

# THE EXPOSITOR.

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## *THE ORAL AND THE WRITTEN GOSPELS.*

It is very natural that, until we are compelled to reflect on it, we should assume the Scriptures of the New Testament to have always occupied the place in the ministry and affection of the Church which we cheerfully assign to them at the present day. For want of reflection, we instinctively conceive of the primitive disciples as holding the New Testament in their hands, taking texts from it, preaching from it, or reading it for their private edification. And, therefore, it cannot fail to surprise us when we first hear or discover that, for two or three generations after the death of Christ, nay, till toward the close of the second century after the birth of Christ, the Church had *no* New Testament; that the first generation of disciples must have been passing away before even the first Gospel was written; and that at least three or four generations must have quitted the scene before the scattered Christian Scriptures were collected into a single volume.

Yet this is the exact state of the case, as we see the very moment we begin to examine and reflect. The first Gospels, St. Matthew's and St. Mark's, were certainly not written till between fifty or sixty years after Christ was born, the Gospel of St. Luke not till between sixty and seventy years after, the Gospel of St. John not till between ninety and a hundred years after, and the New Testament Canon was not formed, the various Gospels and Epistles

were not collected into a book, till nearly two hundred years after Christ was born. So that thousands and myriads of the early believers must have died in the faith of the Gospel, who had never read a single page of those Gospels in which we ourselves have found Christ and his salvation !

What then ? Were they without a Gospel because they had no written Gospel ? No ; they had the oral or spoken Gospel, delivered to them by eye-witnesses and ministers of the Word. Are our Gospels the more imperfect and unreliable because they were not written till long after the Son of Man had ascended into heaven ? No ; they are the more perfect and the more reliable, the better adapted to the great work they have done and are still doing in the world.

Let us realize as vividly as we can the character and position of the Apostles and Evangelists after the death and resurrection of the Lord. A new revelation had been made to them, a new *uncovering* of the thoughts and purposes of God. The veil had been stript from Moses and the Prophets. They saw in clear vision what God had been doing for men in the past, how He had made all men for Himself, how He had been training them for the kingdom of heaven. His eternal grace, his goodwill to men, his hatred of the evils by which they were afflicted and degraded, his fixed purpose to redeem them from evil and its miseries, and to raise them into a life of righteousness, charity, and peace, all these were now disclosed in the word—in the life, death, and triumph—of Jesus Christ. For them, the long-promised redemption, the kingdom of heaven, had come ; and for the world. The world, as they thought in the first ardour of their faith, only needed to hear the good news in order to receive them, only needed to see the kingdom in order to enter it. They felt that the common routine of life was for ever broken up, that a spiritual revolution had been set on foot which could not fail to dethrone the lords many and

gods many who had long usurped the seat and place of God. "The coming age" was come at last. Old things had passed away; all things were to become new. The "former fashion of the present world" was gone for ever; a new world was rising out of it, in which nothing hateful and unclean could dwell. As they saw city after city, and nation after nation, accepting the word of this new and better life, they never dreamed of the long conflict between life and death which had still to be waged before death could be swallowed up of life. For them, the end was at hand, the final triumph of Christ at the very door. What need, then, was there for them to write, with unaccustomed pens, elaborate histories of his first coming when He was so soon to come again? All they had to do was to prepare the way for his coming, by going out into all the world and preaching his gospel to every creature.

The very fulness of hope by which the early Church was inspired rendered, or seemed to render, it unnecessary for them to write annals for future ages. And this conclusion would be confirmed by the training and habits of their lives. The whole bent of the time, at least in Judea, was adverse to written, favourable to oral, instruction. Tradition was the habit of their race and age. The rabbis, to whom they had listened before they came to Christ, had made it a rule—a rule by which we have lost much that would have been of grave value to us—that "*nothing* should be committed to writing." To these rabbis the Old Testament was the only book. The voice of the teacher might be used to interpret, to explain, to enforce its lessons, but nothing could or must be added to it. Lest they should even seem to make additions to it, or in any degree distract attention from it, even the most gifted and learned rabbis refused to write out the wise sayings that fell from their lips: the only indulgence to which the love of name and fame could prompt them was to compress the thoughts of a lifetime into a single saying, so

rich in meaning, so picturesque or polished in form, that their disciples would pass it down from lip to lip, generation after generation.

What the Apostles knew before they sat at the feet of Jesus was only, therefore, what they had learned from reading the Old Testament, or hearing it read, and from listening to the wise Rabbinical sayings which were quoted from age to age. And they were simple and unlettered Galileans; many of them probably could hardly write at all; none of them had that erudition which prompts a man to cast his thoughts into the literary and artistic forms which have been the study of his life.

And if they *could* write, yet why should they write books? *Christ* had written no book. He had simply spoken the truth.

When He gave them their commission, He did not bid them write narratives, but *preach*—preach the Gospel to every creature. While they did that, they were discharging the ministry He had entrusted to them, a ministry for which they were qualified not only by the effusion of the Holy Ghost, but also by the whole training and all the habits of their lives. Why should they leave that ministry for a task to which Christ had not called them, and for which they had not been trained?

They had no motive for it. Their feeling was, "How shall men believe *without a preacher?*" not, "How shall coming ages be instructed without a book?"

*They* cherished the most vivid image, the most lively recollection, of the life and teaching of Christ, although they had no chronicle, no gospel, in their hands; and they might well hope that the Spirit, who preserved that image in their hearts, would convey and fix it in the hearts of others.

The Gospel of Christ was spirit, not letter; it did not need to be inscribed whether on tables of stone or skins of

parchment, but to be written on the fleshy tablets of believing hearts.<sup>1</sup>

There were many and sufficient reasons, then, why the Twelve should preach the Gospel rather than write Gospels. But do not all these reasons imply that, when they did write, their writings would be miserably inadequate, omitting much, or even adding much to the original tradition. When the first ardour of their faith cooled down with the lapse of years, when they discovered that it would be long before the world was won for Christ, and that narratives of his life and word were becoming necessary for the instruction of the Church, must not their recollection of what He said and did have grown imperfect? Must not the fresh hues and outlines of his image have grown dull and faint? Must not their written Gospels, therefore, be so much the more misleading and incomplete?

<sup>1</sup> These paragraphs had not been written more than a week when that very able and erudite book "Onesimus" by the author of "Philochristus" appeared. And in one of the letters of Onesimus to Artemidorus (pp. 89, 90) the following singularly confirmatory passage occurs:—"I now find that these very people who profess to worship Christus, and who recognise in him the fulfilment of ancient prophecies, nevertheless neglect, and I might almost say despise, all modern writings and records, insomuch that even at this present time no account of his words and deeds is committed to paper. Of this strange neglect there are several strange causes, and the first the strangest of all. You must know then that these people commonly believe that Christus will speedily return enthroned upon the clouds to make himself governor over the whole world; so that it is needless to write the words of one who himself will soon be speaking upon the earth. The second cause is, that there is a tradition among the Jews, current now for many hundreds of years, not to write new sacred books, but to hand down by word of mouth from teacher to pupil, through many generations, such traditions as may be needful. A third cause is, that Christus, having given them no clear and definite law, nor even many distinct precepts, his followers stand not upon his exact commandments; and indeed some fear not to say openly that they care little for the letter of his commandments, for that he himself promised to send them a certain good demon or spirit (even such a one as Socrates had) which should prompt and warn them what to do and what to avoid, and teach them how to defend themselves against their persecutors and before their judges. I have omitted a fourth and last cause which is not the least important: namely, that most of the followers of Christus have been, from the beginning of the sect, men of no education, but illiterate and scarce able to write at all, so that they naturally preferred speaking to writing. So much for the books, or no books, of the Christians."

No; but rather so much the *more* complete, adequate, instructive. If, in that long interval, they had ceased to *preach* Christ, then indeed their versions of his life and teachings might have suffered, as some have supposed they did suffer. But inasmuch as throughout that interval they were daily recounting the facts of his life and the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth, the delay would only give an added value to their writings. For, consider, when some great man expires, when some great life, full of wisdom and service, comes to a close, are we, is any man, all at once competent to describe and appraise it? to detect its unity, to select from a great mass of recollections and records that which is distinctive and peculiar to it, and to cast aside whatever would but dull and obscure our conception of it? We all know, so often as a great man dies we all feel, that time must elapse before any true and adequate conception of him can be formed and given, before any worthy biography of him can be written. We are too near him yet, too intimately interested in the movements in which he took part, too conscious of what was ordinary or objectionable in his life, too prejudiced for or against him, to give a fair and complete account of him. We must wait—and in proportion as he was really great, we must wait the longer—before we shall know him as he was. Which of us, for instance, did not know, even before he read it, that Froude's *Life of Carlyle* must be an inadequate life, must convey an impression of him which after ages will have to correct, simply because it has been written too soon? How many years must elapse after Mr. Gladstone's death before our prejudices for or against him will have died out, and his true character and place can be defined? Or, to take an historical example, by his own age Shakespeare was not rated much above the other poets and dramatists of the time. Within the last hundred years men who were unworthy so much as to read his poems have not

scrupled to recast and *improve* his dramas, and were absolutely thought to have improved them by the generation for which they wrote! It is only within the last fifty years that he has been generally acknowledged to be the world's supreme poet, not for an age, but for all time.

It takes time, then, for a world of little men to recognize the greatness of the great man whom God has given to them. Above all, it takes the sifting process of years to detach from the image men have formed of him, all that is excessive or unnecessary, to contract or expand it to its due dimensions, to select and preserve only those features which are really significant and indispensable.

Well, the Apostles were but men, though they were inspired men. And it is easy to see how the experience of years would qualify them to give us a more adequate and vital conception of the Master whom they loved. At first, no doubt, their memories would be *crowded* with incidents and sayings, each of which they held to be precious, each of which was most precious in itself, but many of which would nevertheless have hindered rather than have helped us to know the Lord. If the book St. John once had in his mind, the book in which *all* that Jesus said and did was recorded,—if this book, as big as the world, had been written, who could have read it? how could such a book as that have been a Gospel for all sorts and conditions of men? Before a serviceable Gospel could be written, it needed that the memory of the Apostles should be sifted; that out of the countless acts and words of the Lord Jesus the cardinal facts and sayings should be selected; that they should be taught what of all they remembered was indispensable to a true and complete story of their Divine Master, and what might with advantage be omitted and curtailed.

No doubt the Holy Spirit *could* have taught them all this in a day. No doubt the same Spirit could place all the needful deeds and words of Christ in *our* minds without

any help from holy men or holy books. But that is not the way in which the Divine Spirit works. He teaches *us* through the books Apostles have written. Why should He not also teach the Apostles what to insert in their books, and what to omit, by the experience of their ministry and the sifting lapse of years? As, moved by the Spirit, they preached the Gospel year after year, now recounting this fact and now that, now this divine discourse and again that, would they not gradually discern what facts and words *told* most on the hearts of their hearers and produced the most vivid and wholesome impression? As their experience accumulated with every trial, with every year, would not the Lord's life and work begin to take its due shape in their minds, to disclose its unity, to assume the very form in which it would be most potent on other minds? And when, at last, they were moved to write their Gospels, would they not naturally insert in them just that Gospel which they had learned to teach, just that selection of facts and words which they had found to stir the hearts of men most profoundly? Would they not thus be enabled to give us a more perfect Gospel than if they had followed Christ from the first, pen in hand, and had reported every act He did and every word He spoke?

This oral Gospel, then, on which the Church lived for many of its best and earliest years, was a most true and suitable preparation for the written Gospels which we read to-day. And this account of the growth of our sacred literature rests upon and is confirmed by all we learn, from the New Testament itself, of the course taken by the Apostles and their successors during the long interval between the resurrection of Christ and the close of the New Testament Canon. Every detail of their conduct indicates that they held it to be their work to ascertain by experiment **what was** the very Gospel in the words and acts of Christ; and that in doing this work they were guided by the Spirit

which He had promised to give them. They remained together in Jerusalem for some ten years, preaching the things that pertained to the Kingdom, taking of the things of Christ and shewing them to men; and in these ten years of fellowship and common labour they had time to shape a common Gospel, a consistent and complete story, which we now find underlying the narratives of St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke, and in part of St. John. They laid it down as the chief qualification of the Apostolic office that those who filled it must be men who had "compained with the Lord Jesus all the time he went in and out among them, beginning from the baptism of John unto the day when he was taken up;" and its chief function that they should "bear witness to his resurrection." Their common work was "continual prayer and the ministry of the word." All we know of most of them is that they did thus preach Christ, and that they wrought signs and wonders to arrest the attention of their hearers to the purport of their message. Most of them never wrote at all. None of them wrote for more than twenty years. But they all preached the common Gospel. And if we ask, Why? One of the early Fathers of the Church replies: "The Elders refrained from writing because they would not interrupt the care which they bestowed on teaching orally by the care of composition, nor expend in writing the time they wanted for the preparation of their addresses."

How little importance was attached to the written Gospels as compared with the traditional or oral Gospel, the Gospel spoken by the Apostles and handed down from lip to lip, may be inferred from the fact that for 150 years A.C. the word "Gospel" is never used to denote any mere writing, but is always reserved for that spoken summary of Christ's life and doctrine which all the Apostles held in common. There were many evangelists in that time, as we learn from St. Paul, many "gospellers," as we might

call them, were we to revive a good old English word; but the evangelist, the gosseller, was a man who always *preached* the Gospel, a man who, as St. Paul says, "kept the traditions" delivered to him by word of mouth, never a man who taught out of a book.

Indeed, for many years after the death of Christ, the primitive Church felt no need of *Christian* Scriptures. They heard the Gospel from the lips of Evangelists; and if they wanted Scriptures, had they not the Law and the Prophets, all of whom bore witness to Christ? And these Scriptures of the Old Testament were the Scriptures which the Apostles constantly quoted,—these and no other. Whether it be Peter who speaks, or Paul, you find him for ever basing himself on the Hebrew Scriptures—citing Moses, or David, Isaiah, Joel, or Jeremiah. Whether they speak to Jews or to Gentiles, the Apostles have no other Scriptures but these; but these are for ever in their hearts and on their lips.

Nay, even for two or three generations after most of the Apostles had been called to their rest, we find *the Gospel* constantly cited or taught, but not *the Gospels*, the Divine tradition, not the inspired writings. So late as the close of the second century even, Irenæus speaks of the Gospel as "*a tradition* manifested in the whole world" and "kept in the several Churches through the succession of the presbyters." "The great outlines of the life of Christ," he says, "were received by barbarous nations *without written documents*, by ancient traditions." So that long after our present Gospels were written, they were unread by thousands who had flung themselves in faith on the strong Son of God and were looking for his salvation. It was mainly by the voice, the testimony, of living men, not by writings however precious and sacred, that his grace and truth were made known in all the world; a fact which goes far to explain why it is that we find comparatively so few definite

testimonies, in the earliest years, to the existence and authority of the Gospels which we now possess.

What, then, *was* this Tradition, this oral Gospel, which the eye-witnesses and ministers of the Word preached in every city? How may we recover it? And of what use will it be to us if we should recover it?

To arrive at the oral Gospel we need not fling our four written Gospels into the crucible of thought and extract what is common to them all; and even if we did submit them to this process, the product would probably be something more, and even much more, than the oral Gospel contained. Nor need we select and expand one of those brief and compressed summaries of Christian teaching and doctrine with which the Epistles abound; such, for instance, as we find in 1 Corinthians xv. 3, 4: "For I delivered unto you, first of all, that which also I received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures;" for these brief summaries give us *the creed* of the primitive Church; and the creed of the Church is apt to be somewhat less than its Gospel. No; if we want the very Gospel, neither more nor less, which was preached in the early Church before any Gospels were written, we must, if it be possible, listen to the words of those who preached it; we must study and compare their sermons and discourses: for where can we hope to find the Gospel that was preached if not from the lips of its preachers?

Now, happily for us, many of these discourses are reported in the Acts of the Apostles; and notably those of two of the greatest of the Apostles, St. Peter and St. Paul. It really matters very little which of these discourses we study, so closely are they framed on one model. Substantially, they all cover the same ground, affirm the same facts, deduce the same doctrinal inferences. But, since we cannot well study them all, let us take St. Peter's first sermon

to a Gentile, and therefore a comparatively ignorant, audience, and the very first sermon of St. Paul of which we have any record.

First, then, let us listen to St. Peter as he preaches this oral Gospel in the house of Cornelius (Acts x. 35-43). He starts by telling us that he is about to speak "the word which God had sent unto the children of Israel . . . by Jesus Christ," who is the "Lord of all" men, and not of the Jew only; and that the ministry of this Jesus began "after the baptism which John preached." And then he proceeds to tell us that God "anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power;" that Jesus "went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed of the devil;" that He was the true Messiah, *i.e.*, since God "anointed" Him; that he was the true Immanuel, since "God was with him." And, further, he goes on to say how Jesus was rejected of men and crucified ("Him they slew, hanging him on a tree"); how He rose again on the third day, and appeared unto chosen witnesses (*viz.* to the men who now testified to his resurrection from the dead); what a great commission He gave to his disciples before He went up on high ("He charged us to preach to the people"); how He would "come again to be the judge of the quick and the dead;" and that "whosoever believeth on him shall receive remission of sins."

This was the oral Gospel according to St. Peter. Was it not a veritable and a sufficient Gospel? Did it not prove itself adequate to the salvation of as many as received it? Is it not, in substance, the very Gospel by faith in which we also look for salvation?

But let us also, before further comment on it, listen to the self-same Gospel as preached by St. Paul in the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch—a Gospel which he could not possibly have learned from any book or writing, since no Christian Scripture could have been in his hand when he

preached this famous discourse (Acts xiii. 16-41). He is speaking to Jews mainly; and therefore he begins with the deliverance of the people of Israel from the house of bondage. He follows them through their wanderings in the wilderness, their establishment in the land of Canaan, their history for four hundred and fifty years under the Judges, their union under Samuel the prophet, their demand for a king, the reign of Saul; and then he dwells with argumentative emphasis on the promise made to David, that of his seed God would raise up a Saviour, a Jesus, who should redeem them from all their miseries by redeeming them from their sins.

All this, however, is exordium merely, such a recitation of the main facts of their history as that with which every Jewish orator engaged and propitiated his audience, such a quotation from ancient Scriptures as conducted him to his point and prepared the way for the Gospel he was about to preach. Then follows the Gospel itself. The Saviour, the Jesus, promised to David, came "when John had first preached the baptism of repentance." John announced and bare witness to Him, and to his power to save. The word of this salvation was sent to the "sons of the stock of Abraham." The rulers of Jerusalem, "because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of their own prophets," although "they found no cause of death in him, yet asked they of Pilate that he should be slain." He *was* slain. "They took him down from the tree" on which they had hanged Him, "and laid him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead." "He was seen for many days" by chosen witnesses who had followed Him "from Galilee to Jerusalem." And through Him, whose death and resurrection even David foresaw and foretold (a point which the Apostle labours and elaborates at great comparative length), is "proclaimed unto you the forgiveness of sins."

The main qualification of an Apostle was, as we have been reminded, that he should be able to bear witness to the life and sayings of the Lord, "from the baptism of John until the day that he was taken up": his main function was to testify to the Resurrection. And it is curious to mark how exactly the oral Gospel which we have just heard from the Apostles Peter and Paul complies with these two conditions. They both begin this story at the baptism of John; they both pass lightly and swiftly over the facts and features of our Lord's public ministry, till they reach his death and resurrection; but here they pause and linger to bear their most emphatic testimony to the fact that He both died and rose again from the dead.

Even from this brief outline of only two of the Apostolic discourses, it is quite easy to recover the substance of that spoken Gospel which quickened and animated the life of the early Church, though an examination of the other Apostolic addresses recorded in the Acts would confirm and deepen the impression produced by these two. The points on which that Gospel laid stress were, evidently, the blameless life of Jesus the Christ, his beneficent ministry, and, above all, his sacrificial death for the sins of men, and his resurrection from the dead as a proof of his entire conquest over all the power of the grave. But, in addition, both the Apostolic preachers are careful to connect these facts with the ancient history and Scriptures of Israel, to mark how they fulfil the Hebrew prophecies; and they thus link on their Gospel to the Hebrew Scriptures in order to shew that the earthly ministry of Christ was no isolated and unforeseen event, but formed part of that historic and world-long process by which the God and Father of all men has ever sought to redeem the world unto Himself.

This was the substance of the oral Gospel; it was in these simple but cardinal facts and truths that the Preachers

of the Word found the lever by which they moved the world, and before which "the former fashion," the heathen fashion, of the world passed away. And it is in these very facts and truths that the real virtue of the Gospel still and for ever resides.

For this is the Gospel which we read in the Epistles of the New Testament, which were written some of them before the first of our present Gospels was published, and all of them before St. John penned his history of the Son of Man. We need not tarry to prove, for it is on all hands allowed that, even should all the other Scriptures of the New Testament perish, we could easily recover the main facts of our Lord's life and works from the Epistles of St. Peter, or St. Paul, or St. John. And no student of those Epistles can doubt that these main facts would be the very facts on which the Apostolic preachers insisted; viz. the blameless life of Christ, his healing and beneficent ministry, his death for sins, his triumph over death; and the connexion of all these with the slow historic development of the saving will of God as set forth in the Scriptures of the Old Testament.

Nor is it otherwise with the written Gospels. For if we take what is common to all four of these Sacred Narratives, while we get much more than the oral Gospel contained, we also find the same great facts and truths selected for special emphasis. This, too, gives us the life of our Lord "from the baptism of John until the day that he was taken up" into heaven. This, too, causes us to hear "the word which God sent by Jesus Christ throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee." This also shews us, only in greater detail, how, "anointed with the Holy Ghost and with power, he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed of the devil." This, also, dwells and lingers on the death by which He took away our sins and reconciled us to God, our Father and our Judge, and on the resur-

rection by which He quickened us to a sure and certain hope of life and immortality.

So that, substantially, and point by point, the Gospel originally spoken by the eye-witnesses and ministers of the Word, the Gospel conveyed by the Epistles addressed to the several Churches, and the Gospel more largely narrated in the four written memoirs of the life of Christ which we cherish as our most sacred and precious heirloom, answer to and confirm each other; and our faith is founded on the very Rock on which the faith of those who first believed was built.

I think, then, that we may fairly take the following conclusions as established. That the Apostles of Christ felt it to be their main duty to *preach* Christ, not to write about Him; that they were disposed to speak rather than to write by character, by habit, by all the influences of their time and race: That, consequently, the original Gospel, the Gospel of the first and of part of the second century, was rather an oral tradition than a written book: That this oral tradition was *historic*, setting forth in a lively and natural way the things which Jesus said and did: That it was the theme and substance of their Discourses, and of their Epistles: That the constant delivery of this oral Gospel was a Divine expedient for teaching them what of all they remembered concerning Christ was most potent on the hearts and minds of men, and so for securing a more perfect written Gospel when the time for writing had come: That in the four written Gospels—four and yet one—we have a record of the deeds and words of Christ in the fullest accord with the message originally delivered by the Apostles: And that whosoever believes in the blameless life and beneficent ministry of Christ, in his death for our sins, and in his resurrection as the crowning proof of life everlasting, holds a true and adequate Gospel, the very Gospel which sufficed for the salvation of the early

Church, however imperfect his knowledge in other respects may be, and however he may differ from us who hold one and the selfsame Gospel with him.

And there is one practical inference from all this, so pertinent to the dubious and sceptical age in which we live, that it ought perhaps to be drawn out and enforced. There are many among us whose faith has been shaken and impaired by the discoveries, or assumed discoveries, of modern sceptical Criticism. They have heard that men of learning and authority have refused to admit that the Scriptures of the New Testament, or most of them, were written by the men to whom, or at the date to which, they have been commonly ascribed; and that there has been a steady and determined effort to bring down at least the four Gospels to the later decades of the second century after Christ. Not having much root in themselves, they have suffered their faith to be nipped and retarded by this cold blast of Criticism. Not having the erudition which would enable them to refute these modern theories, they have at least so far yielded to them as to suffer their hearts to be troubled and disquieted within them.

Now it would be easy to reassure them by informing them that the very critics, or the very schools of criticism, which started these theories, are now pretty generally admitting that they have been disproved; and that there is at the present time a more general consensus of opinion than ever, among sceptical as well as orthodox critics, that the New Testament Scriptures—to whatever other objections they may lie open—were for the most part written by the men, and at about the dates, to which they have long been assigned.

But I think we can place them on higher and firmer ground than that. The main facts of Christ's life and teaching, the facts which, as we have seen, constituted the substance of the original and oral Gospel, have never been

seriously disputed. That is to say, no one disputes that, from the first, the disciples of Christ held and taught that, after having lived a sinless life and discharged a most kindly and gracious ministry, Jesus died to take away the sin of the world, and rose from the dead to throw open the kingdom of heaven to all believers. Even these facts themselves have hardly been seriously disputed, though they have been variously interpreted, and though a few, lost to shame, or of so coarse a fibre and so untrained in historical studies as to be insensible to moral beauty or the force of argument, have ventured to blaspheme against the blameless Son of Man. But among decent and intelligent men, who have seriously occupied themselves in the study of them, these facts have seldom been questioned, and still less the fact that this was the belief and the teaching of the primitive Church.

Virtually, therefore, we have, and so long as a Christian Scripture is left us we must always be able to recover, the very Gospel by which men were first brought to a saving knowledge of the truth. Of *this* Gospel we can never be robbed, let Criticism do what it may. If it should ever take away from us every one of the four written Gospels which it is now admitting to be, or to contain, veritable and authentic records, yet so long as it leaves a single discourse or a single letter of the Apostles—some of which it has never yet attempted to impugn—we should still have the oral Gospel which of old sufficed to convert the civilised world; we should still retain, or be able to recover, the simple but cardinal facts and truths on which the Christian Church was established. And any man who sincerely and from the heart believes these facts, has Christ for his Saviour; and, standing on these, may defy all the assaults of doubt, and all the still more deadly assaults of a narrow and cruel fanaticism.

For, be it remembered, our argument is as good against

Bigotry as it is against Criticism. Let our modern Rabbis and Pharisees prate and anathematize as they will, let them demand what additions to our creed they may, if men believe in the simple Gospel first delivered to the faithful; if, that is, we believe that, in Christ, the Sinless suffered for the sinful, the Best for the worst; that the Highest came down to save and redeem the lowest; and that He who alone has life in Himself so conquered death as to confer the power of an endless life on men once dead in trespasses and sins, we believe all that is essential to salvation, all that Apostles and Evangelists, the first teachers and preachers of the Word, insisted on and demanded of those who listened to them. We have and hold the very Gospel, the Gospel in the Gospels, and should let no man make us afraid.

ALMONI PELONI.

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*THE PRESENT POSITION OF EVOLUTION AND  
ITS BEARINGS ON CHRISTIAN FAITH.*

THE death of Mr. Darwin has naturally led to renewed reflection on the scientific discoveries which are due to him, and on the principles with which his name has been associated—discoveries and principles which have of late years attracted so much attention and have acquired so much influence. More particularly has this been the case in respect to the relation of those discoveries and principles to the truths of our Christian Faith. The interest which men in general feel in the truths of Religion on the one hand, and in the great discoveries of Science on the other, is so intense and so persistent that it is inevitable they should watch with eagerness the relations between the two, and should be disturbed by any temporary appearance of diversity