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I.

CHRISTIANITY AND THE EXPERIMENTAL METHOD.

IN a scientific age like ours, something will be gained if we can show that Christianity is amenable to the Experimental Method. This method has very largely made the modern world. It received its great exposition and impulse from Lord Bacon, and is sometimes called the Baconian method. It consists of three stages: first, the collection of all the facts procurable upon the subject in hand; secondly, the casting about for some happy hypothesis to explain the facts; and, thirdly, the verification of the hypothesis by experience or experiment.

Now it so happens that Christianity may be made amenable to this method; and, that there may be no mistake about this being the Founder's intention, let us look at one declaration He made in the days of His flesh. His enemies had, strange to say, argued themselves into the idea that He deserved to be killed because He had made a man every whit whole on the Sabbath day (John vii. 23). They illustrated in doing so the fact that, if we only set ourselves to it, we can argue ourselves into anything. The history of human thought shows that there is nothing too absurd, nothing even too diabolical, to be reached by argument. But Jesus has a better method to suggest than this one of everlasting discussion; and it is contained in the words, "If any man will [*willeth to*—Revised Version] do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself" (John vii. 17). He does not say, "If any man will *discuss* God's will in all its length and breadth, he shall know of the doctrine;" but if he will *do* it, he shall reach

III.

THE FORMATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

THE title of my address* is slightly ambiguous. A few words of preliminary explanation are therefore necessary to make its purpose and scope entirely plain.

We often use the word "formation" in the sense of "structure," as when we speak of the physiological formation of the human body or the geological formation of a section of the earth's crust. "The formation of the New Testament" would then mean the mutual relations of its component parts. That it has a structural arrangement of its parts might easily be shown. It is not a collection of unconnected pamphlets enclosed between two covers. On the contrary, its several books reveal themselves to the reader as parts of a literary organism, as chapters in a volume whose object is the presentation of original Christianity. When thus viewed its formation discloses two elements, the one historical, the other didactic. We have first the earthly ministry of Jesus set forth in a fourfold form. In the Book of Acts we have an historical account of the establishment of universal Christianity. Then the purely didactic portions which follow exhibit and apply the truths in which the Apostles considered Christianity to consist. The volume, as a whole, is therefore so formed as to present the facts and truths which were the content of apostolic Christianity. It has thus a real, organic structure. It is a literary unit, although written by different hands. Whatever explanation may be given of the way in which the New Testament originated, its structural formation is an obvious fact of large significance. The early Church, in finally arranging the books of the New Testament in their present order, did but make apparent the two elements of history and doctrine which constituted the message of the apostles and which would have existed in the Testament whatever the order in which the books were placed.

But the order in which the books of the New Testament now stand was not, as is well known, the order in which they were composed. The earliest extant apostolic writings were Epistles.

* Delivered as one of a course of Sunday afternoon lectures in the Wylie Memorial Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia.

It is probable that our first three Gospels were not written until the seventh decade of the first century. The fourth Gospel was written from twenty to thirty years later. Nor were the Epistles written in the order in which they now stand in our Testament. It is quite probable that the Epistle of James was the earliest of them all. At any rate the Epistles to the Thessalonians were the earliest that we have from the pen of the Apostle Paul. There is room for difference of opinion as to the exact order of many of the books, but it is certain that their present order was not that of their composition. Neither were they placed in their present order because that was supposed to be the order of composition, but because, as I have said, the early Church more or less clearly perceived the structure which inhered in the collection as a whole; though, within the limits of the larger divisions of the volume, various arbitrary reasons appear to have determined the arrangement. The question arises therefore, How did the New Testament come to be formed? Under what circumstances and through what influences did it originate? How did its parts get together? Then, too, for what reasons and in what way was it made into the second portion of the Sacred Scriptures? These inquiries will explain the sense in which I propose to discuss the formation of the New Testament.

It is important however, at the outset, to observe that this inquiry is not of merely historical and literary interest. In the case of many great literary productions, the question of their composition does not affect their practical value nor the profit we derive from them. This is so, for example, with Shakespeare's plays. Whatever may have been their actual origin, their power to give stimulus to the intellect and pleasure to the imagination remains the same. If Mr. Donnelly should be right in attributing them to Lord Bacon, it would not alter their value to humanity. So the question which other critics raise as to the authorship of some of the works usually included in the collection known as Shakespeare's plays, are of purely historical and literary interest. Now there are those who contend that the same may be said of the New Testament, and that it is a matter of comparative indifference to Christians what its origin really was. These books, it is said, still present to us the same ideas and awaken the same ethical and religious interests, however they may have been formed. Their present value alone need concern us. The question of their origin is of no real religious interest.

But this view, though specious, is deceptive and superficial. It is true indeed that most readers obtain the highest good from the New Testament without knowing anything about the historical

evidence that it came from the Apostles and very little about the story of its formation. But it is also true that the ideas which a reader has or which he assumes about the origin of the Testament do most directly determine the *kind* of good which he derives from its use. The average Christian assumes that it came from the Apostles and is clothed with their authority, and hence he submits himself to its historical statements, its doctrinal statements and its moral precepts. He, on the other hand, who denies that it came from the Apostles, either in whole or in part, or that its statements are authoritative, may still derive from its perusal some benefit. He may be intellectually stimulated and perhaps morally enlightened. But he will not receive from it the same *kind* of good which is received by him who assumes its apostolicity and authority. It will not, by itself, determine his view of life and duty, of God and of salvation: so that if it be important that we should have correct views upon these topics, and if we have reason to believe that a revelation about them was given by Christ and through His Apostles, the origin of this volume cannot be considered a question of little moment.

The religious importance of our inquiry follows, moreover, from three distinctive features of the New Testament, in which again it differs totally from such a literary work as Shakespeare's plays.

The first of these is that the New Testament pretends to be in large measure *historical*. Now, an historical narrative raises questions entirely different from those raised by either a theoretical treatise or a work of the imagination. It is of no value, for the purposes which it claims to subserve, unless it be historically true. Therefore we ask of it whether it originated under such circumstances and from such a source that we can rely upon its statements. It is a matter of small importance whether Shakespeare wrote "Cymbeline" or not, because we do not go to "Cymbeline" for our early English history. But it is a matter of much importance to know that Livy and Tacitus were the authors of the histories which bear their names: for on them we depend largely for our knowledge of the ancient Roman world. So it is a matter of still higher importance to know whether the four Gospels came from the Apostles and their companions, or whether they were the work of later writers; for the immediate testimony of the Apostles to the facts of Christ's life is obviously more trustworthy than a later account would be likely to be. Thus the historical element in the New Testament makes the question of its formation one of primary importance.

Again, the *authority* which the writers of the Epistles continually claim for their teaching makes the origin of the books a matter of

vital moment. The estimate placed on these claims will naturally depend as much on the view taken of the authenticity of the documents as on that taken of the authority of the Apostles. In the case of any pretended law, the first question is as to whether it was really enacted by the legislature from which it professes to have come.

Thirdly, the religious importance of our inquiry follows from the fact that the New Testament, both in its historical and didactic portions, treats of a person and of a series of facts and truths which are, if as represented, undoubtedly of supreme value to the human race.

For these reasons, it is in no mere spirit of curiosity that we discuss the formation of the New Testament. I must strongly insist that we are dependent on it for our knowledge of Jesus Christ. Unless it be the genuine, apostolic announcement of Him, we have no clear or sufficient knowledge of what He was or taught. Outside of it, we have only a few instances of the mention of His name by pagan writers and the later tradition of the Church. But the tradition of the early Church stands or falls, in all important points, with the apostolicity of the New Testament, since it was based on the latter, or else, in the very earliest period, on the apostolic preaching which the New Testament contains. Where tradition differs from the New Testament, it bears the unmistakable marks of mere legend or positive fiction. If, moreover, we think that the history of the volume allows us to reject some of its alleged facts while accepting others, the test of truth will inevitably become a merely subjective one, and the idea formed of the origin of Christianity will differ with various critics and be demonstrable by none. Or, if we think it possible to accept its narrative about Christ but to reject the teaching about Him which accompanies the narrative, we shall again have the ground for certitude even as to the narrative taken away. For in the New Testament the facts are intimately connected with the teaching as proofs or illustrations. The two elements are welded together in such a manner that if the teaching about Christ be not trustworthy, neither can we accept with any confidence the narrative which is conjoined with it. If, for example, John was wrong in declaring Jesus to be the eternal Son of God, what confidence can we have in his report of Christ's discourses, in which Jesus Himself is made to bear explicit testimony to the same fact. And if, in general, these writers were misled or confused in their ideas about Christ, what confidence can we have in their testimony to Christ, since all their testimony, even that borne to the most purely historical events, is presented in the light of their doctrinal ideas about Him?

The result is that, unless we can rationally depend on the New Testament as the apostolic and trustworthy presentation of Jesus Christ, He becomes a subject for private speculation, about whom we can have neither historical nor doctrinal certainty. It is a fact that those who deny the trustworthiness of the New Testament differ from one another merely in the greater or less probability of their personal speculations. But surely this is to give up Christianity, if that be anything distinctive and positive. For human history became Christian history, and human thought became Christian thought, not merely by the introduction of a new name. Judaism had the name "Christ" ages before. What transformed Judaism into Christianity unless there was an historically real person, with historically real teaching, by whom the change was brought about? Unless, therefore, we know Him and His message, we do not know specific Christianity. We know not the fact which differentiated the world after from the world before Christ. But for our knowledge of Him we are dependent on the announcements concerning Him made by His Apostles. For those announcements we are dependent on the New Testament, since we have practically nothing else to inform us on the subject. Unless, therefore, it be trustworthy, our Christianity must be a structure without known foundation or historical proof, practically a structure hanging in the air. Such dependence on the Testament must obviously be required to justify itself to reasonable inquiry, and hence the importance for religion and life of a discussion of its formation.

To bring the discussion, however, within the limits of an address, I shall be forced, of course, not to traverse the entire ground. I shall only undertake to present the leading facts. I shall try to exhibit the historical conditions under which the books of the New Testament came to be written, and then the process by which they were collected into a volume to which authority for faith and practice was attributed.

I. First, then, as to the origin of the New Testament books. Let us inquire what the New Testament has to say about the circumstances of its own origin and especially about the conditions under which its component parts came to be written. It is a fair rule in such investigations to begin by questioning the book which is the subject of discussion. Unless it be a singularly ingenious forgery, it will reveal to the careful reader the circumstances of its origin. Few will charge deliberate forgery against the writers of the New Testament; certainly none for whom the present address is intended. In fact even skeptical critics usually proceed by the method which I propose, often to the wanton exclusion of external evidence. But such an examination will be sufficient to give a

general, yet clear, view of the historical causes which created the New Testament; the motives which led its authors to write; the relation which they felt themselves to occupy to the subjects about which they wrote. The result will be, I apprehend, an even clearer and more persuasive view of the matrix, so to speak, out of which the Testament was born than could be obtained by such a presentation of details as would be possible on the present occasion.

1. Let us take then as a starting point the opening words of the Gospel according to Luke. In them the Evangelist tells how and why he composed his narrative, and his language may fairly illustrate the way in which the historical books of the Testament were written. The author moreover expressly distinguishes himself from the Apostles. If, therefore, his method appear agreeable to the requirements of trustworthy history, much more must the historical works of the Apostles themselves be worthy of credence.

The preface to the third Gospel is as follows: "Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to draw up a narrative concerning those matters which have been fulfilled (or, fully established) among us, even as they delivered them unto us which from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the Word, it seemed good to me also, having traced the course of all things accurately from the first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty concerning the things wherein thou wast instructed." Observe the state of things among the early Christians which is here disclosed. The time had come when they felt the need of written narratives of the life and teaching of Jesus, and various attempts at this had been already made. Luke however felt himself qualified to give a more complete account. With all however the source of information lay, not in loose tradition, but in the testimony of those who had been "from the beginning eye-witnesses and ministers of the Word," that is, eye-witnesses of Christ and His appointed servants in the Gospel. Note too the personal qualifications which in Luke's mind made him fit to compose his book. He had "traced the course of all things accurately from the first." Still further, observe the purpose which he had in view, viz., that his reader might know the certainty of the matters in which as a catechumen he had been instructed. Consider finally his statement that what he narrated was the common belief of the Christian community.

Now I call your particular attention to these incidental indications of the conditions under which this Gospel arose according to its author's own testimony. We may perceive in Luke's mind two motives: the one historical, in accordance with which he labored to give accurate information concerning Christ based on first-hand

evidence; the other doctrinal, in accordance with which he sought to establish his reader in the Church's faith concerning Christ. This double motive will be found on examination to run through his entire narrative, as is the case also with the other Gospels. For the present I call attention to the historical element. We find the strongest claim made for historical truthfulness and a clear appreciation of how that could be obtained. We see the patient investigation by the conscientious historian, and this not for the purpose of presenting new views of Christ, but for the purpose of describing with comparative fullness the grounds on which the faith of the whole Church rested. The story of Jesus was thus widely known. The original authorities had been consulted. The narrative comes to us through Luke from those best acquainted with the events and is supported also by the voice of the whole apostolic Church.

Still stronger claims to accurate knowledge are made by the fourth Evangelist. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us and *we beheld his glory*" (i. 14). "There are also many other things which Jesus did which are not written in this book, but these are written that ye may believe," etc. (xx. 20). Describing the spear-thrust from which Jesus died, he writes, "He that hath seen hath borne witness, and his witness is true; and he knoweth that he saith true that ye also may believe" (xix. 35). The first Epistle of John was undoubtedly by the same author as the fourth Gospel, even in the opinion of most rationalistic critics, and it begins "That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld, and our hands handled, concerning the Word of life, . . . that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you."

These are fair samples of the direct testimony which the historical books of the New Testament profess to give us. Unless they are utterly false and lying documents, they originated from the immediate knowledge of Christ's life possessed by the Apostles, who were His chosen and constant companions. They were composed when the needs of the primitive Church made written records necessary and were intended to embody in permanent form the united testimony of the Apostles.

2. Let us now turn from the historical books to the Epistles. Here three facts should be especially considered.

The first is that the authors of the Epistles clearly believed in the same historical Christ who is set forth in the Gospels. It is interesting to notice the incidental testimony thus borne by the Epistles to the Gospels as true reports of the Apostolic preaching. Of course we should not expect to find in an Epistle, written for other objects, a full historical account of Christ's life. But it is all the more

significant when we do find allusions to or assumptions about the historical Christ which precisely correspond, so far as they go, with the Gospel records and which in no case differ from them. It thus becomes evident that the New Testament account of Christ is an harmonious unit. One writer may present one aspect of it and his colleague another; but when we find even the incidental allusions of the Epistles agreeing with the formal narratives of the Evangelists, it becomes a demonstration that the belief of the Apostolic Church concerning Christ was based on historical evidence universally admitted and entirely consistent; while the harmony thus established between the Epistles and the Gospels affords the strongest attestation to them both as documents which have sprung from the one original circle of trustworthy authorities.

Illustrations of this corroborative testimony of the Epistles to the historical Gospels might be given in great number. It needs no quotations to prove that the writers of the Epistles believed in a divine Person incarnate and in His crucifixion, resurrection and ascension to the right hand of God. The careful reader, however, may go further and find in them references to Christ's life of lowly service (*e. g.*, Rom. xv. 8; 2 Cor. viii. 9, x. 1, xv. 3; 1 Pet. ii. 23), to particular examples of His teaching (*e. g.*, 1 Cor. vii. 10, ix. 14; 2 Thess. v. 2; Jas. i. 5, 21, 22, ii. 5), to His patience under suffering (*e. g.*, 1 Thess. i. 6; Heb. v. 8), to His temptations (*e. g.*, Heb. ii. 18, iv. 15), to His holy character (*e. g.*, 2 Cor. v. 21; Heb. vii. 26), to His betrayal (1 Cor. xi. 23), His burial (1 Cor. xv. 4), institution of the Supper (1 Cor. xi. 23, etc.), and other facts equally pertinent. The Epistles thus bear in themselves evidence that they came from the same sources as the Gospels. They prove themselves to be the didactic side of the same apostolic teaching of which the Gospels are the narrative side: and the harmony is the more demonstrative for being incidental and therefore unintentional.

The second fact to be noted in the Epistles is that they refer frequently to certain living persons as accredited and authoritative teachers.

Foremost of these were the Apostles. They appear as conspicuous and supreme in the delivery of the truth to the Church. They are said to have been chosen by Christ directly, to be authenticated as His ambassadors by signs and wonders, and to be recognized as infallible teachers and founders of the Church. It is sufficient to refer to the way in which Paul asks, when vindicating his authority, "Am I not an Apostle?"; to the way in which he and Peter begin their Epistles by styling themselves "Apostles of Jesus Christ;" to Paul's language to the Galatians, "The Gospel which was preached by me is not after man,—for neither did I receive it

from man nor was I taught it, but it came to me through revelation of Jesus Christ;" and to the vision of the New Jerusalem described by John, "which had twelve foundations and in them the names of the twelve Apostles of the Lamb."

Besides the Apostles, we also read of prophets, who, like the former, are described as chosen organs of revelations, though not endowed with the peculiar apostolic office.

Now the Apostles and prophets are represented in the New Testament as the living instruments through which God was at *that time* communicating His will to the Church, and their teaching is represented as constituting the rule of faith and practice. Thus we read of "the mystery of Christ which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men as it hath now been revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit" (Eph. iii. 5); and Paul explicitly describes the Church as "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone" (Eph. ii. 20). It is true, indeed, that the New Testament represents the Spirit as possessed by all believers and as thus bestowing miraculous powers upon many of them. But it does not represent all as possessing all the gifts, but quite the contrary (1 Cor. xii. 4); and Apostles and prophets are alone described as the organs by which the truth was directly communicated from God. It is apparent, also, that the Apostles are described as superior to the prophets, being *permanently* endowed with authority as teachers, and their teaching being the standard by which the true prophet might be tested (see 1 Cor. xiv. 35; 2 Thess. iii. 14; 2 Peter ii. 1, iii. 2, 3; 1 Cor. xii. 28; Eph. iv. 11). Thus while the truth is described as communicated through both Apostles and prophets, the former are described as the permanent guardians and guarantors of all the truth.

The New Testament Epistles further tell us that they, no less than the oral teaching of the Apostles, were considered by their writers to be the product of this divinely given authority and therefore themselves authoritative. Paul directs that his Epistles be read in the churches and circulated from church to church. "If any man thinketh himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him take knowledge of the things that I write unto you that they are the commandments of the Lord" (1 Cor. xiv. 35). "Stand fast and hold the traditions which ye were taught whether by word or by epistle of ours" (2 Thess. ii. 15).

Now my object is simply to direct attention to the conditions under which the books of the New Testament declare themselves to have been written. It is clear that they came from men who claimed and were then acknowledged to be authoritative teachers.

They came, according to their own testimony, directly from living authorities, and are, it may be added, fairly quivering with the life of each writer, as the prominence of the personal element in all of them shows. This latter fact utterly forbids the supposition of forgery. The books approve themselves, therefore, as the products not only of the original witnesses to Christ, but also of men and of an age conscious of possessing supernatural powers, one of which was the authoritative communication of the truth for the guidance of the people's faith and life.

The third fact concerning the Epistles to which I call attention, is the obvious one of the evidence they afford as to the history of the apostolic Church subsequent to Christ's ascension. Add them to the Book of Acts and the course of events becomes sufficiently clear. Yet the Epistles were written for specific purposes, so that the construction of the history, which is possible by their aid, being quite incidental to their immediate purposes, further guarantees their authenticity, and also throws much light on the formation of the Testament.

We learn that these books were called forth by the need which particular churches or communities had of specific apostolic instruction. Through them, therefore, it is possible to trace the leading events of the period. The history which they imply is perfectly intelligible and harmonizes with what we know of the situation of affairs from secular authors. In them we can trace the growth of the original Christian community out of the little band of Jewish disciples whom Jesus left, into the world-wide company of believers which the Church had become by the close of the century. We can see the racial, political, social, intellectual and religious obstacles which had to be overcome, and the representations given of all of these correspond with the known features of life in that period. These literary productions therefore take their places as monuments of a real history. The views which they afford of the several stages of the history so complete one another and adjust themselves to each other that unless the reader approach them with an *à priori* and naturalistic theory of what the history must have been, he will feel himself to be dealing with documents which are, as it were, alive with the vital currents of the primitive age, and which consequently provide sure data both for the reconstruction of the history and for an understanding of the origin of the books themselves.

These then are the leading facts which show what the New Testament itself testifies as to the conditions under which its parts originated. As has been said, it is a fair rule to begin investigation with the testimony, direct and implied, of the book which is the

subject of discussion. This is the method usually pursued by investigators. The burden of proof lies on the objector. He must show in the case before us either that external evidence can be produced to disprove the claims of these books or that their own statements are inconsistent with their claims. To thus overthrow the self-testimony of the New Testament has been the laborious effort of skeptical criticism during the past century.

So far, however, as *external* evidence is concerned, I feel safe in saying that nothing has been adduced sufficient to disprove its claims or its trustworthy character. Much on the other hand has been produced by investigators in confirmation of it. Coins have turned up in Asia and Cyprus which corroborate some of its most trifling historical details. The inscriptions which have been unearthed do the same. Pagan authorities, so far as they touch on the subject, lend support to the record in the Testament. Jewish antiquities attest the truth of the historical situation therein described. The highly complicated relation of the Jewish sects to one another and to the questions of the day is reflected in the New Testament with convincing accuracy. The relation of the Christians to Roman law, as here described, agrees with what from the known principles of Roman administration we should expect. The topography of Palestine and Asia Minor, the social and religious customs of the various communities, the political condition of different cities, the speculations of pagan minds, and many other similar facts, are here represented quite incidentally and yet with demonstrable truthfulness. Not a single ancient document has been discovered, among the many which have been brought to light, which overthrows our confidence in the story of the Testament as to the circumstances of its origin or affords reason for doubting its trustworthiness. I do not mean to deny that difficulties exist. There are a few historical details of minor importance, the truth of which, in the absence or meagreness of other evidence, cannot be demonstrated apart from the testimony of the New Testament itself, and to which plausible objections may be made. There are a few parallel passages also which are, in view of the incomplete information obtainable, difficult to harmonize. But difficulties in matters of detail are to be expected in such a case. The marvel is that they are so few. They ought not to weigh against the vast amount of positive confirmation which exists. It is reasonable to expect that further investigation will remove many of them, as it has already greatly reduced their number. They certainly do not invalidate the richly supported testimony of the New Testament to itself.

In fact, however, skeptical criticism has mainly relied not on external evidence but on certain assumptions as to the process by

which, it is said, the New Testament must have been formed. The real difficulty with the majority of critics has been to admit the action of the supernatural in history, for criticism usually takes its standards and tests from philosophy. Hence the attempt has been made repeatedly to explain the origin of these books on a naturalistic basis. This involves an entire reconstruction of early Christian history, directly in the face of the testimony of the Testament, in order to provide a set of conditions under which, on such a basis, the origin of the books may be conceived. We have had the mythical theory of Strauss, according to which the New Testament's account of Jesus arose out of the gradual growth of myths among the disciples, who attributed to Him the ideas and qualities which from their Jewish training they supposed a Messiah ought to have. This hypothesis, however, goes to pieces not only on the rock of external evidence,—for the date of the documents allows no time for the formation of such myths,—but also on the fact that the current Jewish ideas of Messiah were demonstrably not those attributed to Jesus in the Gospels. Then we have had the “tendency” theory of Baur and the Tübingen school, according to which Catholic Christianity arose out of the conflict either of Peter and Paul, or of their followers, and a later reconciliation,—a conflict which is said to have begun with the question of the relation of the Gospel to Judaism, and to have thence developed along two opposing lines of theological thought until in the second century they were merged into one another. The books of the New Testament are represented by this theory as polemical pamphlets, written to further the views of one or other of the opposing parties, or else to mediate between them, and as not hesitating to misrepresent history in the interest of the polemic, or to put forth, as apostolic, letters written by later hands. But the Tübingen theory, not only requires us to reject a large amount of external evidence, but is met by the indisputable fact that the documents themselves, taking only those admitted to be apostolic, totally disprove the assertion that the Apostles were divided and opposed. Hence, we have to-day the Ritschlian school of reconstructionists, who, turning from the hypothesis of Baur, content themselves with asserting that a legendary element is to be found in the Gospels and that some of the New Testament books arose, after the apostolic period, from that influence of Greco-Roman thought upon the Church, which, by the Ritschlian critics, is supposed to have transformed apostolic Christianity into the dogmatic, ecclesiastical system of a later time. This theory, in its turn, is confronted by the fact that the books which are admitted to be Apostolic show that original Christianity was dogmatic as well as ethical, while no constructive influence of Greek thought can be pointed out in any of them.

It is in view of all these theories that I have directed attention to the testimony which the New Testament gives to the circumstances and conditions of its origin.

Observe, by the light of the facts which I have presented, first, the note of *historicity* which these books possess; that is, their conformity to those tests by which we are accustomed to judge the historical character of a narrative. Recall the preface of Luke's Gospel and consider if such a careful and painstaking writer could possibly have belonged to a myth or legend-making movement, or could have consciously fabricated his narrative in the interest of a doctrinal debate. Recall also the incidental testimony which the Epistles provide to the Gospels, and consider if there be any indication of indifference to historical veracity. Contrast these books with the Apocryphal Gospels, where myth and legend are seen at work, and you will recognize at once the difference. Consider the independence of the Gospels, so that they do not stop to make the harmony of their accounts appear, but relate their several stories with the assurance of truth. The very differences which exist between the documents, when taken in connection with their substantial agreement, constitute a proof that they are the works of men who felt themselves to be giving facts, and who wrote, as they claim to do, on the basis of apostolic knowledge.

Observe also the note of *authority* which these books possess. They lay down their teaching positively and on the basis of an authority with which the writer was endowed. In the case of historical narrative, this takes the form of the assertion of truthfulness, as we have seen. In the case of the Epistles, it takes the form of authoritative instruction and direction. This latter feature is not usually found in writings which belong to a secondary or dependent phase of any movement. There we find appeals to earlier authority; and such we would expect to find here, if our Epistles were religious speculations seeking to establish ideas previously unacknowledged by the Church. But, with the exception of appeals made to the Old Testament and occasionally to the words of Christ, the Epistles appear as the utterances of men who felt themselves to be recognized and ultimate authorities, commissioned to lay down truth and duty to their fellow-Christians.

We might then ask, from what age could these books have come, if not from the age of the Apostles? The literature of the second century is just as obviously a dependent literature as this is obviously original. In it we find citations of these books, appeals to the authority and teaching of the Apostles, and the use of the language of the New Testament even when it is not formally quoted. These are infallible signs of a dependent, secondary

literature. How, then, could that period have produced these works, which are marked throughout by the consciousness of original authority?

But I must be content simply to point out that their internal character confirms their claims, and that the conditions under which they originated were not those which skeptical criticism is obliged to suppose. They arose out of the need, which the apostolic Church gradually came to feel, of written records of Christ's life and written directions for faith and practice. At first this need was not felt. The Apostles were in their prime, and the disciples probably did not realize how long the new dispensation was to last. But in time the necessity for written documents arose. The mere extension of the Gospel required written communications from the Apostles to the churches, containing instructions for faith and life, and thus the foundation of apostolic literature was laid. Then, too, the need arose for written records of the life of Christ, in order that the testimony of the Apostles to it might be preserved and disseminated. The beginnings of this narrative antedated our Gospels, as, indeed, the preface to Luke expressly states. But Providence did not intend to allow the story of Christ to be given to the world in mere fragments. He therefore led our first three Evangelists to give to the Church their more complete narratives, while John a few years later supplemented their accounts. Since, moreover, the change was so great from the original company of Jewish believers to the flourishing Gentile churches of thirty or forty years later, the author of the third Gospel was impelled to compose also an historical sketch showing how by the Spirit, through the Apostles, this change has been brought about. Finally, the Seer of the Apocalypse received those visions of the coming conflict and triumph with which the revelations of the Apostles appropriately closed.

The formation of the several parts of the New Testament thus appears as a perfectly natural process, provided that the historical conditions of the apostolic age which it describes, including the supernatural elements, be accepted. If the supernatural elements be rejected, the formation of the Testament can only be explained on the hypothesis of delusion and falsehood. But if we accept those supernatural facts and forces which the New Testament describes, its formation may be explained in accordance with its own claims and statements, and it appears as the natural form in which, under the circumstances, apostolic teaching would be finally embodied.

II. But now the further inquiry arises, by what steps were these books formed into a single collection and placed beside the Old Testament as the second part of Holy Scripture?

Much has been written upon this topic in modern times; but it is a matter of secondary importance, if the account which the books give of their origin be correct. The really important thing is to show that they originated under the conditions which have been described. It is a subordinate question, how soon and how widely the early Church realized just what their value was.

There are, moreover, a few facts concerning the post-apostolic age which need to be remembered in order to understand aright the process by which the New Testament collection was formed.

1. One is that the Apostles did not establish a great ecclesiastic organization, embracing in one external society all the Christians scattered throughout the Roman empire. The formation of such an organization was the work of a much later age. The Apostles established separate churches in the various cities or provinces of the empire in which they or their assistants labored. The Christians indeed realized that they were united with all their brethren throughout the world. But it was a union of the churches in faith and love. It was not an external and formally organized unity. Hence the various parts of primitive Christendom were more or less independent of one another. They had local customs and provincial peculiarities, as well as much in common. Since, therefore, the books of the New Testament originated, as we have seen and as their titles often imply, with primary reference to special communities, it often required time for them to obtain universal circulation and recognition. This was naturally the case with those written for communities distant from any place where a collection began to be made, and also for those intended for the early Jewish believers whose local organizations were swept away by the Roman wars. The same slowness in attaining circulation should likewise be expected in the case of the smaller books and those not of the most obvious importance to the Church at large.

Accordingly we find that in the second century some sections of the Church did not use all of our New Testament. Books used in one community were sometimes not known or were suspected in others. The universal acceptance of the entire collection was a gradual process. But, for the reasons given above, this should not cause surprise. In truth, it exhibits the care with which the collection was made. This difference of usage, moreover, is only found in the case of a few of the books, and those the ones to which the above reasons specially apply. The four Gospels were universally accepted from the beginning. So were the Acts and the Epistles of Paul. It was only in respect to some of the remaining books that differences existed. But the circumstances to which I have referred sufficiently explain the variations of usage; so that

the latter enable us to perceive the method by which the collection was formed and the carefulness with which it was established.

2. Another fact to be remembered is that in the post-apostolic age oral tradition was still fresh and impressive. The prominent men in the churches had been the immediate disciples of the Apostles or of their followers. They naturally loved to relate what they remembered of apostolic teaching. They occasionally speak in a familiar way of what the Apostles were reported to have said and done; so that some derive the impression that these men did not recognize the external authority of the New Testament, or rate it higher than traditions. But this is an unreasonable inference. The Americans of two generations ago were fond of relating from memory and tradition the sayings and opinions of the men who wrote our Constitution. Professor Fiske, of Harvard, has gathered the ephemeral literature of that day bearing on "The Critical Period of American History." Yet no one imagines that these floating memorials of the Federal Convention either formed the Constitution or throw doubt on its being, then as now, the acknowledged law. In like manner, the existence of oral traditions in the post-apostolic Church need throw no doubt on the existence and authority of the apostolic writings.

3. One more fact should also be remembered. The whole history of the Church, and indeed of human knowledge, illustrates the fact that truth is realized through discussion and controversy. Unhappy as the theological controversies of Christian history may appear in some aspects, they have been the means by which the truth has been understood and established.

Now, in the second century, the Gnostic heretics found themselves forced to impugn the authority of the apostolical books which the churches possessed, and this brought the whole question of their value and number and integrity into debate. The consequence was that we find the Church writers of the latter part of that century much more explicit and minute than their predecessors in their statements concerning the apostolicity, authority and inspiration of the New Testament. This, however, affords no reasonable ground for the supposition that the later writers introduced new views upon the subject. They explicitly declare their views to be the old ones. We should rather accept their more extended testimony, and use it as a guide to the understanding of the less minute and explicit statements of those who wrote before controversy on this point had broken out.

Bearing in mind then these facts, we ask on what principle the early Church collected the books of the New Testament and placed them beside the Old as part of the sacred Canon. As I have

said, the question is really of secondary importance. It is conceivable that the early Church acted on a wrong principle, or in some cases on a right and in others on a wrong one. It may be admitted as possible that she was mistaken in some of her judgments. We do not appeal to her as a dogmatic authority. If I were discussing the doctrine of the Canon, and if I were trying to prove the true principle on which the contents of the written rule of faith ought to be determined, I would appeal to the teaching of the New Testament itself. But my present object is historical. We are inquiring how the collection was actually formed. This we can only learn from the testimony of the early Church: though we cannot help thinking it strange, if the age immediately succeeding the apostolic wholly misunderstood the authority to which the Apostles taught Christians to appeal.

This question, however, though purely historical, is so involved with dogmatic opinions that writers of different theological schools are prone to represent the facts in quite different ways. The Roman Catholic, on the one hand, holds that the decision of the Church, through her councils and Popes, settles what is Scripture and what is not, and hence is disposed to affirm that from the beginning acceptance by the churches constituted the principle on which the collection was made. Many modern critics, on the other hand, are disposed to regard both the authority of the Church and of the Scripture as not primitive Christian doctrines, but growths of the post-apostolic age. Some affirm that at first no authority was recognized among the Christians except the tradition of Christ's teaching. Others add to this the tradition of the teaching of the Apostles. Others again think that at first the individual Christian, believing himself to have the Holy Spirit, was a law unto himself. But all this class of writers unite in affirming that gradually new sanctity was attributed to parts of the Testament and then to the whole; that it was thus not only collected, but canonized; and that the final estimate which the Church placed upon it was very different from that which the Apostles intended their writings to have, and which the earliest disciples attributed to them. In this view the formation of the Testament was not merely a process of collection but of canonization.

It must be evident that the theological and critical questions which are thus seen to be involved in that of the formation of the New Testament give to the historical inquiry more importance than it would otherwise have. We believe, in opposition both to the Romanist and the rationalist, that the facts show that from the beginning apostolic teaching was the external and supreme rule of the Church's faith. In it we include the testimony given by the

Apostles to Christ's life and the doctrinal and practical directions which they gave to the churches. We believe that this teaching, contained in the New Testament, and whether written by the Apostles themselves or by their companions, was bequeathed to the Church as her abiding rule of faith, was so accepted because known to be apostolic, and that on this basis the collection of New Testament books was made. I will attempt, very briefly, to give at least an idea of the historical basis on which this view of the matter rests.

(1) In the first place, appeal may be made to the unquestionable fact that the Church began her career with the idea of a written rule of faith and practice fully formed and universally accepted. There is no doubt whatever that the early Christians considered the Old Testament to be such a written rule. The New Testament clearly shows this to have been the belief of the Apostles and their disciples. It was just as certainly the belief of the Christians of the post-apostolic age. The Christian Church accepted the Old Testament from the Jewish Church as the Word of God. It will be enough for me to cite two representative statements, the one from the middle of the first century, the other from the middle of the second. Paul wrote: "Every Scripture, inspired of God, is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim. iii. 16), and by "every Scripture" he meant, as the preceding verse shows, "the sacred writings" in which Timothy had been trained by his Jewish mother. Nearly a century later Justin Martyr taught that the Old Testament is "inspired," that its writings "do not contradict one another," nor can "any fault be found with them if their meaning be understood."

But if the Church began with the belief that God had given His people a written rule, which comprised the revelation of His will under the old economy, it was natural for them, believing that a fresh and more complete revelation had been made through Christ and the Apostles, to regard the writings of the latter in the same way in which those of the prophets were regarded. The idea of a written rule of faith was thus in existence from the start. It did not have to be created by or for the Church any more than the idea of one God did. The only modification of it was with respect to the admission into the written Canon of new books. In saying this we do not intend to rest our proof on this *à priori* supposition. The proof will be given in a moment. But it is proper to begin by pointing out the unquestionable fact that the idea of a written rule was primitive and apostolic, since the fact may fairly influence our interpretation of the positive evidence.

(2) Secondly, then, and positively, it may be shown from the

New Testament books themselves, that they had already begun to be collected and were already regarded as authoritative Scripture. St. Paul (1 Tim. v. 18) appears to unite a quotation from the Old Testament with one from Luke's Gospel, and cites both as from the Scripture. St. Peter (2 Pet. iii. 16) speaks of Paul's Epistles as part of Scripture, and (*ibid.*, iii. 1, 2) places his own, as representative of the "commandment of the Lord and Saviour through your apostles," on a par with "the words of the holy prophets." Paul, as we have seen, claimed authority both for his oral and written teaching, and directed the circulation of his letters. John's Gospel, moreover, implies in its readers acquaintance with the account of Christ's life given by the Synoptists, so that the latter appear to have been in circulation at the close of the first century. His first Epistle also is a formal apostolic declaration, summing up in its introductory words the contents and purpose of the apostolic message, and then declaring, with reference to the whole literature of which he was the last author, "these things we *write*, that our (or your) joy may be made full." In fact, the close student of the Testament is continually impressed by the evidence which the books afford of the acquaintance of the writers with the books of their colleagues. Thus, to take one example, 1 Peter shows familiarity both with Paul's Epistles and with that of James. It thus becomes clear that even in apostolic times the collection had begun to be formed, and that the written works of "the apostles and prophets" of the new covenant were being added to those of the old.

(3) In the third place, appeal may be made to the testimony of the Church fathers of the second century.

The extant literature from the first three-quarters of the century is indeed comparatively scanty, but enough remains to give us such facts as the following:

(a) The writers constantly refer to the Apostles as the authoritative teachers of the Church and draw a sharp distinction between them as founders of the Church, and later instructors.

Thus Ignatius, a little more than a decade after the death of St. John, exclaims, "I do not as Peter and Paul command you. They were Apostles, I am a condemned man" (Ep. to Romans 4). His friend Polycarp, who was a personal disciple of St. John, writes, "Neither I nor any like me can follow close on to the wisdom of the blessed and glorious Paul, who, when present with you, taught accurately and firmly the word concerning truth" (Ep. to Philippians 3). These are but examples of the way in which the Apostles were spoken of by their immediate successors. Their authority as teachers was the recognized foundation of the faith.

(b) Again, the books of the New Testament were read together

with the Old Testament in the assemblies of the Christians. The earliest description we have of a Christian service represents the Gospels as thus read and commented upon by the presiding officer. It is true that other books were sometimes read also, but this was exceptional, while the use of New Testament books in service was universal.

(c) Still further, commentaries were written on them not only, as is probable, by an orthodox father (Papias), but even by an heretical writer too (Heracleon); and a most demonstrative proof of the high estimate in which the four Gospels were held is furnished by the fact that in the second half of the century a harmony of them was prepared by Tatian.

These and similar facts which might be given seem sufficiently to prove that the Christians of the second century recognized the Apostles as their authorities for faith and practice and the books of the New Testament as the written digest of their teaching bequeathed by the Apostles to the Church. We are not surprised therefore to find them citing or referring to these books as Scripture (Polycarp, Pseudo-Barnabas, Aristides, 2d Clem.) and repeating their language and directions as authoritative words. This latter fact indeed is one of the most convincing because incidental and informal. Mr. Green, in his *Short History of the English People*, describes the change which passed over the English language and literature when the Bible was translated and became the book of the common people. "The power of the book," he says, "over the mass of Englishmen showed itself in a thousand superficial ways and in none more conspicuously than in the influence it exerted on ordinary speech." A like fact may be observed in the extant Christian literature of the second century. It may be fairly said to be saturated with New Testament diction and ideas. What can this mean except that the books of the New Testament were then, as they are now, the daily food of the Christians?

(4) Finally, appeal may be made to the explicit and formal statements made by the great Church writers who flourished at the close of the second century and the beginning of the third and from whom we possess extensive literary remains.

Two of these are especially notable witnesses: Irenæus of Lyons and Tertullian of Carthage. Both wrote against the Gnostics and the chief works of both have been preserved. They declare the New Testament to be Scripture like the Old, and to form with the Old the rule of faith. They declare repeatedly that this had been the Church's belief from the beginning. I will quote a sentence from each of them. Irenæus says (iii. 1. 1), "We have learned from none others the Plan of Salvation than from those

through whom the Gospel has come down to us, which they did at one time proclaim in public and, at a later period, by the will of God, handed down to us in the Scriptures to be the ground and pillar of our faith." Tertullian writes, with reference to the Church of Rome of his day, "One Lord God does she acknowledge and Christ Jesus, born of the Virgin Mary; . . . the law and the prophets, she unites in one volume with the writings of Evangelists and Apostles, from which she drinks in her faith" (*De prescript. heret.*, 36). Tertullian expresses the matter with precision when he calls the New Testament the "New Instrument;" that is, the new rule of government or body of laws which the Church had received from her founders. Now we think that these eminent men may be reasonably supposed to have known the facts to which they testify. Irenæus was the disciple of Polycarp and the latter was the disciple of St. John. Irenæus therefore is separated by but one link from the Apostles. Both he and Tertullian declare that the Church based the authority of the New Testament on the fact that it had been given as her rule of faith by the Apostles. Apostolicity therefore was the principle upon which the collection was made. We ask if it be credible that these men, with their large opportunities for possessing information on the subject, were mistaken and that during their very lifetimes the books of the New Testament had been raised to a sanctity which they did not possess originally.

Such then are our illustrations of the evidence going to show the principle upon which the New Testament collection was formed. We have already learned that the several books claim to have originated with the Apostles and their companions and under conditions which, from even a merely historical point of view, secured to them the same trustworthiness and doctrinal authority which the Apostles themselves possessed. Now we can also trace the process by which they were made into a collection and added to the older Bible. The four Gospels were soon placed side by side as the apostolic testimony to the life of Christ and were together called "The Gospel." The Epistles were united into larger or smaller collections under the usual title of "The Apostles." As already explained, it required more than a hundred years for every one of the twenty-seven books to gain recognition from the whole Church. But each one forced its way finally to universal acceptance, because in some portion of the Church, if not everywhere, it was known on sufficient evidence to be apostolic; that is, to have either been written by an Apostle or to possess apostolic sanction. This was the test of canonicity.

Hence we affirm that the New Testament was formed by apostolic authority. Its several parts were produced by the Apostles

or their companions. It was bequeathed by the Apostles to the Church as the latter's abiding rule; not, indeed, by a formal rescript but with evident intention. It was also received by the Church as the apostolic instrument, and its parts gradually combined. It was, finally, so formed, in the Providence of God, that it adequately conveys to us the teaching as to fact, doctrine and duty of those men whom Christ chose and qualified to be the founders of His Church, and one of whom solemnly declared: "Though an angel from heaven should preach unto you any Gospel other than that which we have preached unto you, let him be anathema" (Gal. i. 8).

It only remains for me to indicate, in a few words, the bearing of this discussion. If the account which I have given of the formation of the New Testament be correct, it comes to us as historically trustworthy, since for its statements of fact we have an amply sufficient guarantee. It arose under conditions favorable to its perfect truthfulness. It conveys to us the independent yet harmonious testimony concerning Christ of those best qualified to give us the real facts. Further, it comes to us possessing the same dogmatic authority which the history tells us that the Apostles had. If its history be true, its doctrines are also; for the history shows that the authors of the Testament had authority to lay down the law for the Church. Lastly, if our account of the formation of the New Testament be correct, we are brought to the place where we must say that it was inspired by God. I might have shown specifically that the New Testament writers openly claim inspiration for their writings, and assert it of the writings of their companions. But I have sought to present the formation of the Testament in a purely historical way. Yet, certainly, when we have found reason to regard it as the genuine instrument of apostolic instruction, we have assured ourselves of qualities in it which are most necessary if it be inspired and which make its inspiration probable. Moreover, the historical process of its formation, and the large part which natural causes had to do with the result, is in no way inconsistent with its inspiration. It is characteristic of the whole Bible that its parts arose in intimate connection with historical movements, and the Bible is none the less immediately inspired for having had a human history. As Jesus Christ was God and yet truly man, so may the Bible be truly human and yet in all its parts the work of God. Such we believe it to be, and we see in the conditions under which it was formed the historical guarantee that its claims to inspiration are well founded. Its formation may be illustrated by that of a building. Quarrymen in distant places must needs hew and cut the blocks of

stone; railroads must transport these to their destination; laborers must excavate the ground; masons trim and set the stone; carpenters throw the beams and joists, and a score of other kinds of workmen must contribute their shares to the final result. But when the building is at last complete, we turn to the architect and superintendent, whose intelligence devised and directed every part of the structure, and congratulate him on the building he has given us. In a much more real sense does the New Testament appear to be the work of a Spiritual Architect and Superintendent; and when we have traced its historical formation, and compare the result with the needs of men, our conclusion can only be, This is indeed both the Work and the Word of God.

PRINCETON.

GEORGE T. PURVES.