgment? Certainly, if Luke drew from this original Gospel, his preface is disingenuous and deceptive. Every one would infer from his announcement, not that he was sitting down to transcribe largely from any of the multitudinous writers to whom he alludes, but that, having distinct and authentic materials of his own, he was prepared to enlighten the Christian community with *his* memoirs of the life of Jesus.

I beg permission to revert to a point already hinted at, and to shew that although Eusebius has not been guilty of any forgeries on his own account, he has relied on and given currency to the forgeries of others. And, however startling it may appear, I am prepared to prove, that up to the 31st chapter of the 3rd book, i. e. to the end of the first century, *Eusebius advances no contemporary external or documentary evidences (apart from the N. T.) in reference to the infancy of the Christian religion, but what are either blunders, falsehoods or forgeries.\** This is indeed a serious charge, but I think an examination of this portion of Eusebius will demonstrate that I am correct.

The first appeal to external documentary evidence is in ch. v., "Of the Times of our Saviour's Manifestation." "It was," he says, "the 42nd year of Augustus, when our Saviour J. C., *at the time of the first taxing under Cyrenius, governor of Judea, was born. . . . which taxing under Cyrenius, Fl. Josephus does mention.*" Now truly, Josephus does mention this very taxing, and affixes the precise date thereof: "It took place 37 years after the battle of Actium;" i. e. nine years after the death of Herod, and consequently at least *ten years after the birth of Jesus.* (Antiq. xviii. 3.) Justin Martyr, probably, led Eusebius into this blunder; for he says† that Christ was born in the time of Cyrenius. I may add, that if Jesus was born in the 42nd year of Augustus, Herod the Great could not have been alive at his birth, for Herod died A. U. C. 750. ‡

In c. ix., Eusebius again appeals to Josephus, and attributes to him what he does not say, viz., that Lysanias was tetrarch with Philip and Herod. Now Josephus says nothing of the sort, and makes no mention of any Lysanias being a contemporary with Herod's sons.

Chap. xi. After confirming the death of John, Eusebius introduces the celebrated forgery from Josephus respecting Jesus, which I have noticed in Ecclesiastical Forgeries, No. VIII.

The forged letters of Abgarus, king of Edessa, and of Jesus in reply, occupy the last chapter of the 1st book. § These are the sole authorities adduced in this book.

Book II. The forged Acts of Pilate, derived from Tertullian, are adduced in the 2nd chapter of this book. In chap. vi. he *again*

\* I except at once the corroboration which Josephus gives to the character and death of John the Baptist and to the siege of Jerusalem.

† Quoted by Du Pin, Vol. I. p. 56, London, 1692.

‡ Herod died (vide Bishop Pearce's Dissertation) A. U. C. 750.

The 42nd year of Augustus was A. U. C. . . . . . 752.

Archelaus deposed, and the taxing under Cyrenius . . . . . 759.

§ Vide Ecclesiastical Forgeries, No. VI.

attributes to Josephus what Josephus does not say: "To whom Josephus agrees, who notes that those troubles with which the whole Jewish nation was molested, began even from the times of Pilate, and from those enormous facts committed against our Saviour." Josephus does not say any thing of the kind; and Valesius shews that the narration of Josephus has no allusion to the circumstances mentioned by Eusebius.

In chap. x., Eusebius quotes from Josephus to corroborate the account of Herod Agrippa's death in Acts: "He was smitten by an angel, and eaten up of worms." But Josephus has no mention of either of these particulars. Josephus is quoted in the next chapter, respecting Theudas, also mentioned in the Acts. But the accounts in Josephus are irreconcilable with those in the book of Acts; and one or the other must give way.

The xiii<sup>th</sup> chapter contains the puerile falsehood, first propagated by Justin, that the Romans worshiped Simon Magus as a god.\*

Chap. xxi. has a reference to Josephus respecting "that Egyptian" mentioned in the Acts; but Josephus says that he led out 30,000 men: the Acts say 4000 men.

In chap. xxiii., Eusebius *again* imputes to Josephus language which he never used. "Josephus," he says, "was not afraid to testify this in writing, declaring himself in these words— '*These things befel the Jews in the way of revenge for James the Just, the brother of Jesus, called Christ, because the Jews had murdered him, being a most righteous person.*'" Now will it be believed that not one word of the above, written in italics, is found in Josephus?— and the clause about Christ is suspected of being a forgery. †

These are the only *contemporary* authorities on which Eusebius relies in the 2<sup>nd</sup> book of his History. When he wants to prove that Peter and Paul suffered at Rome at the same time, he has recourse to Dionysius, bishop of Corinth, A. D. 170, and Zephyrinus, bishop of Rome, A. D. 212. But how is this account consistent with what Paul says (2 Tim. iv. 11), "The time of my departure is at hand... only Luke is with me"?

I say nothing of the passages quoted out of Philo, the Jew, respecting the Therapeutæ, whom Eusebius wishes to identify with the Christians; because, as Valesius observes, the description given of these ascetics does not accord with the practices of the professors of the Christian religion.

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> book, there is *no appeal* † to *contemporary authorities*. The authors cited are, Irenæus, A. D. 170—200; Hegesippus, A. D. 173; Polycrates, A. D. 185—196; Clemens Alex., A. D. 194; Justin, 150; Caius, A. D. 212; Tertullian, A. D. 200—245. In lieu of such evidence, we have unaccredited traditions and hear-say accounts. Chap. i., "Thomas, *as tradition hath it*, had Parthia allotted to him." Chap. iv., "*They say* that Paul was wont to mean the Gospel of Luke, when speaking of his own Gospel." Chap. xii., "*It is re-*

\* Vide Ecclesiastical Forgeries, No. IX.

† See note to Hudson's Josephus, folio, Oxford, 1770, Vol. II. p. 896.

‡ I have already excepted Josephus' account of the siege of Jerusalem. But I do not consider this as a fact connected with the rise of the Christian religion, or recorded, properly speaking, in the N. T.

ported that Vespasian sought out the kindred of David." Chap. xviii., "It is reported that John the apostle was banished," &c. And chap. xxiv. contains four *hear-says* about the origin of the four Gospels.

There are two remaining passages in W. J.'s letter which I shall very briefly notice. He speaks of the "belief which gained ground early in the 2nd century, that Christ was born of a Virgin." Does W. J. mean to deny that this doctrine is taught in the first and third evangelists? W. J. also speaks of "the irreconcilable genealogies of Matthew and Luke," and evidently pronounces them *forgeries*. His words are, "Justin, followed by Irenæus and others, specifically referred to some *notorious forgeries*. . . these were the Prophecies of Hystaspes, the Acts of Pilate, the Oracles of the Sibyl,—to say nothing of the *irreconcilable genealogies of Matthew and Luke*. These *forgeries* were not mentioned by any before Justin." Now, that these genealogies are *irreconcilable*, I am ready to acknowledge; but if W. J. pronounces them *forgeries*, he "starts a surmise off-hand," deserts the "province of fair and dispassionate criticism," and "vilifies rather than sifts ancient witnesses." There is no valid argument which can be brought to dislodge these preliminary chapters from their respective places. They have always been as much a part and parcel of Matthew and of Luke, as any chapters in the middle or end. Mr. Martineau has fairly conceded the unsoundness of Mr. Belsham's argument against the authenticity of the first chapters of Matthew.\* To expunge those texts which clash with each other, as interpolations, is contrary to all critical rule. The only way is to deal with them as we should do with any other author, and impute the discrepancy to the ignorance of one or of both of the writers themselves.

A LAYMAN.

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WALPOLIANA.

"Turning Methodist."

MANY passages in the "Correspondence" shew the impression made upon the upper ranks of society by Whitfield and Wesley. Walpole always affects to despise the apostles and the disciples; his language concerning them is sometimes full of hate; but it is evident that he saw that they were bringing on a spiritual revolution. He asks of the Earl of Strafford,—June 25, 1768,—V. 210,—“Is it true that Lady Rockingham is turned Methodist? It will be a great acquisition to the sect to have their hymns set by Giardini. Pope Joan Huntingdon will be deposed, if the husband becomes first minister. I doubt, too, the saints will like to call at Canterbury and Winchester in their way to heaven. My charity is so small, that I do not think their virtue a jot more obdurate than that of patriots.”

*Monkery.*

Walpole confesses to Mr. Chute, from Paris,—Aug. 5, 1771,—V. 309,—his faded interest in the *spectacles* of the Romish Church, though it will be hereafter seen that he agreed with the bitter High-Churchman—his correspondent—Cole, of Milton,—in liking the "romance" of Popery.—“It is very singular that I have not half the satisfaction in going into churches and convents that I used to

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\* "The Bible—what it is, and what it is not," p. 18, and note at p. 49.