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NAPOLEON'S ARGUMENT

FOR

THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST, AND THE SCRIPTURES,

IN A CONVERSATION WITH GENERAL BERTRAND, AT
ST. HELENA.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH.

“TRUE, Christ offers to our faith a series of mysteries. He commands us authoritatively to believe, and gives no other reason than his awful word, *I am God*.

“True, this is an article of mere faith, and upon it depend all the other articles of the Christian system; but the doctrine of the divinity of Christ once admitted, Christianity appears with the precision and clearness of algebra; it has the connectedness and unity of a science.

“This doctrine, resting upon the Bible, best explains the traditions prevalent in the world. It throws light upon them; and all the other doctrines of Christianity are strictly connected with it, as links of the same chain. The nature of Christ's existence is mysterious, I admit; but this mystery meets the wants of man; reject it, and the world is an inexplicable riddle—believe it, and the history of our race is satisfactorily explained.

Christianity has one advantage over all systems, of

philosophy, and all religions; Christians do not delude themselves in regard to the nature of things. You cannot reproach them with the subtleties and artifices of those idealists who think to solve profound theological problems by their empty dissertations. Fools! their efforts are those of the infant who tries to touch the sky with his hand, or cries to have the moon for his plaything. Christianity says simply, 'No man hath seen God but God. God reveals what he is; his revelation is a mystery which neither imagination nor reason can conceive. But when God speaks, man must believe.' This is sound common-sense.

"The Gospel possesses a secret virtue of indescribable efficacy, a warmth which influences the understanding and softens the heart; in meditating upon it, you feel as you do in contemplating the heavens. The gospel is more than a book; it is a living thing—active, powerful, overcoming every obstacle in its way. See upon this table this book of books," and here the emperor touched it reverently; "I never cease reading it, and always with new delight.

"Christ never hesitates, never varies in his instructions, and the least of his assertions is stamped with a simplicity and a depth which captivate the ignorant and the learned, if they give it their attention.

"Nowhere is to be found such a series of beautiful thoughts, fine moral maxims, following one another like ranks of a celestial army, and producing in the soul the same emotion as is felt in contemplating the infinite extent of the resplendent heavens on a fine summer night.

"Not only is our mind absorbed; it is controlled, and the soul can never go astray with this book for its guide.

"Once master of our mind, the gospel is a faithful friend. God himself is our Friend, our Father, and truly our God. A mother has not greater care for the

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infant on her breast. The soul, captivated by the beauty of the gospel, is no longer its own. God occupies it altogether; he directs its thoughts and all its faculties; it is his.

“What a proof it is of the divinity of Christ, that with so absolute an empire, his single aim is the spiritual melioration of individuals, their purity of conscience, their union to the truth, their holiness of soul.

“My last argument is, there is not a God in heaven, if a mere man was able to conceive and execute successfully the gigantic design of making himself the object of supreme worship, by usurping the name of God. Jesus alone dared to do this: he alone said clearly and unflinchingly of himself, *I am God*; which is quite different from saying, *I am a god*, or *there are gods*. History mentions no other individual who has appropriated to himself the title of God in the absolute sense. Heathen mythology nowhere pretends that Jupiter and the other gods themselves assumed divinity. It would have been on their part the height of pride and absurdity. They were deified by their posterity, the heirs of the first despots. As all men are of one race, Alexander could call himself the son of Jupiter; but Greece laughed at the silly assumption; and so, in making gods of their emperors, the Romans were not serious. Mahomet and Confucius merely gave out that they were agents of the Deity. Numa's goddess Egeria was only the personification of his reflections in the solitude of the woods. The Brahmas of India are only deifications of mental attributes.

“How, then, should a Jew, the particulars of whose history are better attested than that of any of his contemporaries—how should he alone, the son of a carpenter, give out all at once that he was God, the Creator of all things? He arrogates to himself the highest adoration. He constructs his worship with his own hands,

not with stones but with men. You are amazed at the conquests of Alexander. But here is a conqueror who appropriates to his own advantage, who incorporates with himself not a nation, but the human race. Wonderful! the human soul with all its faculties becomes blended with the existence of Christ.

“And how? by a prodigy surpassing all other prodigies he seeks the love of men, the most difficult thing in the world to obtain; he seeks what a wise man would fain have from a few friends, a father from his children, a wife from her husband, a brother from a brother—in a word, the heart; this he seeks, this he absolutely requires, and he gains his object. Hence, I infer his divinity. Alexander, Cæsar, Hannibal, Louis XIV, with all their genius, failed here. They conquered the world and had not a friend. I am, perhaps, the only person of my day who loves Hannibal, Cæsar, Alexander. Louis XIV, who shed so much lustre upon France and the world, had not a friend in all his kingdom, not even in his own family. True, we love our children, but it is from instinct, from a necessity which the beasts themselves obey; and how many children manifest no proper sense of our kindness and the cares we bestow on them—how many ungrateful children? Do your children, General Bertrand, love you? you love them, but you are not sure of being requited. Neither natural affection nor your kindness, will ever inspire in them such love as Christians have for God. When you die your children will remember you—doubtless while spending your money; but your grandchildren will hardly know that you ever existed. And yet you are General Bertrand! And we are here upon an island, where all your cares and all your enjoyments are centered in your family.

“Christ speaks, and at once generations become his by stricter, closer ties than those of blood; by the most

sacred, most indissoluble of all unions. He lights up the flame of love which consumes self-love, which prevails over every other love.

“In this wonderful power of his will we recognize the Word that created the world.

“The founders of other religions never conceived of this mystical love, which is the essence of Christianity, and is beautifully called charity.

“Hence it is that they have struck upon a rock. In every attempt to effect this thing, namely, *to make himself beloved*, man deeply feels his own impotence.

“So that Christ’s greatest miracle undoubtedly is the reign of charity.

“He alone succeeded in lifting the heart of man to things invisible, and in inducing him to sacrifice temporal things; he alone, by influencing him to this sacrifice, has formed a bond of union between heaven and earth.

“All who sincerely believe in him taste this wonderful, supernatural, exalted love, which is beyond the power of reason, above the ability of man: a sacred fire brought down to earth by this new Prometheus, and of which Time, the great destroyer, can neither exhaust the force, nor limit the duration. The more I,” Napoleon, “think of this, I admire it the more. And it convinces me absolutely of the divinity of Christ.

“I have inspired multitudes with such affection for me that they would die for me. God forbid that I should compare the soldier’s enthusiasm with Christian charity, which are as unlike as their cause.

“But, after all, my presence was necessary, the lightning of my eye, my voice, a word from me; then the sacred fire was kindled in their hearts. I do, indeed, possess the secret of this magical power which lifts the soul, but I could never impart it to any one; none of

my generals ever learnt it from me ; nor have I the secret of perpetuating my name and love for me in the hearts of men, and to effect these things without physical means.

“Now that I am at St. Helena—now that I am alone, chained to this rock, who fights and wins empires for me? Where are any to share my misfortune—any to think of me? Who bestirs himself for me in Europe? Who remains faithful to me; where are my friends? Yes, two or three of you, who are immortalized by this fidelity, ye share, ye alleviate my exile.”

Here the emperor's voice choked with grief.

“Yes, my life once shone with all the brilliance of the diadem and the throne, and yours, Bertrand, reflected that brilliance, as the dome of the ‘Invalides,’ gilt by me, reflects the rays of the sun. But disasters came, the gold gradually became dim, and now all the brightness is effaced by the rain of misfortune and outrage with which I am continually pelted. We are mere lead now, General Bertrand, and soon I shall be in my grave.

“Such is the fate of great men. So it was with Cæsar and Alexander, and I, too, am forgotten; and the name of a conqueror and an emperor is a college theme! our exploits are tasks given to pupils by their tutor, who sits in judgment upon us, awarding us censure or praise.

“How different the opinions formed of the great Louis XIV. Scarcely dead, the great king was left alone in his solitary chamber at Versailles—neglected by his courtiers, and, perhaps, the object of their ridicule. He was no more their master. He was a dead body, in his coffin, the prey of a loathsome putrefaction.

“And mark what is soon to become of me—assassinated by the English oligarchy, I die before my time,

and my dead body, too, must return to the earth to become food for worms.

“Such is soon to be the fate of the great Napoleon. What a wide abyss between my deep misery and the eternal kingdom of Christ, which is proclaimed, loved, adored, and which is extending over all the earth! Is this death! is it not life rather? The death of Christ is the death of a god.”

The emperor paused, and as General Bertrand did not answer, the emperor resumed :

“You do not perceive that Jesus Christ is God? then I did wrong to appoint you general!”

The above is translated from a French tract, printed in Paris, with the title “Napoleon.” The narrative is confirmed by a letter from the Rev. Dr. G. De Felice, professor in the Theological Seminary at Montauban, France, in a communication inserted in the New York Observer of April 16, 1842.

Professor De Felice states, that the Rev. Dr. Bogue sent Napoleon, at St. Helena, a copy of his “Essay on the Divine Authority of the New Testament,” which eye-witnesses attest that he read with interest and satisfaction. He also states, that similar witnesses attest that he read much in the Bible, and spoke of it with profound respect; and, further, that there was a religious revival among the inhabitants of St. Helena, which extended to the soldiers, who prayed much for the conversion and salvation of the noble prisoner. Professor De Felice closes his communication by translating from a recent French journal the following conversation related by *Count de Montholon*, the faithful friend of the emperor.

“I know men,” said Napoleon, “and I tell you that Jesus is not a man!”

“The religion of Christ is a mystery which subsists by its own force, and proceeds from a mind which is not a human mind. We find in it a marked individuality, which originated a train of words and maxims

unknown before — Jesus borrowed nothing from our knowledge. He exhibited in himself the perfect example of his precepts. Jesus is not a philosopher; for his proofs are miracles, and from the first his disciples adored him. In fact, learning and philosophy are of no use for salvation; and Jesus came into the world to reveal the mysteries of heaven and the laws of the Spirit.

“Alexander, Cæsar, Charlemagne, and myself founded empires; but upon what did we rest the creations of our genius? Upon *force*. Jesus Christ alone founded his empire upon *love*; and at this hour millions of men would die for him.

“It was not a day or a battle which achieved the triumph of the Christian religion in the world. No; it was a long war, a contest for three centuries, begun by the apostles, then continued by the flood of Christian generations. In this war all the kings and potentates of earth were on one side: on the other I see no army but a mysterious force, some men scattered here and there in all parts of the world, and who have no other rallying point than a common faith in the mysteries of the cross.

“I die before my time, and my body will be given back to the earth to become food for worms. Such is the fate which so soon awaits him who has been called the great Napoleon. What an abyss between my deep misery and the eternal kingdom of Christ, which is proclaimed, loved, and adored, and which is extending over the whole earth! Call you this dying; is it not living rather? The death of Christ is the death of a God!”

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