

# The Bible Student.

CONTINUING

## The Bible Student and Religious Outlook.

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**The Speeches  
In Acts.** There is nothing in the Book of Acts more remarkable than the series of speeches incorporated into it. If we look at them merely quantitatively, their number and mass are so great as to constitute them an outstanding feature of the book. The slightest penetration beneath the surface reveals in them a freshness, a variety, a fitness to the several occasions on which they are said to have been spoken, to the several speakers to whom they are attributed, to the general proprieties of the several situations and the stages of development of the Church and of doctrine at which they are introduced, that are nothing less than astonishing. Their presence in it not only gives a marked vitality and vividness to the narrative, but adds to it a *vraisemblance* which is almost irresistible. It is scarcely possible to rise from an attentive perusal of these speeches without the conviction that they represent speeches actually delivered by the persons to whom they are attributed at the points of time and on the occasions to which they are assigned. Decidedly, they constitute a phenomenon with which those who would have us believe that the Book of Acts is more or

less a piece of imaginative literature, dating from post-Apostolic times, must reckon.

### Are They Inventions of The Author?

What critics of this class would fain have us think of them we may learn as well as elsewhere from the article on Acts contributed by Professor PAUL W. SCHMIEDL to Dr. CHEYNE'S *Encyclopaedia Biblica* (I. 47). "With regard to the speeches," says he, "it is beyond doubt that the author constructed them in each case according to his own conception of the situation. In doing so, he simply followed the acknowledged practice of ancient historians. Thucydides (I. 22, 1), expresses himself distinctly on this point; the others adopt the practice tacitly without any one's seeing anything in it morally questionable." That is to say, briefly, the author of the Acts is to be supposed to have placed within the mouths of his characters speeches composed by himself, according to his idea of what on such occasions these characters might well be imagined to have said; and the speeches he presents us are, therefore, only a part of his art in giving vividness to the narrative, and are to be read rather as embodying his

conceptions of the characters and situations portrayed than as veritable documents from which we can form our conceptions of them.

**The Example  
Of Classical  
Historians.**

The prevalence of this mode of writing history among the Greek classical historians undoubtedly lends some color to the assumption that the author of Acts may also have followed it. It certainly seems natural to suppose that a writer of history of the first century after Christ, would stand under the influence of the great historiographers of the classical age, and would be apt to adopt the mode of presenting his material and of telling his story which had been consecrated by their example. "Or are we to hold," asks Mr. ARTHUR WRIGHT (*The Gospel According to St. Luke in Greek, &c.*, p. xviii.) "that an inspired writer was entirely free from the influences of the age in which he lived?" The dilemma in which Mr. WRIGHT would place us by this question does not seem, however, altogether inevitable. It may very well be that an inspired writer would not write history precisely like even the greater heathen writers of his time, and yet not be "entirely free from the influences of the age in which he lived." And it does not seem impossible that we may lay too much weight on the analogy which it is attempted to make out between the Greek historiographers and the author of Acts, in their relation to the speeches incorporated into their narratives.

**Thucydides  
Denies that  
His are Pure  
Inventions.**

For one thing, very scant justice seems to be done to Thucydides in the use which is made of his practice in this regard. Did Thucydides "freely compose"—this is the

phrase most commonly used—the speeches which he placed in the mouths of his characters? Not if we are to believe his own testimony. He draws a sharp distinction between his method of writing history and that most in vogue among his contemporaries, on the very ground that his concern is with the record of fact, theirs with attractiveness of impression. In other words, he distinguishes between the historical motive that dominated him and the artistic motive that ruled in their compositions: and on that very ground contrasts his work as a "possession forever," with their prize-essays designed merely to tickle the ears of the hearers of the moment. He does not, indeed, claim equal exactitude for his record of speeches with his record of facts. He professes to have made the most laborious inquisition into the facts and to have set down only what had actually happened, and as it happened. As for the speeches, on the other hand, he remarks on the difficulty of recalling "the exact words of what was said," and so excuses his permission to himself of a certain freedom in reproducing them. But he by no means confesses to an entire invention of them; on the contrary, he professes to have adhered as closely as possible to the general sense of what was really said, and only within those limits to have allowed himself to give a form and character of his own to the several speeches recorded. This is very far from "free composition" of speeches to be placed in the mouths of historical characters. It is a claim to have made a substantially true record of what was said.

**Livy's Purpose  
And that of Acts  
Not Identical.** It is exceedingly doubtful, moreover, whether any instructive analogy can be drawn in a matter of this kind be-

tween the classical historiographers and the New Testament narrators. Mr. ARTHUR WRIGHT seems to think he has gone far towards settling the matter of Luke's exactitude as a historian by adducing the example of Livy. Livy, it seems, "is very far, indeed, from showing any excessive scruples about accuracy. He never visits a battle-field or verifies a description. He counts his authorities rather than weighs them. He follows first one and then another, taking little care to reconcile them or fill up the gaps between them." "St. Luke," he adds, "was writing in a much less ambitious way, with an entirely different purpose; ought we to suppose that his historical conscience was so much more enlightened than Livy's?" It does not appear why we should not answer by a hearty "Yes;" and on the very ground that Luke "was writing in a much less ambitious way, with an entirely different purpose." In a word, Livy was far more concerned to produce literature than an exact record; Luke was far more concerned to produce record than literature (Luke i. 2-3). And it is because of this difference that the analogy utterly fails between them.

**Contrast  
Between  
Heathen and  
Christian Point  
Of View.**

It would be difficult to press this contrast too far. The Greeks made everything of form and in the entire sphere of literature, too, wrought consciously or unconsciously on the maxim of art for art's sake. Exactitude, even general accuracy, was of little moment to them in comparison with beauty, artistic impression. Christians wrought, on the contrary, on the maxim of truth for truth's sake. And there is a deep and true sense in which it may be said that from the very beginning Christian literature differentiated itself from that of the

heathen, just by its renunciation of all striving after beauty of form. When Paul declares that he came to the Corinthians with no excellency of speech (I. Cor. ii. 1), and freely admitted his rudeness in speech—but, he adds significantly, "not in knowledge" (II. Cor. xi. 6),—he sounds the keynote of early Christian literary work. This principle was carried so far, indeed, that a conscious contrast was erected between Christian and heathen literature just on the ground of the distinction between content and form. EDUARD NORDEN, writing from the standpoint of the pure philologist, remarks (*Die antike Kunstprosa*, II. 458): "The struggle between Hellenism and Christianity,—if we wish to keep in view a single and that an essential aspect—may be called a struggle between form and content." Christian writers, he says again (p. 529), "from the earliest times to deep in the middle ages, almost without exception, in theory defended the standpoint that they must write in a homely way." It was even made a topic of serious debate whether a Christian should not write ill elaborately and of set purpose: for "why," asked Gregory the Great, "should the words of the heavenly oracle be straitened under the rules of Donatus?" We are not suggesting that the Book of Acts is written under the influence of so fanatical a theory. That belongs to later and less simple times when the very preference of Christian writers for inartificial writing had become itself an artifice; and men, actually following the bombastic, finical, affected style of the Sophists, compounded with their Christian consciences by such extremities of theory. But we are contending that what NORDEN calls the "formlessness" of the New Testament writings in contrast with the excessive devotion to form of the

heathen,—the stress they laid on “knowledge” as over against “excellency of speech”—induces such a contrast between the two that the analogy of the subordination of truth to rhetoric in the case of the one does not hold good with reference to the other. If Thucydides could discriminate his history from that of the average rhetorical composition of the time, on the score of his superior regard for truth in his presentation whether of the facts or the speeches; much more might the author of Acts on precisely the same ground differentiate his work from that even of Thucydides himself.

**Impossibility of Explaining the Speeches as Pure Inventions.** It is, however, from the *a posteriori* standpoint that the difficulty of attributing these speeches to the “free composition” of the author of the book becomes most apparent. These speeches are not, in themselves, such as we can easily accredit to the author of the book. They do bear, to be sure, such traces of his hand as inevitably accompanies their adjustment to his use: they owe, no doubt, much of their condensation, for example, to him. But their prime characteristic is not this. It is rather their redolence of the personalities to which they are attributed in the narrative. So marked is this, that even those most persistent in attributing them rather to the author of the book, usually find it impossible to carry this contention really through. Thus even SCHMIDEL after roundly ascribing the speeches to the author of the book, and laboring to show that they are unhistorical, is compelled at once to allow that this theory will not account for the Christology embedded in the speeches attributed to Peter: “It is hardly possible not to believe that this Christology of the speeches

of Peter must have come from a primitive source.” No more instructive example can be found, however, than that afforded by the treatment of the subject by the late Dr. SAMUEL DAVIDSON in that melancholy second *Introduction to the Study of the New Testament* which he put forth to counteract the good effects of his first. After the fullest consideration of the internal character of the speeches, prosecuted with the evident determination to make the worst of them possible, the conclusion that he is compelled to reach is (II. p. 120): “The speeches should not be considered the free composition of the writer *altogether*. As he used sources oral and written, he had information from without. But the nature of the speeches necessitates the conclusion that they received part of their substance and most of their form from the narrator.” Which, being interpreted, is that the speeches cannot by any means be accounted for as the “free composition” of the author of the book; but after everything has been attributed to him which could on any, even the wildest hypothesis, be possibly attributed to him, there remains yet a large residuum both of substance and form which cannot by any possibility be attributed to him, but must be attributed to the speakers to whom the several speeches are assigned. These speeches then, are not the “free composition” of the author of the book at all; at the most they have been somewhat reworked by him to adjust them to his use; in any possible event they are true general reports of what their reputed authors actually said.

**Was the Author of Acts the Greatest of Dramatists?** This being confessedly the general character of these speeches, let us consider what would be involved in supposing them, never-

theless, the "free composition" of the author of Acts. In the first place, we should have to ascribe to him nothing less than the highest quality of dramatic genius. There is probably nothing quite equal to it in the whole of literature. Certainly no parallel can be found in the speeches embodied in their narratives by the classical historians; not even in Thucydides. For note, we are not speaking here of literary but specifically of dramatic genius. Even ROBERT BROWNING'S *Dramatis Personae* are not in the same class with these simple, apparently unstudied, and yet perfectly fitting speeches, redolent each of the mental characteristics, stage of development, and very phraseology of the author in whose mouth it is put. And note the subtle, almost sly, skill of this supreme characterizer, who never forgets the dramatic proprieties for a single second. Not only is Peter not allowed in his earlier speeches to transcend the stage of doctrinal development then attained in the delivery of doctrine and is only slowly carried upwards towards the "Paulinism" of his Epistles. Not only is Paul, on the contrary, all that the Paul of the Epistles is, and his speeches filled with his characteristic phraseology. But where he is represented as having spoken in Hebrew (xxii. 1-21)—here, surely, the artifice of this great artificer will fail! But no, this speech is full of Hebraisms and is peculiar among the speeches attributed to him in being entirely lacking in echoes of Paul's Greek style! Surely, if these speeches are to be viewed not as records of what was said and how it was said, but as rhetorical exercises of a "free" writer, the world has hitherto done gross injustice to one of the greatest dramatic geniuses it has yet produced.

**Did the Author Have a Minute Knowledge of The Apostolic Age?** But there would be more involved than even this remarkable dramatic talent in the "free composition" of this series of speeches. This, namely: the most minute and exact knowledge of the whole course of Apostolic history and of all the actors in it. For this dramatist is not dealing with imaginary characters developing an imaginary plot—over which and over whom he has a certain power and needs only to conceive all his details consistently with themselves in order to present a unitary and harmonious picture. He is dealing with a section of actual history and with characters that actually lived and wrought: and we know somewhat of this history and much of these characters apart from his narrative. He has been compelled, therefore, to be consistent not only with himself, but also with the characters with whom he deals, as otherwise known to us. And it is this that he has thoroughly accomplished in the speeches he has attributed to them. It is the Peter of the Gospels that reappears in the Acts; the Peter of his Epistles that speaks in the speeches attributed to him. It is the James of his Epistle that we recognize in the discourse put here into his mouth. It is the thought, manner, the very diction of Paul's Epistles that meet us again in the speeches he is here made to deliver. And all this is not done with a coarse hand, as if the Epistles were the source of the information thus utilized; but with the utmost *finesse*, fitting everything into its true historical place and development. It cannot be denied that the author of the Book of Acts, on the supposition that he composed these speeches, had access to minute and trustworthy information as to the whole course of

the Apostolic history and as to all the actors in it, no longer accessible to us. We may even go further and say that the one who could compose these speeches must be accredited with so thorough and so exact a knowledge of the Apostolic Church and its chief leaders, that it would be impossible for him not to have had communicated to him the contents of any important speeches they may have made. In other words, in order to account for the "free composition" of these speeches, we must attribute to the "free composer" such a detailed knowledge of the whole course of the Apostolic history, as to render it unnecessary for him to "compose" these speeches: they would be naturally put in his hands already composed.

**How Account For Preservation Of the Speeches?** If we are asked how we are to suppose the speeches were preserved for record in this book, we do not know that a definite answer is incumbent on us. Here the speeches are: and this is their character. They cannot, being what they are, be the products of "free composition;" they are obviously, whatever slight modification they may have received from the hand of the writer, recorded substantially as they were delivered. This fact remains a fact, and the valid basis of all inferences legitimately derived from it, even though we may remain in ignorance of the process by means of which they were preserved. And it is worth while to note that nothing is told us in the narrative itself of the means taken to preserve them. They are simply introduced as speeches actually delivered, bearing in themselves all the marks of speeches actually delivered; and left to tell their own tale. There are, however, two *verae causae* which speculatively suggest themselves to

us, which may have played a part—the one or the other—in their preservation, and to which we may briefly advert as possibly accounting for it.

**Were they Taken Down In Short-hand?**

We may think, for example, of shorthand writing. There are some of the speeches, to be sure, which it seems scarcely possible to suppose were taken down in short-hand. Who, for example, would have been likely so to take down those early speeches of Peter's—which nevertheless bear strong internal marks of authenticity,—the very character of which was their suddenness? But there are other addresses, such, for example, as those delivered before Felix and Agrippa and Festus, at the delivery of which it is altogether probable that shorthand writers were present and probably officially employed in taking them down. How widely short-hand was used in Greek-speaking lands at the opening of our era, we scarcely know with accuracy. **DIOGENES LAERTIUS** seems to tell us (ii. 48) that Xenophon was the first of the pupils of the philosophers to use it in "taking notes" of his master's discourse. A little later it appears to have been common enough. Thus, for example, when **Flavius Philostratus** left Antioch it seems the most natural thing in the world to tell us that he took with him both a tachygrapher and a calligrapher—the former to catch, the latter to record his speech. So again, **EUSEBIUS** tells us that Origen, when writing his commentaries, dictated to no fewer than seven tachygraphers, who relieved each other at intervals, while as many bibliographers recorded their notes and female calligraphers beautified them. The Greek Sophists were accustomed to have their orations taken down by tachy-

graphers, and it is to this custom, passed over to the church, that we owe the preservation of the discourses of the great preachers. Of course, the common run of preachers did not enjoy this distinction, and so we know nothing of the ordinary preaching of the times, and have in our hands only the "rhetorical exercises." When we remember what the Apostles and Prophets were to the early Church, it does not seem impossible that many of their speeches were taken down from their lips in short-hand.

**Were they Kept in Trained Memories?** And we must remember that those were days of prodigious and prodigiously cultivated memories. "Commit nothing to writing" was a maxim of the Rabbis: and in its observance the finest scope was found for the development of the memory. The ideal of proficiency was that the mind of the hearer should be like a "well-plastered wall, which will not lose a drop." Many hearers of the early Apostolic proclamation had been trained in this school of quick and retentive memory; and were capable of receiving and retaining a speech on its delivery, to be afterwards delivered up again on demand. And let us remind ourselves again that these speeches were not languidly listened to. There is not merely the enthusiasm begotten by the fresh proclamation of the glad-tidings to be reckoned with, but the authority claimed by the speakers. At such times even an indifferent memory exhibits unwonted power: a well trained memory might be trusted to give a good report of itself. As Mr. HEADLAM well says (*Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible*, I. 58), "The speeches of the leading Apostles would impress themselves on the growing community and would be

remembered as the words of the Lord were remembered."

**Were they Recorded by Luke at Once?** We have purposely taken no account thus far of the personality of the author of Acts, to whom we owe the record of these speeches. But it is only fair to remind ourselves, before closing, that if he really was what he represents himself as having been, a close companion of Paul's later years, who accompanied him to Jerusalem and Rome, this will go far to account for the preservation of many of the speeches here recorded. Many of them the author must have himself heard; of many more he enjoyed the fullest opportunity to obtain a complete account. No doubt, we are thus attributing to him certain qualities of interest and memory. But surely we are authorized to do that in the case of a historian who took his task as seriously as he represents himself to have done in his preface to Luke's Gospel, and as he exhibits himself as having done in every page of his narrative. Even a BOSWELL, because he had given himself to the task of writing his hero's life, "acquired," as he tells us, "a faculty of recollecting," and grew very "assiduous in recording" Johnson's conversation,—with the result that every one knows. Need we hesitate to attribute a like acquisition and assiduity to Luke? B. B. W.

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**Apocalypse—The Name.** Apocalypse is simply the word *ἀποκάλυψις* in English dress. This Greek term means unveiling, revelation. Nor does its meaning change when it is transliterated. This appears from the fact that the last book of Scripture is called indifferently either The Apocalypse, or