

THE SELECTED FOUR

SYNOPSIS

THE IDEA OF A NEW TESTAMENT

The circulation of Gnostic Gospel and Acts and the still more dangerous competition of a compact New Testament put out by the semi-Gnostic Marcion forced the Church in self-defence to assign an exclusive canonical authority—not inferior to that heretofore ascribed to the Old Testament—to those older lives of Christ which it regarded as specially authentic. Thus c. A.D. 180 we find the Four Gospel Canon firmly established.

LOCAL GOSPELS

But a variety of considerations suggest that originally the Gospels were local Gospels circulated separately, and authoritative only in certain areas. The tradition which assigns Mark to Rome and John to Ephesus may safely be accepted. That connecting Luke with Achaea (*i.e.* Greece) and Matthew with Palestine is perhaps no more than conjecture; Matthew may with greater probability be connected with Antioch.

The destruction of Jerusalem A.D. 70 deprived the Church of its natural centre. The capitals of the larger provinces of the Roman Empire succeeded to the place left vacant; and among these the tradition of Apostolic foundation gave special prestige to Antioch, Ephesus, and Rome. The result was a period of about ninety years of more or less independent development, in doctrinal emphasis, in church organisation, and in the production of religious literature. Hence the history of the three succeeding centuries of Catholic Christianity is largely the story of a progressive standardisation of a diversity which had its roots in this period. The delimitation of the Four Gospel Canon was the first step in this process.

THE TWILIGHT PERIOD

The dearth of early Christian literature outside the New Testament makes the ninety years after A.D. 64 the most obscure in the whole history of the Church. Hence the importance of supplementing the scanty evidence as to the existence and circulation of the Gospels during this period by the results of that critical comparison of the Gospels themselves which leads up to the identification of the sources used by their authors. Not infrequently, by bringing the external literary evidence into relation with the results of source-criticism, an unexpected degree of precision and definiteness can be reached. This point illustrated by examples bearing upon the evidence as to the early circulation of each of the four Gospels—a new interpretation being suggested of the evidence of Papias in regard to Matthew.

SOURCE AND TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Why these are important to the historian. The study of them can be made interesting, if approached from the right standpoint. Analogy between the method of these investigations and that of the science of Geology.

CHAPTER I

THE SELECTED FOUR

THE IDEA OF A NEW TESTAMENT

THE primitive Church had all the advantages, without any of the disadvantages, of an authoritative collection of sacred books. Some temperaments are attracted by the idea of novelty, others by the appeal of an immemorial antiquity. The early Church could provide for both. Only yesterday, it taught, under Pontius Pilate, God had sent His Son to die for man; but this recent event was but the culminating point of an eternal purpose revealed to man by a line of Prophets in a sacred literature of prodigious age. On the one hand the Gospel was preached as a new salvation; on the other—the point is elaborated in all the early defences of Christianity¹—its truth was demonstrated by the exact conformity of events in the life of Christ to what had been foretold by writers of an antiquity immensely greater than the poets, philosophers and historians of the Greeks. Yet, though the Church had the advantage of resting on a basis of ancient revelation, its free development was not, as has so often happened in religious history, fettered by its past. For with the coming of the Messiah the Law of Moses, to the Jews the most inspired portion of the whole Old Testament, was abrogated to a large extent—though exactly to what extent was a matter of much controversy—and while the Church of Christ was

¹ Cf. Theophilus (A.D. 180), *Ad Autolyicum*, iii. 20, "The Hebrews . . . from whom we have those sacred books which are older than all authors."

understood to be in a sense identical with the "Church in the wilderness,"¹ it was no less clearly understood to have been, as it were, refounded; it had received a further revelation and had made a fresh start.

But, since, for practical purposes, no revelation is complete unless there is an authentic record of it, there was logically implicit from the first, in the idea of a "further revelation," the conception of a New Testament to supplement the Old. The Church was intellectually in a weak position until and unless it could support its specific doctrines by the appeal to a collection of sacred books which could be regarded as no less authoritative and inspired than the ancient Jewish Bible. But, although a canonised New Testament was necessary, the need for it was only slowly realised. Nor, had the need been felt, could it have been satisfied all at once. A community can only invest with canonical authority literature which is already ancient, and which has already, by its own intrinsic merit, attained to a high degree of authority and repute. Official canonisation cannot create scripture; it can only recognise as inspired books which already enjoy considerable prestige. The Epistle traditionally attributed to Clement of Rome² is in this respect particularly illuminating. The writer's theology is largely taken over from the Epistle to the Hebrews, while Romans and 1 Corinthians are quoted in a way which implies that they are classics; but, quite clearly, the Old Testament alone is regarded as inspired Scripture.

The formation of an authoritative Canon of the New Testament would in any case have been a natural and obvious development. It was enormously accelerated owing to the wide prevalence of various schools of fantastic theosophy, classed together under the general name of Gnosticism, which seem to have had an extraordinary fascination for the half-educated mind

¹ Acts vii. 38.

² Usually dated A.D. 96; cf. add. note to Ch. XVII. below. As I hold that it is indubitably quoted by Polycarp c. 115, I cannot accept the late date recently proposed by E. T. Merrill, *Essays in Early Church History* (Macmillan, 1924), p. 217 ff.

in the second century. In points of detail the systems of the various Gnostic leaders differed immensely. But common to them all is the idea that matter is essentially evil, and that therefore the material universe cannot be the creation of the Supreme Good God, but of some inferior Power from whose grip Christ, the emissary of the Good God, came to deliver man. Gospels, Acts, and other writings claiming to be by Apostles were circulated everywhere, in which Christ was represented as a Divine Being not having a real body of flesh and blood, and as having therefore suffered only in semblance on the cross; or in which, alternatively, it was recorded that the Divine Christ came down upon the man Jesus at the baptism, and was taken up again to heaven at the Crucifixion. "My Power, My Power, why hast thou forsaken me?" says Jesus in the Apocryphal Gospel of Peter; and, adds the author, "immediately he (*i.e.* the Divine Christ) was taken up." It was because this kind of thing, grotesque as it appears to us, had a wide appeal in that age, that the Church was compelled, sooner than might otherwise have been the case, to draw a line between books which might, and books which might not, be "read," that is, accepted as authorities for true and Apostolic doctrine.

The necessity for an official list of accepted books was more especially brought home to the Church by the extraordinary success of the semi-Gnostic Marcion. Marcion came to Rome from Pontus on the Black Sea in A.D. 139, and lived there for about four years in communion with the Church. Being unable to convert the Roman Church to his peculiar views, he proceeded to found a new church, of which a fundamental tenet was the existence of two Gods. The Old Testament he rejected, as being the revelation of the inferior of these two deities who was the Creator of this evil world. The Good God, the deliverer of mankind, was first revealed in Christ; but the original Apostles had unfortunately misunderstood Christ, and supposed the God whom He revealed to be the Creator, the inferior deity who inspired the Old Testament. Christ's new revelation was

therefore repeated to Paul. Hence his Epistles and the Gospel of Luke—with all passages conflicting with Marcion's views carefully expurgated as Jewish-Christian interpolations—constituted the sole authentic record of the new revelation made by Christ. Thus Marcion for the first time emphatically presented, both to the Jewish and to the Christian world, the conception of a fixed and definite collection of Christian literature conceived of as having canonical authority *over against and in distinction from the Old Testament*. Marcion combined the dualistic explanation of the problem of evil, which was the main attraction of all types of Gnosticism, with the simplicity and fervour of the specifically Pauline type of Christianity. He himself united intense religious conviction with great organising capacity ; and within his own lifetime he had founded a compactly organised church extending throughout the Roman Empire. Its members, in the asceticism of their lives and their readiness for martyrdom, equalled and claimed to excel those of the Catholic Church. Earlier Gnostics had maintained that their particular tenets had been originally a mystic revelation, too precious to be committed to the vulgar, and had been handed down to them by a secret tradition from some one or other of the Apostles. Marcion made a new point when he averred that the Twelve Apostles themselves had been in error. To the Gnostics in general the answer of the Church was to appeal to the unbroken tradition of the great sees founded by Apostles and to the Gospels, Acts, and Epistles recognised by those Churches ; against Marcion in particular the tradition of the Church of Rome gained special importance from its claim to represent the united tradition of both Peter and Paul—whom Marcion's theory set at variance with one another.

Marcion was the most formidable, precisely because he was the most Christian, of all the Gnostics. The existence of his canon forced the Church explicitly to canonise the books which it accepted ; for his position could not effectively be opposed if the Church ascribed to its own Gospels, and to its own version of the Epistles, a degree of plenary inspiration less than that

attributed by Marcion to the books in his collection. But when the Church had taken this step it found its position unexpectedly strong. After all, *four* Gospels does sound more imposing than one; and a collection of books which included the Acts, and works attributed to Matthew, John, Peter, and Paul could colourably be regarded as representative of the concurrence of *all* the Apostles. Once this collection was definitely regarded as scripture, as a *New Testament* on the same level of inspiration as the *Old*, the apologetic of the Church was provided with a far broader foundation than the one Gospel and single Apostle to which Marcion appealed. Incidentally the possession of a New Testament made it possible to reply more effectively than heretofore to the more damaging arguments of Jewish opponents; for the difference between Jew and Christian was no longer a matter of the correct interpretation of the prophecies of the ancient scriptures, but of the recognition of the new. Whether the explicit recognition of the New Testament writings as inspired scripture was the result of some official pronouncement agreed upon by the authorities of the Great Churches we do not know. What we do know is that by about the year A.D. 180 the Four Gospels had attained this recognition in Antioch, Ephesus, and Rome.

For Antioch our evidence is the statement of Jerome that Theophilus, bishop of that church *c.* 180, wrote a commentary on the Four Gospels, coupled with the fact that, in his one surviving treatise, Theophilus quotes the Fourth Gospel as "inspired scripture," and by the name of John.¹ For Ephesus and Rome combined our authority is Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons. He had listened to Polycarp in Smyrna as a boy, had resided and lectured in Rome in 177, and played the mediator between Ephesus and

¹ *Ad Autolyicum*, ii. 22. Jerome's language in his Epistle to Algarsia (Vallarsi, i. 858) may imply that Theophilus made a Harmony of the Gospels before commenting on them. Some think he may actually have used Tatian's Diatessaron; but, even so, the fact that this was a harmony of "the Four," along with the ascription of scriptural authority to John, justifies the inference that the Four were regarded by him as the inspired Four.

Rome in 191, when Victor of Rome had excommunicated the churches of Asia—"Asia" is the Roman name for one province of Asia Minor—over a difference as to the manner and time of keeping Easter. The main argument in Irenaeus' comprehensive *Refutation of the Knowledge falsely so called* (usually cited as *Adversus Haereses*) is the appeal, against the Gnostic claim to possess *secret* Apostolic traditions, to the uninterrupted *public* tradition of the bishops of the Apostolic sees of Rome and Asia. Accordingly we may be certain that what he says about the Gospels represents the official view at Rome and Ephesus at the time he wrote (c. 185). What that view was the following extracts will sufficiently indicate.

"Matthew published his written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own language, while Peter and Paul were preaching and founding the church in Rome. After their decease Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, also transmitted to us in writing those things which Peter had preached; and Luke, the attendant of Paul, recorded in a book the Gospel which Paul had declared. Afterwards John, the disciple of the Lord, who also reclined on his bosom, published the Gospel, while residing at Ephesus in Asia."¹

"It is impossible that the Gospels should be in number either more or fewer than these. For since there are four regions of the world wherein we are, and four principal winds, and the Church is as seed sown in the whole earth, and the Gospel is the Church's pillar and ground, and the breath of life: it is natural that it should have four pillars, from all quarters breathing incorruption, and kindling men into life. Whereby it is evident, that the Artificer of all things, the Word, who sitteth upon the Cherubim, and keepeth all together, when He was made manifest unto men, gave us His Gospel in four forms, kept together by one Spirit. . . . For indeed the Cherubim had four faces, and their faces are images of the dispensation of the Son of God. . . . For the Living Creatures are quadriform, and the Gospel also is quadriform."²

¹ Iren. *Adv. Haer.* iii. 1. 1.

² *Ibid.* iii. 11. 8.

To the modern reader, language like this seems fantastic ; but it is supremely interesting for what it implies. No one, even in that age, could have used it except about books whose sacrosanctity was already affirmed by a long tradition.

LOCAL GOSPELS

The existence of four Gospels is so familiar that we are apt to take it as a matter of course ; to us, as to Irenaeus (though for different reasons), it seems almost part of the nature of things. But once we begin to reflect upon it, the acceptance by the Church of four different official Lives of Christ is a fact which cries out for an explanation. To begin with, the practical inconvenience of having so many Lives is very great, especially as these alternately agree and differ from one another in a way which makes it extremely hard to get a consistent view of the story as a whole. The inconvenience has been felt by every one who has tried to give practical religious instruction. Again, already in the second century heretics were making capital out of the discrepancies between the Gospels.¹ So far as we can judge from the solutions produced by later writers, it would appear that criticism was principally directed to the divergence between the genealogies of our Lord in Matthew and Luke and between the chronology of the Fourth Gospel and that of the Synoptics. But there are other hardly less striking divergences which, then as since, must have given trouble to the apologist.

Tatian (who left Rome for Mesopotamia c. A.D. 172) tried to overcome these difficulties by combining the Gospels into a single connected narrative. And until about 430 his Diatessaron, or Harmony,² which carefully weaves the four Gospels into a

¹ Iren. *Adv. Haer.* iii. 2. 1. The Muratorian Canon (c. A.D. 200), l 16-25, seems to glance at the same debate. Julius Africanus, c. A.D. 230, reconciles the genealogies by a theory of Levirate marriages. Eusebius, perhaps following Hippolytus (cf. B. W. Bacon, *The Fourth Gospel in Research and Debate*, pp. 226 ff.), discusses the reconciliation of the Synoptic and Johannine chronology. *H.E.* iii. 24.

² The original of this is lost, but we have Arabic, Latin, and Old Dutch

continuous story, while preserving as far as possible their original wording, seems to have been the only form in which the Gospels were publicly read in the Churches (and even commented on by theologians) among the Syriac-speaking Christians. In that part of the world the "Separate Gospels" were very little used, while the Diatessaron was commonly spoken of simply as "the Gospel." Fortunately for the historian, though perhaps less so for the Sunday School teacher, the experiment of substituting a single official Life for the four separate Gospels did not commend itself to the Greek and Latin Churches, otherwise our Gospels might have survived only as conjectured "sources" of the Diatessaron.

Another thing that requires explanation is the inclusion of Mark among the selected Four. Modern scholars, it is true, are unanimous in accepting the view that Mark is the oldest of the Gospels, and was one of the main sources from which Matthew and Luke drew their information. And Mark preserves a number of small details, omitted or blurred in the other Gospels, which, to the historical instinct of the twentieth century, are of the utmost interest. But the very fact that these details were not reproduced in the later Gospels shows that they were uninteresting, or even positively distasteful, to the Church of that age. Again, Mark has no account of the Infancy, nor (in the text as given in the oldest MSS. and versions) of the Resurrection Appearances, and it contains comparatively little of the teaching of our Lord. Apart from the minor details already mentioned, it includes only two miracles and one parable not in Matthew or Luke, and most of its contents are to be found in *both* the other two. It is the Gospel least valued, least quoted, and most rarely commented on by the Fathers. Augustine can even venture to speak of Mark as "a sort of lackey and abridger of Matthew."¹ And in the Western Church, till Jerome's Vulgate,

versions, besides an Armenian version of a commentary on it by Ephraem the Syrian (c. 360). The most recent discussion of the comparative value of these authorities is by F. C. Burkitt, *J.T.S.*, Jan. 1924.

¹ "Marcus eum (sc. Matthaeum) subsecutus tanquam pedisequus et brevior ejus videtur," Aug. *De cons. evan.* ii.

in spite of the fact that tradition averred that the Gospels were written in the sequence Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, they were officially arranged in the order Matthew, John, Luke, Mark,¹ so as to put the least important Gospel last. They so stand in many Old Latin MSS. and in the Greek MSS. D and W, which give a definitely Western text. Why, then, was it thought necessary to ascribe to it canonical authority at all? Why did not Mark, like the other ancient sources used by Matthew and Luke, cease to be copied—being superseded by its incorporation in these fuller and more popular works?

The foregoing considerations prove that the inclusion of four Gospels, and of these particular four, in the Canon, was not determined by considerations of practical convenience; and it involved the Church in obvious apologetic difficulties. Thus it can only be accounted for on the hypothesis that, at the time when the Canon was definitely settled, each of the four had acquired such a degree of prestige that no one of them could be excluded, or could even have its text substantially altered in order to bring it into harmony with the rest.

Certain of the divergences between the Gospels, in particular those between Matthew and Luke, are of such a character that it is difficult to believe that these books originated in the same church, or even in the same neighbourhood. The contrast between the Jewish atmosphere of Matthew and the even more markedly Gentile proclivities of Luke is enhanced by a still more notable contrast between the divergent cycles of tradition on which they draw. The formal contradiction between the two genealogies is really less significant than the extraordinarily meagre contacts between their two accounts of the Infancy and of the Resurrection Appearances, for these were matters of much more

¹ This order is explained and stated to be official in the so-called Monarchian Prologues: "Qui (sc. Johannes) etsi post omnes evangelium scripsisse dicitur, tamen dispositione canonis ordinati post Matthaeum ponitur." These Prologues to the Gospels, found in some Latin MSS., are printed in Wordsworth and White's Vulgate; also in convenient pamphlet form in *Kleine Texte*. P. Corssen, in *Texte und Untersuchungen*, xv. 1, dates them as third century; others attribute them to Priscillian ±380.

general interest. Churches in which the traditions current were so completely independent in regard to points of such absorbing interest as these must, one would suppose, have been geographically remote from one another. Again, the survival of Mark would be adequately explained if it had had time to become an established classic in one or more important churches some time before its popularity was threatened by competition with the richer Gospels produced in other centres.

Thus we are led on to the view that the Gospels were written in and for different churches, and that each of the Gospels must have attained local recognition as a religious classic, if not yet as inspired scripture, before the four were combined into a collection recognised by the whole Church. The tradition, for what it is worth, decidedly supports this view. Mark is assigned to Rome, John to Ephesus, Luke to Achaëa, and Matthew to Palestine. The tradition connecting the Gospels of Mark and John with Rome and Ephesus is so early and fits in so well with other pieces of evidence that it may safely be accepted. In particular, the view that Mark was the old Gospel of the all-important Church of Rome would completely account for its inclusion in the Canon. The tradition connecting Luke, the most Hellenic of the Gospels, with old Greece cannot be traced earlier than the (probably third century) Monarchian Prologues to the Latin Gospels. It may be only a conjecture—if so, it is a happy one. The evidence connecting Matthew with Palestine must be largely discounted, inasmuch as it is bound up with the statement that it was written in Hebrew, which does not seem to hold good of our present Gospel. I shall shortly return to this question; but, at any rate, the tradition constitutes *prima facie* evidence that the Gospel originated in the East—probably at Antioch.¹

All four Gospels were certainly known in Rome by A.D. 155, if not before. Justin Martyr, who was writing in Rome,

¹ See below, p. 500 ff. So also Foakes-Jackson and Lake, *Beginnings of Christianity*, i. p. 329 f. (Macmillan, 1920.)

150 years—he himself says—after the birth of Christ, speaks of “Memoirs which are called Gospels,”¹ and again of “Memoirs composed by the Apostles and their followers.” These he says were read at the weekly service of the Church. And in his writings are to be found something like a hundred quotations or reminiscences of Matthew and Luke, and some of Mark and John. There is so very little in Mark which does not also occur in Matthew or Luke that we should expect the allusions to matter peculiar to Mark to be few. But the paucity of his quotations from John is a little strange when set side by side with the central position in his apologetic system of the Johannine doctrine of the Logos. From this, some scholars have inferred that, while Justin himself—who had been converted to Christianity in Ephesus—accepted the Ephesian Gospel, the Roman public for which he wrote did not put it on quite the same level as the other three. Moreover, it is possible, though not I think probable, that he made occasional use of other Lives of Christ besides the four we have. If so, he used them only as subordinate authorities. But although Justin’s evidence shows that by A.D. 155 all four Gospels have reached Rome, once the idea that the Gospels were originally local Gospels is presented to us, we realise that each of the Gospels must have an earlier history, which requires to be separately investigated and must go back a considerable period before the date when the collection of Four was made. But the separate histories of the Gospels cannot be properly appreciated if considered apart from the histories of the several churches in which they were produced. In this connection I would stress a consideration to which scholars in general have, I think, given too little attention.

The original capital of Christianity was the mother Church of Jerusalem. But Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in

¹ Justin, *Apol.* i. 66; *Dial.* 103. Convenient tables illustrating Justin’s use of the Gospels are given by W. Sanday, *The Gospels in the Second Century*, pp. 91 ff., 113 ff.

A.D. 70, after a long and peculiarly horrible siege. By that time most, if not all, of the original Apostles had died. Naturally, therefore, Christians in the smaller cities of the Roman Empire tended more and more to look for guidance and direction to those other ancient capitals upon which in secular affairs they and their ancestors had been most directly dependent. Rome, the political centre of the civilised world, was in a more special sense the capital of the West. In the East the old capitals of conquered states were still the headquarters of provincial administration, the most important being Alexandria and Antioch on the Orontes, the capitals respectively of the old Egyptian Empire of the Ptolemies and of the old Seleucid Empire of Syria. Of the lesser kingdoms which had been incorporated into the Roman Empire, one of the most prosperous was that province of Asia Minor known by the Romans and in the New Testament as "Asia," of which Pergamum was the official capital but Ephesus the most notable city. Two other provinces which for special reasons are important in the history of the early Church were Achæa and Palestine, of which the administrative capitals were Corinth and Caesarea. The Church in all these cities could claim special association with, if not actual foundation by, Apostles. Hence during the second century, when Gnosticism seriously menaced the essential character of Christianity, and when it seemed that it could only effectively be resisted by the appeal to Apostolic tradition, their Apostolic connection gave these churches—and especially the three most important of them—Antioch, Ephesus, and Rome—a prestige which made their influence for the time being determinant in the development of Christianity. It is notable that it was not until after A.D. 190, by which time the Four Gospel Canon seems to have been universally accepted, that Alexandria began to exercise any considerable influence on the Church at large.

During the century or more after the death of the original Apostles and the fall of Jerusalem there was no unifying authority, no world-wide organisation, however informal, to check the

independent development of the various local churches each on its own lines. Inevitably this independence resulted in local diversity—in regard to doctrinal emphasis, Church organisation, the religious literature most valued, and also, as we shall see, in regard to the manuscript tradition of such books as they had in common. Thus the history of Catholic Christianity during the first five centuries is very largely the history of a progressive standardisation of a diversity the roots of which were planted in the sub-Apostolic age. It was during the earlier part of this period of maximum independence that the Gospels were written; and the delimitation of the Four Gospel Canon was the first step in the process of standardising.

THE TWILIGHT PERIOD

The story of the Acts of the Apostles leaves Paul in Rome a couple of years or so before the persecution under Nero (A.D. 64), in or shortly after which probably Paul, and possibly Peter, fell. Owing to the extreme paucity of early Christian literature (apart from the New Testament) the ninety years which separate this event from the writings of Justin is the most obscure in the history of the Church. It was during this period that the Gospels were written, and during the earlier part of it each must have had a separate history. In the last three chapters of this book I attempt to trace something of this history. By a scrutiny of the evidence sufficiently minute, more especially by the piecing together of results gained along different lines of research, it is, I believe, possible to do this, and to determine the dates, authorship, and place of origin of the several Gospels with a greater degree of assurance than is commonly supposed. But for the moment the point I desire to emphasise is that among the most important of the facts on which these larger historical conclusions must be based are the results attained by a critical study of the mutual relations of the Gospels to one another and the light which this throws on the sources which their authors used.

In order to illustrate this point, and at the same time to make an opportunity of setting down certain facts to which I may have occasion to refer back later on, I will cite four pieces of evidence bearing on the origin and dates of the Gospels—indicating the way in which they are amplified or reinforced by the result of the critical studies upon which the reader of this volume is about to embark.

(1) Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, on his way to martyrdom in the Colosseum at Rome, c. A.D. 115, wrote seven short letters. In these we find a dozen or more reminiscences of material found in the Synoptic Gospels. But, if these allusions are critically examined by a student of the Synoptic Problem, he will note that while all of them *may*, some of them *must*, be regarded as reminiscences of Matthew; for in certain cases the language of Ignatius implies a knowledge of passages which such a student recognises as attributable to the editor of that Gospel and not his sources.¹ Matthew, then, was a standard work at Antioch before 115. This would fit in with the tradition of Palestinian origin; but, for reasons I shall develop later, I think it more probable that, though it may incorporate a Palestinian source, the Gospel itself is really the local Gospel of the important Church of Antioch. At any rate, its use by Ignatius fixes a point in the history of the Gospels.

(2) I have already mentioned how, after a four years' membership of the Roman Church, Marcion founded the most vigorous of all the early sects, and how, rejecting the Old Testament, he elevated to the rank of inspired Scripture the Epistles of Paul (the only Apostle who had really understood Christ) and the Gospel of Luke—all heavily bowdlerised to accord with his own views. Now even so forcible a person as Marcion could hardly have induced his followers to attribute plenary inspiration to an existing document unless it was one which enjoyed considerable

¹ *E.g.* Ignatius clearly alludes to Mt. iii. 14-15 (*Smyrn.* i. 1) and to Mt. viii. 17 (*Polyc.* i. 2-3). In Ch. XVII. below I comment on the more striking allusions in Ignatius to passages in the Gospel.

prestige; hence we may infer that, at any rate in Rome, the Gospel of Luke was, by A.D. 140, already a Church classic of some years' standing. If, however, we wish to trace the history of the Gospel further back, we find that, though possible reminiscences of it (and its sequel, the Acts) may be found in the scanty literature of the period, they fall short of certainty. At once the importance is seen of the question whether or no Luke was known to the author of the Fourth Gospel, since (if the view maintained in Ch. XV. be correct) this cannot be later than A.D. 100 and may quite possibly be as early as 90. Thus the problem of the sources of the Fourth Gospel bears also on the history of the Third.

(3) Eusebius, the father of Church History, c. 325, had a fortunate habit of quoting his authorities verbatim; and, as we can check his accuracy by those which still survive, we can trust it in regard to those which do not. Among these are two passages from Papias, bishop of Hierapolis, ten miles from Laodicea, of the "seven churches of Asia." As to the date at which Papias wrote his *Exposition of the Oracles of the Lord*, from which Eusebius quotes, there has been much dispute; but the limits on either side would seem to be 135 and 165. It runs as follows:

"And the Elder said this also: Mark, having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately everything that he remembered, without however recording in order¹ what was either said or done by Christ. For neither did he hear the Lord, nor did he follow Him, but afterwards as I said (attended) Peter who adapted his instructions to the need (of his hearers) but had no design of giving a connected account of the Lord's oracles. So then Mark made no mistake while he thus wrote down some things as he remembered them; for he made it his one care not to omit anything that he heard or to set down any false statement therein" (Eus. *H.E.* iii. 39).

¹ I dissent from F. H. Colson (*J.T.S.*, xiv. 62 f.) that rhetorical, rather than chronological, *τάξις* is meant.

From the context in Eusebius it would appear that the Elder spoken of was the Elder John. His identity must be inferred from another quotation by Eusebius, this time from the Preface of Papias' work.

“And again, on any occasion when a person came in my way who had been a follower of the Elders, I would enquire about the discourses of the Elders—what was said by Andrew, or by Peter, or by Philip, or by Thomas or James, or by John or Matthew, or any other of the Lord's disciples, and what Aristion and the Elder John, the disciples of the Lord, say.”

Aristion and the Elder John, it appears from this, were in the unique position of being “disciples of the Lord” who ranked after the Apostles themselves as depositories of authentic tradition. Presumably they must at least have seen the Lord in the flesh. Irenaeus¹ tells us how in his youth he heard Polycarp speak of “John and the others who had seen the Lord,” and it is not impossible that Polycarp was alluding to John the Elder, though Irenaeus seems to have understood him to mean the Apostle John. Some critics wish to emend the Greek in the quotation from Papias so as to make Aristion and the Elder disciples, not of the Lord, but of the Apostles. In my own view the emendation is arbitrary and improbable. But, even so, Aristion and the Elder John are left as immediate followers of the Apostles—like Mark or Luke. That is to say, on any view, the statement of the Elder John as to the origin of Mark is the evidence of a contemporary.

Contemporary evidence as to the origin of the oldest of our Gospels is of the utmost historical importance. But the question has been raised, Was the Gospel of Mark of which the Elder spoke the Gospel we possess or some earlier edition? The answer to this question is bound up with the answer to the other question, whether the extant Gospel of Mark, or some earlier edition of it, was known to, and used by, the authors of Matthew and Luke. Further, it will appear (in Chap. XI.) that this last point

¹ In his letter to Florinus, quoted p. 443 below.

cannot satisfactorily be decided without a correct estimate of the comparative value of the several lines in the manuscript tradition of the text of the Gospels. That is to say, the question as to the original Mark can only be settled on the basis of the combined results of both Synoptic and Textual criticism.

(4) To the quotation from Papias about Mark, Eusebius adds one about Matthew: "So then Matthew composed the oracles (*τὰ λόγια*) in the Hebrew language, and each one interpreted them as he could." Volumes have been written on this enigmatic fragment. In this place all I can do is to state in a seemingly dogmatic way an hypothesis, which I believe to be original, and which I shall attempt to justify at greater length in the sequel.

(a) Irenaeus is known to have read Papias; we infer that his statement about the Hebrew original of Matthew, and all the similar statements by later Fathers, are probably derived from Papias. Since, then, the credibility of any statement depends on its origin, not on the number of persons who repeat it, the statements of the later authors can be ignored, if only we can find what exactly is the meaning and authority of this passage in Papias.

(b) Whoever was the author of the Fourth Gospel, there can be no reasonable doubt that it was written in Ephesus. And at the date at which Papias wrote—and the later we make this date, the stronger the argument—it must have been officially recognised in Papias' own province of Asia. Further, as Lightfoot pointed out, in the list of Apostles mentioned in the previously quoted fragment of Papias, the order and selection of names is that of their occurrence in the Fourth Gospel, not of the Synoptic lists. We are bound, then, to consider the curiously disparaging tone of Papias' remarks about Matthew and Mark in the light of this presumption that Papias knew the Fourth Gospel.

Of Mark, Papias, or rather the Elder his informant, says in effect "the facts are correct—that follows from Mark's connection with Peter—but, as Mark had only his memory to rely upon, he has got them in the wrong order." In regard to Matthew he

says that "the original of the discourses (*τὰ λόγια*) was in Hebrew and there is *no authorised translation*." Now this depreciation of Gospels used in the Church is quite unaccountable unless it seemed necessary in order to defend the superior accuracy of some other Gospel which was in conflict with them in regard to certain points.

Now obviously the Fourth Gospel is in violent conflict with Mark in regard to the order of events. But it has not, I think, hitherto been realised, in this particular connection, that the Fourth Gospel is equally in conflict with Matthew in regard to the "prophetic utterances"—that is the strict meaning of *τὰ λόγια*—of our Lord. Matthew is the Gospel which lays most emphasis on the idea of an early visible Second Coming; John is the Gospel which all but substitutes for this visible return of Christ the coming of the Paraclete. Papias himself was a Millenarian; but it is probable—Eusebius is ambiguous here—that the passage about Matthew, like that about Mark, is quoted from the Elder John. In that case the two fragments of Papias represent what Asian tradition recollected of John the Elder's reply to critics who impugned the accuracy of the Fourth Gospel on the ground of its divergence from Matthew and Mark.

Heretofore scholars have taken it for granted that *τὰ λόγια* was the title of a book—differing only in their view as to whether the book referred to was our Gospel of Matthew, a lost collection of sayings of the Lord, or a collection of proof-texts. I submit that if—in the lost context of the fragment—Papias was talking, not about books, but their subject-matter, *τὰ λόγια* would be the natural phrase to use in speaking of the sayings of Christ which form so conspicuous an element in the existing Gospel of Matthew. The Elder—thinking, partly of the Judaistic, but mainly of the Apocalyptic, sayings in Matthew—says that the *discourses* in this Greek Gospel cannot always be relied on as accurately representing the original Hebrew (cf. p. 416).

If this explanation is correct, the Elder may have known of the existence of a Hebrew (prob.=Aramaic) collection of

sayings of Christ by Matthew (though he need not actually have seen it), and he does not wish to deny that this had been used by the author of the Greek Gospel. But he declines to regard as a wholly apostolic, and therefore in all points authoritative, work the Greek Gospel which, at the time when he was speaking, was in all probability a new arrival in Ephesus and not yet generally accepted in that church. But, supposing the fragment represents a protest on behalf of the local Ephesian Gospel against the superior claims made by certain persons in favour of a Gospel recently introduced from outside, we are not entitled to infer from the expression "each one translated them as he could" that the Elder knew of any other Greek versions of Matthew's Hebrew work. More probably his language is a slightly contemptuous exaggeration intended to assert that the particular Greek version (*i.e.* our Gospel of Matthew), to the authority of which the critics of the Fourth Gospel were appealing, was an anonymous version having no claim to direct apostolic authority. What he is anxious to assert is that the Greek Gospel of Matthew, like that of Mark, is only deuterio-apostolic, and that, therefore, its authority cannot be quoted as final where it conflicts with the Fourth Gospel. This does not necessarily imply that he attributed the Fourth Gospel to an Apostle. On the contrary, supposing that the Elder knew that this Gospel was by an unknown disciple of John, or supposing that he were himself (as I shall argue) the author, it would only be the more necessary to point out that Gospels like Matthew and Mark, which were at times in conflict with it, were no more directly apostolic than itself.

In the interpretation of the meaning of a fragment, torn from its original context, there must always be an element of doubt. But the above interpretation has two great merits. First, it explains the extraordinary fact that the earliest allusion in Christian literature to the Gospels is an endeavour to minimise their accuracy and Apostolic authority. Secondly, the view that the Elder John meant to affirm that the Greek Matthew

was *not* the work of an Apostle, though embodying a work originally written in Hebrew by the Apostle Matthew, fits in admirably with the result of a critical comparison of the Synoptic Gospels, which suggests that the author of our First Gospel used Mark and at least one other source mainly consisting of discourse. There is not, however, I may incidentally remark, any reason to suppose that the Hebrew work of Matthew was ever known by the title "Logia."

SOURCE AND TEXTUAL CRITICISM

These examples will suffice to show how the critical study of the internal relations of the Gospels to one another may illuminate the external evidence as to their authorship, date, or locality of origin. But, if we are to pass on from the history of the Gospels themselves to a consideration of their value as historical authorities for the life of Christ, the analysis of sources is still more important. For our estimate of the historical value of the Gospels depends in the last resort upon the opinion we frame as to the sources of information upon which the several authors relied, and of the degree of accuracy with which they reproduced them.

The historian, moreover, must go on to ask the question, How far does the text of the Gospels that has come down to us represent what the authors wrote? The earliest MSS. we possess, apart from a few papyrus fragments, are separated by a matter of two and a half centuries from the authors' original. Since absolute accuracy is an ideal not attainable by mortal man, every time a MS. is copied some errors will get into the text. But the errors which will arise and be propagated along one line of transmission will not be the same as those along another. Thus by a comparison of MSS. representing different textual traditions the errors of one can be corrected from another. But if this is to be done, it is vital to ascertain the number and character of these different traditions and how far they are

independent of one another. I have already indicated how in certain ways the study of textual criticism, in the light of recent MS. discoveries, throws unexpected light on some of the obscurer aspects of the Synoptic Problem; incidentally it provides further evidence of the necessity of studying the history of the Gospels in each of the Great Churches separately.

Many of those who recognise that both textual criticism and the analysis of sources are an essential preliminary to a truly historical investigation are nevertheless inclined to recoil from the study of these problems, fearing lest they may become choked by the dust of multifarious detail. To such I would venture to suggest that whether a particular investigation is instinct with interest or fraught with tedium depends very much on the spirit in which it is approached. The problems discussed in the present volume have, if one cares to look at it in that light, much the same kind of intellectual appeal as the quest for the solution of a difficult acrostic or of a problem in chess. An even better analogy would be the science of Geology; for that is recognised as truly a science, though a science which, from the nature of the case, is compelled to dispense with the method of experiment and relies solely on observation. Geology attempts to reconstruct the history of the past by a highly scientific application of the method of observation. Facts, over as wide a range as possible, are collected, sifted, and compared, in order that hypotheses may be framed which will satisfactorily account for the observed phenomena. The critical investigations pursued in this volume are of a precisely similar character. And the student who enters upon these problems in the same spirit of scientific inquiry as he would if they were problems of Geology will find the method not without interest and the results well worth the trouble.

Map showing chief places mentioned in this book.

English Miles
0 50 100 200 300 400

