

HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION TO THE TEXTUAL CRITICISM OF THE NEW TESTAMENT. I.

A CHURCH Historian may perhaps venture to think that something of the difficulties which repel so many students from the subject of textual criticism is due to the habit of treating it too much as a matter of the criticism and classification of documents, and too little as a branch of living history. After all, the New Testament was the possession of the Christian Society, and it is the experiences of the New Testament at the hands of Christian scribes and Christian scholars that form the subject-matter of our enquiry. Something, it seems, ought to be feasible in the way of approaching the textual criticism of the New Testament from a novel point of view, and of explaining its elements—‘making the salient things really salient’—just by looking at it as a branch of Church history. In lieu, then, of the time-honoured division under the three heads of Manuscripts, Versions, Fathers—though I hope we shall have learned something about all three before we have done—we will rather note what are the aspects and events in the development of the Christian Society which bear upon the preservation, the reproduction, the translation, the corruption and restoration, of the text of the Christian sacred books. And for the purposes of our enquiry the appropriate arrangement dictates itself; the divisions into which these lectures fall must be chronological. We shall not begin by isolating the MSS from the Versions, or the Versions from the Fathers, but we shall try to follow the fortunes of the New Testament through the successive generations of the earlier Christian centuries.

GROWTH OF THE IDEA OF A CANON OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

If, then, we are to treat the textual criticism of the New Testament historically, it will be necessary to base the enquiry

on some general foundation of the conditions and circumstances under which the New Testament Canon came into being. In the present article we will go back to the beginnings of Church History, before ever there was a New Testament at all. It is sometimes said, and an important truth lies concealed under the phrase, that the Church existed before the Bible. But a Christian of the earliest days, if you had used such words to him, would have stared at you in undisguised amazement. He would have explained to you that in the Law and the Prophets and the Psalms the Christian possessed all the Scriptures he could want, for they all spoke of Christ. These were 'Holy Scriptures that could make a man wise unto salvation through the faith that is in Jesus Christ'.¹ Out of these, both before and after His Passion, the Lord had built up the faith of the disciples in Himself: 'that all the things written about Him in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms had to be fulfilled' had been the theme, He reminded them, of the words He had spoken to them while they were together²: 'beginning from Moses, through all the Prophets He interpreted to them' the Messianic meaning of all the Scriptures, and shewed how the Passion of the Christ was the condition precedent of His glory.³ On the same Scriptures He had based His appeal to his Jewish hearers: 'Ye search the Scriptures . . . but it is they that testify to Me.'⁴ It was natural, then, that the apostolic preaching, while it plants one foot on the fact of the Resurrection, of which the Apostles were the 'witnesses', rests the other on the Scriptures in which the Passion and Resurrection and Pentecostal outpouring are foretold: 'all the prophets that have spoken from Samuel onwards have announced these days.'⁵ Nor did the method of St Paul differ from that of the elder apostles. To the Jews of Pisidian Antioch he asserts that in the trial of Jesus the rulers and people of Jerusalem had fulfilled the prophecies which every sabbath day rang in their ears.⁶ At Thessalonica 'according to his practice' he visited the synagogue, and for three sabbath days discussed and explained the Scriptures, citing proofs for Messiah's Passion and Resurrection, and working up to the conclusion that in Jesus all Messianic conditions were

¹ 2 Tim. iii 15.

² Lk. xxiv 44.

³ Lk. xxiv 26, 27.

⁴ Jo. v 39.

⁵ Acts iii 24.

⁶ Acts xiii 27.

fulfilled.¹ And the historian can find no higher praise for the apostle's hearers at Beroea than that they looked up the Scriptures for themselves, to verify 'whether these things were so'.²

The Old Testament Scriptures were the one common ground of Jew and Christian, and the controversy with Judaism continued naturally to be carried on over their interpretation. The various specimens of this branch of Christian propaganda which have come down to us in literary documents³ are concerned, therefore, with the true meaning of the prophecies, and with the argument whether the events of the life of Jesus or the respective fortunes of Jews and Christians correspond with the conditions indicated in the Old Testament. And as long as the main conflict of the nascent community was with Judaism, there was no need to look further: the Old Testament Scriptures were all that the Church needed.

But the labours of St Paul and his fellow missionaries had very early carried the proclamation of the Gospel beyond the limits of Palestine, and though everywhere it was in the synagogue and to the Jews of the Dispersion that the message was first given, yet their rejection of it soon led the preachers to look to a wider horizon: 'Since ye judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, see, we turn to the Gentiles.'⁴ It can hardly have been much more than a generation after Pentecost before the vast field of labour thus opened up had begun to dwarf the Church's mission among the Jews as a very minor portion of her task. By the days of the Neronian persecution, in A.D. 64, she

¹ Acts xvii 2, 3.

² Acts xvii 11.

³ Curiously enough the Dialogue became very early, and long remained, the characteristic form in which the anti-Jewish literature of the Church clothed itself: witness the (lost) Dialogue of Jason and Papiscus; the Dialogue of Justin Martyr with Trypho; the *Dialogus Christiani cum Iudaeo de Trinitate*, by Hieronymus Graecus; the Dialogue of Gregentius of Taphar with the Jew Herbanus; the Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila, published by Mr. Conybeare; the Dialogue of the Jews Papiscus and Philo with a certain monk, published by McGiffert; or the Latin Altercations, of Simon and Theophilus edited by Bratke, and of the Church and the Synagogue in the appendix to St Augustine. I cannot help thinking that this constant literary tradition had a direct historical origin from the days when such dialogues were being customarily held, in synagogues and elsewhere, between the adherents of the new movement and its opponents: cf. Acts ix 22 (*συμβιβάζων*), xviii 4 (*διελέγετο . . . ἐπειθὲν τε*), xix 8 (*διαλεγόμενος καὶ πείθων*), xix 9 (*διαλεγόμενος ἐν τῇ σχολῇ Τυράννου*).

⁴ Acts xiii 46.

was girding herself to the conversion, not of a single nation, but of an empire and a world to the Faith. And to the heathen any primary appeal to the Scriptures of the Jewish people would have been ineffective and out of place.

And in turn as the Christian community itself increased in numbers, and attracted new adherents from fresh strata in society and from different nationalities, the complexity of the problems which faced its daily life removed it ever further and further from the limited sphere within which the Scriptures written for a single race could remain the exclusive and authoritative standard.

Thus both in its internal and in its external relations—whether in view of its missionary enterprise to the heathen world, or of its own developement as a body recruited more and more largely from non-Jewish sources—the Church could not rest content with its original attitude towards the Jewish Scriptures. The new wine must burst the old bottles.

But this great revolution was not accomplished in a moment. The Christians struggled bravely to continue under the old conditions. Even in the second half of the second century Melito of Sardis and Irenaeus of Lyons were still issuing for the Christian public works of dogmatic instruction based entirely on the Old Testament. The *Eclogae* of Melito consisted of select passages from the Jewish canonical books ‘concerning our Saviour and the whole of our faith’¹; the work of Irenaeus, newly recovered in an Armenian version, is a book of elementary *catechesis*, giving a Christian interpretation to the Old Testament prophecies.² Two considerations made it possible to prolong this exclusive or at any rate predominant employment of the Jewish Scriptures. In the first place, the argument from the fulfilment of prophecy—the correspondence of fact between the life of Christ and of the Christian Society with predictions written down long before—could be made effective, either as in Justin Martyr’s first Apology,³ for the controversy with intelligent pagans, or, as in Cyprian’s book of *Testimonies*, for the confirmation of converts in the faith. In the second place (and this is much more important), the allegorical method of exposition lay ready to hand as an obvious instrument of extending the application of the ancient Scriptures to modern needs.

¹ Eus. *H. E.* iv 26.

² *Ib.* v 26.

³ *Apol.* i 31–53, 61.

It was in Alexandria and at the hands of Philo, an elder contemporary of our Lord and the apostles, that the allegorical method attained its full development. Himself a Hellenized Jew, and keenly desirous to commend to Hellenic culture the Jewish religion and the Jewish Scriptures, Philo would have found alike the anthropomorphism and the legal and ceremonial detail of the Mosaic books an insuperable bar to the success of his propaganda among his Greek neighbours, if he had not been able, by a wealth of imagery and allegory, to represent the material sense of the letter as only the covering which concealed from any but a seeing eye a deeper spiritual meaning. By far the greater portion of his writings consists of an elaborate allegorical exegesis of sections of the books of Genesis and Exodus. His direct influence both on the Christian School of Alexandria and on some of the later Fathers, such as Ambrose, was very great; it is at least possible that the writers of the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Fourth Gospel owed something to him: but it must not be supposed that an allegorizing exegesis of the Old Testament is confined to his direct imitators alone. St Paul himself, and in his earlier epistles, finds not only 'types' (*τύποι*, *τυπικῶς*) but 'allegories' (*ἀλληγορούμενα*) in the histories of the Pentateuch¹: when he wrote of the precept, 'Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn,' 'Does God care for oxen, or is it of course on our account that He says it?'²—and again, that the Rock of which the fathers drank in the wilderness was the Christ³—he was allegorizing the Old Testament every bit as much, though he did not do it so systematically, as Philo. We have seen what binding authority a Messianic interpretation of the Old Testament had for Christians; and though the allegorical and the Messianic interpretations are by no means the same thing, the passages just quoted will shew how easily they might slide into one another. As a matter of fact we find Theodore of Mopsuestia, the great opponent of the allegorizers, restricting, and indeed reducing to a minimum, the directly Messianic application of prophecy.⁴

Thus there was every inducement, in tradition and in circum-

¹ 1 Cor. x 6, 11: Gal. iv 24.

² 1 Cor. ix 9.

³ 1 Cor. x 4.

⁴ For instance, the school of Theodore admitted only the four Psalms ii, viii, xliv[xlv], cix[cx], as properly Messianic.

stances, for the first generations of Christians to apply the Old Testament, as long and as far as they could, to contemporary and Christian purposes. The very early epistle known under the name of Barnabas represents, to a degree never equalled in patristic literature, the system of the more reckless allegorizers. Not only is the whole of Christian ethics and Christian theology to be found in the Law, but there was never really any other than the Christian meaning in it at all. It was pure misunderstanding on the part of carnally minded Jews if they thought that a literal circumcision and a literal Sabbath rest were ordained by Moses, rather than the rest from evil doing and the circumcision of the heart; while the supposed prohibition of particular animals for food was in fact the prohibition of the vices which those animals symbolized. This, however, was an extreme view: it was not necessary to deny the superficial and temporary meaning of the letter of the Scriptures in order to hold the superior validity of the underlying and remoter application: and indeed the pressure of the controversy with Gnosticism, and especially with Marcion, soon forced the Church to re-assert the truth and reality, within their own sphere, of the records of the Old Testament dispensation. Barnabas was more readily followed when he noted, for instance, that the 318 followers of Abraham—in Greek numerals ΤΙΗ'—signified in mystery the Incarnation and Passion of the Saviour, for ΙΗ are the first letters of Ἰησοῦς, and Τ is itself in form a cross. In the same spirit it was possible to discover not only the life of the Lord but the life of the Church revealed, for those who looked long enough and deep enough, in the Old Testament Scriptures. Justin Martyr and Tertullian see the twelve apostles in the bells on the High Priest's robe and the jewels on his breast¹: Clement of Rome finds Christian bishops and deacons in the pages of Isaiah.²

It is very necessary to emphasize this continuance, in Christian circles, of the supreme and unique value, as a written standard, of the Jewish Scriptures. And yet it would of course be untrue to fact to conclude that Christians had no authority to depend on of a more direct and immediate nature; for in truth they

¹ Justin *Dial.* xlii: Tert. *adv. Marcionem* iv 13.

² Clem. *ad Cor.* xlii (Is. lx 17).

possessed such authority from the first in a twofold form, in the tradition of the words of the Lord and in the persons of His living representatives. These authorities were not in any sense inferior to the Scriptures—the *Λόγια Κυριακά* were necessarily final—but they were on a different plane: there could be no definite comparison or commensuration of the new authorities and the old, as long as the one was only written while the others were only oral. St Paul reminds his Ephesian converts of the appeal he had made to them in his teaching that they should keep before them the words of the Lord Jesus¹: and the words that he proceeds to quote are found in no written Gospel. Nor in his letters to his converts does he shew any consciousness that there attached to his written message a greater authority than to his oral teaching; rather, the order in which he speaks of 'a revelation, a word, a letter', or again, 'my words and my letters,'² suggests if anything the contrary conclusion. His letters were in fact the substitute, imperfect but inevitable, for his presence. It is only our habitual use of the word 'epistle' which tends to obscure to us this truth; for 'epistle' has acquired something of a more formal character, and carries with it the reflection of the ecumenical authority implied by admission into the Canon. At the time of writing none of the epistles, except perhaps those addressed to Rome and Ephesus, had or were intended to have any validity apart from the immediate circle of their recipients.

Thus if the unique position of the Old Testament was from the very beginning unconsciously undermined in the Christian community, it was being undermined in a way which did not in the least suggest a collection of Christian Scriptures or New Testament. What the earliest evidence shews us—the evidence in fact contained in the writings which formed later on the New Testament of the Church—is, on the one hand, the appeal to the written Scriptures that were common to Jew and Christian, and, on the other hand, side by side with that another appeal to a body of tradition peculiar to the Christian Society, based on the teaching of the Lord, reinforced and completed by those who had received His commission and His promise to that end; and this tradition as orally conveyed assumed a definite and

¹ Acts xx 35.

² 2 Thess. ii 2; ii 15.

côherent, if still ductile, form, long before there was any idea on the part of the preacher of embodying it, or on the part of the disciple of looking for it, in written documents.

Two terms, or families of terms, are employed by St Paul to denote this body of Christian truth. Sometimes we find the term which remained fixed in later usage for the preliminary stage of instruction given to the postulant for Christian baptism: the 'catechumen' is one who is being taught the 'Word' ('let him that is being catechized in the Word share all his goods with his catechizer'¹) or 'the words' ('that thou mayest recognize the sure basis of the words in which thou wast catechized'²). But more frequently he speaks of the *παράδοσις* or *παραδόσεις*: to the conception of *παραδιδόναι* or *παρατίθεσθαι* on the part of the apostle answers a corresponding *παραλαμβάνειν* on the part of his disciples. 'Hold fast the traditions which I have taught you.'³ 'I congratulate you on your accurate memory: you keep the traditions in the shape in which I gave them you.'⁴ And with the same expression, but with a forcible metaphor added, 'you have heartily obeyed that doctrine into the mould of which you were cast.'⁵ These *παραδόσεις* are like the valuables which a man who had to make a journey, and had no banking account, deposited with his dearest and surest friend: 'O Timothy, keep the deposit safe.'⁶ But this deposit, unlike others, is one which never has to be handed back but always to be handed on.⁷ 'I gave over to you at the beginning what I in my turn had received'⁸: 'I received from the Lord what I have already handed on to you'⁹: 'that which thou hast heard from me, guaranteed by many witnesses, do thou commit to such trustworthy men as will be competent in turn to teach others.'¹⁰

What then can we learn from the New Testament as to the content of these 'traditions'? It does not seem going beyond the evidence if we answer that it was twofold. That it was, on the one hand, a simple catena of the actual words, and (so far as was necessary to interpret the words) of the accompanying

¹ Gal. vi 6.

² Lk. i 4.

³ 2 Thess. ii 15.

⁴ 1 Cor. xi 2.

⁵ Rom. vi 17.

⁶ 1 Tim. vi 20.

⁷ And so perhaps the thought in Jude 3, 'the faith once delivered to the saints,' represents another and rather later stage than St. Paul.

⁸ 1 Cor. xv 3.

⁹ 1 Cor. xi 23.

¹⁰ 2 Tim. ii 2.

actions, of the Lord, seems to be implied by the *παράδοσις* of the Institution of the Eucharist in 1 Corinthians xi¹: and so St Luke's prologue speaks of Gospel narratives drawn up 'on the lines in which the story was given to us by those who were the original eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word'.² That with the great facts of the Gospel history was interwoven something of a dogmatic interpretation of them on the part of the Apostle—in other words, something of the nature of a Creed—and something also of a Messianic application of the Old Testament, follows from the *παράδοσις* of the Passion and Resurrection in 1 Corinthians xv, 'that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,' &c.³: and so the Apostle bids Timothy bear in mind the twin characteristics of his teaching, 'Jesus Christ raised from the dead, Jesus Christ of the seed of David, according to my Gospel.'⁴

As early therefore as the first Christian generation we see emerge, side by side with the written authority of the Old Testament, the equal authority of the Lord's Words and the Apostolic Traditions. Let us illustrate this by seeing how in the phraseology of the second century the two Dispensations and their representatives are brought into practical, but still at first quite irregular, parallelism. At the beginning of the century Ignatius of Antioch writes to the Philadelphians that he takes refuge 'in the Gospel as the Flesh of Jesus, and in the Apostles as the council-board of the Church, and the Prophets too we love',⁵ or again in the same letter that 'there is one Door, through which enter in Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and the Prophets and the Apostles and the Church'⁶: while to the Smyrnaeans he speaks of those who were not persuaded by 'the Prophecies nor by the Law of Moses nor even now by the Gospel nor by our individual sufferings',⁷ and bids them 'take heed to the Prophets, but more particularly to the Gospel'.⁸ With the writers of

¹ 1 Cor. xi 23-25.

² Lk. i 1, 2.

³ 1 Cor. xv 3-7.

⁴ 1 Tim. ii 8.

⁵ Ign. *ad Philad.* 5.

⁶ *Ib.* 9.

⁷ *ad Smyrn.* 5.

⁸ *Ib.* 7. Note particularly the singular *εὐαγγέλιον*, as in all the earliest references: the Gospel of good news is one, even if it reaches us through several channels. The plural is a sign of later date, as in the so-called Epistle to Diognetus (xi 6), 'Then the awe of the Law is hymned, and the grace of the Prophets is

the middle of the century the parallel takes more conventional shape: in the letter known as 2 Clement we have 'the Books [i. e. the Old Testament] and the Apostles'¹: in Justin's Dialogue with Trypho 'the voice of God spoken to us by the Apostles of the Christ and proclaimed to us by the Prophets'²; and in Hegesippus 'the Law and the Prophets and the Lord'³. And just as the embodiments of the two Dispensations are thus paralleled, so too are the Dispensations themselves. As there was a Law and a Covenant for Israel of old, there is now a new Law and a new Covenant⁴: but while the Old Covenant is preserved in writing—St Paul speaks of its being read aloud,⁵ and Melito of Sardis makes definite mention of the 'Books of the Old Covenant'⁶—the New Law and New Covenant is spiritual and is not originally conceived of as a series of documents. The Cup of the Eucharist, in St Paul's 'tradition' of the Institution, is 'the New Covenant in the blood of Christ'⁷: the Apostle himself is a minister or deacon of a New Covenant.⁸ In Barnabas we find 'the New Law of our Lord Jesus Christ',⁹ in Justin 'the New Law and the New Covenant',¹⁰ in Irenaeus 'the New Covenant and life-giving Law.'¹¹ And both the lines of parallelism we have been following out are combined in Clement of Alexandria: 'the Rule of the Church is the concord and harmony of Law and Prophets with the Covenant entrusted to our keeping when the Lord was present with us.'¹²

recognized, and the faith of the *Gospels* is established, and the tradition of the Apostles is guarded, and the grace of the Church bounds for joy.'

Even when τὰ εὐαγγέλια had come into common employment of the four written Gospels, the older usage perpetuated itself in two directions: (1) each individual Gospel was not the Gospel of, or by, Matthew or Mark, but the one only Gospel according to, in the shape given to it by, Matthew or Mark, τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τὸ κατὰ Ματθαῖον; (2) the Gospel section in the Liturgy is still 'the Holy Gospel' as written in such and such a chapter of such and such an Evangelist.

¹ 2 Clem. 14.

² Justin *Dial.* 119.

³ ap. Eus. *H. E.* iv 22.

⁴ The word διαθήκη, which is now stereotyped in Latin and English as 'Testamentum' and 'Testament', in the LXX and for the most part in N. T. and early Christian writers meant 'Covenant': though of course the Greek word does properly mean not 'Covenant,' which should be συνθήκη, but 'Testament' in the sense of a will, and this sense is found—side by side with the other—both in Philo and in the Epistle to the Hebrews (Heb. ix 16, 17: Philo *de mutatione nominum* 51 [ed. Cohn & Wendland, ii p. 166 l. 4]).

⁵ 2 Cor. iii 14.

⁶ ap. Eus. *H. E.* iv 26.

⁷ 1 Cor. xi 25.

⁸ 2 Cor. iii 6.

⁹ Barnabas 2.

¹⁰ Justin *Dial.* 12.

¹¹ Iren. IV xxxiv 4.

¹² Clem. *Strom.* vi 15 § 125.

It is clear, then, that the Church, at a very early stage of her history, definitely and consciously placed the New Covenant and its representatives on at least a level with the Scriptures of the Older Covenant and their authors; but it is equally clear that this did not necessarily mean in any sense or to any degree a parallelism of two collections of books. There were, in fact, at first no Christian books to collect, and those which ultimately made up the Canon of the New Testament were only being gradually written during a period of two generations. As long as the expectation of an immediate Return of the Lord was as vivid and overmastering as we see it in the earlier epistles of St Paul, there was no object in writing for any but an immediate and temporary purpose, still less in collecting what other people had written. Even apart from that special cause, it was the task of preaching which had been laid on the Apostles, and not the task of writing: their enthusiasm, as Eusebius¹ and St Chrysostom² put it almost in the same words, was not for τὸ λογογραφεῖν. Or again, if we look at things not from the standpoint of the Apostles but from that of their immediate disciples, oral or unwritten tradition has a special attractiveness of its own. It is something which a tiny society separated from the world can guard as a sacred trust more jealously than the books which may by accident fall into the hands of the profane; it is something too which brings one indefinitely nearer to those with whom it deals than do the books which, as it were, interpose a third personality between the reader and the subject. Of this preference for the unwritten over written tradition Papias has become through Eusebius the classical interpreter³: he had made it, he tells us, his special object to collect the sayings of the elders, because he conceived he would get less benefit out of books than from the living and abiding voice.

But the number of steps in the ladder which connected the Church of the second century with the lifetime of her Master was multiplying, and each step was less firmly fixed than the one which preceded it. Even at the time when Papias began to collect the traditions which he afterwards—and apparently long afterwards—set down in writing, two only of the Lord's

¹ Eus. *H. E.* iii 24.

² Chrys. *in Act. Ap.*, praef.

³ ap. Eus. *H. E.* iii 39.

personal disciples, so far as we learn from him, survived, and it is not certain that he had come into personal contact with either of them¹: and even Aristion and the presbyter John may probably have been long dead when Papias published—some-where before the middle of the second century—the *Expositions of Dominical Oracles*, *Λογίων Κυριακῶν ἐξηγήσεις*. As the second century after Christ waned, the only obvious chain of oral tradition remaining was that which bound the Church of Gaul through Irenaeus to Polycarp, and through Polycarp to John of Ephesus: but invaluable as this chain is for the purposes of the historian, it needed not one chain only, but the combined strength of many, to ensure the security of Apostolic tradition. Where the personal equation may be so disturbing, it is only the consensus of independent lines of witness which can have full validity.

This truth might not have been borne in so early to the minds of churchmen of that age, if it had not been for the pressure of the Gnostic movement. Whether without or within the Church, in the person of Clement of Alexandria as well as of Basilides or Valentinus, the Gnostic claimed to be the depository of a further and higher development of Christianity than was open to the ordinary Christian; and the authoritative nature of the truths he represented was guaranteed by the secret channels of tradition which, as he claimed, connected him with the Apostles. What follows is taken wholly from Clement; and it may be judged how much further, in the case of the Gnostics proper, the Gnostic attitude departed in this respect from catholic churchmanship. Christ, then, revealed His mysteries only to a few²: the Apostles—James, Peter, John, and the rest—were the first Gnostics,³ and they in turn handed on the tradition orally to some few⁴; and so by a sort of apostolic succession, ‘son succeeding father, but few are the sons like to their fathers’,

¹ The words of Papias are: ‘If any one came who had been a follower of the elders, I used to sift the sayings of the elders: what Andrew or Peter had said, or Philip or Thomas or James or John or Matthew or any other of the Lord’s personal disciples; and what Aristion and the elder John were saying.’ Eusebius indeed understood Papias to mean that he had himself been a hearer of John and Aristion; but the words appear to mean just the contrary, and Eusebius seems conscious that his interpretation is not the obvious one, for he goes on with the particle γοῦν, ‘at any rate he names them often and gives traditions of theirs in his books.’

² Clem. Al. *Strom.* i 13.

³ *Ib.* vi 68.

⁴ *Ib.* vi 7, 61.

through God's Providence there survived even to Clement's time men qualified to 'deposit in congenial soil the fertile seeds of the true Apostolic tradition'.¹

It was over against these perversions of the use of oral tradition and of the appeal to the Apostles, as they were used to recommend the various forms of heretical Gnosis, that churchmen were thrown back upon their own existing belief and practice, and forced to cross-question them, to define them, to correlate them: and so came the assertion of the claim to possess in the Creed the one and only universally received summary of Apostolic doctrine, in the Episcopate the one and only authoritative succession of teachers from the Apostles, and in the Canon of the New Testament the one and only public collection of genuine Apostolic writings. But the Creed was not invented to counteract Docetism—or the Episcopate to outshine the succession of true 'gnostics'—or the New Testament to rival the apocryphal traditions of the heretics: they were there already to hand. The books which constitute the Christian Scriptures had been, with one or two insignificant exceptions, composed before the end of the first century; and during the first three quarters of the second century an instinctive and at first no doubt unconscious process had been gradually collecting, sifting, canonizing them, until the Church possessed a New Testament almost without being aware of it. As the bulb germinates beneath the ground, striking root slowly and deeply into the earth, and only then emerges above the surface and shoots up suddenly into foliage and flower, so the real and effective canonization of the Apostolic writings had been silently wrought in the inner chambers of the life of the Christian Society, before history can lay her finger upon any open proofs. But when once the evidence comes, it comes, in the last quarter of the second century, abundantly and with a rush.

There remain, however, two points of view from which we can watch indications of this gradual process, and anticipate to some extent its culmination.

1. Perhaps it had been first by means of the liturgical worship of the Church that the equation of the written documents of the two Dispensations became a familiar idea to the Christians of the second century. We know from numerous allusions in the

¹ Clem. Al. *Strom.* i 11.

New Testament that the services of the Synagogue included the reading of passages from both the Law and the Prophets. Moses was 'read aloud in the synagogues every sabbath day'¹: 'every sabbath day the words of the Prophets are read aloud'²: it was 'after the reading of the Law and the Prophets'³ in the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch that St Paul was asked to speak a word of; exhortation to the people. Christian worship was a continuation of Synagogue worship—of course with the 'Breaking of the Bread' for its *differentia*, and with the substitution of Sunday for the Sabbath—and therefore in Christian worship too the reading of the Old Testament Scriptures had its place: St Paul, in his injunctions to Timothy,⁴ sets the duty of public reading, *ἀνάγνωσις*, before even those of preaching and teaching. But in the Christian meetings, at any rate, other things might be read besides the Old Testament Scriptures. When the Apostle wrote to his converts, his letter was not sent round, like the literature of a circulating book-club, with an injunction to each Christian to pass it on, when he had done with it, to some one else: it was addressed to the Church, and it was doubtless read aloud at the Church's Sunday service. And in proportion as the letter was highly prized, would follow the desire both to hear the reading of it repeated and also to send copies of it to other neighbouring communities that they too might profit by it. So St Paul himself bids the Colossians arrange with the Laodiceans an exchange for this purpose of his letter to Colossae and his letter to Laodicea⁵: and so Dionysius of Corinth, about 170 A.D., tells Soter of Rome that the letter sent by Clement from Rome to Corinth two generations earlier continued to be read in his Church every Sunday.⁶ The public reading of the written 'traditions' of the Lord's Words—it must be remembered that some Christians at least would be unable to read them for themselves—was doubtless even more universal: in the Roman Church, at any rate, by the time of Justin Martyr, we learn that at the commencement of the weekly worship as much was read as

¹ Acts xv 21, cf. 2 Cor. iii 15. ² Acts xiii 27, cf. Lk. iv 16, 17. ³ Acts xiii 15.

⁴ 1 Tim. iv 13.

⁵ Col. iv 16.

⁶ ap. Eus. *H. E.* iv 23. Compare Tertullian *praescr.* 36 'percurre ecclesias apostolicas . . . apud quas ipsae authenticæ litteræ eorum recitantur, sonantes vocem et repræsentantes faciem uniuscuiusque': and Jerome *vir. illustr.* 17 'Polycarpus . . . scripsit ad Philippenses valde utilem epistolam quæ usque hodie in Asiae conventu legitur'.

time permitted of 'the memoirs of the Apostles and the writings of the Prophets'.¹

2. Not less instructive is it for our purpose to note the formulæ with which the Apostolic writings are referred to in the Christian literature of the post-apostolic age. Whereas at first the Lord's Words are introduced with the past tense, as matter of history—'the Lord commanded' 'the Lord said' 'the Lord said in His teaching'—,² with the progress of time the present tense replaces the past, and instead of εἶπεν or ἐκέλευσεν we find λέγει ἢ φησί,³ for the documents containing the Lord's Words have themselves become an authority, and Scripture is always present with us. Quite similarly the verb γέγραπται and the noun γραφή γραφαί are at the outset strictly reserved for the Old Testament. In the New Testament writings the solitary exception to this rule is the passage in 2 Peter,⁴ where the epistles of 'our beloved brother Paul' are compared to 'the rest of the Scriptures', τὰς λοιπὰς γραφάς; and though even this is not quite the same thing as calling the epistles themselves 'Scriptures', still the phrase is so unusual as to suggest the later origin of the document which contains it. In the sub-apostolic writers there are indeed several instances in which apocryphal writings are cited as Scripture⁵—in other words, a looser Alexandrine Canon was used in preference to the more rigid Palestinian—but of instances where the Apostolic writings are thus treated we have no more than one doubtful case in Polycarp, one rather more certain case in Barnabas, and one quite certain case in 2 Clement.⁶ When we come to Justin Martyr (150–160 A.D.) a process of transition is clearly at work: γέγραπται is used freely for Gospel citations—nine times, for instance, in §§ 100–107 of the *Dialogue with Trypho*—but γραφή and γραφαί are still confined to the Old Testament. The last step was, however, soon to be taken, and what Papias called the λόγια κυριακά become in Dionysius of Corinth the κυριακαὶ γραφαί.⁷

Our enquiry up to this point has shewn us the growth and maturity during the second century—or, to be more accurate,

¹ Justin *Apol.* i 67.

² *Didache*: Clem. Rom.: Polyc. ii 3, vii 2.

³ 2 Clem. iii 2, iv 2, vi 1, viii 5, xiii 4.

⁴ 2 Pet. iii 15, 16.

⁵ Clem. Rom. xvii 3?, xxiii 3, xxvi 2, xxxiv 8, xlv 2: Barnabas iv 1, vi 13, vii 4, 11?, xii 1, xvi 1: *Hermas Vis.* II iii 4.

⁶ Polyc. xii 1: Barn. iv 14: 2 Clem. ii 4.

⁷ ap. Eus. *H. E.* iv 23.

during the first three quarters of it—of the conception of a 'Canon' of the New Testament, of the separation of a group of Apostolic writings from the rest of Christian literature and their elevation to an equal authority with the Scriptures of the Old Testament. Of what books or classes of books this New Testament consisted is a further question, and one which must be left to another article.

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