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**The Formation**  
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# The Formation of the New Testament

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By  
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A FELLOW-PUPIL IN THE SCIENCE  
AND ART OF CHRISTIANITY



## PREFACE

ABOUT fourteen years ago, while a student in Union Theological Seminary, I began a study of the Ante-Nicene Fathers, with a view to discovering the forces and aims that caused the Christian Church to form a New Testament. I submitted an essay at that time, for which I was awarded the prize in New Testament Introduction. A few years later I read a paper on the same subject before the American Society of Church History. While a pastor in New Haven I did some work in the library of Yale University, especially on the fragments of Heracleon's "Commentary on John," preserved for us by Origen, on the ground of authority underlying the Christianity of Clement of Alexandria, and on several other subjects closely related to this discussion.

I do not claim for this fruitage of my study an exhaustive treatment. Such a treatment is practically endless. A hundred related subjects crowd in upon the question we have set before us. I have only tried to trace the conflict between the early principle of an "open vision," and the ecclesiastical principle of a closed "canon," trying to avoid the confusion of thought that comes from a failure to keep the two ideas distinct. As

far back as the age of the writer of Second Peter we find a tendency to collect the Epistles of Paul. This does not mean, however, that the author of Second Peter regards Paul's Epistles as a closed canon, or looks upon his own writing as of inferior value. Indeed, countless books were written in the early days to which the names of apostles were attached. This very act was a tacit admission of the superior authority of the apostles; but it was also a proof that the writers did not regard the age of revelation as closed. What we are trying to find here is not the time when the New Testament books were written, nor even when they were brought together in collections, but when the idea first arose that no more could be written, and that the collection was limited to a definite body of documents.

I am greatly indebted, especially in the early years of my study, to suggestion and inspiration received from Prof. A. C. McGiffert, of Union Theological Seminary. My indebtedness to Prof. Adolph Harnack, of Berlin, will be manifest to all who are familiar with his "Dogmengeschichte." Help has also been received from Professor Loofs' "Dogmengeschichte." My thanks are due to the Rev. Charles R. Gillett, D. D., librarian of Union Theological Seminary, and to Mr. Addison Van Name, M. A., librarian of Yale University, for courtesies extended to me.

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I

THE NEW TESTAMENT A SELECTION



## I

A STUDY of the motives and movements in the early church that led to the formation of a New Testament cannot fail to possess a peculiar interest. We hear much said about "a New Testament church," but it is generally forgotten that a New Testament church is a church without a New Testament. The moment we begin to ask how the documents came to be included in one book, we see that it takes just as much "inspiration" in the common conception of that word, to get the book closed, as to get it written. And yet the whole question is seldom carried beyond the problem of the composition of the documents. A work on the "Canon" is generally nothing but a history of the accepted books, that endeavors to trace back their origin to the first century. Seldom is any consideration given to other books. Not long ago, when a fragment of the Gospel of Peter was discovered, no little apprehension was aroused in the minds of many, because of the treatment it received at the hands of scholars. Some treated it as if it were authen-

tic gospel history. Some called attention to the important place it held in the church in the second century. Even the more conservative did not hesitate to contrast its sayings with those of the Four. Certain preachers, of the liberal sort, selected texts for sermons from it.

✓ All this raised the question as to how the number of Gospels became definitely and finally settled. ✓ Who determined that *four* was the accepted number? How was the decision reached? Was the man who reached it inspired? Did he receive a direct revelation, as authoritative as that of the Gospels themselves? Such questions were asked quite generally, and were never successfully answered. The disturbance subsided, and the church settled down once more, as often, to the unquestioning acceptance of tradition; settled down, all but that residuum of earnest and conscientious minds, left behind by every such period of questioning, to whom nothing is ever settled until it is answered. It is to such minds that we appeal for companionship in the following investigation.

In the middle of the second century we find that our New Testament books were mixed in with a great mass of literature, containing epistles, homi-

lies, prophecies, apocalyptic visions, apostolic histories, and gospel narratives. No effort had been made to sift this material, and some of these books were prized even more highly than those which eventually found an entrance into the authoritative collection. Those who accept this collection, as it has come down to us, and receive without question the group of documents selected by the church, must admit the inspiration of the church, in a sense just as true and definite as that of the authors of the books themselves. The same Spirit that did the writing must have done the separating. If this is the case, and the inspiration of the church is to be put on a plane of absolute equality with the inspiration of the New Testament writers, the question naturally arises whether that inspiration continues to this day, or whether it was limited to that particular period and to that special service. In order to get a closed canon must we admit the Catholic doctrine of an inspired church? If we reject the Catholic doctrine of an inspired church can we get a closed canon? Indeed, how did we get our New Testament anyway, and just what attitude must a man manifest toward it, who cannot accept it unquestioningly, merely because

it has been so accepted for many centuries by the great Christian body? These are questions of living interest, involving claims to catholicity put forth by others than the Roman Church, entering into the foundation of every Protestant body, and raising anew the very problem of the seat of authority in religion.

Many a strange hypothesis has been advanced to bridge over the hiatus between the mass of uncollected and unsifted documents, and the New Testament. The dream of a table in the midst of a great library, of certain praying saints in a neighboring room, of the rustling of a mysterious Spirit among the dusty documents, and of the final entrance of the holy men into the library to find on the table the books that constitute our present New Testament, is one that need not engage our attention. And yet, as a matter of fact, for many centuries some such conception as this was very generally accepted in the church, even by scholars. However desirable such an explanation may be from the poetic standpoint, and however closely it may seem to connect the method of the *formation* of the New Testament with the popular conception of its *composition*, such a hypothesis is overthrown the moment we open

the pages of patristic literature. Whatever idea of inspiration the student may hold, when he enters the writings of Irenæus and Tertullian he is forced to abandon the thought that the selection of the documents was made by a method supernatural and mysterious.

Almost as difficult of acceptance is the theory that the formation of the New Testament was an expression of the "Christian consciousness of the second century." The expression "Christian consciousness" is somewhat vague, but if it be taken to mean the general approval of the Christian communities, it is not true that the New Testament was so formed. For example, a book like the "Shepherd of Hermas" could not have been excluded by a consensus of popular opinion, for it was probably more widely read and admired than any book now in our New Testament. It must have been repudiated first by certain men in authority because of its heretical tendencies, have been gradually discredited by the church officials, and finally have been torn out by the roots from the depths of the Christian heart. This was actually done. In this case the "Christian consciousness" means the authority of the bishops. Then too, there were in existence books that had been

written by men like "the apostle Clement," and "the apostle Barnabas." If the test of a book is to be its apostolic authorship, and no one ever thought of questioning this, how can these books be excluded, and the writings of Mark and Luke included? If the "Christian consciousness" had been allowed to express itself on this point there can be no doubt that the decision would have been entirely different. Without utterly ignoring many of the most significant facts in our sources, we cannot account for the formation of our New Testament save by the instrumentality of episcopal authority, which, for the time being at least, was equal to that of the writings themselves. Only those who mean this authority, when they say "Christian consciousness," have any right to use the term. The phrase sounds well, and, like the more poetic explanation of the miracle in the library, seems to save us a great deal of trouble and investigation. But the facts of history are against it. The books were not put to a vote. The popular consciousness had little to do with the matter. The sifting was entirely done by men whose ecclesiastical position put them on a level of authority with the New Testament writers themselves.

It will readily be seen that we are here dealing with a most delicate question. The relation of the Roman Catholic Church to the New Testament is somewhat of an anomaly to her opponents. It has always been a strong point in Protestant polemics that her extension of the period of revelation beyond the time of the canon leaves no place in her system for the canon itself. This is true, in a sense, but the books were in existence before the Catholic Church, and something had to be done with them. The Catholic Church might have dispensed with them, on the ground that she believed in the continuation of inspiration through the medium of her officers, but she was given no choice in the matter. They were there, and were destined to give her no end of trouble as the years went by, because of the contrast they furnished between primitive and Catholic Christianity.

On the other hand, those Protestant writers who use the New Testament as a weapon against the old church, do not always realize that the extension of the period of revelation beyond the apostles, and its confinement to the bishops, was necessary in the beginning in order to get the canon closed. They make much ado over "A

New Testament Church," and forget that the church had no New Testament. The Catholic Church gave it to us. If the Protestant theologian takes the ground that the church ought to have put the matter to a popular vote, he practically admits that we ought to have a different canon from that one which he so strongly insists is "the only infallible rule of faith and practice." So his position becomes just as much of an anomaly to the Catholic, as is that of a Catholic to him.

As we shall see, there was a movement in the early church that opposed the Catholic doctrine of the confinement of inspiration to the bishops, a belief in the universal inspiration of believers; but the claim was easily made against these people that they had no need of a New Testament at all. Among the Montanists, the books might have been put to a popular vote, but the fact that the prophetic gift was still supposed to be continued among them did away entirely with the necessity of a closed canon in those circles, and made them the strong opponents of all efforts to "set boundary-posts to God."

What, then, did give birth to the necessity for a New Testament? Why was it that away on

into the middle of the second century the church grew and expanded with remarkable rapidity, without giving a thought to collecting and closing her authoritative documents? There is but one explanation. Up to that time she made no effort to become a speculative homogeneity. She had no well-defined system of doctrine. She was more interested in changing men's lives than in changing their opinions. She was trying to make them morally at one with the will of God, rather than intellectually in agreement over a theory of the origin of the cosmos. All books that helped to this end were accepted without question, and history tells us that the number of such books was very great. It ought to answer forever the hypothesis that narrowness is essential to progress, that the period of Christianity over which hovers the greatest romance, while she was secretly building up that influence that was soon to surprise the world, was the period when her authoritative literature was without limit.

As the years went by, however, there came into the church a tendency, having its origin in the spirit of Greece, that made redemption consist in knowledge, in the acquaintance of the finite

spirit with the character and the purposes of the Infinite. This tendency took the emphasis away from moral conduct, and placed it upon speculation. Its passion for redemption became a search for the true science. What was the Christian conception of the origin of the universe? Where was to be found the system of thought as taught by Christ? Manifestly only in the writings of those to whom he taught it. So began an investigation of the Christian Scriptures, with a view to finding the ontological explanation of the origin of the cosmos, as contained implicitly in their teachings. At first the church was shocked. Christians everywhere cried out against the new movement. The finding of mysteries about creative powers, and about the battles of personified ideas in those documents which had heretofore been but sources of inspired truth, disgusted them. The Christian conflict had been very real and tangible up to this time. Persecutions, idolatries, immoralities, the temptations to apostasy, the allurements of sense, and all the dangers of a corrupt society, had made it very plain to the mind of the average Christian what it meant to be "redeemed." But suddenly the word received a new content. It became a battle of con-

ceptions up in the clouds. It consisted in mystic union with God through a comprehension of his method of creation. Redemption was through "gnosis," or knowledge. However much the simple Christian might resist this tendency, it had come into the church to stay. When once the effort to find a "system" takes possession of a man or a church, and "faith" is identified with holding the proper doctrine, there is no stop until religion is reduced to a formula, and salvation consists in the holding of the right creed.

So the church began to speculate on its written memorials. It was taken for granted that there was a definite body of writings, contained somewhere in the mass of Christian literature, that was a theological unit, and that contained the Christian "system." All that remained to be done, in order to form a New Testament, was to find these books, and bring them together. This was no easy task, as events proved. Until the purpose to weed out the heretical books, and to gather together those that are authoritative, is born, it is not proper to speak of the existence of a New Testament. Not until a distinction is made between those documents from which men have a legal right to draw their doctrines,

and those which, though containing a certain amount of truth, are not authoritative in every particular, is there present that legal conception which is expressed by the words "canon," and "canonical." The term is juridical. There may exist in the church a vast amount of sacred literature, of varying degrees of value, which the different assemblies regard as holy, and read in their public meetings, some estimating one class of books most highly, and some another, long before a canon is in existence. The formation of a canon implies, not the collection of these books, but their separation into canonical and apocryphal.

It is very essential to bear this in mind. What we are seeking is not the origin of the separate documents, but the origin of the New Testament. A book may have been in existence long before it was regarded as a part of a single and authoritative collection. Its insertion in such a collection does not necessarily imply a change in the value put upon it, but a change in the use made of it, and above all, its separation from certain other books that have hitherto stood on a level with it. Any work on the "Canon," which ignores this distinction, however valuable it may

be as an apologetic account of the antiquity of the accepted documents, will be utterly valueless as an account of the formation of the New Testament. On the other hand, to show that this distinction was not made until the latter part of the second century does not cast any contempt upon the books, or imply that they were not valued as the revelations of God for many years previous to their formation into a New Testament. Such a formation implies a sifting process for the purpose of segregating the doctrinally reliable books, and also implies the existence of certain questions of a speculative nature which require an authoritative norm for their settlement. A New Testament fences off its contents from all outside literature, and will not allow its documents to mix freely with outside books, however useful such books may be for purposes of devotion. A canon exalts itself as the supreme court of appeal in doctrinal strife, as the last resort for determining the wisdom and will of the Infinite.

But, granted the assumption that there is a complete science to be found in the Christian Scriptures, a difficulty presents itself. These Scriptures deal primarily with matters of conduct, and are often nothing but simple accounts

of the sayings and doings of Jesus. How can a cosmology be found in such books? Here the allegorical method of interpretation comes in. This method, which finds great mysteries and hidden meanings in numbers and symbols, had enabled Philo to discover the entire Platonic philosophy in the Pentateuch. In the same way it had long been customary for the best educated men in the little Christian communities to prove that the Old Testament was a Christian book. Up to the time when Heracleon, the Gnostic, prepared his commentary on the Gospel of John, it is impossible to find any example of such a method of interpretation being applied to a Christian book. As soon as the idea was born that there was a definite system of theology taught by Christ and the apostles, we find this method used in the interpretation of the documents. It became necessary to prove that all doctrinal strifes were foreseen by the New Testament, and a norm therein provided for their settlement. This necessity led the church Fathers to use the allegorical interpretation with increasing freedom. As soon as an effort was made to select an authoritative set of books from the great mass of literature, and Christian teachers, instead of standing upon their own inspired

authority, began to appeal to documents, we find the beginnings of that method which enabled each school of thought in Greece to find its tenets in the fables of Homer, the text-book or Bible of paganism. At first the Fathers ridiculed it, but they soon fell into it. We find Irenæus, in almost the same chapter, laughing at the philosophers, and pilfering their method. Of course, the New Testament itself was not supposed to construct explicitly a system of theology, founded on a definite cosmological conception of the universe; but it was taken for granted that such a system was in the mind of the great Author. So all that remained to be done, in order to construct such a system, and group Christian thought about it, was to make explicit that which was implicit in the canon. For this no better tool could be found than the old eclectic method of interpretation.

If the New Testament was not formed by a popular vote, but by the power and authority of certain men in ecclesiastical positions in the church, we cannot refrain from asking, "What sort of men were they? what motives actuated them? did they do their work carefully?" Many of these questions, which naturally come upon us in great numbers, will be answered implicitly in the

following pages. One thing, however, we must not forget: we are not able to hear both sides of the case. The defendant has been silenced. The great mass of early Christian literature has been destroyed, and we are almost invariably dependent for the teachings of a heretical writer upon what is said of him by his theological opponents. We are forced to say, "Here is a place to hang up a red light." The polemics of men like Tertullian and Epiphanius, whatever we may think of the earnestness of their spirit or the truth of their creed, was not of sufficiently high character to justify implicit confidence in their judgments of men. We can hardly say that it is safe, even now, to judge of a man by reading extracts from his writings made by one of the opposing school of thought. The reader can easily see what our attitude must be toward the statements of writers living in an age when error was considered a crime.

What we are to seek in our investigation is not the origin of the separate documents, but the origin of the New Testament. A canon is of necessity a homogeneity, having one real Author, and not many. To recount the history of the literature contained in it is altogether a different

task from the effort to give an account of its formation. We are not trying to discover when the documents were written, but when they came to be looked upon as the integral parts of a single and authoritative volume. Our search is for the birth of an idea. The Epistles of Paul may have been regarded as sacred, and may have long been used in public reading because of their ethical and spiritual value, without once being looked upon as parts of a closed collection that is useful, not only in building men up in the religious life, but as the "last will and testament" of the apostles, as a literal authority in settling difficult doctrinal disputes, and as the repository of thought that is the key to the explanation of the universe. To prove that this book or that was very highly prized, and was quoted by the earliest Christian writers, has nothing to do with the question as to how it came to be regarded as a part of a canonical collection, to which appeal must be made in settling the disputes of a divided Christendom.



II

THE FIRST NORM OF AUTHORITY



## II

“ I HAVE no commandment of the Lord,” said Paul in dealing with a certain question; “ yet I give my judgment, as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful ” ( 1 Cor. 7 : 25 ). One has but to read the context to see that the apostle refers to a direct spiritual communication, and not to any saying obtained from a document, when he speaks of a commandment of the Lord. This source of authority was found in the church for over a hundred years after the death of Christ. The Spirit of Christ was supposed to be present in his church, inspiring the heart, informing the mind, and guiding and directing the counsels of his people. To be sure, not all Christians had the fine discrimination of Paul between the “ commandment of the Lord ” and their own judgment. Wild prophets, possessing the gift of “ tongues,” or receiving spiritual communications by means of dreams and trances, were found in many Christian communities, and great importance was attached to the revelations received through them. The number of “ apoca-

lyses" far outnumbered the "gospels" in the literature of the second century. The nature of these revelations can only be inferred from the one that was circulated under the name of John, and that eventually found a place in the New Testament. Through this, as a window, we can look in upon the church of the second century, and obtain a glimpse of the spirit that ruled it. The favorite vehicle for "commands of the Lord" was not the more sober history, but the imaginative work, clothed in highly colored and figurative language. The reason for this preference was that the "commands of the Lord" had not yet become things of the past, but were a spiritual and present reality. Despite all the grotesque and mystical forms which the belief in a present Christ assumed, there was back of it a mighty and practical power. Christianity was not a thing of yesterday to the Christian of the time of Hadrian. To possess the "mind of Christ," to allow the "Spirit of Christ to rule in him," to feel Christ's plans and purposes working themselves out in his life, was the one great desire of his heart.

A correction of the abuses to which this doctrine of a present inspiration was subject, was

found in another and parallel norm of authority. Men who had walked and talked with Christ handed down by word of mouth certain sayings of his, which gradually became common property, and assumed somewhat the nature of a moral code. As the days dragged by, and life after life disappeared, and the survivors of the generation of Christ became fewer and fewer, the tendency to make this authority literary, that is to fix these "commands of the Lord" in documents, slowly began to supersede the method of oral tradition. A transformation so radical, however, could not take place all at once. Indeed, we find Papias, of Hierapolis, in Phrygia, a Christian writer who flourished a little before the middle of the second century, and suffered martyrdom about the year 160, saying this, "For I did not think that what was to be gotten from the books would profit me as much as what came from the living and abiding voice."<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, he assures us that if he met some one who had talked with some one who had seen the Lord, he questioned him very carefully, because he regarded this tradition as more important and reliable than anything he could get from the documents. In this

<sup>1</sup> Eusebius, H. E., III., 39, 4.

Papias represents an attitude very common in earlier times, but one that was dying out in his day. His work was entitled, "Exegesis of the Sayings (or Oracles) of the Lord." His norm of authority was confined to the "commandments of Christ," but he was willing to gather these commandments, even after one hundred years, from some old man who had met and talked with a disciple, or a hearer of the Master.

This exegetical work of Papias plainly had no theological purpose, but was solely for the inspiration and guidance of the religious life of the church. Some light is thrown upon his purpose by what he said of Matthew. He tells us that this evangelist drew up a collection of the sayings and doings of Christ "in the Hebrew dialect," and that "every one translated it as he was able." An effort was being made to fix the form of the Gospel more definitely. These "sayings" of Christ, which we find distributed through the other Gospels, but grouped in Matthew, were a sort of a "new law" to many of the early Christians. Papias gathered together the "Oracles" of Christ, not for any theological end, but purely with an ethical and spiritual purpose. To this day those to whom Christianity is a spirit and a

life, rather than an organization and a theology, find it made most luminous in the Sermon on the Mount. The first collections of the "Oracles" of Christ can hardly be called an effort to make Christianity a historical religion, buried in certain documents, for the sole aim in their production was to keep alive in the church the inspiration of the spirit and the mind of Christ. The study of words and phrases, the discovery of great world-forming mysteries in a preposition or an accent, had not yet entered the church. Christianity was an experience, not a theory; the disciple of this period was known by his fruits, rather than by his creed. Persecution kept the Christian's faith in a living Christ pure and vital, and as long as Christ was present in the church there was no need of looking for him in a book.

When the *Didache* calls itself "The Teaching of the Lord Through the Apostles," and exhorts its readers so frequently to do "as the Lord commanded," it has no idea that these commands are fixed in a book, nor does it endeavor to justify itself by quotation. One has but to read the document to see that a large number of its commands must have been received through oral tradition, or by direct inspiration. The modern reader fre-

quently asks, "When did Christ say that?" And yet the effort to fix "the teachings of the Lord through the apostles" is itself somewhat significant. The multiplicity of questions of a practical nature, arising in the church, gave birth to a demand for some more concise, definite, and authoritative statement of the nucleus of the teaching of Christ. The *Didache* was simply one of many efforts to meet this demand. The revelations of wandering prophets were not entirely satisfactory to the more sober and practical Christians. Examples of this tendency might be multiplied from Polycarp to the Philippians, from the First Epistle of Clement, and from the homily called the Second Epistle of Clement, where we frequently find exhortations to fulfil "the commands of the Lord," and where citations are commonly introduced by, "The Lord declares," or "The Lord says."<sup>1</sup>

The reader cannot fail to see in this a distinct advance over the conception of Paul, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, in the question of the vehicle of inspiration. Paul's thought of a direct revelation from Christ, through the pres-

<sup>1</sup> See Polycarp 2 : 3; 1 Clem. 13; 2 Clem. 17 : 3; 3 : 4; 6 : 7; 8 : 4; 4 : 5; 9 : 11; 5 : 2; 6 : 1.

ence of his Spirit in the soul, was gradually giving way to an appeal to written "oracles." In that conception of Christianity as a "new law" we have the germs of a development that was destined to result in the death of spiritual religion, and in the formation of a great hierarchy. The imitation of Christ was to become, not a repetition of his spirit, but a painful obedience to his decrees. The "fruits of the Spirit" were to pass over from the ripening products of an inner life, to the copying of an outward pattern, and then to the performance of a ritual. The germs of a hierarchy are here in these ethical teachers, called the "Apostolic Fathers."

And yet they were near enough to primitive Christianity to be free from the conception of a book religion. In all their references to "commands of Christ" they make no effort to establish the authority of any document, or collection of documents, which profess to contain these commands. Second Clement quotes from the Gospel of Peter in exactly the same manner as from the others.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, sayings of Christ are to be found in great abundance in all the writers of this period, which cannot possibly be identified,

<sup>1</sup> See Edition by Lightfoot, Part I., Vol. II., p. 202.

or be made to parallel, with anything contained in our Gospels. As we observe their great freedom in the matter of quotation, and the very slight regard they have for literal exactitude and authority, we are forced to admit that they were very far from being ruled by the conception of a New Testament. The documents were of value to them merely as repositories of commands that were useful in building men up in the Christian life. They had no theological interest whatever, and mingled their own exhortations with those of the apostles and Christ without the least regard to exactness of statement.

1  
Summary  
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We thus see that there were three sources of authority in the church previous to the middle of the second century. The commands of Christ were received by direct spiritual communication, by word of mouth from those who heard him or his disciples, and by documents that were in general acceptance in the churches. No effort was made to equate these three sources of authority, or to determine their relative values. "The time was short." The three could live side by side in a church that was expecting momentarily a world-cataclysm, or the end of the æon. The "living and abiding voice" was not supposed to

be at variance with the books, as the latter owed their very existence in the beginning to the former. Few churches possessed more than one copy of the gospel narrative, and a traveling prophet or teacher, who was acquainted with the commands of the Lord as recorded in other Gospels, was at liberty to change or add to a particular manuscript, as he might deem necessary. In this way, no doubt, many of the alterations in the text took place, which gave Origen so much trouble when he undertook in later years to establish the gospel text. As long as passing events, like the news of a Roman defeat, the report of a distant flood, the advance of an invading army, or a midnight shower of meteors, were looked upon as the heralds of impending doom, there would be little discussion of the niceties of textual interpretation. Even in more settled and rational communities, where the old expectation was disappearing, the main interest among men from the common walks of life was in questions of conduct, that were easily settled by an appeal to the teaching of Jesus, or by some revelation of a church prophet. The reference to the authority of the past had no other design than the upbuilding of men in the Christian type of character.

The theological interest had not yet entered the arena. No cosmological speculations had yet made it necessary to find volumes of philosophy in one of those simple "commands of the Lord." The spread of Christianity did not take place at first among men who had been influenced by the doctrines of the philosophical schools.

But suddenly the scene changed. Christianity became better known, and was no longer despised as an inhuman and brutal superstition, at whose feasts it was customary to drink blood. Men of thought and social standing came into the church. Among them were scholars from the ranks of the Platonists, who had been trained to find a system of philosophy in the poems of Homer. These men came with a real redemptive interest, but with a conception of redemption steeped in the spirit of Greece. The salvation they were seeking was merely an escape from the entanglements of matter, by means of a mystical union with the Spirit of God. This union was to be brought about by an intellectual apprehension of the plans and purposes of the Infinite. Plato taught that vice was ignorance, and that virtue consisted in the holding of right opinions. To him ideas possessed a saving power in themselves.

In the second century certain followers of this great sage began to find in Christianity the solution of the cosmological and soteriological mysteries of the universe. They began to write commentaries on the Christian books, with a view to bringing out the essence of the Christian system. They worked out an elaborate and profound systematic theology. They introduced the old intellectual aristocracy of Greece into the Christian communities, drawing a sharp line between those who understood the deep mysteries of Christianity, and those who merely apprehended it as a system of external commands. The chief interest of our investigation of these men, however, is the fact that their appeal to the written memorials of the apostolic age was of necessity far different from that of the early church during her period of missionary expansion. It is one thing to use books as a source of inspiration in the building up of the Christian life, and it is quite another to make them the dogmatic basis of systematic theology, the source of proof-texts to establish creeds and Confessions, the last appeal in an effort after a code of canon law.



III

THE PERIOD OF CONFUSION



### III

THE great majority of Christian writers in the second century have no conception of the existence of a definite collection of documents, constituting a closed book, and representing the authoritative teaching of the apostles. In the present chapter we shall endeavor to show that many of the men who molded the life and thought of the day were utterly without the idea of a New Testament. For them there was no set of writings, which had been collected and equated and handed over to "the heirs of the apostles," as the final authority in establishing the truth. For them the apostolic college was not a publishing house, and the twelve followers of Christ had not filled up the measure of truth. Indeed their norm of authority is not apostolic at all. Many of them, like the author of the pseudo Cyprian treatise, "De Aleatoribus," who was doubtless a writer of this period, estimate the prophetic writings of the Old Testament, together with the books of the Christian prophets, more highly than any other class of writings. These constitute

the "divine Scriptures," the "sayings of the Lord through the prophets." They are of even greater importance than the Gospels, inasmuch as they contain more directly the teaching of Christ, than the simple historical account of what he said in Galilee. Still other writers regarded the philosophy of the Greeks as a source of revelation, and admitted that whatever was true must have been inspired. Their Bible was the whole range of truth, and anything that commended itself to them as Christian was regarded as a revelation.

Let us take a few concrete examples. Theophilus of Antioch, bishop of that important See in the East, represents an attitude that was very common in the second century, in places where the church came into contact with Greek culture. In the second book to his friend Autolytus, he declares that the sibyl has been a bearer of the Holy Spirit to the Greeks, as was the prophet to the Hebrews.<sup>1</sup> This belief was very common among the early apologists. The effort to reconcile certain elements of Greek philosophy with the Christian system gave birth to this theory. It was entirely consonant with the common belief in a

<sup>1</sup> To Autolytus, II., 9.

continuance of the prophetic gift. The ground of authority to men like Theophilus is well illustrated by words like these, "Wherefore the holy Scriptures teach us, as do all the Spirit-bearing men, one of whom, John, says."<sup>1</sup> He has no fixed and definite norm save that of the inspiration of the Spirit, which is just as possible in a Greek sibyl, as in an apostle. Such an attitude, on the part of the occupant of the most important See in the East, is very significant. An educated Greek who embraced Christianity would naturally weave into his argument occasional quotations from the cultured writers of his native tongue. That these quotations should be looked upon as authoritative and inspired utterances shows clearly how wide was the notion of sacred literature in Antioch. Theophilus quotes apocryphal sayings of Christ, without designating them as such.<sup>2</sup> His first and second books are filled with Pauline ideas and phrases that are mixed into the argument in a most free and easy manner, with no attempt at literal accuracy. It is very evident that the thought in the mind of Theophilus is that he is quoting a "Spirit-bearing man," and not bolstering up his argument by

<sup>1</sup> To Autolytus, II., 22.

<sup>2</sup> To Autolytus, II., 34.

reference to authoritative documents. It is the "voice of the gospel" that is all important to him.<sup>1</sup>

Serapion, who became bishop of Antioch about A. D. 190, a man of considerable influence and the author of many writings, represents a distinct advance upon Theophilus. Discussions of theological questions had arisen in the diocese, and there was a demand for a little more definite ground of authority. This ground Serapion lays down in the words, "For we, brethren, receive both Peter and the other apostles as Christ." But the bishop shows how far Antioch was from possessing a settled canon of authority, when he says of the Gospel of Peter, "As I had not read the Gospel which they put forth under the name of Peter, I said, 'If this is the only thing which occasions littleness of soul among you, let it be read.'"<sup>2</sup> The whole quarrel of his flock over this particular form of the gospel narrative he regarded as a "littleness of soul." His final reason for the rejection of this Gospel was not because he had come to learn that the number of the Gospels was limited to four, but because in this Gospel he believed that the narrative had been tampered

<sup>1</sup> To Autolycus, III., 13.

<sup>2</sup> Eusebius, H. E., VI., 12.

with in the interest of a sect that was heretical. If no such tendency had been found in it, it would have been as authoritative as any other traditional form of gospel history. He thought he found elements of Docetism in this Gospel, and banished it from his church for reasons very similar to those which led the Alogi to reject the Gospel of John.

An important witness to the origin of the New Testament canon is Tatian, a strolling rhetorician who became converted to Christianity in Rome. Sometime in the latter part of the second century he went to Syria as a missionary, and constructed a Gospel that was called the "Diatessaron" ("out of four").<sup>1</sup> This document held its place as an authoritative Gospel in the Syrian churches for two whole centuries. Theodoret, who was bishop of Cyrrhus, in Syria, during the early part of the fifth century, says that in his diocese alone he caused more than two hundred copies to be withdrawn. It is just such a book as a missionary would prepare, who wished to present the gospel story to a new people in as concise and clear a manner as possible. Undoubtedly

<sup>1</sup> Zahn, "Tatian's Diatessaron," Erlangen, 1881. Julicher, "Einleitung i. d. N. T." S 300. Hemphill, "The Diatessaron of Tatian," London, 1888. Edition by Harris. London, 1890.

Tatian constructed this book in Rome, and took it with him to Syria. The importance of the Diatesaron as a witness to the fact that the number of the Gospels in general use in a certain part of the church, say Rome, was fairly definitely fixed at four, has obscured its other bearing, viz., on the estimation in which those Gospels were held. The book is generally called a "harmony," but such a word is misleading. If we were to publish such a "harmony" to-day, and then were to burn up all existing copies of the separate Gospels, we would have an analogous state of affairs to that which existed in nearly all the churches of Syria for many years. No harmony is intended to supplant the work which it harmonizes. Tatian's work was a *creative*, not an *apologetic* act. Eusebius calls it a "Gospel,"<sup>1</sup> and such it was. Professor Moore, of Andover, compares it to the redaction of the Pentateuch, saying, "It certainly is within the bounds of possibility that, if the Syrian church had been left to itself, without constant contact with the greater church of the West, the knowledge of the separate Gospels might in the end have been lost, even among the learned. The parallel to the history of the Pentateuch

<sup>1</sup> H. E., IV., 29,6.

would then have been complete.”<sup>1</sup> The Diatessaron was not rejected at last by popular vote, but was arbitrarily uprooted by the arm of authority.

If, in the days of Tatian, there had been a New Testament canon, the literal text of which was regarded as authoritative, the Diatessaron could never have had such a history. It manifestly represents a time when the sole interest attaching to the Gospels was the Life they revealed, and very little regard was had for their literary authorship. We cannot possibly suppose that the Syrian church was far enough advanced in doctrinal strifes over the “Johannine Question,” or the “Synoptic Problem,” to be in need of a “harmony.” If we take the situation naturally, we shall see that the condition of the New Testament in the Syrian churches was a typical one. Manuscripts were scarce; churches were springing up; there was a call for brevity; and so the documents were treated very freely. All our sources point to the fact that the original Bible of the Syrian church was the Old Testament and the Diatessaron. Says the “Doctrine of Addaei,”

<sup>1</sup>“Tatian’s Diatessaron and the Pentateuch,” *Journal of Bib. Lit.* IX., 209. For further discussion of the Diatessaron see Harnack, “*Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*,” IV., 471 ff. “*Texte und Untersuchungen*,” I., 1, and the pamphlet, “*Das Neue Testament*.”

“But many people assembled day by day and came to the prayer of the service, and to the reading of the Old Testament and the New, viz., the Diatessaron.”<sup>1</sup> This attitude is almost exactly analogous to the development in the rest of Christendom, where the first ground of authority was “the teaching of the Lord.” The only desire for any documentary authority was for the assistance it might give in the upbuilding of the religious life, and the Diatessaron was sufficient for this. In later years, when the Syrian church became interested in theological matters, it split up into two factions, a Bardensian party and an orthodox party, that almost completes the analogy to the prior development in the church at large.

If we turn to Justin Martyr, who was Tatian’s teacher in Rome, we find almost no use made of any Christian writing except the Gospels. For Justin there is but one source of authority, the divine Logos. It was the Logos who spake through the prophets of old.<sup>2</sup> It was the Logos who was the essence of that authority to which he appeals so frequently, “the Spirit of Prophecy.”<sup>3</sup> Of the Old Testament writers Justin says

<sup>1</sup> English translation by Phillips, London, 1876, p. 34.

<sup>2</sup> Apology, I., 34, 36.

<sup>3</sup> Apology, I., 35, 36, 39, 41, 42, 44, 51, 59, 60, 63; Dial., 43, etc.

that they did not speak their utterances themselves, but by the divine Logos who moved them.”<sup>1</sup> There is no definite and established number of Christian writings to which this same thought is applied. The Christian documents are useful to Justin chiefly as a confirmatory record of what was foretold by the “Spirit of Prophecy,” and as a repository of the instruction of Christ. He uses the “Acts of Pilate”<sup>2</sup> and the “Preaching of Paul”<sup>3</sup> (or perhaps the Ebionite Gospel) as authentic records, like the Gospels, for proving that the predictions of the prophets in regard to Christ were correct. Of course, Justin makes no distinction between the revelations of the Logos in the Old Testament, and his more recent utterances and manifestations in the person of Christ. He is never led into a discussion of the question whether Christianity is a new and independent revelation. Indeed, in one place, he makes the prophets sponsors for the writers of the Gospels, asserting that he believes the things handed down by those who have recorded what concerns our Saviour, because through Isaiah “the Prophetic Spirit” has declared the same things.<sup>4</sup> In his dialogue with Trypho the Jew, where he

<sup>1</sup> Apology, I., 36. <sup>2</sup> Apology, I., 35, 48. <sup>3</sup> Dial., 88. <sup>4</sup> Apology, I., 33.

is constantly led into asserting that there is no salvation save through Christ, that the ceremonial law of Israel is unnecessary, that Christ is useless to those who keep the law, and that the ancients who were righteous under the law were saved through Christ, there is not one passage which we can definitely fix as a quotation from the Epistles of Paul. Indeed, in all the writings of Justin we cannot find a quotation from any New Testament writing, except the Gospels. His only Christian source of authority is to be found in such expressions as the following, in which he abounds, that the Christians worship God, "and the Son who came forth from him and taught us these things";<sup>1</sup> that "our teacher of these things is Jesus Christ, who was born for this purpose";<sup>2</sup> that Christians are "taught by Christ and the prophets who preceded him";<sup>3</sup> and that since their "persuasion by the Word"<sup>4</sup> they live "conformably to the good precepts of Christ,"<sup>5</sup> who "declares whatever we ought to know."<sup>6</sup>

So little is Justin ruled by the idea of a definite deposit of authoritative tradition, that he declares that "every race of men are partakers" of the

<sup>1</sup> Apology, I., 6, 13.

<sup>2</sup> Apology, I., 13.

<sup>3</sup> Apology, I., 23.

<sup>4</sup> Apology, I., 14.

<sup>5</sup> Apology, I., 14.

<sup>6</sup> Apology, I., 63.

Logos, and that all who have lived according to the divine Logos are Christians. Among the Greeks such men as Socrates and Heraclitus are to be so classed.<sup>1</sup> He tells the emperor, in his Apology, that he does not wish to weary him by repeating all the names of those Greek and Roman worthies who have been guided and inspired by the Word. They knew the Logos, but they did not know the whole Logos, which is Christ.<sup>2</sup> "Christ," he says, "was partially known even by Socrates."<sup>3</sup> "The Logos, who taught in Socrates, afterward took shape and became man, and was called Jesus Christ."<sup>4</sup> Stoics, poets, historians, and the followers of Plato, all "spake well in proportion to the share they had in the spermatic Logos."<sup>5</sup> The sibyls and Hystaspes also partook of the same revelation.<sup>6</sup> The difference between all these and the Christian revelation is that the latter is "fuller and more divine."<sup>7</sup> This stand, that "there are seeds of truth among all men,"<sup>8</sup> which the church abandoned when she began to form a hierarchy, was very common in the early apologists. That

<sup>1</sup> Apology, I., 46; II., 8, 10.

<sup>2</sup> Apology, II., 10.

<sup>3</sup> Apology, II., 10.

<sup>4</sup> Apology, I., 5.

<sup>5</sup> Apology, II., 10.

<sup>6</sup> Apology, I., 20.

<sup>7</sup> Apology, I., 20.

<sup>8</sup> Apology, I., 44.

Christians know the truth better than others Justin proves from this fact—not that they have received it from the apostles who were given the authority to publish the true tradition—but because there are among them some who do not know the form of letters, and even some who are blind, who have arrived at the highest height of the attainments of the philosophers, inspired directly by God.<sup>1</sup> There is very little conception of a closed canon of revelation in such an argument as that. Eusebius assures us that Justin overshadowed all the great men who illumined the second century, by the splendor of his name.<sup>2</sup> He can be taken as a certain testimony to the fact that in the year A. D. 150 the church in Rome did not possess a new collection of documents that could be placed side by side with the Old Testament, as a canon of authority. Aside from the Old Testament Justin knows nothing whatever of any authority, save that which comes from the life and teaching of Christ.

A similar testimony is borne by Hegesippus, who wrote his "Memoirs" under Bishop Eleutherus, in Rome, somewhere about the year A. D. 170. He says that in every city that is held

<sup>1</sup> Apology, I., 60.

<sup>2</sup> Eusebius, H. E., L., 4, 11,

“ which is preached by the Law and the Prophets and the Lord.”<sup>1</sup> A later writer greatly strengthens this testimony by quoting Hegesippus as saying that certain men falsely interpret “ both the Holy Scriptures and the Lord.”<sup>2</sup> We possess but a fragment or two of the writings of this author, which have been preserved for us by Eusebius and Photius, and it is very significant that in such scant material we should find two distinct indications that a prominent Roman writer in the latter part of the second century still held to the old norm of authority of the Old Testament and the teaching of Christ. In an investigation like that which we are conducting, this is all the more significant because of the fact that in later years, when the canon had been formed, there was a tendency to suppress all writings that tended to undermine the conception that from the very beginning the church had possessed a closed collection of authoritative and apostolic documents.

If we turn to Africa we find the condition of affairs very similar to that which obtained in the West. The words and doings of Christ were regarded as authoritative, but there was no fixed collection of documents conveying to the world

<sup>1</sup> Eusebius, H. E., IV., 22, 3.

<sup>2</sup> Photius, Bibliotheca, Cod., 232.

his teaching and his life, much less any group of letters written by apostles, from which it was legitimate to draw doctrines and precedents. In the "Acts of the Martyrs of Scillis" the accused Christians are asked by the proconsul, "What sort of things are contained in your chests?" and they answer, "The Books that are in use among us; and in addition to these the epistles of a holy man named Paul." This separation of "Books," (or "Scriptures") and "epistles" indicates that to their mind the epistolary form of literature was not quite on a level with the historical. Such a separation was very general. It is not probable that any Epistles were read in public worship in the second century. They were considered to be more for private perusal and for particular instruction. While the Gospels slowly grew into a position of authority as a result of being read so continuously in the churches, the public reading of the Epistles seems to have come only after they were established as authoritative writings. This may account for Justin's lack of familiarity with the Epistles of Paul, as well as the slight influence of Pauline conceptions upon the growing hierarchy of the second century.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Cambridge Texts and Studies, I., 106 ff.

Another witness from Africa is that of the "Gospel according to the Egyptians." This book bears precisely the same testimony to the estimation in which the early documents were held as that borne by the Diatessaron of Tatian. It appears to have been a compilation of two Gospels, that were substantially like our Matthew and Luke, being in the interest of asceticism. It was much used in the middle of the second century, wherever this tendency was prominent. The great influence and circulation of the book was no doubt due to the ascetic spirit that ruled in the churches throughout Africa. It was used by the Gnostics<sup>1</sup> and the Encratites<sup>2</sup> as a recognized source of Christian teaching and authority. The homily called the Second Epistle of Clement quotes from it as from the other Gospels. It was probably regarded by the writer of the Didache as a source of teaching of the Lord. Clement of Alexandria quoted from it.<sup>3</sup> Even as late as the third century the Sabellians appealed to it, as to an authority.<sup>4</sup> The book bears a striking testimony to the freedom with which the gospel narrative and tradition was used, even to serve a

<sup>1</sup> Hippolytus, *Philosophumena*, V., 7.

<sup>2</sup> Clement, *Stromata*, III., 9, 13. Exc. ex Theodoto, 67.

<sup>3</sup> *Strom.*, III., 9.

<sup>4</sup> Epiphanius, *Hær.*, 62, 2.

particular interest. Such a book could not have been written in an age when the form of the gospel story was fixed and definite, and when its very letter was regarded as of canonical authority. The title, "Gospel according to the Egyptians," together with the fact of its great authority in that part of the Christian church, shows that men saw nothing incongruous in that day in molding the form of the gospel narrative to meet the needs of a particular portion of the church. Clement valued it very highly, but after a careful examination decided that it was not to be put upon a level with the four Gospels generally recognized. In this he was not governed by the thought that the number was fixed at four, but by what seemed to him to be dangerous tendencies in the book itself.

Clement, who became head of the catechetical school in Alexandria about the year A. D. 189 is himself an excellent witness to the attitude of a cultured Greek toward the source of Christian authority. He boasted that he was a "Gnostic," *i. e.*, a "knowledge-seeker," and was in search of a system of Christian truth. In this he marks a distinct advance upon any previous writer quoted in our investigation. Justin was simply writing

an apology to the emperor, endeavoring to justify Christianity as a movement. Clement was endeavoring to construct a systematic theology. What documents he regards as legitimate sources of authority, is therefore a question of great importance. No writer in the early days of Christianity, whose works have been preserved for us possessed a wider canon than Clement. Wherever he found truth, there was to him authority. He was a "Sicilian bee," whose home was among the flowers in the great meadows of God, he declared. So he abounds in quotations from every source. "The beginning of knowledge," he says, "is wondering at objects, as Plato says in the *Theætetus*; and Matthias, exhorting in the 'Traditions,' says, 'Wonder at what is before you.' So also in the Gospel to the Hebrews it is written, 'He that wonders shall reign.'" <sup>1</sup> This is a characteristic passage. Plato is authority. The Gospel to the Hebrews is used with the introduction common only to quotations from the Old Testament, "It is written." The "Traditions of Matthias" is just as valuable in establishing a doctrine as any other document. He speaks of "Barnabas the apostle," and regards his epistle

<sup>1</sup> Strom., II., 9.

as an authoritative document.<sup>1</sup> He introduces a citation from I Clement with the solemn words, "It is written in the Epistle to the Corinthians," and "In the Epistle to the Corinthians the Apostle Clement says."<sup>2</sup> He regarded the Preaching of Peter as a source of authentic apostolic history.<sup>3</sup> In one place he has a long dissertation upon the use this document makes of the words "according to the Greeks." He uses these words just as early Christian writers used expressions from the Old Testament in his endeavor to establish the important doctrine that a revelation was made to the Greeks. Evidently he had no idea that his opponents would dispute the fact that the Preaching of Peter was an authoritative Christian book. Of the Shepherd of Hermas he says, "The divine power which appeared in the vision to Hermas declared."<sup>4</sup> Then follows an extended allegorical interpretation of this divine revelation. He also held the Apocalypse of Peter in very high esteem, quoting it with the words, "The Scripture says."<sup>5</sup> He regards the writings of the sibyl and Hystaspes as Scripture. "Since,

<sup>1</sup> Strom., II., 6, 7.

<sup>2</sup> Strom., IV., 17. See Euseb., H. E., VI., 13 and 14.

<sup>3</sup> Strom., I., 29; II., 15; VI., 5, 6, 7, 15.

<sup>4</sup> Strom., I., 29; see Strom., II., 1; XI., 15.

<sup>5</sup> Eclogæ ex Scrip. Proph., 41, 48, 49.

therefore, just as God wished to save the Jews by giving them prophets, so also he distinguished the most excellent of the Greeks from the common herd by raising up prophets of their own, in their own tongue, as they were able to receive God's beneficence. Besides the Preaching of Peter the Apostle Paul reveals this to us, saying, 'Take also of the Hellenic books, read the sibyl, how it is shown that God is one and how the future is revealed. And taking Hystaspes, read and you will find much more luminously and distinctly the Son of God described.'"<sup>1</sup> And again, "Wherefore Peter says that the Lord said to the apostles, 'If any one of Israel, then, wishes to repent and by my name to believe in God, his sins shall be forgiven him after twelve years.'" Where did Clement get these sayings of Paul and Peter? Of their documentary source we are entirely ignorant, and yet he uses them as sources of apostolic doctrine, just as valuable as any words quoted from a book that has come down to us. His was a very large canon. He cites words from the Didache with the introduction, "It is declared by the Scriptures."<sup>2</sup> We have already seen that he used the Gospel

<sup>1</sup> Strom., VI., 5.

<sup>2</sup> Strom., I., 20.

according to the Egyptians very freely. He very often quotes the saying of Christ, "Be skilful money changers," as "Scripture."<sup>1</sup> He speaks of the Epicurean Methodorus as "inspired."<sup>2</sup> But far more important than his reference to any single writer, or his quotation from any single document, is the fundamental principle of authority which he expresses so often in words like these, "All things necessary and profitable for life come to us from God, and philosophy more especially was given to the Greeks, as a covenant peculiar to them, being, as it is, a stepping-stone to the philosophy which is according to Christ."<sup>3</sup> "So, then, the barbarian and Hellenic philosophy has torn off a fragment of eternal truth from the theology of the ever-living Word."<sup>4</sup> Clement is utterly lacking in the conception that Christian theology must justify itself by a reference to apostolic writings. He represents an attitude common not only to men like Justin, and Theophilus of Antioch, and other early apologists, but to the men who were cast out of the church as Gnostics. The first efforts at an eclecticism that should make the Christian religion square with Greek philosophy,

<sup>1</sup> Strom., I., 28; II., 4; V., 10.

<sup>2</sup> Strom., V., 14.

<sup>3</sup> Strom., VI., 8. <sup>4</sup> Strom., I., 13. See I., 5, 19; VI., 5, 8, 11, 17.

were without a definite ground of authority. Naturally some men carried this principle of the inspiration of the Greeks by the Word of God to greater lengths than did Justin and Clement. The principle, however, was precisely the same. The question is simply this, "In our efforts to systematize Christian truth shall we be limited in the sources from which we can draw for authoritative statements?" To this Clement answered, "No." The question did not occur to Justin as definitely, because in presenting a résumé of Christianity to those in authority, in order to stop that very persecution to which he eventually fell a victim, he found that the gospel narratives furnished him all the material he needed. This was true of all the apologists. Though the very rise of defenders of the new faith tended to establish more firmly the authority of certain Christian writings, because of an appeal to them in controversy, still this appeal was so simple that books like the Epistles of Paul, that contained almost no tradition of the teaching of Christ, were not dragged into the controversy. It was left to other movements to bring these documents into prominence.

We have reached the following conclusion by

our investigation: That about the year A. D. 150, in Rome, and much later in the East, there was no definite collection of documents, which had been collected and equated, and bound up into a single volume whose legal validity was equal to that of the Old Testament. But there were certain movements in the church which tended this way. Men were writing to Roman officials, endeavoring to convince them that the new movement was by no means the revolutionary and inhuman affair it was reported to be. This defense, being of necessity more or less systematic, led to an appeal to history, and so called to the front authoritative documents. The Gospels supplied this need fully, and all during this period very little use was made of epistles. Not one quotation from this form of literature can be found in the writings of Justin. Although other writers occasionally refer to epistles, no attention is called to the personality of the author, nor is he lifted in any way above the great mass of Christian teachers. The only Christian authority is Christ, and the men he has inspired to carry on his teaching and work. That this authority has been delegated to apostles, and by them in turn to the constituted officers of an organization,

is a claim we do not find during the early part of the second century. Much less do we find the idea that the apostles were given the task of writing down the memorials of the time of Christ and publishing them in a closed book, upon which there was a copyright. The early church took it for granted that any book that edified was inspired by the Spirit. In later years this norm was exactly reversed, and only those books which were decided upon as inspired were allowed to be used for edification. The early church took it for granted that all teachers and prophets who "spoke with authority" were the natural successors of the apostles. In later years this norm was exactly reversed, and only the constituted successors of the apostles were allowed to speak with authority. These two movements went hand in hand. As long as the church supposed herself in possession of the natural successors of the apostles, who taught as they were inspired by the living Word, she never imagined that it was necessary to justify her power or her methods by a reference to the "last will and testament" of the apostles.

But this condition of affairs was not destined to last. The dying out of the old expectation of

a return of Christ on clouds of glory, and the consequent cooling down of feverish hopes, gave birth to more settled and mechanical methods in church organization. As a result men began to appeal to the historical sayings of Christ more, and a little less dependence was put upon the words of every passing prophet. However, it was far down in the second century, as we have seen, before this appeal to the words and deeds of Christ became wrapped up in documents. Old men were living who had seen the apostles. Any oral tradition that touched the Life of lives was very highly prized. But this was a vanishing norm. Its decrease was accompanied by a corresponding increase in the emphasis put upon the written memorials. Papias is a witness to the fact that at first very little attention was paid to the authorship or validity of these documents. It was enough that they bore the name of an apostle, or the disciple of an apostle. "Of course I accept the word of Peter," is the assurance which Serapion gives his flock; but he has grave doubts whether Peter wrote the Gospel existing under his name, at any rate in its present form.

Another necessity about this time drove the church into a stronger emphasis upon her written

memorials. Complications with the public officials of the Roman government arose, as Christianity spread and became powerful. Grave rumors were circulated by her enemies, of horrible rites, like the drinking of blood, performed as part of her worship. Investigations and persecutions arose. In defending herself she put forth certain champions who were acquainted not only with her own life and teaching, but with the customs and culture of the pagan world. These men did not cast off entirely their old ways of living and thinking when they entered the church. Justin, for example, even after he became a Christian teacher, went about still wearing the garb of a Platonic philosopher. In defending Christianity, therefore, it was natural that men who had been educated in pagan philosophy should endeavor to retain as much of their old thought as was consistent with their comprehension of the new faith. Many of these men, whose names are to this day on the list of the saints of the church, did not hesitate to affirm unequivocally the inspiration of the Greek philosophers. They had no thought that in so doing they were untrue to Christ. The Platonic doctrine of the Logos, in its conception as the informing and inspiring Word,

was not only regarded as not inconsistent with the Christian revelation, but was considered one of its crucial principles. Every truth, wherever found, was a fragment of the Logos, a portion of the Word of God. This Word was Christ. He was the source of all knowledge and all truth. In thus affirming that the inspiration of Socrates was received from Christ they thought to exalt the latter.

As events proved, this principle of eclecticism gave rise to endless complications. To what an extreme it can be carried can be easily seen on the pages of Philo Judæus, who applied the same principle to Judaism in the early part of the first century, and found so much of the Platonic philosophy in the Pentateuch that it is hard to tell, as one reads, whether his heart is with Plato or with Moses. It was inevitable, when Christian teachers began to manifest this same tendency, that the church should begin to feel a little uneasy about some of the leaders. Were they Christian or were they pagan? Did they not lean too far to the side of the philosophers? Was there not danger that the gospel narrative would soon be placed side by side with the myths of Greece?

The eclectic method which these men used, was applied not only to apologetics, but to systematic theology as well. In times of peace, or in lands where there was little persecution, men were endeavoring to see how much of the old cosmologies they could find in documents that were accepted as authoritative by the church. They were entirely sincere and earnest in this. They did not feel satisfied or contented in a church that possessed no system of theology. A man who came over to Christianity from some school of thought would naturally try to win over his old associates by showing the superiority of the new system to the old. He would retain the essential elements of his philosophy, and endeavor to read them into the Christian documents. Thus an entirely new basis for Christianity was formed. Instead of being an appeal to the heart, it began to shift its emphasis to the understanding. And this new basis, as the number of these men multiplied, gave birth to a new use of the Christian documents. Just as Philo found the whole system of Plato in the books accepted as authoritative among his people, so the teachers of Christianity now began to find their own documents replete with the thoughts and dogmas of the various

schools of the day. In this way a means of transformation was found by which that intense earnestness of early Christianity which had heretofore manifested itself in working out great moral and religious changes, could be turned into the establishing of a system of metaphysics, and spiritual enthusiasm could be metamorphosed into theological intolerance.

The student of morals can hardly fail to lay great stress upon this change. It is extremely significant that the first Christians to speculate and to defend Christianity were so very broad in their conception of authority and inspiration. Theophilus would include Greeks among "the Spirit-bearing men." Justin declares that Socrates and Heraclitus shared in the inspiration of the Logos. Clement, despite the lateness of his day, goes so far as to say that philosophy was a covenant between God and the Greeks. This frank admission of an intellectual obligation to the great sages of that wonderful land was possible as long as the church was mainly interested in transforming the lives of men. Her passionate moral earnestness stood in remarkable contrast to the skepticism and dilettanteism of Roman toleration. She could be tolerant too, just as long as the

two ideas of the transformation of opinions and the transformation of life were not identified. But the moment the Platonic conception that "vice is ignorance" took possession of a body so full of a deep and passionate regard for the reform of men, the foundation was laid for one of the most fanatical and intolerant systems the world has ever seen.

We shall notice in the next chapter the steps by which this change was brought about. Up to the period covered by our investigation thus far Christians saw no incongruity whatever in recognizing the genuine inspiration of all truth, wherever found, and especially in the teachings of the great Greeks. That those teachings had not transformed the lives of men more effectually was, of course, supposed to be due to their abstract character. They were not incarnate. They were without a Christ. They had no dynamic power. Only the truth, as it was radiant in the person of the Son of God, could touch the springs of action. Philosophy was frozen truth. Christ was the concrete expression of all revelation, the divine Logos, the sum total of the wisdom and the knowledge of God. Did not Plato himself recognize in a well-known passage the impotence of

philosophy until incarnate in a person to redeem the human race?

One can scarcely avoid a feeling of regret that the church ever abandoned this broad platform of the apologists for the narrower conception of an inspiration confined to a collection of apostolic writings. But she felt that to carry this spirit to its logical conclusion would end by placing Christ in a niche in the Pantheon. Between the spirit of those philosophers, who adorned their homes with the images of Pythagoras and Cleanthes, and yet called themselves "Christians," and the spirit of that emperor who placed an image of the Nazarene, with the statues of the philosophers, in his chamber, the gradation was slight. A mere intellectual admiration did not satisfy the needs of a church so filled with moral earnestness and a passion for the redemption of the whole human race. It is unfortunate that the church felt that it had to pass on toward this goal over the pathway of intolerance, of creed formation, of unscrupulous exploitation of the labors of the philosophers, and of the narrowing down of revelation to a little book that should contain all the light and wisdom of the infinite God.

IV

THE FIRST THEOLOGIANS



#### IV

IN endeavoring to discover the origin and to trace the early history of that effort to give Christianity a definite and fixed body of doctrine, which was the source of the conception of a canon, we at once find ourselves face to face with a very serious obstacle. We have no knowledge whatever of the pioneers in the movement, save that which has come down to us from their most bitter opponents, who were endeavoring to prove that they were the very representatives of the Antichrist. At first, no doubt, they were ignored by the church at large. But as their followers began to multiply, an effort was made to answer them—often by men whose zeal for Christianity was far greater than their knowledge of Greek philosophy. As was very natural, the effort of these philosophers to reconcile two systems seemed to very many to be dividing their allegiance. They were accused of possessing “images of Pythagoras, and Plato, and Aristotle, and the rest,”<sup>1</sup> and it was even hinted that they might

<sup>1</sup> Tertullian, *De Præscriptione*, 42.

worship them as idols. The theory of Justin that Socrates and Heraclitus, that the sibyls and Hystaspes, that poets and historians, were all inspired by the same Logos that gave Christianity to the world, was all right when used as an apology to the emperor, in an effort to stay the hand of persecution. But when the same theory was advanced in the gatherings of the church, and all sorts of speculative questions were dividing Christians, and men began to say, "I am of Basilides; and I of Valentinus; and I of Heracleon; and I of Theodotus," then it seemed as if the church were in danger of turning aside from her great purpose, and the accusation was brought against these teachers that "they made it their business not to convert the heathen, but to subvert our people."<sup>1</sup> To the moral simplicity and earnestness of a purely missionary church it seemed as if they were trying to serve two masters. As a matter of fact, however, they were engaged in an effort to make Christianity on its speculative, as well as on its moral side, a universal religion. The spirit of that people who spent their time "in nothing else, but either to tell or to hear some new thing," and who seemed to the Apostle Paul

<sup>1</sup> Tertullian, *De Præscriptione*, 42.

to be "in all things too religious," had crept into the church. From now on there could be no rest until a "Christian philosophy" was formulated.

That the pioneers of this movement had no intention of forming a separate organization is shown by the words of Irenæus: "They even complain to us because, although they hold doctrines similar to ours, we without cause keep ourselves aloof from their company; and although they say the same things and hold the same doctrines, we call them heretics."<sup>1</sup> These men, who were called Gnostics—a name which Clement of Alexandria was proud to own because it indicated an emphasis upon knowledge—were the first systematic theologians of Christianity. They did not endeavor to enforce their conclusions by any council or decree, but like Clement, they believed in an "esoteric" Christianity for the learned, and an "exoteric" for the rabble. This was a genuine Greek conception. Christianity was to have its "mysteries." They gathered their disciples around them and taught the deeper truths. It is almost impossible for us to obtain any conception of their teaching, because only its most absurd and grotesque features have been

<sup>1</sup> Irenæus, *Contra Hæreses*, III., 15, 2.

preserved for us by Irenæus, Tertullian, and Epiphanius. These writers mix up the theories of teacher and disciple in such a hopeless manner that the same man is frequently made to utter the most contradictory statements. But despite this fact, very suggestive passages frequently come to light, and it would be an interesting investigation to trace the philosophical relationship of these utterances, and to thread out of them the Stoic, Platonic, and Neo-Pythagorean elements. We might compare them with the writings of Plotinus and Iamblichus, to see how they are related to that Neo-Platonic movement which was started in Alexandria by Ammonius Saccas, a Christian by birth, who relapsed into heathenism. For example, nothing could be more Neo-Platonic than the following, reported to be the doctrine of Basilides, or his followers: "Since, therefore, nothing existed—not matter, nor substance, nor anything insubstantial, nor anything absolute, nor anything composite, nor anything inconceivable, nor anything devoid of senses, nor man, nor angel—when all things are absolutely removed—a 'non-existent' God, inconceivably, insensibly, indeterminately, involuntarily, impassively, unactuated by desire, willed to create a cosmos.

In this way a 'non-existent' God made the cosmos out of nonentities, casting or depositing some one seed that contained in itself the entire spermatic energy of the cosmos." <sup>1</sup> But with the systems of these men we have nothing to do in this investigation save to note the manner in which they defended their theories, and the relation they bore to the literature of the church of their day.

Basilides, who was said to be a disciple of Glaucius, an interpreter of Peter, taught in Alexandria during the reign of Hadrian, A. D. 117-138. The few fragments of his writings, and those of his disciples, which have come down to us, make his dependence upon the philosophy of Plato and Zeno beyond dispute. Origen says that he "had the effrontery to write a Gospel, and to give it his own name," <sup>2</sup> but the lack of any other authority for this statement makes it somewhat improbable. Eusebius quotes from Agrippa Castor to the effect that he "wrote twenty-four books on the gospel." <sup>3</sup> Clement of Alexandria quotes very copiously from the twenty-third of these books, to which he gives the name "Exegetics." <sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hippolytus, *Philosophumena*, VII., 20.

<sup>2</sup> Hom., I., in Lucam.

<sup>3</sup> H. E., IV., 7, 6.

<sup>4</sup> Strom., IV., 12.

This work of Basilides is very well attested, and it was beyond a doubt an effort to prove exegetically that the narrative of the gospel contained implicitly his system of thought. This is the first example of which we have any record where the written tradition of Christianity is brought forward to attest any definite metaphysical system. The method employed by these ancient theologians is a familiar one. For example, Basilides masses the following proof-texts to prove that the divine principle of light descended from the Ogdoad to the Hebdomad, and thence to Jesus, the son of Mary: <sup>1</sup> "The Holy Spirit will come upon thee, and the power of the Highest will overshadow thee"; <sup>2</sup> "By revelation was made known unto me the mystery"; <sup>3</sup> and "I have heard inexpressible words, which it is not possible for man to declare." <sup>4</sup> That the Archon was instructed by Christ as to the "non-existent" One is the mystery in the scriptural-expression, "Not in words taught of human wisdom, but in those taught of the Spirit." <sup>5</sup> That Christ was mentally pre-conceived at the time of the generation of the stars is indicated by the relation of the Magi to the star

<sup>1</sup> Philos., VII., 14.

<sup>2</sup> Luke 1 : 35.

<sup>3</sup> Eph. 3 : 3-5.

<sup>4</sup> 2 Cor. 12 : 4.

<sup>5</sup> Philos., VII., 14.

of Bethlehem.<sup>1</sup> That more than one Sonship exists in the "non-existent" One is shown by the words, "Waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God."<sup>2</sup> The emphasis here laid upon single words, and the mysterious meanings discovered in seemingly simple passages, all indicate the new use of the Christian documents which was brought into existence by cosmological speculation. Basilides exerted a great influence upon the church of his day, not only because of his profound learning, but also because of the purity of his character and his unquestioned sincerity. His followers were numerous, and long after his death Christian writers were endeavoring to answer his doctrines in regions as far away as the valley of the Rhone. Epiphanius declares that he taught in all the cities of Africa. That he adopted a position that seemed almost impregnable by his method of exegesis, and by his ingenious adaptation of passages from authoritative Christian documents is shown by the methods employed to silence his followers.

Valentinus, who was reported to be a disciple of Theodas, a man who was acquainted with the Apostle Paul, was one of the most influential of

<sup>1</sup> Philos., VII., 15.

<sup>2</sup> Philos., VII., 13.

all those teachers who endeavored to put Christian doctrine on a philosophical basis. He first came into prominence in Egypt somewhere about the year A. D. 130, and in the early part of the reign of Antoninus Pius he went to Rome. Here he entered upon a career so successful that at one time he was thought of as bishop for this important See.<sup>1</sup> The method employed by him and his followers to establish their philosophical speculations has been well described for us by Irenæus. "They endeavor," he says, "to adapt, with an air of probability, to their own peculiar assertions the parables of the Lord, the sayings of the prophets, and the words of the apostles, in order that their scheme may not seem altogether without support."<sup>2</sup> It is evident that even those who endeavored to answer the Valentinians regarded this as "a plausible kind of exposition."<sup>3</sup> "By transferring passages, and dressing them up anew, and making one thing out of another," they "adapted the oracles of the Lord to their own opinions."<sup>4</sup> Surely this sin is so old and common that there is scarcely a theologian in the whole history of Christianity who has a

<sup>1</sup> Tertullian, *Adv. Val.*, 4.

<sup>2</sup> *Iren.*, I., 8, 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Iren.*, I., 9, 1.

<sup>4</sup> *Iren.*, I., 8, 1.

right to "cast the first stone." It almost seems like listening to a discussion of yesterday to hear Irenæus complaining that "collecting a set of expressions and names, scattered here and there, they twist them from a natural to a non-natural sense."<sup>1</sup> He complains that it is just as if an image of a king had been constructed out of precious gems, and then some one were to take the jewels out of their setting and rearrange them into the form of a dog or fox.<sup>2</sup> The very surprise of Irenæus at this perverse method of tearing proof-texts from their setting is extremely suggestive. Such a treatment of the books of Christianity had never been made before. Familiar as it is in theological discussion even to this day, it was at that time entirely unknown as a use of the documents which the early church had regarded merely as the inspired utterances of her apostles and prophets, or the ethical and spiritual oracles of her Lord. The origin of this method of interpretation is indicated by these words of Irenæus: "In so doing they act like those who bring forward any kind of hypothesis they fancy, and then endeavor to support it out of the poems of Homer, so that the ignorant

<sup>1</sup> Iren., I., 9, 3.

<sup>2</sup> Iren., I., 8, 1.

imagine that Homer actually composed the verses with a view to that hypothesis.”<sup>1</sup> A concrete example is then given of this method, and after the proof-texts have been given Irenæus adds: “Now what simple-minded man, I ask, would not be led by such verses as these to think that Homer actually framed them so, with reference to the subject indicated.” This solicitude of Irenæus, as we shall see later, is not always so keen and alert when he is endeavoring to establish his own opinions. The great fact is that an entirely new use is being made of the written memorials of Christianity by these theologians, who “with great craftiness adapt parts of Scripture to their theories,” and “derive proofs for their opinions from the writings of the evangelists and the apostles.”<sup>2</sup>

Let us take a few examples of their method. That Christ is derived from all the æons, and is himself the *pleroma*, they prove from such passages as these from Paul:<sup>3</sup> “In whom dwelleth the *pleroma* of the Godhead”;<sup>4</sup> “Of him, and through him, and to him, are all things, to whom be glory unto the æons”;<sup>5</sup> “Christ is all, and in

<sup>1</sup> Iren., I., 9, 3.<sup>2</sup> Iren., I., 3, 6.<sup>3</sup> Iren., I., 3, 4.<sup>4</sup> Col. 2 : 9.<sup>5</sup> Rom. 11 : 36.

all";<sup>1</sup> "All things are summed up by God in Christ."<sup>2</sup> The parable of the Laborers Sent into the Vineyard is found to be an allegory of the thirty æons, because some were sent out the first hour, some the third, some the sixth, some the ninth, and some the eleventh, while the sum total of one, three, six, nine, and eleven is just thirty.<sup>3</sup> One might easily join in the indignation of Irenæus that they thus find their doctrines "in the multitude of things contained in the Scripture, which they adapt and accommodate to their baseless speculations,"<sup>4</sup> were it not for the fact that this is just the method which Irenæus himself employs to prove that the Gospels cannot be more in number than four.<sup>5</sup> The Valentinians made much of such phrases as "Now are things hidden from thee,"<sup>6</sup> "I thank thee that thou hast hid these things,"<sup>7</sup> to establish their claim to an esoteric doctrine, and to show that Christ did not explicitly state his system. They claim that Paul frequently mentions the æons, and even asserts their rank in the words, "To all the generations of the æons of the Æon."<sup>8</sup> The rank of twelve æons, called the Duodecad, is established by the

<sup>1</sup> Col. 3 : 11.<sup>2</sup> Eph. 1 : 10.<sup>3</sup> Iren., I., 1, 3.<sup>4</sup> Iren., I., 1, 3.<sup>5</sup> Iren., III., 11, 8.<sup>6</sup> Iren., I., 20, 2.<sup>7</sup> Iren., I., 20, 3.<sup>8</sup> Iren., I., 3, 1; Eph. 3 : 21.

fact that Christ was twelve years old when he disputed in the temple, and made the number of his disciples just twelve.<sup>1</sup> This same thing is also indicated by the fact that the woman who touched the hem of his garment had been afflicted just twelve years.<sup>2</sup> In this latter incident the Valentinians find a great cosmic mystery. The lost drachma in the parable is a symbol of the lost power in the Duodecad.<sup>3</sup> The story of Gethsemane and Calvary is filled with indications and revelations of the struggle of cosmic forces.<sup>4</sup> The three measures of meal, in the parable of the Leaven, is made to symbolize the later Platonic psychology.<sup>5</sup> Simeon in the temple, ready to depart in peace, is a type of the Demiurge, who takes his place in the scale of being upon the arrival of the Logos.<sup>6</sup> The parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Piece of Money are made to teach the dualistic doctrine of a wandering power, outside the pleroma, who in a state of passion created matter.<sup>7</sup>

So did these ancient theologians find all their doctrines foreshadowed in the Christian Scriptures. It was all in vain that Irenæus declared

<sup>1</sup> Iren., I., 3, 2.

<sup>2</sup> Iren., I., 3, 3.

<sup>3</sup> Iren., I., 16, 1.

<sup>4</sup> Iren., I., 8, 2.

<sup>5</sup> Iren., I., 8, 3.

<sup>6</sup> Iren., I., 8, 4.

<sup>7</sup> Iren., I., 8, 4.

that it was not "John's intention" to set forth an Ogdoad and a Tetrad.<sup>1</sup> The fascination for speculation had seized the church. The teachings of Christianity must now have a metaphysical background. However foreign a theory might be to the mind of Christ and his followers, it must justify itself by reference to their words. It may not have been John's "intention" to set forth an explicit system of theology; but one was in his mind, and he who understands the depths of Scripture will be able to find it. That this position, first adopted by the Gnostics, was not abandoned by the orthodox teachers who answered them can be seen on almost every page of their writings.

The assumption that the final system of truth was in the background of the thought of the writers of Scripture is one that has not died out to this day. To be sure the speculations of the Gnostics now sound strange and remote, but in their day the language was familiar to all cultured people, and the proof that their philosophy was hinted at, and often plainly declared, in the sacred books of the church, must have swept with tremendous force through the various centers

<sup>1</sup> *Iren.*, I., 9, 1.

of Christian thought. The widespread influence of the teaching of Valentinus is a testimony to this fact. His followers were found in Egypt, in Syria, in Mesopotamia, in Cyprus, in Gaul, and in Rome. Indeed, so many and so various were the schools of his disciples and the phases of their thought that the early Fathers who endeavored to answer them have left us an almost hopeless tangle. Irenæus compares the school of Valentinus to that many-headed beast, the Lernæan Hydra.<sup>1</sup> Epiphanius tells us that even in the fourth century his followers were found in various parts of Egypt.<sup>2</sup> Of Secundus, one of his first disciples, very little is known.<sup>3</sup> Ptolemæus, another disciple, was head of the Italic school in the time of Irenæus, about A. D. 180, and no doubt many of the doctrines attributed to Valentinus were taken from him or his followers. We have a fragment of the teaching of this disciple in the "Epistle of Ptolemæus to Flora," which is an effort to answer the question of a female follower as to the relation of the Mosaic law to Christianity. Although it belongs to the "exoteric" teaching of the Gnostic leader, and has little to do with

<sup>1</sup> Iren., I., 30, 15.

<sup>2</sup> Hær., 31, 17.

<sup>3</sup> Tert., Adv. Val., 4; Iren., I., 11, 2; Philast. Hær., 40.

his theological system, still the use made of the Christian documents is entirely in keeping with what we have seen of his master Valentinus. Marcus, another disciple, who taught in Asia, exercised so great an influence that Irenæus said he was leading away Christians "even in our own district of the Rhone."<sup>1</sup> Of Axionicos, who taught in Antioch in the early part of the third century, Tertullian says that he alone "vindicated the memory of Valentinus by complete keeping of his rules."<sup>2</sup> Of Theotimus, Alexander, Carpocrates, Isidorus, and many others whose names are mentioned by the early Fathers as disciples of Valentinus, we know next to nothing.

By all means the most interesting of all the followers of Valentinus for our investigation is Heracleon, who was declared by Clement of Alexandria to be the most influential of his disciples.<sup>3</sup> He probably taught in some city in southern Italy or Sicily, but just where we do not know. The interest attaching to his name is due to the fact that he wrote a commentary on the Gospel of John, which is referred to over sixty times in the small fragment which we have of Origen's commentary on the same Gospel. In these discussions

<sup>1</sup> Iren., I., 15, 6.

<sup>2</sup> Adv. Val., 4.

<sup>3</sup> Strom., 4, 9.

of Heracleon we have the clearest and most unanswerable evidence of the fact that the Gnostics were the first Christians to use the documents of Christianity in the same manner as that in which theologians had long been accustomed to use the Old Testament. Clement discusses at some length a distinction which Heracleon made between the use of the dative and accusative case in a certain saying of Christ.<sup>1</sup> It is probable that Heracleon wrote other commentaries besides the one on John; but it is enough for our purpose to note his method of interpretation as revealed in the fragments discussed by Origen. In the expression, "All things were made by him," the preposition is found to be very significant, and a great Platonic mystery is found to be hidden in that little word "by."<sup>2</sup> Just so salvation is "of" the Jews, but not "in" them. The minuteness and accuracy of this examination of words is the beginning of the belief in verbal inspiration. The words "in him was life" denote the existence of all "pneumatic" men in the Logos.<sup>3</sup> In the number of the husbands of the woman of Samaria, in the two days spent by Christ in the city of Sychar, in the seventh hour in which the nobleman's son was

<sup>1</sup> Strom., 4, 9.

<sup>2</sup> Com. in Joan., I., 8.

<sup>3</sup> Com. in Joan., I., 13.

healed, and in other numbers of the text, Heracleon finds many significant and mysterious lessons. The nobleman is a type of the Demiurge; the servants are the angels; the son is the material world created by the Demiurge.<sup>1</sup> The woman of Samaria represents the "pneumatic" man, instructed by the Logos; the water of the well, which she rejected, is Judaism; the husband she is to call is her spiritual bridegroom from the pleroma; the watering-pot is the soul, open to receive instruction from the Saviour,<sup>2</sup> and so on.

That Origen regards this as perfectly legitimate interpretation is evident. Indeed, he expressly says so. What he objects to is not the method of interpretation, but the theology it is made to foster. Again and again he agrees with the opinions of Heracleon, and sometimes as one reads on it is difficult to tell just where the opinions of the one leave off and those of the other begin. Origen himself finds great and wonderful mysteries in the colt of the ass on which Christ rode into Jerusalem, in the branches cut from the trees on that occasion, in the accompanying crowds, and in other things without end. Indeed, we frequently find the interpretation of Heracleon far more sane

<sup>1</sup> XIII., 58.

<sup>2</sup> XIII., 11.

than that of Origen. The latter complains that the words "whose shoe-latchet I am not worthy to unloose," receive "much too simple an interpretation" by Heracleon.<sup>1</sup> To be sure the Gnostic commentator shows some "largeness of mind" when he understands the shoe to signify the cosmos, but he spoils all this by making the whole thing to mean an admission by the Demiurge that he is not equal to the Logos.

We might multiply examples of the method of interpretation employed by Heracleon, but a few more must suffice. In the words "he went down to Capernaum," the word Capernaum signifies those far-away regions of matter into which the creative power descended, and the phrase "went down" contains a creative mystery.<sup>2</sup> The ascent of Christ to Jerusalem typifies the going up of the Saviour from the sinful material realm to the region of pure spirit.<sup>3</sup> The scourge of small cords is an image of the power and energy of the Holy Spirit; the wooden handle to which the cords are tied is a symbol of the cross; the merchants driven out of the temple are a symbol of the powers cast out and destroyed by Christ. The word "lamb";<sup>4</sup> the phrase "in three days";<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> VI., 23.

<sup>2</sup> X., 9.

<sup>3</sup> X., 19.

<sup>4</sup> XI., 38.

<sup>5</sup> X., 21.

the expression "ye worship what ye know not"<sup>1</sup>—these, and many other things, are freighted with immense significance.

Nowhere do we have better opportunity to test the strength of the Gnostic position than in this commentary of Origen on John. The method employed by both writers is exactly the same, but the Gnostic has the advantage of priority. He found his doctrines taught in Scripture in exactly the same manner as that employed by his opponent to answer him. Such an advantage in time accounts for the tremendous power and influence of the Gnostic schools. "So firm is the ground upon which these Gospels rests," says Irenæus, "that the very heretics themselves bear witness to them, and starting from them each one of them endeavors to establish his own peculiar doctrine."<sup>2</sup> Between these lines one can read, "So firm is the ground upon which these scientific theologians stand, who read in the Gospels their strange mixture of Platonism and Orientalism, that the church must take the books out of their hands, close up the canon, and then read into it her own system of doctrine by adopting their method of interpretation." This is what actually happened.

<sup>1</sup> XIII., 19.

<sup>2</sup> III., 11, 7.

The Gnostics were the bridge by which the church passed over from the period of expansion into the period of reflection. Their effort to give Christianity a definite and fixed body of doctrine was the first step in the direction of creed formation. We soon find a subtle transformation taking place, by which the emphasis is shifted from a moral and spiritual to an intellectual condition of church-membership, and the incipient stages in the development of the so-called "Apostle's Creed" can be traced in the writings of those who answered the Gnostics. The emphasis upon "gnosis" bore its fruit, even though the men who first advocated it were driven from the church. Just so did the principle of an esoteric and an exoteric truth become established in Christianity, though the right to the former was confined to the recognized and ordained officials of the church, and every man who had a philosophical system was not at liberty to promulgate it, as formerly. We thus find three forces working side by side in the church—the tendency to appeal to an apostolic and literary norm of authority, to make "faith" consist in "gnosis," and to confine the teaching function to regularly constituted authorities. These three forces resulted in the formation

of a canon, of a creed, and of the monarchical episcopate.

Though our investigation has to do solely with the first of these forces, we cannot utterly ignore the other two. The assumption of the Gnostics that knowledge of the character and purposes of God constitutes the essence of salvation, and their appeal to recognized written traditions to justify their systems, bore fruit in more ways than one. To be sure, the church at first had no sympathy with their efforts to form a spiritual aristocracy of the "knowing ones," because such an act of necessity cast more or less contempt on the ignorant and simple folk who had been the main support of Christianity in the days of its unpopularity. But in later years, by the very adoption of the creeds, and the development of the speculative theology of the great doctors, she did the same thing herself, and to this day the inner mysteries of the gospel are withheld from the rabble in the church then formed. That this tendency was resisted at first, even in the form that eventually triumphed, is shown plainly by the saying of Tertullian that "the simpler minded, not to say the ignorant and unlearned men, who always form the majority of believers, are frightened by the

Economy”<sup>1</sup>—a name by which this writer designated the philosophical explanation of the Trinity. “I am not unaware,” says Clement, “of what is babbled by some, who in their ignorance are frightened by every noise, and tell us that we ought to occupy ourselves with what is most necessary, and what contains faith; and that we should pass over the superfluous things that lie beyond, which wear us out and detain us to no purpose over matters which contribute nothing to the great end.”<sup>2</sup>

Here we have the issue squarely joined between the speculative and the moral conception of “faith”; between the redemption of culture and the redemption of discipline. To the stern moral earnestness of the early Christians the speculative tendency was going “beyond” things necessary, and was exhausting the energy of the church in a vain effort to settle things which contribute nothing to salvation. There can be no doubt that great multitudes did not understand the underlying assumption of Gnosticism that there is an intellectual “redemption,” and that the highest salvation is only obtained by knowledge of the great mysteries of the cosmos. The Platonic doctrine

<sup>1</sup> Adv. Praxeas, 3.

<sup>2</sup> Strom., I., 1.

that vice is ignorance, and that virtue consists in the holding of right opinions, which is behind every process of creed formation, was triumphant in the second century. Aristotle, with a more modern psychology, had advanced the theory in the Nicomachean Ethics that vice is a wrong state of the will, and virtue consists in setting the will right; but the teachings of this philosopher exerted but little influence on the church leaders of the second century. Beyond a faint trace of his teachings in the fragments left us of the theories of Paul of Samosata, and others of the "Adoptionists," we can scarcely find a reference to this philosopher in the writers of this period.

It was thus a speculative interest that started the movement of sifting the literature of the church, and forming a fixed and closed canon of revelation. The only authority recognized in the church before the year A. D. 125 was the possession of the Holy Spirit, and he was supposed to speak to Christians of the day in precisely the same manner as he had spoken to the apostles. No line was drawn between the two revelations, making the one superior to the other. From the very beginning followers of Christ had believed themselves to be in immediate contact with the Spirit,

and had looked to him to reveal to them such truth as was needed for the guidance of their lives. The first Christians to resign this high privilege were the Gnostics. When Heracleon, by his commentary on John, undertook to find a system of philosophy in the teachings of Jesus, and sought to justify his beliefs by reading them back into the apostolic age by the allegorical method of interpretation, he began a movement that was far-reaching in its consequences. Henceforth the apostles were to be regarded as the sole recipients of Christian communications from God, and their teachings were to become the only source and standard of truth for the church.

As the century passed on the movement grew, and other teachers of influence and learning began to carry the germs of Platonic mysticism and the elements of various Oriental cults over into the teachings of the apostles, by the method employed by Heracleon. It soon became necessary for the church to settle the question whether these speculations were really taught by the apostles or not, and thus the question of a canon was raised. What books were of apostolic origin? What system of philosophy did they teach? The Gnostics forced the church to answer these questions. Of course

the exact limits of the canon could not be found at once. There were doubts and discussions over certain books for generations. But this very fact shows how general was the conception of revelation in the early days. To form an authoritative and exclusive collection from the great mass of sacred writings was no easy task. To be sure, a simple norm was furnished in the thought that the canon must be "apostolic"; but two of the Gospels in general circulation could not claim apostles for authors. The final decision had to be more or less arbitrary. When the third council of Carthage, in the year 397, included the Epistle to the Hebrews among the Epistles of Paul, it was simply carrying out the principle that was laid down for the formation of the New Testament in the second century.

Of course the consequences of this step were momentous. The baneful and pernicious notion that every doctrine and every practice of the church must somehow find apostolic authority, even if it must twist passages out of their context in order to do it, and find marvelous absurdities in numbers and trivial objects, like shoe-laces and whip-cords, utterly destroyed the sense of perspective in the Gospels, and led the church away

from the great spiritual and ethical message of its Master. So far did it wander that it has not yet returned. The idea is still widely current that the church must carry back all its customs, beliefs, and institutions to the apostolic age. The method is still widely current of treating the apostles as a single and composite body, whose individuality overshadows that of the separate members and hides their humanity under a mechanical conception of revelation. We still feel the incubus of the thought that in our day there is "no open vision," and unless we can find confirmation of our plans and discoveries in the canon we must abandon them. Above all, we are still far from exalting to the place of supreme authority among us Christ's conception of his kingdom, because of the minor matters of the New Testament that absorb all our attention. If ever we return to that desire of our heart, "a New Testament church," it must be by realizing that such a church has no idea of a New Testament. A church with a New Testament is a "Gnostic church."

With the conception of a closed epoch of revelation we find an entirely new interest centering in the inspired books. From this time on they are supposed to contain not only utterances for the

edification and guidance of men in the religious life, but symbols and analogies that are freighted with deep theological mysteries, and implicit dogmas that explain the origin of the universe and the true significance of being. It is one thing to believe that a book reveals to us instruction necessary to the realization of a divine life, and it is quite another to appeal to that same book for proof-texts to establish a Pythagorean or Platonic ontology. It was just this difference which gradually took place in the second century in the use made of the Christian documents, and it was this shift of emphasis that led to the formation of a closed New Testament. Just as Maximus of Tyre endeavored to purify and unify the pagan religion by applying the allegorical method of interpretation to the fables of Homer, so now an effort was made to reduce the Christian religion to a speculative unit by reading the scientific conceptions of the age into the writings of the apostles.

The reader need not be told how easy it is, by the skilful manipulation of quotations and the fanciful interpretation of figures, to make the Scriptures teach the cosmology of any school, or any age. One who is familiar with the efforts

of certain modern interpreters to make the Bible a text-book of geology and astronomy, a sponsor for the doctrine of evolution, a revelation of mysteries about the Paleozoic age, a storehouse of strange and weird anticipations of every scientific discovery, will at least understand the efforts of the Gnostics to find in it some indication of a belief in the æons Aletheia and Zoe. Their science may sound grotesque to our ears, their conclusions may appear wild and incoherent, their whole thought may seem ridiculous and antiquated, but their major premise of a Bible that contains the thought germs of every age is one that the church inherited from them, and still clings to fondly. It is easy to ridicule them for their strange conceptions of Buthos, and Nous, and Sophia, but these terms were merely the scientific vernacular of the day, and nothing is more cheap than the contempt heaped by one age upon another for its scientific mistakes.

How thoroughly modern the whole contest was can be seen by taking some such statement as the following, which might have been made in the latter part of the second or the latter part of the nineteenth century: "When all this seething speculation shall come to an end, and we shall

reach a true and final conclusion as to just how God created and fashioned this universe, that conclusion will in no wise contradict the revelation of himself which he has made in the sacred Scriptures, but will be found to have been marvelously anticipated and foretold in the infallible visions of the divine Book." Whether these words were uttered by a preacher in the age of Valentinus to quiet some of his hearers who had been disturbed by the speculations of Gnosticism, or whether they were uttered from a London pulpit in the age of Herbert Spencer to allay the doubts raised by the theory of evolution, let the reader who is familiar with both periods answer.



V

THE RESENTMENT OF THE CHURCH



WE are compelled to resort almost entirely to conjecture in our effort to picture to ourselves the feeling of the church at large at this new use of the documents. The common Christian had no spokesman. He was at the mercy of his ecclesiastical superiors. He belonged to the "exoteric" multitude, and was not considered fit to settle the great crucial problems that had arisen. Formerly he had been the strength and pride of the church. Justin had boasted that in the Christian communities of his day there were some who did not even know their letters, who had attained the highest heights of inspired wisdom. Paul had stopped in the midst of his stormy career to cry out, "Where are the wise?" The founder of Christianity himself had thanked his Father that its deepest truths were hidden from the "wise and prudent," and revealed unto "babes." But now the "wise and prudent" were assuming the leadership of the church. There is a feeling of contempt in the reference of Tertullian to those "simple-minded, not to say ignorant and un-

learned men, who always constitute the majority of believers," and who are frightened at the speculative tendencies of the day. Clement treats with a haughty air those "babblers who in their ignorance are terrified by every noise," and who insist that the church cling to essentials and let cosmological dreams alone.

Every indication points to the fact that the common Christian was utterly shocked at the turn affairs had taken. He was dazed by Ogdoads and Tetrads, by Pleromas and Kenomas, by the Avelion and the Demiurge. The transformation of Christianity, by which it was ceasing to be a moral conflict in the midst of temptations to treachery and apostasy and licentiousness, and was becoming a struggle of æons, was utterly unreal and repulsive to him. He did not believe that the mind of Christ had been occupied with any such speculative foolishness. And yet the philosophers claimed to find it all in the Gospels, and the best informed leaders of the church scarcely dared contradict them. He was told that his inability to see was due to his spiritual blindness. He was told that only the initiated, whose understandings were trained to apprehend the deep things of God, could see how the scriptural writers, when they

spake of how Christ went down to Capernaum, meant the descent of the world-forming æon into the far distant realms of sinful matter.

It is very unfortunate that the student has almost no material from which to glean the sentiment of the church at large in this important transition. The suppression of every document that in any way militated against the conception of an apostolic church leaves us almost helpless. And yet we find an occasional suggestive fact or reference that gives us a glimpse of the feeling of the "simple minded" at this change from a basis of redemption by morals to a basis of redemption by theology. One such fact is found in the party of the "Alogi." It is hardly fair, however, to call them a party. Epiphanius, two centuries later, in his work against all heresies, gave them this name. He said he called them "Alogi" because of their opposition to the Logos speculation. No better testimony could be borne to the fact that the movement was not regarded in its day as a heresy. The first step in the condemnation of a sect is to give it a name. As long as men can keep tags off themselves they can remain in the church undisturbed. They are just "Christians" then. Now whatever these Alogi were,

they were never driven from the church, but maintained their position among the body of believers.<sup>1</sup> Yet Epiphanius says of their attitude toward the Johannine writings, "They say they were not written by John, but by Cerinthus, and are not worthy to be kept in the church."<sup>2</sup> Now Cerinthus was a Gnostic Jew, and since the Alogi were the bitter enemies of all Gnostic speculation over the Logos, they must have believed that the Johannine writings were a product of this tendency. This was not strange. Serapion believed that the Gospel of Peter had been written in the interest of Docetism. Tertullian supposed the Shepherd of Hermas to be a product of Adoptionism. The Egyptian Gospel was doubtless written in the interest of asceticism. It was a very common thing for a book to be composed to bolster up some tendency in the church.

The Alogi observed that the favorite book among the Gnostics was the Gospel of John. Heracleon wrote a commentary upon it. Perhaps a Gnostic wrote the book itself. The Alogi were merely certain Christians who put their emphasis upon practical matters, and who resisted in

<sup>1</sup> Epiphanius, *Hær.*, 51. Herzog, *Real-Encyc.*, X., S. 183. See Harnack, "Zeitschrift f. d. Hist. Theol.," 1874, S. 166.

<sup>2</sup> Epiphanius, *Hær.*, 51, 3.

every way the philosophical and speculative tendencies of the day. The cosmological speculations, bound up in the doctrine of the Logos, seemed to them a turning aside from the great prime purpose of saving men. They were not very well informed in matters of criticism, as their fundamental hypothesis testifies. It is inconceivable, however, that a party could have arisen in Asia Minor and have spread even to Rome, and that made enough impression upon the religious thought of its day to be deemed worthy of notice two hundred years later, that attributed the entire Johannine writings to the arch-heretic Cerinthus, and that advocated banishing them from the churches if there had been in existence at that time a closed New Testament canon. Such an act would have shattered into fragments the very foundation of church unity. But the fact is the church had no unity, and endless schools of philosophy were springing up within her borders. Discussions of points in metaphysics were taking the place of the old redemptive interest, and it seemed to the Alogi that Christianity was selling her birthright for a mess of Greek pottage. They wanted to banish the whole thing, and it seemed to them that the quickest way to do it was to burn

up the books that were causing all the trouble. They did not appreciate the significance or the depth of the movement.

What sources Epiphanius drew upon for the doctrines of these people, and just how strong the movement was we do not know. Undoubtedly the reason it was not given a name was because the Alogi were not clearly differentiated from many other Christians, who proposed all sorts of remedies for the speculative evil, and who represented various tendencies of feeling and of purpose. Not all Christians who objected to the tendency of the church to draw off her energies into metaphysics could have found a solution in the rejection of the writings of John. It may have been that only a small fragment of the objectors favored this remedy. But at any rate the Alogi enable us to see how the common Christian was impressed by the effort to make Christianity a philosophy. To his mind it was ridiculous. It was "to no purpose." It occupied the time of Christians with matters that did not "contain faith." It turned its attention away from the great population sunk in barbarism and needing a Saviour to the unprofitable dreams and misty speculations of the groves of Greece.

To these new interpreters of Scripture the parable of the Sheep that Went Astray and of the Lost Piece of Money indicated, not the straying of some poor human being from the will and purpose of the heavenly Father, but the wandering of the æon Achamoth beyond the pleroma into regions of darkness and vacuity, which was the first act in the drama of creation. How such an interpretation must have shocked the deep spiritual earnestness of every Christian who retained that passion for men which was the dynamic of the apostolic church! The fires of Christianity were about to vanish in the smoke of philosophy. What profit could there possibly be in an interpretation that declared that the story of Simeon taking the infant Christ in his arms meant the Demiurge rendering thanks to Buthos for the arrival of the world-forming æon? The first creative Tetrad—Father, Monogenes, Charis, and Aletheia—was found in the expression, “the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” The second Tetrad—Logos, Zoe, Anthropos, and Ecclesia—was found in the statement that the word “was life, and the life was the light of men.”

To one unacquainted with the Platonic

doctrine of creative ideas these speculations seem like the veriest nonsense. No doubt they so seemed to the majority of Christians of the second century. But to the Gnostic they were filled with significance, and the student of philosophy can trace directly the connection between this idealism and the theology of Origen and Athanasius. The Fathers denounced it, the assemblies scorned it, the bishops repudiated it, but it triumphed nevertheless, and another form of Platonism justified itself from Scripture by interpretations just as fanciful as those of Heracleon and Valentinus. It seemed foolish to common Christians, uninstructed in the schools, to say that the daughter of the ruler of the synagogue was a type of Achamoth; that the words, "Why hast thou forsaken me?" mean the desertion of Sophia by Horos; and that the thirty years of silence in the life of Christ indicate an Ogdoad, a Decad, and a Duodecad of Aeons. When Irenæus said that the men who use such methods of interpretation endeavor "to adapt the oracles of God to their baseless fictions, by violently drawing away from their proper connection, words, expressions, and parables, wherever found,"<sup>1</sup> he but told the truth. But

<sup>1</sup> Iren., I., 8, 1.

he did the same thing himself. And to this day theology continues to do it. Indeed, the assumption that a complete system of doctrine is to be found in the Scriptures forces her to do it. Yet the fact remains that a morally earnest church, whose interest was in men and not in æons, was so shocked by this misuse of her documents that she proceeded to brand her first systematic theologians as heretics and outcasts.

One other tendency was opposed by the Alogi. Of the Apocalypse they were wont to say, "Of what profit is it to me, when the Apocalypse of John speaks to me concerning seven angels and seven trumpets?" We can almost hear them laugh as they say, "And it says, 'Go and tell the angel, Loose the four angels that are bound in the great river Euphrates.' And the number of the army were two hundred thousand thousand, and they had breastplates of fire and of jacinth and of brimstone." Says some good Alogi brother, "Now, what nonsense that is!" "These men," says Epiphanius, "seem to be afraid that the truth will become ridiculous."<sup>1</sup> It is evident that the Alogi had little sympathy with the belief in the continuance of the prophetic spirit. The

<sup>1</sup> Epiphanius, *Hær.*, 51, 32.

speculations over apocalypses, the feverish expectations of unsettled minds, the wild dreams and visionary hopes, tended just as much to divert the energies of the church from her great work of redemption as did the refining exegesis of the schools of Gnosticism. To an ordinary Christian, with little insight into theological and historical matters, both these tendencies would seem extremely ridiculous. An untutored mind, interested in matters of a practical nature, would not make fine distinctions between parties and schools, but would condemn all movements that were to "no purpose," and that dealt with things that did not "concern faith." Irenæus evidently refers to the Alogi when he says, "Others, that they may set at nought the gift of the Spirit, do not admit that aspect presented by John's Gospel, in which the Lord promised that he would send the Paraclete, but set aside at once both the gospel and the prophetic Spirit."<sup>1</sup>

The Alogi represent the first impulse of the church toward outward unity. They perceived that both Montanism and Gnosticism appealed to the same group of literature in defense of their dreams of the Paraclete and their speculations on

<sup>1</sup> Iren., III., 11, 9.

the Logos. The Alogi at once determined that as these doctrines were creating divisions and were turning the church aside from its proper work, they must be wrong, and the documents from which they were drawn must be falsified. So they attempted to stop the whole matter by attributing the Johannine writings to Cerinthus. Their remedy was uncritical, and was just the sort of a solution that would be proposed by minds of little insight. They thought to find unity by removing all foundation from under the dreamers and philosophers. Had the church possessed a New Testament, from which it was customary to justify all doctrines, such an act would have removed the foundation from the church itself. But the church possessed no New Testament. Her great mass of literature was yet in a chaotic state. The plan of unity proposed by the Alogi did not succeed, not because they rejected the Gospel of John, but because the doctrines of the Logos and the Paraclete were too deeply rooted in Christian history and experience to be treated in a manner so cavalier. Men who saw more deeply into the movements of the day must have realized that the rejection of a group of documents would not put an end to Gnosticism and Montanism.

The Alogi existed in the church for some time. What their strength was in other places we may only surmise from their influence in Rome, where the movement was not native. Theodoret no doubt belonged to them. There are good reasons for thinking that Caius derived his objections to the Apocalypse from them. Hippolytus, who was Bishop of Portus, near Rome, in the early part of the third century, attempted a refutation of their doctrines in his "Philosophumena." We have seen that Epiphanius, in the latter part of the fourth century, was writing against them, and was the first to give them a name. Indeed, all indications point to the fact that the movement was not an organized effort at all, but merely an expression of the body of common Christians, who did not see deeply into the matter, but who knew that something was wrong. The Alogi mark a period in the history of the church when the criticism of the documents was very free, when it was not definitely settled that a good Christian could not reject the Gospel of John, when men were tolerated who opposed heretics with the most drastic measures, when the questions raised by the philosophers were becoming common property, and when the problem of theological unity was

assuming an importance that overshadowed everything else. They prove conclusively that the church of their day did not think that the all-important thing about the Gospel of John was that it belonged to a definite and settled group of inspired and authoritative documents.

Who shall say that this movement does not give us a true insight into the "Christian consciousness" of the second century? The same men who objected to the Ogdoad of Valentinus also objected to the Trinity of Tertullian. No such things were to be found in the documents, they declared. Either Heracleon's grotesque interpretations of John were not correct or else the Gospel of John was not Christian. This was the dilemma. Some reached one conclusion and some another. All were agreed that the metaphysical movement was a shift of emphasis, that to make the lost sheep in the parable an æon instead of a forsaken and outcast humanity was to Hellenize Christianity, and that no such "systems" were to be found in the apostolic writings anyway. Even the Fathers, whose writings have come down to us, took this stand when speaking of the heretics. Their point of divergence from men like the Alogi consisted in the fact that they did

not deny that there was a rounded and completed system of thought to be found in the apostolic books. What they did deny was that the Gnostics had found this system. Until the confusion could be cleared up and some definite theological programme could be adopted it was sufficient to admit the fundamental hypothesis of the heretics, and to deny their conclusions. This was done, with more or less consistency, by both Irenæus and Tertullian. They had an easy time in ridiculing the teaching of the Gnostics, because the judgment of the great unthinking mass of Christians was with them, and the vast majority of the assemblies were ready to laugh the philosophers out of court. The falsehood of their position consisted in the assumption that the Christian books contained a final and completed system of theology, which eventually must be brought to light by a process of speculation. The common Christian, to whom Christianity was a vital reality, a present-day experience, a continuance of the inspiration of the Spirit, and was not yet bound up with any set of historical events or documents, was far nearer the truth than those who led the church on into the hierarchy.

VI

MARCION'S NEW TESTAMENT



## VI

THE first closed canon of Christian writings was given to the world by Marcion. This great leader and organizer, who was the son of a bishop of Sinope, came to Rome some time during the latter part of the reign of Hadrian. We cannot enter minutely into his teaching here, save to show the interest and the motive that led him to the formation of a New Testament canon. Indeed, it is utterly impossible to trace back to Marcion a completed and consistent system, or even the elements of one. His interest was not speculative. He cared little for theories, and much for men. He was a strong religious character, and the gospel, to his mind, was not an explanation of the origin of the world, but a means of redemption from the world. In this respect Marcion is to be classed with those old-fashioned Christians, who resisted the Hellenizing tendencies of the second century. He expressly claimed for his work that it was not an innovation but a restoration of the gospel.<sup>1</sup> He

<sup>1</sup> Tertullian, *Adv. Mar.*, 20, 1.

put his emphasis on faith, and not on "gnosis." He never used the allegorical method of interpretation. He had no esoteric and exoteric doctrines to propound. In short, he is to be regarded, not as a philosopher, but as a reformer.

Becoming convinced that there was a violent contrast between the teaching of Paul and the growing Catholic hierarchy of his day, he set out to purify Christianity. His point of departure was the Pauline antithesis between faith and works, between the gospel and the law, between the children of wrath and the children of grace. This contrast, backed by a strong moral and redemptive dualism, and a mind that loved to dwell in the paradoxical, led Marcion, as it at one time led Luther, to certain untenable extremes. Being utterly unable to understand the Pauline suggestion that "the law is a schoolmaster to lead us to Christ," he rejected entirely the Old Testament, attributing it to an evil god—the god of wrath, who is the direct antithesis of the Christian God of mercy and love. Marcion delighted in emphasizing the tender attributes of the good God, who is the Father of the Lord Jesus. The evil god was the creator of the world. He was a being whose stern justice was untempered by any

mercy, and whose wrath knew no forgiveness. In striking contrast to him was the God of the Christian. "Our God," say the Marcionites, "although he did not manifest himself from the beginning and by means of creation, has yet revealed himself in Christ Jesus."<sup>1</sup> "One work is sufficient for our God; he has delivered man by his supreme and most excellent goodness, which is more important than the creation of locusts."<sup>2</sup>

Tertullian devotes one whole book in his reply to Marcion to the Christo-centric character of his religion. The revelation of God in Christ was put before all things else. This emphasis was no doubt the strength of the position of Marcion. His weakness consisted in the cavalier and arbitrary manner in which he treated the great question, which was demanding solution in his day, as to the relation of Judaism and Christianity. It was Marcion himself who first put the question, "What new thing did the Lord bring us by his advent?"<sup>3</sup> It was an uncomfortable question for those who were founding the Catholic hierarchy. The answer to this

<sup>1</sup> Adv. Mar., I., 19.

<sup>2</sup> Adv. Mar., I., 17.

<sup>3</sup> Iren., IV., 34, 1.

question made by Paul was in direct opposition to the tendency of the day. That Marcion did not answer it correctly, either, is no reason for thinking that his solution was more wide of the mark than that of the great church. The early ethical ideal that is found in the Didache, in Barnabas, and in so many of the first Christian writings seemed to him to teach the false Jewish doctrine of salvation by works. Christianity was to the writers of these documents nothing but a *new law*. As Luther would cast out the Epistle of James as "an epistle of straw," so Marcion would banish the great mass of the early documents and consign them to the brush-heap. Even the Gospels had been corrupted in the interest of this false tendency.

Like a good Tübingen critic, Marcion reveled in the second chapter of Galatians. Paul had been obliged to separate himself entirely from the rest of the apostles, because they would cling to their Judaism. Tertullian complains that Marcion always makes Jews of the apostles. "On all occasions you wish them to be understood to be in alliance with Judaism."<sup>1</sup> Irenæus says: "He maintained that the apostles preached the gospel

<sup>1</sup> Adv. Mar., V., 3.

while still under the influence of Jewish opinions";<sup>1</sup> and elsewhere he says that the Marcionites "maintain that the apostles intermingled the things of the law with the things of the Saviour."<sup>2</sup> "The separation of the law and the gospel," says Tertullian, "is the peculiar and principal work of Marcion."<sup>3</sup> This separation Marcion effected in a work called the "Antitheses,"<sup>4</sup> which was exalted to a place of authority among his followers.<sup>5</sup>

Two things led Marcion to this radical position—the drift of the church away from the simplicity of the gospel and in the direction of a hierarchy, and the lack of any tendency or principle of reconciliation in his own mind. He had the rugged nature of a reformer, and he never used the allegorical method of interpretation. His mind was not adjustable. Tertullian frequently accuses him of failing to prove his assertions. This much is to be said for him, though he did not comprehend Paul's means of preserving the Old Testament, despite the fact that the law was no longer of any avail,

<sup>1</sup> *Iren.*, III., 2, 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Iren.*, III., 12, 12.

<sup>3</sup> *Adv. Mar.*, I., 2. See also II., 28; IV., 1; *Iren.*, I., 27, 2.

<sup>4</sup> *Adv. Mar.*, I., 19; II., 28; IV., 1; *Philos.*, VII., 30.

<sup>5</sup> *Adv. Mar.*, I., 19.

still he did grasp the deep Pauline principle of justification, which the church of his day had lost.

It is impossible to conceive of the formation of a New Testament without some preceding discussion as to its relation to the Old Testament. It was perfectly natural that this discussion should begin with an emphasis upon the Christianity of Paul, and with a complete rejection of the Old Testament. This much we could have reasoned out if we had never known of Marcion or of the formation of a hierarchy which he resisted. To this day the Pauline doctrine of sin and grace, in the form of Augustinianism, and the Catholic practice of justification by works, lie side by side in that old church, with no attempt at reconciliation. How the writer of the "Confessions" could remain an ardent advocate of the hierarchy must ever remain a mystery. Even our Protestantism is frequently becoming one-sided, and driving out of its ranks men of strong ethical tendencies. We must not be too hard on Marcion because he could not make the law and the gospel live together in peace.

His was far from being a weak or nerveless Christianity. No Christian community in the second century insisted so strongly on renunciation

of the world as did the Marcionites. Union of the sexes was not allowed; even the married had to be separated before they could be baptized. The most rigid rules in regard to eating and drinking were enforced. The members of his church found great joy in martyrdom. Indeed, so preeminent were they for the strictness of their morality that the church Fathers were at a great disadvantage in answering them. This asceticism rooted itself in a strong dualism, which Marcion justified by the Pauline antithesis of flesh and spirit, death and life. He made much of such passages in Paul as the seventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans.

Still there was a great deal of the Greek about Marcion, and his dualism had just a little Platonic tinge. When we try to find a consistent theory in his teachings, however, we are lost in a labyrinth of contradictions and uncertainties. His main interest was the preservation of the Pauline doctrine of redemption, and different theological tendencies soon appeared in his church, which were mutually tolerant of each other, showing that his movement did not have a speculative foundation, as did the Gnostic schools. It was a missionary and reformatory effort to persuade men to accept

the divine mercy offered them in Christ, to get them to renounce their self-righteous pride for a life of grace and forgiveness, to lead them to reject the law and the Old Testament for the true gospel as proclaimed by Paul, and to help them to conquer sin by a strict mortification of the body and a sincere renunciation of the world.

We can understand now the interest which led Marcion to the formation of a canon. To purify the documents from all interpolations, to restore the gospel to its true Pauline basis, and to make it impossible for future ages again to corrupt the stream of tradition, he took up the task of forming a closed collection of authoritative Christian writings. In this he was perfectly sincere, and possessed the tremendous advantage of being the first to try to found a "New Testament Church." His movement possessed no theological basis, and no new prophets ever appeared among his followers. There was but one course open to him, and that was an appeal to the written memorials of Christianity. He was the first to endeavor to fix the boundaries of inspired Christian documents, and to exalt a definite collection of writings to the plane of canonical authority. This does not mean that he valued the writings any more highly than

did the church at large, but that he made an effort to settle definitely the number of them that were authoritative. Without such an effort there can be no "canon."

The object of Marcion in doing this was to secure and preserve the Pauline principle of justification and grace, which to him was "the gospel," from all future mixtures and corruptions. When the church at large formed her canon in later years it was with the desire of keeping intact the form of the apostolic teaching. She had precisely the same motive as had Marcion. Naturally the nucleus of his canon was a collection of the Epistles of Paul. These came in the following order: Galatians, First Corinthians, Second Corinthians, Romans, First Thessalonians, Second Thessalonians, Ephesians (which Marcion knew by the name of "Laodiceans"), Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon. He did not recognize the Pastoral Epistles, nor the Epistle to the Hebrews. That he did not alter the text much of the accepted Epistles is evident. Even the proofs adduced by Tertullian and Epiphanius go to show that he preserved the Epistles as he found them, with the slight alteration of a few words.

Beside this collection, which was known as

“The Apostolicon,” his canon possessed another part, which was known as “The Gospel.” He took a manuscript, substantially identical with our Gospel of Luke, and made corrections and emendations, in order to eliminate all traces of Judaism, which he regarded as corruptions of the text. He was probably attracted to this form of the gospel narrative because of its frequent incidents putting Jesus in the light of the Saviour of sinners. It lent itself beautifully to the redemptive interest, which was a passion to Marcion. Then too, he may have thought that this Gospel had been influenced less by the false ethical ideals of the Judaizers. Whether he knew it under the name of Luke, and whether he was attracted to it because it had already been connected with the name of Paul we do not know. We only know that Marcion called it simply “The Gospel,” and held that it was what Paul had in mind when he referred to his Gospel.

We have no time, and it would profit us little if we had, to enter into the discussions of the Fathers over the textual emendations of Marcion. His importance in a history of the rise of the New Testament canon is the fact that he first endeavored to close the book, and did it on the

basis that it must be an absolute homogeneity. His conception that a canon must contain no contradictory teachings, and that no opposing individualities must obtrude themselves, was precisely the idea which the church adopted in later times. But the church Fathers possessed one advantage over Marcion; they were able to reconcile the most diverse statements by their allegorical method of interpretation, and so could accept a much larger number of documents. But even in this there must have been a charm about a rugged and earnest character who had the courage to cut out the hard passages instead of explaining them away. Paul had released Christianity from the fetters of Judaism; but his deep mystical conception of "faith" had never been grasped by the church at large. It is safe to infer that there never would have been a great hierarchy formed in the second century had Paul been thoroughly understood. The idea of Christianity as a "new law" could never have taken such deep root in a Pauline church. It was this idea that Marcion was combating, and it was inevitable that the first effort in the direction of the freedom of faith should take on certain strong antinomian tendencies.

As for the canon, the church had possessed one in the Old Testament for over a hundred years, and had been allegorizing Christian truth into it. We cannot conceive a *second* closed canon of revelation coming into existence without some previous speculation as to the relation of the two. In such a speculation the Pauline Epistles must stand in the foreground. No one else had so deeply and thoroughly entered into the question of the divergence of the Christian from the Jewish system. It was Marcion's task to raise this question anew. It had slept for nearly a century, and the apostolic Fathers had gone on enunciating ethical rules that Luther would have called "straw." The emphasis Marcion laid upon personal religion, as opposed to all legalistic and ceremonial enactments was genuinely Pauline. That he should have come at it by a sweeping rejection of the Old Testament is not so very surprising. How could there be two authoritative canons? When they disagreed, as certainly they would in the case of two such different systems as Christianity and Judaism, what possible appeal could there be? The Catholic answer is, "Appeal to the authorized successors of the apostles." Marcion was enough of a Protestant to refuse to admit such

an appeal. He insisted that the Christian canon was sufficient. In this again he has the Fathers at a great disadvantage. They stumble and quibble in endeavoring to answer him. Their most frequent and effective answer is simple denunciation. He does not accept the Old Testament. What better sign that he is not a true Christian? Why he does not accept it is a question that raises uncomfortable issues, and few of the Fathers are able to handle such a tremendous problem.

If we had started out with a theory instead of with an examination of the facts of history, our knowledge of Christianity would have led us, no doubt, to predict that there would be a conflict between the "law" and the "gospel" before two closed volumes of authoritative literature could be included in one book. That we find this actually happening in the case of Marcion is therefore not remarkable. Nor is it remarkable that Marcion was finally put down by the formation of that strange system that enabled Augustine to be such a devout believer in the free grace of God, and such an earnest advocate of the principle that that grace could only be mediated through the sacraments of a hierarchy. The church never

really took hold of the question raised by Marcion, but put down his movement by main force, bound up the two canons into one, and left the two principles side by side in her system, subordinating, of course, the inner life to the outer ceremonies.

The history of Christianity contains the record of numberless efforts to reverse this subordination, making the form the servant of the spirit. The Pauline conception, which the great apostle no doubt obtained from Christ, that the ethical and ceremonial life is to be regarded as merely the "fruit" of an inner, spiritual transformation, has been a most uncomfortable principle to the hierarchy. By it Luther shook Europe; and by it the mystics have often tried to overthrow all organization. Even the Protestant church has not yet found a way to live with it in comfort. Adopting the principle, first enunciated by Marcion, of a church founded on the New Testament, she has found that the thought of an inner authority of the Spirit has been turned against her authoritative book. Just as the Catholic Church was driven by Marcion into a compromise that subordinated the Pauline principle to a hierarchy, so the vagaries of the mystics drove Protestantism

to a theory by which the inner revelation of the Spirit was subordinated to that of a book. We shall see in the next chapter that the church of the second century met with this problem too. The very conception of a closed canon of revelation was sure to meet with the opposition of the idea of direct revelations from the Spirit, which in the beginning had produced the canonical books. Indeed, the Epistles of Paul, which Marcion made the basis of the first canon, contain a conception of Christianity which has ever been turned against the very idea of a canon. In view of all these things we cannot blame Marcion very strongly because he did not understand the great principle laid down by the apostle he professed to follow.

The church founded by Marcion grew to most remarkable proportions. Epiphanius says that in his day Marcionites were to be found in Rome, Italy, Egypt, Palestine, Arabia, Syria, Cyprus, the Thebaid, and even in Persia. Celsus divided the Christian church into two great bodies, one of which regarded their God as identical with the God of the Jews, and the other of which regarded theirs as a different Deity, and hostile to the Jews. The former he calls the "Great Church";

the latter are the Marcionites. There can be no doubt of the fact that soon after the middle of the second century in every place where a considerable body of Christians was to be found, there would be found one of Marcion's churches, with a simple service, a clean-cut conception of the essence of Christianity, a definite canon, whose limits had been fixed, and a body of believers noted for their high moral standards and their willingness to endure martyrdom. Their numbers, relative to the size of the "great church," must have been equal to that of the number of Protestants to Catholics in the world to-day. When we consider the severity of their discipline, and the exacting demands made upon all members of the Marcionite church, this growth is very remarkable. Their solidarity must have given them the advantage for the time-being over the church at large, which was just then trying to fuse the most diverse elements into a compact whole. They had attempted to answer clearly and finally the question, "What is Christianity?" and they were not subject to constant checks and quarrels over new revelations, because their canon of authority was closed. The free organization of their churches, the lack of disintegrating

speculations over metaphysics, the genuinely spiritual emphasis of their basic principle, the strong testimony of the purity of their lives, the missionary earnestness of their Pauline gospel, and the definite ground of authority furnished by their canon—all these must have conspired to increase their strength and growth.

What worked most strongly against the Marcionites was the fact that the church was becoming secularized, and was feeling the necessity of adjusting itself to the conditions of this world. A body aiming at political power could not demand of all its members that stern ascetic standard which ruled in the churches of Marcion. A few anchorites might fly to the desert or the mountains for the realization of a life of purity, but mortification of the body, delight in martyrdom, and rigid rules of fasting were not acceptable to men desirous of entering the world as its rulers. A double standard of morality had to be discovered, by which that dualism, which found adherents in nearly every school of thought of the day, could be adjusted to well-fed ecclesiastics, as well as gaunt anchorites. The intense moral earnestness of the Marcionites led them to extremes that were hardly consistent with the

followers of One who had been called "a wine-bibber, and a friend of publicans and sinners." The pendulum was swinging away from the ideals of a persecuted church to those of a great secular organization. Moral standards that were enforced when men expected the sudden appearance of Christ on the clouds were not applicable to a church that had gained a foothold in the palace of Cæsar, and was about to gain possession of the Roman scepter itself. The drift of the age was against the Marcionites, and the very depth of their earnestness, as well as the purity of their lives, helped to make their cause increasingly unpopular.

Then too, the fact that they stood for no definite theological explanation of the universe, and placed their emphasis upon redemption rather than speculation was a hindrance to their success. Their Paulinism did not allow them to make that complete compromise with the Greek spirit, which was the order of the day. Redemption through knowledge, union with God by means of science, salvation by contemplation of the creative methods of the Infinite—these were conceptions utterly foreign to the rugged evangelism of the Marcionite churches. They were too

much engaged with the fact of sin, and with resistance to the compromising methods of a worldly church, to fall in with that ethereal and theorizing tendency that poured all its energies into trying to solve the problem of the "creation of locusts." It was sufficient for them that God had delivered man "by his supreme and most excellent goodness," and refinements over the priority of creative æons must be made subordinate to faith in Christ. It is not to be wondered at that the church did not understand this position. Faith in Christ had come to mean an explanation of his place in the universe as the creative Logos, and until this problem could be solved, and an ambitious church could substitute a creed for a life, little foothold could be found in it by men like Marcion.

And yet there was an element of weakness in the fundamental position of Marcion. His very claim to a restoration of the gospel, and his effort to found a church on a canon, was an appeal to history, and shifted the basis of authority from faith to documents. Here the church had him at a great disadvantage. However pure his life, and however noble his followers, when the appeal was made to the apostolic age he had to be ruled

out of court. He did not accept the documents. If this is the test of Christianity, and it is right to appeal to a canon, then the most upright and honorable life will not avail the Marcionites. It is all in vain that they abstain from sins of appetite and suffer martyrdom. They do not belong to the apostolic church. They do not build on the apostolic teaching.

Marcion saw clearly the falsity of such an appeal, and realized that the emphasis on "apostolic Christianity" was making the religion of Christ a "new law," and was substituting another set of ethical rules for those given on Sinai, and yet he was compelled to go back to the apostolic age for his principle of "justification by faith," and in so doing he fell into line with that exaltation of the first century, which was the basic principle of Gnostics and church Fathers alike. So he helped to raise the question, "What was the teaching of the apostles?" This very question was his undoing. It drew attention away from that vital and personal relationship with a living Christ, which was the strength of his conception of Christianity, and introduced that endless era of criticism and exegesis which to this day holds the church in its grasp. "Apostolic Christianity" is

still the favorite topic of the schools, and that deep Pauline conception that regards life's common virtues as the "fruits of the Spirit," that seeks to enthrone Christ at the seat of the affections, that allows the Spirit to work its way out by "the law of liberty," that cares more for "the mind of Christ" than for all ceremonies and rabbinic subtleties, and that makes its point of departure a present-day inspiration, rather than a past code of commands, is waiting for the day of ecclesiastics and theologians to be over.



VII

THE NEW PROPHETS



## VII

THE theological chaos was not the only problem the early church had to face. As the Christian communities became secularized, and a gradual adjustment to the life of the empire was brought about, it was inevitable that there should be a lowering of moral standards, and a consequent reaction in the direction of primitive simplicity of life. These opposing forces, of those who favored the naturalization of Christianity in the world and those who clung to the ideal of the days when it was expected the Lord would soon return, naturally came into conflict. The belief in the continuance of prophecy, in the possession of the Holy Spirit by the individual, and in the universal priesthood of believers, had gradually died out in the church. All these primitive conceptions were revived in Montanism. But this revival of the spirit of prophecy was just as insubordinate, just as bewildering, and just as depolarizing as was the multitude of philosophical schools. Its great strength consisted in the fact that it resisted so strongly the

tendency of the church toward a double standard of morality, and had no sympathy with a propaganda that lowered the requirements of sacrifice in order to conquer the world.

In its inception the movement was more than a simple revival of primitive ideas. It began in Asia Minor, with a Christian prophet named Montanus, who, assisted by prophetesses, set out to realize the superior things promised in the Gospel of John by the coming of the Paraclete. We have no time in this discussion to enter into the vagaries and violent demands of the early years of this movement. As it spread to the West it took on more moderate forms. The conception that the New Jerusalem was to come down in Phrygia was abandoned. No effort was made to separate from the church at large, and all emphasis was laid on purity of conduct and character. This deadened somewhat the first enthusiasm of the movement, but it enabled it to take in whole churches, without any appearance of schism or heresy. The strong and courageous resistance it made to the effort of Christianity to become a legal and political power helped it greatly. Its earnest exhortations for the manifestation of a pure daily life, its insistence that the Christian

should be willing to suffer martyrdom joyfully for Christ's sake, and its support of these things by the old belief in a direct inspiration of the Spirit, all gave it great power and influence.

With the third of these only have we to do in our discussion. The Montanists believed in a new prophecy; and this belief was in direct antagonism to the conception of a closed period of revelation and of a canon. We have no record that they ever insisted upon putting their books into the bound volume. Indeed, at the beginning they had no conception whatever of such a volume. If they had been told of a "New Testament," they would have claimed that theirs was the "Newest Testament." They did actually call their commands the "newest law." But as the movement spread through the West, with its desire to maintain connection with the great body of the church, it found difficulty in reconciling its position with the idea of a past period of revelation, which was becoming generally accepted there. The contest narrowed down to two points—whether there could be a continuance of Christian prophecy and whether the laxity of moral character should be allowed to continue in the church. As soon as the idea of a New

Testament was generally accepted, the conception of a later and superior revelation of the Paraclete could not be tolerated for a moment. And yet what could a man do who had been led to believe in the necessity of a closed canon as a means of putting an end to the speculation of Gnostic schools, who yet sympathized with the Montanists, because of their ideal of a pure life and strict moral conduct? A church that allowed its members too great freedom and looseness of life could surely make no claim to a complete preservation of the ideal of the apostles. This fact would lead an earnest man to sympathize with the Montanists. On the other hand, this same earnest man, observing the secularizing tendency of Gnosticism, and realizing that a fixed body of Christian doctrine could not be formed without a canon of apostolic literature, would sympathize with the effort to form a New Testament. Such a man would be in an almost hopeless tangle.

There was, in fact, such a man. We have but to turn to the writings of Tertullian to observe the conflict of the two principles of a continuation of the prophetic gift and a closed period of revelation. Inasmuch as he tried to be both a

Montanist and a Catholic Christian, we can best study in him the antagonism of these two tendencies. He tried hard to defend his orthodoxy. "They and we," he said, "have one faith, one God, the same Christ, the same hope, the same baptismal sacraments. Let me say it once for all, *we are one church.*"<sup>1</sup> This sentiment was not shared by the church at large. Tertullian was a great champion in the fight with Gnosticism and the Marcionites, and so was tolerated; but the fundamental principle of the "new prophets" was directly contradictory to the conception of a canon and an apostolic church. For example, what could be more revolutionary than a statement like this: "For if Christ abrogated what Moses enjoined, because from the beginning it was not so, why may not the Paraclete abrogate an injunction which Paul granted?"<sup>2</sup> What becomes of the doctrine of a final deposit of inspiration, if it is subject to constant corrections from "modern prophets"? It hardly seems possible that the man who so flatly and openly asserts the right to correct the ancient revelation by more recent commands of the Spirit can turn about and say something like this: "It is true

<sup>1</sup> De Virg. Vel., 2.

<sup>2</sup> De Monog., 14.

that believers also have the Spirit of God, but not all believers are apostles. For apostles have the Holy Spirit properly who have him fully, in the operations of prophecy, in the efficacy of healing, and the evidences of tongues, not partially as all others have.”<sup>1</sup> It is evident that the whole question is yet in a chaotic state.

A more complete statement of the final authority of the Scriptures cannot be found anywhere than in Tertullian. “The Scriptures deny what they do not affirm,”<sup>2</sup> he says. And yet he tells us that in the interest of a united church and a completed sacrament it is very essential “to believe nothing conceded by John which has been flatly contradicted by Paul.”<sup>3</sup> It is not profitable, he thinks, to dwell too much “on the authority of those scriptures which are a sort of cable of contention with alternate pull in diverse directions, so that one scripture may seem to draw tight, another to relax, the reins of discipline—in uncertainty, as it were.”<sup>4</sup> And yet, if any of the Fathers did this very thing, it was Tertullian. He devotes whole pages to disputing the meaning of a preposition or a phrase. His idea that the

<sup>1</sup> De Ex. Cast., 4.

<sup>2</sup> De Monog., 4.

<sup>3</sup> De Pud., 19.

<sup>4</sup> De Pud., 2.

Scriptures deny what they do not affirm made it absolutely necessary that he over-emphasize every little disagreement, in a vain effort at reconciliation. The question of marriage—a most important matter to the Montanists—gave him much trouble. He says of Paul, “He has introduced all indulgence in regard to marriage from his own opinion—that is, from human sense; not from divine prescript.”<sup>1</sup> He finds himself in a tangle here, but does not hesitate to say that Paul makes all his declarations from his own “personal suggestion, not from a divine command,” and he assures us that there “is a wide difference between a precept of God and a suggestion of man.”<sup>2</sup> In this way he endeavors to set aside the whole seventh chapter of First Corinthians, and transcend it in the interest of the sterner discipline of the Montanists. At times he grows weary of the whole process of refining exegesis, and of the undue exaltation of particular passages of Scripture, and we find him saying, “We prefer, if it must be so, to be less wise *in* the Scriptures than to be wise *against* them.”<sup>3</sup> “I am content with the fact,” he says, “that between apostles there is a common agreement in rules of

<sup>1</sup> De Ex. Cast., 3.

<sup>2</sup> De Ex. Cast., 4.

<sup>3</sup> De Pud., 9.

faith and discipline.”<sup>1</sup> And yet this was just what he tried in vain to find. His stern and puritanical soul was tried exceedingly by the looseness of life that had crept into the church, as it had become a great world power. The lax Christians, who sought to adjust themselves to the ways of the world, presented a strange contrast to the Christians of earlier times. And yet there was no definite law to which appeal could be made. Arguments for both laxity and strictness could be brought forward from the Scriptures. It was this very fact that made the higher revelations of the Montanist prophets appeal to the sterner souls in the church. The “new prophets” were explicit and definite in their regulations in regard to morals, in their insistence on abstinence from second marriage, in their rules dealing with fasts, and in their exhortation to endure martyrdom for Christ’s sake with a willing heart. In these respects they actually seemed to be superior to the Scriptures. This fact makes Tertullian again and again rise to a very lofty and spiritual conception of authority. He nobly defines the church as follows: “The church is the Spirit himself.”<sup>2</sup> Wherever he is, there is the

<sup>1</sup> De Pud., 19.

<sup>2</sup> De Pud., 21.

church. Authority, he declares, rests in this "church of the Spirit," and not in "the church which consists of a number of bishops."

It may be asked, "How could a man who held such views as these be tolerated in the Catholic Church?" The only answer is that there was no Catholic Church. Such a church was in process of formation, and we do not have to look far to see how useful Tertullian was in carrying out this process. We find him caustically accusing the great Marcionite Church of introducing new ideas into Christianity. We must remember, when we read these strange accusations of Tertullian, that the "new prophecies," which he himself advocated, were to his mind simply a return to first principles, and to a former manner of life. For this reason he is very severe on the "novelties" introduced by Marcion. "Schoolboys are proud of their new shoes," he says, "but their old master beats their strutting vanity out of them."<sup>1</sup> So, he implies, will this Marcionite movement, with its strange methods and conceptions, be put down eventually by the lash of authority. That he was perfectly right in this prophecy no student of history will deny. The "old master" at last did

<sup>1</sup> Adv. Mar., I., 8.

beat the "strutting vanity" out of every one of her refractory pupils, including Tertullian's own "prophets."

He complains bitterly that the church is "setting boundary-posts to God."<sup>1</sup> and declares that all that remains now is to banish him entirely from the world. He felt deeply the effect upon the lives of Christians of the unspiritual conception of a closed era of revelation. Why then, we ask, did he not find some other weapon with which to fight Marcion than to take up the Catholic cry against the "new revelation" and the "new God," of the "neophyte," the "shipmaster of Pontus"? Evidently he did not always see the application of this principle of tradition. He does not agree at all with those members of the church at large who turn this principle against the Montanists. He says, "They are constantly reproaching us with novelty concerning the unlawfulness of which they lay down a prescriptive law that either it must be judged heresy, if it is a human presumption, or else pronounced pseudo-prophecy if it is a spiritual declaration."<sup>2</sup> This he will not admit. And yet when he turns to answer Marcion he lays down this as the norm

<sup>1</sup> De Jejun., 11.

<sup>2</sup> De Jejun., 1.

that is to determine what is right and what is wrong: "Now what is to settle the point for us except it be that principle of *time*, which rules that authority lies with that which shall be found to be more ancient; and assumes as a fundamental truth that corruption belongs to the side which shall be convicted of lateness in origin. For inasmuch as error is falsification of truth, it must needs be that truth therefore preceded error." <sup>1</sup> This is a very convenient platform upon which to meet one who has published an emendation of the gospel narrative in the interest of a Pauline Christianity. He can easily prove that Marcion's Gospel is a "new invention." He can overthrow his antagonist at once, if the only test of truth is "that which shall be found to be more ancient."

But how about himself? If you turn to another treatise you will find him abandoning this position entirely, and taking his stand upon the truly Protestant principle that "Christ surnamed himself truth, not tradition." "It is not so much novelty as truth which convicts heresies. Whatever savors of opposition to truth will be heresy, even if it be an ancient custom." <sup>2</sup> What finer declaration will be found anywhere, in all the

<sup>1</sup> Adv. Mar., IV., 4.

<sup>2</sup> De Virg. Vel., 1.

literature of Christian polemics! It is a great pity to find this champion of "truth" abandoning entirely his lofty platform, and speaking as follows to Marcion: "Wherefore, O shipmaster of Pontus, if you have never taken on board your small craft any contraband goods or smuggler's cargo, if you have never thrown overboard or tampered with a freight, you are still more careful and conscientious, I doubt not, in divine things; and so I should be glad if you would inform us under what bill of lading you admitted the Apostle Paul on board, who ticketed him, what owner forwarded him, who handed him to you, that so you may land him without any misgiving."<sup>1</sup> He then goes on to show that Marcion, by rejecting the Acts of the Apostles, and by denying that Paul went up to Jerusalem to receive his commission from the rest of the apostles, has no foundation whatever upon which to rest his belief in Paul. It would be interesting to hear what Paul himself would have to say about this. Imagine some one asking him under what "bill of lading" he came into the church, and "who ticketed him," and "what owner forwarded him!" Indeed, it would be very interesting to

<sup>1</sup> Adv. Mar., V., 1.

get the judgment of Paul on this whole movement to form a closed canon of revelation. That very "liberty," which was so dear to his heart, has to be sacrificed entirely in order to get him "on board" an apostolic church. From now on we shall hear much about how he crept up to Jerusalem, in order to get permission from the apostles to teach the truth. The apostles "ticketed him," and so he had a right to proclaim his message.

In no other writer does the conflict of the two principles of truth and tradition come out more clearly than in Tertullian. He was two men—one a Catholic, and one a Montanist—and he never succeeded in making the two live together. They could not live together. A compact and absolute government is an impossibility, if the rulers are to be constantly subjected to the checks of prophecy, and the Catholic and the Montanist principles are as irreconcilable as anarchy and monarchy. "Whoever thinks his own way of thinking is Catholic," says Athanasius, "is guilty of the folly of the Montanists."<sup>1</sup> They were the most dangerous people the hierarchy had to deal with. They declared that the church was

<sup>1</sup> Socrates, H. E., II., 36.

“expelling prophecy,” that it was “driving out the Paraclete.” This it was certainly doing by its rejection of the belief that an ordinary Christian, under the inspiration of the Spirit, could give utterance to authoritative messages and instructions. Of course the principle was susceptible of great abuse, and all sorts of fanciful and fanatical utterances were attributed to the inspiration of the Spirit. All this was gradually abolished by the formation of a canon. The conception of a classical period of Christianity, whose height of revelation could never be attained by any later generation, became firmly established in the church, and the spread of Montanism was checked. This period of revelation was represented by the New Testament, and the only authoritative interpretation of it came through the apostolic office of the bishops. Later ages might admire it, reverence it, look up to it as an ideal, but might never think of actually attaining its transcendent height of knowledge and vision. To be sure the constituted representatives of the church were to be placed on a level, in the matter of authority, with the ancient documents, which they alone were able to understand. But the rank and file of Christians could never dream of

possessing the Spirit in the same measure, or even the same manner, as the apostolic writers and the apostolic church.

This double system of revelation Tertullian resisted with all his might. He saw that it was working great evil in lowering the requirements made upon the average Christian in the matter of conduct. He insisted upon seeing the "virginity of the church" in the fact that it was a holy community, banded together for the realization of a life of purity. As soon as men ceased to feel that they were under the direct guidance of the Spirit they abandoned that high moral standard that had come down from the earlier times, and that had been purified in the fires of martyrdom. In resisting this tendency toward a secularization of the church, the Montanists were fighting a losing battle. In ages of persecution, like that under Marcus Aurelius, they flourished; but as soon as events became more quiet, and Christians sought to live more comfortably, and the church began to conform to the ways of the world, every effort was put forth to get rid of these inconvenient Puritans.

It is unfortunate that we know so little of the movement. Its earlier history is shrouded in

darkness. We only see it plainly, and have records of it that are authentic, in its Western manifestations, where its edge is dulled and its enthusiasm deadened. In coming West it did not endeavor to form a new organization, but accepted the conditions found in the church. We have records of partial, and even whole communities, that went over to the new prophets, and yet retained their connection with the church at large. The growing belief in a closed period of revelation, which the Montanists were compelled to accept, was most deadly to their fundamental conception. We have already seen in Tertullian the strange contradiction introduced into his system by his acceptance of the idea of a New Testament, and by his adherence to the "new prophets." Such a contradiction cannot long stand. Consistency may be the "hobgoblin" of petty minds, but the world will strive for it, and no man can long continue to say in the same breath that the Spirit no longer inspires men, and yet that it does.

If the Montanists had been able to fight out the battle on the moral issue alone, they might have won. The lofty purity of their conduct, the stern demands they made upon their followers, and the

joy they manifested in martyrdom, raised them far above the members of the church at large. In this respect they were more "apostolic" than the apostolic church. But that word "apostolic" was coming to have little to do with conduct. Other issues come into the conflict. The "virginity of the church," of which so much had been said in former times, was coming to be looked upon as the holding of a deposit of pure doctrine. The mother church, that had hitherto protected her children so earnestly from immoralities, was hereafter to protect them fanatically from heresies. The insistence upon the *creed* of the apostles, and the effort to make them a publishing-house, whose mission was to issue a closed volume of authoritative writings, was the death sentence of the Montanist movement.

To be sure we cannot say with any degree of probability that the Montanists were the *cause* of the formation of a canon. In fact, the movement was more the effect of that secularization of the church, of which the formation of a canon was merely a part. The conception that "the church is the Spirit," and that wherever spiritual manifestations are found there is a church, is utterly incompatible with a definite and fixed

organization, whose representatives are seeking a foothold in every sphere of social and political activity. In every way Montanism was in direct antagonism to the spirit of the times. Its democratic spirit was hostile to the centralization of power in the episcopate; its conception that the virginity of the church consisted in purity of deed, rather than purity of dogma, was a challenge to the speculative and metaphysical spirit; and its belief in the continuance of prophecy could not possibly live in peace with the effort to close the period of revelation, and "seal up the book." Despite the vagaries of the movement, its foundation principle that "Christ surnamed himself truth, not tradition," and that the appeal to the age of the apostles for anything but a spiritual ideal of life was setting "boundary-posts to God," marks the high tide of second century Christianity.

If this position could have been taken rationally instead of hysterically, and could have been held back from the extremes of a weird and grotesque mysticism, it would have been the highest conception of authority ever held in the Christian church since the days of Paul. But wherever the fires of Montanism cooled down, and more

rational leaders emphasized the moral life as a manifestation of the Spirit, there its followers could hardly resist the strong tide toward a Catholic Christianity. The very fact that they admitted that their ideal was that of the apostolic age raised the question as to just what documents contained that ideal. The historical question crept in under cover of a great spiritual purpose, and when once it was in, it proceeded to become dominant over everything, and to "quench the Spirit." The Montanists were really striving to build up a "New Testament church," and that is why they resisted so strongly the effort to form a New Testament.

It was all in vain that the Montanist mourned the degeneracy of the times and exhorted men to return to the high standard of the apostolic age. His Catholic opponent simply answered that men would only return to that standard when they held the doctrines of the apostolic age. The belief that the spiritual life is the outgrowth of a metaphysical system was used as a bludgeon to subdue all independent thought. To the Montanist the whole thing seemed simple enough. He preferred to be "less wise in Scripture," rather than to enter upon a refining exegesis, while making a moral

compromise with the forces of evil. He believed that in all essential things there was a "common agreement among apostles." The Christian ideal was so plain that the simplest mind could apprehend it. If anything said by John was "flatly contradicted by Paul," that thing could not be a matter of very great consequence. The kind of a life demanded of a Christian was one about which there could be very little difference of opinion. It was written large in the ancient documents. These men who know so much about Scripture, and who find such mysterious things in numbers and prepositions, are the very last of all Christians to go to martyrdom with courage and cheerfulness. Indeed, do not some of them, like Heracleon, say that martyrdom is unnecessary? Evidently, while seeking to become "wise in the Scripture," they have become "wise against it."

All this was good, sound reasoning in ages of persecution. But when the times became more quiet, and the church resumed her temporary task of conquering thrones and kingdoms, it was found that a more compromising principle was necessary. Energies that in times of danger manifest themselves in deeds of moral heroism are more likely to be drained off in speculation in quiet

periods. The Montanist definition that "the church is the Spirit" will then be supplanted by the conception that the church is the organization that holds the true doctrine. Besides all this, men who are in perfect agreement under persecution, and who then manifest remarkable solidarity, are often the first to separate when danger departs. The mystics are proverbially insubordinate. For this very reason, no doubt, the Montanists greatly accelerated that very consolidation and secularization of the church which they resisted, and by the disintegrating influences of their "new prophecies" helped to hasten that time when the epoch of revelation should be forever closed, and there should be formed a "canon of the books of the New Dispensation."



VIII

THE CATHOLIC FATHERS



## VIII

“WE lay it down as our first position,” says Tertullian, “that the Evangelical Testament (Evangelium Instrumentum) has apostles for its authors, to whom was assigned by the Lord himself this office of publishing the gospel.”<sup>1</sup> This claim that Christ gave to certain men the exclusive right to publish the written gospel, was put forth for the first time in the latter half of the second century. The apostles were the legal and constituted “authors” of the Christian revelation. They had been commissioned by Christ for this work. In view of the fact that Luke and Mark did not belong to the Twelve, and in view of the further fact that the word “apostle” had had such a wide significance, being still applied in Alexandria to the seventy and to men like Barnabas and Clement of Rome, the church had no easy task before her in her effort to form an *apostolic* New Testament.

One of the first steps in this process was to limit the word “apostle” to one of the Twelve. From

<sup>1</sup> Adv. Mar., IV., 2.

now on this is done in Rome, and wherever the monarchical episcopate is becoming more centralized. Then too, this little group of twelve, as we have seen above in Tertullian, are now looked upon as "authors," upon whose writings there is a copyright, which belongs to their heirs. "I am the heir of the apostles,"<sup>1</sup> is the confident declaration. Who is this "I"? Manifestly the organization centering in the office of the bishops. The sum total of the books written by the apostles, when the number can be determined, is the sum total of the apostolic teaching, and the content of the canon. But who is to determine what books were written by the apostles? Again the dictatorial "I" comes in. Only the heirs have a right to determine what the ultimate and authoritative edition shall contain. With this edition the measure of revealed truth will be filled up. Whatsoever cannot be found in the canon will be pronounced to be "something beyond the truth."<sup>2</sup>

The work of Tertullian on "The Prescription of Heretics," contains a luminous passage, revealing the forces at work in the church in the latter part of the second century. "Since you are close upon Italy," he says, "you have Rome,

<sup>1</sup> Tert., *De Præscr.*, 37.

<sup>2</sup> *Iren.*, V., 20, 2.

from which there comes into our own hands the very authority (of apostles themselves). How happy is its church on which apostles poured forth all their doctrine along with their blood! where Peter endures a passion like his Lord's! where Paul wins a crown in a death like John's! where the Apostle John was first plunged unhurt into burning oil, and thence remitted to his island exile! See what she has learned, what taught, what fellowship she has had even with churches in Africa. One God does she acknowledge, the creator of the universe, and Christ Jesus, born of the Virgin Mary, the Son of God the creator, and the resurrection of the flesh; the law and the prophets she unites in one volume, with the writings of evangelists and apostles, from which she drinks her faith." <sup>1</sup> How much is contained in these words! Upon Rome the apostles have "poured forth all their doctrine." Rome is beginning to make herself felt even among "churches in Africa." Rome is said to be binding up the Christian writings into one volume with the law and the prophets. Rome announces to the world that she "acknowledges" one God, the Father, and Jesus Christ,

<sup>1</sup> De Præscr., 36.

his Son, born of the Virgin Mary, the resurrection of the flesh, and other doctrines. In this little passage we have the acorn from which grew the great Roman oak. The centralization of the episcopate, the formation of a canon, and the incipient stages of an "apostles' creed," are all here.

Take another passage. Tertullian refuses to enter into any dispute with the heretics in regard to what books are authoritative. Despite the fact that Valentinus came near being elected bishop of Rome, and despite the fact that his followers are generally in good standing in the churches, they are not allowed to express any opinion in regard to what books shall be placed in the canon. Why? The answer is simple. "Not being Christians, they have acquired no right to the Christian Scriptures. It may be very fairly said to them, 'Who are you? When and whence did you come? As you are none of mine, what have you to do with that which is mine? Indeed, Marcion, by what right do you hew my wood? By whose permission, Valentinus, are you diverting the streams of my fountain? By what power, Apelles, are you removing my landmarks? This is my property. I have long possessed it. I possessed it before you. I hold sure title-deeds from

the original owners themselves, to whom the estate belonged. I am the heir of the apostles. Just as they carefully prepared their last will and testament and committed it as a trust, even so do I hold it.' ”<sup>1</sup> The one thing prominent is the dictatorial “I.” This book is “mine.” You are trespassing on “my” property. You are diverting “my” streams, removing “my” landmarks. I have long possessed this book. It is hardly a good answer to the commentaries prepared so carefully by men like Heracleon, Valentinus, and Ptolemæus, to order them off the ground. But before Origen can undertake to answer these commentaries the church must get possession of the books. The first stage, therefore, is one of simple denunciation. The heretics are ordered off the premises. The church does not deny, what the heretics have already taken for granted, that the apostles have left an authoritative New Testament; she simply asserts that she is the “heir of the apostles.”

This conception of a canon is very sudden in its appearance among orthodox writers. We look in vain through all previous Christian literature for statements like those just quoted from

<sup>1</sup> De Præscr., 37.

Tertullian. That the apostles "carefully prepared their last will and testament," and committed it to the church as a "trust," is a thought that never occurred to any one before the champions of the church began to attack the Gnostics and Marcion. Tertullian never tires of repeating that the doctrines of the heretics were all anticipated in the apostolic writings, and condemned before they were uttered. "The apostle," he says in one place, "reprobates likewise such as bid to abstain from meats; but he does so from the foresight of the Holy Spirit, precondemning already the heretics who would enjoin perpetual abstinence to the extent of destroying and despising the works of the Creator; such as I may find in the person of a Marcion, or a Tatian."<sup>1</sup> "Hence it is," he says in another place, "that the Holy Spirit, in his greatness, foreseeing clearly all such interpretations as these, suggests in this Epistle to the Thessalonians," etc.<sup>2</sup> The thought that every question of Christian doctrine is contained in the sacred writings, that no appeal can be made from them to any more recent light or revelation, and that all controversies were foreseen by the writers and settled beforehand by

<sup>1</sup> De Jejun., 15.

<sup>2</sup> De Res. Car., 24.

some mystical or allegorical implication, is now found for the first time in Christian writers. The kind of interpretation that now prevails is well illustrated by the following argument by Tertullian: "The Holy Spirit, willing that there should be no distinction, willed that by the one name of *woman* should likewise be understood the *virgin*; whom, by not specially naming, he has not separated from the woman, and, by not separating, has conjoined to her from whom he has not separated her."<sup>1</sup> This exegetical contortion is used to prove that the divine author of Scripture was not only a Catholic, but a Montanist. How common, in all after literature, this absurd method of reading doctrines into scriptural passages is to become! It became necessary just as soon as the idea of a canon entered the church, and the books from being free and natural expressions of the religious life, became the depository of all truth and doctrine.

The kind of argument necessary to get the documents of early Christianity into the hands of the Catholic Church is well illustrated by Tertullian, when he says that the "authority of the apostolic churches" supports the other Gospels,

<sup>1</sup> De Virg. Vel., 4.

besides Luke, and that Marcion ought to be brought to account for rejecting them. Indeed, he says, "It is even more credible that they existed from the very beginning; for, being the work of apostles, they were prior and coeval in origin with the churches themselves."<sup>1</sup> He thus makes the churches sponsors for the Gospels, and the Gospels the foundation of the churches. This question of priority has always been an inconvenient one to the Catholic Church. Like the old problem whether the hen came before the egg, or the egg before the hen, it always raises a second and unanswerable question. When the advocate of the Hindu cosmogony was driven back from the elephant to the tortoise, and then was asked upon what the tortoise rested, he replied that it was "tortoise all the way down." So the authority of the hierarchy rests upon an ultimate dogmatic assertion, that is Catholic "all the way down."

One of the most interesting witnesses to the growth of the conception of a canon is Irenæus, who became bishop of Lyons, in Gaul, about the year A. D. 177. He prided himself on the fact that in his very early years he had been a pupil

<sup>1</sup> Adv. Mar., IV., 5.

of Polycarp, in Asia, who had in turn been a pupil of the Apostle John. "What I heard from him," he says to Florinus, "that wrote I not on paper, but in my heart, and by the grace of God, I constantly bring it fresh to my mind." He puts little trust, however, in oral tradition. He exactly reverses the estimation of Papias, and regards the written documents as far more trustworthy than any report handed down by word of mouth. "We have learned from none others," he declares, "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."<sup>1</sup> The two sources of authority are here blended in their usual manner. Irenæus can boast of his connection with the apostles, and so he does not hesitate to assert that the Scriptures are the "ground and pillar" of the Christian's faith. He will not permit the Gnostics, however, to have anything to say as to what books are apostolic. They have no right to the Christian books. John would not argue with Cerinthus, nor would Polycarp consent to dispute with

<sup>1</sup> III., 1, 1.

Marcion. The whole matter must be settled by a dictum. "It is incumbent to obey the presbyters, who are in the church—those who possess the succession from the apostles, and have received genuine gifts of truth. But the heretics, indeed, who bring strange fire to the altar of God, namely, strange doctrines, shall be burned up by the fire from heaven, as were Nadab and Abihu."<sup>1</sup>

By such methods as these the bishops managed to get the reins of authority into their own hands, as a first step in the direction of the formation of a canon. Some one must have the legal right to give to the world a definite statement of what books are genuine, and who has this right, if not the ordained successors of the apostles? The man who ties himself to the organization is safe. "Then shall every word also be fixed for him, if he for his part read the Scriptures in company with those who are presbyters in the church, among whom is the apostolic doctrine, as I have pointed out."<sup>2</sup> Thus was begun in the world that thought-saving device of ecclesiasticism, by which men are relieved from the necessity of doing their own thinking, because every word of the

<sup>1</sup> IV., 26, 1.

<sup>2</sup> IV., 32, 1.

Scriptures is "fixed for them" by the constituted authorities, who possess the "apostolic doctrine." How clearly does the motive that led to the formation of a canon shine forth here!

And what arguments are advanced to fix the number of the books? Take an example. We are told that it is not possible that the Gospels should be more or fewer in number than four, "since there are four zones of the world in which we live, and four principal winds, while the church is scattered throughout all the world, and the pillar and ground of the church is the gospel." "Then too, the cherubim were four-faced, and their faces were images of the dispensation of the Son of God." "The living creatures too (of the Apocalypse) were fourfold." "For this reason four principal covenants were given to the human race."<sup>1</sup> One might almost fancy that he was reading an excursus by Philo Judæus on some sacred number. By such arguments he proved that all the doctrines of his favorite Greek philosopher were anticipated by Moses. From now on this method will be increasingly applied to the Christian documents. In the very chapter in which Irenæus gives us the reasons why there

<sup>1</sup> III., 11, 8.

can be but four Gospels, he finds the whole message of Christ in a mystic symbol of the Apocalypse. Evidently he has forgotten how in a previous book he ridiculed the tendency of the Gnostics to support their views by twisting passages of Scripture, just as if the words had been composed "with reference to the subject indicated."<sup>1</sup>

The fact is, the church could only get rid of the Gnostics by adopting their weapons. Irenæus is himself genuinely Gnostic, when, in opposition to the doctrine of a heavenly Æon Christ, and a man Jesus, he appeals to the expression of Paul, "one Christ Jesus."<sup>2</sup> His whole argument hinges on the little word "one." Paul foresaw that some day certain corrupters of the truth would try to make two men out of Christ, and so he used the word "one." Matthew also provided for just such an emergency. He "might certainly have said, 'Now the birth of Jesus was on this wise,' but the Holy Ghost, foreseeing the corrupters (of truth), and guarding by anticipation against their deceit, says by Matthew, 'But the birth of Christ was on this wise.'"<sup>3</sup> This fact definitely proves that it was

<sup>1</sup> I., 9, 4.

<sup>2</sup> III., 16, 9.

<sup>3</sup> III., 16, 2.

Christ himself, and not the man Jesus, who was born of Mary. He spends five chapters discussing the meaning of Paul's words, "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God."<sup>1</sup> Such a use of the Epistles is absolutely unheard of in previous Christian history. Indeed it can be said that Irenæus is the first Christian writer, aside from the Gnostics, to use the Epistles as Scripture. He says of Paul, that "foreseeing through the Spirit the subdivisions of evil teachers, and being desirous of cutting away from them all occasion of cavil," he used a certain expression in Romans.<sup>2</sup> He introduces a quotation from Second Corinthians with the phrase, "for the word says."<sup>3</sup> He sees in the phrase of Paul, "as lights in the world," a mystical reference to the fact that the seed of Abraham should be "as stars in the heaven," saying that "this is what Paul meant, when he wrote it."<sup>4</sup> Examples might be multiplied without end of this new use of the Epistles. The literature of the heart is now becoming the weapon of dogmatics. The simple and personal message, directed to the end of spiritual inspiration and the upbuilding of character, is looked upon as a treasure-house of proof-

<sup>1</sup> V., 9, 14.

<sup>2</sup> III., 16, 9.

<sup>3</sup> V., 3, 1.

<sup>4</sup> IV., 5, 3.

texts for the backing up of metaphysical theories—the arsenal from which the contending theological schools can snatch their weapons. From Irenæus to Origen we can trace a gradual development of this tendency, which began with the Gnostics and will never end until the Scriptures become the inspired literature of the heart once more.

Irenæus even tries to tell us the order in which the four Gospels were written. “Matthew,” he says, “issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own language, while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome, and laying the foundations of the church. After their departure Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, did also hand down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter. Luke also, the companion of Paul, recorded in a book the gospel preached by him. Afterward John, the disciple of the Lord, who also had leaned upon his breast, did himself publish a Gospel, during his residence at Ephesus in Asia.”<sup>1</sup> Here is an effort to place on firmer historical foundation those documents which had been known to Justin simply as the “memoirs of the apostles.” The question of authorship had

<sup>1</sup> III., 1, 1.

not been considered an absorbing one heretofore. The Gospel of Peter, the Gospel according to the Egyptians, the Gospel according to the Hebrews, and many other gospels, were in circulation in different parts of the church, all of them agreeing in the main particulars. Manifestly, if the test of canonicity were to be established as apostolic authorship, the Gospel of Peter would stand higher than the Gospel of Luke.

The task before the church was no easy one. We can hardly say, after reading a few chapters in Irenæus and Tertullian, that the question was finally settled by a long and careful process of investigation, that entered critically into the claims of the different books, and at last reached an impartial and judicial conclusion. The whole matter was settled by the dictatorial "I." It was a fiat, and not an investigation, that gave to the world the final decision. As Luther said of the cardinal legate, who came to meet him at Augsburg, "He was come to command, not to argue." Had we the works of heretical writers of the second century in our possession we might frequently find this expression of surprise in their writings too. The church that issued the fiat had not the strength in the second century which it

had in the sixteenth, or else the question of the canon might have been settled much sooner. But the command went forth: "And therefore it was said to Daniel the prophet, 'Shut up the words and seal the book even to the time of consummation, until many learn and knowledge be completed.'"<sup>1</sup>

The importance of this decision cannot be overestimated. We are here at the crossroads of early Christianity. That everything not contained in the book is "something beyond the truth," is a conception that is to have a long and fateful history. Before this theory the individualities of the writers vanish, the historical perspective disappears, the naturalness of inspiration is lost, and revelation becomes something apart from life. An adjective is made to contain, by implication, an entire metaphysic. Christianity is buried in history, and when the drama of the first century is explained he who understands and accepts is saved. Redemption is a mental process, with its seat in the understanding. Men must find the esoteric truth, contained in the Bible as an allegory, before they can be lifted into likeness to God. The "ground and pillar

<sup>1</sup> *Irenæus*, IV., 26, 1.

of our faith" is no longer "the witness of God with our spirit, testifying that we are sons of God," but is the story of something that happened in the age of the apostles, and was faithfully recorded by them. To defend this story as an actual historical occurrence now became the great labor of Christianity, and the "defender of the faith" was no longer the martyr, who witnessed to its reality by his life, but the philosopher, who proved its dogmas from the documents. Infidelity ceased to be lack of faithfulness in conduct, the absence of charity, of compassion, of gentleness, of generosity, of brotherly-kindness, and became doubt of the historical accuracy of certain statements made in the New Testament. So strong was the emphasis laid by the early church upon life, and upon the acceptance of Christianity as a personal message, that some Christians "in good and regular standing" rejected the Gospel of John entirely without being disciplined, and others, remarkable for their purity of life, declared that only a modified form of Luke had any historical basis of fact. From now on the emphasis was shifted, and all Christians were required to accept the finality of the apostolic documents, while fewer questions were asked as

to whether they attended the gladiatorial shows, or abstained from the revelries of the public festivals.

Moreover, the documents had to be read "in company with the presbyters," and the system of thought accepted by the authorities had to be found therein. The average Christian could not be trusted to discover for himself the esoteric mysteries of redemption. The essence of Christianity was soon to be fixed in a creed, put forth by those in authority, and faith would thereafter consist in the intellectual acceptance of this creed, despite the incomprehensible mysteries involved in it. In this way Paul's marvelous conception of faith, as that spiritual communion with God by which a transformed nature begins to put forth the fruits of the Spirit, was supplanted by the purely formal acceptance of a stereotyped statement, and the man who "kept the faith" was no longer the one who followed the inner guidance of the Infinite, but the one who held on most consistently to an outer dogmatic statement.

One curious transformation is to be noticed in this process. There can be no doubt that the early church valued the utterances of Christian

prophets more highly than any document, and that the estimate of Papias of the spoken above the written word was then very common. The first step in the formation of a canon was the exact reversal of this estimate, and the complete subordination of all sources of authority to the documents. Then there came a second step, by which the two were reversed once more, and the utterances of the constituted successors of the apostles, of the officers of the hierarchy, came to have more weight than the Book itself. Protestantism, in its efforts to get back to the Christianity of the apostolic age, has generally returned to the first of these two steps, and there has stopped. It has taken from the Catholic Church the conception of an apostolic New Testament, but has rejected the apostolic authority of the bishops, by which the New Testament was closed. Instead of emphasizing the direct witness of God, and the impact of the divine life on the human soul, above all records of past revelation, it has made the New Testament so supreme in its authority that God has been imbedded in documents of the first century, and many keen minds, like that of Cardinal Newman, have turned to the Catholic Church in order to find a real and present-day

authority. Here, at least, is an organization that speaks to our day, and does not take refuge behind the authority of ink and Aramaic. To be sure, the doctrine of "apostolic succession," to use the crude illustration of another, may seem "like a great gas-pipe system, that refuses to admit that any life can be the 'light of the world' until it is connected with the main," but there will always be some who see greater advantage in this system, than in one that shuts up Christianity in a first-century reservoir, and then abolishes the main. The latter method leaves us utterly disconnected, and in the darkness.

The claim that the heretics had no right to the documents, that the church was the "heir of the apostles," and that Rome held "sure title-deeds" to every book, was the *sine qua non* of a closed New Testament. There will always seem to be a fundamental inconsistency in a church that accepts the result as infallible, and then rejects the authority by which it was produced. Protestantism has taken her closed canon of revelation from the Catholic Church, has read theology into it by the Gnostic and Catholic method of interpretation, has taken it for granted that all questions were anticipated by the writers, has

made the essence of Christianity to consist in a historical and final revelation, has repeated the Catholic creeds in her services for hundreds of years, and in short has accepted the whole programme by which the Catholic Church was formed, save the one declaration that gave that programme its power and consistency, viz., "I am the heir of the apostles."



IX

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES



## IX

THE Epistles of Paul, as we have seen, were becoming an inconvenient heritage to the church. His ringing declarations of freedom, his deep spiritual conception of redemption, and the large liberty he accorded to the churches he founded, seemed incompatible with the second century effort at centralization. The spiritual democracy of those burning centers of light and revelation, which he kindled in the pagan darkness, was a principle exceedingly dangerous to the hierarchy. What to do with Paul was the problem of the hour. It was solved by raising the old question once more, which the great apostle had faced in his own day, and which he brushed aside so proudly by calling attention to the spiritual fruit of his labors, "Where did he get his authority as an apostle?" He was not one of the Twelve. He had not been trained and commissioned by the Founder of Christianity. He had not been "ordained."

It will readily be seen that this problem raises the whole question of the seat of authority in

religion. A church that is trying to exclude from her counsels all teachers who have not been properly ordained by the successors of the apostles, will be in danger of losing the greatest spiritual character ever produced by Christianity. What violence has to be done, by such a church, to the teaching of Paul, in order to get possession of the person of Paul, we leave our readers to determine for themselves as they read the following pages. The question came squarely before the church in the latter part of the second century. Can it be proved, by some old document, that the apostles were regarded in the early days as a compact body, from which all authority emanated? Can we furnish any apostolic sanction, upholding the writings of Paul, and placing them on a canonical basis? The doctrine of "apostolic succession" is a chain that must lack no link.

To supply this link the Acts of the Apostles now comes to the front. In all previous Christian literature we find only two or three uncertain quotations from it. It is not surprising that many critics of a quarter of a century ago took the stand that the book was actually composed at this time, to meet the need which it was made to supply. This theory has been completely abandoned, but

the fact remains significant that so little use was made of it before the end of the second century. There were many books in circulation, recording the deeds and doctrines of the different apostles. Why was this one singled out? Let Tertullian answer! "They who reject that book of Scripture can neither belong to the Holy Spirit, seeing that they cannot acknowledge that the Spirit has been sent as yet to the disciples, nor can they pretend to be a church, seeing that they have no means of proving when and with what infant-nursing this body was established."<sup>1</sup> "I may say here to those who reject this Acts of the Apostles, 'It is first necessary that you show us who this Paul was—both what he was before he became an apostle, and how he became an apostle.'" Such statements might be multiplied almost without end. Again and again is Marcion reminded that Paul went up to Jerusalem, and received his authority from the apostolic college. It was on this visit that he was "ordained," and received his "apostolic succession."

The importance of this claim can readily be seen. Marcion was making converts by the thousands, upon the basis of a Pauline Christianity

<sup>1</sup> De Præscr., 22.

that was torn loose from every apostolic and Judaistic tie. He misunderstood the great apostle in many important particulars, to be sure, but he comprehended his fundamental principle much better than did the church at large, and he was making havoc among the followers of the growing hierarchy because of his earnest and self-sacrificing devotion to the principle of justification by faith. There was no turning back for the church. She must show Paul to have been a loyal and devout Catholic. The method taken to do this comes out plainly in both Irenæus and Tertullian. Both of these writers take that ringing declaration of independence in the second chapter of the Epistle to the Galatians, and completely change it. Paul no longer says, "To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour!" We are told that this is "an interpolation of Scripture." What he really said was, "For an hour I gave place by subjection." It is a neat turn. By the simple omission of the negative, Paul is changed from the "free man of Christ," into a submissive and humble believer in apostolic succession. For the sake of the great Catholic Church he bows his head, and receives from the hands of the apostles that divine

commission without which a man is a heretic and an outcast.

This interpretation, which changes the great emancipator of the first century into a medieval saint, was no doubt believed in thoroughly by Irenæus and Tertullian. They could not imagine for a moment that Paul would be guilty of an act of insubordination. The Catholic type of mind, which is always willing "to give place by subjection for an hour," is totally incapable of comprehending the spirit that cries, "Brethren, ye have been called unto liberty!" Believing in a salvation that has been mediated through external ceremonies and rituals, it looks upon all resistance to the organization as an act of pride, to be put down as the very temptation of the evil one. Paul could not possibly have said that he resisted the apostles. The negative must be an interpolation. Irenæus and Tertullian well know that changes in the text of Christian documents were not infrequent. Just as Marcion believed that the Gospel of Luke had been tampered with, in certain phrases and incidents, for the sake of the Catholic view, so the Fathers were perfectly sincere in their belief that the Epistle to the Galatians had been altered by some one who was

seeking to overthrow the doctrine of apostolic succession.

The book of Acts was of great service in the formation of a New Testament. Together with the so-called "catholic epistles" it formed the connecting link between the Gospels and Paul. It furnished the latter with his authority; it excluded the heretics, because it taught the Catholic doctrine of the laying on of hands; and it gave to the whole Christian system its legal validity and authority from heaven, Pentecost being its Sinai. Though it really represents the activity of but two of the apostles—Peter and Paul—it immediately steps into prominence as being a history of the twelve apostles. The Muratorian Fragment calls it the "Acts of all the Apostles"; Aphrates cites it with the title, "History of the Twelve Apostles"; and the "Doctrine of Ad-daei" refers to it as the "Acts of the Twelve Apostles." In one chapter, where Irenæus is attempting to give "the doctrines of the twelve apostles," out of thirty-five quotations from the New Testament thirty are from the book of Acts. (III., 12.) Nothing is more suggestive of the method and the motive in the formation of a New Testament than the sudden prominence

given to this old document, that had hitherto attracted very little attention, and had simply been one of the large number of books that were used in the church for ethical instruction and spiritual improvement.

Up to this time no lines had been drawn in the matter of inspiration, but there must have been a slight distinction made between those books that merely related the history of the apostles, and those that contained the "commands of the Lord," or the utterances of Christian prophets. The latter came with more direct and positive power, and had more the appearance of a personal message, than the mere record of the journeys and sayings of holy men. To the average Christian of the middle of the second century the words of the Shepherd of Hermas were about on a level with the sayings of Jesus. All through the East the Revelation of Peter was regarded as Scripture. Apocalypses of Thomas, of Stephen, of John, fired the heart of the believer. Now it is utterly inconceivable that if a vote had been taken as to just what books should be included in the New Testament these would have been left out. It is far more probable that a book like the Acts, which can hardly be traced

in previous literature at all, and which was far less popular than the Acts of Paul and Thecla, would have been excluded. In a very large collection, and on the basis of a wide conception of canonicity, it might have been included. If excluded, it would not have been because of any lack of confidence in its genuineness and trustworthiness, but because less interest attached to historical books than to the declarations of prophets.

But the New Testament was not formed by popular vote. The interest that closed the book was theological and ecclesiastical, not religious and redemptive. To call it "the spontaneous declaration of the Christian consciousness," is to confuse in a hopeless manner the ambition of a hierarchy with the consensus of brethren, the speculations of philosophers with the faith of believers. It may be that we have a better New Testament than if it had been born of the heart of the early Christian communities, but that we would have had a *different* New Testament, had it been so produced, there can be scarcely the shadow of a doubt.

There were many books in existence recording the sayings and doings of the apostles. Clement

of Alexandria by no means regarded our book of Acts as the sole source of the history of the apostles. He seems to have been much more familiar with the Preaching of Peter, and to have estimated that book just as highly, if not higher. He uses, as equally important sources of apostolic life and doctrine, the Acts of John, and the Traditions of Matthias.<sup>1</sup> Tertullian refers to "this Acts of the Apostles," in a discussion that plainly implies that his readers recognize others.<sup>2</sup> Indeed he has no easy task in attacking those in the Carthaginian church who derive their authority for the right of women to practise baptism from the Acts of Paul and Thecla.<sup>3</sup> This book was extremely popular, and was generally looked upon as genuine. It was placed side by side with the book of Acts by many in places of authority in the church. Several of the earlier collections included it in the canonical list. Tertullian himself appeals to the Acts of Pilate as an authoritative and trustworthy source of Christian history.<sup>4</sup> The Montanists in the West supported some of their doctrines by appealing to the Acts of Lucius,

<sup>1</sup> Hypotyp., I., John 1 : 1.

<sup>2</sup> De Præscr., 23.

<sup>3</sup> De Bap., 17.

<sup>4</sup> Apolog., 21.

never supposing for an instant that this book was not firm ground to stand upon.<sup>1</sup> This Lucius, about whom so many interesting traditions were current in the early church, that he was one of the seventy, that he was the "kinsman" referred to by Paul in his Epistle to the Romans (16 : 21), that he was in the congregation to which Peter preached on the day of Pentecost, that he was consecrated bishop of Cenchræa by Paul, and many other things—was included in the list of "apostles" before the middle of the second century. The common tradition may have identified him with Luke. At any rate the Acts of Lucius was widespread, and was regarded as an authoritative document.

There were many other books of "Acts." In the Codex Claromontanus we find the Acts of Paul included in the list of New Testament books. Indeed he who tries to thread his way through all the references to the Acts of Peter, the Acts of John, the Acts of Thomas, the Acts of Paul, the Acts of Andrew and John, the Preaching of Paul and Peter at Rome, the Doctrine of Peter, the Writings of Bar-

<sup>1</sup> These were probably the Acts of Peter, John, Thomas, and Andrew, of which portions have come down to us.

tholomew, the Acts of the Apostles of Seleucus, the Acts of Lenticius, and countless other books referred to in the Fathers, will obtain some slight conception of the exceedingly broad standard of apostolic authority that must have obtained in the early church. The literature must have been endless. As it has nearly all been lost, with the exception of a few fragments, judgment upon it is an impossibility. Of course it is easy to accept the conclusion of the church, and decide that all these books were spurious, and that not one of them contained any authentic history of the apostles. To the fair-minded student, who is acquainted with the motives and methods that closed the New Testament, such a conclusion is somewhat naïve. Suffice it to say that the common Christian in the assemblies of the early second century, when men were witnessing to their faith by their blood, loved these documents, and received from them a glow of faith and devotion that has been rarely equaled in all subsequent history.

Particularly was this true of the apocalyptic visions of the apostles. There was a Revelation of Peter, a Revelation of Paul, a Revelation of Thomas, a Revelation of Stephen, and

many others. In circles that retained the primitive expectation of a return of the Lord these prophetic documents must have been more popular than the more prosaic "Acts." Roman conquests, and the rumors of distant revolutions fired the imagination of the Christian, and the predictions and visions of apostles assumed unusual importance. Had we the material at hand, nothing would be more interesting than to trace the rise and fall of the prophetic form of literature, with the appearance and subsidence of persecution. But we are utterly in the dark. We have vague glimpses of a whole realm of literature, that exerted a profound influence on the early church, and then was lost. Its very nature has to be surmised. Its spirit and teaching possessed a dynamic power that resulted in many deeds of heroism and endurance. It was backed by the authority of apostles, and that it came as a real revelation from God was never questioned by thousands of Christians. It was far more influential than many books that found a place in the New Testament.

But it is useless to speculate. Suffice it to say that all these books existed, and that from a time reaching back into a period when many of

our New Testament books were written they had borne the name of apostles. Were they finally rejected because, by a minute and scientific investigation, it was determined that their origin was not apostolic? To answer such a question in the negative we need only read a few pages in Irenæus and Tertullian. Only one "Acts," and only one "Apocalypse," found a place in the canon. It was a long time before the Apocalypse of John firmly and finally established its right to a place in the second collection, but our book of Acts sprang into canonical authority all at once, and held its place ever afterward. Again and again do Irenæus and Tertullian remind us that "it must be accepted." Why? Because those who reject it have no means of proving that they are a church. Because the doctrine of "apostolic succession" is there plainly and distinctly taught. Because it shows that even Paul dare not go forth to preach until he had gone up to Jerusalem to get credentials from the apostles. If this was true of the great messenger to the Gentiles, what shall we say of those who dare to teach without first asking permission from the ordained successors to the apostles? By spending a few moments looking

up the quotations from the Acts in Irenæus and Tertullian, the most careless student can convince himself of the motive that dragged the Acts into the canon. It was not its apostolic authorship, but its seeming sanction of the idea of an apostolic church, that gave it its sudden place of prominence. It was elevated above all the other histories of the apostles, not because it was found to be historical, and they were found to be legendary, but because Marcion in particular, and the Gnostics in general, were dividing the church, and were forming what seemed to be a partial and fragmentary Christianity, and some ground of authority had to be found upon which to unify Christendom.

This ground was discovered in the doctrine of "apostolic succession," taught in the book of Acts. That the book of Acts is a wonderful document, no one will deny. That its incidents of faith and heroism have a history in all subsequent Christian consciousness and life, is scarcely a matter for discussion after these two thousand years. But that it found its way into the New Testament because of a critical examination of its contents, and a careful comparison of all other books of Acts, is a theory that is simply absurd.

Who shall say that the Acts of John, and the Acts of Peter, would not have had a great history too, had they been included in the New Testament? The formation of the canon was not the result of a critical process, but of an ecclesiastical movement. Very little careful scholarship is to be found in the church before the days of Origen, and then it was simply to establish conclusions already reached. The hierarchical method is always to settle questions first by the decree of the church, and then to call in her scholars to defend what has already been done. There was a great deal of discussion over a few particular books for nearly a century, and the limits of the canon fluctuated somewhat all the time, but that was because the Catholic Church was not definitely formed, and it was not finally settled just what needed to be supported by the canon. The great mass of early literature, however, was never again considered, and all the apostolic Acts and Visions began to disappear in the darkness.

We cannot pass on without a word of regret. The Moslem who said that if the books of the library in Alexandria were in the Koran they were useless, and if they were not they were pernicious, has filled the centuries with sorrow.

Nor can we think, without a feeling of deep disappointment, of the loss of that great body of literature which the church regarded as sacred in days of so great strength and purity. It may have contained many childish, many grotesque, many foolish things. It may have been as useless and as weird as the book that speaks of "seven angels and seven trumpets" seemed to the Alogi. But it must have contained passages of inspired beauty and grandeur, and these the world can ill afford to lose. To be sure there are some who say that the elevation of certain books into a canon was the very thing that preserved them for us, and that but for this act we should probably not have any literature of the early church at all. This, however, even if we grant it, which is by no means necessary, does not save us from the regret that the norm of this canon formation was so narrow, and merely cheers us with the thought that it might have been worse. It simply says that we can never know the whole body of literature from which Christianity received her inspiration, at a time when she was filling the whole civilized world with her spirit and her power. We want to know more about that transformation, which

constitutes the greatest religious change in the world's history, which took place unnoticed right beneath the gaze of some of the most noted historians of all time, which was creeping through the lanes and hovels utterly unobserved by philosophers and statesmen, and which only emerges into clear light when it became a great world-power and began its period of compromise and conquest. But most of the literature is lost. If any consolation is to be found, it must be sought in the fact that, though the form and methods of early Christianity can never be determined in complete outline, we have still enough books preserved to give us a clear and definite impression of what it was in its spirit and in its purpose.



X

THE VOICE OF ROME



THE moment the assertion was made that there was a deposit of doctrine contained in a definite collection of documents, whose inspired authority it was impossible for after ages to attain, that moment the idea of a New Testament was born. We have seen that this assertion was made in the Western Church, in the latter part of the second century. But between the birth of an idea, and its realization as a fact, long periods of time often intervene. Ideas have to fight for their lives in the arena of affairs. While the conception of a New Testament is sudden in its appearance, the actual realization of a closed book was a long and difficult process. We find men taking it for granted that there is a New Testament in the period with which we are dealing, but we do not find them in entire accord as to its contents. The church claims that there is a fenced-off period of revelation, and that she is the "heir of the apostles," but she has not yet surveyed the territory and fixed the boundary posts. With the actual accomplishment of a closed New Testament,

and with the decrees of Councils by which the position of this book and that was established, we have nothing to do in this investigation. The limits of our study do not carry us beyond the birth of the idea, and the steps by which that idea obtained a foothold in the world of human speculation and ambition. But to carry out this purpose we cannot entirely avoid the question as to just when and how the first list of books was made.

Thus far we have seen men content with the simple assertion that there is such a list, and that the heretics have no right to use its contents. "You have no right to hew my wood; you have no right to draw my water," says the church. But where is the fence around your forest? where is the curb about your well? The church is not yet centralized herself, and to give to the world an authoritative statement of the list of New Testament books is a difficult thing to do. The leaders are not in entire accord. A bishop of Antioch would allow the Gospel of Peter to be read in his churches. The great scholar of Alexandria would draw doctrine from the philosophers of Greece. What is to be done? The need is urgent. Is there no one to speak with

authority? Will no one give to the world a list of books? The matter cannot be submitted to a vote, for the church is filled with all sorts of vagaries and wild speculations. Even in the days of Augustine, after years of Catholic triumph, that writer enumerated eighty-eight Christian sects. What is needed is an authoritative decree.

The reader is doubtless familiar with that discovery of modern science, by which an astronomer, after observing certain perturbations among the planets, told a fellow-observer that if he would turn his telescope to a certain spot in the heavens, on a certain night, he would see a planet that had never been seen before. One who has followed events with us thus far in the latter part of the second century, and has marked the trend of thought as revealed by Irenæus and Tertullian, will say: "If you look carefully in the direction of Rome you will see her issue a list of the authoritative books of the New Testament about the year A. D. 190."

This is exactly what she did. In the Ambrosian Library at Milan the famous Italian archeologist, Lodovico Antonio Muratori, discovered in 1740 a fragment, that is an evident attempt to enumerate what books belong to the New

Testament.<sup>1</sup> Its date is fixed in the latter part of the second century by the words: "The Shepherd, moreover, did Hermas write very recently, in our times, in the city of Rome, while his brother Bishop Pius sat in the chair of the church of Rome."<sup>2</sup> This "Muratorian Fragment," as it is called, is beyond a doubt the attempt made by the Roman Church to close the canon of Christian literature. When Tertullian says of Rome, "The law and the prophets she unites in one volume with the writings of evangelists and apostles, from which she drinks her faith," he refers to something more definite than a mere consensus of opinion. The importance of the Fragment lies more in the fact that an attempt at a catalogue of the books of the New Testament was made at this time, and in this place, than in anything else, but we may find a few suggestive things in its contents, despite its brevity.

The writer assures us that Luke wrote his Gospel under Paul's direction.<sup>3</sup> He especially warns his readers against any book of the Valentinians or the Marcionites, or any of the heretics.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For a more general discussion, see Harnack, "Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte," 1879, 358 ff.; Tregelles, "Canon Muratorianus," Oxford, 1867; Westcott, "On the Canon," 5th edition, p. 521.

<sup>2</sup> Fol. IIa, 11.

<sup>3</sup> Fol. Ia, 5.

<sup>4</sup> Fol. IIa, 19.

Of the Epistles of Paul he speaks at some length. We can glean from what he says a slight suggestion of the difficulty involved in the insertion of literature of a private nature, like epistles, into the canon. There were no epistles in the Old Testament. Why should there be any in the New? Paul, he assures us, though writing to particular churches, and not to the church in general, yet wrote to seven churches, and seven is the ecumenical number. "And John too," he adds, "in the Apocalypse, although he writes to seven churches, yet addresses all."<sup>1</sup> As to the four Epistles to private individuals, although written from "personal feeling and affection," yet they are "hallowed in the esteem of the catholic church in the regulation of ecclesiastical discipline."<sup>2</sup> This necessity of apologizing for any "personal feeling and affection" in the New Testament books is extremely significant. The conception of a canon is a foe to anything personal. The writers must lose their individuality if they are to gain canonical authority.

The same thing comes out in his treatment of the Gospels. "Although different points are taught in the several books of the Gospels," he

<sup>1</sup> Fol. *Ib*, 26.

<sup>2</sup> Fol. *Ib*, 29.

says, "there is no difference as regards the faith of believers, inasmuch as in all of them all things are related under one leading Spirit, concerning the nativity, the passion, the resurrection, the conversation with his disciples, and the twofold advent."<sup>1</sup> We have here an attempt at a doctrine of "inspiration." In the interest of homogeneity the writers are beginning to lose their identity. When the canon is complete every word of it will be regarded as written "under one leading Spirit," and the writers will be simply the amanuenses. As to the heretical Gospels, Epistles, and redactions, the Fragmentist enters into no argument, but simply states that they are to be rejected. He merely gives as his reason that "it is not suitable for gall to be mingled with honey."<sup>2</sup> This is the general method of procedure of the church in this whole movement. It is one long story of denunciation and dogmatism, from first to last. The frequent recurrence in the Fragmentist of such words as "we receive," and "we reject," is very suggestive. The document sounds just like the declaration of a church that is beginning to feel her authority, and that does not see the need of wearisome

<sup>1</sup> Fol. Ia, 16.

<sup>2</sup> Fol. IIa, 5.

argumentation over a matter that she prefers to settle by a decree.

Not only is this list of books to be the limit of all authority in matters of speculation, but it is to be the sole source of ethical instruction and spiritual edification. No other books can be read in the churches. This is a sweeping declaration. Up to this time no limit had been set to the public reading of Christian books. Any document that edified was allowed in the church services. Now the norm is reversed, and only the books that are allowed in the church services are able to edify. The Fragmentist has no easy time in dealing with the Shepherd of Hermas, on the basis of this norm. Here is a book that has helped multitudes of Christians. He says that they ought to read it in private, "but it cannot be made public in the church to the people, nor placed among the prophets, as their number is complete, nor among the apostles, to the end of the time."<sup>1</sup> The period of revelation is closed. It ceased with the apostles. The Shepherd was written "very recently in our time." Such a book, whatever its beauty and helpfulness, cannot be authoritative. The number of prophets is complete.

<sup>1</sup> Fol. IIa, 15.

Of the Acts he says: "The Acts of all the Apostles are comprised by Luke in one book, and addressed to the most excellent Theophilus."<sup>1</sup> He even goes so far as to say that Luke was an "eye-witness" of all things therein recorded. He says nothing whatever of the numerous other books, purporting to give the history of the apostles. It is sufficient condemnation of them to leave them out of the authoritative list. There is one thing, however, which the Fragmentist feels called upon to explain. This book, which is supposed to relate all the doings of all the apostles, says nothing whatever of the visit of Peter to Rome. This is a serious defect in a document that has to play the part of godfather to an apostolic and Roman Church. Some good reason must be found for it. This reason, the Fragmentist assures us, is nothing less than the unwillingness of New Testament writers to record anything from mere hearsay. Luke witnessed everything he records in his book, but he did not accompany Peter to Rome, and so he does not speak of it. This one fact, so essential and fundamental to the conception of "apostolic succession" has to be left to tradition, and to the

<sup>1</sup> Fol. Ib, 3.

authoritative declaration of the church. The statement that New Testament writers recorded only what they had seen with their own eyes is one that the Fragmentist would have had a hard time in defending. If Paul dictated to Luke the third Gospel, as he declares, did he only relate what he had himself witnessed? In keeping with this strong assertion is the further declaration of the Fragmentist that the apostles themselves are the sole source of New Testament history.<sup>1</sup> This claim was now made for the first time. Evidently Papias, who was willing to talk with any one who had seen one who had seen the Lord, and who estimated this testimony higher than that of the documents, had never heard of such a thing.

Slight though the Muratorian Fragment is, it is a very suggestive document. We feel in it the pulse-beat of the authority of Rome. The solemn declarations that "we accept this," and "we reject that," and that this other "must not be read," have their echo in history. Christianity's Cæsar has crossed the Rubicon. The church is to enter upon an entirely new period. The mistiness, the confusion, the uncertainty, of the fog-like speculations of a thousand

<sup>1</sup> Fol. Ib, 5ff.

schools, must cease. The Fragment is like a bolt of lightning that clears the air. To be sure the movement is not entirely sudden and new. Just as the surcharged clouds contain the electricity long before it descends in the bolt of lightning, so the conception of a hierarchy was in solution in the church for years before it revealed itself. Rome only made explicit, what had long been implicit. We cannot help feeling that the Muratorian Fragment is the first faint note of that authority, whose thunderous tones are to be heard through the centuries in the West.

Contrast the spirit manifested by this document with the attitude of the same period in the East! How different are these authoritative declarations from the spirit of Clement of Alexandria, with his broad eclecticism, and his exhortations, "Take the Hellenic books! read the sibyl! read Hystaspes!" "Philosophy was given to the Greeks, as a covenant peculiar to them." This was the common conception of the early apologists. We surely cannot complain of the weakness of the church during the period when this broad interpretation was put upon the doctrine of revelation. "The Hellenic philosophy," said Clement, "has torn off a fragment of eternal

truth from the theology of the ever-living Word." It took a long time for this spirit to die out entirely in the East. Even as late as the middle of the third century we find a little of it clinging to the leaders of thought in Alexandria. Dionysius, who was surnamed the "Great" because of his refutation of heresies, who became bishop about the year A. D. 247, tells of a time when he feared lest the reading of heretical books might lead him astray in his own thinking. At this time a vision came to him, and he was commanded: "Read everything which thou canst take in hand, for thou art able to correct and prove all; and this has been to thee from the beginning the ground of thy faith."<sup>1</sup>

What a revolution would have been accomplished if this "ground of faith" had been extended beyond the episcopal chair! The right to read books outside the authoritative list was denied by the Fragmentist. Tertullian said that the Roman Church "drank her faith" from a closed collection of documents. That faith is a matter of the understanding, and is to be obtained by the exegetical interpretation of a definite collection of ancient writings, is a conception that is

<sup>1</sup> Euseb., H. E., VII., 7, 3.

just beginning to take possession of the church. What wonder the Fragmentist felt that he had to apologize because a New Testament writer wrote "from personal feeling and affection!" Everything personal is now eliminated from the content of faith. The royal throne of religion is no longer set up in the soul of the individual, but is established without, in manuscripts and miters and metaphysical statements of truth. It is all in vain that men are inspired to deeds of compassion, to acts of heroism, to services of sympathy, while reading books outside of the authoritative list. Such books are not inspired. The "fruit of the Spirit" is a certain cosmology, and all noble and moral acts, unaccompanied by an acceptance of the true doctrine, are worse than useless.

So was born that belief in the guilt of theological error, that caused the blood of thousands to be shed over the question of the proper time of celebrating Easter, and that deprived those men of the honors of a Christian burial who refused to admit that the light at the Transfiguration was uncreated. What a history could be written of those words of the Fragmentist, "We reject!" What scenes it calls up, of fierce monks dragging

the noble Hypatia into a Christian church, to tear the flesh from her bones with sharp shells, and to fling her naked and mangled body into the flames; of the mob of followers of the bishop of Alexandria, who kicked and beat Flavianus, bishop of Constantinople, until he died, in the "Robber Council" of Ephesus; of the three thousand persons who were killed in the riots that convulsed Constantinople when the Athanasian Bishop Paul was overthrown by the Arian Macedonius; of the fierce and bloody conflicts that followed the Council of Chalcedon; and of all the plunders, and murders, and outrages, that followed the Monophysite, the Pelagian, or the Donatist controversies. Men who believed that faith consisted in the acceptance of a proper metaphysic, could hardly act otherwise. When Greek speculation took possession of hot-blooded barbarians, and was made the essence of salvation, the conditions were present for one of the fiercest forms of intolerance the world has ever seen. Christianity is not Christianity without a deep passion for the redemption of man. But when redemption is identified with the acceptance of a cosmology, toleration becomes a sin.

To be sure all this is not to be attributed to the

formation of a New Testament, nor must we overestimate the effect of eliminating from the documents all "personal feeling and affection." Other factors, of course, enter into the result. But the Gnostic tendency to place the emphasis upon a cosmology, obtained by interpretation from authoritative documents, which passed over into the church, and resulted in the formation of a creed and a canon, is beyond question the beginning of all those bloody riots and fierce persecutions, which extracted cries of wonder from Julian, and called down upon Christianity the ridicule of cultured pagans of Alexandria. They simply could not understand how men, as Gibbon had put it, could shed each other's blood over a diphthong. Why fill the world with carnage over Homoousian and Homoiousian? The answer of the Christian is simple enough, "On the issue involved in these two words hang all the interests of time and eternity, and the redemption of the whole human race rests on a proper solution." Men like Gibbon, who have no passionate desire for the salvation of their fellow-men, may ridicule Christianity if they will, but the fact remains that the great dynamic power of all improvement is that intense earnestness, that seems

so terrible when it runs in wrong channels. The pity is not that men believed so intensely, but that their belief became detached from moral entities, and poured all the power of its enthusiasm into the establishment of fixed metaphysical formulas of faith. Had not the demand for these formulas been forced upon Christianity by the Gnostics, and had not the desire to become a compact and world-ruling power taken possession of it, it might have gone on for an unknown period as the spiritual leaven in the lump of society, receiving inspiration from every source that "spake with authority, and not as the scribes."



XI

THE PROCESS REVIEWED



## XI

LET us briefly review the development. The first Christians, in settling their difficult questions of conduct, naturally appealed to the "commands of the Lord." It made little difference whether these commands were read from a document, or were related by an apostle, or came from one who had been the companion of an apostle. This state of affairs was elastic enough to reach down past the first quarter of the second century. Even as late as that we have seen men of prominence and scholarship, leaders in the church, placing greater emphasis upon the spoken than upon the written word. But of course the number of men who had walked and talked with apostles became less and less, and the written word rose into greater and greater prominence. Even now, however, it was not held to with any literalness or exactitude, but was used in a free and simple manner. This is shown by the way Tatian took the Gospels he found in Rome, and made one Gospel out of them, and went out as a missionary, with this Gospel as his

only Bible. In addition to this we find one of the most influential bishops in the East willing to admit the Gospel of Peter into the churches of his diocese, without any definite idea as to the number of the gospel narratives; we find a strong party in the Western Church, whose leaders had come from the East, and whose members were not regarded as heretical enough to be given a name, who rejected the Gospel of John entirely, in the interest of church unity; and we find a Gospel according to the Egyptians compiled in another part of the church for the fostering of a certain tendency that had taken root in that region. It is thus evident that little emphasis is put upon the *form* of the gospel narrative long after the church relinquishes her dependence upon oral tradition, and falls back entirely upon the books.

But other kinds of literature grew up. Epistles were written by apostles and apostolic men, and were treasured for their helpfulness and high spiritual standards long after the circumstances that gave them birth had passed away. These documents were circulated in other churches than the ones to which they were addressed, though still regarded as somewhat local and particular in

character. They were written "from personal regard and affection," and were not to be put in exactly the same category as the Gospels. There were also histories of the apostles in abundance. Just what Peter did on a certain occasion, or just what John or Thomas said in reply to a certain question, was found to be a great help in settling matters of conduct. Triumphant utterances of the apostles were very comforting too, when the Christian had to face martyrdom. These books also were held in high esteem. There were numerous books of vision in circulation also, giving the dreams of the apostles, and filled with highly colored pictures and allegorical figures. These served to fire the imagination of the more fervid Christians, and no doubt formed the texts for the exhortations of countless wandering prophets. These prophets were often held in very high regard, and their utterances were placed on a level with the things contained in the books. During all this period the sole aim of the church was the realization of a holy life. Frequent fires of persecution kept the motives of her members pure, and she was troubled little with disintegrating speculations and vexing moral problems.

But the fires of persecution died down. Martyrdom bore its fruit in that large class of people who mistake admiration of heroism for heroism itself. The church filled up with less serious members. Men began to try to explain. Christianity was found to be very interesting on its speculative side. Then the question arose, "Just where, in this mass of Christian literature, shall we find an authoritative statement of the system of Christian doctrine?" A man named Heracleon wrote a commentary on the Gospel of John, the first commentary on any Christian document. Valentinus, one of the most learned men in the church of Rome, by means of the allegorical interpretation, proved that Christ and the apostles had held implicitly a curious system of Platonic philosophy and Oriental mysticism. The church was dazed. She had never dreamed that such things had anything to do with Christianity. What was the Christian system? A halt must be called. Nothing could be determined in the midst of such confusion.

To add to the distraction a man named Marcion had discovered a discrepancy between a life lived according to certain outward precepts, and a life of freedom from law, as taught by Paul. On

the basis of this discovery he set out to reform the church, and was leading away thousands of her followers. He seemed to have solved the question that was in the air everywhere, "Wherein does Christianity differ from Judaism?" Above all he had sifted the mass of Christian literature, and had a definite and fixed collection of writings, upon which he based his movement.

Besides all this, the tendency to worldliness, which was inevitable as the church began to take in all classes, started a movement in the direction of primitive purity and enthusiasm. The Montanists were charging the church with abandoning the moral standards of Christ and the apostles; the Marcionites were accusing her of forsaking the principle of Paul which was the very charter of her liberty; and the Gnostics were telling her that she had a very elaborate system of metaphysics hidden in her books, of which she had never dreamed. What was she to do? With all this din sounding in men's ears, she could teach the world nothing. She regarded herself as a "schoolmaster," according to the Fathers. She must call her school to order. She must "beat the strutting vanity" out of her refractory pupils. They must become docile, or depart from her

jurisdiction. Above the noise and confusion sounds the voice of Rome. It speaks with authority. "We accept this!" "We reject that!" it cries. So was born the canon.

That the germs of this development can be found even in the literature of the first century must be granted. In the early days there were "Knowing Ones," who used such catch-words as these: "I know God; I dwell in God; I have passed from death unto life." It is all right to call these men "Gnostics," if we bear in mind the fact that they were merely the forerunners of the movement. They are far from being the celebrated schools of later days. They do not bolster up their theories by documents. The chief charge against them is that they "care nothing for love, nothing for widows, nothing for orphans, nothing for the sick, nothing for prisoners or freed captives, nothing for them that hunger and thirst" (Ignatius). Against these men John urges that the road to true "gnosis" is love to the brethren. This battle is entirely different from the one that arose at a later date. The opposition to speculation, mysticism, idle philosophy, dreams, and theoretical prattle, to be found in the Pastorals, in James, in the Epistles of John,

and elsewhere in early Christian literature, is not at all theological, and has no need whatever for a canon.

This applies equally to the fact that the writers of the closing years of the first century regarded the apostolic age as of superior sanctity and authority, and so attach the names of apostles to their books. Such a thing might have gone on for centuries without a canon being formed. Books bearing the apostolic names were written after the middle of the second century. That this would have come to an end at last, and a New Testament have been formed, had there been no Gnostic schools, no Montanism, no Marcionite movement, we cannot deny. But in such a hypothesis we have little interest, as our effort has been to discover how it actually did happen.<sup>1</sup>

To be sure the ecclesiastical tendency, and the spirit of prophecy, came into conflict before the first century had come to a close. This was natural. Prophets and bishops never get along

<sup>1</sup> Wernle discovers ("Beginnings of Christianity," II., 246) what he calls "layers" of documents in the first two decades of the second century. To these he gives the name "New Testament." This seems to me to be juggling with words. It is like the claim that Jesus and Paul were "Catholics." Wernle himself discovers a few germs of a hierarchy in Paul. Is it legitimate, then, to call Paul a "Roman Catholic"? History is impossible if we use words so loosely. Nothing ever happens. Some token, some faint foreshadowing of everything, can be found in previous history. A New Testament implies a *closed* epoch of revelation. Where does Wernle find this idea before A. D. 150?

well in the same church. The busy workers in the cause of church discipline and order, at the very beginning of the Christian movement, clashed with the enthusiasts. Each had a literature to which they appealed. Some of the "Acts" and "Apocalypses" of the visionaries were very popular among the laity. The way in which Montanism swept over the church is a witness to the mighty influence exercised in the early days by those who believed in new revelations straight from the Spirit of God. Montanism, to be sure, was merely a revival. The fading out of dramatic fancies took place many years before, and with it went a weakening of the spirit of prophecy. This, however, was not due to a triumph of the ecclesiastical party, but to the long-delayed coming of Christ on the clouds of glory. The principle of an "open vision" was not abandoned in the least, but enthusiasm died down because prophecy was not fulfilled. The frequent exhortations in these days to obedience to the bishop, and the warnings against "false prophets," bear witness to the fact that still the fire smoldered, ready to burst into a flame at any moment. When the Epistle of Jude quotes apocalyptic writings as Scripture it is only falling

in line with the thought of the day. Books of vision were everywhere, and it was many decades before the church could safely declare the age of revelation closed.

It is essential for us to remember, however, that the formation of the New Testament did not put a higher, but a different value upon the books. The words of the Lord and of his apostles were not treasured more devoutly, because suddenly it was found that they contained great cosmological mysteries, and solemn warnings against the views of the false teachers. For a long time the reliance upon oral tradition had been weakening, and the books had been coming into greater and greater prominence. The apostles had always been looked upon as the founders of Christianity, and to make their authority literary did not imply any startlingly new estimate of the books, or of their authors. What was new was the rejection of a great mass of literature, that hitherto had been accepted with all the devotion and reverence attaching to an apostolic writing. For a long time writers on the canon contented themselves with an investigation into the history of the accepted books, and by showing that these books were considered sacred and authoritative long before

a definite collection was made, they endeavored to prove the existence of a New Testament from the very beginning of the Christian era.

This is an extremely inadequate treatment of the subject. It is possible to show that scores upon scores of other books were also regarded as sacred and authoritative. The innovation in the formation of a New Testament is not to be looked for in any peculiar sanctity attaching to inspired and apostolic books. The church did not enunciate a new theory when it declared that the writings of the apostles were the ground of authority. Even the Gnostics admitted this. No doubt there had been much uncertainty among more intelligent Christians for some time as to the genuineness of many books that bore the name of apostles. It took several decrees to give the Epistle of Hebrews its Pauline authority. Some uncertainty must have existed as to the Johannine authorship of the Apocalypse. Mark had to be made apostolic by an appeal to oral tradition. The exaltation of these books over many others that claimed apostles for their authors, and the drawing of a sharp line between them that could not be passed, was the new step that was taken when the canon was formed.

Another new thing was the silencing of the spirit of prophecy definitely and finally. Up to this time there was nothing to prevent the production of new books by one who possessed the gift of the Spirit. If the statement of the Fragmentist be true that Hermas wrote the Shepherd "very recently in our time," then one of the most highly prized of all the Christian books was a modern production. To be sure no new thing was said, when it was asserted that all the books in the list of the Fragmentist were written "under one leading Spirit." They, and many more, were believed to be the productions of the Holy Spirit. There might still be books produced under the inspiration of the same "leading" Power. Nor did the church assert anything new when she declared that in these books there was "no difference as regards the faith of believers." All Christians took it for granted that the inspired books contained no contradictions. This was just what was startling in the speculations of the Gnostics. The church was dividing on the basis of books that had been written under the guidance of "one leading Spirit." How was this possible? Could it be the books were not a unit? No hierarchy

could admit this. The church seemed to be taking a firm stand when she said that the conclusions drawn were false.

In the third new step her ground was not so firm. She took it for granted that the documents contained a system of theology. If they were written under "one leading Spirit," she thought, they must contain, at least by inference, a single and final theory of the universe. From the beginning Greek thought had been endeavoring to find unity in the cosmos, by reducing it to a single substance or idea. Thales had said it was water; Anaximander had called it "the unchangeable"; Anaximenes had declared it was air; Heraclitus had found his explanation in becoming; and Xenophenes had found his in being. In this struggle for simplicity Greek speculation had become very complex. The Greek thinkers who came to the church could not leave their nature behind them, and so they threw themselves, with all the eagerness of that wonderful people, into the task of finding the Christian explanation of the universe. Thus was born Gnosticism, or the Christian hunt for knowledge.

Previous to this effort, the energies of the

church had been given to the realization of a holy life. She did not now deny the assumption of the Gnostics that her books contained a cosmological explanation of the universe, nor did she deny their genuinely Greek assumption that the "holy life" was the one that possessed the true knowledge. She took the position that the regularly ordained officers of the church were the only ones who had the power to obtain this "knowledge," and she commanded those officers to find it as soon as possible. It is not necessary to enlarge on the results of this assumption that the Christian writings contained a single and consistent theological system. Its echoes are in history. The departure from the primitive belief that whatever inspires is inspired, and that the books were intended to give us inspiration and not theology, has not accomplished its purpose in unifying the church. The Bible may be a theological unit, but as a matter of fact every speculative vagary in creation appeals to it, from polygamy with its reference to the patriarchs and Christadelphianism with its friendliness for Daniel, to the dreamy Millenarianism that loves the Apocalypse and the devout Divine healing that appeals to nearly every page of the Gospels.

If we take the third step, taken by the church at the close of the second century, we can hardly avoid taking the fourth, the most serious of all. If we declare that the Christian Scriptures contain a theological system, we must withhold them from the people. If our desire for unity leads us to the assertion that the books are an absolute homogeneity, despite the fact that every phase of thought and opinion is able to appeal to them, we must centralize the interpreting power too, and instead of allowing people to go to the books with a mind that is a *tabula rasa*, we must either tell them what they are compelled to find there, or we must take the books away from them. In all this matter the Catholic Church has been the one form of Christianity that can point to an absolutely consistent record. That church has kept the books from the common people. The average Christian, she says, is not able to find the deep and underlying unity that pervades the canon. It would seem, if there is such a unity, that she is right. Her strength to this day is in the fact that she can point to one hundred and fifty Protestant denominations, and say, "They all appeal to the Scriptures; do you think they understand them?"

I have said that the Catholic Church is the only form of Christianity that has been consistent. This is not entirely correct. The church that said, "Whatever inspires is inspired," was much nearer the truth, and was consistent as well. It was another kind of consistency—consistency of knowledge, not of life—that was striven for when the decree went out, "I am the heir of the apostles!" From that time on the documents, instead of being productions of the Spirit, for the spiritual edification of the different assemblies, were looked upon in the light of legislative enactments, that were thereafter to form the basis of canon law.



XII

CONCLUSIONS



## XII

THE facts brought out in our investigation are revolutionary only in their application to a certain conception of inspiration. The value and authenticity of the books contained in our New Testament are by no means injured by the fact that they were arbitrarily selected, and bound up in a single volume by the decrees of a hierarchy. We can even conclude that the best of early Christian literature was preserved for us by this process, and so feel grateful. Still, the idea of a sharp line of demarcation, separating the age of inspiration from all after-centuries, receives a decided shock from the facts we have adduced in the preceding pages. Protestantism has always turned the New Testament on the hierarchy, as a most effective weapon. Scholarship is just beginning to turn the New Testament on Protestantism. We are to learn in the years to come that a "New Testament Church" is a church without a New Testament. The boundary must fall. The first century must take its place with the others. The age of the apostles

must become part of the great, continuous, unbroken plan of God.

A very interesting comparison might be made between the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Epistle of Barnabas, both products of the anti-Jewish apologetic of the early church. The favorite part of the Old Testament for the writer of Hebrews is the Pentateuch, while the writer of Barnabas is attracted much more by the Prophets and the Psalms. The former, looking with envy on the ecclesiastical claims and prerogatives of Judaism, and realizing that Christ is not of Aaron's line, sets up the counter claim that he is a High Priest according to the order of Melchisedek. This peculiar method of defending Jesus by tracing his authority back to a shadowy figure of the Old Testament makes no appeal whatever to our modern religious consciousness. A far higher conception is to be found in the sixteenth chapter of Barnabas, where the writer refers to the destruction of the temple at Jerusalem, declaring that God has found another temple. This temple, he declares, is the Christian, in whom "God truly dwells." "How? By his word of faith; by the calling of his promise; by the wisdom of his statutes; by the commands

of his teaching; he himself prophesying in us; he himself dwelling in us." The sublime declaration of the abolition of the Jewish sacrifices, to be found in the second and third chapters of Barnabas, is almost worthy to be compared with the great philosophy of history of the eleventh chapter of Hebrews.

It is needless to go deeper into this comparison. Both epistles contain much that sounds strange to our ears. The long controversy in Hebrews, which takes so much account of the formal claims of Judaism, trying to give Christianity a higher ritual, making Christ both its priest and its victim, summing up in his person a rival sacrificial system, is less in accord with the thought of our day than the more spiritual idea of Barnabas. If the reader will take both epistles and carefully compare them, trying to divest himself of the training and study that has made him familiar with one and unfamiliar with the other, and will ask, "What would have been the result if Barnabas had been included and Hebrews left out?" he will, in all probability, reach the conclusion that the effects to Christianity, and the loss, would not have been serious.

Eusebius says of Dionysius of Corinth, "He

makes mention also of Clement's Epistle to the Corinthians, showing that it has been the custom from the beginning to read it in the church."<sup>1</sup> It would not be harmful to read it to-day. It contains splendid declarations. "If a man be faithful; if he be powerful in the utterance of knowledge; if he be wise in weighing words; if he be pure in all his deeds; yet the more he seems to be superior to others, the more humble-minded ought he to be, and to seek the common good" (chap. 48). "How blessed and wonderful, brethren, are the gifts of God! Life in immortality, splendor in righteousness, truth in perfect liberty, faith in assurance, self-control in holiness!" (Chap. 35.) "There is nothing base, nothing arrogant in love. Love admits of no schism. Love gives rise to no sedition" (chap. 49). What could be better for our modern Gnostics than this: "Consider, brethren, that the greater knowledge that has been vouchsafed to us, the greater also the danger to which we are exposed" (chap. 41). That strife cannot exist between two good men (chap. 45), is decidedly wholesome doctrine. The passion of the first century breathes in this declaration in regard to Christ: "By him our foolish

<sup>1</sup> H. E., IV., 23 : 11.

and darkened understanding blossoms up anew toward his marvelous light" (chap. 36). The hymn of harmony in nature (chap. 20), the figures of resurrection (chap. 24), the declaration of justification by faith (chap. 32), and the massing of Hebrew and Christian history to show the evil effects of envy (chap. 4, 5), are all splendid passages. Had this epistle been included in our New Testament it would have been used far more frequently, particularly among our dividing and multiplying Protestant sects, as a plea for harmony and unity, than some books contained in the canon.

It is difficult to enter into the spirit of a past age, and so appreciate its literature, but the true critic cannot shrink from the effort. In proportion to our success in this task, in that proportion will the beauty and strength of books like the *Didache* grow upon us, and we shall even enter into the spirit of the apocalyptic literature, with its glorification of martyrdom, and its sense of the heroic. As we read it to-day it has a far-off sound, mainly because it is unfamiliar to our ears. If we had heard its words since childhood, if it had been read and revered in the place of worship and at the family altar, many of its mysterious and

unmeaning phrases would come to us freighted with the lessons of life and experience.

This is particularly true of the Shepherd of Hermas. He who reads it sympathetically will find underneath its strange imagery many remarkable and inspiring utterances. To be sure it can scarcely be placed on a level with the Apocalypse, but if it had been included in our New Testament no one would think of excluding it. Those who allegorize the story of the temptation of Jesus, who find a mysterious lesson in his vision of Satan, "as lightning, falling from heaven," and who use Paul's experience of being "caught up into paradise," where he heard "unspeakable words," as an inspiring example of religious idealism, would doubtless discover in this old allegory many a precious lesson of elevating and transcendent truth. We must reach the conclusion, therefore, not that the New Testament books were uninspired writings, but that their inspiration will suffer no hard line of separation from the workings of God's Spirit in all his prophets, apostles, and teachers, throughout all time. Even the age of creed-formation was not without its "word of witness," its "open vision," had it been willing to listen.

The one question asked concerning a book by the early church was this, "Does it inspire?" This question was changed, in later years, into another, "Is it inspired?" The two questions were one to primitive Christianity, and, as the Spirit was still present in the heart of the believer, it was taken for granted that what inspired to a better life to-day, had been inspired in its writing yesterday. The two questions, however, became separated in the Catholic Church. "Is it inspired?" came to mean many things. "Can it be traced back to the apostles?" "Will it help in the establishing of a definite body of dogma?" "Does it contain any passage that denies the authority of the church?" "Does it help to establish the principle of 'apostolic succession'?" "Above all, can it be used to silence the confusion of speculation, to hush the new prophets, and to answer the arguments of that radical reformer, 'the shipmaster of Pontus'?" These questions imply altogether a different interest in the documents from that which attached to them when they were used solely as aids to devotion, or the repositories of the truth of "the ever-living Word."

The distinction is sharp and clear between the

ecclesiastical view of a book as a legal document, and the devotional conception of it as a gift of the Spirit. The eyes that scan the pages for proof-texts will have a different light in them from those that read for the purpose of spiritual communion with God. The letters which a lover writes to his sweetheart do not sound the same when they are taken to a law-office, to play a part in a suit for "breach of promise." The expressions of tenderness and the glowing terms of affection have a different interest attaching to them, when they are scanned by the sharp eyes of an attorney. They are love-letters no longer; the same words are there but they sound like totally different productions, when they become the ground of litigation, instead of simple expressions of hope and affection.

The illustration may be homely, but the analogy is true. Just such a change came over the use of the Christian documents in the second century. They became the ground of a legal contest with the heretics. Formerly they were read with feelings of hope and tenderness; now they were scrutinized for legal subtleties. When the hierarchy took possession of them, they scarcely seemed like the same books. Indeed, they never

again were the same books until Protestantism caused their resurrection once more. To the early Christian they were the simple and living springs of inspiration, the vital and thrilling message of the life of yesterday to the life of to-day. They throbbed with interest; they glowed with love; they flashed with commands; they pictured the ideal life in terms of truth and beauty. With the formation of a New Testament all this was changed, and the interest in them became archaic and deadened. They were the legal documents of an inspired age, whose height of truth and revelation was past and gone, never to be realized again.

That the echo of this belief is still in the church, we need scarcely be reminded. The tendency to let Christianity evaporate in mere admiration of the first century, or in dogmatic speculation over its events, is still with us. Dialectical skill, the subtleties of metaphysical genius, the penetrating analysis of logic, have all been turned on its pages in an effort to form a satisfactory theory of the "Atonement." Artists have pictured on canvas its tragic and pathetic features. Poets have set its crowning story to rhythmic cadence. Schoolmen have discussed its

teachings in their gatherings, and have left ponderous tomes to gather dust in monasteries. The tendency of all this admiration has been to obscure the New Testament, by enveloping it more and more in a golden haze, that soothed the imagination, satisfied the esthetic sense, delighted the powers of reason, but failed to transform the life. That the New Testament is not an epic, not a masterpiece, not a dogma, but a "voice" calling to a larger and purer life, is a conception hard to establish in minds that have isolated it, and lifted it to a region of lonely and unattainable grandeur.

It is refreshing to find a slight resistance to this tendency in the second century, even if it did come from men of little culture and critical attainment. While the church was being overawed by men who found Ogdoads and Tetrads in her documents, it is pleasant to hear the Alogi asking, "What foolish things are these?" We can almost hear them say, "The apostles wrote their books to direct our lives, to revise our standards, to point us to paths of righteousness, and not to settle silly disputes about the world-forming Logos." In this they were nearer the truth than their opponents. Though they

represent the attitude of the uncritical and ethical Christian, whose mind had not been Hellenized, and who resented the tendency to take the documents into court, their significance is in what we can see back of them. Much more numerous than the Alogi must have been the great body of earnest and simple-minded followers of the Nazarene, to whom the Christian life was a very plain thing, an open and loving testimony to the power of the person of Christ, and to whom the documents were nothing but the glowing accounts of the doings and prophecies of certain past witnesses. They were, to such men, merely the literature of an inspired affection. They were read with no regard for proof-texts, with no effort to silence opponents, with no desire to find justification for a Platonic conception of the creation, but merely to throw light on present-day problems, and to learn about Him who is "the way, the truth, and the life."

It is necessary to know this, in order to see that it was not a lower estimate, but a different estimate, that was put on the books, when a New Testament was formed. It is extremely easy to go through the records and bring forth passages to show how high was the respect and reverence

paid to the documents for decades and generations before the books were collected and equated. Though their words might be changed by wandering prophets, and their number added to continually by "Spirit-bearing men," they were still the very voice and message of God. As we approach the end of the second century, when the church was getting adjusted to the life of the world, the changes must have been slighter, and the additions fewer. But even then, the Shepherd, written "in our time," could sweep over the Western Church with an inspired message from on high. This tendency the Catholic Church could only conquer by claiming a continuance of the prophetic gift, and then by confining it to her own appointed teachers. By so doing she thrust the New Testament into the background, and has consistently tried to keep it there. By limiting the teaching function, and confining prophecy to church channels, she has maintained unbroken that unity which she achieved so many centuries ago. The tremendous advantage this gives her, by presenting a solid doctrinal front to the disorganized mob of Protestant sects, is seen every day.

Even that New Testament, which Protestantism

has used so effectually in the interest of freedom, was furnished her by the Catholic Church. The inconsistency of her attitude has been shown again and again by men like Newman, as well as by her own sons of freedom, who have striven for a larger liberty. That she has found in the New Testament the same kind of "authority" sought by all devout Catholics, she has been very slow to learn. That, having started on the path of liberty, she can never go back again, is a lesson that the centuries are slowly forcing upon her consciousness. However much she may regret its evil effects, its twists and turns, its occasional anarchy and frequent insubordination, it cannot be put down any more by the arbitrary arm of authority, or even by the merciless logic that forges its weapons from a New Testament that has been sealed and closed forever. To be sure, we must grant men the right to speculate, and to seek philosophical unity of thought in their interpretation of the universe. To be sure, we cannot avoid their forming theories as to the relation of this thought to the early documents of our Christian inheritance. But to make these documents stand sponsor for the science or the metaphysics of any age, whether of the time of

Irenæus or Huxley, is to pervert them to unjust and illegal uses.

The question naturally arises as to the reliability of a New Testament formed in the manner we have stated. We have said that one of the questions involved in canonicity was this, "Can it be traced back to the apostles?" How far then can we trust the witness of the men of the second century, that the documents they have handed down to us are of ancient date and apostolic sanction? To this the careful student will make a somewhat cautious reply. Self-deception is one of the most common experiences in times of religious controversy. To tell whether men are entirely sincere and honest at such times is an exceedingly difficult matter. However, one is forced to say that in general the men who formed our New Testament thought they were getting together apostolic documents. This may have been because those documents taught doctrines they wanted to enforce. It may have been because they lacked critical insight. It may have been because they were ignorant of the history of the documents. Whatever the reason, the fact remains. Despite the bitterness of the controversy, and the unworthiness of some of its objects,

we can see in the background of the thought of the Catholic Fathers a genuine desire to get at the teaching of the apostles. The methods they employed were often unworthy, and the sense of literary honor and integrity is scarcely up to modern standards, but the purpose seems genuine.

Let us take a concrete case of what we mean. Tertullian, for example, sends his readers to the churches of Corinth, Philippi, etc., for the "original autographs" of Paul's Epistles. Did he really think they were to be found there? If so simple-minded, the reader may ask, how can we trust his judgment in the difficult problems of literary authorship and documentary authenticity? Perhaps it was just a rhetorical exaggeration! If so, where are we to draw the line between his flourishes of rhetoric, and the real groundwork of fact in his statements in regard to the canonical books? Worst of all, he may have known that he was endeavoring to silence his opponents by a sort of imaginary "pious fraud." In any case the dilemma is not pleasant and is sufficient to make us cautious in accepting unchallenged our sources of information. No investigation into the tendencies of this period will be of any value that does not transcend the

Catholic calendar of "saints." But, when all deductions have been made, we will be obliged to admit certain facts.

There were four Gospels in general use in the Western Church toward the end of the second century, and in that section they occupied a decided preeminence over all other forms of the gospel narrative. In other regions this was not the case. The Gospel according to Peter, the Gospel according to the Hebrews, the Gospel according to the Egyptians, and other forms of the narrative, some of them constructed to advance a particular tendency or interest, were read at the services as Scripture, and were revered by scholars, in other parts of the world. However, it is fairly certain that our four Gospels, if they did not furnish the basis of these books, at least contain nearly all that was of any essential value in them. The fragment discovered of the Gospel of Peter by the French Archæological Mission, in Akhmin, in the year 1885, would not lead us to put a very high estimate on that form of the narrative. It seems to draw on our four Gospels entirely as its sources. The fragments of the Gospel according to the Hebrews preserved by Origen, Eusebius, and Jerome, lead us to a some-

what higher regard for this document. However, it is useless to carry on a speculation in the dark. Suffice it to say that as far as our knowledge goes we have handed down to us nearly all the gospel tradition that was of any value, that existed about the year A. D. 150. The documents used by Luke, the sources of the fourth Gospel, and all the phases of the "Synoptic Problem," do not come within the scope of our study. One old tradition alone should make us cautious. According to a tradition preserved in a very early manuscript (Codex D, at Luke 6 : 4), Jesus one day saw a man working on the Sabbath, and said, "If thou knowest what thou doest, thou art blessed; but if thou knowest not, thou art accursed." A nobler declaration on a very vexing problem cannot be found in any age, or in any literature.

When we turn to the book of the Acts it is difficult to make statements as clear and as confident. That this book was written by the same author as the Gospel of Luke is seldom questioned. That it deserves a place in the New Testament, not alone for its antiquity, but for its inspiring simplicity and grandeur, no one will deny. This is not the question. How about the other books of "Acts"? The Acts of Paul, of

Peter, of John, of Thomas, of Andrew, and of Philip, have all survived in part. The rest have been lost. Some of these are older than books that found a way into the canon. They reflect the ideal of popular piety. They represent the men of God as converters of the heathen, as ascetics, as workers of miracles, as martyrs. In fact they are very sweeping in their asceticism, and exalt entire continence. They are products of the dying enthusiasm of the early church, and beyond a doubt were excluded from the canon, not so much because of lack of apostolic authorship, as because they lent such decided aid to Montanism. Here again we are face to face with the impossible problem of transporting ourselves into the spirit of another time. In all probability, if these books had been bound up with our New Testament, they would be found helpful to-day. With the lost books of "Acts" much may have gone that was genuinely inspiring and noble. We must avoid the two extremes of a tendency to idealize them, or of a hasty conclusion that they were utterly worthless.

This is still more true of the Apocalypse. That not one of all the books of vision, extant about the middle of the second century, was worthy a

place in the New Testament, implies a confidence in the judgment of the Catholic Fathers that only the most devout adherent of the hierarchy can give. A portion of the Apocalypse of Peter was discovered at the same time that the fragment of the Gospel was found. It contains the end of a prophecy of Jesus about the "last times," a vision of the state of the blessed, and a long description of the torments of various kinds of sinners. The thought of the second century must have been full of these Orphic visions of heaven and hell. Here, again, we are in touch with the ideal of popular piety. The new prophets were far more highly honored by the people than their bishops. The Third Epistle of John urges its readers not to despise the church officials, because they are just as much deserving of respect as the prophets and teachers. It is easy to see why the Catholic Fathers were drawn to the books with an ecclesiastical tendency, rather than toward the more popular records of visions. The strife between church officials and prophets began very early in Christianity. The New Testament was formed during a complete triumph of the former. Naturally it turned away from the literature of the latter. How wide and how authoritative this

literature was, we can only surmise. It must have been great. The Epistle of Jude uses the Book of Enoch and the Ascension of Moses as Scripture. Barnabas uses the Apocalypse of Ezra. Hermas quotes the prophecy of Eldad and Medad. Papias quotes a text from the Apocalypse of Baruch as a saying of Jesus. The whole Jewish apocalyptic literature was used by Christians as canonical and authoritative. To this must be added numberless adaptations, and new creations.

All this was swept away by the formers of the New Testament. We cannot picture them examining the books with absolute critical candor, or spending much time over matters of authenticity. In Alexandria, where the nearest attempt was made at scientific scrutiny, we have seen how wide was the canon of authority of the great Fathers of the church. One who reads carefully the writings of Clement and Origen will find a presumption strongly in favor of much that was excluded from our New Testament.

A final question remains. "What, then, is the secret of the remarkable influence and history of the New Testament?" The question can be answered in one word—"Christ!" He is the treasure hid in the field. He gives the book its

value. It is because the world has found him there, that it is willing to go and sell every other book, and buy that book. The most devout adherent of the doctrine of verbal inspiration never makes the mistake of valuing every pebble on its pages as highly as the Pearl of Great Price. For one to ask, "How much would the New Testament be worth if Christ were left out of it?" is tantamount to asking, "What would you give for the Sistine Madonna without the canvas?" We have no objection to the frame put on the picture by devout men of the first century. We are even grateful for the care and reverence, mistaken though it sometimes was, that tried to preserve it. We only insist that the value is to be found in the sacred and inspiring image, and not in the frame.

That the New Testament gives us a true and reliable picture of the spirit and character of Christ can hardly be doubted. The one great truth toward which the ages are working is that it is the same Spirit, acting on our hearts, that enables us to recognize the divine image when we see it in the book. Therefore, no sharp line is to be drawn between the New Testament times and ours, save that which existed between the

character of Christ, and its unrealized expression in the church that now bears his name. That this is vast no one can deny. That the pages that tell us of Christ constitute the supreme inheritance of all time, few will dispute. To free those pages from a perfunctory reverence, and help center the thought and hope of Christendom on the great Head of the Church, we hope will be the result of our study.



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