

## ARTICLE II.

FERRIS'S "FORMATION OF THE NEW  
TESTAMENT."<sup>1</sup>BY REVEREND PARKE P. FLOURNOY, D.D.,  
BETHESDA, MARYLAND.

EUSEBIUS<sup>2</sup> speaks of Quadratus as a prophet, and as an evangelist who traveled to many countries and peoples, and who, with others who did the same work, "also delivered to them the books of the holy Gospels." He speaks of him as one of those "who held the first rank in the apostolic succession." Eusebius tells us, also, of Quadratus, that he presented to the Emperor Hadrian an apology or defense of Christians who were suffering persecution, and that this work was in his own hands. This apology may have been presented to Hadrian at his accession (117 A. D.), some seventeen years after the death of the Apostle John. It is noteworthy that, as early as this, evangelists had already been engaged in distributing "the books of the holy Gospels" wherever they went.

But Eusebius introduces us to another defender of the faith, who presented his apology to the same emperor (Hadrian) at Athens in the eighth year of his reign; and that apology, both in the original Greek and in a Syriac translation, has come to light of late years. Dr. Rendel Harris discovered the Syriac translation in the St. Catherine convent on Mount Sinai in 1889, and this led to the discovery of a

<sup>1</sup> Concluded from page 525.<sup>2</sup> Eccl. Hist. iii. 37.

large part of the Greek text embedded in another work, called "Barlaam and Josaphat."

In this apology, Aristides tells Hadrian of the "holy Gospel writing" which the Christians had, "and their other writings," which he exhorts the Emperor to read, and from which he said he derived his information. There is no reason to doubt that these were our Gospels and other writings in the New Testament. His condensed account of our Saviour's incarnation, death, burial, and resurrection he speaks of as taught in "the Gospel, as it is called . . . which, a short time ago, was preached among them," and adds, "and you also, if you will read therein, may perceive the power which belongs to it."

There are the clearest references to the Acts of the Apostles, and a remarkable parallel, in this speech of the Athenian philosopher at Athens, to the address of Paul to the philosophers on Mars Hill at Athens, recorded in the seventeenth chapter of Acts. When he says that one of the apostles "traversed the countries about us," we can hardly help believing that he refers to Paul, the apostle who first brought the gospel to Athens, Corinth, and Macedonia.

But Aristides gives evidence that he not only knew the matter contained in the Gospels and the Acts, but also the Epistles and the Revelation. There is remarkable coincidence in forms of expression; as, for instance: Paul says, "By him all things consist"; Aristides says, "Through him all things consist." Paul says the heathen "serve the creature [or creation] more than the Creator"; Aristides says they "began to worship the creation more than their Creator." James exhorts Christians to be "gentle and easy to be entreated"; Aristides says, "They are 'gentle and easy to be entreated.'" Paul speaks of the Jews as "my brethren, my kinsmen ac-

cording to the flesh," and uses the expression "not after the flesh, but after the spirit"; Aristides says, "Brethren, not after the flesh, but after the spirit." Peter, speaking of the Epistles of Paul, says, "As also in all his Epistles . . . in which are some things hard to be understood"; Aristides, having told the Emperor of "the holy Gospel writing," says, "There are found in their other writings [i.e. other than "the holy Gospel writing"] things which are hard to utter and difficult for one to narrate." In Hebrews ii. 5 and vi. 5 we find the phrase "the world to come"; Aristides speaks of those who seek "the world to come." John, in the Revelation, speaks of the things which must come to pass hereafter, having already received the command from the Saviour. "Write . . . the things which shall come to pass hereafter"; Aristides says, "Since I read in their writings, I was fully assured of these things as also of things which are to come." Paul repeats God's promise, "I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them"; Aristides says the Christians "have the commands of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself graven upon their hearts." Paul exhorts Christians to give "not grudgingly"; Aristides says the Christians "give ungrudgingly." Peter speaks of the regenerated as "born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God which liveth and abideth forever"; Aristides says, "Let all that are without the knowledge of God draw near thereto [i.e. to their doctrine], and they will receive incorruptible words." John the beloved says, "Let us love one another"; Aristides says, "And they love one another."

It would seem that to deny that Aristides was acquainted with our New Testament books would require a considerable amount of hardihood. *And this address to Hadrian was made*

125 A.D., according to Eusebius. Well may Professor Harnack say, as he does in his notable article in the *Preussische Jahrbücher* (May, 1898), "The discovery of this Apology is a find of the first importance."

These facts show, I think, that the theory of the formation of the New Testament presented to us in this book under review is radically false. The New Testament was not "formed" by the action of the Third Council of Carthage in the fourth century any more than the whole Bible was "formed" by the decrees of the Council of Trent in the sixteenth. Leipoldt, in a single sentence, presents a very different view:—

"It was a perfectly natural development which raised to the rank of canonical Scriptures Gospels and letters which were much used, often read and held in reverence from the beginning."<sup>1</sup>

He evidently does not consider the formation of the New Testament the act of arbitrary ecclesiastical authority.

With this view another recent utterance of scholarship agrees:—

"There was then no formation of the canon in the sense that a general council took up the question. The number of books in the New Testament simply grew. When anyone had the question as to the sacred character of a book to decide, he was very likely to ask whether it was from an apostle or not."<sup>2</sup>

For lack of space, no reference has been made to Polycarp as a witness to the New Testament; though, as Dr. Gregory says, his Epistle is full of it. *And he sat at the feet of the Apostle John.*

Also, it will be noticed that no reference has been made to Ignatius, whose acknowledged letters Dr. Sanday finds steeped in Johannine thought. And he suffered martyrdom soon after the beginning of the second century.

<sup>1</sup> Geschichte des Neutestamentlichen Kanons (Leipzig, 1907).

<sup>2</sup> Gregory, Canon and Text of the New Testament, p. 293.

Even the writers of apocryphal books and Gnostic disquisitions knew the New Testament. Apocryphal Gospels are witnesses for the true. Dr. Sanday says: "A new element is introduced into the question by the discovery of the Gospel of Peter, which uses all four Gospels," etc.<sup>1</sup> The Gospel according to the Hebrews draws three-fourths of its matter from our Gospels.

About 160 A.D., Heracleon, a Gnostic, wrote a commentary on St. John's Gospel. Says Dr. Sanday:—

"There is no distinction between the words of Christ and the parts of the Gospel which are due to the Evangelist. The latter are expounded as an authoritative text in the same manner as the former.

"But the way in which Heracleon sits down to write this commentary shows that he is not introducing any new conception, but is acting upon one which is already settled and established. Nor does Heracleon stand alone. All the other Valentinian leaders, as well Ptolemaeus his colleague in the West as those of the Anatolic or Eastern branch of the School, our knowledge of which is derived from the so-called *Excerpta Theodoti*, place the Fourth Gospel with the other Gospels on the same footing of Divine authority."<sup>2</sup>

But another Gnostic, Basilides, long before him, used the New Testament as of divine authority. Dr. Gregory says of Basilides that he

"lived, so far as we can judge from the accounts, soon after the beginning of the second century. He wrote twenty-four books on the Gospel. It is clear that he accepts in general the books of the New Testament. He appears to know Matthew, and he quotes Luke, John, Romans, First Corinthians, Ephesians, and Colossians. He may have alluded to First Timothy, and have quoted First Peter. Now, it is extremely strange that . . . [he] should do what no one had done before him . . . namely, quote the books of the New Testament precisely in the same way as the books of the Old Testament."<sup>3</sup>

Common sense demands an answer to this question: If these writings, evidently the same with, at least, the bulk of

<sup>1</sup> Bampton Lectures, p. 301, note.      <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 307.

<sup>3</sup> Canon and Text of the New Testament, pp. 69 f.

our New Testament, were universally regarded by Christians in A.D. 125 as inspired and authoritative, and had been circulated all over the Roman world long before and accepted everywhere as the sacred records of Christianity, how did they attain to this universal acceptance in this character? The only rational answer is that they went forth under apostolic authority. Thus accepted by the great body of Christians, many thousands of whom were younger contemporaries of the Apostle John, they must have had apostolic authorship or authorization. Any other attempted explanation of their universal acceptance is irrational and incredible.

Thus it seems clear that there began to be a New Testament for the "New Testament Church," which our author avers had no New Testament, when the first writing in it came to a church with apostolic authority. When a letter came with such authority to a single church, it was at least the New Testament in germ to that church. The formation of the New Testament did not take place by the arbitrary act of the church in the North African city within three years of the beginning of the fifth century, but altogether in the first century. The picture of the Church standing by a pile of innumerable productions and sifting out the books of our New Testament is a travesty on the actual process of its formation. Under the influence of his theory, the writer scoffs at the idea of apostolic authority having given us the New Testament with divine sanction; and, ignoring it, asks the question: "If we reject the Catholic doctrine of an inspired church can we get a closed canon? Indeed, how did we get our New Testament anyway?" He says truly, "These are questions raising anew the very problem of the seat of authority in religion" (p. 16).

It is easy to ask puzzling questions about almost any subject, and especially easy to ask them in a way to raise apparent-

ly insoluble problems on a subject of so much mystery as that of inspiration, and so much historical obscurity as that of the gathering together of the many writings which compose our New Testament. If we admit what our author insists on as true, that the Catholic Church gave us our New Testament (p. 20), then we are indeed inconsistent in maintaining the divine authority of the New Testament, and denying the divine authority of the Catholic Church. Then, how are we Protestants to have confidence in the New Testament as of divine authority?

As one Protestant, I would say that a satisfactory solution of the problem is this: Not the Catholic Church, but *God*, gave us the New Testament. Our Saviour explained to his apostles that his going away, the thought of which grieved them so sadly, was expedient for them. His going away was essential to their receiving his Holy Spirit in the measure and manner necessary for those exalted functions for which they were appointed. He promised that through the Holy Spirit, given according to his promise and the promise of the Father, they should be led into all truth, and that all things should be brought to their remembrance. Now are we to assume that this guidance was to be withheld from those who should be called to write, while it should be given to those who were only to speak of these things? or are we to assume that it would be withheld from these apostles in giving their approval of those writings which in their lifetime were given to the church for all time?

The opinions of riper scholars than our author may be referred to here. That the authority of the apostles was appealed to in these matters in the apostolic and sub-apostolic times, Jülicher plainly shows.<sup>1</sup> Speaking of the prologue to

<sup>1</sup> Introduction to the New Testament, pp. 474-491.

the Acts of the Apostles and Luke's Gospel, he remarks that the terms linking the two together indicate this, that "under the collective description 'those things which have been fulfilled among us,' Luke thus early, perhaps, includes both Acts of Jesus and Acts of the Apostles." This he thinks "best shows the light in which the Apostles were regarded in his age." He goes on to say:—

"Naturally, everything which had any significance among Christian circles in matters of teaching and life, of discipline or the usages of public worship, was now traced back to the Apostles; the word 'Apostolic' became a synonym for 'ecclesiastically correct,' and whatever men wished to establish as truly Christian was handed or written down, in good faith, as the rule or doctrine of the Apostles. Thus in 2 Peter iii. 2 the command of the Lord and Saviour is described expressly as being vouched for by 'your Apostles [commandment of the Lord and Saviour through your Apostles].' God, Christ, the Apostles: Clement<sup>1</sup> considered these degrees as no less complete than universally recognized [Christ sent forth by God, and the apostles by Christ]—both, consequently, springing in their order from the will of God, and the Divinity of apostolic institutions was thus proved."

He then proceeds to show that in the epistles of Clement, Polycarp, and Ignatius, "the apostles" are regarded as an incontrovertible authority,<sup>2</sup> and we know that Justin Martyr's name for the four Gospels is "memoirs of the apostles."

"A New Testament grew, or was composed, out of partial collections which were already in existence." "One of those collections was the Gospel"; and certainly, he says, "the

<sup>1</sup> First Epistle, chap. xlii.

<sup>2</sup> As to apostolic authority, let us hear a second-century witness: "For the Lord of all gave to His apostles the power of the Gospel through whom also we have known the truth, that is, the doctrine of the Son of God; to whom also did the Lord declare: 'He that heareth you, heareth Me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth Me, and Him that sent Me.'" (Irenæus, *Against Heresies*, book iii., Preface.)

"We have learned from none others the plan of our salvation, than from those through whom the Gospel has come down to us, which they did at one time proclaim in public, and, at a later



Memoirs of the Apostles belonged to the most precious of our Scriptures." Another collection was "the Apostles," and Jülicher draws attention to the fact that Polycarp,<sup>1</sup> the disciple of the beloved disciple, uses this language in speaking of the Epistles of Paul: "His scripturis dictum est as applied both to Psalm iv. 5 and Eph. iv. 26."

Thus the answer to the puzzling question of this book is clearly made. The New Testament was not a gift of the Catholic Church, but the gift of God, through Christ and through his apostles. Had the Third Council of Carthage never met, our New Testament would in all probability have been precisely the same as it is now. Indeed, it was precisely the same before the Council met; and it appears that the only thing done in the matter was to decide upon the authorship of one Epistle which was already accepted as a part of the New Testament — the Epistle to the Hebrews. Even such a higher critic as Jülicher, as we have seen, quotes Th. Zahn, the coryphæus of German New Testament scholarship, as saying that in "the third generation after Christ (c. 100) the principal parts at least of the New Testament were already an actually working authority, recognized as binding in all parts of the Church."

The New Testament was completed when the last words period, by the will of God, handed down to us in the Scriptures, to be the ground and pillar of our faith. For it is unlawful to assert that they preached before they possessed 'perfect knowledge,' as some do even venture to say, boasting themselves as improvers of the apostles. For, after our Lord rose from the dead, [the apostles] were invested with power from on high when the Holy Spirit came down [upon them], were filled with all [His gifts], and had perfect knowledge: they departed to the ends of the earth, preaching the glad tidings of the good things [sent] from God to us, and proclaiming the peace of heaven to men, who indeed do equally and individually possess the Gospel of God." (*Ibid.*, iii. 1.)

<sup>1</sup> Epistle to the Philippians, chap. xii.

were written, not when the whole collection of writings was distributed and accepted as "an actually working authority, recognized as binding in all parts of the Church." Its completion came not with the action of the Third Council of Carthage; but in the apostolic age. Part after part was given out according to the need, and each part, though it may not have been immediately distributed and universally recognized as such, was a part of what we now call the New Testament. Like the Old Testament, it came in "divers portions and in divers manners," and in it "God hath at the end of these days spoken to us in his Son." The "great salvation which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord was confirmed unto us by them that heard him." The permanent records of this testimony are the New Testament.<sup>1</sup>

As has been well said by Professor Armstrong, of Princeton Theological Seminary, the New Testament is not "an authoritative *collection* of writings, but a collection of *authoritative writings*."

Is the defining of the canon by an ecumenical council an all-important thing, after all? It may have a relative importance for the placing of the writings of the New Testament before the people and the exclusion of extraneous mat-

<sup>1</sup> As to the claim that the fact that some writings were sometimes read in the public services of some churches placed them on a level with the books of the New Testament, Dr. Gregory says: "What was read in the public meeting was read either under the head of: God to Man, or under the head of: Man to Man" (p. 235). The same thing is still done without the slightest danger of confusion or misunderstanding, as, e.g., when a sermon is read in the absence of the minister, or some edifying passage is read by the minister himself. After considering the claim that the first letter of Clement of Rome was used as Scripture, Dr. Gregory says: "So there is no thought of its being scripture in the mind of Irenæus. Clement of Alexandria quotes his namesake often and with respect, but does not use his letter as scripture" (p. 238).

As to the Shepherd of Hermas, which the author of this book

ter. But the Scriptures, and not the ecclesiastical ring which surrounds them, are the essential thing. The shell of the egg is of relative importance, but the egg itself is what we want. The shell, whatever its value, is not very digestible. If the writings which make up the New Testament had never been bound into one volume, they would yet have been of incalculable value to us. Indeed, if they had come to us thus, we should have had an advantage in one respect: they would have impressed us more distinctly, thus separate, as the different testimonies of many witnesses to the great facts and truths of the gospel. Then many mistakes have been made in attempts at defining the canon. Two councils, held only three years apart, made different deliverances as to the authorship of a most important book of the New Testament — the Epistle to the Hebrews.

After all, the authority of the books of the New Testament is a matter to be determined by evidence, not by inclusion in a canon. If we were bound to accept as Scripture all the writings included in the canon by the Third Council of Carthage and the Council of Trent, for instance, we should have to accept the Apocrypha of the Old Testament; so that we would have to take some matter inclosed in the shell, which thinks was more widely read and more highly prized in the second century than any New Testament book, and the exclusion of which from our New Testament he so laments, besides its "unpleasant" feature to those who do not enjoy prurient productions, and its Adoptionism in its presentation of the person of our Lord. It came undoubtedly, as the Muratonian Canon tells us, from a period long after the apostolic age, and, therefore, could not have apostolic authority. The Muratonian Canon has this to say of it: "But it cannot until the end of time be published (that is: read as if it were scripture) in the church before the people neither among the completed number of the prophets nor among the apostles. [Dr. Gregory remarks:] That tells us that two kinds of scripture books were then read in the church [about 170 A.D.], prophets and apostles."

would have been rather indigestible for most of us. As an egg is an egg from the time it is the size of a pinhead, New Testament writing was New Testament in character and authority from the first inspired writing — whether Gospel or Epistle, or Acts or Apocalypse — to the time that the shell of ecclesiastical approval was placed around it by a church council. On this meat the New Testament church grew and thrived; and it is on this that the Christian church is to live and flourish to the end.