

presupposes the existence—at the time of the settlement in Canaan—of the law of the central sanctuary,—he will make a fatal mistake. Ninety-nine thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine out of every hundred thousand will in all probability come to the same conclusion, viz. that the law of the central sanctuary was in operation at the time of the entrance into Canaan. That does not matter; that cannot be helped. The mistake is there, all the same. The higher critics must be appealed to, in order that the truth wrapt up in the apparently simple narrative may be known.

If this position is to be accepted, it is surely not unreasonable to ask that the attention of critics should now be turned specially to the determination of what is trustworthy history in the Old Testament. In the interest of Old Testament discussions themselves—considering the point to which they have been carried—this is desirable. In the interest of the great body of the Christian people, who have little

familiarity with the process by which Old Testament conclusions have recently been arrived at, but who are bewildered by the discussions that are going on and the results reported from time to time, it is still more desirable. It may be said that this is not specially the business of the critics,—that they have shown *the way* to read the Old Testament, and each man must do his reading for himself. This is, no doubt, true. But will they show no compassion in their day of triumph? Will they not stretch out a helping hand to those whom they have been the chief means of throwing off their balance? Besides, these codes, which form the crown of their labours,—and under the guidance of which the reading is to be done,—are *kittle cattle*, and require to be deftly handled. Are the critics satisfied to leave the free use of them to the *profanum vulgus*? If they are, they cannot reasonably complain if the result should frequently prove unsatisfactory.

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## The "Gospel of Peter" and the Four.

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THE light which this precious discovery may cast on the history of our canonical Gospels is, of course, the question of questions with those who examine it. I am venturing to add one more to the various accounts of our fragment's origin and purpose, in the hope that my suggestion may help in the discussion of the evangelic problems, though I am too imperfectly equipped in post-canonical literature to speak in any tone of confidence.

Whence come the discrepancies between "Peter" and the Four, so many and so remarkable when placed side by side with those coincidences which establish a connexion beyond doubt? The answer has hitherto been generally that the author alters the narrative intentionally under various tendencies. Firstly, there is his implacable hatred towards the Jews, which introduces touches too obvious to need retailing. Secondly, there is his alleged Docetic bias, which will account for some of the romances added to the Resurrection story, and especially for the elimination of (1) some words from the Cross, and (2) the appearances of Jesus to

the disciples on Easter Day.<sup>1</sup> Thirdly, there is conforming to prophecy.<sup>2</sup> Will these causes account for all the discrepancies? It would be difficult surely to trace any of them in such points as Herod's position as leader of the Jews, Joseph's asking for the Lord's body *before* the judgment, the treatment of the penitent robber, the disciples fasting and wailing "night and day until the Sabbath,"<sup>3</sup> their being accused of wishing to burn the Temple, the addition of Andrew and Levi to

<sup>1</sup> Yet may not this be due to St. Mark, who does not *seem* to provide for these appearances, promised apparently for Galilee? Note how strongly the conclusion of the genuine St. Mark is suggested by the end of the last complete paragraph in "Peter." (I should begin the last paragraph of all with the words *ἦν δὲ τελευταία κ. τ. λ.*, which are very unfortunately placed with the description of Easter Day.)

<sup>2</sup> On this point, elaborated by Dr. Swete in his lectures at Cambridge, I am at a disadvantage through my unfortunate absence from the lectures, which are not yet published.

<sup>3</sup> Are not these words proof that "Peter" accepted *Thursday* as the day of the Crucifixion, as Dr. Westcott has argued from our Gospels already?

the company on the lake, with other smaller details. I think we can only explain these by assuming that "Peter" is really independent of our *written* Gospels, except, perhaps, St. Mark. The phenomena seem to me strongly confirmatory of the mainly oral origin of the Gospels. There were many imperfect written narratives in narrow local circulation, but till the Synoptics became generally known, each Christian community would principally depend on floating traditions coming from those who had heard the facts of Christ's life at first, second, or third hand. Many of these traditions would naturally be very much obscured by transmission, and such perversions as that of the *σκελοκοπία* become perfectly explicable when we suppose them the resultant of misreported and misunderstood information passed from one careless hearer to another. The marked coincidences with St. John (for which I may simply refer to Harnack's exhaustive account in *Texte und Untersuchungen*, vol. ix.) become clear by the simple assumption that some casual hearer of the apostle at Ephesus brought to the birthplace of the "Petrine" Gospel a more or less inaccurate account of his reminiscences of the life of Jesus. My conjectural presentation of "Peter's" origin will be then on these lines. It was written in a Gentile church which was, like Corinth, rent with dissensions between the parties calling themselves by the names of St. Peter and St. Paul. Very soon after the martyrdom of both apostles, a Paulinist conceived the plan of claiming Peter's authority for some of the chief controversial points insisted on by the Gentile Christian party. St. Peter himself had vehemently denounced the awful crime of the Jewish leaders, and this was all the anti-Jewish party wished; it was not yet the day of Marcion, whose forerunners were still diligent students of the Old Testament. Our author has perhaps read the earliest Gospel, which he does not seriously pervert; and sundry more or less distorted fragments of evangelic tradition were floating in his environment ready to be set down with as much accuracy as a strong controversialist could command. His mind is, moreover, coloured by an instinct natural enough in a man heathen born, and rather imperfectly Christianised, which made him feel that a Divine Being could not have laid aside all His divine power, could not have suffered like other men, and must, when once the mysterious shadow was past, have been surrounded

with the visible signs of Deity to an extent which imagination was free to suggest.<sup>1</sup> To this extent he was doubtless a Docetist (like his contemporary Cerinthus?), but the heresy was very faintly differentiated from "orthodoxy," and was apparently only discerned on a second perusal by a theologian made suspicious by the advanced Docetism of a century later.

I am thus putting this "Gospel" a generation earlier than the end of the first century, at a time when St. Mark was beginning to gain an authoritative position; when the Aramaic original of St. Matthew was still perhaps being translated or mistranslated in the Gentile churches "according to each man's ability"; when St. Luke was yet unknown in most churches, except from hearsay quotations; and St. John's Gospel was still only extant in the apostle's mind, and in his oral teaching. The "many narratives," of which St. Luke speaks in evident depreciation, might well continue to be produced in an age which had not yet the opportunity of recognising the incomparable superiority of the Four. One or two additional marks of this early date may be suggested. Firstly, note the results of proving that Justin used this Gospel as authentic, quoted its statements by the side of those drawn from the canonical narratives, and (if we may still follow Harnack) called it—and not St. Mark—the "Recollections of Peter." Must it not be much earlier than Justin's own day if he accepted it so unsuspectingly? Secondly, is not the Docetism decidedly early—so strongly anti-Judaic, yet so steeped in Old Testament prophecy? Some time should surely be left between this stage and that of Marcion. Finally, observe that the use of this Gospel alike by the orthodox and the heretics is completely explained by its dating from a period when the heresies were only half developed: the imperfections of its doctrine would not be noticed till the growth of Marcion's school made the teachers examine more carefully the books on which the new doctrines might be supported.

<sup>1</sup> I do not believe that the writer asserts that the Lord "felt no pain": the context favours the translation "had no trouble," *i.e.* at being "numbered with the transgressors." That he renders *Ελί* "my strength" (with a possible reminiscence of Ps. xlii. 9), and that he uses *ἀνελήθη* to describe the Lord's death (just as St. Mark uses *ἔξπνευσεν*, shrinking from *ἀπίθανον* in the same way), do not seem to me traces of Docetism at all: I find it mainly in the omissions, and in the romances referred to above.