

The Origin and Character of our Gospels.

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III.

ST. JOHN.

THUS far Luke; I now come to John. There is no hint with him of the destruction of Jerusalem (except possibly what Caiaphas says in 11^{48ff.}): and the saying of Jesus about the destroying of 'this temple' is explained by the Evangelist as about His body (2²¹). Still further, in one passage (5²) the city is expressly recorded to be still standing: 'There *is* in Jerusalem a pool called Bethesda, having five porches.' '*Is*' is the reading universally attested, though elsewhere the text of John shows countless variations betwixt its witnesses, especially in details like this; therefore the pool was still standing in Jerusalem when the Evangelist was writing. I had lately to determine the author, and date of origin, of certain newly discovered fragments of a Greek historian, which treat of the beginning of the fourth century before Christ. I consulted a specialist among my fellow-professors, and the first point which he verified was this, that the work was written before the destruction of the Persian Empire by Alexander; for it says: 'It *is* the custom of the Persian king in all his wars,' etc. What is valid here ought also to be equally valid for John. No doubt more depends upon the latter, but the scientific investigator has nothing to do with that. It is to be observed that in narrative the past tense can be used of things which we presuppose to remain unchanged. Accordingly John says, 'there was much water there,' just as we ourselves do when we speak about a journey. For this past tense does not deny the present, and contains nothing false. But, on the contrary, the present tense used of what no longer exists contains something false, and is therefore not used consciously. It is not used even by Josephus in describing the siege of Jerusalem; for such a statement as 'there is a hill there' (to which some have appealed) is of course justified, and proves nothing. Therefore this Gospel was composed before A.D. 70, although not long before it, at a time when John was already in Asia Minor, and

specially at Ephesus, and possibly had not been long there.

Why should John have delayed to write what he knew and had not yet been written? Did he know that he would live to a great age, and retain all his faculties? Did others know it, on whom devolved the duty of recording it? There is a very strong tradition about John's sojourn at Ephesus, which, to be sure, does not move the theologians whom it does not suit, but which powerfully impresses the Austrian archæologist O. Benndorf, who has lately written a great book about Ephesus on the basis of the excavations, and it appears to him to be credible. We must think, therefore, of the communities of Asia Minor as the first circle of readers, with which the expression 'the Jews,' so continually used in the Gospel, harmonizes: for this probably denotes not simply the inhabitants of Jerusalem and their leaders, but also the Galileans (Jn 6⁴¹). Any Jew like John, writing in Judæa, would not have expressed himself thus; even Luke, the Gentile, has in his Gospel nothing but 'Arimathæa, a city of *the Jews*' (23⁵¹), and Matthew nothing but 'this saying is commonly reported among *the Jews* unto this day' (28¹⁵).

Among the witnesses we must again consider Papias, unfortunately only with badly handed down quotations out of his works. It has been said by a late writer, that John dictated his Gospel to him (dictation reminds one of Ro 16²²), while, according to an assertion from another quarter, this scribe was more probably a countryman of Papias, named Eubiotos of Hierapolis. Would that Papias were discovered! For I have no doubt that he spoke of this Gospel, and he may have said, as we read in Eusebius, that its object was to supply what was lacking in the Gospels already written. There is a difference, however, between conjecture and knowledge. Let us therefore, meanwhile, consider what we have, the statement from Papias of 'John the Elder' about Mark. Its result is the correction of Mark in one particular, namely, his defective order. There is also one passage in the Gospel of John, which looks like a correction of Mark.

Look at Mk i¹⁴, 'After that John was delivered up, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching' (so also Matthew). Compare Jn 3^{22a}, 'After these things came Jesus into the land of Judæa . . . and baptized; and John also was baptizing in Ænon . . . for John was not yet cast into prison.' One may call it, instead of 'correction,' 'information' for readers, who were already acquainted with the other Gospels, and therefore might take umbrage at the simultaneous baptizing. It is well known that a chronology of the life of Jesus is only possible at all on the basis of John, and the talk of a three years' activity could only have been extracted from him, and in no way from the three first Gospels.

This, of course, was only a minor object with John. He states his chief aim in 20³¹, thus: 'But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.' Here, for once, the author turns directly to his communities, just as in the First Epistle, which may have been written about the same time; at all events, the identity of the author of the First Epistle with the author of the Gospel is just as evident as the identity of the author of the Apocalypse with the latter is against all that one can see and observe. And there is something in this Gospel which makes it quite sufficient for faith; as I saw lately in the case of a Spanish student of science before he had quite finished reading it. There is no notice taken of the other Gospels; and yet the greatest regard is paid to them (as Th. Zahn has worked out), just as if they were well known; not, however, by means of what the author says, but by means of what he thinks it unnecessary to say. 'John was not yet cast into prison.' We know that that happened

to him, and through whom, and for what reason, and with what result. The Jews send to John to ask him (1¹⁹). Where he was, and what he was doing, we are not told at this point; but both the place and the baptism are mentioned later on. How could any one relate in such a manner, except about well-known things? We take no offence, because we are familiar with them; but let us imagine a person who knew nothing about it, and then we shall see how little suitable for him this style of narrative is. 'Jesus went to Capernaum' (2¹²), the *place* is known. 'The Sea of Galilee' (6¹); 'The Sea of Tiberias' according to a better reading) is quite a misleading expression for any one who does not know the geography of Palestine, for he would be likely to think of the Mediterranean. Even Samaria and the Samaritans (4¹) are known, though nothing occurs about them in Mark, and only a very little in Matthew and Luke. And so on: the author is writing for people who were quite familiar with the Gospel history in its leading features. Therefore, as Eusebius says, after a Gospel literature had arisen and been widely diffused, John made a complementary supplement on his own account, not only, as Eusebius insists, in regard to the first beginnings of Christ's activity, but also specially about his ministry in Jerusalem. For, with the other Evangelists, apart from the last journey, Galilee is the scene, not unnaturally, as Peter would not so readily report in Jerusalem what had happened there, as what the Jerusalemites could not know. Yet it is in Luke we find (13³⁴), 'O Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children together,' etc.; and it is John who first clears up this passage, and justifies it.

The Great Text Commentary.

THE GREAT TEXTS OF ST. LUKE.

LUKE XI. 1.

'And it came to pass, as he was praying in a certain place, that when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, even as John also taught his disciples.'—(R.V.).

EXPOSITION.

'As he was praying in a certain place.'—This introductory explanation of the situation is not given in any

other Gospel. We have here one of Luke's peculiarly characteristic references to Jesus praying. He indicates that this was so impressive as to rouse in the disciples a desire to be taught by Jesus how to pray as He understood prayer. The evangelist does not say when or where this was, probably because he has no information on the point. In Matthew (6⁹⁻¹³) the Lord's Prayer comes as part of the Sermon on the Mount. Of course, Jesus may have given it twice. If not, the preference must be for the setting in Luke, because (1) this explains the occasion that led our