

baptized with the baptism that He was baptized with, and ascended with Him in His train of captives, passing through the heavens into heaven itself.

His right hand and left are not two places; they express the spiritual condition of union with Him. He is 'at the right hand of God,' that is, in perfect union with the Father, wielding His power; and those for whom it is prepared are similarly at the right and left hand of Christ, in union with the Son, and wield His power. 'To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne,

even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne' (Rev 3²¹). They reign with Him, and with Him sway the hearts of men, because they have been crucified with Him, because they continually repent and go on repenting, and continually pray and go on praying, and continually mortify their thoughts and feelings and wishes and impulses, and because they continually hunger and thirst for more and more and more of Him. To them belong His victorious salvation, and His divine feast, and therefore His royal power over men.¹

¹ A. H. McNeile, *He Led Captivity Captive*.

Primitive Christian Literature.

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WHAT was the beginning of Christian literature? It is surely unbelievable that in a literary age such as the first century A.D. there were no Christian writings before the earliest epistles. The First Epistle to the Thessalonians, according to Dr. Lock, 'must lie some time between A.D. 49 and 53.' Even if we grant that Galatians was written first, it cannot be more than a year or two earlier at the most, while the earliest possible date for St. Mark is 65, over thirty years after the Ascension. It is impossible to imagine that it was not until after this length of time that any details of our Lord's life and death were committed to writing, or even that it was twenty years before some one, in the person of St. Paul, put his pen to paper to write the earliest Christian work.

Of course no one does believe that 'St. Mark' was the first writing of the 'Gospel' type, but most critics work backwards from our present Gospels to documents such as 'Q,' which existed but a short time before. But even if we knew the exact nature and date of 'Q,' it would only have pushed the problem one stage further back, which still leaves a blank of many years. If it is possible, the better way would be to work forward from the date of the Ascension.

In trying to discover the nature of primitive Christian writings, we must endeavour to work as far as possible from an historical basis. But whence is historical evidence to be drawn? From the one truly historical book of the N.T., the Acts. Here

we get the story of how a few men were given the commission to proclaim the Gospel to the whole world. How did they set about it? How does any man with a lesson to teach set about it? He begins with what is well known by his pupils, and, using that as a foundation, he proceeds to the unknown. What better foundation could the Apostles have than the literature which they possessed in common with their hearers? If we look at the early speeches recorded in the Acts we find that they consist of a string of quotations from the O.T., with a Christian commentary and explanation attached. It is probable, therefore, that we have here a reflexion, if not occasionally even an extract, from the earliest Christian writings. On this hypothesis these writings would consist of a string of 'proof texts,' to which was added a few salient facts in the life of our Lord as being a fulfilment of the prophecies quoted. In this connexion it is interesting to recall that St. Luke tells us how Christ Himself, 'beginning at Moses and all the prophets expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.' Was St. Luke himself one of the listeners? Did he commit to memory, if not to writing, these 'expositions' of our Lord? In any case the main body of this testimony would immediately be passed on to the other disciples and become the common property of the infant Church. When, then, they were called upon to teach others, of what better method could they think than that through which they

themselves had been convinced and taught by the supreme Master Himself? That they actually did so is borne out by the fact that in every speech in the Acts, to a Jewish audience, except St. Paul's interrupted defence in Ac 22, this method is always adopted.

From these considerations we can draw the conclusion that the form which the earliest Christian writings would naturally take would be of a similar nature; 'testimonia,' with a brief application to the life and claims of our Lord.

These would thus combine the purpose both of a primitive 'Gospel' and a Creed, but would naturally tend to disappear as the Church became more and more Gentile, and as many of them became incorporated in the Gospels and Epistles; but for a time, and for Jews, they would be adequate as a 'first reader' in Christianity. But this would not be for long. The fact that the converts would be eager to know every detail in the life and death of our Lord, still more the fact that for the Gentiles these 'testimonia' would carry little weight, would result in greater stress being placed upon the actual facts of that life, while the fulfilment of the O.T. prophecies would become only subsidiary proofs.

To imagine that the Synoptic Gospels are but one remove from their sources is a mistaken idea. Like most things, they are the product of a gradual growth. The first step was these 'testimonia,' probably one of them compiled by St. Matthew which carried his name into the First Gospel; the second step, as suggested above, was the necessary elaboration of the 'Gospel' proper at the expense of the lengthy quotations from the O.T.¹

The third step was the multiplication of short accounts 'set forth in order' by the 'many' of which St. Luke speaks. Here we are at least on sure ground, though exactly what these accounts were it is hard to say, but it was apparently from some such sources that Theophilus had obtained part of his instruction.

These, St. Luke tells us, were compiled by eye-witnesses. We are apt to forget that there were many eye-witnesses besides those whose records

¹ We may perhaps mention here the early Christian hymns, such as the *Benedictus*, the *Gloria in excelsis*, or those of which we have some fragments in Eph 5¹, 1 Ti 3¹⁶, 2 Ti 2¹¹, Rev 15³, etc. But probably they were not put in writing till a later date, if indeed some of them were ever written as separate entities.

we still possess. Surely every member of the Twelve must have had his own particular 'Gospel.' Each would tell his hearers of his own personal recollections of the sayings and doings of our Lord: and if there was some saying which was peculiarly his own, would he not take an especial pride in narrating it? It is here that the apocryphal gospels fail to stand the test; if, for example, the Protevangelium of St. James had really been written by him, we should have found in it additional touches which were, so to speak, his own particular property, not merely exaggerations and legendary accretions which have neither sense nor profit in them.

But it was not only the Apostles who were eye-witnesses of our Lord's works. Surely it is not straining the imagination too far to think of such a person as the woman of Samaria telling her friends, 'He actually said to me give me to drink! and I said to Him . . . and then He said . . . and then . . . and then . . .'. And to each person she tells the same story, until a little bit of the Gospel becomes stereotyped in that village. Perhaps St. John gained his information through this source, for we are told that no one ventured to ask about it at the time.

Such an instance could be multiplied many times over. All up and down the country little bits of gospel would be scattered and provide abundance of material for many writings: in fact, the editor of the Fourth Gospel says with pardonable exaggeration (Jn 21²⁵) that the world could not contain all the 'books' that would be required to record all these fragments. Perhaps we find some of them in the 'pericope,' the man working on the Sabbath day, the strange addition to Mk 16 found in the Frere MS. of the Gospels (W), as also in the longer ending to that Gospel. That such oral fragments existed is certain, and with St. Luke's words before us it is almost equally certain that some of them were put in writing.

We have now emerged from the 'testimonia' stage to that of the written Gospel, properly so called, for sooner or later some editor would collate some of these to form the first continuous account. Who was the bold person who ventured to produce the first written Gospel or Logia? Here we are met by that riddle of riddles, the synoptic problem; for the first authoritative writing must have had a considerable influence on all that followed.

These written 'sources' were many, but in course of time it was inevitable that one or two would become more widely known than others. Possibly one of them would deal entirely with the Galilean ministry, another with the Judean, or with the events of the Passion Week. Again, one may not have been an historical sketch at all, but merely a 'light on the daily path from the sayings of the Master': a treatise dealing with the Christian's attitude towards the problems of his daily life and religion.

St. Luke at any rate knew of many such, and presumably used some of them, selecting, adding, editing as it seemed good to him. Thus we have

endeavoured to trace the primitive Christian literature down to the time when organized Christianity demanded some definite textbook of the life and teaching of our Lord. St. Paul must have felt the want of something of this sort, and it was perhaps the perception of this 'long-felt want' that led his companion St. Luke to compile his Gospel, too late for the use of his master.

The difficulties that meet us now are connected with the synoptic problem, which is not the subject of this present paper. My object has been to try and show the probability of the existence of Christian writings two decades before the earliest Epistles of St. Paul.

Entre Nous.

TWO TEXTS.

Isaiah xl. 4.

THE British and Foreign Bible Society has issued three volumes. One is *The Gospel in Many Tongues* (6d.), specimens of five hundred and forty-three languages in which some portion of the Bible has been published and circulated by the Society. The text chosen is Jn 3¹⁶. One is *The 117th Report of the British and Foreign Bible Society* (1s.). And one is a condensed Report, called *Good Will Toward Men*. The last is at any rate the most readable. Here is a specimen of its contents:

'At a Bible meeting held last winter at Kelvedon, Essex, Mr. James Rhoades, well known as a poet, made this striking comparison: "I am strongly reminded of two lines of the poet Æschylus, who lived in the sixth century before Christ—lines strangely reminiscent of that passage in the 40th chapter of Isaiah, 'Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain.' They are such grand-sounding lines that perhaps I may be allowed to quote them:

Κελευθοποιοὶ παῖδες Ἥφαιστον χθόνα
ἀνήμερον τιθέντες ἡμερωμένην—

which mean, being interpreted, 'The road-making sons of Hephaistos (the old Greek fire-god) making tame the savage places of the earth.' It was by

the aid of fire that they were enabled to hew down forests and reclaim the waste—fire which Prometheus was supposed to have stolen from heaven for the benefit of mankind. And when I read of these colporteurs—these 'the-holy-book-to-sell-run-about-men'—wading through swamps and plunging into pathless jungles, carrying with them a more sacred fire than Æschylus ever knew of (though he was a most religious man, continually insisting on the omnipotence and justice of the Supreme Being), I think of these men as being the pioneers, the sappers and miners, of the armies of Christ, bearing ever about with them the same marching orders, *Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.*"

Luke v. 8.

How far afield may one dare to go to find an illustration? The text is, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.' First of all introduce Chum Andrews, the pride of the cricket eleven at school. Chum Andrews wants to be a farmer, but his father has determined to make a draper of him. Now it has come to pass that only the prosaic aspects of the drapery business are recognized by the world.

Take Mr. H. G. Wells as instance. 'Mr. Wells spent his early days as an assistant in a draper's shop; and he has been ridiculing and denouncing the business ever since. "For a couple of years," he tells us, "I slept in one of those abominable