

CHRISTIANITY BEFORE THE GOSPELS.

PROBABLY few but professed theologians realise that for a considerable time Christianity existed without the support of any one of the canonical Gospels. Of course a moment's thought will shew that there must have been a nascent Church, and teaching about the Church's Founder, before any written record came into existence, but till the contrary is pointed out, most people will naturally regard the interval as very short. We are so familiar with the English New Testament and the order of its contents that an effort of mind is required to grasp the fact that the order is not the chronological order of original publication—if indeed we can properly speak of the *publication* of some of the documents at all. Was it *publication* for St. Paul's letters to be read in the congregations at Thessalonica, or Corinth, or Rome? In this sense their publication virtually synchronised with their composition, and it was followed by their being copied for the use of other Churches. All this was before the production of a written Gospel, and it took time. And this fact is exactly what it is so difficult to grasp. The popular idea would be represented by the following sentences from Didon's *Jesus Christ*, published in 1891 :

“On ne peut préciser la durée exacte du temps écoulé entre le début de la prédication apostolique et l'apparition du premier Mémoire écrit. Ce temps dut être fort court. La tradition universelle de l'Eglise place la composition du premier Evangile entre l'an 33 et l'an 40 de l'ère chrétienne.”¹

This thoroughly unscientific statement is characteristic of the whole book, which nevertheless bears the imprimatur of the Holy See. What fate befell Tyrrell, Loisy, and other independent thinkers is too well known to need recalling.

¹ p. 19.

The above opinion is by no means that of critical scholars, who agree with remarkable unanimity that at least some thirty years must have elapsed between the crucifixion of Christ and the publication of the first canonical Gospel, that "according to St. Mark." This comparatively early dating is the result of what amounts to a revolution in New Testament criticism, which little more than a generation ago was disposed to place the Gospels much later. But the schools of Strauss and Baur are so dead, largely owing to the labours in our own country of Lightfoot, Wescott and Salmon, that I understand it is no longer considered necessary to instruct candidates for Holy Orders even in the outlines of the "Mythical" and the "Tendency" theories, and the arguments against them. The canonical Gospels are now brought much nearer to the first beginnings of Christianity, but still there is the gap of thirty years or more.

Before proceeding further, it may be well to establish this position by brief quotations from three or four representative theologians. So far back as 1897, F. Godet, of Neuchâtel, treating Matthew as the earliest Gospel, dates it "quelque peu antérieur à l'an 66, où commença la guerre, et où est lieu l'émigration de l'Eglise de l'autre coté du Jourdain."¹

In 1902, Dr. Armitage Robinson, then Canon (afterwards Dean) of Westminster, and now Dean of Wells, assigned "the year 65 as a probable date" for Mark, not excluding the possibility that it might be some years earlier, if it was written during St. Peter's lifetime, and if St. Peter suffered under Nero.²

In 1910, Dr. J. M. Wilson, Canon of Worcester, wrote: "About thirty years after the crucifixion of Christ, that

¹ *Introduction au Nouveau Testament*, ii. p. 249.

² *The Study of the Gospels*, p. 17.

is about the year A.D. 63, certainly before A.D. 70, there was written a short book which, at the time, was without any parallel or precedent in literature . . . the book which we know as 'the Gospel according to St. Mark.'"¹

In October 1911 the acknowledged leader of New Testament scholarship in this country, Dr. Sanday, of Oxford, wrote :

"We may believe that . . . St. Mark (was written) not long before A.D. 70 ; St. Matthew, some years later, and St. Luke later still (about 80), and St. John nearer the end of the century."²

In Germany Professor Harnack's elaborate investigations have led him to the conclusion, in which he carries many other scholars with him, though not without vigorous dissentients, that :

"Die Schlussverse der Apostelgeschichte, im Zusammenhang mit dem Fehlen jeder Anspielung auf das Ende des Prozesses des Paulus und auf sein Martyrium im Buch, machen es im höchsten Grade wahrscheinlich dass das Werk geschrieben worden ist, als der Prozess des Paulus in Rom noch nicht beendet war."³

The importance of this for our present purpose is that it carries with it our third Gospel, an earlier work by the author of the *Acts*, and therefore *Mark* as well, if not *Matthew*. Personally I find a difficulty in thinking that Dr. Harnack has altogether proved his point. The latter part of *Acts* is practically a biography of St. Paul, and it is hard to convince oneself that a friend and companion would choose for the publication of his history the precise moment when that Apostle had been "two whole years" a prisoner "in his own hired dwelling." Why *Acts* should abruptly

¹ *Studies in the Origins and Aims of the Four Gospels*, p. 2.

² *Hibbert Journal*, x. No 1, p. 90.

³ *Neue Untersuchungen zur Apostelgeschichte*, 1911, p. 96.

close just here is one of the puzzles of literature. Undoubtedly the simplest explanation is that nothing further is said because nothing further had happened. But is this credible? Anyhow, it is to be insisted that the famous German scholar, in this and other works, has made the earlier dating of the principal N.T. documents extremely probable. One cannot say *practically certain*, because assent is not absolutely universal. As he himself remarks, *à propos* of the "We sections," "Allein man kann viel leichter einer fragwürdigen Hypothese Glauben verschaffen, als einem strengen Beweis Anerkennung. So ist immer gewesen, und so wird es bleiben!"¹ Against prejudice one may argue and argue:

"Sed auræ

Omnia discernunt, et nubibus irrita donant."

One more reference may be permitted. Crossing the Atlantic, we have Dr. B. W. Bacon, Professor in Yale University, assigning the appearance of the Gospel of Mark to c. 75 A.D. at Rome.²

It would be easy to multiply references, but these are quite enough to prove my point. Without claiming that scholars are yet agreed as to precise dates, I may at least assert that there is practical unanimity in the opinion that our earliest Gospel did not appear till some thirty years after the death of Christ. If one of the children whom on a memorable occasion Jesus took in His arms and blessed, was then five years old, he was getting on for middle age before he had a chance of reading any narrative now in our possession of the life of Him of whom he must have heard so much. For nearly, perhaps for altogether, a generation the growing Church did not possess a historical book which was destined to become canonical.

¹ Op. cit. p. 2.

² *The Making of the New Testament* (Home University Library), p. 107.

I put the fact in this way in order to bring it home the more forcibly to the mind. Is there now a missionary station in the world where the converts would be left for thirty years before any one of the Gospels was put into their hands? Is it not one of the first aims of missionaries to give the Gospels in their own language to the congregations they succeed in forming? What an impression would be made on the Christian world by the information that after thirty years of labour the isolated congregations in heathen lands were still without a copy of a single Gospel? And be it remembered, this space of time brings us only to the composition of *Mark*. No doubt it was at once read in the Church at Rome, or wherever it first became known; and no doubt other churches soon came to hear of it, and to ask for copies. But in those days of reproduction by hand and of slow travel, how long would it be before there was a general knowledge of *St. Mark* in the lands bordering on the Mediterranean Sea? *Mark* enters into the composition of both *Matthew* and *Luke*, and both these Gospels may have been produced within a few years; but how long a time would elapse before they were generally known and received? Definitely to answer this question is impossible, only a general statement can be made, allowing a wide margin for error; but this is of no importance for my present purpose. It must be abundantly plain, even to those who had never thought of it before, that for many years the Church developed, and the spiritual life of its members was nourished, without the aid of the canonical Gospels. It was not merely that individual Christians could not read them. That has happened too often, for want of education, in later epochs. It was that whole congregations must have been instructed by teachers who were themselves not acquainted with the Gospels, and that multitudes must have lived and died in that state.

Now, can we form any clear conception of what Christianity was in those days? For the thing—if we may call Christianity a *thing*—the thing existed, if not the name. “It came to pass that even for a whole year they (Barnabas and Saul) were gathered together with the Church, and taught much people, and that the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.”¹ The name *Christians* carries with it *Christianity*. Christianity without the Gospels? Yes, precisely that.

Nothing could be more interesting than to look back on the life of those earliest of all Christians, the disciples of Jesus and their immediate converts, and to sketch out, however roughly, a picture of their creed and conduct. At first sight it may be thought there can be no great difficulty in making such a picture. In the *Acts of the Apostles* we have a narrative of the expansion of the Church from the ascension of its Founder down to the time when it was firmly established in the capital of the Empire, where the Church’s foremost champion, a prisoner indeed, was nevertheless engaged in an active propaganda with the tacit sanction of the authorities. But the prominence given to this champion in the latter part of the *Acts* is a reason for careful examination before we decide to accept the history as entirely adequate and complete. Its author, who I have no doubt was St. Luke, was manifestly a disciple and admirer of St. Paul. He accompanied that Apostle from time to time in his travels, probably in the capacity of the “beloved physician,” and his literary work must be to some extent coloured by Pauline influence. Now Paul had never known Jesus in the flesh, any more than had Luke himself, and the former’s Gospel is a gospel of the risen and ascended Christ. The Atonement, it is true, looms large in the Pauline letters, but it is because the crucifixion is followed, and one

¹ Acts xi. 26.

may say consummated, by the resurrection and the life in glory. If Paul had not been fully convinced of the latter, the former would have had no value for him. Every one knows of the Pauline doctrine of justification by faith, apart from the works of the Law, and of his great struggle against the Judaisers on behalf of the liberty of the Gentiles. St. Paul's friend and companion could not but be acquainted with what is so familiar to us, and when he compiled his history of the first age of the Church, he compiled it in the light of that knowledge. It may be, indeed it is, surprising that the narrative is not more strongly coloured by these views than it is, but all the same the colouring is there. The history would not have had quite the same tint if it had been depicted by a disciple of James, the Lord's brother. We have all seen those windows by which the same landscape is viewed through panes of various hues. Look through this rosy-tinted glass, and you see a landscape bathed in the warm glow of summer; look through that blue glass, and you see the same landscape with the sombre and cold hue of winter—incongruous it may be, with leaves and flowers, but winter none the less. And so the facts related by Luke, supposing them to be accurate in themselves, would bear another aspect if they came to us through a representative of another school. F. C. Baur and the Tübingen school made a wrong use of this fact. Neither *Acts* nor any other book of the New Testament is a "tendency" writing, as is now fully recognised, but all take their colouring from the particular school in which they arose. In saying this I am not seeking to discredit the *Acts* as a history, I am only uttering the caution that we must remember the same history might have been written with equal veracity from a different point of view. A Roman Catholic historian and a Protestant, with equal opportunities and abilities, and with equal honesty of purpose, would not

draw identical pictures of the Reformation. Luke gives us a history of the Church to which the Gospels were unknown, but that history might have been written very differently. We must not assume that *Acts* alone gives a complete representation of Christianity before the Gospels.

When we proceed to inquire what further factors must be taken into account, we are met at once by the admission that our four canonical Gospels are by no means the first attempts to meet the needs of the Church. The preface to the third Gospel informs us candidly that the author was only following the example of "many" who had "taken in hand to draw up a narrative concerning those matters which have been fulfilled among us," and that these earlier writers had reproduced what had been "delivered" by those "which from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the word." It is to be noticed that Luke does not attribute these earlier narratives to the eye-witnesses and ministers, but only to those who reported what the eye-witnesses and ministers said, a description which very well fits the Gospel of Mark, for Mark, according to the most ancient tradition, reproduced the teaching of Peter. Perhaps this description also fits Q, as we have learnt to call the source, in addition to Mark, which is common to Matthew and Luke. But it does not fit the Aramaic Logia attributed to Matthew the Apostle. Papias, bishop of Hierapolis in the former half of the second century, who is supposed to have been born between A.D. 60-70, and who was a hearer of John (probably the Elder, not the Apostle), is the authority for the well-known tradition preserved by Eusebius, that Matthew "composed the oracles in the Hebrew language, and each one interpreted them as he could." In the controversies arising out of these few and simple words reams of paper have been covered, but probably the true meaning is that Matthew wrote in Aramaic a collection of the sayings

of Jesus, perhaps with some incidental narrative of their occasion, but there was no authoritative Greek translation, each student or writer making the best use of the collection he could. It may be assumed that this collection lies somewhere at the basis of our first Gospel, and is the origin of its name. In saying this I am, of course, only repeating a conjecture which has been widely made. But Matthew the Apostle was certainly an eye-witness, so that Luke's preface cannot refer immediately to him, though it may refer to writers who had utilised his Logia. There may have been some narrative which worked up the Logia preserved by Matthew, just as Mark worked up the teaching of Peter. In any case it is obvious that the very first Christian teaching must have been oral, though it is possible that from the very beginning notes may have been made of some of the maxims of Jesus. Why should not some of His hearers have jotted down the sayings which most impressed them? The main *events* would not easily escape from memory, but *words* are evanescent. The words of Jesus ring truer than ever any other words rang, but sooner or later they had to be written down, and this very quality may be the reason why they were written down from the first.

The Gospels began to appear about thirty years or more after the Crucifixion; they were designed to meet the needs of the Church, and they arose out of the Church. The Church is not built on the New Testament; on the contrary, the New Testament is the literature of the inspired Church. Christianity is not properly the religion of a book; it is the religion of a person. The Gospels which became canonical set out the history and teaching of that Person with a fullness that had not hitherto been attempted, and they speedily made their way. There survives no record, no hint, of any authoritative sanction given to them by the Church as a whole, or by its leaders. They simply won

acceptance by their own merits. In what I am here writing I am thinking chiefly of the Synoptics. The Fourth Gospel comes later (heroic efforts to prove it the first of all have failed), and it is a theological treatise rather than a history. The most illuminating remark on it has been made by Loisy (whether by others before him I do not know), that all the discourses in it are discourses of the glorified Christ. Even the Synoptic Gospels are not biographies; they are, as Justin Martyr called them, ἀπομνημονεύματα, "memoirs." Of necessity they differ among themselves, or there would have been one, not three. The later shew advance upon the earlier; e.g., Mark relates that on first hearing the preaching of Jesus His neighbours exclaimed: "Is not this the carpenter?" In Matthew this is softened down to: "Is not this the carpenter's son?" Matthew and Luke have Nativity stories which are not in Mark. But on the whole the three agree in the representation of Jesus which they offer to the Church. *And the Church accepted it.* That is the point which I want to bring out. That the Church received these narratives and canonised them, proves that they did not contain a new doctrine. If the aim had been to foist on the Church a novel view of its Founder we should have heard something of it, and it is not likely that the aim would have been attained. That there were schisms and heresies almost from the beginning is not disguised in early Christian literature, but the fact of the reception of the Gospels by the Church as a whole throws a flood of light on the Church of the earlier days. It proves that they contained nothing essentially out of harmony with Christian teaching during the thirty years which followed the Crucifixion. By this time there were congregations over a great part of the civilised world; a considerable time must have elapsed before the three were carried right round the Mediterranean, but wherever they

came—to Asia Minor or Greece, to Egypt or Rome, or Gaul—they were welcomed. Each of them might have borne on its forefront what Luke declared to Theophilus, that his intention in writing was “that thou mightest know the certainty of the things wherein thou wast instructed.” The new books which became current contained no new doctrine; they stereotyped the teaching already prevalent. The figure they portrayed was the same figure which Christians already worshipped. This is a significant fact, because the usual tendency is for the second generation to belittle what its predecessor thought much of. The children throw mud at the idols worshipped by their fathers. The space of thirty years was just long enough for most of the contemporaries of Jesus to have died, and for another generation to have grown up with new ideals and new aspirations. If the contemporaries who survived, and the new generation, could alike welcome the writings which were beginning to circulate it must have been because these writings were in harmony with what they already held.

The new writings could not have attained their pre-eminent position without some quality which differentiated them from their predecessors. The one quality which above all others distinguished them was apparently their comprehensiveness. They gathered up and brought into order the materials which lay loosely scattered about in the various churches. There was the Jerusalem tradition; there was the Galilean tradition; there was the *Logia*, perhaps in more than one recension; there were notes made by eye-witnesses of the great events, hearers of the great words. Renan's theory of the compilation of the Gospels is probably truer of the documents which lie behind them. “There was no scruple in inserting additions, in variously combining them, and in completing some by others. The poor man who has but one book wishes that

it may contain all that is dear to his heart. These little books were lent, each one transcribed in the margin of his copy the words, and the parables he found elsewhere, which touched him. The most beautiful thing in the world has thus proceeded from an obscure and purely popular elaboration." Each of our four Gospels bears too many marks of original composition for this to be literally true, but it may well be approximately true of the elements which enter into them. On these elements Mark first laid masterful hands, working them up with his recollection of Peter's addresses, and the result is what we know. That but little genuine tradition escaped one or other of the Gospels is rendered probable not only, as already remarked, by their general reception, but by the scantiness of the gleanings in the same field. In an address reported in *Acts*, St. Paul impresses on his hearers "the words of the Lord Jesus . . . It is more blessed to give than to receive."¹ After Luke vi. 4, Codex Bezae (D, the famous Cambridge MS., a witness to the "Western" text) adds what may be a veritable survival from the great ministry, "On the same day, seeing a certain man working on the sabbath he said to him, Man, if thou knowest what thou art doing, happy art thou; but if thou knowest not, thou art cursed, and a transgressor of the law." In 1897, and again a few years later, Drs. Grenfell and Hunt disinterred at Oxyrhynchus a few "Logia," one or two of which it is tempting to think may be real additions to our collections of the sayings of Jesus, though others are obviously only variants of what we have already. Of the former category are these: "Except ye fast to the world, ye shall in no wise find the kingdom of God; and except ye make the sabbath a real sabbath, ye shall not see the Father." "Wherever there are (two), they are not without God, and wherever there is one alone, I say, I am with

¹ *Acts* xx. 35.

him. Raise the stone, and there thou shalt find me ; cleave the wood, and there am I." " (Ye ask ? who are those) that draw us (to the kingdom if) the kingdom is in Heaven ? . . . the fowls of the air, and all the beasts that are under the earth or upon the earth, and the fishes of the sea, (these are they which draw) you, and the kingdom of Heaven is within you ; and whosoever shall know himself shall find it. (Strive therefore ?) to know yourselves, and ye shall be aware that ye are the sons of the (almighty ?) Father ; (and ?) ye shall know that ye are in (the city of God), and ye are (the city ?)." ¹ In the Dialogue with Trypho Justin records two or three traditional details which have escaped the New Testament: That Jesus was born in a cave ; that as a carpenter He made ploughs and yokes ; that at His baptism a fire was kindled in the Jordan. The last of these is obviously a myth. The first may have arisen out of the LXX version of Isaiah xxxiii. 16, *οὗτος οἰκήσει ἐν ὑψηλῷ σπηλαίῳ πέτρας ἰσχυρᾶς*, the early Fathers being bent on finding in Christ a fulfilment of all the Old Testament scriptures. As to the other tradition, it may obviously be correct, but we do not know Justin's authority. Eusebius, the Church historian, preserves a few particulars falling within the scope of the *Acts*, but later than the lifetime of Jesus. And that is about all. If more had been known, I for one believe that it would have been preserved in one form or another. I hold that the canonical writers swept the field practically bare, and that despite the enigmatical and rhetorical comment of John, " There are also many other things which Jesus did, the which if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that should be written." ² The anecdotes in the apocryphal Gospels are fables, many of them silly fables. Irenæus, appealing to the authority of men who had been

¹ Published 1904.

² John xxi. 25.

acquainted with John and other apostles, affirms that the ministry of Christ was prolonged till He was approaching the age of fifty.¹ Of such little value historically are the traditions carried down through other channels than the New Testament.²

From the obscure years of the period succeeding the life of Christ two or three traditions are reported by Eusebius, who relates that Thomas the Apostle sent to Edessa Thaddeus, an apostle and one of the seventy disciples; that James, the brother of the Lord, called "The Just," was in a popular tumult thrown down from a wing of the temple and beaten to death by a fuller's club (the authority for the story being Hegesippus); that Mark carried the Gospel to Alexandria. For Mark's mission there is ample room during the years between his abandonment of Paul, Acts xiii. 13, and the next mention of him as being with the great apostle during his Roman imprisonment, Col. iv. 10. But it is strange that an event of so great importance should have been ignored by Luke, who can scarcely have been ignorant of it, since he also was with Paul at the later time (Col. iv. 14). How could Mark and Luke be together without comparing notes? But no argument is more precarious than that from silence. Some doubt must be suggested by Luke's apparent ignorance, but there is fairly good evidence on the other side. If there is truth in the conjecture that *Acts* ends as it does because the author meant to carry on the history in a third volume, it may be that it was in his mind to turn back and pick up some of the threads which he had dropped in order not to interrupt his narrative of Paul's missions and captivity.

¹ *Against Heresies*, ii. 5.

² Mention ought to be made also of two well-known sayings attributed to our Lord, the several times quoted, "Be ye approved money-changers," and the words preserved by Origen, "He that is near me is near the fire [? Father], but he that is far from me is far from the kingdom."

During all these years the Church was sustained by the living voice, first of the actual disciples of the Lord, and then by the disciples of these. Even in the early part of the second century, when the Synoptic Gospels certainly, and the fourth Gospel probably, were already in existence, Papias could record his preference for oral tradition over written. When he came in contact with any one who had been in touch with the "elders," he says, he examined him as to the words of the elders, "What Andrew or what Peter said, what Philip, or Thomas, or James, or John, or Matthew, or any other of the Lord's disciples, what Aristion and John the Elder, the Lord's disciples say. For I did not suppose I should profit so much by books as by the living and abiding voice." This has often been adduced as proof that Papias set little store by our present Gospels. Seeing how scanty are the fragments known to us of the Bishop of Hierapolis it is dangerous to speak positively, but we are informed by Eusebius, quoting Irenaeus, that he wrote in five books *Expositions of the Oracles of the Lord* (λογίων κυριακῶν ἐξηγήσεις), and the quotation above is from the preface, κατὰ τὸ προϊύμιον τῶν αὐτοῦ λόγων). It would seem likely, therefore, that he was really commenting in some way on the Gospels, and that the books he disparaged were other compositions. But all that really matters for our present purpose is that even to his day the living voice was heard of the disciples of the Lord. And this was more effective for edification than any writing.

It is so now. To read a speech in a newspaper, however well reported, is not the same thing as listening to its original delivery. To read about Chatham or his son, even in the brilliant pages of Macaulay or Lord Rosebery, is not the same thing as a description (if only it were possible) from the lips of one who had seen and heard for himself. And the first generation of Christians had the advantage of the

living voice. It was a Peter, it was a John, it was one or other of the Twelve who spoke, who could say: "Thus and thus I saw, thus and thus I heard." It was a Stephen or a Philip from the Hellenists in Jerusalem, but taught by the Twelve. It was a Paul, to whom the risen Lord had appeared in person; it was the eloquent Apollos, instructed by Aquila and Priscilla, who had been instructed by Paul. And so the movement went on. The *Acts* tells us how, relating the story, as has been explained above, from a particular point of view. And all this activity, it must be remembered, was prior to the composition of the Gospels. The material was accumulating which was afterwards to be worked up to such good effect, and it was as the first witnesses and their immediate followers dropped off one by one, and the return of the Master was still delayed, that the necessity began to be felt of a permanent and authoritative account of the things which were surely believed by the community. Till the written Gospels became known and were received, the teaching was for the most part oral, though there were possibly documents in existence which were utilised, perhaps incorporated in the larger works. Such may have been the "Little Apocalypse" of Mark xiii. It is by no means certain (as Dr. Sanday has pointed out) that this Apocalypse ever did actually exist as a separate brochure, but it can be so easily detached from its context that the hypothesis is tempting. Still, we must be on our guard against accepting every tempting hypothesis as a demonstrated fact. A small amount of definite external testimony will sometimes suffice to upset a great deal of inference from internal criticism.

Among the living agents, besides the apostles, were the seven deacons, the evangelists, teachers and prophets, all members of the charismatic ministry. In later days it became necessary to devise some means of testing their

genuineness, and the *Didaché* lays down rules, arbitrary enough, for distinguishing a true prophet from a false. In St. Paul's missionary journeys he appointed presbyters in every church. Among their duties may have been the superintendence of the charities and other affairs of the community, the carrying on of communications with other churches, and the maintenance of a standard of doctrine. This last was exceedingly difficult, and was in fact one of the greatest problems of the age, as is proved by St. Paul's epistles.

We are thus brought to a mention of one of the most important factors to be taken into account in forming a picture of the time. Especially in the churches of his own foundation, Paul's letters must have been of enormous weight. In the mother church of Jerusalem his influence was apparently almost *nil*, in spite of the collection for the poor saints which he so zealously promoted in the Gentile congregations. At Antioch emissaries who claimed the authority of James, the Lord's brother, caused disturbance, and in the churches of Galatia similar troubles arose. Nor is this to be wondered at in view of Paul's attitude to the Mosaic Law. I believe those critics (principally German) to be in error, who discover a flat contradiction between Paul's relations to the Law, as described in his own epistles, and his relations as described in *Acts*. This is not the place to enter upon a fresh examination of this much debated point. It must suffice to say that the account of Paul's conduct with the four men who had a vow upon them in *Acts* xxi. is fully explicable in view of those places in the epistles where he boasts of his Jewish descent, and especially of 1 Corinthians ix. 20 : "To the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain Jews ; to them that are under the law, as under the law, not being myself under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law." His position was open to mis-

understanding, but to a dispassionate observer it is quite intelligible. He held that in Christ the Law had found its goal, and was henceforth not obligatory, having lost its effect. It was by no means to be imposed on Gentile converts to Christianity. On this point he was adamant. But Jewish converts, to whom it was second nature, might continue to observe it so long as they imposed no disabilities on the Gentiles because of their non-observance. Peter's mistake at Antioch, for which Paul "resisted him to the face, because he stood condemned," was that having first eaten with Gentiles he afterwards, on the arrival of certain who came from James, separated himself, and even (so it is alleged) sought to make the Gentiles Judaize. In Paul's own words, publicly addressed to his brother apostle, "If thou, being a Jew, livest as do the Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, how compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?" (Gal. ii.). To one who is not bound by the iron chains of an inflexible theory, but is conversant with the give and take of actual life, all this is perfectly natural. Paul may not have been altogether logically consistent, but then he had not a logical mind, at least as we Westerners conceive it. Nothing could be more illogical to us than the Rabbinical arguments which to him were conclusive. His was a fiery spirit, rushing to determinations by intuition rather than by argument, but seeing clearly enough that however devotedly Jewish converts might be attached to the Law, the imposition of its yoke on the Gentiles would be fatal to the propagation of the Gospel. This was a position not likely to be acceptable in Jerusalem, or indeed among Jewish Christians anywhere. In theory it might be admitted, as it was by the original apostles, but its great advocate and champion, who was revolutionising the Church with his multitudes of converts from among the Gentiles, was too overpowering for them. In Jewish-Christian

quarters the apostle of the Gentles could not be popular.

In the wider field of Gentile Christianity Paul's influence was great. But his authority was not unquestioned. The Epistles to the Corinthians introduce us to the schisms arising in that Church through the parties who attached themselves to various leaders, and also to the difficulty which Paul experienced in enforcing his decision on a question of plain morality, a question on which it ought never to have been necessary for him to speak at all. The Corinthian Church retained the same character of intractability long after Paul's death, as is evident from the *Epistle of Clement* addressed from Rome to that Church towards the end of the century. Yet after allowing for all this, Paul's was the predominant influence among the Gentile Christians, that is in the larger and more progressive part of the Church. One may assert this without implying that the ideas for which he stood were peculiar to himself and his immediate disciples. "Paulinism" is a real element in the New Testament, but it is conspicuous apart from Paul's epistles, and is only one part of the Church's life coming to the front, and getting a distinctive label.

There is another feature of Paul's teaching which is worthy of notice here, and that is the little emphasis which is laid on the life of Jesus. The epistles assume the Incarnation; they build on the Crucifixion and Resurrection, these are the all-important factors in Paul's scheme of doctrine; but all that lies between, if we except the Last Supper (and this is not really an exception) is ignored. The incidents of the earthly life are not recalled; there is not a distant reference to a parable or a miracle. It looks as though in his intercourse with those who had been with Jesus Paul never cared to inquire about anything that happened before the closing scenes in Jerusalem. How strange that seems to us who are tormented by the desire to know what Jesus

really did, what He really said ! In his work, admirably translated under the title : *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*,¹ Dr. A. Schweitzer gives us an account of a portentous number of attempts to write the Life of Christ. So far as we can judge, Paul cared for none of these things. Even in the references to the Death and Resurrection, his whole interest lies in their sacrificial and propitiatory value. His mind is engrossed with the glorified Christ who is soon to return ; forgetting the things that are behind, he presses on to the things that are to come. It is not possible to explain his silence by the assumption that his churches were so well acquainted with the facts that there was no need to recall them. The allusions in his epistles are sufficiently clear as to what his oral instruction included, and there is no indication that he ever touched on what we think so valuable. Baptism, the Eucharist, atonement, forgiveness, restoration, future judgment, the life of the world to come, that is, the matters of practical concern for man as a spiritual being—these were the warp and woof of his instruction. The details of the Lord's life on earth did not interest him. He is as silent on these as he is on the natural beauties and grandeurs of the country through which he passes on his journeys. He cares neither for biography nor scenery. His concern is with the souls of men. His business is to preach the Gospel.

In his doctrine is the germ of the Creeds, even of the so-called Athanasian Creed. I believe that if the greatest apostle could have been confronted with a copy of the " Quicumque vult," he would have been puzzled and horrified ; puzzled as to the distinction between *substance* and *person*, with the other metaphysical subtleties ; horrified that man should so use his measuring rod on the Deity.

¹ London, 1910.

"Let lore of all Theology
 Be to thy soul what it *can* be :
 But know—the Power that fashions man
 Measured not out thy little span
 For thee to take the meting-rod
 In turn, and so approve on God
 Thy science of Theometry."

But granting the data assumed by Paul (not that they were peculiar to him), it was inevitable that questions should arise as to the being of God, and as to the relations of the Son and the Spirit to the Father. And when they arose, and were answered, it was inevitable that the Church should indicate what answer seemed to her most nearly in accordance with Holy Scripture. And—apart from the anathemas, the "warning clauses" as it is now the fashion to call them—this is all that the *Quicumque vult* does. No doubt it is much to be regretted that the mind of man ever insisted on exploring these regions, and on drawing logical conclusions from such data, but the conclusions cannot be denied without invalidating the data, though, as I have already said, it is questionable whether Paul (not having a logical mind) would have recognised the deductions. And it is much more to be regretted that an intolerant age added the clauses which lead in our more enlightened days to special pleading which brings on its practisers the charge of being either muddle-headed or dishonest. At all events, in the churches of Paul's foundation, when the Gospels were brought they would find a ready reception from those who had already been orally instructed in the doctrines which later hardened into the dogmas of the Church. And to a great extent this must have been true of the other churches as well. Divergent as Paul and the original apostles were in many ways, they were fundamentally at one in their conception of the person of Christ. The universal acquiescence in the supreme authority of the canonical Gospels shews this. In course of

time all rivals vanished, only the four were left. This did not mean a great revolution in Christianity; it meant only an evolution of the Christianity existing before the Gospels. Of the Gospels the simplest, the most natural, as well as the earliest, is *Mark*. As is well known, the proper ending to this Gospel is lost, that which appears in our English Bible being a later addition or substitute. It is impossible now to say what was the real cause of the mutilation, and whether it was by accident or design, but the suspicion suggests itself that Mark may have ended his work with some statement that was not acceptable to the Church, and that rather than allow its circulation, the Church cancelled it. The result was a maimed story, but that may have been thought to be better than one which was judged erroneous. The cancelling would not have been the decision of a council, or of any properly constituted and representative authority, it would be the unofficial act of some who felt themselves sufficiently in touch with the Christian consciousness to be sure of what would offend. But this is the purest conjecture.

As to the way of life of Christians before the Gospels, what Luke in the early chapters of Acts relates about the Church in Jerusalem is, *mutatis mutandis*, true of other Churches also. Only in Jerusalem could daily attendance at the Temple be practised, but as long as it was possible to do so the Jews who became Christians continued to worship with their former co-religionists. They did not at first regard themselves as having ceased to be Jews, but as having found the long-promised Messiah in Jesus. But the Gentile converts were in different case, and the worship which was common to them and the Jewish Christians must have been leading up to the final breach with Judaism which was effected by the catastrophe of A.D. 70. All the churches alike "continued steadfastly in the apostles' teach-

ing and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers." The last clause evidently indicates the beginning of liturgical worship, traces of which possibly survive in other places in the New Testament, as there are also traces of hymnody. For the latter the reader may refer, e.g., to Ephesians v. 14, as it is printed in the Greek Testaments of Westcott and Hort or of Nestle. The first clause is a confirmation of what has been already urged with regard to the general recognition of our present Gospels. They would not have triumphed over all rivals if their doctrine had differed from that handed down from the apostles.

The charismatic ministry found its counterpart in some of the congregations. Those are strange scenes of disorder to which we are introduced by the rebukes and instructions of 1 Corinthians xii. and xiv. The historical book of Acts passes over all such phenomena in silence, but in the light of what has occurred at similar times of religious excitement in later ages, one can form a picture of the scenes. The rhapsody, even frenzy, into which the excitable Corinthians fell, has been many times paralleled. No doubt the unhealthy state of mind indicated by the phenomena was also accountable for the disorders at the Love Feast and the Lord's Supper which are so sternly rebuked earlier in the same epistle. The glossolalia of Corinth is probably the phenomenon which underlies also the curious relation in *Acts* of the signs which accompanied the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost. As told to Luke, and repeated by him, the story was that the disciples received the power of speaking divers languages without the trouble of learning them; but firstly, there is no hint elsewhere of such a power being exercised; and secondly, most, if not all, of those present at the scene would have some acquaintance with the common language, Greek. Greek was the medium of mission preaching and instruction afterwards, as it was also the medium used

in writing. Dr. Adolf Deissmann has made it abundantly clear that there is no such thing as a special Biblical Greek ; what used to be so called is nothing but the international language, the *κοινή*, which was the means of communication right round the Mediterranean. The speaking with tongues at Pentecost was assuredly the same phenomenon as was subsequently witnessed in Corinth, but it is not on record as a permanent characteristic of the Jerusalem Church. Whether it appeared in other congregations than the Corinthian is not said, but there would be nothing surprising if it did.

The ordinary Christian worship of his own day, c. 150 A.D., is described by Justin Martyr, and the description may well be applicable to the epoch now under review. There were four elements in the worship—which, by the way, took place “on the day of the sun”—and these were the reading of the memoirs of the apostles, or the writings of the prophets, the delivery of an exhortation by the “president,” then prayer said in common (and therefore presumably according to some set form), and lastly the partaking of bread and of wine mingled with water. Christians who were not present shared in the Eucharist through the elements being carried to them by the deacons.¹ Such has Christian worship been all through the centuries. There is no actual description of it in *Acts* or the *Epistles*, but the general lines must always have been much the same.

In morals the rules of the primitive Church were identical with the rules of the Church now, but in practice it has always been difficult to prevent the Christian society from contamination by the outside world. The notorious case at Corinth, where a Christian married his step-mother, is denounced by Paul as worse than anything that could have been sanctioned among the heathen, and his grief is intensified

¹ *Apolog.* 67.

by the complacency of the culprit's fellow-Christians, who did not take steps to rid the Church of the scandal, and were not even shocked by it. This callousness can be easily explained by the general atmosphere of Corinth, the licentiousness of which was notorious. It was difficult for converts always to realise that practices to which they had been accustomed all their lives were abominable sins. Identical difficulties confront missionaries among the more degraded races to-day. We do not read of similar lapses elsewhere, but a part of the decree of the Council of Jerusalem (Acts xv. 29), as well as admonitions in the epistles, is directed against sins of the flesh. The teaching of Jesus, too, on this subject was carefully treasured up, and found its way into the Gospels. The question cannot be here discussed whether Jesus did or did not allow of the exception "for fornication" to His law of the indissolubility of marriage, but it may be remarked that the criticism which excises these words from Matthew v. 32 (the clause is: "clearly an interpolation" in xix. 9¹) may be directed with greater force against the mention of the Trinity in xxviii. 19. But both of these, though denied to Jesus, may nevertheless be integral portions not only of what Dr. Hort called "the extant form or edition of the first Gospel," but of the original. The one may have arisen in the Church from the experience of the hard facts of life during these obscure years, the other from the lofty Christology of St. Paul. The full baptismal formula meets us in the *Didaché* towards the end of the century; but unfortunately the *Didaché* is not a witness to an independent tradition, since it is judged to make use of *Matthew*.

The period that we have been discussing must have been a period of transition. At its beginning oral teaching, buttressed possibly by manuscript notes, was sufficient to meet

¹ See W. C. Allen *in loco*. *Internat. Critical Comm.*

the needs of the Church. But as converts came in in growing numbers, and as the original witnesses and their immediate disciples simultaneously became less available, written sources were increasingly drawn upon, and acquired greater importance. The occasional letters of Paul and other writers were circulated, and copies were acquired for churches other than those to which they were first addressed. But to follow this thread would lead to a discussion of the formation of the Canon of the New Testament, and carry us far beyond the limits of our time and subject. The aim of this paper has been to draw attention to the long gap between the historic life of Jesus and the writing of the only records of it which have survived, and at the same time to point to reasons which make it probable that the teaching of the Gospels was not a new importation, but, so to say, a stereotyping of the Christianity existing before their composition. One cannot but wish that an account had been preserved of the arrival of the earliest canonical Gospel in, say, Jerusalem, and of the eager discussion and comparison of memories which its reading must have evoked. But as to all that, history is blank, and only imagination is available. To picture what may have happened is an attractive, but not always a profitable, venture ; it will not be attempted here.

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