

VIII.

THE GOSPEL CANON.

THE actual process by which our Four Gospels arrived at their present rank of pre-eminence is quite obscure. From about 170 AD onwards the Gospel Canon enjoys practically unchallenged supremacy, as we see from Tatian's Harmony, from the document known as the Muratorian Canon, and from S. Irenæus. Somewhat earlier than Tatian must be placed an interpolated edition of the Four Gospels, which seems to have been set forth in Rome, and from which the more important 'Western Interpolations' in Greek and Latin Biblical MSS are ultimately derived. This brings us back to about 150; but the literary history of our Gospels during the first half of the second century is unknown. Justin Martyr doubtless used all the Four in Rome about the middle of the century, and Marcion certainly used Luke about 130-140. Earlier still are the allusions which indicate a use of Matthew by S. Ignatius. But there is nothing

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to shew that Marcion was acquainted with any other of the Canonical Gospels than Luke, and very little to shew that S. Ignatius used any other Canonical Gospel than Matthew ; while the verbal inaccuracy of Justin's quotations suggests that even in his day the 'Memoirs of the Apostles' had hardly yet taken their place beside the Law and the Prophets as part of the written Word of God. At the same time, Trypho, Justin's Jewish opponent, is quite aware that the way to become acquainted with Christian doctrine is to read what is written ἐν τῷ λεγομένῳ εὐαγγελίῳ (*Tryph.* § 10). Thus 'The Gospel' has already become the name of a Book.

We have really to distinguish three stages in the process by which the Gospel Canon was formed. Of the 'many who took in hand' to write of Jesus Christ, the Four Gospels alone remained in favour. The rest either failed altogether to attract, or were discovered to teach heresy. There is first the stage in which 'the Gospel' changed its meaning from the announcement of the Kingdom of God to a narrative, or a set of narratives, about Jesus Christ. Then there is the stage in which our Four Gospels won their way to recognition. Lastly, there is the stage in which these Four attained full and exclusive canonicity. The final stage was thus one of exclusion.

THE CHOICE OF THE CHURCH

Certain 'Gospels' had been adopted locally, such as the 'Gospel of Peter' at Rhossus, near Antioch, but one by one these unauthorised works were suppressed. On the other hand, the attempt made by Tatian to combine the unrejected Four into a single account failed everywhere, except in the still unconsolidated Syriac-speaking community of Edessa. Whether the Church made the ideally best choice from the point of view of the modern historical investigator is a matter that cannot be scientifically demonstrated, for the simple reason that the rivals of the canonical Four have not survived in full. But the abiding interest which each and all of the Four have excited during eighteen centuries is enough to shew that the Church chose well. And it should not be forgotten that those of the non-canonical Gospels, which we know enough of to pass judgement upon, shew a sensible inferiority. Marcion's Gospel is in every way inferior to Luke, and the Gospel of Peter is inferior to either of the Synoptic accounts of the Passion. It is, in fact, because the canonical Gospels paint such an eternally fascinating Portrait, that we welcome every scrap that may claim to give another view, however inadequate.

In one respect I venture to think the modern historical investigator is more fortunate than from

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general considerations he might have expected. We are indeed fortunate that the Gospel according to Mark should have been included in the official Canon. Many of the special ideas and tendencies of the First and the Third Evangelists are in close touch with the ideas and tendencies of second-century literature. I have tried to shew in the preceding Lecture that the theology of the Fourth Gospel met the wants of the Church, that it pointed out the way along which the conflicting currents of Christian thought and feeling might run together. In any case, the Fourth Gospel is unique. But it is difficult to understand what attraction was offered to Christians of the second century by the Gospel of Mark, which the Gospels according to Matthew and Luke did not offer, either singly or taken together, in a more eminent degree. Probably its traditional connexion with S. Peter may have had a determining share in recommending it, and the appeal of Irenæus to historical tradition against Gnostic theorizing may help us to understand how such an old-fashioned book as the Gospel of Mark, S. Peter's 'interpreter,' should have survived. It is, we find, very little quoted before it became part of the official four-fold Canon, that is, before the time of Irenæus, and it is certain that it ran a very serious risk of

THE CANONICITY OF S. MARK'S GOSPEL

being forgotten altogether. As every one knows, the genuine text ends at Mk xvi 8, in the middle of a sentence describing the terrified departure of the women from the empty tomb. There is no reason to doubt that the Gospel went on to describe some of the appearances of Jesus to the disciples after the Resurrection. The narrative is incomplete as it stands, and it is much more likely that the mutilation was accidental than intentional. Had it been intentional, the break would never have been made where it is, at ἐφοβοῦντο γὰρ . . . : even the sentence is left incomplete. But all our MSS ultimately go back to this mutilated text; it is therefore evident that at one time no more than a single mutilated copy was in existence, or at least available. The work had dropped out of circulation, it had lost its public, and we can only guess at the reasons which led to its resuscitation.

The fact, however, remains. By its inclusion in the Canon we are to-day in possession of a document in warp and woof far more primitive than the Churches which adopted it. The fine instinct which reserved a place for the Gospel of Mark among the books of the New Testament shews the Catholic Church to have been wiser than her own writers, wiser than the heretics, wiser, finally, than most Biblical critics from S.

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Augustine to Ferdinand Christian Baur. It is only in the last half-century that scholars have come to recognise the pre-eminent historical value of that Gospel which once survived only in a single tattered copy.

It may be convenient here to give a short

Chronological Summary.

From what has been said in the foregoing Lectures, it will be evident that no very definite date can be assigned to any of the Gospels, except S. Luke's. But we may distinguish four periods of 40 years each, reckoning from the Crucifixion.

I. 30-70 AD. Oral Period. No written 'Gospel' appears during this period, nor any formal shaping of the Gospel history as a whole. S. Paul's accounts of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor xi 23 ff) and of the Resurrection (1 Cor xv 3 ff) do not appear to have any *literary* connexion with what we read in our Gospels. To the end of this first Period we may assign the fly-sheet underlying Mk xiii (in Greek), and S. Matthew's Collection of Messianic Prophecies (in Hebrew).

II. 70-110 AD. Period of the writing of the Gospels.

Gospel of Mark, 70-80 AD.

„ „ Luke (and Acts), 100 AD.

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Gospel of Matthew, 90–100 AD., in any case
before 110 AD.

„ „ John, 100–110 AD.

III. 110–150 AD. Period of the catholic reception of the Gospels.

IV. 150–190 AD. Period of the canonization of the Gospels. By the end of this period the Idea of the Fourfold Gospel (*Iren.* 192) is fully established.

The Influence of the Gospels on the Church.

The fact that the Church came to accept the Four Gospels is a proof that each of these works satisfied in a general way the Church's requirements. Had it been otherwise, the Gospel in question would never have attained to canonicity. At the same time, it would be absurd to regard the Church's requirements as being in any way occupied with details; these the Church has learnt from what the Evangelists have supplied. The Church's picture of Jesus Christ is not unfairly summarised in the so-called Apostles' and Nicene Creeds; it is the written Gospels that have preserved for us the winning personality of the Son of Man.

The history of Christology is not that of a simple advance from an original unitarian psilan-

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thropy to the ultimate recognition of the Deity of Christ. Naturally it took many generations of Christian thought to evolve a form of words which should satisfactorily define the exceptional Nature of the Founder of the new Religion in terms of current philosophical conceptions. But from the first there existed the sentiment of devotion, the temper of mind which was assured that no title was too high to give, no homage too high to pay, to the Son of God who had been sent from Heaven to overcome death and open the gates of everlasting life to those who believed on Him. For the first thirty years or so practically all Christians were converts: those who doubted how far the Message was true did not become Christians at all. And unless the extant literature gives a totally false impression of the general state of mind among Christians, the interest of the nascent Church was not in the least directed towards the past. In the words of the earliest written Christian document that we possess, the converts had "turned unto God from idols to serve a living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivereth us from the wrath to come."¹ Those that had entered the Church by baptism were to set their minds on the things that are above, where

¹ 1 Thess i 9, 10.

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Christ is, seated on the right hand of God. It was true that the Christians in consequence of their belief submitted to new rules of conduct, and that these rules consisted in great part of reminiscences of the words of the Lord Jesus who had taught 'sweet reasonableness' and longsuffering (*ἐπιείκειαν καὶ μακροθυμίαν*), rules such as: "pity, that ye may be pitied; forgive, that ye may be forgiven."¹ But the Gospel was not a formal Code, still less a Biography. No pictures of early Christianity have been conceived more fundamentally false, both to the spirit and the letter of historical fact, than those which represent S. Matthew or S. Peter as delivering catechetical lectures on the 'Life of Christ.'

The actual course of events was very different from what the first generation of believers had anticipated. The End, so confidently awaited, was not yet. One by one the Companions of the Ministry went to their graves, and when the cataclysm of the Jewish War broke up for ever the one community in which there could have been common first-hand knowledge of how our Lord had lived and moved among men, the great majority of Christians were Greek-speaking inhabitants of the Levantine cities, a population far removed in spirit and in culture from the pro-

¹ Clem. Rom. *ad Cor.* xiii.

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vincial Judaism of Galilee. What wonder that Christianity began to mix with alien elements and to appear in forms which alarmed the more conservative believers ?

A few words may be said here on the influence of S. Paul. To us, and to the whole Church for the last seventeen centuries, S. Paul is pre-eminently the writer of the Epistles. We, like the Church in general, recognise the wisdom that was given him, while at the same time we find in these Epistles 'some things hard to be understood, which the ignorant and unstable wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, unto their own destruction.' The Epistles come to us as part of the sacred Canon ; consequently they are studied, and careful study shews us that, strange and unfamiliar as is the whole world of thought in which they move, they are the product of a great mind occupied with extraordinary circumstances. Of course, to us the Epistles, or parts of them, are verbally familiar ; but I feel sure that, if we had not so often heard them read and commented on, we should find great parts of them most incomprehensible on a casual hearing. To the careful student, as I said, they are documents of very high interest. The Epistle to the Galatians and the Second Epistle to the Corinthians give in the

THE LETTERS OF S. PAUL

most lively and moving way the indignant self-defence of an intensely earnest and sincere religious innovator, withstanding absolutely alone in the midst of a heathen world the attacks of his co-religionists, themselves a mere sect of the isolated Jews. The adversaries of Paul are convinced that his doctrines are not only mistaken but absolutely anarchical, destructive of the ancient ordinances of religion. Yet in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, and elsewhere also where occasion offers, we see the destructive anarchist labouring, and labouring with fervour and practical good sense, to build up the infant communities which he had founded on the basis of a new morality, equally alive to the real claims of Freedom and of Order.

All this is profoundly interesting, profoundly instructive. But a good deal of what is best in the Pauline Epistles does not lie on the surface. They are in their outward form and in their whole manner of composition occasional pieces, the product of an age of transition. The Churches to which S. Paul wrote, and over whose development he watched with such anxious ardour, were neither in their formal theology nor their outward organisation so many early examples of the Catholic communities of later times. Nor were they simple colonies of converted Jews. Their

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interest to us historical students lies just in this, that they were something between—the first result of principles, so to speak, in the process of fashioning for themselves an appropriate embodiment. But for that very reason they presented little practical interest to the next generation.

As I said, S. Paul is to us pre-eminently the writer of the Epistles, the founder of 'Paulinism.' But this cannot be said of the portrait of Paul which we find in the Acts. If our only knowledge of the Apostle of the Gentiles were drawn from the Acts, we should not know that he ever wrote any Epistles, and we certainly should have had no idea of his style or manner of writing. This, as you all know, has often been used as an argument to prove the Acts to be unhistorical, on the assumption that the Letters, or some of them, are genuine. But I venture to think the true conclusion is that for a couple of generations after his death the memory of S. Paul the theologian faded away with the special set of circumstances that called his theology to the point of expression, and that what was remembered was S. Paul the missionary. What we find in the Acts is re-echoed by Clement of Rome, writing at the end of the first century AD, at the very time when I think the Acts was being published. It is the unwearied patience and steadfastness of S. Paul's

S. PAUL'S CONVERTS

missionary journeys that calls forth the mention of his name.¹

The practical result effected by S. Paul's labours upon the development of Christianity lay, in a word, not in the adoption of Paulinism, but in the presence of his converts. The Church did not embrace S. Paul's theories as a whole. What one man could do he did, but it is not given to ordinary folk to stand against the world, and the Churches which he founded slipped back into more or less ordinary Jewish and Heathen notions about virtue and morals. S. Paul's strange and penetrating criticism of the true nature of Law and Grace, and his doctrine of that trust in God which can alone set a man in the right, is alien from the thought of second-century Church theology. We hear little about 'Justification by Faith' from the Fathers of the second century. But what remained was the steady pressure of the rank and file of the Church, now almost wholly Gentile and Levantine by race and by tradition.

Through S. Paul Christianity became distinct in fact as well as in theory from Judaism, and with the change of race came a change in the

¹ Clem. *ad Cor.* v. In chap. xlvii S. Clement refers very appositely to 1 Cor i 12, and it is evident that he had read the Epistle to the Romans. But there is no sign in S. Clement of a collection of Pauline Letters.

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character of the popular belief. Christianity lost its racial colouring and atmosphere, and became more and more Greek, or rather, Greco-Roman. The Christians accepted, indeed, the Hebrew Scriptures in their Greek dress, but the Old Testament was no longer to them a national literature. It was a strange foreign book, full of riddles and mysteries. And, what is still more important for us now, the Messiah and the Kingdom of God ceased to be natural ideas. To say that Jesus was the Christ, the Anointed of God, ceased to have any real meaning except that of a profession of devotion. To the children of S. Paul's converts at Corinth and Ephesus the scenes of the life of our Lord, whether in Galilee or in Jerusalem, were events in a foreign world.

A picture of normal Church life about the end of the first century is to be found in the *Didache*. The 'Teaching of the Lord by the Twelve Apostles to the Gentiles,' as the document calls itself, was first printed in 1883. But the greater part had been, in one form or another, already known to scholars. In fact, a great part of the interest of the *Didache* lies in this, that it was so often altered and adapted to suit the changing requirements of the Church in different ages. It is extant in Latin as well as Greek, and a peculiar recension of parts of it is found in

THE DIDACHE

Syriac and Ethiopic. Even in the earliest extant form it may be a second or third edition, revised to date and perhaps modified in some details to suit a particular community. But the general plan appears to be unaltered.

The 'Teaching' is a short manual designed to instruct the disciple how to lead the Christian Life. The Christian Life is grouped under three heads: Christian morality, Christian worship and organisation, and the Christian hope. It begins with morality, with instruction taken from the *Two Ways*, a Jewish ethical handbook adapted for Christian usage. The Christian is here taught to love God and his neighbour, to live uprightly and to abstain from vices and from the service of idols. Christian worship and ritual includes Baptism, Fasting, Prayer—the Lord's Prayer thrice daily,—and the Eucharist. After giving Eucharistic Blessings to be said over the Cup and the Bread and after the Meal,¹ the Teaching goes on to prescribe rules for the reception and treatment of the wandering 'prophets' and for the maintenance of the regular ministry. Finally, we have a chapter on the Second Coming of the Lord, which is still the consummation instantly to be expected. There are no directions given for the burial of the dead.

¹ *Did.* § 10, μετὰ τὸ ἐμπλησθῆναι.

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Thus the *Didache* runs through the whole gamut of Christian economy: conduct, worship, organisation, all is provided for. Short as it is, the book is meant to be sufficient and comprehensive, at least in essentials; we can ascertain from it the main ideas of the compiler and of the community for which he wrote. We see that all prayer was offered to God through Christ;¹ life and immortality had been given to man through Christ;² the true prophet was to be received as Christ;³ the Christian's conduct was to be what Christ had commanded.⁴ But biographical interest in Christ is completely absent, even more completely absent than it is from the letters of S. Paul; for aught that appears in the *Didache*, Jesus of Nazareth might never have been crucified.

Naturally we must remember that the *Didache* is a formal handbook of Christian praxis, and as such represents the low-water mark of Christian feeling and speculation. But it shews us better than any other document the aspect of Christ's work which was most prominent to the average gentile Christian in the first century of the Church's existence. To such a one Christ was the *παῖς θεοῦ*, the messenger from God who had come down to earth with tidings of immortality

¹ *Did.* §§ 9, 10.

² §§ 9, 10.

³ § 11.

⁴ §§ 8, 15.

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and now was waiting till the appointed Day when He should appear in glory on the clouds of heaven. It is not surprising that to many a believer the melancholy story of Jesus of Nazareth was a stumblingblock, and that His sufferings were incredible.

All the more was this the case among those who had attempted to find an appropriate place for Jesus Christ in the various philosophical theories of the Universe, which thoughtful men had devised and were devising. In proportion as the idea of Monotheism had become widely spread, the gulf between God and man grew. God and man, the ultimate Divine Essence and the common matter of which we and the earth are composed, seemed increasingly incongruous. The people of Lycaonia might have been willing to believe that the Gods themselves should come down in the likeness of men, but they were old-fashioned folk in a country town. And even the Lycaonians in the story did not think that the Gods stood before them with human feelings and natures.¹

Christian sentiment and learned speculation were thus alike ready to welcome what we call the Docetic heresy. Docetism is not the name

¹ Acts xiv 11, 15. There is an intentional contrast between *ὁμοιωθέντες ἀνθρώποις* and *ὁμοιοπαθεῖς ἑσμέν ὑμῖν*.

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of a sect. It is a theory of the person of Christ which takes many forms and which has entered into the theology of many schools of thought. The essential thing is that Jesus Christ was man only in appearance. Some, like the writer of the *Acts of John*, denied that our Lord had any material existence; He could be seen and heard, but the form and the voice differed on different occasions. Others were content to deny that He felt the pains of crucifixion; others, like Marcion, denied His birth. But all were alike in this, that they regarded Jesus as having been in no sense a real human being. It is a theory incredible, almost inconceivable, to us; but we have learnt to know Jesus Christ through the written Gospels.

The part played by Docetic theories of our Lord's nature and person had a determining influence upon the official preservation of the Gospel History. In the foregoing Lectures I have attempted to sketch what I conceive to be the literary origins of the several Gospels. The point that I wish here to re-emphasise is the private, individual, and unofficial character of the earlier documents. That S. Luke's Gospel was a private venture is sufficiently indicated by the Preface. That S. Mark's Gospel was so is sufficiently indicated by the narrow escape it

DOCETISM

ran of being lost altogether. The Gospel we call S. Matthew's has a more formal, authoritative tone, and it bears marks of a Palestinian origin; in other words, it comes from the one region where we have a right to expect independent reminiscences of the Master to have survived. It would have been no surprise if the Gospel according to Matthew had been different altogether from the others. Yet, as a matter of fact, it is in structure and in much of its wording and material based on Mark. Thus we learn that even in Palestine no regular effort had been made to hand down a summary of the outward events of our Lord's Ministry.¹

To some pious Christians biographical accounts of the life and words of the Lord may very likely have seemed unnecessary and unspiritual. But the rise of Docetic theories gave these "memoirs of the Apostles" a new and theological value. This new condition of things is mirrored in the Ignatian Epistles. S. Ignatius was Bishop of Antioch, and his Epistles were written on his way to martyrdom in Rome at some date between 110 and 117 AD. To him the Gospel history was immensely important, because it

¹ The lost 'Gospel according to the Hebrews' seems to have been very similar in general plan to our Matthew, so that it also must have had its ultimate basis in our Second Gospel.

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furnished the proof of the real humanity of Christ. If Christ were not really human, His sufferings were not real, really akin to human suffering; and if His sufferings were not real, why should Ignatius be willing to endure martyrdom (*Trall.* § 10)? An acquaintance with the human side of Jesus Christ was therefore necessary to Christianity. But to make the acquaintance of this human side a biography was indispensable.

S. Ignatius was "fully persuaded, as touching our Lord, that He is truly of the race of David according to the flesh, but Son of God by the Divine will and power, truly born of a virgin and baptized by John that 'all righteousness might be fulfilled' by Him, truly nailed up in the flesh for our sakes under Pontius Pilate and Herod the tetrarch"; and, further, that "after His resurrection He both ate with them and drank with them [the Apostles] as one in the flesh, though spiritually He was united with the Father" (*Smyrn.* §§ 1, 3). Even this short summary of Christological doctrine goes, as you will perceive, beyond any known *Credo* in its literary dependence on a biographical Gospel; for that Jesus was baptized by John, that all righteousness might be fulfilled by Him, is thoroughly characteristic of 'Matthew,' and, so far as we know, it is found in 'Matthew' alone

THE CHRISTOLOGY OF S. IGNATIUS

of all the Gospels that ever were written.¹ With this agrees the circumstance that S. Ignatius uses several phrases, such as *φυτεία πατρός*, 'the Father's planting,' which indicate the literary use of the Gospel according to Matthew. It seems likely also that he had read the Fourth Gospel, and it is almost certain that he once quotes from an 'apocryphal' work called the Preaching of Peter (*Κήρυγμα Πέτρου*), a document which appears to have been a very early rival of the canonical Acts of the Apostles.

But we are not now concerned with the reconstruction of S. Ignatius's library: the important thing is that the most characteristic representative of the Catholic theology of the beginning of the second century tends to base his Doctrine of Christ on a Gospel which is biographical in form. This point of view was not at first accepted by all. The Law and the Prophets, as interpreted in the new light, seemed sufficient to some. "If I find it not in the charter (*τὰ ἀρχεῖα*, the 'archives,' i.e. the Old Testament), I believe it not in the Gospel," said the opponents of Ignatius, and when he said, "It is written," they answered, "That is the question" (*Smyrn.* § 8). But Ignatius had no doubt, and the Church was with him, that the Gospel record was necessary, as

¹ Matt iii 15.

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the guarantee of the real humanity of Jesus Christ.

One point deserves special notice in passing. S. Ignatius is the earliest express witness to the belief that Jesus was born of a virgin. He is most emphatic in asserting this; but the importance of the doctrine for him is not that the miracle assures us that the man Jesus was Divine, but that the Christian's God was really born of woman (*Eph.* § 18).

The Church of Antioch, if we may judge from the Ignatian writings, took its knowledge of the Gospel history from our 'Matthew.' The Church in Pontus a little later, if we may judge from the heretic Marcion, who left it in AD 138, used our 'Luke.' When and where our Four Gospels were gathered together into a single *Corpus Evangelicum*, we do not know. Traces of this Corpus are first found in Rome about the middle of the second century, and indeed the conservative character of the early Roman Church makes it a little easier to understand how so ancient a document as the Gospel of Mark came to be included in the Canon. The process seems to have been very nearly complete in the time of Justin Martyr (*Apol.* i 67; *Tryph.* 106), who wrote in the decade following 150, and it is certain that Justin's disciple Tatian

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constructed his Gospel Harmony out of the canonical Four.

Thus our Gospels fell into their place as the charter of the Christian Religion, a fixed standard open to the inspection of friend and foe. We need hardly follow their literary history further at this point, for in essentials they have remained unchanged from the time of Justin to this day, both in text (apart from minor corruptions and alterations) and in their nominal estimation by the Church. Before the end of the second century the Gospel Canon was absolutely established. The rivals of the Four, which here and there were still read, were being rooted out by authority, and S. Irenæus was able to say that there could not be more or less than four Gospels, that they corresponded to the four Regions of the world and the four Winds, and, above all, to the four mystic Beasts of the Apocalypse.¹ Secure in his acceptance of all four Gospels on the authority of Church tradition, Irenæus had an easy task to shew that the various speculative hypotheses as to the nature of Jesus Christ, which had been put forward by the eager theorists of the second

¹ *Iren.* iii 11 : contrast *Iren.* ii 24, where S. Irenæus shews how foolish it is to argue from numbers, by collecting the instances of Fives in the Bible and Nature.

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century, were inconsistent with the statements of the Gospels themselves. But there is a great gap between Irenæus and Justin. We cannot but feel it to be only too true that Irenæus accepts the Gospels on the authority of a previous age: it is, I think, almost impossible to imagine him accepting them as authorities for his theology if they had been novelties. In fact, though not in name, they belonged to an age already antiquated. The Church declared itself to be founded on the Four immoveable Columns of the Gospel, and in token of homage its members stood, as they stand to this day, when the Gospel was read out to them in their assemblies. But though the Church was still nearer to the Gospel than the heretics, it was now parted by the ever-increasing differences of conditions and the ever-lengthening stretch of years between its present state and Palestine during our Lord's Ministry. In the next generation to S. Irenæus, the Catholics themselves began to allegorize the Gospels, just as the Alexandrian Jews had taken refuge in allegorizing the Law.

To us, who are trying to understand what the Gospels really mean, more interest attaches to an earlier criticism on the Gospel, perhaps the earliest piece of criticism from outside that has come down to us. It hits the mark from more than one

TRYPHO'S CRITICISM

point of view. "I well know," says Trypho, the Jewish opponent of Justin Martyr, "that your Christian precepts out of what is called the *Gospel* are great and admirable, so admirable, indeed, that I doubt if any one can keep them—and I speak from personal knowledge of these writings. Moreover, we non-Christians specially wonder why you expect to get any favour from God, when you set your hope on a man who was crucified" (*Tryph.* § 10).

This simple and obvious piece of criticism touches the essential point. The real humanity of Jesus who was crucified in Judæa, and the soaring ethical principles that He taught,—these are the obvious characteristics of the Gospels, and it is the Gospels which secure these things as an inalienable possession of the Christian Church. Moreover, Trypho's criticism is unanswerable, if the Gospels be regarded as mere law-books, as a code of morals. The Pentateuch *is* a law-book; it is possible to obey it to the letter, and those who compiled it intended it to be obeyed to the letter. But he who exchanges the Pentateuch for the Gospel does not exchange one code for another, as actually happens in the case of a Jew turning Muslim. He who reads the Gospel finds, on the one hand, that eternal life is promised for the observance of the Decalogue (Mk x 17, 19);

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on the other, that the renunciation of every earthly tie is demanded (Lk xiv 26, 27), and that except the righteousness of the Christian exceed the legal requirements he cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven (Matt v 20). This discrepancy is more than an affair of divergent 'sources' or of rival schools of Christian ethics : it is essentially characteristic. The Gospel as a whole is not intended to introduce us to a code by which all men alike should regulate their conduct ; it is intended to introduce us to Jesus Christ, whose commands differ for each age and for each individual, because He dealt with principles and not with rules. The love of God and the love of our neighbour was what Jesus Christ taught ; but to turn these principles into a fixed Code of rules might easily produce a course of life harmful to our neighbour and unpleasing to God. We do not get rid of the real difficulties of the Gospel, though we make jettison of all the miracles, if we leave the Sermon on the Mount.

The Gospel Ethics need criticism more, not less, than the Gospel miracles ; and for this reason, that it is more for the ethics than the miracles that the Gospels are permanently valuable. We need to put the Gospel morality into its due relation to time and place. If Christ said, 'Give to every one that asketh thee,' and, 'Unto him

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that smiteth thee on the one cheek, offer also the other,' we need to understand the social conditions of Christ's day, and those of our own also, before we can turn these maxims into a rational command for fellow-believers. This is not explaining away Christian morality. Many as have been the abuses of casuistry, it is a necessary study for the practical moralist. In one sense it is particularly suited to Christianity, a religion founded on the attitude of the inner man towards God, not upon the outward observance of particular acts or customs. If principles remain constant, the significance of particular acts must inevitably suffer change. It was not the practice of casuistry, but the simple fact that the Jesuits of the 17th century had systematically practised it to condone what they and their penitents knew to be wrong, that gibbeted these men for ever in the pages of the *Provincial Letters*. It is impossible to doubt that the particular type of casuistry condemned by Pascal was designed to make things easy for the evil-doer at the expense of the spirit of the Gospel, not to find an appropriate course for the spirit of the Gospel to express itself in altered conditions; and it was because this was really so, that the mordant satire gained its triumphant success. For after making all necessary deductions the common sense both of Christendom and

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of the world outside knows very well what is meant by 'the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount' and similar phrases. And it has ever been a mark of true Christianity to seek to apply the words of the Gospel to the changing needs of the time, a task which is none the less incumbent upon the Church for being always difficult.

But the Gospel morality is not the Gospel, any more than the *Didache* is the Gospel. Christianity stands or falls, lives or dies, with the personality of Jesus Christ; and the Gospel is our introduction to Jesus Christ. From the Gospel according to Mark we may learn who Jesus Christ was, and what part He played on earth in human history. From the Gospels according to Luke and Matthew we may learn something of what Jesus Christ taught. From the Gospel according to John we may learn what His followers declare to be the real significance of His Life. It is the great charm of Christianity that its innermost doctrine is incarnate in the person of its Founder, rather than crystallized into a set of propositions or ordinances. The propositions and the ordinances may be necessary deductions; one of them, as we have seen, forms the ground idea of the Fourth Gospel. But they are exhibited in action; like the Laws of Nature themselves, the doctrines of Chris-

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tianity are human deductions from the course of events.

Let me give one instance, perhaps all the more instructive for being concerned with the practical sentiment of the Christian community than with high theological speculation. Apart from the Gospels, I cannot find that early Christian literature exhibits the slightest sympathy towards the young. S. Paul tells children to obey their parents in the Lord, and commands fathers not to provoke their children. Further, in the Epistle to Titus, the young women are to be trained to love their husbands and love their children. But this is all, and it seems rather inadequate. Outside the New Testament matters are not much better. Clement of Rome (xxi) speaks of 'reverencing the elders and instructing the young in the instruction of the fear of God,' a passage which is re-echoed by Polycarp. 'Thou shalt not take away thy hand from thy son or from thy daughter, but from youth up thou shalt teach the fear of God' is all that the *Didache* has to say (§ 4).¹

These extracts are, in fact, characteristic of the official Christian view. In the words and actions of Jesus alone, as recorded in the Synoptic Gospels, and especially by Mark, do we find love

¹ Compare also (for a later period) *Didascalia*, xxii.

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and sympathy for children. He taught His disciples that it was as honourable to receive even a child in His name as to receive the chief of all of them ; and on another occasion, that he who would enter the Kingdom of God must himself become in some sense like a little child. But even Luke and Matthew leave out what Mark tells us, that our Lord took the children in His arms,¹ and that He was moved with indignation when the disciples wished to keep the children away from troubling Him. The young folk did well to shout, 'Hosanna to the Son of David!' in the Temple, for His voice is almost the only one for centuries that spoke of them with love and sympathy in the things of religion. The bereaved parents whose pathetic utterances are preserved not in Christian literature, but in the buried inscriptions of the Catacombs, had little religious countenance for their affection except from the Saviour Himself.²

This illustration shews as clearly as any that can be drawn the difference of atmosphere which separates the Gospels from the rest of early Christian theological literature, both orthodox and heterodox. And thus it brings us back to

¹ Mk ix 36, x 16.

² The memory of her little brother Dinocrates came back to S. Perpetua in prison. He had died of a cancer at the age of seven, and Perpetua ultimately saw him in a vision well and happy.

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the main point which I have wished to bring before you in this Lecture, that the Gospels we have would never have become the official charters of the Church, but for the theological necessity of insisting upon the true human nature of our Lord.

The Church of the second century was content to wait until the time was ripe for formulating a Christology. Then, as ever, it was those who lived on the borderland of the Church who were in a hurry to precipitate a solution. The leaders of the main body of the Christians were for the most part merely critical of Gnostic speculation; their positive doctrine was mainly developed in controversy against the conservative Jews, the essence of this doctrine being that the Word which spoke in the Gospel message was the same Word of God that spoke to men of old time through the Prophets. But, in addition, it was an essential part of their theory that this Word of God had become incarnate as a real human being in the person of Jesus Christ. It was this part of their theory which led them to hold firmly by a set of narratives telling the story of Jesus, which had been drawn up by various writers towards the end of the first century of the Christian era, before the memory of what had really happened in Judæa had quite faded into legend. We have

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every reason to be grateful for the rash speculations of the Gnostic heresiarchs, for it was by reaction against their too elaborate theorizings that the Church took refuge in records of past events. It was through the premature efforts of heretics to crystallize Christian theology, that the history of the Ministry and Crucifixion of our Lord, to the Jews as ever a stumblingblock, and to the Gnostic philosophers a fable for the common people, became enshrined as the palladium of the Catholic Church.

IX.

MARCION, OR CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT HISTORY.

IN the first prospectus of the *Hibbert Journal* the editors announced that they intended to open their pages to all varieties of religious thought, but that it was not part of their design to occupy their readers with the discussion of 'dead religions.' The heretic Marcion has been dead for more than seventeen centuries, and the Church which he established has utterly perished. The religion of Marcion is on the face of it a dead religion, and having decided to speak to you about it in this Lecture, I feel it will be part of my duty to attempt to explain why Marcion still may have some living interest for us. The main object that I have in view is to shew you what form Christianity took in the mind of an earnest Christian of the second century, to whom the historical element in the Gospel meant little or nothing, a thinker who desired to give up everything in order to have his Christianity purged

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from all defilements of nationalistic and materialistic elements.

Let me begin by putting before you the outline of Marcion's career. I cannot claim to have any new light on the subject, which you will find admirably treated in the article on Marcion, in the *Dictionary of Christian Biography*, by the late Provost of Trinity College, Dublin. There is, indeed, little dispute as to the essential facts. Marcion was born about 100 AD in Pontus, apparently at the well-known Black Sea port of Sinope, and his life occupies the first sixty years or so of the second century. His father was a Christian; our authorities tell us that he was 'Bishop' of the Church there, and according to some accounts Marcion himself had been made his suffragan. Here we have the first point of interest. We cannot tell, of course, what was the exact state of the development of the Christian Ministry in Pontus during the first quarter of the second century. At a later period, when Marcion had become an excommunicated heretic and had founded his own heretical Society, he was regarded as their bishop, and he transmitted his 'Orders' to a succession of Marcionite bishops who came after him. The Marcionite 'orders' were not recognised at Rome any more than Anglican orders are at the present day, but that naturally

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did not affect their legitimacy in the eyes of the Marcionites. This matter, however, hardly concerns us now. The real point of interest is that Marcion came of orthodox Christian stock, and that the Marcionites, however much they were mistaken, and however much they were to be condemned, were definitely a sect of Christians. This is not true of most of the early heretics, or not true to anything like the same extent. For the most part, the Gnostic heretics—Valentinus, Marcus, Hermogenes, and the rest—were products of the mixture of Greek speculation with Christianity. Their systems were only half-Christian. But Marcion's ideas were Christian through and through. Two centuries later, S. Ephraim in his Hymns against Heretics avers that Bardaisan the Gnostic (who was, in fact, a distinguished Astronomer and Astrologer as well as a Theologian) wasted his time in reading heathen books about the signs of the Zodiac instead of studying the Bible. Ephraim has many hard things to say about Marcion, but he does not make that kind of accusation against him. Whatever we may think of Marcion's theories, we must acknowledge that they proceeded from the study of the Gospel.

The story of Marcion's life is for the most part unknown. According to the Edessene Chronicle

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he left the Church in AD 138. He then appears to have proceeded to Rome, where he hoped that his doctrine would be accepted, or that it would at least receive toleration; but in this he was disappointed. He seems to have led a wandering life, but he was established in Rome as a teacher of his peculiar doctrines during the episcopate of Anicetus (154-166), and for aught we know to the contrary he may have died there.

The importance of Marcion does not lie in the outward events of his life, but in the doctrines which he taught. They can be expressed in very few words. His teaching was the exact converse of those discourses in the Acts with which we are all so familiar, in which the speaker, S. Peter or S. Paul, seeks to prove to those who believe Moses and the Prophets that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ of God. Marcion's teaching was very different. Believing fervently that Jesus was the Son of God, come down from the highest Heaven to reveal the Divine will to man, he took the Gospel message and asked how it was possible to believe that the Author of the Gospel could have been the God of the Old Testament.

Marcion started, in fact, from the Gospel. The God, he said, whom Jesus preached was *ἀγαθός*, 'Good,' or rather, 'Kind.' He is *le Bon Dieu*, a God who is able and willing to forgive. The

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God of the Old Testament is Just, keeping His promise for ever. He loves them which love Him, and those that sought Him early found Him. He was kind to His friends, terrible to His foes, visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of them that hate Him. Those that left His service learned to their cost that He is a jealous God. He taught His worshippers that He was God, and that there was none beside Him, and His glory He would not give to another. How different, said Marcion, is the Most High whom Jesus preached; for He is kind to the unthankful and evil, and He commands His servants to be in like manner kind to their enemies and to forgive.

Here you have in a few words the essence of Marcion's religion and Marcion's philosophy. All the rest follows from it, or is the result of mere accidental co-ordination with it. What the master cause was that compelled him to be a Christian, that attracted him to the Gospel, that constrained him to believe in the Divine Message of Jesus, we do not know with precision. No Marcionite work has survived, and we have to pick up our information from opponents more eager to refute the great heretic than to expound his beliefs. That which Marcion shared with his fellow-Christians his refuters pass over for the most part

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in silence. But we may guess to some extent the forces that influenced him. In the first place, as we have seen, he was born a Christian. The general Christian tradition, the life of the Christian Society, had doubtless a firm hold on Marcion, as also had the belief that the same Jesus who had taught in Palestine had proved Himself the Lord of Death. But Marcion was something far deeper than a mere Christian by inheritance. The mere fact that he felt so acutely the difference between the Old Law and the New is a proof of the profound impression which the teaching of Jesus, the Gospel morality, continued to exercise upon him.

In all this we cannot fail to recognise the parallel between the second-century heresiarch and those thinkers of the present day who are attracted to the Gospel partly from ancestral association, partly from a genuine conviction that the message of the Gospel is the highest teaching which they know, who nevertheless cannot identify the Power that has evolved the visible universe of Nature and produced secular history—in a word, the God of this world—with the Father whom our Lord revealed. Our modern ideas about the early history of man and Nature are widely different from those current in the second century, whether among heretics or orthodox;

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but this should not blind us to our ethical kinship with some of Marcion's leading principles of religion. As nearly as any one of whom we have knowledge, he preached the Gospel morality without external sanctions. The essence of the orthodox polemic against him was that in doing this he became involved in contradictions with his own doctrines.

Sometimes it is stated that Marcion rejected the Old Testament. That is not quite true. Marcion rejected the God of Israel as his God; but, as was the case with all early Christian thinkers, the cosmogony of the Pentateuch and its interpretation played an important part in his speculations. Nothing more clearly illustrates the great gap between modern and ancient speculation about the cosmos than the use made by Marcion of the Book of Genesis. In point of fact, the Book of Genesis had no serious rivals until the modern sciences of Geology and Archæology taught us something of the actual march of events on this planet before ordinary history began.

It is rather difficult to do justice to Marcion's speculations on the Fall of Man. To go into details in a lecture like this would be misleading. What we most need is not antiquarian lore about ancient heretics; we need to try to translate Marcion's beliefs into a form which is now in-

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telligible, to attempt to realise what attitude he took up with regard to the problems which are still unsolved, or of which we only now are approaching the solution. The chief point is that Marcion believed that man is governed or influenced by three Principles or Forces. There is *Matter*, out of which his body was made ; there is Justice, or, as we now call it, *Law*, by means of which he came into being and emerged from mere inanimate material ; and there is *Grace*, a principle distinct from and superior to Law, by which man may be redeemed from the dominion of Law, and by which in the end the better and eternal part of man will escape from the defiling contamination of Matter. According to Marcion, Matter, Law, and Grace are distinct entities in the cosmos, each dwelling in its own sphere. This world we live in was made by the action of Law upon Matter. Man, the noblest product of Law and Matter, is distracted between the two principles of his being. He alone among created things consciously tries to obey Law, *i.e.* Justice, and to forsake the degrading service of Matter ; but through his imperfect constitution he fails to find the true Law and becomes involved in the worship of Idols. Justice neither forgives nor makes allowances, and for the sin of worshipping Idols, false ideals which do not exist, Man goes to hell—that

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is to say, the spirit of Man goes to conscious torment, for the body perishes at death.

This miserable state of things went on for many centuries. At last the principle of Grace who dwells in the highest heaven—in other words, *le Bon Dieu*—took pity on Man and sent His Son down to earth to redeem them from their slavery. Hitherto He had been a stranger to Man, He had been neither the origin of Man's life nor the object of his worship. It was out of mere compassion that Grace came down and interposed—we may almost say, interfered—to save mankind from their hopeless condition.

So Jesus, the Son of God, appeared on earth, doing good without reward, and healing those who for their sins were sick, until at last the God of the Law was jealous; and the God of the Law stirred up his servants and they took Jesus and crucified Him, and He became like the dead, so that Hell opened her mouth and received Him. But Death could have no dominion over Jesus, nor could Hell retain One who was alive within its bounds. Jesus therefore burst the bonds of Hell and ascended to His Father, carrying with Him the spirits that lay there in prison. Then Jesus came down in His glory and appeared before the God of the Law, who was obliged to confess that he was guilty according to his own

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Law ; for Jesus had only done good to the race of men, and yet He had been crucified. "I was ignorant," said the God of the Law to Jesus, "and because I sinned and killed Thee in ignorance, there shall be given to Thee in revenge all those who shall be willing to believe in Thee, to carry away wherever Thou wilt." Then Jesus left the God of the Law and betook Himself to Paul, and revealed this to him, and sent him to preach that we have been bought with a price. All who believe in Jesus were then and there sold from the dominion of the Just Power to the Good and Kind One.

Eznik the Armenian, from whose account of the Marcionites the details recounted in the last paragraph have been taken, goes on to say : "Not all the Marcionites know all this, but only a few of them, who hand down the doctrine one to the other by word of mouth. What the Marcionites usually say is simply, 'The Good Stranger—with a price He bought us from the Lord of the Creation,' but how or with what He bought them,—that not all of them know." Most modern scholars suppose that this detailed theory of how the price was paid for man belongs to a later development of Marcionism, but there is nothing in it inconsistent with the leading idea of the Marcionite doctrine. This idea is the

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essential antithesis between Law and Grace. 'Mercy rejoiceth against Judgement,' and Marcion saw in the God of the Old Testament the God of Judgement, and in the God of the New Testament the God of Mercy.

It should be here pointed out that this story of how the World-Power caused our Lord to be killed, not knowing who He was, and how as a consequence He descended into Hell and harrowed it, was not confined to the Marcionites. It has dropped out from the modern presentation of Christianity, but it is always meeting us in pre-Reformation theology, from the Acts of Judas Thomas and the Nisebene Hymns of S. Ephraim to the Gospel of Nicodemus and the windows of King's College Chapel. The only real difference between the Marcionite and the orthodox forms of the story is that where the Marcionites speak of the God of the Old Testament, the orthodox speak of Satan. In either case, it is the Adversary of Jesus. The Marcionites taught that by the sacrifice of the Cross our Lord bought us from the dominion of the God of the Law, the orthodox taught that by the sacrifice of the Cross our Lord bought us from the dominion of the Devil. And I cannot help feeling that there is a definite reason why the Marcionite form of the doctrine may be the more original, and that the

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story which enshrines the doctrine may have originated among the Marcionites, if it does not come from Marcion himself. For Marcion was constrained to explain how the Good God came to have any concern at all with mankind. The orthodox Christian might believe that Jesus Christ came in the fulness of time, in accordance with the eternal purpose of God for His Creation. But, according to Marcion, man originally owed no allegiance to the Good God. Man was the handiwork of the Just God, and owed Him allegiance; it was necessary therefore to explain how man's allegiance was transferred to the Good Stranger.

But the most curious part of the story, from the point of view of the history of ideas, has yet to be told. The belief that the Redemption was essentially an act by which Man was bought by God from the Devil prevailed among theologians during the first ten centuries of Christianity. It was accepted by S. Irenæus, by Origen, by S. Augustine. But at last it fell into discredit, and a new theory took its place. The author of the new theory was as far removed from heresy as it is possible to be. Anselm was a prince of the Church in his lifetime, and now he is a canonized Saint. This great philosophical thinker was profoundly dissatisfied with the current view of the Atonement. He felt it unworthy to represent

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God as giving the Devil his due: the redemption of man must be something wholly accomplished and transacted by the Divine Personality, not something paid away by God to some one else. And so Anselm elaborated the famous theory by which the sacrifice of Christ was represented as a debt paid by God's Mercy to God's Justice.

This thought is very near akin to the leading idea of Marcion. In Anselm's system, which was accepted by the mediæval Church, and is very commonly held even now among Protestants, God's Justice and God's Mercy are eternal principles which play separate and opposing parts. They are, in fact, if not in name, distinct Persons in the Divine Essence. The world is governed by Justice, and Mercy can only interfere by paying the price to Justice. Justice cannot and will not forgive, and it is distinct from Mercy and Grace. But this is what Marcion taught eight centuries before Anselm. The difference is only in nomenclature. S. Anselm speaks of the eternal Justice of God, and, on the other hand, of the eternal Mercy of God at last manifested in Christ; Marcion spoke of the God of the Law, and of the Good and Kind Stranger who sent His Son. I cannot see that there is any real difference.¹

¹ 'If we searched all space,' says Luthardt, 'we should discover only the gospel of power; if we surveyed all time, only the gospel

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I have not attempted to set before you to-day a complete and ordered exposition of Marcion's doctrines. In the first place, the materials are insufficient ; and, in the second place, you can easily read up for yourselves all that is known about him. What I have tried to do is to shew how fundamental and vital were the questions which he raised, and how closely the solution which he proposed, strange and repellent as it sounds, is in touch with the thought of various ages, when it is stripped of mere accidents of second-century phraseology. And, indeed, the controversy between Marcion and the Church was no mere academic discussion.

We are told by Epiphanius that when Marcion first came to Rome he asked to be admitted to Communion, and when he was refused communion he went on to ask the Roman Presbyters what was meant when our Lord spoke of the new wine and the old bottles and of the folly of putting a new patch on a worn-out garment. It was a great and serious question. Christianity, we believe, is both old and new ; in this saying of Jesus it is for the moment represented as a thing

of righteousness. Only in Jesus Christ do we learn the gospel of grace.' This characteristic sentence from an orthodox Lutheran theologian, quoted with approval by Canon Ottley in his article on the Incarnation in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*, ii 465*b*, seems to me a piece of unadulterated Marcionite doctrine.

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essentially new, and the problem of how to combine the old and the new still besets the constructive reformer of every age. But Marcion was told that the worn-out garment signified Judas Iscariot, who was worn out with covetousness, so that he was unable fitly to receive the new and heavenly hope of the Gospel; and though he was joined on to the eleven Apostles by the Lord, a worse rent came through him, and, moreover, his mind and thought did not agree with the others! Nothing more clearly shews than this answer how incompetent the heads of the Church about 140 AD were to resolve the doubts of a keen and earnest thinker like Marcion. What wonder that Marcion replied by identifying himself with the new piece of cloth and regarding the Church as the worn-out Jewish gabardine! "I will tear your Church," said he to the Roman Presbyters, "I will tear your Church and make a rent in it for ever."

The Marcionite schism was a very serious rent, and one that was not mended for many a long day. In spite of persecution, at first from the heathen, and afterwards from fellow-Christians, in spite of a severely ascetic mode of life, in spite of 'refutation' by almost every prominent orthodox theologian, one after the other, the followers of Marcion organised themselves into a

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Church and maintained their corporate existence until after the 5th century. An inscribed stone is still preserved which had stood over the lintel of the Marcionite chapel of a village near Damascus.¹ It is the oldest dated inscription from any Christian place of worship, and it is melancholy to think that in all probability this building was destroyed at the instigation of Christians a few years after it was dedicated. For 318 AD, the date of the dedication of this Marcionite Chapel, occurs in the interval of toleration between the end of the great Diocletian Persecution (313) and the definite triumph of Christianity under Constantine (324), after which the Marcionites were forbidden to meet for worship either in public or private, and the buildings they had already erected for meeting-places were to be confiscated. The Marcionites had proved their devotion to our Lord by many a martyrdom, their discipline was strict, their lives were pure; but the Catholic Church waged war upon them to the death.

I do not intend to take you step by step over the detailed refutations of Marcion by Tertullian and Epiphanius. The detailed refutation of a

¹ The inscription runs: 'Synagogue of Marcionites of Lebab village of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (Χρηστοῦ), at the expense of the priest Paul in the year 630²—i.e. 318 AD. The place-name in the Greek is κώμη Λεβάβων, *Le Bas* iii 583 (2558).

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lost cause generally arouses sympathy rather than conviction, for we ourselves are obliged to supply the arguments on the heretic's side. Moreover, the orthodox champions do much less than justice to Marcion. Tertullian is epigrammatic, harsh, and wholly without the sympathy which alone can comprehend; while Epiphanius, for all his erudition,—well, think of the narrowest clergyman of your acquaintance and what *he* thinks and says of the Dissenters in his parish—that (only much worse) is the attitude of Saint Epiphanius toward heretics. We shall do better to leave Tertullian and Epiphanius alone, until we have a better idea of the principles underlying both parties.

For, after all, the formal refutations do not supply us with the principal reasons why the Church rejected Marcion. As in all great questions, the two parties ranged themselves on opposing sides not so much from the objections which could be raised against the other's views as from allegiance to positive principles. And it is comparatively easy to pick holes in your opponent's case, to point out the weaknesses and inconsistencies into which he has fallen; but for the most part triumphant demonstrations of this kind only serve to encourage fellow-believers. For us, after the lapse of seventeen centuries, it is more interesting and more profitable to try and

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get at the positive ideals which underlay the controversial tactics of the two camps. We have seen what were some of the main principles of Marcion: the eternal antithesis of Law and Gospel, of Justice and Mercy, of Nature and Grace. Now let us see why the Church refused the dilemma. What were the principles to which the Church clung when Marcion was swept away?

The answer to this query lies implicitly, as I venture to think, in a piece of literary borrowing, which surprised me much when I first came across it, but which I now see to have a real appropriateness. Tertullian, as you have heard, wrote a long and elaborate refutation of Marcion. He also wrote, or (as some think) a Carthaginian contemporary wrote, a treatise against the Jews. Whether this treatise against the Jews was actually compiled by Tertullian, or not, does not greatly matter; the important point for us is undisputed, viz. that it was published a very few years after the publication of Tertullian's work against Marcion. The two works appeared at the same place, and belong to the same school of thought; they are, in fact, practically designed for the same public. Now the surprising thing is that about half the treatise against the Jews is simply copied out of the Third Book against

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Marcion. Paragraph after paragraph agrees verbally, or only with the omission of a contemptuous reference to Marcion's Pontic birth.¹

It does not matter whether the writer of the treatise against the Jews was Tertullian plagiarising from himself, or some one else plagiarising from Tertullian. The important thing is that the same arguments that were thought appropriate to use against the Jews were thought appropriate to use against Marcion the anti-Jew. Surprising as it seems at first sight, the Church had to a great extent the same controversy with both opponents. The Church was determined to maintain its claim to be the true heir of the promises of the Old Testament, the promises made of old to the Fathers. The Jews and Marcion had this in common, that they disputed the claim of the Christian Church to be the legitimate successor of the Patriarchs and the Prophets, and this was a claim that it was vital for the Church to make.

The claim was made good. Of course the price had to be paid. We sometimes hear that there is too much of the Old Testament in the Christian Religion; that may have been, and may be still, true of certain forms which

¹ Cf. Aliud est si penes Ponticos barbariae gentis infantes in proelium erumpunt (*adv. Marc.* iii 13)=Aliud est si penes uos infantes in proelium erumpunt (*adv. Iud.* § 9).

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Christianity has taken. But, on the whole, there can be no doubt that the Church was right and that Marcion was wrong. The Church was right both as a matter of history and as a matter of religious theory. As a matter of history, there can be no doubt that Jesus Christ Himself believed that He came not to destroy but to fulfil, and that He believed that the Father whom He preached was the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, the God of the Prophets and the Psalmists. No one had known the Father but the Son; yes, but that was because men were blind and crass, not because God was a stranger. Our Lord was not the kind of Messiah that the Jews were expecting, but none the less He was a Branch out of the root of Jesse. He was a Jew by birth, by training, by His whole environment; and to forget or deny this, as Marcion denied it, and to regard Him as something wholly new, come down from the Absolute, is to make Christ and Christianity incomprehensible and unreal.

And as a matter of religious theory Marcionism is inferior to its rival. In fact, we can see this now much clearer than it could be seen in the second century. Neither Tertullian nor Marcion had much idea of the orderly development of Religion from crude and childish notions about

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God and the world to thoughts adequate for a maturer stage in human history. But while Development occupies only a small space in the Catholic theory, in Marcion's theory there was no room for it at all. It is a theory of catastrophe: a New God comes down from nowhere, and proclaims true religion for the first time. And closely allied with Marcion's rejection of the Old Testament history as being in any sense the history of true religion was his denial of the reality of our Lord's body as being in any sense true flesh and blood. Marcion's Christ condescends to treat with the God of the Law, but He will have nothing to do with Matter, which in Marcion's view was a thing altogether unclean and outside the Christ's beneficent operations.

The refusal of the Catholic Church to give up the real humanity of our Lord, or to regard our material life as essentially unclean and impure,—the two refusals are most intimately connected—is one of the highest claims it has upon the gratitude of the modern world. That what is Divine is degraded by becoming really human carries with it the corollary that the things which really make up human life, eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, the trivial round, the common task, have no part in the service of God. They are not things to be

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consecrated: they have nothing to do with religion. Consequently we find those that hold this theory either regard mere morality as a thing indifferent; or, as more often happens with those in whom the religious feeling, the devotion to the Divine, is strong, they fall into the opposite error of asceticism.

Among these was Marcion, and he impressed his beliefs on his followers. According to Marcion, the procreation of children was a doing the works of the Creator of this world, an act unworthy of a member of Christ. And so no Marcionite was admitted to baptism, unless the candidate was prepared to live a life of absolute continence from that day forward. Holy Matrimony to the Marcionite meant marriage to Christ, and for man and wife to live together meant divorce from Christ.¹

Tertullian's strictures on Marcion about this very important point are both vigorous and sensible. Gluttony, he says, is bad, but that is no reason for proscribing food; what is needed is temperance. Marriage may be the cause of many evils, but it is not to blame for those evils. In common with almost all Church writers, Tertullian believes that 'holiness,' *i.e.* a life of continence, is better than the married

¹ Tert. *adv. Marc.* i 29, iv 34

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state, but (he says) we hold up this ideal not as good as opposed to bad, but as a better as opposed to good. And, he adds, when marriage is attacked as unlawful for Christians, the Church expressly defends it.

We shall all be ready to side with Tertullian here, rather than with his opponent. But we must be careful about the terms we use in reprobating the Marcionite theory and practice. Marcion was not alone in his rejection of marriage. Nor was the actual practice of his adherents quite so revolutionary as it sounds to our ears. The mere fact that the Marcionites continued to exist for more than three centuries, enjoying all the while a reputation not for licence, but for puritanical austerity, is enough to shew that they were not a sect of 'race-suicides.' It was in their Sacramental theory rather than in their social life that the Marcionites differed from their Catholic cousins. No doubt there were many young folk among them who volunteered early for baptism and actual participation in the Holy Communion, just as there were, and are still, young Catholics who volunteer to become monks and nuns, and remain so. But these, I venture to think, did not form the majority of the sectaries. The majority lived like their neighbours in the world, attending their 'Church' (in which they

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were allowed to witness the celebration of the Eucharist without partaking of the sacramental meal), and no doubt distributing towards the necessities of the Saints. Such persons, of course had not yet been through the ceremony of baptism. No doubt most of them were married like their Pagan neighbours: the Wedding Feast, and for aught I know the Wedding Ring itself, is a good deal older than Christianity. But a Marcionite marriage was not recognised by the Marcionite Church, and neither man nor woman was admitted to baptism and communion until he or she was ready to live apart for the future. The general result, therefore, was that the sacramental life was deferred; it became a preparation for entering the life after death rather than a régime for the present.

This view of the Sacraments was by no means confined to the followers of Marcion. I have attempted elsewhere to shew that it prevailed in the Syriac-speaking Church down to the fourth century. It is at least certain that candidates for Baptism in this branch of the Church were warned that if their hearts were set on marriage they had better turn back from Baptism¹ and go away and be married. Yet these folk were in communion with the rest of the

¹ Aphraates, *Hom.* vii 20.

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Catholic Church, and their Bishops sat with the rest in the Council of Nicæa. And we may remember that the Council of Nicæa was summoned by Constantine the Great, a Christian Emperor who thought it well and seemly to delay his own baptism until a few months before his death.

The reservation of the Sacraments for those who had withdrawn themselves from the world by celibacy and freedom from worldly cares is not therefore a special feature of Marcionism. None the less we cannot doubt that the Church was right to reject it. Both the Catholics and the Marcionites believed that the reception of the Eucharist involved the real presence of God in the recipient. But while the Marcionites thought that so holy a Presence ought not to be mingled with the elements of everyday human life, the Catholic theory, however haltingly and however imperfectly, declared that the elements of everyday life are not essentially unclean, and that the highest union with the Divine Nature of which man is capable will consecrate these elements, not destroy them.

All this was involved in the Church's controversy with Marcion. The issues at stake were really great and always new and vital. When we remember this, we may be more able to understand and partly to excuse the bitterness

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with which Church writers speak of an ardent and earnest Christian thinker.

I must now say a few words upon Marcion's Bible, that is to say, his Gospel, and his edition of S. Paul's Epistles. Thirty or forty years ago this would have been the centre of interest in a Lecture on Marcion. A very general belief was then current in critical circles that the Gospel accepted by Marcion was not, as Tertullian and Epiphanius asserted, a mutilated edition of S. Luke, cut about to suit the heretic's notions. It was thought that Marcion's Gospel might be the original and our S. Luke a later interpolated version used by the orthodox. But this theory has been entirely given up on closer study of the question from various points of view. The assertions of Tertullian and Epiphanius have been fully vindicated, and Marcion's Gospel has sunk into a mere curiosity of literature.

In the first place, the numerous omissions, by which Marcion's Gospel chiefly differs from the canonical S. Luke, are all, or almost all, easily explicable. Most of them, indeed, could not have been retained by one who held Marcion's views. The birth of Jesus Christ from a human parent and the baptism of Jesus Christ by a prophet of the old order were inconsistent with

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what Marcion taught. Marcion did not believe that Jesus could have said that God had clothed the grass of this material world, or that He could have declared the old Prophets to have spoken of Him. So all these passages are absent from the Marcionite Gospel. But no one doubts that they form a genuine portion of the Third Gospel.

Again, the linguistic evidence is fatal to the priority of the Marcionite edition. If the parts rejected by Marcion did not really belong to the Third Gospel, but were later accretions, there should be some difference of style between these portions and the rest. But as a matter of fact there is none. The characteristic style of the Lucan writings equally pervades the passages rejected and the passages retained by Marcion; in fact, there is nothing to separate the two classes except that what Marcion rejected does not fit his peculiar theory.¹

The trend of modern Synoptic criticism is also adverse to the priority of Marcion's Gospel. The Gospel according to S. Luke is a composite work, compiled by the Evangelist from two main sources, one identical with, or at all events nearly resembling, our Gospel according to S. Mark, the other mostly consisting of our Lord's Discourses.

¹ The linguistic evidence is admirably marshalled in Dr. Sanday's *Gospels in the Second Century*, pp. 222-230.

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But Marcion's omissions are spread over both documents. Some of the passages omitted, such as 'Go and tell that fox' (Lk xiii 32), are peculiar to S. Luke; others, such as the Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen (xx 9-18) and the Widow's Mite (xxi 1-4), are found also in S. Mark. It is, I firmly believe, impossible to invent a hypothesis which will account for the actual facts, except the hypothesis advanced by the Church Fathers, that Marcion himself abridged S. Luke's Gospel. Of course, he believed himself to be restoring the pure Gospel, purged of foreign accretions, but from a purely literary and historical point of view we can scarcely agree with him.

One thing, however, we may note in passing. Marcion is, in a sense, the last of the Evangelists. He is the last to produce a book, professing to give the Gospel Story, which is not a mere Harmony of the Four Gospels. The Christian of a later age, however heretical, did not feel himself free to select and to reject; Marcion's method of treating S. Luke does not differ in kind, only in result, from S. Luke's very free treatment of S. Mark's Gospel.

A copy of the Marcionite edition of S. Paul's Epistles would be, on the whole, a more valuable discovery than a copy of the Marcionite Gospel.

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The Marcionite Gospel is merely an abridged and altered edition of what we already possess, but Marcion's edition of the Pauline Epistles very possibly represents an earlier stage of the collection of S. Paul's letters than the canonical. The history of the collection of these letters is distinct from the question of the genuineness of any or either of them. That the longer letters ascribed to S. Paul are really his, is the verdict of most scholars, whether they belong to the critical school or otherwise ; and further, it seems probable that several of these letters, notably 1 Corinthians and Galatians, have come down to us practically in their original form. But there is no great probability that S. Paul himself made a collected edition of his letters, or even that he kept copies of those that he sent. He may have done so, but there is no evidence. It is indeed wholly uncertain how or when these letters were first brought together into a *Corpus*. I think we may fairly consider our present collection to be at least a second edition, revised and enlarged ; and there is something to be said for supposing that the previous edition was due to Marcion's reverence for the great Apostle. As I said before, this question is distinct from the question of the genuineness of the several letters. There is clear evidence that some of the letters, especially

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1 Corinthians, were known and held in great respect by writers earlier than or contemporary with Marcion. But there is no tangible evidence for an *Apostolicon*, a collection of the Epistles. Thus S. Clement of Rome, writing to the Church at Corinth, quotes 1 Corinthians by name, and most appropriately: "Take up the letter of the blessed Paul the apostle, how . . . he spiritually charged you concerning himself and Cephas and Apollos."¹ But it is more than doubtful whether S. Clement had ever heard of the letter which we call the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, and it is very likely that the genuine letters of Paul, out of which our Epistle is composed, were at that time lying unknown to the rest of the Christian world in Corinth itself. Again, there is very little to suggest that S. Ignatius knew the letter to the Galatians, though he certainly knew 1 Corinthians, and probably knew Ephesians. When, therefore, we consider Marcion's special interest in S. Paul, he being, according to Marcion, the only one who understood the doctrine that Jesus came to deliver to mankind; and when, further, we remember that Marcion was perhaps more of a traveller than any other Christian in the second century, and therefore had opportunities for collection above most of his contemporaries; when we consider these

¹ 1 Clem. xlvii 1.

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things, we may be permitted to wonder whether Marcion may not have been the first to make a regular collection of the Pauline Epistles. At the same time, I should be sorry to leave you with the impression that this hypothesis is an assured result of criticism. It is not so; it is no more than a guess, and the evidence is not sufficient to enable us to reach anything like certainty in the matter.¹

Marcion's share in the collection of the Pauline Epistles must remain doubtful. But there can be little doubt that he was the first to canonise the New Testament. The Bible of the earliest generations of Christians was the Bible of the Jewish Church. The Law and the Prophets and the Psalms, together with the still undefined limits of the rest of the Books, were to them the recorded Word of God. The idea of a new volume, to be added to what had been written aforetime, was strange and foreign to their thought. No one can read S. Luke's Preface to his great work and not feel that the author could never have imagined that his work would be sacred, otherwise than by

¹ Marcion's collection consisted of ten letters, which he arranged as follows :—Galatians, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Romans, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Ephesians (called by Marcion, 'To the Laodiceans'), Colossians, Philemon, Philippians. He did not receive the Epistles to Timothy and to Titus.

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the fact that words of the Lord Jesus were recorded in it. S. Paul writes to his spiritual children with natural authority, but the Gospel which he enforces is a living, floating belief, not a written record. And this remained the point of view of the early Church. They remembered the words of the Lord Jesus, they repeated the prayer He had taught His disciples to use, but the Scripture, the written Word of God, remained what it had been. To such an extent is this the case, that when we find in a very early Christian writing, the so-called Epistle of Barnabas, the words, 'Many called, but few chosen,' with *as it is written* prefixed, we feel that we are confronted with a real difficulty.¹ It is probable that 'Barnabas' really had the words of Jesus in his mind, whether he knew of them through our Gospel according to Matthew or from some earlier collection of sayings; but it is very improbable that he intentionally quoted them with the regular Scripture formula. It has therefore been supposed, with a good deal of reason, that he had forgotten the reference, and consequently has employed the formula 'as it is written' by inadvertence for the more appropriate 'as the Lord said to His disciples,' or something of that kind.

The Church felt in no need of a new Bible; as

¹ *Barn.* iv 14.

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we have seen, the preoccupation of Church theologians was to vindicate the Church's claim to be the Heir of the Covenants, to prove that the Law and the Prophets rightfully belonged to the Christian Church rather than to the unfaithful Jewish Synagogue. But Marcion rejected the Law and the Prophets. He was left without a Bible. For him true Religion began with the descent of the Son of God to preach in Galilee. The record of this preaching was for him what the mystical lives of the Patriarchs were to Jewish and orthodox Christians, and the writings of the true theologian Paul were the true prophecy. Thus for Marcion the Gospel and the Epistles made up a New Testament, replacing the Old.

The Catholic Church complained, not without reason, that Marcion's Gospel was nothing more than a mutilated version of a thoroughly orthodox and trustworthy work, and it was not to be expected that Marcion's edition of S. Paul's letters would be accepted without scrutiny as complete or accurate in text. But the fact remains that Marcion is the first to come before us with a collection of Christian writings which are treated as Scripture, that is, as works out of the words of which doctrine can be proved. Before Marcion's time, in the works of what are commonly called the Apostolic Fathers, we can find traces of the

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literary use of certain of S. Paul's Epistles and (less certainly) traces of the use of some of our Gospels. But though the Old Testament is often quoted, no formal quotation is found from the books which comprise the New Testament, with the exception of the quotation of 1 Corinthians by Clement and the passage from the Epistle of Barnabas to which I have just now referred. Marcion then appears on the scene with a collection of books, which, though rudimentary and incomplete, is recognisably our New Testament. A generation later we find the idea of a written record by Evangelists and Apostles firmly rooted in Catholic theology. When we remember that this same Marcion, in whose hands a New Testament is first found, had far greater need than his Catholic brethren of an authoritative New Testament, it is impossible to avoid the inference that to Marcion himself is due the introduction of Christian books into the sacred Canon. The books were not new; they were used and venerated before, but they did not occupy the same rank as the Old Law.

A New Testament Canon of some kind would doubtless have been formed, if Marcion had never appeared, and, as a matter of fact, the Church rejected Marcion's Gospel in favour of earlier documents. What we really owe to Marcion, as

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I venture to think, is the enormous preponderance of the writings of S. Paul in our New Testament. To Marcion, as afterwards to the Reformers of the 16th century, S. Paul was the great Theologian, the leader and fashioner of theological thought. But it was not so to the early Catholic Church. The antithesis of Law and Grace, Justification by Faith, the Church regarded as the Body of Christ,—on all these points the ancient baptismal Creeds are silent. I think it would surprise any one who knew the writings of the early Fathers from Clement of Rome to the Nicene Age, but was unacquainted with the New Testament, to learn that even though the Gospel was included four times over, letters of Paul occupied a quarter of the official Canon. It is the great service which Marcion rendered to the Church, that he recognised and emphasised with a fervour, that was none the less effective for being narrow and one-sided, the unique position of the great Apostle of the Gentiles.

[For the Marcionite Prologues to S. Paul's Epistles, see the separate Note, p. 353.]