

ARTICLE IV.

THE REAL DATE ¹ OF THE GOSPELS.

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DOCTOR SANDAY, Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity in Oxford University, who is very generally regarded as among the first, if not the very first, of English scholars in New Testament criticism, asserts in his "Criticism of the Fourth Gospel" that "those who attempted to write what we wrongly call 'Lives of Christ' did not, as it would seem, for the most part, begin to do so, or make preparations for beginning, for some thirty years after the crucifixion" (p. 217).

This may be said to be the opinion not only of Dr. Sanday, but of nearly all of the most distinguished New Testament scholars of the present time. But, may we not ask, What is the reason for supposing that this long period of delay was allowed to pass before recording the words and deeds of Christ?—words and deeds of more importance than any others which history has preserved. In view of the great array of discoveries which show the prevalence of the practice of writing in the time of Christ and in the apostolic age ² by unlearned people, the question is surely a reasonable one.

¹ "Date," instead of "dates," is used advisedly, as will be seen.

² "That the whole practice of government and law at an early time was based on the rule that everything must be written down at the moment, e.g. that all sales and conveyances of property must be registered in writing,—all this has been revealed in recent years, not in literary evidence, but by finding the actual documents." (Sir William M. Ramsay, *Trans. Victoria Institute*, vol. xxxix. p. 203.)

These discoveries have thrown a flood of light on the peculiarities of the Greek of the New Testament, showing that it is the Greek of the people and not that of classical literature. The same sort of Greek is found on the papyri and ostraka of these times. Those who have read Professor Adolf Deissmann's articles on "New Light on the New Testament Greek," or his lectures delivered in 1907 at Cambridge University, know how general was the practice of writing in Greek at this period among all classes of society, and that this writing on all matters of business and common interest among Greek-speaking people was in a Greek very much like that of the New Testament. This being so, we naturally ask why the apostles and immediate followers of Christ should be supposed to have deferred committing to writing what they knew about Christ, and what he taught them, till more than thirty years after the crucifixion, when people of their own class were writing, all around them, on all matters which concerned them? It is true, Peter and John were considered "ignorant and unlearned men" by the Sanhedrin; but, as has been well said, this was from the standpoint of rabbinical learning. Their writings of a later date show that they were by no means unable to write, and to write with great force—one of them having written as no man, inspired or uninspired, has ever written, before or since.¹ God chose the instruments for making the record concerning his Son, in accordance with their fitness for the great work, and the particular part of it committed to each, as is seen in the distinctly marked individuality of the different writers. No one holds that the ability to write was given by inspiration, and if the Evangelists had the ability to write at

¹ "The utterance of one of those rare souls who speak with timeless voice to the permanent wants of man." (James Drummond, *Authorship and Character of the Fourth Gospel*, p. 23.)

the later date usually assigned for the writing of the Gospels, they had it at an earlier time.

The reasons given for the supposed late production of the Gospels are three: (1) Tradition (Eusebius, H. E. v. 8; iii. 24); (2) No need of written Gospels while the apostles were still giving their oral testimony; (3) That we have no quotations from, nor references to, written Gospels at an earlier date.

Support for the first and second of these reasons is supposed to be furnished by Eusebius, who states that Matthew wrote his Gospel when he was leaving the Hebrews (H. E. iii. 24), to go to other nations.

Whatever weight this tradition may have as to the Matthean *authorship* of the first Gospel (and it undoubtedly has much), the *date* of its composition is not settled by it. For one thing, we do not know at what date Matthew left Palestine; and then, while a universal tradition as to the *authorship* of a book may be entirely reliable, a tradition as to the circumstances of its production may be very much less so.

As to the *need* of written records, we must remember how many nations were represented at the Pentecost after the crucifixion, and how widely Christianity spread among them during that generation. In view of this progress of the gospel in many countries, it certainly seems reasonable to suppose that something more definite than oral tradition was needed, especially among heathen recently turned from their false religions, to prevent fatal mistakes about the most vital of facts. Personal witnesses of the deeds and words of Christ could remain with churches founded by them for but a short time, as they would have to go on to the regions beyond. As the work progressed and churches were multiplied in various countries, "native workers" following the first missionaries as instructors of the new converts thus left behind, it would seem to have

been imperatively necessary to have written records about Him in whom they believed, and in whom was all their hope of salvation. These records, supposing there were such, were not, probably, in the form of completeness which they took under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, suiting them for all following ages, but suitable for meeting the needs of that time. Indeed, the prologue of Luke's Gospel opens a window on the scene through which we catch a glimpse of "many" authors who drew up such narratives to meet the universal need. It can hardly be claimed, then, that there *was* no need of written records during all this generation succeeding the crucifixion, and Luke's Gospel furnishes proof that earlier narratives had been drawn up before this one, more complete, and fitted for use in all future ages, was written.

While "many" were drawing up narratives, is it reasonable to suppose that the apostles, Matthew and John, who were personal witnesses of all that was to be told of Christ, refrained from writing memoranda of these things?

As to the third reason for believing that none of our Gospels was written till near the fall of Jerusalem, namely, that there are no quotations of them in literature of an earlier date, it is sufficient to answer, that we *have* no literature of that time which would be likely to contain such quotations. That part of the New Testament which follows the Gospels does so in a perfectly natural way in the treatment of the great theme. The Acts, Epistles, and Revelation all presuppose what is told us in the Gospels. Without what the Gospels contain, these books would be incomprehensible—without a foundation, like a house hanging in the air. We know, approximately, the dates of most of these writings, and it is plain to every unsophisticated reader that those who wrote them had accurate knowledge of the great facts of Christ's life, death, and resurrection which

we find recorded in the four Gospels.¹ Not only is this so, but it is evident that those to whom the Epistles were *written* were familiar with the cardinal facts of the gospel history. They could not have been understood by them without such knowledge.

Among the last utterances of the late Professor Blass of Halle is the expression of his conviction that "Paul himself was certainly in possession of some sort of records." He was convinced, from his researches, too, that "a copy of a Gospel nearly as long as that of Mark had come to Alexandria about A.D. 49," and remarks, "It may have actually been the Gospel of Mark." May not the "books" and "parchments," like the "cloak" left with Carpus at Troas, have been part of Paul's missionary outfit? May they not have been some of those "narratives" of which Luke, his companion in evangelistic labor, speaks? There is no more natural supposition than that they were such "memoirs of the apostles and their followers" as Justin Martyr speaks of—the records of some who followed Christ in his ministry, and could give personal testimony to the great facts of his life, his death, his resurrection, and his ascension.

Though most modern critics, following the lead of Harnack and Zahn of Erlangen, agree substantially with Dr. Sanday as to the date of the Gospels, there are distinguished exceptions. Dr. Bernhard Weiss, after mentioning that Eusebius, in his "Chronicon," "puts the composition of Matthew's Gospel in the year 41," though his history seems to imply a change of

¹ It is proper to notice here that the First Epistle of John, which is later, as all agree, than the Synoptic Gospels, does not contain a single quotation from them. Why, then, should it be held that these Gospels could not have been in existence when Paul wrote his Epistles, because these Epistles are not full of quotations from the Gospels? But, the gospel facts underlie all Paul's Epistles, as they do the Epistle of John.

view, states that "of late Plitt, Hengelfeld and others go back to the fifties," and Blass states confidently that "Peter left Jerusalem for good in A.D. 47 or 48, and the other disciples at the same time or earlier," and says, "Therefore we may date the first written records for Judea about A.D. 48."

John's Gospel, as is quite generally agreed, was written later than the Synoptics, as Eusebius states, and is generally assigned to the decade 90-100 A.D. Yet Blass, who believes in his traditional residence in Asia Minor, would place it much earlier. Dates are often indicated by means of things mentioned without any such purpose as that of indicating the time of writing. For instance, in John v. 2 we read, "Now there is in Jerusalem by the sheep gate a pool which is called in Hebrew Bethesda, having five porches." This is said not to settle a date, but to indicate the locality in which a miracle was performed. Yet many think that it *does* indicate that the Gospel of John was written before the destruction of Jerusalem. After that event, John could hardly have spoken of the pool and the porches as still in existence. Bengel, in his commentary on the passage, uses these words: "*Ἔστι, there is.* John wrote before the destruction of the city. *There is*, saith he, not *there was*, a pool. Even then there was remaining with his hearers a recollection of the treasury, a place in the temple: ch. viii. 20. 'These words spake Jesus in the treasury as He taught in the temple.' In agreement with this are those of the ancients who set down this book as edited 30, 31, or 32 years after the ascension of our Lord."

This view is held not only by the "ancients"; but we learn from the *Review of Theology and Philosophy*, June, 1906, pp. 819 ff., that "Gebhart accepts the main conclusion [of Wuttig] that the Fourth Gospel and the first Epistle were written before the fall of Jerusalem." The force of the words "There is in Jerusalem" may be made to appear by a very simple illus-

tration. There was in the city of Washington forty years ago a rather unsightly object, an incomplete monument to the father of our country. It stood there many years in this condition, to the shame of the American people, the subject of much jeering and poor wit. But at last it began to rise, and by 1885 the aluminum cap (on the capstone) was brought forth with rejoicing. The monument was finished, and is now the pride and not the reproach of the nation. Now, if an undated letter of some well-known person were found in which it was said, that "there is in Washington, south of the White House, a half-finished monument to George Washington," every one who knew the facts of the case would feel entirely certain that this letter was written at least fifteen years before the beginning of the twentieth century.

There seems to be no expression in either the Gospel or First Epistle of John which is inconsistent with its production before the fall of Jerusalem. The discussions with the Jews, it has been noticed, would seem to indicate that the part of the Gospel containing them was written not forty years after they were uttered, but even, the writer in the Review thinks, while John still abode in Palestine. He also sees an indication that other apostles were still living when the Gospel and Epistle were written, "and were associated with the writer in the witness which he bears to Jesus as the Christ." Expressions such as "That which *we* have heard," etc., are referred to. He thinks, also, that there are external evidences which are reliable, as "Many ancient versions and glosses are at one in maintaining that the Fourth Gospel was written in the time of Nero, that is, before the year 68. A number of Greek manuscripts assign it definitely to 30 or 32 years after the ascension of our Lord. Cf. Drummond, *Character and Authorship of the Fourth Gospel*, p. 67, note."

Now Eusebius (vi. 14) quotes from Clement of Alexandria

as follows: "Last of all, John, perceiving that the bodily [external] facts had been set forth in the other Gospels, at the instance of his disciples, and with the indication of the Spirit, composed a spiritual Gospel."

There is no reason to doubt the assertion here that the Gospel of John was written later than the Synoptics, and the character of the Gospel is in full keeping with it. Indeed, very few have doubted that the Fourth Gospel was written after the three others.

If, then, the Fourth Gospel was written before the fall of Jerusalem (an event, which, if it had occurred, would almost certainly have been mentioned in it, or at least have left some unmistakable trace in it), the great difference in the presentation of the work of redemption in this Gospel and the others would indicate a much earlier origin for them than is generally conceded.

Almost every thoughtful reader must have noticed the great difference between John's Gospel and the other three. These present to a great extent a different class of facts and different discourses from those which we find in John's Gospel, which seems designed for readers maturer in knowledge of the person, character, and work of Christ, and this may be taken as an indication of its later date. John seems to have been specially chosen for this work and furnished with those mental and spiritual endowments which were necessary for its performance.

Dr. Sanday, speaking of the promise of the Holy Spirit, in John xiv. 25-27; xv. 26, 27; and xvi. 13, 14, remarks: "It might be said that these passages are a summary sketch of the mental history of the Evangelist from the day of Pentecost onward"; and, as to that class of teachings which characterize the Gospel of John, says: "It is teaching of a kind that might

perhaps haunt the minds of a few gifted and far-sighted individuals, but would certainly fall through the meshes of the mind of the average man."

Now, whether the Gospel of John was written, in its complete and final form, in the last quarter of the first century, or in the last decade of it, or in the decade preceding the destruction of Jerusalem, as a small minority of critics think, does not much matter as to the main contention of this paper. However this may have been, we may confidently believe that the Gospels are not only the testimony of contemporaries of Christ, but that they contain contemporary testimony of him. The testimony of a contemporary witness may be testimony by no means contemporary. Lapses of memory, and the unconscious working of the imagination, may warp it very far from what it would have been if delivered immediately on the occurrence of the events which are related. I believe that the promise of the Holy Spirit to bring all things to their remembrance, and lead them into all truth, was kept, and that the testimony of the Evangelists was not transformed by the lapse of time or lapses of memory. This might have been accomplished without the use of the pen or with it. Alford thought it was without writing immediately. The use by the Synoptists of the same words and phrases, he thought, could be explained by supposing that these were so frequently used in oral discourse that they became the natural vehicle of the relation of the events. He recognizes the existence too of some contemporary records.

Alford summarizes his views given in his *Greek Testament* (*Prolegomena*, chap. i.) in the following words: "That the Synoptic Gospels contain the substance of the apostolic testimony, collected principally from their oral teachings current in the church—partly, also, from written documents embodying

portions of that teaching; that there is, however, no reason, from their internal structure, to believe, but every reason to disbelieve, that any one of the three Evangelists had access to either of the other two Gospels in its present form." "The common substratum of apostolic teaching" he believed to have been "the original source of the common part of the three Gospels."

He sharply distinguishes this from ordinary oral tradition thus: "The oral tradition (or rather oral teaching) with which we are concerned, formed the substance of a deliberate and careful testimony to facts of the highest possible importance, and as such was inculcated in daily catechization; whereas, common oral tradition is careless and vague, not being similarly guarded, nor diffused as matter of earnest instruction."

As to the theory, almost universally adopted by critics at present, that the Gospel of Mark was the chief "source" of Matthew and Luke, Dr. Sanday expresses the generally received view of the relations of the Synoptic Gospels and their time of production thus: "I do not doubt that the most active period for the putting together materials for the Gospels was the decade 60-70 A.D. At the beginning of this period St. Mark had not yet taken up his task; and his Gospel forms the basis of the other two Synoptics. The Matthaean *Logia* perhaps were by this time collected" (*Criticism of the Fourth Gospel*, p. 217). "Of course," he says, "the fundamental text is that of St. Mark" (p. 153).¹

Dean Alford more than doubted the truth of the theory that one Evangelist borrowed from another. He remarks: "It is

¹Professor F. C. Burkitt, of Cambridge University, in his *Gospel History and its Transmission*, p. 38, uses such language as this: "It is now enough to say that the relative priority of Mark is now ac-

inconceivable that one writer, borrowing from another matter confessedly of the very first importance, *in good faith and approval*, should alter his diction so singularly and capriciously as, *on this hypothesis*, we find the text of the parallel sections of our Gospels altered."

We should remember, too, that the improbability that *one* author should be found copying and altering in this capricious way is small compared with that of *two* doing the same thing and with different alterations.

A writer in the *Review and Expositor* for July, 1907, Joseph Palmer, of New South Wales, is equally opposed to the theory so generally held, that Matthew's and Luke's Gospels are drawn largely from Mark's; and, as a test, compares two parallel passages from the two Gospels, Mark i. 21-28 and Luke iv. 31-37,—two passages remarkably alike—and shows the unreasonableness of the supposition that one was copied from the other.

If we compare parallel passages *in all three* of the Synoptics, I think we can see very plainly the unlikelihood of such a process. The first set I happened to turn to as a test impressed me in this way. They were the three accounts of the appointment of the twelve apostles,

MATT. X. 2-4.

Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Phillip, and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the publican; James the son of Alphæus, and Thaddeus. This list is accepted almost as an axiom by the great majority of scholars who occupy themselves with Gospel problems."

For discussions on the two sides of this question, the reader is referred to W. C. Allen's commentary on Matthew in the *International Critical Commentary* in favor of the Markan theory, and the article of Arthur Carr, M.A., on the Authenticity, etc., of the First Gospel, in the *Expositor* for October, 1907, in reply.

dæus; Simon the Cananæan, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him.

MARK III. 13-19.

And he goeth up into the mountain and calleth unto him whom he himself would: and they went unto him. And he appointed twelve, that they might be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach, and to have authority to cast out demons: And Simon he surnamed Peter; and James the son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James; and them he surnamed Boanerges, which is, Sons of thunder; and Andrew, and Phillip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphæus, and Thaddæus, and Simon the Cananæan, and Judas Iscariot, which also betrayed him.

LUKE VI. 12-16.

And it came to pass in these days that he went into the mountain to pray, and he continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, he called his disciples: and he chose from them twelve, whom also he named apostles; Simon, (whom he also named Peter,) and Andrew his brother, and James and John, and Phillip and Bartholomew, and Matthew and Thomas, and James the son of Alphæus, and Simon, which is called the Zealot, and Judas the brother of James, and Judas Iscariot, which was the traitor.

Matthew's account, it will be seen, is not the *appointment*, which, however, is implied; but the *sending forth* of the twelve apostles, and is introduced by suggesting the reason for it. It was this: "And when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted and were scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherd" (ix. 36). And he exhorted his disciples to pray that laborers be sent forth. Mark speaks of the appointment, and tells of the preparation for it in his withdrawing to the mountain and calling to himself a select number of his followers, from whom he chose twelve. Luke speaks of another most important part of this preparation: "He continued all night in prayer, and when it was day, he called his disciples, and he chose from them twelve." This, surely is not copying. If there ever were three accounts of the same occurrence, independent of each other,

and each throwing some additional light on it, I think we have an instance here. When we come to the list of the twelve we find them called apostles, by all three; Peter is, in all, placed first and Judas Iscariot last. The fact that the last is the traitor is included in all. These are things we should naturally expect in each account; but look at the difference in the grouping, and the difference in the phraseology in speaking of the traitor and in the giving of the surnames. There is no copying here.

In the words of the last writer named, "What reason could there be for making alterations of such a character? That the alterations, if they be alterations, are not due to carelessness, is proved by the exact agreement between the narratives in all details of fact."

Dean Alford's supposition of the knowledge among the Christians of that generation of the "common substratum of apostolic teaching" seems a much more probable explanation, both of the identities and of the differences of these accounts, each of which has a distinct character of its own, and reflects the individuality of its author.

But the writer in the *Expositor and Review* takes an important step in advance of Alford which he feels fully warranted in doing by later discoveries as to the character of the Greek used among the people of the apostolic age. He feels sure that our Saviour, reared from childhood in "Galilee of the Gentiles," used this Greek as well as Aramaic, and that his apostles, who were of the same region, did the same. He thinks that accounts of some of the remarkable occurrences were written down immediately or very soon after they took place, and that notes of discourses and parables were taken as they were uttered; that some of these were spoken in Greek—the Greek of the people—the Greek of the New Testament, and some in

Aramaic; and that John preserves for us in his Gospel a selection chiefly from those spoken in Greek, while the Synoptists made their Gospels chiefly, so far as discourses are concerned, from those delivered in Aramaic. The bilingual and trilingual inscriptions which have come to light in our days are suggestive here.

He thinks that though, as Luke says, "*many*" may "have taken in hand to draw up a narrative," the four Evangelists, two as apostles and eye-witnesses, and two under apostolic guidance and with apostolic approval, wrote on the basis of the contemporary records, some of which were their own writings, and some, those of other witnesses.

It must be plain to every one who reads the Gospels or any other books of the Scriptures that inspiration does not deprive the writers of their individuality. The supernatural "power" given them does not supersede the natural powers with which they have been gifted. In connection with the supernatural power exercised in miracles we find that natural means are not set aside. Christ said, "Lazarus, come forth"; but said to those standing by, "Loose him, and let him go," as He had already said, "Take away the stone." Doubtless He could have caused the stone to move, and the bandages to fall off, by his all-powerful word; but He let ordinary human agencies do what they could.

In the feeding of the thousands, He could, doubtless, have caused the loaves and fishes to float through the air to each receiving hand; but He gave them to his apostles and they distributed them. So, without doubt, our blessed Lord *could* have fulfilled his promise that the Holy Spirit should "bring all things to their remembrance" without the use of means: yet it would seem more in accord with his usual course that their natural powers should be used under the stimulation and

guidance of the Holy Spirit. The mention of their "remembrance," indeed, implies this; and why should that common aid to memory, writing, be excluded?

It has been well said, "A line written upon the spot is worth a cart-load of reminiscences." The vivid touches of the gospel records certainly would not impress one as made thirty or forty years after the occurrence of the deeds and scenes described. That "looking up into heaven" as He blessed the loaves and fishes is one of them: the "green grass" on which the multitude sat is another.

I am glad to be able to quote here the words of that accurate scholar and diligent searcher of facts, Sir William Ramsay, addressed to the Victoria Institute in London: "How few would venture to maintain that the Synoptic Gospels are, or might be, based on documents, some written while Christ was still living, some within a few days or hours of His death? *i.e.* [that] there were such documents in existence, accessible to persons who desired to attain 'to know the certainty of those things?' I feel no doubt that this was the case" (Trans., vol. xxxix.). Further on he says: "In the last few days I have printed an argument that about a sixth part of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, which is common to them, but is not found in the Gospel of Mark, is taken from a document written before the death of Christ." He remarks: "A history which ultimately rests partly on contemporary written evidence, partly on the evidence of eye-witnesses and actors in the events, stands on the highest plane of historic certainty." Professor Ramsay bases this belief as regards the Gospels on the innumerable discoveries which show the general prevalence of the custom of keeping records of all transactions of business—of writing "on the spot" and not trusting to memory. But, in showing that the Book of Acts "could not have been written in the second

century"—and he does it most conclusively—he adduces an argument of a different kind which is equally applicable to the Gospels, as records made earlier than the dates assigned by the great majority of New Testament scholars. These are his words: "The Book [Acts] could not have been written in the second century, as the later nineteenth century scholars declared it to be, because it is inconsistent with the situation in Asia Minor in the second century; it assumes conditions and relations that ceased to exist before the date when it was declared to have been fabricated; it is a document that is stamped as of the first century on the ordinary canons of criticism, and marked as originating from contemporary records by its vividness and individuality."

Harnack is quoted as saying of the Synoptic Gospels: "In their essential substance the Gospels belong to the first, the Jewish, aspect of Christianity, that brief epoch which may be denoted as the palæontological." Of unlearned readers, I think fully nine out of ten feel, if they never come to the point of expressing it in words, the same fact. It has been remarked of some of the opening sentences of some of Paul's Epistles, that a "whole system of theology" lies behind such expressions. Behind the narratives and recorded utterances of these Gospels, we feel that no such system lies; but that they are the seeds out of which such a system normally grew at a later stage in the development of inspired Christian thought. Yet according to the theory held even by conservative scholars, these Gospels were written after these Epistles of Paul. I cannot believe it without undeniable proof, of which, it can be safely asserted, there is none. The traditions repeated by Eusebius are not decisive as to matters like this, valuable as they are as to the broader fact of the *authorship* of the Gospels. We might have no doubt as to Bacon's authorship of the Organon, and

yet place very little confidence in any oral traditions as to the time or circumstances in which it was written.

Canon Gore (as he then was), writing in the *Pilot* in 1901, drew attention to some striking differences between the phraseology of the Gospels and that of the Epistles. In editorial comment, the *Expository Times* says: "Look at the phraseology of the Gospels first of all. In the Epistles, Christians are called 'the brethren' or 'the saints.' These titles describe their relations to the community. In the Gospels, as in the early history of the Acts, they are entitled 'the disciples.' Again, in the Gospels, the characteristic title of Jesus is 'the Son of Man,' and Christ is still the Jewish Messiah. In the Epistles, 'Christ' has become almost a proper name and 'the Son of Man' is no longer in use. . . . The phraseology of justification, sanctification and election, if it appears at all in the Gospels, appears so untechnically that the contrast is only the more impressive." After other differences are referred to, the remark is made: "It is difficult to imagine stronger evidence that the Gospels came into existence in the natural way described by St. Luke in his preface, and that they were left uncoloured by the thoughts and necessities of a later time."

If we take the opening verses of a later writing, the First Epistle of Peter, and compare the phraseology with that of the Gospel of Mark, we find the contrast equally striking. When we find Peter, there, speaking of Christians as "elect according to the foreknowledge of God, the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ," we are impressed with the fact that such doctrines as those of election, the Trinity, the atonement, with the fruit of "obedience" in the reconciled, and efficacious grace in salvation, were all familiar, not only to a few, but to those that were "scattered abroad" over many countries. "A whole system of

Theology," indeed, lies behind this; we have gotten far beyond the point of view of the Synoptic Gospels.

When we turn to the Gospel of Matthew, which a tradition tells us was written among the Hebrews and in their dialect,¹ "while Peter and Paul were laying the foundations of the church in Rome," we see no sign of such a system of theology lying behind the simple narrative, but feel that here are the *seeds* of which the system is the matured harvest. Many years of development must lie between the two, and we cannot but think the tradition a pure legend, so far as the time and circumstances of the record contained in the Gospel of Mark are concerned. Our inability to believe that the Gospel of Matthew was written "while Peter and Paul were laying the foundations of the church in Rome,"—a collaboration which many think fabulous—need not disturb our confidence in the Matthean authorship of the Gospel, to which all antiquity testifies. We may doubt the truth of the tradition that Shakespeare wrote "As You Like It," at a certain time, at a certain house; but none but a few literary cranks doubts that he wrote it.

The same tradition of Irenæus represents Mark as writing after the deaths of Peter and Paul. Whensoever the last touches may have been given to the Gospels, fitting them for use in all ages and for all nations, the whole style and point of view in them indicate the existence of contemporary records out of which they were formed. In Luke's case, these were the records of "many" who had "taken in hand to draw up a narrative," and in Mark's, may have been chiefly Peter's, and in the case of Matthew and John, their own diaries.

We cannot say just how it was done, as a matter of course. We can only consider the probabilities of the case in canvassing such questions as these: When "many" were making

¹ Iren. III. 1. 1, quoted by Eusebius, H. E. v. 8.

records, well may we ask, Is it likely that the Evangelists would have failed to do so? If they were to write these reminiscences of the most momentous events of the world's history for the interests of all humanity, is it likely that *their* pens would fail to move till some thirty or forty years after the events and utterances to be recorded? Is it likely that a whole generation of Christians would have been left without reliable written records, when their numbers were increasing so rapidly that personal testimony could not possibly be conveyed to the great majority of them? We all know how oral testimony, as it passes from mouth to mouth, takes on protean shapes, and is often entirely changed, not only in form but in substance. Would not vast numbers need, like Theophilus, to know "the certainty of these things" during this long formative period?

Such probabilities should certainly be considered in forming an opinion about such a matter.

Then look at the Gospels themselves. Do they bear the marks of a time when Christians could take in truths presented in the form we see in the Epistle to the Ephesians, for example? When we examine the Gospels and observe the great contrast of style, point of view, stage of development, and atmosphere, we can hardly fail to agree with Harnack when he says that, "In their essential substance, the Gospels belong to the first, the Jewish, aspect of Christianity."¹

"But," it is objected, "we have no literary proof, in the form of references to or quotations from the Gospels indicating their existence earlier than the decade 60-70 A.D." We may ask in reply, "Where is the literature of that time in which we could *expect* references to such records?" There is none ex-

¹"Julicher remarks truly: 'The true merit of the Synoptists is that they, in spite of all their poetic touches, [*sic*] did not repaint but handed down the Christ of history.'" (The Biblical World, Nov., 1907, p. 348.)

cept the other New Testament books, and these all presuppose the great facts and teachings which we have in the Gospels.

We may well ask here, "Why is evidence demanded for the authorship and early origin of the New Testament which is never required in the case of the classics of Greece and Rome? Why, in the case of the New Testament books alone, is the date of writing determined by the date of the earliest quotations or references in other literature?" If the same rule were applied to the classics, we should have no works of Aristotle or Thucydides, or even of Virgil, Horace, or Tacitus. Look at the case of Roman authors contemporary with the writers of the New Testament. "Martial and Statius never mention one another; both might seem unknown to Tacitus. . . . Tacitus does not think it worth while to mention the *Histories* of the Emperor Claudius, the *Tragedies* of Seneca, or the *Punica* of Silius Italicus."

Then, as to the writings of Tacitus himself, this statement is made: "The case, then, of the writings of Tacitus stands thus: One passage of his *Histories* is cited within a hundred years of his death. Three centuries after his death there are in one author undoubted references to parts of the *Histories*, and one undoubted reference to a passage of the *Annals*, in another author a great many references to the *Histories*, in a third, a reference to one passage of the *Histories*." (R. E. C. Well-don, *Nineteenth Century and After*, October, 1907.)

Well may this writer say, "But, a theory which impugns the credit of all ancient literature disproves itself."

The first quotation we have of Tacitus, a contemporary of the Apostle John, is by Tertullian about 200 A.D. But Lardner estimates that in the writings of Tertullian alone there are more quotations from the New Testament, small book as it is, than there are "of all the works of Cicero, though of so un-

common excellence of thought and style, in the writings of all characters for several ages." (*Ibid.*) So there is no lack of quotation when there is literature in which it could be expected to appear.

In a case like this, as has been said, a conclusion can be reached only by a weighing of probabilities; and the conclusion can only be a probable one. Certainty cannot be reached without positive proof. But, considering the need of a whole generation of believers to have definite information constantly before them as the foundation of their belief; the common practice of making records in that day; the unexplained differences of phraseology in the different Gospels in describing the same events, which make the copying theory incredible; and the great contrast in the style, point of view, verbiage, and general atmosphere of the Gospels to that of the Epistles, it seems very probable that the Gospels contain evidence recorded very soon after the occurrence of the events of our Saviour's life. The identities in words and phrases in the Gospels are naturally explained by that "common substratum of apostolic teaching" which would naturally take form in the use of certain words and phrases during the time when the Apostles remained in Jerusalem, and the differences are absolutely inexplicable on the copying theory.

The very probable conclusion, then, would seem to be that the Gospels, whenever they may have been finally finished to suit them for use in all ages, contain written records made very soon after the events related. This conclusion must give to every one who confidently accepts it, a higher conception of the value of the Gospels. As Sir William Ramsay has well said: "A history which ultimately rests, partly on contemporary written evidence, partly on the evidence of eye-witnesses and actors in the events, stands on the highest plane of historic certainty."

Then, when we find rising to our view out of these records, above all heroes, all wise men, all philanthropists, the form of One like unto a Son of Man, a marvelous, unique Person, at once divine and human, who has directed, elevated and purified humanity as all other influences combined have failed to do, we have clear evidence that the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit was given these writers so that these things were written that we "may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing, we may have life in His name."