

## INTRODUCTION

THE obscurity, commonly supposed to veil the origin of the Gospels, is due not so much to the scantiness of the evidence available as to the difficulty of focussing on this one point the fresh evidence which has been accumulated during the last half-century. Students in various specialised branches of research, such as textual criticism, source-analysis, the cultural background of the early Church, and the psychology of Mysticism, have worked at these subjects more or less in isolation; and without intensive specialisation the advance made would have been impossible. But the time is now ripe for an attempt to co-ordinate the results reached—so far as they bear on the origin of the Gospels—and see them in their true relation in a single organic process of historical evolution. In this volume I have set out some researches of my own in two of these fields of study, which, I believe, throw new light on certain aspects of the problem; but my main aim has been that co-ordination of the results achieved along different lines of investigation which, by using these to illuminate and consolidate one another, provides a basis for further conclusions.

In the writing of the book I have had in view readers of three quite different kinds. (1) There is the educated layman who is sufficiently interested in the origin of the Gospels, the manuscript authority for their text, the sources of information possessed by their authors, and in the relation of the mystical to the historical elements in the Fourth Gospel, to undertake a piece of rather solid reading—provided that the book can be

understood without any previous technical knowledge. (2) I have had in mind the divinity student or minister of religion who desires an introduction to Textual Criticism, to the Synoptic Problem, and the Johannine question, but who does not know of any book which takes cognisance of the MS. discoveries, and light from other directions, which have become available in the last few years. (3) I desire to submit to the judgement of expert scholars the results of my own original research.

Accordingly I have endeavoured, wherever possible, to arrange the material in such a way that the argument and the nature of the evidence shall be clear to a reader who is unacquainted with Greek; and I have relegated to footnotes matter with which the general reader (or the divinity student on a first reading) can afford to dispense; I have also been at considerable pains to present a clear outline of the argument in the Synopsis at the head of each chapter, and in the Diagrams at the beginning of Parts I. and II. The reader to whom the whole subject is quite new would perhaps do well, at the first reading, to omit Ch. III.-VI., VIII.-XII. and XIV.

The expert will, I believe, find in every chapter suggestions which, whatever their value, have not previously been put forward; but the most original conclusion, and perhaps the most important, is the identification of the text found in the new Koridethi MS. Θ, and its allies, with the text in use at Caesarea about A.D. 230. This identification supplies, as it were, the coping stone of the arch in that reconstruction of the various local texts of the Gospels current in the early Church at which scholars have been working for a generation; it also leads on to a new conception of the history of the text during the first three centuries—differing as much from that held by Westcott and Hort as from the more recent view put forward by von Soden. The result is materially to broaden the basis of early evidence for the recovery of an authentic text.

The Synoptic Problem is another large issue in regard to which I have attempted to break new ground. While accepting,

and indeed further consolidating, the received theory that Mark was one of the sources made use of by Matthew and Luke, I adventure a new approach towards the question of their other sources. Here, from the nature of the case, evidence of a demonstrative character is not forthcoming. Nevertheless, partly by bringing to bear on this problem results gained in the field of textual criticism, partly by considering anew the nature of parallelism in oral tradition and the probable connection of our Gospels, and also of their sources, with definite localities, I reach conclusions which seem to be sufficiently probable to justify my submitting them—under the conceptions of “Proto-Luke” and “A Four Document Hypothesis”—to the serious consideration of students. If correct, these conclusions are important, as enhancing our estimate of the historical value of much of the material which is preserved by Matthew or Luke only. I have also, I hope—by a new use of the MS. evidence available—finally disposed of the troublesome phantom of an “Ur-Marcus” (or earlier version of Mark) which has for too long haunted the minds of scholars.

The problem of the Fourth Gospel must, I am convinced, be approached from two sides. The results of historical and source criticism must be supplemented and interpreted in the light of a study of the psychology of the mystic mind. This done, the question of its authorship can be profitably discussed. My conclusions in regard to this Gospel are avowedly of a tentative character, and it is as a personal impression only that I put forward Part III. of this book. I feel sure, however, that, even if the conclusions reached are in some points erroneous, the method of approach is sound.

The questions treated of in Parts II. and III. cannot be considered entirely in isolation and apart from some consideration of the evidence as to the early circulation of the Gospels and their collection into a Canon of inspired writings; accordingly I begin with a chapter, “The Selected Four,” summarising as briefly as possible the main facts bearing on this point. And

I conclude in Part IV.—on the basis of the results reached in the previous sections of the book—with an endeavour to determine more exactly the dates and place of writing of the first three Gospels, and also to dispose of the difficulties still felt by some scholars in accepting the Lucan authorship of the Third Gospel and the Acts.

I should perhaps add that I have refrained from discussing recent attempts to reach by critical analysis the sources used by Mark; brilliant as some of these are, for reasons of the kind indicated p. 378 ff., they leave me unconvinced. I have also ventured to ignore many interesting theories, even though put forward by eminent scholars, which seem to me to have been adequately refuted by other writers. Very few dead hypotheses deserve the honour of a monument.

The Bibliographies in Moffatt's *Introduction to the N.T.* and—for textual criticism—in Gregory's *Textkritik* are so excellent and so well known that I early abandoned the idea of compiling one of my own, thinking it would be of more practical utility to supplement these by references in the notes to the best, or the most accessible, authority on each particular point as it arose.

I have to acknowledge gratefully assistance received from various friends—in particular from Dr. R. P. Blake of Harvard, Prof. Burkitt of Cambridge, Prof. Dodd of Mansfield College, Oxford, Miss Earp of Cumnor, and Archdeacon Lilley of Hereford, in careful reading of the proofs; to all of these I owe valuable suggestions. I have to thank Mrs. V. J. Brook of Oxford, for very great help in working out points of textual evidence, verifying references, and compiling Tables; the Rev. J. S. Bezzant, Vice-Principal of Ripon Hall, Oxford, and the Rev. R. D. Richardson, for the compilation of the Indices, and Mr. Norman Ault for drawing the Diagrams and Map.

B. H. STREETER.