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# THE EXPOSITOR.

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## *THE VALUE OF THE PATRISTIC WRITINGS FOR THE CRITICISM AND EXEGESIS OF THE BIBLE.*

### I.—THE HIGHER CRITICISM.

THE Council of Trent laid it down as a fundamental proposition, that Holy Scripture is not to be interpreted in a manner contrary to the sense which the Church "has held and holds," or "against the unanimous consent of the Fathers."<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, in the course of a recent controversy, readers of THE EXPOSITOR were told that these ancient writers are too often uncritical and credulous, and "it is clear that their authority in a question of this kind may be disregarded."<sup>2</sup>

Again, we have from a writer, holding a position midway between these two opposite poles, such an expression of opinion as the following: "The unanimity of the Fathers seems to me to have less weight in the interpretation of a text of Scripture than in matters of doctrine. Their unanimity convinced us that the Epistle was genuine, because such unanimity could not otherwise be accounted for. And I thankfully accept it in this case as proof that they held that Christ is divine. . . . Although the opinions of the Fathers, especially when unanimous, always have my

<sup>1</sup> *Concil. Trident. Sess. iii.*  
JANUARY, 1880.

<sup>2</sup> THE EXPOSITOR, No. liii. p. 398.

respectful and careful consideration, yet, as a Protestant, I am not prepared to accept in every case, even in matters of doctrine, their unanimous, or rather, in this case, their uncontradicted consent. Our only safe guide is the sacred text." <sup>1</sup>

Or, to take another instance of the application of principles to a concrete case, we may place side by side these two statements: "The internal difficulties urged against St. John's Gospel appear to be overborne by the weight of the external testimony, taken in conjunction with the characteristics and necessities of the Apostolic age." <sup>2</sup> "The usual point of departure in this inquiry—to which Keim is the only exception—has been a mustering of external evidence to the [Johannine] origin of the Gospel, to the results of which a greater weight has then been allowed in the final verdict than is admissible either from the character of the evidence or from that of the ecclesiastical tradition as to the origin of the New Testament writings generally." <sup>3</sup>

Where opinions diverge so widely, which is to be accepted? If the extreme positions cannot be made good, how far are we to go in the direction of either? The answer to this question is commonly assumed without discussion. It usually forms a part of the stock of prepossessions with which a writer sits down to his work, and is not treated as a matter for argument. Yet the very diversity just exemplified shews that argument and discussion *are* needed. And it is with a view to further this result, and to contribute if possible to the obtaining a greater amount of con-

<sup>1</sup> Beet, *Epistle to the Romans*, p. 262.

<sup>2</sup> Liddon, *Bampton Lectures*, p. 224, n.

<sup>3</sup> Wittchen, *Der geschicht. Charakter d. Ev. Joh.* p. 2, *ad fin.* Elberfeld. 1869.

sent on these matters, that I am permitted to offer in the pages of *THE EXPOSITOR* a series of articles "On the Value of the Patristic writings for the Criticism and Exegesis of the Old and New Testaments."

The third subject that might possibly be introduced—*Doctrine*—I propose not to take up, at least for the present. Criticism and Exegesis are wide enough, if not too wide; and I fear there will be a difficulty in treating them as concisely as might be wished; but I will do my best not to transgress the limits proper to a Magazine, or to forget the kind of public for which I am writing. Nor can I indeed claim to have new facts and new materials to bring to light. My own study of the writings in question has been incidental, rather than direct and continuous. All I can hope to do is to collect together some of the data that have presented themselves in this way, and to focus them, as it were, upon the particular point at issue. If some of the points adduced should seem to scholars trite and hackneyed, the excuse must be that their very triteness proceeds from their importance, and that they must needs be set before the reader, if he is to form a sound conclusion.

It might have been well perhaps if the reader could have been helped to form such a conclusion—if it could have been stated in some neat and crisp formula, which might be tested from time to time as the discussion proceeds. I doubt very much, however, if any such single formula is forthcoming. At all events it would be premature to lay down any hard and fast generalization. Our best plan will probably be to examine the witnesses first, and then to see what is the kind of result to which they lead.

It will clearly be advisable to break up the comprehensive heading "Criticism and Exegesis" into its parts. These will naturally be, (i.) the so-called Higher Criticism ; (ii.) the so-called Lower Criticism ; (iii.) Exegesis proper.

#### I. THE HIGHER CRITICISM.

Higher Criticism is a term that is commonly used to designate that branch of literary criticism which is concerned with the determination of the date, authorship, and character of the books to which it is applied. What kind of assistance do the patristic writings lend us towards this in the case of the Bible? The assistance that they give is of two kinds: partly *unconscious*, in so far as they contain quotations from or traditions respecting the books of Scripture, and so afford materials for modern criticism to work on ; and partly *conscious*, in so far as the patristic writers<sup>1</sup> themselves exercise criticism similar to that which we are obliged to use now. The difference will be at once apparent between quotations introduced incidentally, or traditions which relate to definite matters of fact, and speculative arguments and reasonings adduced in support of certain conclusions. This difference suggests a division of the subject of which we will avail ourselves, and confine the present paper to the first of these aspects, devoting a further paper to the second.

From the Old Testament the Fathers of the Church

<sup>1</sup> The Church of Rome, as is well known, distinguishes between "Church Writers" and "Church Fathers," confining the latter designation to writers of acknowledged and unsuspected orthodoxy, and excluding such men as Origen, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and Theodoret. I have included these in speaking of the "Patristic Writings," and have purposely chosen the vaguer expression with that object.

are too far removed in point of time to supply positive evidence of any great value. We shall have occasion to see in the next paper how they dealt with disputed questions of canonicity and authorship; but they dealt with them not as being merely exponents of a tradition, but with the same conscious weighing of critical data that we are accustomed to now.

When we turn to the New Testament, it is well known that the evidence for the different books varies greatly. For some, *e.g.*, Romans, 1 Corinthians, and Hebrews,<sup>1</sup> the evidence is distinct and express before the close of the first century. The Epistle of Clement of Rome to the Corinthians was probably written about A.D. 95,<sup>2</sup> and it contains unmistakeable quotations from these three books. On the other hand, it is doubtful whether there is *quite clear* evidence for 2 Peter before Eusebius, though it has, indeed, at that time a lengthened history behind it.<sup>3</sup> The great mass of important evidence belongs to the last thirty years of the second century, and the first ten or twenty of the third, beginning with the Muratorian Fragment, and including the three voluminous writers, Irenæus, Clement of Alexandria, and

<sup>1</sup> In the case of the Epistle to the Hebrews, the early date of the external evidence is of especial importance, on account of the advanced Christological doctrine of the Epistle. The Epistle to the Hebrews stands midway between St. Paul and St. John. It shews that all the antecedent conditions of the Johannean teaching were in existence before the destruction of Jerusalem. Accordingly, writers whose system compels them to place St. John's Gospel in the second century, have also endeavoured to assign an impossible date to the Epistle of Clement, and also to that to the Hebrews (so Baur, Schwegler, Volkmar).

<sup>2</sup> The great majority of critics assign the Epistle to this date. The number includes Bishop Lightfoot, the Leipsic editors, and M. Renan. It is rather noticeable that Harnack (*Patr. Apost.* Fasc. I. Part i. p. 55, Ed. 2), while contending for this date, declares "his conviction" that the *Epistle to the Hebrews* was not written before the time of Domitian. This conclusion is facilitated by the assumption that the Epistle was originally addressed to Rome. The arguments against it, and in favour of the ordinary date, are not, indeed, decisive, but yet seem to carry with them a certain balance of probability.

<sup>3</sup> Euseb. *II. E.* vii. 3.

Tertullian. It becomes, then, a matter of considerable moment to decide what degree of weight is to be attached to the tradition of which these three writers are the chief representatives.

Here, as elsewhere, it is necessary to take into account the special circumstances of each writer. The position of Tertullian cannot be considered, on the whole, very favourable for the transmission of a sound and well-established tradition. Though the phenomena of the Old Latin Version shew that the Gospel very early found its way into Africa, still there is no reason to think that it was conveyed thither by the Apostles. Nor has the name of a single member of the sub-apostolic generation come down to us as forming a link between the Apostles themselves and the next age of African tradition. The antecedents, both of Tertullian himself and the Church to which he belonged are unknown to us. It must have been in existence for some time. Of so much we may be sure, but of nothing more. Tertullian personally had received as good an education as his province could give. His natural gifts were great. As a rhetorician his style is brilliant. For rapid cut and thrust of argument, and for vehemence of impassioned invective, he has, perhaps, hardly an equal. But Goldsmith's saying about Johnson would apply to him rather too well: "If his pistol missed fire, he would knock you down with the butt end of it." He was far from fastidious as to the quality of his arguments so long as they served his turn. He was a controversialist to the core. Neither his abilities nor his ideals were those of a scholar. Legal practice and forensic oratory ranked first in Africa. A forensic and rhetorical standard

was all that Tertullian would either care to apply himself, or expect to have applied to him. There was none of that sobering control which the presence of a highly cultivated body like the catechetical school of Alexandria could not fail to exercise. Nor did the idiosyncrasies of his own character make up for the defects of circumstances and training. Bold, impetuous, fearless, and careless of consequences, Tertullian did not stay to weigh and balance a statement before he made it. Possibility—nay, impossibility—was the same with reality, if it happened to be convenient to him.

It is in this random way that he bids his readers go to the Churches of Corinth, Philippi, Thessalonica, and Ephesus, and there inspect the autograph copies of the letters written by the Apostles themselves.<sup>1</sup> It would be a most unsound conclusion to draw from this that the autograph copies were really in existence. If they had been, can we suppose that they would have escaped the diligence of a real scholar like Origen, or that the temperate and modest Irenæus, himself a native of Asia Minor, for so long a time the residence of St. Paul and St. John, would have had nothing better to appeal to than old and trustworthy copies?<sup>2</sup>

Tertullian's writings supply parallels enough for his audacity in claiming the support of writings that he had never seen. In one place he speaks of the "census of Augustus which the Roman archives guard as a most faithful witness of the Lord's Nativity."<sup>3</sup> In another he asserts that "Tiberius, in whose days the Christian name made its entry into the world, laid

<sup>1</sup> *De Præscript.* c. xxxvi.

<sup>2</sup> *Adv. Hæc.* v. 30, 31; comp. Scrivener, *Introduction*, pp. 446, 449, 451.

<sup>3</sup> *Adv. Marc.* iv. 7.



before the senate, with the prior assent of his own vote (*prærogativa suffragii sui*), intelligence brought to him from Palestine which had there revealed the truth of his Divinity." <sup>1</sup> And again he appeals to the report of the Crucifixion sent to the Emperor Tiberius by Pilate.<sup>2</sup> Here, too, it would be only characteristic of Tertullian to assume that such a report must exist, and then to base an argument on the assumption. At the same time, it is perhaps not improbable, as Justin had preceded him in a similar appeal,<sup>3</sup> that he had in his mind a real document—the earliest, perhaps, of Christian forgeries—the Acts of Pilate.

It is only fair, while mentioning this, to say that he is better informed as to the origin of another apocryphal work—the Acts of Paul and Thecla. The author of this work (he tells us) was a presbyter in the Church of Asia, who confessed what he had done, and was removed from his office in consequence.<sup>4</sup> Here Tertullian shews some acquaintance with what had passed in a Church at some distance from his own; but it is plain matter of fact, and does not involve any critical sifting on his part.

Again, he uses some strong language about the Shepherd of Hermas, and claims that it was "classed by every council of the Churches, as well heretical as

<sup>1</sup> *Apol.* c. v.

<sup>2</sup> *Apol.* c. xxi.

<sup>3</sup> *Apol.* i. 35, 48. The value of Justin's critical judgment may be seen in the well-known story (*Apol.* i. 26), that a statue was erected on the island "in the Tiber, between the two bridges," in honour of Simon Magus, and with the inscription, ΣΙΜΩΝΙ ΔΕΩ ΣΑΓΚΤΩ. It is seldom that a legend can be traced so directly to its origin. In the year 1574 there was discovered, in this very island, the base of a statue inscribed, SEMONI SANCO DEO FIDIO, &c. The statue had clearly been that of Semo Sancus, an ancient Sabine divinity! It would not be easy to find a better illustration of what is meant by the word "uncritical": (1) carelessness of observation; (2) rashness of inference; (3) ignorance of essential points bearing upon the question.

<sup>4</sup> *De Baptism.* c. xviii.

orthodox, among the false and apocryphal books." <sup>1</sup> Dr. Westcott rightly remarks <sup>2</sup> that this passage is of considerable importance as shewing that so early as the second century the canonicity of the books of Scripture was actively debated. Still there must be a good deal of Tertullian's usual exaggeration in the statement, when Origen, not very much later, can ascribe the same work to the Hermas mentioned in the Romans, and speak of it as "very useful, and, as he supposes, divinely inspired." <sup>3</sup>

The chief reason for thus testing the value of a writer on ground where all is pretty clear is to have a means of gauging his value on matter which is more uncertain. What we have seen is hardly likely to inspire us with any great amount of confidence in the statement which Tertullian makes as to the authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews. This he attributes positively to Barnabas.<sup>4</sup> The opinion is not, indeed, impossible in itself. It is true that the style and tone of thought is so different from that of the Epistle of Barnabas, commonly so called, that the two cannot very well be by the same writer. But the genuineness of this latter epistle is itself so doubtful that the assumption of it ought not to stand in the way of an hypothesis otherwise well established. It can hardly, however, be said that Tertullian's opinion as to the authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews is of this character, and it conflicts with other statements which have weightier authority and better arguments to recommend them.<sup>5</sup> There will be more to say on this point presently.

<sup>1</sup> *De Pudic.* c. x.

<sup>2</sup> *On the Canon*, p. 178, n. (3rd Ed.)

<sup>3</sup> *Comm. on Rom.* x. 31.

<sup>4</sup> *De Pudic.* c. xx.

<sup>5</sup> Jerome also says that the epistle was by some attributed to Barnabas; and in modern times this view has been maintained especially by Wieseler, Ritschl, and

Another point where we have to ask the value of Tertullian as a witness to tradition is in the case of the Apocalypse. Indirectly he must be reckoned among those who place the composition of this book under Domitian. Among the many glories of Rome, he mentions that here the Apostle John, after being plunged in boiling oil without receiving any hurt, was exiled to an island.<sup>1</sup> As this story belongs to the Domitian version, that version would seem to be the one adopted by Tertullian. About this, too, we shall have more to say. But in the meantime we only need to note that the "boiling oil" casts discredit upon it. The whole story of the journey to Rome rests on slender foundations.

On the whole, then, we conclude that Tertullian, unsupported by other evidence, is not a safe witness for occurrences that are said to have taken place in the Apostolic age. He represents the belief of the African Church, and that, when taken in connection with the belief of other Churches, may become of some importance; but its importance is of this relative and secondary kind.

Both Irenæus and Clement of Alexandria have much greater claim to consideration. In the line of tradition neither stands alone. In his youth Irenæus

Weiss. The last of these three writers has reached his conclusion after a thorough doctrinal analysis of the Epistle, which he thinks has its origin in Jewish Christianity, with only a comparatively external tincture of Alexandrinism (*Theologie d. N. T.* p. 522 ff.). It is noticeable that Riehm, the other writer who has gone most deeply into the theology of the Epistle (in his *Lehrbegriff d. Hebräerbrief*, a volume of nearly 900 pages!) assigns to the Barnabas hypothesis the third place, after those which point to Silas and Apollos.

<sup>1</sup> *De Præscript.* c. xxxvi. This is the well-known legend of St. John the Evangelist "ante Portam Latinam," which is commemorated in the ecclesiastical calendar on May 6th. Some of my readers will remember the remarkable picture representing it by Quentin Matsys in the Museum at Antwerp.

had sat at the feet of Polycarp, and Polycarp in his turn had been a disciple of John. In the Gallic home of his later years, Irenæus still retained a vivid recollection of the way in which Polycarp used to describe the habits of the aged Apostle.<sup>1</sup> Nor was this the only link by which Irenæus was connected with Apostolic times. Pothinus, whom he succeeded as Bishop of Lyons, was more than ninety years old at his death in 177 A.D.,<sup>2</sup> so that his boyhood must have overlapped the closing years of the Apostle. Besides these, Irenæus is fond of appealing to the testimony of the presbyters "who had seen the Apostle" "who had lived with John," and so on.<sup>3</sup> A tradition the links in which are so sound would naturally be expected to be in a great degree trustworthy.

It should be noted further that though settled for the latter part of his life in Gaul, Irenæus brought with him the higher culture which he had acquired in his early youth in Asia Minor. It would be too much to say that he had exactly a critical training; but still there would be more of an element approaching to criticism in it than in the case of Tertullian. His character, too, was favourable to the patient hearing and weighing of both sides of a story. Without the fire and force of Tertullian, he was also without his haste and rashness. Moderation and quiet good sense are apparent to a considerable degree in his writings. I am not at this moment anticipating the final decision as to how far he possessed the critical gift, and how far his writings are to be taken as bearing a critical value.

<sup>1</sup> *Ep. ad Florinum*, ap. Euseb. *H. E.* v. 20.

<sup>2</sup> *Ep. Vienn. et Ludg.* c. ix.

<sup>3</sup> See the passages collected in Routh, *Reliq. Sacr.* i. pp. 47 ff., or in Gebhardt and Harnack, *Patr. Apost.* Fasc. I. Part ii. pp. 105 ff.

I am only considering what might have been antecedently expected from him. And from this point of view it would seem as if character, training, and circumstances combined to make our expectations high.

Very much the same is to be said respecting Clement of Alexandria. In him we see a natural ingenuousness and love of truth, wide and varied learning, a training as scholarly, and, we might almost add, as critical as the age in which he lived could afford, in connection with circumstances that seem to hold out a guarantee for a sound and reliable transmission of facts. This is the language that he uses about himself in the introduction to his work called *Stromateis*, or *Miscellanies* :—

“ Now, this work of mine in writing is not artfully constructed for display ; but my memoranda are stored up against old age, as a remedy against forgetfulness, truly an image and outline of those vigorous and animated discourses which I was privileged to hear, and of blessed and truly remarkable men. Of these, the one in Greece, an Ionic ; the other in Magna Græcia : the first of these from Cœle-Syria, the second from Egypt, and others from the East. The one was born in the land of Assyria, and the other a Hebrew in Palestine. When I came upon the last (he was the first in power), having tracked him out concealed in Egypt, I found rest. He the true, the Sicilian bee, gathering the spoil of the flowers of the prophetic and apostolic meadow, engendered in the souls of his hearers a deathless element of knowledge. Well, they, preserving the tradition of the blessed doctrine derived directly from the holy Apostles, Peter, James, John, and Paul, the son receiving it from the father (but few

were like the fathers), came by God's will to us also to deposit those ancestral and apostolic seeds." <sup>1</sup>

This is said of course in the first instance of the transmission of doctrine, rather than of critical details. Still the one could not very well exist without the other. The tradition handed down so carefully from father to son cannot all have consisted of mere abstractions. It is not likely that the great authorities for doctrine, the Gospels and Epistles, claiming to have been written by Apostles and Apostolic men, would be received without any inquiry as to their credentials.

Accordingly, we find that not a few interesting particulars have been preserved by these two writers. Such would be the statement of Irenæus, that the Gospel of St. Matthew was written originally in Hebrew, and for the Hebrews, about the time that Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome.<sup>2</sup> Such, again, would be the apparently independent (because somewhat divergent) statements both of Irenæus and of Clement of Alexandria about the origin of the Gospel of St. Mark.<sup>3</sup> Such, further, would be the incidents related concerning the later life of the Apostle St. John: Irenæus' statement that the Apostle lived

<sup>1</sup> *Strom.* i. 1. The translation is from Clark's *Anti-Nicene Library*.

<sup>2</sup> *Adv. Hær.* iii. 1. The question as to whether St. Matthew did or did not write in Hebrew would take a volume to discuss, and would then leave us not very much nearer to a decision so far as our present subject is concerned. In the case of the principal witness Papias (ap. Euseb. *H. E.* iii. 39), the difficulty is not so much to determine the historical value of the statement (for this, proceeding as it does from the first half of the second century, cannot but be considerable) as to explain with reference to it the phenomena presented by the Gospel. The same difficulty attaches to the fragment relating to St. Mark.

<sup>3</sup> Iren. *Adv. Hær.* iii. 1; Clem. Alex. ap. Euseb. *H. E.* ii. 15, vi. 14. According to Irenæus, the Gospel was written *after*, according to Clement, *before* the death of Peter. In the two passages quoted by Eusebius, Clement himself (if he is rightly reported) gave different versions of the relation of the Gospel to the Apostle: in the one he says that it received his sanction; in the other that he "neither hindered nor encouraged it."

till the times of Trajan, and his story of the *rencontre* with Cerinthus, and Clement's story, "which is no fable," of the reclaimed bandit.<sup>1</sup>

Another especially interesting statement is that of Clement respecting the origin of the Epistle to the Hebrews. "He said," so Eusebius tells us,<sup>2</sup> "that the Epistle to the Hebrews is indeed Paul's, but that it was written for Hebrews in the Hebrew tongue; and that Luke eagerly translated it and published it to the Gentiles. Hence it is that the same complexion is found in it and in the Acts in regard to expression. But that there is no such preface as 'Paul an Apostle' with good reason. For (he says) that in writing to Hebrews who had taken a prejudice against him, and suspected him, he very discreetly did not deter them by placing his own name at the beginning." Eusebius goes on to say, that Clement added, on the authority of the "blessed presbyter" (*i.e.*, Pantænus), that St. Paul had a double reason for not introducing himself as an Apostle to the Hebrews, partly because the Lord Himself was the true Apostle of the Hebrews, and partly because he was going somewhat out of his own province, as Apostle of the Gentiles, in writing to them.

Strange to say, the latest production of modern criticism on this Epistle has been an elaborate attempt to make good the literal accuracy of almost every part of this statement of Clement's. I am not prepared to say that the attempt has been successful. I do not think it has. I am still, indeed,<sup>3</sup> inclined to suspect

<sup>1</sup> See Iren. *Adv. Hær.* ii. 22, iii. 3; Clem. Alex. *Quis dices*, c. xlii.

<sup>2</sup> *H. E.* vi. 14.

<sup>3</sup> Dr. J. H. R. Biesenthal, *Das Trostschriften des Apostels Paulus an die Hebräer.* Leipzig, 1878.

that Clement's statement represents not so much an actual tradition, descending from Apostolic times, as an ingenious hypothesis invented subsequently to account for the facts. And yet the hypothesis is certainly an ingenious one, and the suggestion that St. Luke had a hand in the composition of the Epistle will probably remain one of the three or four most plausible solutions of a difficult problem.

In these respects, then, Irenæus and Clement of Alexandria seem to have a certain claim upon our confidence. Still there are "notes to trouble the mind's eye." A large majority of modern critics have decided against the genuineness of the so-called Epistle of Barnabas; yet Clement of Alexandria undoubtedly believed it to be the work of that Apostle.<sup>1</sup> Another statement of Clement's must be regarded as very doubtful. He says that the Gospels containing the genealogies were written first. And yet if any result is coming out clearly from modern investigations, it is that the two other Synoptic Gospels, in the form in which we have them, are both based upon St. Mark's.<sup>2</sup>

These seem to be the clearest cases in which Clement of Alexandria is at fault. For although he quotes the Gospel according to the Hebrews, and also that according to the Egyptians, he lays down distinctly that

<sup>1</sup> The author is referred to by him repeatedly as "Barnabas, the Apostle." It would seem, however, that Clement attributed to the Epistle a secondary authority, much as Tertullian did to the Epistle to the Hebrews. See Lightfoot, *St. Clement of Rome*, p. 12; Gebhardt and Harnack, *Barn. Ep.* p. 46, n.

<sup>2</sup> I am glad to be able to quote, in support of my own conviction on this point, the decisive language of Dr. E. A. Abbott (*Oxford Sermons*, p. 49): "With the aid of this harmony it will be possible not merely to suggest, nor merely to make probable, but to demonstrate—as certainly as a proposition of Euclid, and in such a manner as to prevent further controversy on the point—that St. Mark's Gospel, in many passages, contains an original tradition from which St. Matthew and St. Luke borrowed." Compare the very able article on the "Gospels," by the same writer, in the recently published volume of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*.



there are only four Gospels of the kind that we should call canonical. And in like manner his quotations from the Preaching of Peter are not put forward as at all authoritative.<sup>1</sup>

There are similar weak places in the testimony of Irenæus. Two stand out preëminently. Among the traditions which Irenæus appears to trace directly to the authority of St. John is the very strange one that our Lord had passed the age of forty when He suffered, and that his public ministry, therefore, lasted for more than ten years. A far more common tradition was that which made the public ministry last only a single year. So the Valentinians, quoted by Irenæus, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen. But Irenæus himself had sufficient sagacity to point out that this tradition had not a strictly historical basis, but was derived from a literal interpretation of the "acceptable year of the Lord" spoken of by Isaiah, and claimed to be fulfilled in the discourse in the synagogue at Capernaum. Irenæus urges justly against this the number of passovers that are mentioned in St. John's Gospel. (He reckons among them the feast of John v. 1; but that is a small mistake.) He does not, however, seem to see that the definite mention of these four (or strictly three) passovers is equally, if less obviously, opposed to his own view, and that the chronological framework of the history is not really capable of being stretched to such an extent. Others have seen this, and, so far as I am aware, he has not been followed by any succeeding writer, ancient or modern. And yet for this extraordinary and impossible statement, he asserts in express terms, that he has the

<sup>1</sup> See Westcott *On the Canon*, p. 482, n. 2.

Ewald, Credner, Reuss, Bleek, De Wette, Düsterdieck. Nor is this view confined to German writers; it can also claim the support of a writer so eminently sober and judicious as Bishop Lightfoot.

It is not only that the history of these times presents a series of remarkable coincidences with the historical background of the book; not only that the "number of the beast" seems to find a peculiarly happy identification in *NEPΩN KAIΣAP* (the various reading 616 being simply the Latin form *NEPΩ KAIΣAP*); but the assumption of a considerable interval between the Apocalypse and the Gospel seems to be the one hypothesis which satisfactorily accounts for them as the work of the same author. "A lapse of more than thirty years spent in the midst of a Gentile population will explain the contrast of language and imagery between the Apocalypse and the later writings of St. John, due allowance being made for the difference of subject. The language and colouring of the Gospel and Epistles are no longer Hebrew, but, so far as a Hebrew mind was capable of the transformation, Greek, or rather Greco-Asiatic."<sup>1</sup> After writing thus, Bishop Lightfoot adds, in a note: "Owing to the difference of style, many critics have seen only the alternative of denying the Apostolic authorship either of the Apocalypse or of the Gospel and Epistles. The considerations urged in the text seem sufficient to meet the difficulties, which are greatly increased if a later date is assigned to the Apocalypse." Is it going too far to say that the difficulties on this latter hypothesis become insuperable?

<sup>1</sup> *Galatians*, p. 346. On p. 343 the relation of the writings to the life of the Apostle had been thus defined: "The Apocalypse winds up his career in the Church of the circumcision; the Gospel and the Epistles are the crowning result of a long residence in the heart of Gentile Christianity."

I do not say that the assumption of an early date for the Apocalypse will remove all difficulties and obscurities. I would only urge that there is on this point an apparent collision between internal and external evidence which ought not to be forgotten in estimating the value of early tradition.

Taking all the facts that we have been considering together, the conclusion that we should naturally come to seems to be that unreserved confidence cannot be placed in the statements even of the early ecclesiastical writers respecting the Apostolic times and the circumstances of the authorship of the books of the New Testament. This is true especially when such statements are isolated, or when they represent only a single line of transmission. When, however, they represent the convergent testimony of a number of different Churches, in widely separated localities, and including the centres of highest literary culture, the tradition so attested is probably a sound one. So, for instance, when Origen speaks of the four Gospels as alone "uncontroverted in the Church of God spread under heaven;" when we find that Irenæus assumes it as almost a law of nature that there must be four, and only four; when we find the same four clearly implied in the Muratorian Fragment, alone quoted by Tertullian, acknowledged by Theophilus of Antioch, placed upon a pedestal above all others by Clement of Alexandria; when we further find them, and them only, translated in the Latin Version towards the middle of the second century, in the Syriac Version not much later, and in the Egyptian Versions not much later again; we hold in our hands a number of threads drawn from the most diverse quarters which can

only have started from one point—the real consent of Christendom at a time when the grave had hardly closed over the last of the Apostles—that those Gospels, and no others, were the authoritative record of the Life of Christ.

There is a parallel in these matters between the more minute criticism of the text and the larger criticism, of which we have been speaking, which deals with books as a whole. The Latin tradition may be wrong; the Syriac tradition may be wrong; even the best Alexandrine Text may be open to doubt; but where all these three are clear and combined, their evidence cannot be resisted.

W. SANDAY.

### BECAUSE OF THE ANGELS.

#### I CORINTHIANS XI. 10.

My purpose in this paper is to discuss, and, if possible, elucidate, one of the most difficult verses in the New Testament, and the argument of which it is the culmination.

After treating at full, in Chapters viii.—xi. 1, a matter on which the Corinthian Church had sought advice, the Apostle introduces in Chapter xi. 2 a new subject, without giving any hint whether it was mentioned in the letter he had received from Corinth (Chap. vii. 1), or had been brought under his notice in some other way.

It is not difficult to harmonize the warm *praise* of Verse 2 with the severe reproof contained in other parts of the Epistle. The words *all things* must, like all universal expressions everywhere, be limited by