

THE GREAT HYPERBOLE.

ST. JOHN xxi. 25.

THERE are good men who deny, or very reluctantly admit, that any inspired Scripture can ever have been lost, although there are many and unmistakable indications in the Bible itself that a considerable number of such Scriptures, once known and quoted in the Church, have not been gathered into our present Canon. It is their very respect for Scripture which impels them, at least on this point, to reject the testimony of the Scriptures. They cannot bear to think that any Divine word has been lost; and so, in the teeth of all evidence, they refuse to believe that any such word has failed to reach them. But surely there is one very large and obvious fact which they have overlooked, or have not duly weighed. For they believe, as we believe, that after the ascension of our Lord *all* the Apostles went forth to preach the gospel they had received from Him. There must, therefore, have been a Gospel according to Philip, a Gospel according to Thomas, a Gospel according to Bartholomew, Andrew, James, Jude, Simon Zelotes, as well as a Gospel according to Matthew, and another according to John, and another according to Peter (if, as is commonly assumed, Mark was only Peter's penman), and another according to Paul, which may still be recovered from his Epistles—as, indeed, it has in large measure been recovered by Dr. Matheson in the pages of this very Magazine. And these Gospels must have been inspired; for Christ had breathed upon all the Apostles; they had all received that Holy Ghost who was to shew them, and who

did shew and bring to their remembrance, all things whatsoever He had commanded them. But where are those Gospels now? Inspired Gospels, many inspired Gospels, must have been lost, whether they were only spoken Gospels, or whether, as may have been the case, they were also written out. And among these lost Gospels there must have been some which would have largely added to our knowledge both of the man Christ Jesus and of the men who wrote or uttered them.

I, for one, would give much to read the Gospel according to Thomas the Twin, the Gospel as it shaped itself in his incredulous but tenacious soul, and cannot but think that it would have been a very suitable Gospel for a sceptical age such as this. A change may have passed upon him after he received the Holy Ghost, like that which made a new man of Peter; and in that case we should have had to pick out his doubts from his beliefs, to infer what had once been most questionable to him from what he afterwards most strongly and emphatically affirmed. Or, like Matthew, he may have been raised rather than changed by the heavenly inspiration and gift, may have been illuminated and exalted rather than transformed. And, in that case, what proofs and arguments he would have plied us with, reasoning with us as he had reasoned with himself; and what a gracious toleration, what a tender and strengthening sympathy he would have shewn to as many as are content with the lower blessedness of believing because they see! In either case we can hardly doubt that the Gospel according to Thomas would have been most welcome and precious to as many as have had to fight with "the spectres of the mind," to as many as have suffered from the sceptical infections of the age.

Is his Gospel, are the Gospels of his silent brethren, for ever lost to us then? Not necessarily. As I sometimes please myself by imagining that from heaven, if I should

ever be admitted within its happy precincts, I may be allowed to see those fair or sublime earthly scenes which I have longed to see but have never been able to visit, so also I sometimes refresh myself with the hope that I may then be permitted to learn what I can never learn here, how the glad tidings of great joy took form in the minds of Thomas, Philip, Andrew, and the other holy men of whose teaching no record has been handed down to us. If there is a library in heaven—as I think there must be and trust there is, or what is to become of those of us who have spent our life in and among books?—no doubt we shall find all these lost Gospels in it; and one of the first that I shall take down from the shelves will be the Gospel according to Didymus, if at least I have eyes for aught but the gospel in the looks of his Master and mine.

Not only are there lost Gospels, Gospels lost to us for a while certainly and perhaps for ever, but also no one of the Gospels we possess affects to give us more than a brief selection of what Jesus said and did. St. John, for instance, expressly tells (Chap. xx. 30): “And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book”; and this assertion is confirmed in Chapter xxi. Verses 24 and 25 of his Gospel. For these two verses are not attributed to St. John. Most of the scholars to whose opinion we defer agree in ascribing them to one of his disciples, speaking in the name of the rest,—probably one of the Ephesian elders speaking in the name of the whole presbytery. St. John had closed his Gospel at Verse 23, with words which Jesus had spoken of himself, the disciple whom He loved. And the Ephesian elders append their certificate: “*This* is that disciple who testifieth of these things, and wrote these things; and *we* know that his testimony is true. And there are also many other things which Jesus did; the which (adds the scribe who holds the pen) if they should be written every one, I suppose

that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written." So that, even when the last Gospel was finished, the uppermost thought of those who had listened to the teaching of the Apostles was: "So much, indeed, has been written down; but, O, how much more has been left unwritten!"

The fact, therefore, to which we have to reconcile our minds as best we may, is that we have in our hands only a brief selection, a short summary, of the things which Jesus said and did; that of by far the larger part of the signs He wrought and the words He uttered absolutely no record has been preserved. Indeed it is impossible to read attentively the four Gospels we possess without becoming aware that the discourses they contain were spoken on a comparatively small number of occasions; and that hence by far the greater part of his teaching has been lost to the Church. And this inference is, as we have seen, confirmed and put beyond all doubt by the express testimony of St. John and his disciples.

At first sight the fact is a very unwelcome one, I confess; and if we cannot but hope that we may one day be permitted to read the Gospel according to Thomas or Philip, how much more must we hope that we may be permitted to see the original Gospel, the Gospel as it shaped itself in the mind and heart of Christ Himself! But the longer we look at this unwelcome fact the more tolerable it grows to us, the more welcome even and the more admirable.

For, as we consider it, we see, first of all, a Divine stamp or signature upon it. There is the same prodigality, the same apparent waste, in the natural world, where a thousand seeds are scattered for one that strikes root and brings forth its flowers and fruit. A man, to whom wisdom is a strain, and beauty of thought and expression a difficult achievement, may well make much of every wise and beautiful word he elaborates, and take infinite pains to plant it

in the memories of men and place it beyond the reach of accident. But if Christ was, as He claimed to be, the Son of God, we should not expect *Him* to be careful of his words or jealous for his fame. We should expect to find in Him the generous bounty, the ceaseless prodigality of Nature. So much as this, indeed, He claimed for Himself when He compared Himself to a Sower going forth to sow, and scattering the precious seed on all soils,—here to be choked by thorns, there to be pilfered by the birds of the air, and here to perish beneath the heat of the sun shining down on earth but thinly strewn over the rocks. He Himself did not expect many of his words to survive; but He knew that where they fell, as some of them did fall, into good and honest hearts, they would quicken and thrive and bring forth fruit abundantly; as, indeed, they have done throughout all the world.

We must remember, too, how impossible it was that a life and wisdom like his should be adequately set forth, let records be multiplied as they might. Men can only shew us what they see; and what they see in any teacher, human or divine, depends on the bent and limits of their several minds. Most of us have framed some conception of the prime minister of the day; but the conception in each of our minds differs from that in any other; no two of them are alike; in some measure they have taken form and colour from the minds which have framed them: and if all these various conceptions could be projected side by side upon a screen, he would have much ado to recognize himself in any one of them. And, in like manner, each of the Apostles had his own conception, his own mental image of Christ, though they all listened to the same words and saw the same signs. Hence, when we read the Gospel according to St. Matthew, if we see much of Christ in it, we also see something of Matthew; and when we read the Gospel according to St. John, if we see more of Christ,

we also see more of John, insomuch that it is often difficult to say where a discourse of Christ ends and St. John's reflections on that discourse begin.

We have but four Gospels, four memoirs of Christ, each of which is tinged with colours drawn from the mind of its author. Should we have been in better case if we had four, or forty, more? It may be doubted. When we read that had all the things which Jesus said and did been written every one, even the world itself could not have contained the books that would have been written, we smile as at an enormous exaggeration or a poetic flight. We commonly call it the great, or the sublime, hyperbole of St. John. But would it not be at once more true and more reverent to say that it is no hyperbole, but the simple truth; to admit that as no human life can be adequately set forth in words, so, much more, the deep and divine significance of what Jesus said and did, of his life who was the Life of the world, could not possibly be set forth; that no book, even though it were big as the world, could record, no words utter, all that was in Him? And if we had a book as big as the world, who could read it? If, even, the very Gospel had to be extracted from a hundred Gospels, or from a single Gospel which omitted nothing that He said or did for thirty years, or for the thirty months (say) of his public ministry, which of us could have mastered it? Only students, who gave their lives to the task, could have got to know Him; and if they wanted to make him known to the general public, they would have had to do precisely what the four inspired Evangelists have done so much better than they could do,—reduce the vast bulk to a brief compass, and select only such signs and such discourses as they held to be most characteristic or most significant.

What we *want*, therefore, we *have*. For all practical purposes we are better off with these four brief memoirs

of infinite significance in our hands than if we had a Gospel which no library could hold and no student overtake.

For the end for which these Gospels were written was not that we should come to know all about Christ—which seems to be the aim of most of our modern lives of Him; but that we should come to know Christ Himself and be brought into a vital relation with Him. They are but windows through which we look at Him as He passes by, bearing the burden of the world's sin, that He may take it away. St. John confesses that he has given us only a selection from the words and facts with which he was familiar, that he did not attempt to write in his book all the signs which Jesus did in the presence of his disciples. But he goes on to tell us (Chap. xx. 31), in words for ever memorable and full of the profoundest meaning, that he wrote what he did write in order "*that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.*" By which he did not mean simply that he wanted to persuade men that he was recording real historical facts, or even that he wanted them to recognize in Jesus the Christ long promised to the Jews. He was writing for men who already believed all that. What he wanted to do was so to set Jesus the Christ before them as to quicken and confirm in them a faith which should make Christ spiritually present to them, and influential, and supreme; so to exhibit Him as that He might be, and they might be sure that He was, their Saviour from all sin, the Prince by whose law their life was ruled, the God manifest in the flesh in order to confer on them the power of a divine and endless life, a life rooted in righteousness and clothed with radiant beauty. Out of the multitude of words and signs which thronged his memory he selected these which he thought would most clearly reveal Christ as the creative Word by whom all things were made, the Light which lighteth every man that

cometh into the world, the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world, and the Life which giveth life to all. And he recorded these significant signs and words, not simply to enrich us with a new philosophy, or a new morality even, but to endow us with a new life, life in Christ, life like Christ's, a life without spot and without end.

Did he make a wise selection? Did the brief Gospel he wrote suffice to shew Christ to men and to quicken them to life in Him? Let the event reply. Even in the lifetime of the Apostle thousands were brought to know Christ by the words he wrote, and so to know Him as to become new men in Him. And ever since that age his Gospel has proved a very river of the water of life, carrying life wherever it has come, and leaving broad margins of verdure and fruitfulness on either bank. Yea, let our own hearts reply. For which of us has not been quickened and gladdened by this living stream? which of us has not learned to know Jesus the Christ, the Son of God, the Saviour of the world, from the discourses which St. John has reported, with a fulness, a joy, a wonder, we should never have felt but for these life-giving words? Over these words indeed, so simple in their form, but in their significance so inexhaustible and profound, more than any other words even in the Bible itself, the Spirit of all Wisdom broods and moves with creative and redeeming energy. Above all other words they are spirit, and they are life.

Though, then, we must admit that whole Gospels have been lost to us, and that in our canonical Gospels we have only a selection from what Jesus did and said, I do not think we need regret that many Gospels have been lost, at least for the present, or that whole libraries have not been filled with the records of the Son of Man. Enough has been given for present use, enough to secure such a knowledge of Him as will bring us everlasting life; and the rest may be accorded us in the ample leisure of

eternity, when we are taken to dwell in the many mansions of the Father's House,—in which there surely must be room for all the Gospels ever written or spoken, even though they would make a book too big for this world to contain.

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*THE REVISED VERSION OF THE NEW
TESTAMENT.*

THE STYLE.

THERE are two competing theories of translation: one, in which the predominant object is to express as exactly as possible the full force and meaning of every turn of phrase in the original, and the other in which the predominant object is to produce a result which shall not read like a translation at all, but which shall move in its new dress with the same ease as in that which is native to it. I say in each case the predominant object; for in the hands of good translators neither the one nor the other of these two things can ever be entirely ignored. The question would be merely which should come first, and which second, in the translator's mind; and when the two conflict and it is necessary to make a choice between them, on which side the sacrifice should be made.

Very roughly speaking, it may be said that these two theories have their head-quarters in our two oldest universities. At Cambridge, scholarship is more exact and close; at Oxford, it is looser but has in it larger affinities with general literary culture. It is quite possible that this distinction may not be permanent, and that it may be due in a measure to personal influences which may be changed and even reversed in the future; and yet it would seem to be not without connexion with the traditional lines of