

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Journal of the Transactions of the Victoria Institute* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_jtvi-01.php

JOURNAL OF
THE TRANSACTIONS
OF
The Victoria Institute,
OR,
Philosophical Society of Great Britain.

VOL. LXV.



LONDON:

Published by the Institute, 1, Central Buildings, Westminster, S.W.1.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

1933

767TH ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING,

HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOM B, THE CENTRAL HALL,
WESTMINSTER, S.W.1, ON MONDAY, MARCH 20TH, 1933,
AT 4.30 P.M.

ALFRED W. OKE, ESQ., LL.M., F.G.S., F.Z.S., IN THE CHAIR.

The Minutes of the previous Meeting were read, confirmed, and signed, and the HON. SECRETARY announced the election of Francis Donald Bacon, Esq., as Associate.

In the absence of the Lecturer through the illness of Mrs. McIntyre, the paper by the Rev. D. M. McIntyre, D.D., entitled "The Synoptic Gospels: their Relation to one another," was read by Mr. Frederick G. Hill, I.S.O.

*THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS AND THEIR RELATION
TO ONE ANOTHER.*

By THE REV. D. M. MCINTYRE, D.D.

THE first three Gospels are entitled "the Synoptics" :* they present us with a conspectus of the earthly life of the Lord. They are held in the same framework, they concur in their selection of incidents, they are couched in similar, often in identical, terms. Yet their agreement is continually interrupted by numerous divergencies. And the "Synoptic Problem" consists in the difficulty of harmonizing this general agreement with so many discordances in detail.

From the third century the mutual relations of the Synoptics have engaged the attention of New Testament scholars. But from the eighteenth century until now the examination and comparison of these Gospels have been prosecuted with much eagerness. The results have been meagre. So much careful study cannot have been without fruit, but it is confessed by all that the Synoptic Problem has not been solved.

* The word "Synoptics" used in this connection is found as early as the sixteenth century. It was popularized later by Griesbach and Neander.

One may roughly mark out three stages in the discussion of questions involved in this enquiry.

- (1) Herder (d. 1803) maintained that Matthew, Mark, and Luke all originated in an oral tradition which had become quite definitely fixed between A.D. 35 and 40. Gieseler (d. 1854) argued strongly in favour of the view that an oral testimony underlay the first three Gospels. Dr. Westcott (d. 1901) supported this opinion with his accustomed force and fairness. "Naturally speaking," he writes, "the experience of oral teaching was required to bring within the reach of writing the vast subject of the Life of Christ Out of the countless multitude of Christ's acts those were selected and arranged during the ministry of twenty years which were seen to have the fullest representative significance for the exhibition of His divine life. The oral collection thus formed became in every sense coincident with the Gospel; and our Gospels are the permanent compendium of its contents."*
- (2) Until recently the "Two-Document Theory" was maintained as the orthodox critical belief. Dr. Sanday in his introduction to *Oxford Studies in the Synoptic Problem* simply takes it for granted;† others hold it as "axiomatic." This hypothesis recognizes two primary sources, the canonical Gospel of Mark and an unknown collection of memoranda of Jesus. This second document is known by various names—"The Logian Document" (Stanton), "The Oldest Source" (B. Weiss), "The Discourses" (Headlam), "The Lost Common Source" (Ramsay). We owe the generally accepted title "Q" (Quelle) to Wellhausen.
- (3) "The Two-Document Theory" has proved to be only the starting-point for further investigation. It reminds one of Descartes' process of simplification: Let us throw away everything we can; two forms of reality remain—knowing and being: "I think . . . I am." Having established these two facts, he hoped

* *Introduction to the Study of the Gospels*, p. 169.

† "We assume what is commonly known as the 'Two-Document Hypothesis,'" p. 3.

by their means to regain the whole world of truth. "Mark and Q" are the irreducible minimum of synoptic research: one cannot stop there, however; one must advance to fresh discoveries. Some German scholars now postulate three sources. Professor Kent, following them, speaks of three ground elements: (a) An early collection of the Sayings of Jesus; (b) The Original Gospel of Mark; (c) Other early fragmentary Gospels. Sir John Hawkins carefully feels his way in the same direction. Canon Streeter, who for a time gave his adhesion to the Two-Document Hypothesis has now disengaged himself from it, and requires a fourfold source—Mark, "Q," Matthew's Special Source, Luke's Special Source.* Synoptic criticism, for the moment, halts at this stage.

I.

The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Mark i, 1) is the personal testimony of those disciples whom the Lord had chosen to bear witness to Him, "beginning from the baptism of John unto that same day that He was taken up" (Acts i, 22). Their testimony covered the wide scope of His ministry, but it centred on His death and resurrection. The primary duty of the Twelve was *to bear witness*; it was for this that they were chosen. The disciples were, for the most part, open-air men, honest, observant, able to relate with exactitude the things which they had seen and heard. The consciousness of their high calling would dispose them to a scrupulously reverent handling of those facts which they had been set apart to place on record. For some time after the great Pentecost they "gave themselves" to this work: "Daily in the temple and in every house they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ" (Acts v, 42). Already a difference is observed between teaching and preaching, although the distinction was not deeply marked: the one was historical instruction turned to evangelistic uses, the other evangelistic appeal framed in historical moulds. In both, it was the story of Jesus. Every believer would be eager to hear, and hear again, the apostles'

* *The Four Gospels*, chapter ix.

rehearsal of the successive incidents of that marvellous ministry ; the newly received converts would in particular insistently require of their spiritual guides the fullest possible description of the earthly life of the Son of God. As time passed, certain episodes would naturally be repeated more frequently than others : many occurrences would fall out of the current teaching, while those that were retained would be apt, by constant repetition, to crystallize into a definite form. The selection of miracles, parables, and incidents of the way, may have been made almost instinctively, but it was divinely guided according to the principle laid down by St. John : " These things are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye may have life in His name." The events which most conspicuously nourished faith were those that came to form the burden of the apostles' teaching. It was in this " teaching " that the believers who were gathered into the Church on and after the Day of Pentecost " continued " (Acts ii, 42).

It is probable that the preaching of the Twelve retained this simple form for a considerable time.* But the inrush of new converts would call for a more deliberate and systematic mode of instruction. Chosen men would be set apart to receive the word from the lips of the apostles and communicate it to inquirers and converts. In this way classes of catechumens would be created.

The method of instruction would, no doubt, vary. At first, in Jerusalem, the teaching would be, according to rabbinic usage, by word of mouth. The teacher would recite the lesson, until it was securely lodged in the memory of each student. For this frequent repetition might be required. The most admired student in the Jewish schools was " one who was quick to hear and slow to forget," or was even compared to " a plastered cistern which loses not a drop." The free use of printing and the possession of books have in these modern days discharged most of us from the task of straining our memories to their last capacity ; but this was the pith and

* When Paul and Barnabas were in Paphos (c. A.D. 47) the form of their ministry seems to have been after this mode : " Then the deputy . . . believed, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord " (Acts xiii, 12). Barnabas, perhaps, or Mark, would rehearse the story of Jesus.

substance of education in the Ancient East. Chinese scholars still commit to a safe recollection great breadths of their classical texts. An Arab will repeat saga after saga and always in identical terms with those which his father had employed. The Book of Leviticus contains no reference to its having been committed to writing; probably it was during many years locked up in the recollection of the priests, just as the decisions of the rabbis now contained in the Mishna were preserved. In the Middle Ages the evangelical sects taught their adherents to memorize the Gospels, the Epistles, the Psalms, and other extended portions of the Old Testament. One may find to this day in the synagogues of Eastern Europe Jews who are able to repeat by heart the entire body of the Hebrew Scriptures. And only a year or two ago Dugald Campbell, in the Sahara, met a lad (and heard of other persons) who could recite the Koran, from the first page to the last, with perfect accuracy.*

After a time, especially in Greek-speaking countries, "the teaching of the apostles" would be committed to writing. The instructor would read over the lesson, perhaps many times, until it was quite familiar to the pupils. In many cases the lesson slips would be carefully preserved, and arranged in some sort of order. But as the teaching was with a view to full faith, it was homiletic rather than chronological, and the scholars, perhaps also the teachers, would have difficulty in apportioning each separate piece of instruction to its true point in time. It is, we may conceive, for this reason that the sequence of the history in the Synoptics is so difficult to determine. As the years passed, and as fresh information regarding the earthly life of the Master was communicated by travelling preachers, the catechumens would insert these additional memoranda, as far as possible, in their due place. In some such way there would come into existence those digests to which St. Luke refers in his preface to the Gospel which bears his name: "Many have taken in hand to draw up a narrative concerning those matters which have been fulfilled among us."

However differently we may conceive the stratification of "the teaching of the apostles," every Bible student will assent to the saying of the late Primate of Ireland: "It seems to be as certain as anything of the kind can be, that an unwritten

* *Wanderings in Widest Africa*, p. 65.

traditional life of Jesus, graven upon the living heart of the Church, preceded the written life.”*

The question which confronts us at this point is: Can we think of our canonical Gospels as having taken form immediately from the teaching of the apostles, or must we postulate sources intermediate between the oral testimony and the Synoptics? It is not impossible that the Second Gospel comes to us directly out of the oral tradition; but documentary sources seem to be called for when we turn to Matthew and Luke.

II.

Some writers assert that the fact that none of the Synoptic Gospels, as we now know them, was received by the Church until at least thirty years after our Lord's resurrection was symptomatic of a general indifference to the details of the life of the Saviour.† One cannot assent to this. No fragment of Christian literature has come to us out of the years which elapsed between the Day of Pentecost and the earliest of the canonical writings; but it was in that very period that the numerous narratives of which Luke takes notice were compiled. The hope of the imminent return of the King did not obscure the lineaments of His earthly life. Christ is everything to those who know Him: He is all, and in all.

But we may in part understand how delay in building up the Fourfold Record arose. The matters to be related were so momentous, the necessity for utter truthfulness was so insistent, that believers in Jesus would naturally prefer to hear of the sacred events of the Saviour's life and ministry from accredited witnesses rather than read of them in an unauthorized production. In addition, not many men of the inner circle, so far as we know, had literary aptitudes. Even the beloved disciple seems to have found letter-writing, although in the briefest fashion, an unwelcome task (2 John, 12; 3 John 13). Above all, we may conclude that the Spirit of inspiration willed that the verbal testimony should be assimilated and

* cf. Stanton: "The ultimate Source of the Gospels is oral traditions" *The Gospels as Historical Documents*, II, p. 131.

† "As it was thought the world was near its end, men were little anxious about composing books for the future: all they aimed at was to keep in their hearts the living image of Him whom they hoped soon to see again in the clouds." Renan, *Life of Jesus*, p. 12.

This Gospel divides itself into two parts, which differ in character. The first part—up to chapter viii, 26—consists mainly of a succession of short paragraphs, recording miracles, parables, and incidents of the way, as these might have been communicated by word of mouth to a cluster of catechumens. These sections are drawn together by a thin line of explanation or enforcement. Wellhausen points out accurately this feature of the Gospel: “The single scenes are often told in a life-like style without unessential additions and reflections, but they stand for the most part as a mere collection of disconnected anecdotes.*

As soon as we come to the second part we become aware of a difference. We have now what seems to be notes of addresses delivered by an eye-witness to audiences of believers who desired to acquaint themselves more fully with the mind and ministry of the Master. As we should expect, the emphasis of these discourses rests on the death and resurrection of the Lord, according to the initial charge given to the Twelve and according to the practice of the apostolic Church. This is all the more significant when we find in the Epistles of Peter a series of recollections which covers the entire ministry of Jesus.†

Would it be wrong to infer that the first part embodied the catechetical instructions, derived originally from Simon Peter’s recollections, gathered into form not long after Pentecost, set in harmony with the witness of the other disciples, and familiar to John Mark during half a life-time? And for the second part, may we not suppose that this consists of reminiscences of the preaching of Peter in the last days of his service, before another girded him and carried him whither he would not? However this may be, we have in the Gospel according to Mark a primary source enshrining the testimony of an eye-and-ear-witness.

The question has often been raised: Had Mark any other source than these Petrine recollections? We may confidently believe that he had access to many primitive traditions, and it is likely that he was not unfamiliar with written records reporting many of our Lord’s sayings and doings. But he does not seem to have made much use of these. He appears to have looked upon his work as a tribute of affection to his beloved

* *Einleitung in die drei ersten Evangelien*, p. 52.

† If one may digress for a moment it is interesting to note that several of these reminiscences confirm the historicity of the Fourth Gospel: e.g. 1 Peter i, 19; ii, 21; v, 2, 5.

teacher, so distinctively that he refrained from gathering fresh material, even though much was lying to his hand. We may pause here, being content to affirm with Professor Peake: "We have evidence that the Gospel of Mark actually rests on oral tradition."*

III.

Ecclesiastical tradition relates that Matthew wrote his Gospel "among the Hebrews," for the use of Jewish converts, and in their national language, "while Peter and Paul were proclaiming the Gospel and founding the Church at Rome." Papias informs us, apparently on the authority of John the Elder, that "Matthew composed his oracles (Logia) in the Hebrew language (Aramaic), and each reader interpreted them as he could."† There does not seem to have been any authorized translation into Greek at the date when Papias wrote (c. A.D. 125), but by the close of the second century our canonical Gospel was generally recognized as the work of Matthew the apostle. This, says Dr. Godet, was "the unanimous tradition of the primitive Church."‡ Such a tradition may come short of positive proof, but it is not to be lightly set aside.

Jerome tells us that the translator of Matthew's Aramaic Logia was at that time (c. A.D. 400) unknown. But is our canonical Gospel a translation? Dr. Zahn argues strongly that it is, others as strenuously deny. In the first place, we cannot be sure what the character and content of the Logia were. Was this document merely a collection of sayings, or a catena of utterances of the Lord framed in their historical setting, or a first sketch of the Gospel as we have it, or that very Gospel in its primitive form.§ Even if the Aramaic Logia

* *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 105.

† Euseb. *Hist. Eccl.* iii, 14; v, 8, 10; vi, 25.

‡ *Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 115.

§ Dr. Gregory and Professor Burkitt had already suggested that the "Legia" of Matthew was a catena of Old Testament passages bearing a Messianic reference. Dr. Rendel Harris has independently advocated this view (see *Testimonies*). He has brought together evidences of the existence of such a manual, from the days of Cyprian of Carthage to the apostolic period. It would be in harmony with all we know of this apostle that he should fortify his own faith and the faith of his disciples by an accumulation of evidence from the Old Testament that Jesus of Nazareth was Israel's Messiah. More than forty of such passages are referred to in the First Gospel. But it is by no means certain that such a group of testimonies represents the "Logia" spoken of by Papias.

and our canonical Matthew are one in substance, the latter need not be regarded as a mere translation. Josephus tells us that his *History of the Jewish War* was originally composed in Aramaic, in the interest of his fellow-countrymen beyond the Euphrates; but that he afterwards re-wrote it in Greek.* Matthew, as a customs' officer in Capernaum, in the neighbourhood of so many Greek cities, and within a belt of international commerce, must certainly have been able to speak and write in Greek.† Other writers in all ages have acted similarly; many continental scholars in our own time pursue the same method. An illustration of this was given to us only the other day. In 1929 Dr. Yahuda wrote *Die Sprache des Pentateuch in ihren Beziehungen zum Ägyptischen*. Only a few weeks ago another volume came from his pen, bearing the same title, this time in English, and containing almost exactly the same matter—"The Language of the Pentateuch in its relation to Egyptian." The author writes: "Instead of giving a mere translation, I preferred to re-write the whole book, in order to adjust it in spirit and language to the taste and requirements of English readers."

It is, however, emphatically asserted by most students of the Synoptic Problem that Matthew is not only a Greek original, but that it draws on Greek sources, the most important of these being our Gospel by Mark. Canon Rawlinson writes: "It is the one absolutely assured result of a century of learned discussion with regard to the origin and mutual relations of the Four Gospels that St. Mark's is the oldest written Gospel which we possess."‡ One may say in passing that if this is the only assured result of Synoptic criticism we dare not, on the strength of this single affirmation, depreciate, as some do, the authority of our canonical Gospels.§ But even this "assured result" is contested by some eminent scholars.

The chief reason for affirming the priority of Mark is the presumed fact that both Matthew and Luke borrow without restraint from this Gospel. Canon Rawlinson says: "Of the 661 verses contained in the authentic text of Mark, the substance of over 600 is reproduced in Matthew. It has further been

* *The Jewish War*, Preface.

† Bengel suggested in 1742 that the First Gospel was a fresh composition by Matthew himself, *Gnomon*, p. 3.

‡ *Commentary on Mark*, p. xv.

§ cf. Dodd, *The Authority of the Bible*, p. 230.

estimated that about 350 verses . . . have been reproduced by Luke . . . Only 31 verses in Mark . . . are wholly unrepresented in either Mark or Luke.”* What is the inference? Shall we say that Matthew—we pass by Luke for the present—has taken into his manuscript almost the whole of the Gospel according to Mark, or that both have drawn from the same fountains?

The answer is far from simple.

For one thing, it is by no means certain that our Gospel by Matthew was later than that by Mark. The references in the Epistles to the Synoptics are mainly to Matthew, and a similar emphasis on the First Gospel may be observed in the sub-apostolic Fathers. It may be said that the reason of this is that Matthew gives the sayings of our Lord more fully than either of the other Synoptists; and that it was in the words of Jesus that the interest of the Church centered. This is true, but I do not think it fully explains the emphasis laid on Matthew. And it raises another point.

It is almost certain that a collection of the sayings of Jesus was in circulation in the Church almost, or quite, from the beginning. Sir William Ramsay is of opinion that such a list of our Lord's significant utterances was the prized possession of the Church from the day of Pentecost, if not before. Professor Souter thinks that such a catena was in the hands of St. Paul.† We should expect, in the nature of the case, that the wonderful words of the Master would be treasured and retained. They were couched in memorable forms—sententious phrase, searching question or pungent retort, parable and similitude—so that recollection was easy. Many significant utterances, too, would be repeated on different occasions. And Matthew, at least, would be able to take them down as they were spoken, possibly in an abbreviated script.‡ That there was such a collection is almost proved by the fact that the Synoptists come much more nearly to exact agreement in recording the sayings of Jesus than in their recital of His deeds. So that it is by no means certain that, with regard to the words of Jesus, Matthew borrowed from Mark.

Again, while the resemblances between Matthew and Mark

* *Op. cit.*, p. xxxv.

† *The Text and Canon of the New Testament*, p. 151.

‡ See Dr. Milligan, “*The New Testament Documents*,” pp. 26, 242 ff., and Sir Flinders Petrie, *The Growth of the Gospels*, p. 5 f.

are patent the divergencies are numerous and call for explanation. Explanations are forthcoming, but they leave one with a feeling of hesitation.

* * * *

Again, the dependence of one Gospel on another is not so convincing as the bare statement of Canon Rawlinson might lead us to believe. Dr. Knapp has computed that, although there are *parts* of over 600 verses belonging the Mark reproduced in Matthew and Luke, "barely fifty or sixty have been reproduced in their entirety." This does not point to a free use of the Second Gospel.

An argument for the priority of Mark has been drawn from the fact that it presents features which are strongly suggestive of an earlier date—a freshness and directness of style, vivid narration as by an eye-witness, absorption in the past, a strict limitation in the testimony given, the impression of a prior stage in the development of Christian ideas. But the Epistles of St. Peter are marked by the same characteristics; they harmonize perfectly with the earlier chapters of Acts, which are undoubtedly primitive; yet those Epistles were later than parts of the New Testament which seem to be older. Simon was possibly in the mid-time of life when Jesus called him, and during his apostolate would naturally dwell much in the past, retraversing those golden years when Jesus walked with men. In this connection Bishop Westcott remarks with his usual sagacity, "The order thus given . . . represents the probable order of precedence of the forms of the narrative which they give. It may, or it may not, coincide with the order of writing; for it is of course possible that an earlier form of apostolic tradition may have been committed to writing at a later period."*

One finds it hard to believe that the author of the First Gospel, a treatise so well ordered, so rich in material, so haunting in expression, "the most important book in the world," according to Renan, should have stooped to borrow without restraint and without acknowledgment from one whose skill in arrangement was so much inferior to his own. And if we assume that the author of our Gospel of Matthew was the apostle of that name, the difficulty becomes almost insuperable. We

* *Introduction to the Study of the Gospels*, p. 210.

can scarcely credit the opinion that he, a close companion of Jesus almost from the first, should have appropriated in this cavalier way the entire study and labour of one who belonged to a younger generation and who had not companied with Jesus in the flesh. Perhaps we may find an opening into the true explanation of the similarity between Mark and the other Synoptists in the sentence of Abbot and Rushbrooke: "It is believed that the Gospel of Mark *contains* a closer approximation to the Original Tradition than is *contained* in the other Synoptists."* The Original Tradition may have existed in many forms—in Aramaic, or in Greek; the Aramaic translated or targumed into Greek, possibly by many hands; written perhaps in part, in part oral. The "irreducible minimum" of Mark and Q must be enlarged indefinitely.

IV.

Very much in the First and Third Gospels is not in Mark, yet with regard to that also a close agreement persists between Matthew and Luke. Those parts which so nearly resemble each other are supposed to have been drawn from another source, called by Sir William Ramsay, "The Lost Common Source." It is indeed "lost," lost so completely as to have passed out of recognition; that such an original ever existed is merely a working hypothesis. This source is usually called "Q" (after Wellhausen) and the title is not inapt, for Q is as indeterminate as an algebraic x . Dr. Burkitt, for instance, says: "The unity of the fragments which modern scholars have called Q is still an unproven hypothesis." He refers again to "the source (or sources) which it is convenient to call Q."† A whole forest of questions springs up in this place. Did Q come to the later Synoptists as a document, or as an oral tradition? If a document, was it one, or were there two, or even more of them? If oral, was it singular, or did it belong to a cycle? Was it quite brief, or large and full? Was it merely an assemblage of sayings, or are those sayings set in their historical connection? Did it contain the recital of certain events, such as the Call of the Baptist, the Baptism of Jesus, the Temptation, the Healing of the Centurion's Son, etc., or not? Did it relate the Passion

* *The Common Tradition of the Synoptic Gospels*, p. vi.

† *The Earliest Sources for the Life of Jesus*, p. 107 f.

history, or did it pass over the last week of the Lord's life on earth? *On all these points high authorities differ.*

Several scholars have attempted the reconstruction of Q—Wendt, Wellhausen, Harnack, Stanton and others, but Streeter is of opinion that they all have failed because they built on false premises. Burkitt, too, confesses that “we can do very little towards constructing the unknown sources used by Matthew and Luke,” and he adds, “Q remains an unknown quantity.”* It is evident that the conception of Q is so vague as to be unhelpful. Indeed Canon Streeter plainly affirms that “the ‘Two-Document Hypothesis,’ so far as it concerns the non-Markan elements in Matthew and Luke, has broken down.”† Thus we are prepared for the confession of Zahn that “up to the present time no one of the investigations of the Synoptic Problem can be said to have produced results which have been generally accepted.”‡ Dr. Latimer Jackson, half-humorously, speaks of the “chaotic” condition of the Problem.§ Perhaps it would be correct to say that it has been led into a cul-de-sac from which it is now beginning to emerge.

V.

[I had prepared a section on the relation of the Third Gospel to the other two, but I have already overstepped the line measured out for me.]

VI.

To sum up. (a) We have first the Records of the Nativity and Childhood of Jesus. The Birth Narrative in Matthew must have come in the first instance from Joseph. It is *his* perplexity that is described, together with his decision on receipt of the divine revelation. To the Evangelist this account would come, directly or indirectly, from members of the Holy Family. In Luke's Gospel we have two chapters which have a Palestinian source. The original is in Hebrew, or Aramaic. It comes inevitably from the Mother of Jesus; its form and wording suggest an immediate derivation from Mary of Nazareth in the days of our Lord's youth. Of this Dr. Plummer says :

* *The Earliest Sources for the Life of Jesus*, p. 103.

† *The Four Gospels*, p. 235.

‡ *Introduction to the New Testament*, ii, 418.

§ *Cambridge Biblical Essays*, pp. 436, 454.

“ We have here the earliest documentary evidence respecting the origins of Christianity, evidence which may justly be called contemporary.” And Dr. Sanday in fullest agreement with this averment, describes the Lucan Gospel of the Infancy as probably “ the oldest evangelical fragment or document, of the New Testament and in any case the most archaic thing in the New Testament.”

(b) We have the sayings of the Lord faithfully remembered and duly recorded while they were fresh in the recollection of the hearer. Those words which “ wander through eternity ” were not flung upon the heedless winds. The Master sowed them on the hearts of His disciples, and foretold their deathless power. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but His words shall stand for ever (Matt. xxiv, 35). They have been remembered, were written down, and are the life-power of the saints. Many of these, we may believe, were recorded almost as soon as uttered. They are contemporaneous with the ministry.

(c) After the ministry was sealed by the cross and burial, the testimony of the apostles began to be received in the Church. From the Day of Pentecost, until the latest of the apostolic company was received into the presence of God, this witness was disseminated, “ both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”

(d) Next we have the more formal communication of this witness in the early Church, through the agency of men who were set apart as ministers of the Word. At first, in Palestine, in the native Aramaic (*cf.* Acts i, 19); afterwards (in Aramaic or in Greek) among the Dispersion; and finally through all the bounds of Empire, the story of Jesus was told and repeated. In church assemblies, especially when the Lord’s Supper was dispensed, those who had first-hand knowledge of that Life which was the light of men, were eagerly listened to, and the words, falling on good soil, bore fruit to eternal life. This continued during the first generation after the resurrection.

(e) Following upon this, we have the initial attempts to commemorate the Saviour’s ministry as a whole. This process was in operation before St. Luke addressed his history to the “ Excellent Theophilus.” On a grander scale he essayed to accomplish a happier enterprise. From “ ancient disciples ” (Acts xxi, 16) not a few, from the family of Philip, from members of the household of Herod, from the believers in Antioch and

Rome, from the lips of obscure believers, from members of the apostolic fellowship, he gathered priceless store. And now we have his Gospel, and the Gospels of Matthew and of Mark—all, I believe, given to us within forty years from the time when the Lord had sent forth His Spirit of truth and counsel. There is no life so abundantly authenticated as the Life that was cradled in Bethlehem, offered once for all on Calvary, and now enthroned in power.

DISCUSSION.

The CHAIRMAN (Mr. A. W. Oke, LL.M.) called for the thanks of the meeting to the writer (and reader) of the paper, and the same were given with acclamation.

Rev. J. J. B. COLES, M.A., said: While thanking Dr. McIntyre for his interesting and suggestive paper, I may remark that I have always felt that the spiritual interpretation of the Gospels was of the utmost importance when we face questions as to literary composition and mutual relations. As to the Synoptic Problem—how the first three Gospels were composed, and to what extent they were dependent on one another—this has not yet been decided, though the discussion had been going on from the third century downwards.

The Holy Spirit had given us in St. Matthew's Gospel a portrait of the Lord as the Jewish Messiah, "Behold your King." In St. Mark, He is the Servant and Prophet of Jehovah—"Behold My Servant." In St. Luke, He is the One who loved to call Himself "The Son of Man"—"Behold the Man." While in St. John we see Him as the Son of God—"Behold your God."

In all four Gospels we see Christ in His rejection, despised and rejected by His people—"A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief."

In St. Matthew and St. Mark He is the Trespass-Offering and the Sin-Offering; in St. Luke the Peace-Offering and the Burnt-Offering. So it is in the two first Gospels only that we find the words, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabaethani," quoted from Psalm xxii—the Atonement psalm. In St. Luke and St. John we see Christ specially as the Peace- and Burnt-Offering of Sweet-Savour; and we remember that it is written of Him "When thou shalt make His soul an

offering for sin," and "He shall see of the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied."

Mr. SIDNEY COLLETT said: I am sure we all feel indebted to Dr. McIntyre for his paper. In dealing with the way in which the accounts of the Gospel came to be written, it seems to me that there is far too much stress laid upon "oral testimony," "original tradition," "the recollections of Peter," and the copying by one Evangelist from another's writings. I maintain that the Divinely-inspired Truths of the Bible do *not* rest upon any such flimsy and uncertain foundation as that. Indeed, the bare facts of the Bible make such a theory impossible. How could "oral testimony," or the "recollections" of anyone give us the account of Christ's temptation in the wilderness, when none but our Lord and the Devil were there? (Matt. iv, 3-11): or, again, the account of Christ's agony in Gethsemane, when the only three disciples who were anywhere near were sound asleep? (Matt. xxvi, 40); or yet again, our Lord's interview with the woman of Samaria, when all the disciples were absent? (John iv).

Mr. R. J. COBB said: To me, as one who is reading at present for the Theological Tripos at Cambridge, the paper has been of extreme interest. This is particularly so as I represent a small group of men who are unable to accede to the theories of documentary interdependence in the Gospels. One remark has come to mind which is worthy of our consideration: in the course of a conversation on this topic, the Rev. Sir Edwyn Hoskyns admitted that the impetus to this form of study of the Synoptics (to use his own phrase, "the key to the problem") had been provided by the critical views of the Pentateuch. Whether he would say so in print one cannot say, but from my point of view the statement is of not a little importance as rather "giving the game away."

Rev. A. BODY, M.A., said: The Synoptic Problem is a difficult one. The similarity that one finds between the Gospels is so close that the documents must be closely connected, while the minute differences make it clear that there could not be direct copying.

When St. Peter preached on the day of Pentecost, we are told

that hundreds of people believed and came for instruction. They were taught about the Resurrection, and then were baptized. But constantly there were others being added to the Church, needing instruction, and those who had been baptized were not satisfied with what they had been taught, but wanted to hear more and more about Jesus Christ. The matter became too great for a dozen men to cope with, even if they were free to give up all their time to it, which was very far from the case. They had to get help. So we find John Mark in charge of that part of Church work. He gathered round him a band of these who were "eye-witnesses from the beginning and became ministers of the Word."

These met together daily, and settled upon the day's lesson, went over it so as to tell the story as simply and effectively as possible, learnt it off by heart, and then went out and taught it to the hearers. They did not write it down, but in true Oriental style they taught it by word of mouth and the hearers *learnt it off by heart*. There was no order in which they were taught; the lessons were, so to say, haphazard. By degrees, the disciples found that one story brought others into their minds and the Gospels took shape.

Mr. PERCY O. RUOFF said: Do not the following words of Christ constitute a guarantee and safeguard of the New Testament sayings of Christ, as being communicated by the supernatural agency of the Holy Spirit? "But the Comforter, Who is the Holy Spirit Whom the Father will send in My Name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. . . . Howbeit, when He, the Spirit of Truth is come, He will guide you into all truth . . . He will show you things to come" (John xiv, 26; xvi, 13).

WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS.

Mr. W. E. LESLIE wrote: The phenomena to be considered fall under four heads. (1) A considerable body of verbal parallelisms. (2) Slight verbal variations. (3) Larger divergencies, such as variations of order, etc. (4) Differences of purpose and standpoint apparent throughout the respective Gospels.

Selective inspiration appears to be an adequate explanation of the two last. The difficulty lies rather with the first and second groups, because they are concerned with those stylistic idiosyncrasies which, as we know, the Holy Spirit has not seen fit to suppress.

The explanation favoured by Dr. McIntyre is that of slowly crystallizing oral tradition. In support of this view, we are told of various feats of memory on the part of Jews, Chinese, and Arabs. But we are not given any exact data as to the phenomena alleged to be thus produced.

For example, we are told an Arab will "repeat saga after saga and always in terms identical with those which his father had employed." But unless the father's recital was taken down in writing and subsequently compared with that of his son, our only guarantee of the verbal identity of the two lies in the memory of the hearer. This assumes in the hearer the very thing that has to be proved in the reciter—it involves a *petitio principii*.

Again, have any of the extraordinary recitations referred to ever been taken down in shorthand and then compared word for word with the original? Unless some evidence of this kind can be produced, the extent to which crystallization of verbal tradition could have produced the linguistic phenomena of the Synoptics, is speculative.

The author and the Council are to be congratulated upon calling our attention to an exceedingly interesting problem, though perhaps the most certain conclusion of the paper is that it remains a problem.

Rev. A. H. FINN wrote: The modern theory as to these is based primarily on a considerable amount of verbal similarity in parallel passages of all three. This, it is argued, is so nearly identical that it must be due to actual copying; that two must have had the third before them and borrowed from it. Then it is assumed, without proof, that St. Mark was the earliest written and the others took much from it, as well as from other sources, such as that called "Q."

In an article contributed to the *Bible League Quarterly* of April last year I showed that along with these similarities there is a larger amount of differences of language and of incident, so great and so impartially distributed as to make it highly improbable that any one of the three could have been acquainted with either of the other two,

pointing to what might be expected *a priori* that all were composed independently. So the modern theory is really based on only part of the evidence, and that not the most significant. The evidence of these differences must be taken into account.

My own belief is that the "Gospel according to St. Matthew" was composed by the Apostle, perhaps at Pella, shortly before (or slightly after) the destruction of Jerusalem, from his own recollections: that "according to St. Mark" from the teachings of St. Peter at Rome, and therefore at a later date; while St. Luke compiled his account mainly from what he learned from St. Paul, combined with what he ascertained from "eye-witnesses and ministers of the Word" (ch. i, 2), notably the first two chapters gathered from the Virgin Mother herself.

How far Dr. McIntyre would agree with me, I am not sure, but I am inclined to think he seems to lay too much stress on the imperfect narratives alluded to by St. Luke (ch. i, 1), and I doubt that he is right in asserting (p. 118) that "At first in Jerusalem, the teaching would be according to rabbinic usage." The Apostles were not Rabbis or disciples of the "Scribes and Pharisees."

MR. GEORGE B. MICHELL wrote: I welcome Dr. McIntyre's paper as the first sound and independent treatment of the "Synoptic Problem" that I have met with. I rejoice to see that he rejects the "documentary hypothesis," with its "sources" and its "redactions."

I am glad also to remark that he notes the fact that the witness in the early church through the agency of men was in the native Aramaic. I would go further. I believe that practically the whole of the New Testament was originally in this Judæo-Aramaic, and that our present Greek texts are translations. For all purposes of witness and edification these texts, and even our English versions of them, are fully sufficient. But for *critical* purposes they are altogether insufficient. And, unless by some unexpected Providence we should become possessed of the original Aramaic texts, I can see no possibility of a scientific "higher criticism." For which, no doubt, we have to be thankful. I endorse Dr. McIntyre's conclusions, and I hope he will yet have an opportunity to give us the omitted section. May I recommend to him, if he does not know it already, Primo Vannutelli's series of papers in the *Revue Biblique*

for 1925 and 1926 on "Les Evangiles Synoptiques." In these the important subject of citations from the Old Testament, and the causes of variations, are discussed.

LECTURER'S REPLY.

I regret that I was unable to read my paper in person, and give a verbal answer to some of the remarks made. I owe cordial thanks to my valued friend Mr. Hill, who took my place. I thank the Chairman also for his kindly reference.

The Secretary asks that my reply shall be brief. I could say a great deal, but there is really no need. Any difference indicated was a difference of emphasis rather than of view.

We are all as solicitous as Mr. Sidney Collett to maintain the divine inspiration of the Gospels; but the Spirit of God acted on human minds: "men spake from God." I concur with Mr. Ruoff in his assurance that our Lord's promise in John xiv, 26, guarantees the accuracy of the evangelists' reports of His utterances.

Mr. Leslie is doubtful if the crystallization of verbal tradition will produce the linguistic phenomena of the Synoptics. Of itself, I do not think it could. It is admitted by all that oral testimony underlies the canonical Gospels; but it is also generally believed that documents were employed—*e.g.*, the Birth Narrative in Luke, and the report of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew, etc. The exact relation of the oral and the documental is the Synoptic Problem.