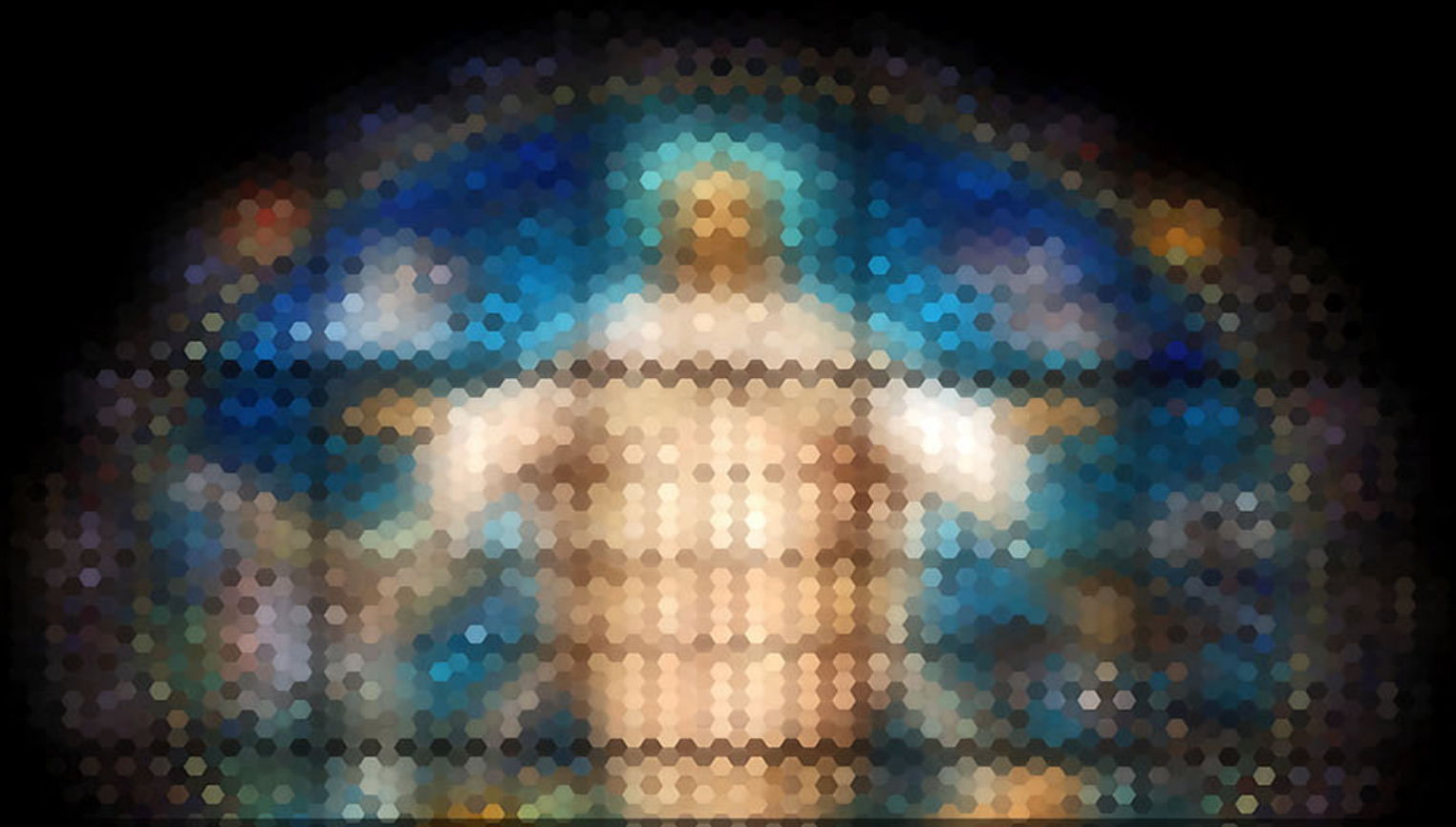
ERNEST RENAN



THE LIFE OF JESUS

ACCORDING TO THE STUDY AND CRITICISM OF THE BIBLE

Ernest Renan

The Life of Jesus: According to the Study and Criticism of the Bible

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AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION,

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In Which the Sources of This History Are Principally Treated

A history of the "Origin of Christianity" ought to embrace all the obscure, and, if one might so speak, subterranean periods which extend from the first beginnings of this religion up to the moment when its existence became a public fact, notorious and evident to the eyes of all. Such a history would consist of four books. The first, which I now present to the public, treats of the particular fact which has served as the starting-point of the new religion, and is entirely filled by the sublime person of the Founder. The second would treat of the apostles and their immediate disciples, or rather, of the revolutions which religious thought underwent in the first two generations of Christianity. I would close this about the year 100, at the time when the last friends of Jesus were dead, and when all the books of the New Testament were fixed almost in the forms in which we now read them. The third would exhibit the state of Christianity under the Antonines. We should see it develop itself slowly, and sustain an almost permanent war against the empire, which had just reached the highest degree of administrative perfection, and, governed by philosophers, combated in the new-born sect a secret and theocratic society which obstinately denied and incessantly undermined it. This book would cover the entire period of the second century. Lastly, the fourth book would show the

decisive progress which Christianity made from the time of the Syrian emperors. We should see the learned system of the Antonines crumble, the decadence of the ancient civilization become irrevocable, Christianity profit from its ruin, Syria conquer the whole West, and Jesus, in company with the gods and the deified sages of Asia, take possession of a society for which philosophy and a purely civil government no longer sufficed. It was then that the religious ideas of the races grouped around the Mediterranean became profoundly modified; that the Eastern religions everywhere took precedence; that the Christian Church, having become very numerous, totally forgot its dreams of a millennium, broke its last ties with Judaism, and entered completely into the Greek and Roman world. The contests and the literary labors of the third century, which were carried on without concealment, would be described only in their general features. I would relate still more briefly the persecutions at the commencement of the fourth century, the last effort of the empire to return to its former principles, which denied to religious association any place in the State. Lastly, I would only foreshadow the change of policy which, under Constantine, reversed the position, and made of the most free and spontaneous religious movement an official worship, subject to the State, and persecutor in its turn.

I know not whether I shall have sufficient life and strength to complete a plan so vast. I shall be satisfied if, after having written the *Life of Jesus*, I am permitted to relate, as I understand it, the history of the apostles, the state of the Christian conscience during the weeks which

followed the death of Jesus, the formation of the cycle of legends concerning the resurrection, the first acts of the Church of Jerusalem, the life of Saint Paul, the crisis of the time of Nero, the appearance of the Apocalypse, the fall of Jerusalem, the foundation of the Hebrew-Christian sects of Batanea, the compilation of the Gospels, and the rise of the great schools of Asia Minor originated by John. Everything pales by the side of that marvellous first century. By a peculiarity rare in history, we see much better what passed in the Christian world from the year 50 to the year 75, than from the year 100 to the year 150.

The plan followed in this history has prevented the introduction into the text of long critical dissertations upon controverted points. A continuous system of notes enables the reader to verify from the authorities all the statements of the text. These notes are strictly limited to quotations from the primary sources; that is to say, the original passages upon which each assertion or conjecture rests. I know that for persons little accustomed to studies of this kind many other explanations would have been necessary. But it is not my practice to do over again what has been already done well. To cite only books written in French, those who will consult the following excellent writings[1] will there find explained a number of points upon which I have been obliged to be very brief:

Études Critiques sur l'Évangile de saint Matthieu, par M. Albert Réville, pasteur de l'église Wallonne de Rotterdam.[2]

Histoire de la Théologie Chrétienne au Siècle Apostolique,
par M. Reuss, professeur à la Faculté de Théologie et au
Séminaire Protestant de Strasbourg.[3]

*Des Doctrines Religieuses des Juifs pendant les Deux
Siècles Antérieurs à l'Ère Chrétienne*, par M. Michel Nicolas, professeur à la Faculté de Théologie Protestante de
Montauban.[4]

Vie de Jésus, par le Dr. Strauss; traduite par M. Littré,
Membre de l'Institut.[5]

Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie Chrétienne, publiée sous la direction de M. Colani, de 1850 à 1857.—*Nouvelle Revue de Théologie*, faisant suite à la précédente depuis 1858.[6]

[Footnote 1: While this work was in the press, a book has appeared which I do not hesitate to add to this list, although I have not read it with the attention it deserves—*Les Évangiles*, par M. Gustave d'Eichthal. Première Partie: *Examen Critique et Comparatif des Trois Premiers Évangiles*. Paris, Hachette, 1863.]

[Footnote 2: Leyde, Noothoven van Goor, 1862. Paris, Cherbuliez. A work crowned by the Society of The Hague for the defence of the Christian religion.]

[Footnote 3: Strasbourg, Treuttel and Wurtz. 2nd edition. 1860. Paris,

Cherbuliez.]

[Footnote 4: Paris, Michel Lévy frères, 1860.]

[Footnote 5: Paris, Ladrange. 2nd edition, 1856.]

[Footnote 6: Strasbourg, Treuttel and Wurtz. Paris, Cherbuliez.]

The criticism of the details of the Gospel texts especially, has been done by Strauss in a manner which leaves little to be desired. Although Strauss may be mistaken in his theory of the compilation of the Gospels;[1] and although his book has, in my opinion, the fault of taking up the theological ground too much, and the historical ground too little,[2] it will be necessary, in order to understand the motives which have guided me amidst a crowd of minutiæ, to study the always judicious, though sometimes rather subtle argument, of the book, so well translated by my learned friend, M. Littré.

[Footnote 1: The great results obtained on this point have only been acquired since the first edition of Strauss's work. The learned critic has, besides, done justice to them with much candor in his after editions.]

[Footnote 2: It is scarcely necessary to repeat that not a word in Strauss's work justifies the strange and absurd calumny by which it has been attempted to bring into disrepute with superficial persons, a work so agreeable, accurate, thoughtful, and conscientious, though spoiled in its general parts by an exclusive system. Not only has Strauss never denied the existence of Jesus, but each page of his book implies this existence. The truth is, Strauss supposes the individual character of Jesus less distinct for us than it perhaps is in reality.]

I do not believe I have neglected any source of information as to ancient evidences. Without speaking of a crowd of other scattered data, there remain, respecting Jesus, and the time in which he lived, five great collections of writings—1st, The Gospels, and the writings of the New Testament in general; 2d, The compositions called the "Apocrypha of the Old Testament;" 3d, The works of Philo; 4th, Those of Josephus; 5th, The Talmud. The writings of Philo have the priceless advantage of showing us the thoughts which, in the time of Jesus, fermented in minds occupied with great religious questions. Philo lived, it is true, in quite a different province of Judaism to Jesus, but, like him, he was very free from the littlenesses which reigned at Jerusalem; Philo is truly the elder brother of Jesus. He was sixty-two years old when the Prophet of Nazareth was at the height of his activity, and he survived him at least ten years. What a pity that the chances of life did not conduct him into Galilee! What would he not have taught us!

Josephus, writing specially for pagans, is not so candid. His short notices of Jesus, of John the Baptist, of Judas the Gaulonite, are dry and colorless. We feel that he seeks to present these movements, so profoundly Jewish in character and spirit, under a form which would be intelligible to Greeks and Romans. I believe the passage respecting Jesus[1] to be authentic. It is perfectly in the style of Josephus, and if this historian has made mention of Jesus, it is thus that he must have spoken of him. We feel only that a Christian hand has retouched the passage, has added a few words—without which it would almost have been blasphemous[2]—has perhaps retrenched or modified some

expressions.[3] It must be recollected that the literary fortune of Josephus was made by the Christians, who adopted his writings as essential documents of their sacred history. They made, probably in the second century, an edition corrected according to Christian ideas.[4] At all events, that which constitutes the immense interest of Josephus on the subject which occupies us, is the clear light which he throws upon the period. Thanks to him, Herod, Herodias, Antipas, Philip, Annas, Caiaphas, and Pilate are personages whom we can touch with the finger, and whom we see living before us with a striking reality.

[Footnote 1: *Ant.*, XVIII. iii. 3.]

[Footnote 2: "If it be lawful to call him a man."]

[Footnote 3: In place of [Greek: christos outos ên], he certainly had these [Greek: christos outos elegeto].—Cf. *Ant.*, XX. ix. 1.]

[Footnote 4: Eusebius (*Hist. Eccl.*, i. 11, and *Demonstr. Evang.*, iii. 5) cites the passage respecting Jesus as we now read it in Josephus. Origen (*Contra Celsus*, i. 47; ii. 13) and Eusebius (*Hist. Eccl.*, ii. 23) cite another Christian interpolation, which is not found in any of the manuscripts of Josephus which have come down to us.]

The Apocryphal books of the Old Testament, especially the Jewish part of the Sibylline verses, and the Book of Enoch, together with the Book of Daniel, which is also really an Apocrypha, have a primary importance in the history of the development of the Messianic theories, and for the understanding of the conceptions of Jesus respecting the kingdom of God. The Book of Enoch especially, which was much read at the time of Jesus,[1] gives us the key to the

expression "Son of Man," and to the ideas attached to it. The ages of these different books, thanks to the labors of Alexander, Ewald, Dillmann, and Reuss, is now beyond doubt. Every one is agreed in placing the compilation of the most important of them in the second and first centuries before Jesus Christ. The date of the Book of Daniel is still more certain. The character of the two languages in which it is written, the use of Greek words, the clear, precise, dated announcement of events, which reach even to the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, the incorrect descriptions of Ancient Babylonia, there given, the general tone of the book, which in no respect recalls the writings of the captivity, but, on the contrary, responds, by a crowd of analogies, to the beliefs, the manners, the turn of imagination of the time of the Seleucidæ; the Apocalyptic form of the visions, the place of the book in the Hebrew canon, out of the series of the prophets, the omission of Daniel in the panegyrics of Chapter xlix. of Ecclesiasticus, in which his position is all but indicated, and many other proofs which have been deduced a hundred times, do not permit of a doubt that the Book of Daniel was but the fruit of the great excitement produced among the Jews by the persecution of Antiochus. It is not in the old prophetical literature that we must class this book, but rather at the head of Apocalyptic literature, as the first model of a kind of composition, after which come the various Sibylline poems, the Book of Enoch, the Apocalypse of John, the Ascension of Isaiah, and the Fourth Book of Esdras.

[Footnote 1: Jude Epist. 14.]

In the history of the origin of Christianity, the Talmud has hitherto been too much neglected. I think with M. Geiger, that the true notion of the circumstances which surrounded the development of Jesus must be sought in this strange compilation, in which so much precious information is mixed with the most insignificant scholasticism. The Christian and the Jewish theology having in the main followed two parallel ways, the history of the one cannot well be understood without the history of the other. Innumerable important details in the Gospels find, moreover, their commentary in the Talmud. The vast Latin collections of Lightfoot, Schoettgen, Buxtorf, and Otho contained already a mass of information on this point. I have imposed on myself the task of verifying in the original all the citations which I have admitted, without a single exception. The assistance which has been given me for this part of my task by a learned Israelite, M. Neubauer, well versed in Talmudic literature, has enabled me to go further, and to clear up the most intricate parts of my subject by new researches. The distinction of epochs is here most important, the compilation of the Talmud extending from the year 200 to about the year 500. We have brought to it as much discernment as is possible in the actual state of these studies. Dates so recent will excite some fears among persons habituated to accord value to a document only for the period in which it was written. But such scruples would here be out of place. The teaching of the Jews from the Asmonean epoch down to the second century was principally oral. We must not judge of this state of intelligence by the habits of an age of much writing. The

Vedas, and the ancient Arabian poems, have been preserved for ages from memory, and yet these compositions present a very distinct and delicate form. In the Talmud, on the contrary, the form has no value. Let us add that before the *Mishnah* of Judas the Saint, which has caused all others to be forgotten, there were attempts at compilation, the commencement of which is probably much earlier than is commonly supposed. The style of the Talmud is that of loose notes; the collectors did no more probably than classify under certain titles the enormous mass of writings which had been accumulating in the different schools for generations.

It remains for us to speak of the documents which, presenting themselves as biographies of the Founder of Christianity, must naturally hold the first place in a *Life of Jesus*. A complete treatise upon the compilation of the Gospels would be a work of itself. Thanks to the excellent researches of which this question has been the object during thirty years, a problem which was formerly judged insurmountable has obtained a solution which, though it leaves room for many uncertainties, fully suffices for the necessities of history. We shall have occasion to return to this in our Second Book, the composition of the Gospels having been one of the most important facts for the future of Christianity in the second half of the first century. We will touch here only a single aspect of the subject, that which is indispensable to the completeness of our narrative. Leaving aside all which belongs to the portraiture of the apostolic times, we will inquire only in what degree the data furnished

by the Gospels may be employed in a history formed according to rational principles.[1]

[Footnote 1: Persons who wish to read more ample explanations, may consult, in addition to the work of M. Réville, previously cited, the writings of Reuss and Scherer in the *Revue de Théologie*, vol. x., xi., xv.; new series, ii., iii., iv.; and that of Nicolas in the *Revue Germanique*, Sept. and Dec., 1862; April and June, 1863.]

That the Gospels are in part legendary, is evident, since they are full of miracles and of the supernatural; but legends have not all the same value. No one doubts the principal features of the life of Francis d'Assisi, although we meet the supernatural at every step. No one, on the other hand, accords credit to the *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, because it was written long after the time of the hero, and purely as a romance. At what time, by what hands, under what circumstances, have the Gospels been compiled? This is the primary question upon which depends the opinion to be formed of their credibility.

Each of the four Gospels bears at its head the name of a personage, known either in the apostolic history, or in the Gospel history itself. These four personages are not strictly given us as the authors. The formulæ "according to Matthew," "according to Mark," "according to Luke," "according to John," do not imply that, in the most ancient opinion, these recitals were written from beginning to end by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John,[1] they merely signify that these were the traditions proceeding from each of these apostles, and claiming their authority. It is clear that, if these titles are exact, the Gospels, without ceasing to be

in part legendary, are of great value, since they enable us to go back to the half century which followed the death of Jesus, and in two instances, even to the eye-witnesses of his actions.

[Footnote 1: In the same manner we say, "The Gospel according to the
Hebrews," "The Gospel according to the Egyptians."]

Firstly, as to Luke, doubt is scarcely possible. The Gospel of Luke is a regular composition, founded on anterior documents.[1] It is the work of a man who selects, prunes, and combines. The author of this Gospel is certainly the same as that of the Acts of the Apostles.[2] Now, the author of the Acts is a companion of St. Paul,[3] a title which applies to Luke exactly.[4] I know that more than one objection may be raised against this reasoning; but one thing, at least, is beyond doubt, namely, that the author of the third Gospel and of the Acts was a man of the second apostolic generation, and that is sufficient for our object. The date of this Gospel can moreover be determined with much precision by considerations drawn from the book itself. The twenty-first chapter of Luke, inseparable from the rest of the work, was certainly written after the siege of Jerusalem, and but a short time after.[5] We are here, then, upon solid ground; for we are concerned with a work written entirely by the same hand, and of the most perfect unity.

[Footnote 1: Luke i. 1–4.]

[Footnote 2: *Acts* i. 1. Compare Luke i. 1–4.]

[Footnote 3: From xvi. 10, the author represents himself as eye-witness.]

[Footnote 4: 2 Tim. iv. 11; Philemon 24; Col. iv. 14. The name of *Lucas* (contraction of *Lucanus*) being very rare, we need not fear one of those homonyms which cause so many perplexities in questions of criticism relative to the New Testament.]

[Footnote 5: Verses 9, 20, 24, 28, 32. Comp. xxii. 36.]

The Gospels of Matthew and Mark have not nearly the same stamp of individuality. They are impersonal compositions, in which the author totally disappears. A proper name written at the head of works of this kind does not amount to much. But if the Gospel of Luke is dated, those of Matthew and Mark are dated also; for it is certain that the third Gospel is posterior to the first two and exhibits the character of a much more advanced compilation. We have, besides, on this point, an excellent testimony from a writer of the first half of the second century—namely, Papias, bishop of Hierapolis, a grave man, a man of traditions, who was all his life seeking to collect whatever could be known of the person of Jesus.[1] After having declared that on such matters he preferred oral tradition to books, Papias mentions two writings on the acts and words of Christ: First, a writing of Mark, the interpreter of the apostle Peter, written briefly, incomplete, and not arranged in chronological order, including narratives and discourses, ([Greek: lechthenta ê prachthenta],) composed from the information and recollections of the apostle Peter; second, a collection of sentences ([Greek: logia]) written in Hebrew[2] by Matthew, "and which each one has translated as he could." It is certain that these two descriptions answer pretty well to the general physiognomy of the two books

now called "Gospel according to Matthew," "Gospel according to Mark"—the first characterized by its long discourses; the second, above all, by anecdote—much more exact than the first upon small facts, brief even to dryness, containing few discourses, and indifferently composed. That these two works, such as we now read them, are absolutely similar to those read by Papias, cannot be sustained: Firstly, because the writings of Matthew were to Papias solely discourses in Hebrew, of which there were in circulation very varying translations; and, secondly, because the writings of Mark and Matthew were to him profoundly distinct, written without any knowledge of each other, and, as it seems, in different languages. Now, in the present state of the texts, the "Gospel according to Matthew" and the "Gospel according to Mark" present parallel parts so long and so perfectly identical, that it must be supposed, either that the final compiler of the first had the second under his eyes, or *vice versa*, or that both copied from the same prototype. That which appears the most likely, is, that we have not the entirely original compilations of either Matthew or Mark; but that our first two Gospels are versions in which the attempt is made to fill up the gaps of the one text by the other. Every one wished, in fact, to possess a complete copy. He who had in his copy only discourses, wished to have narratives, and *vice versa*. It is thus that "the Gospel according to Matthew" is found to have included almost all the anecdotes of Mark, and that "the Gospel according to Mark" now contains numerous features which come from the *Logia* of Matthew. Every one, besides, drew largely on the Gospel tradition then current. This tradition was so far

from having been exhausted by the Gospels, that the Acts of the Apostles and the most ancient Fathers quote many words of Jesus which appear authentic, and are not found in the Gospels we possess.

[Footnote 1: In Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.*, iii. 39. No doubt whatever can be raised as to the authenticity of this passage. Eusebius, in fact, far from exaggerating the authority of Papias, is embarrassed at his simple ingenuousness, at his gross millenarianism, and solves the difficulty by treating him as a man of little mind. Comp. Irenæus, *Adv. Hær.*, iii. 1.]

[Footnote 2: That is to say, in the Semitic dialect.]

It matters little for our present object to push this delicate analysis further, and to endeavor to reconstruct in some manner, on the one hand, the original *Logia* of Matthew, and, on the other, the primitive narrative such as it left the pen of Mark. The *Logia* are doubtless represented by the great discourses of Jesus which fill a considerable part of the first Gospel. These discourses form, in fact, when detached from the rest, a sufficiently complete whole. As to the narratives of the first and second Gospels, they seem to have for basis a common document, of which the text reappears sometimes in the one and sometimes in the other, and of which the second Gospel, such as we read it to-day, is but a slightly modified reproduction. In other words, the scheme of the *Life of Jesus*, in the synoptics, rests upon two original documents—first, the discourses of Jesus collected by Matthew; second, the collection of anecdotes and personal reminiscences which Mark wrote from the recollections of Peter. We may say that we have

these two documents still, mixed with accounts from another source, in the two first Gospels, which bear, not without reason, the name of the "Gospel *according* to Matthew" and of the "Gospel *according* to Mark."

What is indubitable, in any case, is, that very early the discourses of Jesus were written in the Aramean language, and very early also his remarkable actions were recorded. These were not texts defined and fixed dogmatically. Besides the Gospels which have come to us, there were a number of others professing to represent the tradition of eye-witnesses.[1] Little importance was attached to these writings, and the preservers, such as Papias, greatly preferred oral tradition.[2] As men still believed that the world was nearly at an end, they cared little to compose books for the future; it was sufficient merely to preserve in their hearts a lively image of him whom they hoped soon to see again in the clouds. Hence the little authority which the Gospel texts enjoyed during one hundred and fifty years. There was no scruple in inserting additions, in variously combining them, and in completing some by others. The poor man who has but one book wishes that it may contain all that is clear to his heart. These little books were lent, each one transcribed in the margin of his copy the words, and the parables he found elsewhere, which touched him.[3] The most beautiful thing in the world has thus proceeded from an obscure and purely popular elaboration. No compilation was of absolute value. Justin, who often appeals to that which he calls "The Memoirs of the Apostles,"[4] had under his notice Gospel documents in a state very different from that in which we possess them. At all events, he never

cares to quote them textually. The Gospel quotations in the pseudo-Clementinian writings, of Ebionite origin, present the same character. The spirit was everything; the letter was nothing. It was when tradition became weakened, in the second half of the second century, that the texts bearing the names of the apostles took a decisive authority and obtained the force of law.

[Footnote 1: Luke i. 1, 2; Origen, *Hom. in Luc.* 1 init.; St. Jerome, *Comment. in Matt.*, prol.]

[Footnote 2: Papias, in Eusebius, *H.E.*, iii. 39. Comp. Irenæus, *Adv. Hær.*, III. ii. and iii.]

[Footnote 3: It is thus that the beautiful narrative in John viii. 1–11 has always floated, without finding a fixed place in the framework of the received Gospels.]

[Footnote 4: [Greek: Ta apomnêmoneumata tôn apostolôn, a kaleitai euangelia]. Justin, *Apol.* i. 33, 66, 67; *Dial. cum Tryph.*, 10, 100–107.]

Who does not see the value of documents thus composed of the tender remembrances, and simple narratives, of the first two Christian generations, still full of the strong impression which the illustrious Founder had produced, and which seemed long to survive him? Let us add, that the Gospels in question seem to proceed from that branch of the Christian family which stood nearest to Jesus. The last work of compilation, at least of the text which bears the name of Matthew, appears to have been done in one of the countries situated at the northeast of Palestine, such as Gaulonitis, Auranitis, Batanea, where many Christians took refuge at the time of the Roman war, where were found relatives of Jesus[1] even in the second century, and where

the first Galilean tendency was longer preserved than in other parts.

[Footnote 1: Julius Africanus, in Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.*, i. 7.]

So far we have only spoken of the three Gospels named the synoptics. There remains a fourth, that which bears the name of John. Concerning this one, doubts have a much better foundation, and the question is further from solution. Papias—who was connected with the school of John, and who, if not one of his auditors, as Irenæus thinks, associated with his immediate disciples, among others, Aristion, and the one called *Presbyteros Joannes*—says not a word of a *Life of Jesus*, written by John, although he had zealously collected the oral narratives of both Aristion and *Presbyteros Joannes*. If any such mention had been found in his work, Eusebius, who points out everything therein that can contribute to the literary history of the apostolic age, would doubtless have mentioned it.

The intrinsic difficulties drawn from the perusal of the fourth Gospel itself are not less strong. How is it that, side by side with narration so precise, and so evidently that of an eye-witness, we find discourses so totally different from those of Matthew? How is it that, connected with a general plan of the life of Jesus, which appears much more satisfactory and exact than that of the synoptics, these singular passages occur in which we are sensible of a dogmatic interest peculiar to the compiler, of ideas foreign to Jesus, and sometimes of indications which place us on our guard against the good faith of the narrator? Lastly, how is it that, united with views the most pure, the most just, the most truly evangelical, we find these blemishes which we

would fain regard as the interpolations of an ardent sectarian? Is it indeed John, son of Zebedee, brother of James (of whom there is not a single mention made in the fourth Gospel), who is able to write in Greek these lessons of abstract metaphysics to which neither the synoptics nor the Talmud offer any analogy? All this is of great importance; and for myself, I dare not be sure that the fourth Gospel has been entirely written by the pen of a Galilean fisherman. But that, as a whole, this Gospel may have originated toward the end of the first century, from the great school of Asia Minor, which was connected with John, that it represents to us a version of the life of the Master, worthy of high esteem, and often to be preferred, is demonstrated, in a manner which leaves us nothing to be desired, both by exterior evidences and by examination of the document itself.

And, firstly, no one doubts that, toward the year 150, the fourth Gospel did exist, and was attributed to John. Explicit texts from St. Justin,[1] from Athenagorus,[2] from Tatian,[3] from Theophilus of Antioch,[4] from Irenæus,[5] show that thenceforth this Gospel mixed in every controversy, and served as corner-stone for the development of the faith. Irenæus is explicit; now, Irenæus came from the school of John, and between him and the apostle there was only Polycarp. The part played by this Gospel in Gnosticism, and especially in the system of Valentinus,[6] in Montanism,[7] and in the quarrel of the Quartodecimans,[8] is not less decisive. The school of John was the most influential one during the second century; and it is only by regarding the origin of the Gospel as coincident with the rise of the school, that the existence of the latter can be understood at all. Let

us add that the first epistle attributed to St. John is certainly by the same author as the fourth Gospel,[9] now, this epistle is recognized as from John by Polycarp,[10] Papias,[11] and Irenæus.[12]

[Footnote 1: *Apol.*, 32, 61; *Dial. cum Tryph.*, 88.]

[Footnote 2: *Legatio pro Christ*, 10.]

[Footnote 3: *Adv. Græc.*, 5, 7; Cf. Eusebius, *H.E.*, iv. 29; Theodoret, *Hæretic. Fabul.*, i. 20.]

[Footnote 4: *Ad Autolycum*, ii. 22.]

[Footnote 5: *Adv. Hær.*, II. xxii. 5, III. 1. Cf. Eus., *H.E.*, v. 8.]

[Footnote 6: Irenæus, *Adv. Hær.*, I. iii. 6; III. xi. 7; St. Hippolytus, *Philosophumena* VI. ii. 29, and following.]

[Footnote 7: Irenæus, *Adv. Hær.*, III. xi. 9.]

[Footnote 8: Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.*, v. 24.]

[Footnote 9: John, i. 3, 5. The two writings present the most complete identity of style, the same peculiarities, the same favorite expressions.]

[Footnote 10: *Epist. ad Philipp.*, 7.]

[Footnote 11: In Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.*, III. 39.]

[Footnote 12: *Adv. Hær.*, III. xvi. 5, 8; Cf. Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.*, v. 8.]

But it is, above all, the perusal of the work itself which is calculated to give this impression. The author always speaks as an eye-witness; he wishes to pass for the apostle John. If, then, this work is not really by the apostle, we must admit a fraud of which the author convicts himself. Now, although the ideas of the time respecting literary honesty differed essentially from ours, there is no example in the apostolic world of a falsehood of this kind. Besides, not only does the author wish to pass for the apostle John, but we see clearly

that he writes in the interest of this apostle. On each page he betrays the desire to fortify his authority, to show that he has been the favorite of Jesus;[1] that in all the solemn circumstances (at the Lord's supper, at Calvary, at the tomb) he held the first place. His relations on the whole fraternal, although not excluding a certain rivalry with Peter;[2] his hatred, on the contrary, of Judas,[3] a hatred probably anterior to the betrayal, seems to pierce through here and there. We are tempted to believe that John, in his old age, having read the Gospel narratives, on the one hand, remarked their various inaccuracies,[4] on the other, was hurt at seeing that there was not accorded to him a sufficiently high place in the history of Christ; that then he commenced to dictate a number of things which he knew better than the rest, with the intention of showing that in many instances, in which only Peter was spoken of, he had figured with him and even before him.[5] Already during the life of Jesus, these trifling sentiments of jealousy had been manifested between the sons of Zebedee and the other disciples. After the death of James, his brother, John remained sole inheritor of the intimate remembrances of which these two apostles, by the common consent, were the depositaries. Hence his perpetual desire to recall that he is the last surviving eye-witness,[6] and the pleasure which he takes in relating circumstances which he alone could know. Hence, too, so many minute details which seem like the commentaries of an annotator—"it was the sixth hour;" "it was night;" "the servant's name was Malchus;" "they had made a fire of coals, for it was cold;" "the coat was without seam." Hence, lastly, the disorder of the compilation, the

irregularity of the narration, the disjointedness of the first chapters, all so many inexplicable features on the supposition that this Gospel was but a theological thesis, without historic value, and which, on the contrary, are perfectly intelligible, if, in conformity with tradition, we see in them the remembrances of an old man, sometimes of remarkable freshness, sometimes having undergone strange modifications.

[Footnote 1: John xiii. 23, xix. 26, xx. 2, xxi. 7, 20.]

[Footnote 2: John xviii. 15–16, xx. 2–6, xxi. 15–16. Comp. i. 35, 40, 41.]

[Footnote 3: John vi. 65, xii. 6, xiii. 21, and following.]

[Footnote 4: The manner in which Aristion and *Presbyteros Joannes* expressed themselves on the Gospel of Mark before Papias (Eusebius, *H.E.*, III. 39) implies, in effect, a friendly criticism, or, more properly, a sort of excuse, indicating that John's disciples had better information on the same subject.]

[Footnote 5: Compare John xviii. 15, and following, with Matthew xxvi. 58; John xx. 2 to 6, with Mark xvi. 7. See also John xiii. 24, 25.]

[Footnote 6: Chap. i. 14, xix. 35, xxi. 24, and following. Compare the
First Epistle of St. John, chap. i. 3, 5.]

A primary distinction, indeed, ought to be made in the Gospel of John. On the one side, this Gospel presents us with a rough draft of the life of Jesus, which differs considerably from that of the synoptics. On the other, it puts into the mouth of Jesus discourses of which the tone, the style, the treatment, and the doctrines have nothing in

common with the *Logia* given us by the synoptics. In this second respect, the difference is such that we must make choice in a decisive manner. If Jesus spoke as Matthew represents, he could not have spoken as John relates. Between these two authorities no critic has ever hesitated, or can ever hesitate. Far removed from the simple, disinterested, impersonal tone of the synoptics, the Gospel of John shows incessantly the preoccupation of the apologist —the mental reservation of the sectarian, the desire to prove a thesis, and to convince adversaries.[1] It was not by pretentious tirades, heavy, badly written, and appealing little to the moral sense, that Jesus founded his divine work. If even Papias had not taught us that Matthew wrote the sayings of Jesus in their original tongue, the natural, ineffable truth, the charm beyond comparison of the discourses in the synoptics, their profoundly Hebraistic idiom, the analogies which they present with the sayings of the Jewish doctors of the period, their perfect harmony with the natural phenomena of Galilee—all these characteristics, compared with the obscure Gnosticism, with the distorted metaphysics, which fill the discourses of John, would speak loudly enough. This by no means implies that there are not in the discourses of John some admirable gleams, some traits which truly come from Jesus.[2] But the mystic tone of these discourses does not correspond at all to the character of the eloquence of Jesus, such as we picture it according to the synoptics. A new spirit has breathed; Gnosticism has already commenced; the Galilean era of the kingdom of God is finished; the hope of the near advent of Christ is more distant; we enter on the barrenness of metaphysics, into the

darkness of abstract dogma. The spirit of Jesus is not there, and, if the son of Zebedee has truly traced these pages, he had certainly, in writing them, quite forgotten the Lake of Gennesareth, and the charming discourses which he had heard upon its shores.

[Footnote 1: See, for example, chaps. ix. and xi. Notice especially, the effect which such passages as John xix. 35, xx. 31, xxi. 20–23, 24, 25, produce, when we recall the absence of all comments which distinguishes the synoptics.]

[Footnote 2: For example, chap. iv. 1, and following, xv. 12, and following. Many words remembered by John are found in the synoptics (chap. xii. 16, xv. 20).]

One circumstance, moreover, which strongly proves that the discourses given us by the fourth Gospel are not historical, but compositions intended to cover with the authority of Jesus certain doctrines dear to the compiler, is their perfect harmony with the intellectual state of Asia Minor at the time when they were written. Asia Minor was then the theatre of a strange movement of syncretical philosophy; all the germs of Gnosticism existed there already. John appears to have drunk deeply from these strange springs. It may be that, after the crisis of the year 68 (the date of the Apocalypse) and of the year 70 (the destruction of Jerusalem), the old apostle, with an ardent and plastic spirit, disabused of the belief in a near appearance of the Son of Man in the clouds, may have inclined toward the ideas that he found around him, of which several agreed sufficiently well with certain Christian doctrines. In attributing these new ideas to Jesus, he only followed a very natural tendency. Our remembrances are

transformed with our circumstances; the ideal of a person that we have known changes as we change.[1] Considering Jesus as the incarnation of truth, John could not fail to attribute to him that which he had come to consider as the truth.

[Footnote 1: It was thus that Napoleon became a liberal in the remembrances of his companions in exile, when these, after their return, found themselves thrown in the midst of the political society of the time.]

If we must speak candidly, we will add that probably John himself had little share in this; that the change was made around him rather than by him. One is sometimes tempted to believe that precious notes, coming from the apostle, have been employed by his disciples in a very different sense from the primitive Gospel spirit. In fact, certain portions of the fourth Gospel have been added later; such is the entire twenty-first chapter,[1] in which the author seems to wish to render homage to the apostle Peter after his death, and to reply to the objections which would be drawn, or already had been drawn, from the death of John himself, (ver. 21–23.) Many other places bear the trace of erasures and corrections.[2] It is impossible at this distance to understand these singular problems, and without doubt many surprises would be in store for us, if we were permitted to penetrate the secrets of that mysterious school of Ephesus, which, more than once, appears to have delighted in obscure paths. But there is a decisive test. Every one who sets himself to write the Life of Jesus without any predetermined theory as to the relative value of the Gospels, letting himself be guided solely by the sentiment of

the subject, will be led in numerous instances to prefer the narration of John to that of the synoptics. The last months of the life of Jesus especially are explained by John alone; a number of the features of the passion, unintelligible in the synoptics,[3] resume both probability and possibility in the narrative of the fourth Gospel. On the contrary, I dare defy any one to compose a Life of Jesus with any meaning, from the discourses which John attributes to him. This manner of incessantly preaching and demonstrating himself, this perpetual argumentation, this stage-effect devoid of simplicity, these long arguments after each miracle, these stiff and awkward discourses, the tone of which is so often false and unequal,[4] would not be tolerated by a man of taste compared with the delightful sentences of the synoptics. There are here evidently artificial portions,[5] which represent to us the sermons of Jesus, as the dialogues of Plato render us the conversations of Socrates. They are, so to speak, the variations of a musician improvising on a given theme. The theme is not without some authenticity; but in the execution, the imagination of the artist has given itself full scope. We are sensible of the factitious mode of procedure, of rhetoric, of gloss.[6] Let us add that the vocabulary of Jesus cannot be recognized in the portions of which we speak. The expression, "kingdom of God," which was so familiar to the Master,[7] occurs there but once.[8] On the other hand, the style of the discourses attributed to Jesus by the fourth Gospel, presents the most complete analogy with that of the Epistles of St. John; we see that in writing the discourses, the author followed not his recollections, but rather the somewhat monotonous