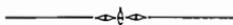


unshaken calm. Hers is that tranquil heroism which never forgot God, which perceived that there was a lofty though not fully-disclosed purpose in her Son's life and mission, and who was devoted enough to be content that He should fulfil it, and trustful enough to believe that what was not known now should be made plain hereafter. So did faith illumine her meekness that the great Divine will and purpose was foremost in her mind. It is the Lord. It is well. In triumph and in failure, in joy and in sorrow. "Behold the handmaid of the Lord: be it unto me according to Thy word."

*(To be continued.)*



## ART. II.—THE COMPOSITION OF THE GOSPELS.

### PART II.

WE have seen that what is wanted is to get firm hold of certain broad principles in studying the Gospels, and to decline to give them up. And among these principles the first is to give the evangelists full credit for meaning exactly what they say, and not to assume that they have gratuitously disregarded the sequence of events. And these are principles which we do not hesitate to observe when reading Thucydides or Cæsar. But if the subject matter of the Gospels was of one-half the importance it would seem to be it must far outweigh that of the Peloponnesian or the Gallic war, and consequently if its writers believed their own story and had faith in their own mission, they must surely have written with as scrupulous and accurate a regard to truth as Cæsar or Thucydides. It does as little credit to our own ingenuousness as it does to the intelligence of the Gospel writers to suppose that they carelessly threw together such events and discourses in their narrative as they happened to remember, without any regard to order, and only with the intention of producing the vague and general effect of a splash or a daub. This would surely be utterly unworthy of them, and infinitely more unworthy of Him to whom they bore their testimony. The fact is, that in thus reading the Gospels there is the unacknowledged and concealed reserve of a half faith. The lot has not been cast in with Christ and His disciples for evil or for good and for life and for death. There is a semi-deferential attitude maintained, but there is all the latent scepticism of a half-resolved belief. But the kind of study that is really wanted is an unhesitating

surrender of the mind and will to the testimony of the evangelists, and so much of sympathy with their position and with the incidents which they describe as will make us quick to gather up slender hints and indications and to detect and to follow up the consequences and surroundings of the situation and the circumstances implied.

For instance, if these principles are valid we shall always be able to determine whether such and such incidents are identical or only similar by noting carefully the environment in which they occur, investigating the antecedents and the consequents in each case. Thus by pursuing such a course it is easy to see that the storm of Matt. viii. 23 is different from that in St. Mark iv. and St. Luke viii. The one was occasioned by a σεισμός, or earthquake in the sea, the other by a λαίλαψ ἀνέμου. In the one case the ship was decked, and it was "covered with the waves," in the other it was an open boat, which was "filled with water." In the one Jesus first rebuked the disciples for their want of faith, and then calmed the storm; in the other, He first calmed the storm, for "they were in jeopardy," and then rebuked their want of faith. Attention to these minute details enables us to give full weight to the circumstance that subsequently in the one case *two* demoniacs are mentioned, whose name is neither asked nor given, and in the other *one*, who could not be bound by fetters or chains, but had often broken them in pieces, whose name is Legion, and who is allowed to go home to his friends and to tell them how great things the Lord had done for him, and had had compassion on him, as well as to the indications of considerable difference in time, besides the significant fact that one occurred at Gadara and the other at Gerasa. I fully admit that the consequences of this arrangement are startling at first, but is every feature of the narrative to be allowed its due weight, and is it improbable that a combination of like circumstances may have occurred more than once, but with specific differences, in the course of our Lord's ministry, or rather is it not possible that He may have chosen to repeat the same kind of significant teaching, by circumstances generally similar but slightly varied on the two occasions? If he followed the prophetic prescription of "line upon line, and precept upon precept," it would naturally be so. Here again our decision will be greatly influenced by the way in which we regard the person and mission of Christ. If He was nothing more than a phenomenon in history, whose precise and relative position we find it difficult to determine on the evidence, which, however, is on the whole too strong to be set aside, then we shall try to reduce the various features of the narrative within the limits of the ordinary and the natural; if, on the other hand, we,

like the restored demoniac in St. Mark, unhesitatingly identify Jesus with the Lord we shall devoutly gather up every fragment of special teaching and personal incident that nothing be lost in our estimate of the Divine whole.

I claim, then, for the narrative of the Gospels, what their striking verbal sameness in the recorded utterances of Christ would lead us to expect, a scrupulous and minute accuracy of statement and detail, involving as a necessary consequence strict adherence to the sequence of events. This is especially and conspicuously manifest in the several narratives of the crucifixion. Everyone must feel that there is no vague and casual writing there. And if the order of time is carefully observed each narrative fits in with and supplements the other, so as to combine into a consistent whole. It is impossible to show this now, but I have satisfied myself that it is the case. And yet, on the other hand, is it possible to read any one chapter of the eight which record that solemn event and not feel the extreme difficulty of setting down accurately the several incidents as they are given, and that, as we may presume was the case, many years after their occurrence? Is not this an instance in which we must take our choice between substantial and circumstantial accuracy? Take, for instance, the narratives of Peter's denial: no two Gospels agree with anything like average consistency. Judged by their details there is so much divergence, not to say collision, as almost to justify the question even of their substantial accuracy. And yet here there is every reason to believe that the circumstantials are minutely accurate, for not otherwise would it be possible as it is to weave the four narratives into one complete and harmonious whole. Here, then, we have a test instance, which shows the kind of accuracy we may expect to meet with in the evangelists.

Of course, nothing is easier than to pooh-pooh this way of treating them, and if this is done all I can say is, we must either shut our eyes to very remarkable features and startling coincidences, or we must acknowledge them and accept the conclusion which they seem to suggest. Personally I have no hesitation how to decide. I believe that the patent features of the Gospels are such as defy all explanation upon natural and ordinary principles. I believe that neither Cæsar or Thucydides was more accurate in statement or careful of the truth, but I believe also that neither the genius of Thucydides or Cæsar would have sufficed to produce any one of the Gospels, while I am equally sure that the hypothesis of any common oral or written fund of teaching in the possession of the first disciples, even if there were any evidence for its existence, which there is not, is totally inadequate to account for all or

for any one of them. Indeed, the evidence there is in this matter is all the other way. In the Acts of the Apostles and St. Paul's Epistles there is not the slightest indication of any such fund. The testimony of St. Paul in his account of the institution of the Lord's Supper, the nearest case in point, is that he derived it by special information from the Lord Himself, and he is equally emphatic in what he tells the Galatians about his Gospel generally. This evidence is at once negative and positive. It is a strong proof that no one of our present Gospels was in existence then, for otherwise it would surely have been appealed to, and it is also a clear assertion that as far as St. Paul was concerned he was entirely independent of any such source, even if it existed.

We are brought, then, as I conceive, very near, if we will honestly and impartially face the facts, to what is, notwithstanding all its transcendent difficulties, the only conclusion that is wholly consistent with them, namely, that the origin of the Gospels cannot be accounted for or explained by any living, natural, ordinary, or human means. They baffle every hypothesis and contradict every proposed theory. And, moreover, they are possessed of features which directly suggest another and a different origin, for it is impossible that any four writers characterized by differences so great and apparently so inconsistent should even be capable of being shown to be not merely harmonious but essential one to the other to complete the harmony. St. Paul did not hesitate to claim for himself an illumination which was neither of men nor by man. If we concede him this, why should we hesitate to credit the evangelists, if they were really the messengers of the Son of God, charged with His message of good news to the world, with that amount of special super-human assistance which He declared should not be withheld from them when He promised to send a Paraclete who would "bring all things to their remembrance whatsoever He had said unto them"?

This, and this alone, is adequate to explain the difference between the three first Gospels and the fourth. Was the preacher of the Sermon on the Mount the speaker also of the Paschal discourses? Was the sixth chapter of St. John spoken by the author of the parable of the sower? Was the seventeenth chapter idealised by St. John or actually prayed by Christ? If it was merely the conception of St. John, was he warranted in writing it? Are we warranted in accepting it? If it was merely St. John's conception, how far has he wandered from the reality, how nearly has he approached it? These are crucial and vital questions. How much depends upon them! Did Jesus really say, "God so loved the world that

He gave His only-begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life," or did St. John fancy Him saying it? Was it Christ the Son of God who actually said, "Him that cometh unto Me I will in nowise cast out"? or was it dramatically put into His mouth by His disciple, with how much of truth or authority we cannot determine? But as it is a matter of life and death, we must determine; and it seems to me that it is no more difficult to believe it actually said by Christ than it is to believe it ideally authorised to be said by John. We do not escape from the ultimate difficulty involved in believing that Christ said it by supposing that St. John was authorised to say it. Because how did he know that he was authorised, and how do we know that he was? It is only those who have not really considered the matter in all its bearings who suppose that they are confronted with a lesser difficulty in regarding the words as the ideal representation of St. John ascribed, with His authority, to Christ. Because the question is, What about this authority? How is it communicated? how is it made known? how is it guaranteed? Do we merely create it by believing in it; and, if not, how is it created? It is surely not more easy to believe that St. John had the authority for writing thus than that Christ had the authority for speaking thus, and that, speaking thus, He was accurately reported by St. John. If his memory was supernaturally assisted, must not his authority, if it was here worth anything, have been supernaturally communicated and guaranteed? Or are we, after all, hoodwinking ourselves and supposing ourselves believers while regarding words like these as the ideal conception of St. John, uttered, indeed, without any actual Divine authority, but only, by the eternal fitness of things, supposed to be in approximate conformity with the Divine character, and a pleasing and attractive representation of the conventional Saviour? "Ay, there's the rub." What constitutes belief? Is this worthy of the name? or is it a veritable fact that belief, in order to be belief, must presuppose and predicate an objective communication from the Divine mind to some chosen human agent, it matters not who, and be not merely the subjective impression begotten and fostered by ourselves that such and such sentiments are worthy of being termed Divine?

It is an initial question of the utmost moment. Is there any Word of God? Where is that Word to be found? Does it anywhere exist? How do we know it to be the Word of God? Is it contained in the Scriptures, or is it identical with them? If it is contained in the Scriptures, are there any Scriptures in which it is not contained? How do we know, how can we tell others in what Scriptures it is or is not contained? If it is identical

with the Scriptures, is it not absolutely certain and obvious that there are many parts of these Scriptures which can only accidentally, as it were, and by a figure of speech be called the word of God—*e.g.*, the genealogical lists of Chronicles and the obsolete Levitical precepts, not to mention other portions as well? But, brushing aside all these minor and subsidiary questions, let us grapple with the real one. What is the Word of God? Now, the Word of God is a living, and not a dead, thing; it liveth and abideth for ever; it is incarnate and incorporate in Christ. But the Word of God implies a spoken word, and the word spoken, if it is to endure, must be the word written; and the written word, if it is to be true, must accurately represent the spoken word, even as the spoken word must accurately express the mind of the speaker. We must have, therefore, an abiding memorial of the mind and will of God if we have any Word of God, and yet a memorial which is dependent for its life upon Him who first spoke it. But more than this: the very idea of a word of God implies that God has spoken, that He has come out of the darkness where He continually dwells, and has declared His will obviously in an exceptional and extra-natural way. He has done this, we affirm, pre-eminently by Jesus Christ, subordinately and vicariously by those whom He ordained to be witnesses to Christ before and after His coming. And of these in the very first rank stand of necessity the evangelists and apostles. And forasmuch as the whole validity of their testimony must depend upon its accuracy and its accordance with the truth—a condition which human nature alone and of itself is unable to fulfil—it is impossible that their testimony can be valid unless its validity is derived from Christ, both as regards His recorded utterances, the just representation of His character, and the essential facts of His history. Less than this it is impossible to dispense with. This at least we must possess if, indeed, we possess the Word of God.

Now, I have tried to show that when all the features of the Gospels are fairly considered, there are so many points connected with them that cannot be explained or accounted for on any known or natural principles that they of themselves suggest as their origin a literal word of God. The discourses of Christ must either be invented or original; their very preservation in a form practically identical by three independent witnesses is distinctly against their being invented, in addition to which it may fairly be said of them that never man spake like these men; and, most of all, it is improbable that fishermen and tax-gatherers should succeed in doing what, on the hypothesis, Christ did not do. Thus the history of Christ is so remarkable, and the evidence for the main features of that

history so strong, apart altogether from the concurrent testimony of the evangelists, that the supposition of the existence of a veritable Word of God is enormously corroborated by the foundation of actual historic facts that we possess. The character of Christ is a unique character. His recorded words have no parallel in literature, His personal claims were advanced with the most assured confidence. They were sustained by works no less marvellous and indisputable; so that if He really was the solitary and unique person He claimed to be, the marvel and the inconsistency would be in the fourfold narrative of His career being other than trustworthy and valid. If the testimony of the Gospels is to be accepted, substantiated as it is by a multitude of independent considerations, Christ was entitled to His claim to be the incarnate Word of God. And if He was verily the Word made flesh, then a light is thrown upon the origin of the Gospels which abundantly accounts for all their phenomena, and at once renders us independent of any further necessity to account for them. This, indeed, in one sense, is to cut the knot rather than to solve it; but if every effort to solve it otherwise has hitherto proved vain, we are shut up, as it seems to me, to the alternative of rejecting the evidence as it is, or of accepting the one inference to which it points.

The composition of the Gospels, then, really throws light upon some characteristics of Scripture generally which are unwillingly recognised, or, indeed, allowed, by many in the present day. There is everything to show that it is absolutely impossible to eliminate the supernatural element from Scripture. We cannot with any fairness reduce it to the merely subjective efforts and expressions of the human mind under certain special conditions. There is explicit evidence of its being more than this. The voice of the Lord God is heard among its leaves in the cool of the evening. It is He who in it is speaking to man, and not merely man who is feeling after Him, with more or less of fruitless endeavour, and with no certain prospect of success. And the character of Scripture from first to last is distinctly in favour of this conviction. The Bible professes to contain promises which it affirms also have been fulfilled. It preserves the record of these promises. Either, then, the promise is a delusion or it has actually been made; but no promise can be made by God unless He has over-stepped the limits and broken the silence of Nature. If this has been done, it is superfluous to seek any further for a natural explanation of Scripture, for the voice of God in Scripture is something other than the voice of God in Nature, and we can have no veritable Word of God unless it is given in a way other than by Nature; for though the voice of Nature is the voice of God,

it is something more than the voice of Nature that we have when we listen to the utterances of the Word of God. The home of the Word of God is not in Nature, but in the heart of man, for that Word is the true light, that lighteth every man that cometh into the world. Now, nothing is more obvious than the apparent want of agreement between the voice of Nature and the voice of God in Scripture. It is only the purged ear that can detect the harmony between them. The apparent collision is patent and acknowledged. If, therefore, the voice that speaks in Scripture is the voice of God, it is confessedly a voice that is not audible in Nature, it is not a natural voice. It is therefore a voice that is independent of Nature, and speaks from a sphere above and beyond Nature. Rightly then is it called the Word of God, the special utterance of the voice of God. But in order that we may hear that voice our natural deafness must be removed. The Scriptures are very explicit on this point. They speak unreservedly of the natural stubbornness of Israel's heart. The latest page of the sacréd history declares that some believed the things that were spoken and some believed not. There is no demand that the Gospels more persistently and emphatically make than the demand for faith. While signs without number are given to those who believe, the unbelief that will be satisfied only with a sign from heaven is met with the declaration, "There shall no sign be given to it." So that while the intellect of man is that to which the voice of Nature appeals, it is the faith of man, and that alone, which can hear the Word of God or the voice of God in Scripture. Faith is to the heart of man what the understanding is to his intellect and the eye is to his body. And Scripture is the voice of God addressed to the heart of man. Where there is no faith, then the voice of God speaks to that which has no organ to apprehend it, just as the revelation of Nature is *nil* to the blind and deaf. But if there is one part of Scripture which more than another shows evidences of being the Word of God, it is the four Gospels. For their origin and composition presents an insoluble enigma, which has exercised minds of the greatest acuteness and learning in the last hundred and fifty years, with practically no result. If, however, there is an incarnate Word of God, where are we so likely to find the utterance and expression of that Word as in the records of His life, teaching and death? I am confident that the more these records are patiently and earnestly studied the more they will assert their own origin, and prove to conviction that no mere efforts of human genius and no mere combination of human agencies could have sufficed to produce them. Why the briefest narrative is often the fullest—why St. Luke has preserved the record of a part of our Lord's

ministry that no one else has touched, whatever the materials he had for so preserving it—and how they can have been reproduced and recorded after an interval of some twenty or thirty years, as they must have been in the case of every evangelist—how the multiplicity of incidents can have been recorded, or for that matter invented, is more than conjecture can imagine. I regard the mere existence of the Gospels as itself a miracle; and I am sure that the more their essential features are duly considered, the more they will stagger and perplex us. To admit that they are substantially true is to be compelled to explain how it is that they are circumstantially false. While to confess that they are circumstantially true, is to shut us up to the conclusion that they must be nothing less than a written transcript of that Word of God whose incarnate life and actions they profess to record.

But if it appears that not only is there no evidence of any earlier record than the Gospel, which there surely would have been had it existed, and if the supposed existence of any such record is insufficient to account for the actual phenomena of the Gospels as we have them, it is surely not unfair to draw from these facts an analogy which throws light on the historical records of the Old Testament. For example, that the Book of Genesis is composed from documentary sources is sufficiently obvious; but to suppose that it has taken the place of any consecutive narrative or narratives of older date is not only to contradict every legitimate inference that may be drawn from the entire non-existence of any such evidence, but is also to invent an hypothesis which the analogy of the Gospels shows to be highly improbable. The actual origin of the books of Moses or of the Psalms is and must ever be as profound and obscure an enigma as the origin and composition of the Gospels. Only in this case, as the data are far less, the door for conjecture is opened all the wider. And, indeed, the area for speculation is absolutely unlimited, as the abundant mass of inconsistent and conflicting hypothesis shows it to be.

In the face of these considerations, the heart which is disposed to listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd may well believe that there is a more excellent way indicated by him who has told us that whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope. And we may confidently trust that all who cherish this hope will find that it maketh not ashamed, for the study of Scripture is its own reward. Of Scripture it is pre-eminently true that he who seeketh findeth; and if the search is conducted under the guidance of Him to whom give all the prophets witness, it is not only impossible to say what treasures we may not find,

but we may also rest assured that we shall not fail to find that it is Jesus of Nazareth of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write.

STANLEY LEATHES.

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ART. III.—UGANDA.

Nought shall make us rue,  
If England to herself do rest but true.

SHAKESPEARE.

THE subject of the evacuation of Uganda has now been for some weeks fully and clearly before the mind of the English nation. It was at first but dimly understood; but it has recently been discussed at so many various gatherings, so many letters on it have been published in the daily and weekly papers, and so many allusions have been made to it from the pulpit and the platform, that it evidently holds a different position in the public feeling than it did when the deputation from the Church Missionary Society waited on the Foreign Minister to urge it on his attention. This subject has had the advantage, in the lull after the General Election, of being the only matter of first-rate political importance. It may well be assumed to be so, because the honour and political integrity of the nation is involved in the final decision, which ever way it may go. Having said this, we do not propose to treat it as a subject connected with party politics, and if in anything we may say we should seem to any reader to transgress this rule even to a hair's breadth, we hope that he will forthwith mentally erase the phrase. The question is by far too important to be smirched by the breath of party. It does, however, clearly belong to the domain of imperial politics. Foreign nations are eagerly watching the course which England will take. Much in her future colonial policy will depend upon it. Should Uganda be retained, and should the retention entail upon this country another costly and unprofitable campaign like those in Abyssinia and the Soudan, the effect on the future of Colonial Africa would be most disastrous. On the other hand, if Uganda is abandoned, and if the result should bring even a greater strain upon England than the above, the future colonial policy would be still more seriously affected. The importance of the subject cannot well be over-rated. So much has recently been written about it by those who thoroughly understand it, that the evidence regarding the matter seems to us pretty clear.

Uganda is one of the most promising countries. It has appropriately been called by Stanley "The Pearl of Africa."