S. Baring-Gould

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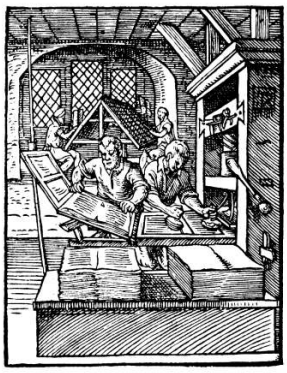
An Essay on the Toledoth Jeschu, and the Petrine and Pauline Gospels of the First Three Centuries of Which Fragments Remain



Published by Good Press, 2022

goodpress@okpublishing.info

EAN 4064066097325

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Preface.

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It is advisable, if not necessary, for me, by way of preface, to explain certain topics treated of in this book, which do not come under its title, and which, at first thought, may be taken to have but a remote connection with the ostensible subject of this treatise. These are:

1. The outbreak of Antinomianism which disfigured and distressed primitive Christianity.

2. The opposition of the Nazarene Church to St. Paul.

3. The structure and composition of the Synoptical Gospels.

The consideration of these curious and important topics has forced its way into these pages; for the first two throw great light on the history of those Gospels which have disappeared, and which it is not possible to reconstruct without a knowledge of the religious parties to which they belonged. And these parties were determined by the fundamental question of Law or No-law, as represented by the Petrine and ultra-Pauline Christians. And the third of these topics necessarily bound up with the consideration of the structure and origin of the Lost Gospels, as the reader will see if he [pg vi] cares to follow me in the critical examination of their extant fragments.

Upon each of these points a few preliminary words will not, I hope, come amiss, and may prevent misunderstanding.

1. The history of the Church, as the history of nations, is not to be read with prejudiced eyes, with penknife in hand to erase facts which fight against foregone conclusions.

English Churchmen have long gazed with love on the Primitive Church as the ideal of Christian perfection, the Eden wherein the first fathers of their faith walked blameless before God, and passionless towards each other. To doubt, to dissipate in any way this pleasant dream, may shock and pain certain gentle spirits. Alas! the fruit of the tree of γνῶσις, if it opens the eyes, saddens also and shames the heart.

History, whether sacred or profane, hides her teaching from those who study her through coloured glasses. She only reveals truth to those who look through the cold clear medium of passionless inquiry, who seek the Truth without determining first the masquerade in which alone they will receive it.

It exhibits a strange, a sad want of faith in Truth thus to constrain history to turn out facts according to order, to squeeze it through the sieve of prejudice. And what indeed is Truth in history but the voice of God instructing the world through the vices, follies, errors of the past?

A calm, patient spirit of inquiry is an attitude of the modern mind alone. To this mind History has made strange disclosures which she kept locked up through former ages. [pg vii] The world of Nature lay before the men of the past, but they could not, would not read it, save from left to right, or right to left, as their prejudices ran. The wise and learned had to cast aside their formulae, and sit meekly at the feet of Nature, as little children, before they learned her laws.

Nor will History submit to hectoring. Only now is she unfolding the hidden truth in her ancient scrolls.

It is too late to go back to conclusions of an uncritical age, though it was that of our fathers; the time for denying the facts revealed by careful criticism is passed away as truly as is the time for explaining the shadows in the moon by the story of the Sabbath-breaker and his faggot of sticks.

And criticism has put a lens to our eyes, and disclosed to us on the shining, remote face of primitive Christianity rents and craters undreamt of in our old simplicity.

That there was, in the breast of the new-born Church, an element of antinomianism, not latent, but in virulent activity, is a fact as capable of demonstration as any conclusion in a science which is not exact.

In the apostolic canonical writings we see the beginning of the trouble; the texture of the Gospels is tinged by it; the Epistles of Paul on one side, of Jude and Peter on the other, show it in energetic operation; ecclesiastical history reveals it in full flagrance a century later.

Whence came the spark? what material ignited? These are questions that must be answered. We cannot point to the blaze in the sub-apostolic age, and protest that it was an instantaneous combustion, with no smouldering train leading up to it,—to the rank crop of weeds, and argue that they [pg viii] sprang from no seed. We shall have to look up the stream to the fountains whence the flood was poured.

The existence of antinomianism in the Churches of Greece and Asia Minor, synchronizing with their foundation, transpires from the Epistles of St. Paul. It was an open sore in the life-time of the Twelve; it was a sorrow weighing daily

on the great soul of the Apostle of the Gentiles. It called forth the indignant thunder of Jude and Peter, and the awful denunciations in the charges to the Seven Churches.

The apocryphal literature of the sub-apostolic period carries on the sad story. Under St. John's presiding care, the gross scandals which defiled Gentile Christianity were purged out, and antinomian Christianity deserted Asia Minor for Alexandria. There it made head again, as revealed to us by the controversialists of the third century. And there it disappeared for a while.

Yet the disease was never eradicated. Its poison still lurked in the veins of the Church, and again and again throughout the Middle Ages heretics emerged fitfully, true successors of Nicolas, Cerdo, Marcion and Valentine, shaking off the trammels of the moral law, and seeking justification through mystic exaltation or spiritual emotion. The Papacy trod down these ugly heretics with ruthless heel. But at the Reformation, when the restraint was removed, the disease broke forth in a multitude of obscene sects spotting the fair face of Protestantism.

Nor has the virus exhausted itself. Its baleful workings, if indistinct, are still present and threatening.

But how comes it that Christianity has thus its dark [pg ix] shadow constantly haunting it? The cause is to be sought in the constitution of man. Man, moving in his little orbit, has ever a face turned away from the earth and all that is material, looking out into infinity,—a dark, unknown side, about whose complexion we may speculate, but which we can never map. It is a face which must ever remain mysterious, and ever radiate into mystery. As the eye and

ear are bundles of nerves through which the inner man goes out into, and receives impressions from, the material world, so is the soul a marvellous tissue of fibres through which man is placed en rapport with the spiritual world, God and infinity. It is the existence of this face, these fibres—take which simile you like—which has constituted mystics in every age all over the world: Schamans in frozen Siberia, Fakirs in burning India, absorbed Buddhists, ecstatic Saints, Essenes, Witches, Anchorites, Swedenborgians, modern Spiritualists.

Man, double-faced by nature, is placed by Revelation under a sharp, precise external rule, controlling his actions and his thoughts.

To this rule spirit and body are summoned to do homage. But the spirit has an inherent tendency towards the unlimited, by virtue of its nature, which places it on the confines of the infinite. Consequently it is never easy under a rule which is imposed on it conjointly with the body; it strains after emancipation, strives to assert its independence of what is external, and to establish its claim to obey only the movements in the spiritual world. It throbs sympathetically with the auroral flashes in that realm of mystery, like the flake of gold-leaf in the magnetometer.
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To be bound to the body, subjected to its laws, is degrading; to be unbounded, unconditioned, is its aspiration and supreme felicity.

Thus the incessant effort of the spirit is to establish its law in the inner world of feeling, and remove it from the material world without.

Moreover, inasmuch as the spirit melts into the infinite, cut off from it by no sharply-defined line, it is disposed to regard itself as a part of God, a creek of the great Ocean of Divinity, and to suppose that all its emotions are the pulsations of the tide in the all-embracing Spirit. It loses the consciousness of its individuality; it deifies itself.

A Suffee fable representing God and the human soul illustrates this well. “One knocked at the Beloved's door, and a voice from within cried, ‘Who is there?’ Then the soul answered, ‘It is I.’ And the voice of God said, ‘This house will not hold me and thee.’ So the door remained shut. Then the soul went away into a wilderness, and after long fasting and prayer it returned, and knocked once again at the door. And again the voice demanded ‘Who is there?’ Then he said, ‘It is Thou,’ and at once the door opened to him.”

Thus the mystic always regards his unregulated wishes as divine revelations, his random impulses as heavenly inspirations. He has no law but his own will; and therefore, in mysticism, there, is no curb against the grossest licence.

The existence of that evil which, knowing the constitution of man, we should expect to find prevalent in mysticism, the experience of all ages has shown following, dogging its steps [pg xi] inevitably. So slight is the film that separates religious from sensual passion, that uncontrolled spiritual fervour roars readily into a blaze of licentiousness.

It is this which makes revivalism of every description so dangerous. It is a two-edged weapon that cuts the hand which holds it.

Yet the spiritual, religious element in man is that which is most beautiful and pure, when passionless. It is like those

placid tarns, crystal clear and icy cold, in Auvergne and the Eifel, which lie in the sleeping vents of old volcanoes. We love to linger by them, yet never with security, for we know that a throb, a shock, may at any moment convert them into boiling geysirs or raging craters.

So well is this fact known in the Roman Church, that a mystic is inexorably shut up in a convent, or cast out as a heretic.

The more spiritual a religion is, the more apt it is to lurch and let in a rush of immorality; for its tendency is to substitute an internal for the external law, and the internal impulse is too often a hidden jog from the carnal appetite. In a highly spiritual religion, a written revelation is supplemented or superseded by one which is within.

This was eminently the case with the Anabaptists of the sixteenth century. When plied with texts by the Lutheran divines, they coldly answered that they walked not after the letter, but after the spirit; that to those who are in Christ Jesus, there is an inner illumination directing their conduct, before which that which is without grew pale and waned. The horrible [pg xii] licence into which this internal light plunged them is matter of history.

One lesson history enforces inexorably—that there lies a danger to morals in placing reliance on the spirit as an independent guide.

The spirit has its proper function and its true security; its function, the perception of the infinite, the divine; its security, the observance of the marriage-tie which binds it to the body.

God has joined body and spirit in sacred wedlock, and subjected both to a revealed external law; in the maintenance of this union, and submission to this law, man's safety lies. The spirit supreme, the body a bond-maid, is no marriage; it is a concubinage, bringing with it a train of attendant evils.

Man stands, so to speak, at the bisection of two circles, the material and the spiritual, in each of which he has a part, and to the centres of each of which he feels a gravitation. Absorption in either realm is fatal to the well-being of the entire man.

And this leads us to the consideration of the marvellous aptitude to human nature of the Incarnation, welding together into indissoluble union spirit and matter, the infinite and the finite. The religion which flows from that source cannot dissociate soul from body. Its law is the marriage of that which is spiritual to that which is material; the soul cannot shake off the responsibilities of the body; everything spiritual is clothed, and every material object is a sacrament conveying a ray of divinity.

There can be no evasion, no abrasion and rupture of the tie by either party, without lesion of the chain which binds to the Incarnation; and it is a fact worthy of note, that mysticism has always a tendency to obscure this fundamental dogma, and that the immoral sects of ancient times and of the present day hang loosely by, or openly deny, this great verity.

St. Paul had a natural bias towards mysticism. His trances and revelations betoken a nature branching out into the spiritual realm; and throughout his letters we see the

inevitable consequence—a struggle to displace the centre of obedience, to transfer it from without and enthrone it within, to make the internal revelation the governing principle of action, in the room of submission to an external law.

But, like St. Theresa, who never relinquished her common sense whilst yielding up her spirit to the most incoherent raptures; like Mohammad, who, however he might soar in ecstasy above the moon, never lost sight of the principles which would ensure a very material success; like Ignatius Loyola, who, in the midst of fantastic visions, elaborated a system of government full of the maturest judgment,—so St. Paul never surrendered himself unconditionally to the promptings of his spirit. Like the angel of the Apocalypse, if he stood with one foot in the vague sea, he kept the other on the solid land.

That thorn in the flesh, whose presence he deplored, kept him from forgetting the body and its obligations; the moral disorders breaking out wherever he preached his gospel, warned him in time not to relax too far the restraint imposed [pg xiv] by the law without. As the revolt of the Anabaptists checked Luther, so did the excesses of the Gentile Christians arrest Paul. Both saw and obeyed the warning finger of Providence signalling a retreat.

Divinely inspired St. Paul was. But inspiration never obscures and obliterates human characteristics. It directs and utilizes them for its own purpose, leaving free margin beyond that purpose for the exercise of individual proclivities uncontrolled.

Paul's natural tendency is unmistakable; and we may see evidence of divine guidance in the fact of his having refused

to give the rein to his natural propensities, and of being prepared to turn all his energies to the repairing of those dykes against the ocean which in a moment of impatience he had set his hand to tear down.

As Socrates was by nature prone to become the most vicious of men, so was Paul naturally disposed to become the most dangerous of heresiarchs. But the moral sense of Socrates mastered his passions and converted him into a philosopher; and the guiding spirit of God made of Paul the mystic an apostle of righteousness.

Christianity, as the religion of the Incarnation, has its external form and its internal spirit, and it is impossible to dissociate one from the other without peril. Mere formalism and naked spirituality are alike and equally pernicious. Formalism, the resolution of religion into ceremonial acts only, void of spirit, is like the octopus, lacing its thousand filaments about the soul and drawing it into the abyss; and mysticism, pure spirituality, like the magnet mountain in Sinbad's [pg xv] voyage, draws the nails out of the vessel—the rivets of moral law—and the Christian character goes to pieces.

The history of the Church is the history of her leaning first towards one side, then towards the other, of advance amid perpetual recoils from either peril.

2. The alarm caused in Jerusalem amidst the elder apostles and the Nazarene Church at the immorality which disfigured Pauline Christianity, was not the only cause of the mistrust wherewith they viewed him and his teaching. Other causes existed which I have not touched on in my text, lest I

should distract attention from the main points of my argument, but they are deserving of notice here.

And the first of these was the intense prejudice which existed among the Jews of Palestine against Greek modes of thought, manners, culture, even against the Greek language.

The second was the jealousy with which the Palestinian Jews regarded the Alexandrine Jews, their mode of interpreting Scripture, and their system of theology.

St. Paul, an accomplished Greek scholar, brought up at Tarsus amidst Hellenistic Jews, adopted the theology and exegesis in vogue at Alexandria, and on both these accounts excited the suspicion and dislike of the national party at Jerusalem. The Nazarenes were imbued with the prejudices they had acquired in their childhood, in the midst of which they had grown up, and they could not but regard Paul with alarm when he turned without disguise to the Greeks, and introduced into the Church the theological system and scriptural interpretations of a Jewish community they had always regarded as of questionable orthodoxy.
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First let us consider the causes which contributed to the creation of the prejudice against the Hellenizers. Judaea had served as the battle-field of the Greek kings of Egypt and Syria. Whether Judaea fell under the dominion of Syria or Egypt it mattered not; Ptolemies and Seleucides alike were intolerable oppressors. But it was especially the latter who excited to its last exasperation the fanaticism of the Jews, and called forth in their breasts an ineffaceable antipathy towards everything that was Greek.

The temple was pillaged by them, the sanctuary was violated, the high-priesthood degraded. Antiochus Epiphanes entertained the audacious design of completely overthrowing the religion of the Jews, of forcibly Hellenizing them. For this purpose he forbade the celebration of the Sabbaths and feasts, drenched the sanctuary with blood to pollute it, the sacrifices were not permitted, circumcision was made illegal. The sufferings of the Jews, driven into deserts and remote hiding-places in the mountains, are described in the first book of the Maccabees.

Yet there was a party disposed to acquiesce in this attempt at changing the whole current of their nation's life, ready to undo the work of Ezra, break with their past, and fling themselves into the tide of Greek civilization and philosophic thought. These men set up a gymnasium in Jerusalem, Graecised their names, openly scoffed at the Law, ignored the Sabbath, and neglected circumcision.1 At the head of this party stood the high-priests Jason and Menelaus. The author [pg xvii] of the first book of the Maccabees styles these conformists to the state policy, “evil men, seducing many to despise the Law.” Josephus designates them as “wicked” and “impious.”2

The memory of the miseries endured in the persecution of Antiochus did not fade out of the Jewish mind, neither did the party disappear which was disposed to symbolize with Greek culture, and was opposed to Jewish prejudice. Nor did the abhorrence in which it was held lose its intensity.

From the date of the Antiochian persecution, the names of “Greek” or “friend of the Greeks” were used as synonymous with “traitor” and “apostate.”

Seventy years before Christ, whilst Hyrcanus was besieging Aristobulus in Jerusalem, the besiegers furnished the besieged daily with lambs for the sacrifice. An old Jew, belonging to the anti-national party, warned Hyrcanus that as long as the city was supplied with animals for the altar, so long it would hold out. On the morrow, in place of a lamb, a pig was flung over the walls. The earth shuddered at the impiety, and the heads of the synagogue solemnly cursed from thenceforth whosoever of their nation should for the future teach the Greek tongue to his sons.3 Whether this incident be true or not, it proves that a century after Antiochus Epiphanes the Jews entertained a hatred of that Greek culture which they regarded as a source of incredulity and impiety.

The son of Duma asked his uncle Israel if, after having [pg xviii] learned the whole Law, he might not study the philosophy of the Greeks. "'The Book of the Law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night.' These are the words of God" (Josh. i. 8), said the old man; "find me an hour which is neither day nor night, and in that study your Greek philosophy."4

Gamaliel, the teacher of St. Paul, was well versed in Greek literature; that this caused uneasiness in his day is probable; and indeed the Gemara labours to explain the fact of his knowledge of Greek, and apologizes for it.5 Consequently Saul, the disciple of Gamaliel, also a Greek scholar, would be likely to incur the same suspicion, as one leaning away from strict Judaism towards Gentile culture.

The Jews of Palestine viewed the Alexandrine Jews with dislike, and mistrusted the translation into Greek of their

sacred books. They said it was a day of sin and blasphemy when the version of the Septuagint was made, equal only in wickedness to that on which their fathers had made the golden calf.6

The loudly-proclaimed intention of Paul to turn to the Gentiles, his attitude of hostility towards the Law, the abrogation of the Sabbath and substitution for it of the Lord's-day, his denunciation of circumcision, his abandonment of his Jewish name for a Gentile one, led to his being identified by the Jews of Palestine with the abhorred Hellenistic party; and the Nazarene Christians shared to the full in the national prejudices.

The Jews, at the time of the first spread of Christianity, were dispersed over the whole world; and in Greece and Asia Minor occupied a quarter, and exercised influence, in every town. The Seleucides had given the right of citizenship to these Asiatic Jews, and had extended to them some sort of protection. The close association of these Jews with Greeks necessarily led to the adoption of some of their ideas. Since Ezra, the dominant principle of the Palestinian and Babylonish rabbis had been to create a “hedge of the Law,” to constitute of the legal prescriptions a net lacing those over whom it was cast with minute yet tough fibres, stifling spontaneity. Whilst rabbinism was narrowing the Jewish horizon, Greek philosophy was widening man's range of vision. The tendencies of Jewish theology and Greek philosophy were radically opposed. The Alexandrine Jews never submitted to be involved in the meshes of rabbinism. They produced a school of thinkers, of whom Aristobulus was the first known exponent, and Philo the last expression,

which sought to combine Mosaism with Platonism, to explain the Pentateuch as the foundation of a philosophic system closely related to the highest and best theories of the Greeks.

In the Holy Land, routine, the uniform repetition of prescribed forms, the absence of all alien currents of thought, tended insensibly to transform religion into formalism, and to identify it with the ceremonies which are its exterior manifestation.

In Egypt, on the other hand, the Alexandrine Jews, ambitious to give to the Greeks an exalted idea of their religion, strove to bring into prominence its great doctrines of the [pg xx] Unity of the Godhead, of Creation, and Providence. All secondary points were allegorized or slurred over. As Palestinian rabbinism became essentially ceremonial, Alexandrine Judaism became essentially spiritual. The streams of life and thought in these members of the same race were diametrically opposed.

The Jews settled in Asia Minor, subjected to the same influences, actuated by the same motives, as the Egyptian Jews, looked to Alexandria rather than to Jerusalem or Babylon for guidance, and were consequently involved in the same jealous dislike which fell on the Jews of Egypt.7

There can be no doubt that St. Paul was acquainted with, and influenced by, the views of the Alexandrine school. That he had read some of Philo's works is more than probable. How much he drew from the writings of Aristobulus the Peripatetic cannot be told, as none of the books of that learned but eclectic Jew have been preserved.8

In more than one point Paul departs from the traditional methods of the Palestinian rabbis, to adopt those of the Alexandrines. The Jews of Palestine did not admit the allegorical interpretation of Scripture. Paul, on two occasions, follows the Hellenistic mode of allegorizing the sacred text. On one of these occasions he uses an allegory of Philo, while slightly varying its application.9

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The Palestinian Jews knew of no seven orders of angels; the classification of the celestial hierarchy was adopted by Paul10 from Philo and his school. The identification of idols with demons11 was also distinctively Alexandrine.

But what is far more remarkable is to find in Philo, born between thirty and forty years before Christ, the key to most of Paul's theology,—the doctrines of the all-sufficiency of faith, of the worthlessness of good works, of the imputation of righteousness, of grace, mediation, atonement.

But in Philo, these doctrines drift purposeless. Paul took them and applied them to Christ, and at once they fell into their ranks and places. What was in suspension in Philo, crystallized in Paul. What the Baptist was to the Judaean Jews, that Philo was to the Hellenistic Jews; his thoughts, his theories, were—

“In the flecker'd dawning
The glitterance of Christ.”12

The Fathers, perplexed at finding Pauline words, expressions, ideas, in the writings of Philo, and unwilling to admit that Paul had derived them from Philo, invented a myth that the Alexandrine Jew came to Rome and was there converted to the Christian faith. Chronology and a critical

examination of the writings of the Jewish Plato have burst that bubble.13

The fact that Paul was deeply saturated with the philosophy of the Alexandrine Jews has given rise also to two [pg xxii] obstinate Christian legends,—that Dionysius the Areopagite, author of the Celestial Hierarchy, the Divine Names, &c., was the disciple of St. Paul, and that Seneca the philosopher was also his convert and pupil. Dionysius took Philo's system of the universe and emanations from the Godhead and Christianized them. The influence of Philo on the system of Dionysius saute aux yeux, as the French would say. And Dionysius protests, again and again, in his writings that he learned his doctrine from St. Paul.

From a very early age, the Fathers insisted on Seneca having been a convert of St. Paul; they pointed out the striking analogies in their writings, the similarity in their thoughts. How was this explicable unless one had been the pupil of the other? But Seneca, we know, lived some time in Alexandria with his uncle, Severus, prefect of Egypt; and at that time the young Roman, there can be little question, became acquainted with the writings of Philo.14

Thus St. Paul, by adopting the mode of Biblical interpretation of a rival school to that dominant in Judaea, by absorbing its philosophy, applying it to the person of Christ and the moral governance of the Church, by associating with Asiatic Jews, known to be infected with Greek philosophic heresies, and by his open invocation to the Gentiles to come into and share in all the plenitude of the privileges of the gospel, incurred the suspicion, distrust,

dislike of the believers in Jerusalem, who had grown up in the midst of national prejudices which Paul shocked.
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3. It has been argued with much plausibility, that because certain of the primitive Fathers were unacquainted with the four Gospels now accounted Canonical, that therefore those Gospels are compositions subsequent to their date, and that therefore also their authority as testimonies to the acts and sayings of Jesus is sensibly weakened, if not wholly overthrown. It is true that there were certain Fathers of the first two centuries who were unacquainted with our Gospels, but the above conclusions drawn from this fact are unsound.

This treatise will, I hope, establish the fact that at the close of the first century almost every Church had its own Gospel, with which alone it was acquainted. But it does not follow that these Gospels were not as trustworthy, as genuine records, as the four which we now alone recognize.

It is possible, from what has been preserved of some of these lost Gospels, to form an estimate of their scope and character. We find that they bore a very close resemblance to the extant Synoptical Gospels, though they were by no means identical with them.

We find that they contained most of what exists in our three first Evangels, in exactly the same words; but that some were fuller, others less complete, than the accepted Synoptics.

If we discover whole paragraphs absolutely identical in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, of the Hebrews, of the Clementines, of the Lord, it goes far to prove that all the Evangelists drew upon a common fund. And if we see that,

though using the same material, they arranged it differently, [pg xxiv] we are forced to the conclusion that this material they incorporated in their biographies existed in anecdota, not in a consecutive narrative.

Some, at least, of the Gospels were in existence at the close of the first century; but the documents of which they were composed were then old and accepted.

And though it is indisputable that in the second century the Four had not acquired that supremacy which brought about the disappearance of the other Gospels, and were therefore not quoted by the Fathers in preference to them, it is also certain that all the material out of which both the extant and the lost Synoptics were composed was then in existence, and was received in the Church as true and canonical.

Admitting fully the force of modern Biblical criticism, I cannot admit all its most sweeping conclusions, for they are often, I think, more sweeping than just.

The material out of which all the Synoptical Gospels, extant or, lost, were composed, was in existence and in circulation in the Churches in the first century. That material is—the sayings of Christ on various occasions, and the incidents in his life. These sayings and doings of the Lord, I see no reason to doubt, were written down from the mouths of apostles and eye-witnesses, in order that the teaching and example of Christ might be read to believers in every Church during the celebration of the Eucharist.

The early Church followed with remarkable fidelity the customs of the Essenes, so faithfully that, as I have shown, Josephus mistook the Nazarenes for members of the Essene

[pg xxv] sect; and in the third century Eusebius was convinced that the Therapeutae, their Egyptian counterparts, were actually primitive Christians.15

The Essenes assembled on the Sabbath for a solemn feast, in white robes, and, with faces turned to the East, sang antiphonal hymns, broke bread and drank together of the cup of love. During this solemn celebration the president read portions from the sacred Scriptures, and the exhortations of the elders. At the Christian Eucharist the ceremonial [pg xxvi] was identical;16 Pliny's description of a Christian assembly might be a paragraph from Josephus or Philo describing an Essene or Therapeutic celebration. In place of the record of the wanderings of the Israelites and the wars of their kings being read at their conventions, the president read the journeys of the Lord, his discourses and miracles.

No sooner was a Church founded by an apostle than there rose a demand for this sort of instruction, and it was supplied by the jottings-down of reminiscences of the Lord and his teaching, orally given by those who had companied with him.

Thus there sprang into existence an abundant crop of memorials of the Lord, surrounded by every possible guarantee of their truth. And these fragmentary records passed from one Church to another. The pious zeal of an Antiochian community furnished with the memorials of Peter would borrow of Jerusalem the memorials of James and Matthew. One of the traditions of John found its way into the Hebrew Gospel—that of the visit of Nicodemus; but it never

came into the possession of the compiler of the first Gospel or of St. Luke.

After a while, each Church set to work to string the anecdota it possessed into a consecutive story, and thus the Synoptical Gospels came into being.

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Of these, some were more complete than others, some were composed of more unique material than the others.

The second Gospel, if we may trust Papias, and I see no reason for doubting his testimony, is the composition of Mark, the disciple of St. Peter, and consists exclusively of the recollections of St. Peter. This Gospel was not co-ordinated probably till late, till long after the disjointed memorabilia were in circulation. It first circulated in Egypt; but in at least one of the Petrine Churches—that of Rhossus—the recollections of St. Peter had already been arranged in a consecutive memoir, and, in A.D. 190, Serapion, Bishop of Antioch, found the Church of Rhossus holding exclusively to this book as a Gospel of traditional authority, received from the prince of the apostles.

The Gospel of St. Matthew, on the other hand, is a diatessaron composed of four independent collections of memorabilia. Its groundwork is a book by Matthew the apostle, a collection of the discourses of the Lord. Whether Matthew wrote also a collection of the acts of the Lord, or contributed disconnected anecdotes of the Lord to Churches of his founding, and these were woven in with his work on the Lord's discourses, is possible, but is conjectural only.

But what is clear is, that into the first Gospel was incorporated much, not all, of the material used by Mark for the construction of his Gospel, viz. the recollections of St.

Peter. That the first evangelist did not merely amplify the Mark Gospel appears from his arranging the order of his anecdotes differently; that he did use the same “anecdota” is [pg xxviii] evidenced by the fact of his using them often word for word.

The Gospel of the Hebrews and the Gospel quoted in the Clementines were composed in precisely the same manner, and of the same materials, but not of all the same.

That the Gospel of St. Matthew, as it stands, was the composition of that apostle, cannot be seriously maintained; yet its authority as a record of facts, not as a record of their chronological sequence, remains undisturbed.

The Gospel of St. Luke went, apparently, through two editions. After the issue of his original Gospel, which, there is reason to believe, is that adopted by Marcion, fresh material came into his hands, and he revised and amplified his book.

That this second edition was not the product of another hand, is shown by the fact that characteristic expressions found in the original text occur also in the additions.

The Pauline character of the Luke Gospel has been frequently commented on. It is curious to observe how much more pronounced this was in the first edition. The third Gospel underwent revision under the influence of the same wave of feeling which moved Luke to write the Christian Odyssey, the Acts, nominally of the Apostles, really of St. Paul. With the imprisonment of Paul the tide turned, and a reconciliatory movement set strongly in. Into this the Apostle of Love threw himself, and he succeeded in directing it.

The Apostolic Church was a well-spring tumultuously [pg xxix] gushing forth its superabundance of living waters; there was a clashing of jets, a conflict of ripples; but directly St. John gave to it its definite organization, the flood rushed out between these banks, obedient to a common impulse, the clashing forces produced a resultant, the conflicting ripples blended into rhythmic waves, and the brook became a river, and the river became a sea.

The lost Gospels are no mere literary curiosity, the examination of them no barren study. They furnish us with most precious information on the manner in which all the Gospels were compiled; they enable us in several instances to determine the correct reading in our canonical Matthew and Luke; they even supply us with particulars to fill lacunae which exist, or have been made, in our Synoptics.

The poor stuff that has passed current too long among us as Biblical criticism is altogether unworthy of English scholars and theologians. The great shafts that have been driven into Christian antiquity, the mines that have been opened by the patient labours of German students, have not received sufficient attention at our hands. If some of our commentators timorously venture to their mouths, it is only to shrink back again scared at the gnomes their imagination pictures as haunting those recesses, or at the abysses down which they may be precipitated, that they suppose lie open in those passages.

This spirit is neither courageous nor honest. God's truth is helped by no man's ignorance.

It may be that we are dazzled, bewildered by the light and [pg xxx] rush of new ideas exploding around us on

every side; but, for all that, a cellar is no safe retreat. The vault will crumble in and bury us.

The new lights that break in on us are not always the lanterns of burglars.

S. Baring-Gould.

East Mersea, Colchester,
November 2nd, 1874.

[pg 001]

Part I. The Jewish Anti-Gospels.

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I. The Silence Of Josephus.

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It is somewhat remarkable that no contemporary, or even early, account of the life of our Lord exists, except from the pens of Christian writers.

That we have none by Roman or Greek writers is not, perhaps, to be wondered at; but it is singular that neither Philo, Josephus, nor Justus of Tiberias, should have ever alluded to Christ or to primitive Christianity.

The cause of this silence we shall presently investigate. Its existence we must first prove.

Philo was born at Alexandria about twenty years before Christ. In the year A.D. 40, he was sent by the Alexandrine Jews on a mission to Caligula, to entreat the Emperor not to put in force his order that his statue should be erected in the Temple of Jerusalem and in all the synagogues of the Jews.

Philo was a Pharisee. He travelled in Palestine, and speaks of the Essenes he saw there; but he says not a [pg 002] word about Jesus Christ or his followers. It is possible that he may have heard of the new sect, but he probably concluded it was but insignificant, and consisted merely of the disciples, poor and ignorant, of a Galilean Rabbi, whose doctrines he, perhaps, did not stay to inquire into, and

supposed that they did not differ fundamentally from the traditional teaching of the rabbis of his day.

Flavius Josephus was born A.D. 37—consequently only four years after the death of our Lord—at Jerusalem. Till the age of twenty-nine, he lived in Jerusalem, and had, therefore, plenty of opportunity of learning about Christ and early Christianity.

In A.D. 67, Josephus became governor of Galilee, on the occasion of the Jewish insurrection against the Roman domination. After the fall of Jerusalem he passed into the service of Titus, went to Rome, where he rose to honour in the household of Vespasian and of Titus, A.D. 81. The year of his death is not known. He was alive in A.D. 93, for his biography is carried down to that date.

Josephus wrote at Rome his “History of the Jewish War,” in seven books, in his own Aramaic language. This he finished in the year A.D. 75, and then translated it into Greek. On the completion of this work he wrote his “Jewish Antiquities,” a history of the Jews in twenty books, from the beginning of the world to the twelfth year of the reign of Nero, A.D. 66. He completed this work in the year A.D. 93, concluding it with a biography of himself. He also wrote a book against Apion on the antiquity of the Jewish people. A book in praise of the Maccabees has been attributed to him, but without justice. In the first of these works, the larger of the two, the “History of the Jewish War,” he treats of the very period when our Lord lived, and in it he [pg 003] makes no mention of him. But in the shorter work, the “Jewish Antiquities,” in which he goes over briefly the same period

of time treated of at length in the other work, we find this passage:

"At this time lived Jesus, a wise man [if indeed he ought to be called a man]; for he performed wonderful works [he was a teacher of men who received the truth with gladness]; and he drew to him many Jews, and also many Greeks. [This was the Christ.] But when Pilate, at the instigation of our chiefs, had condemned him to crucifixion, they who had at first loved him did not cease; [for he appeared to them on the third day again alive; for the divine prophets had foretold this, together with many other wonderful things concerning him], and even to this time the community of Christians, called after him, continues to exist."17

That this passage is spurious has been almost universally acknowledged. One may be, perhaps, accused of killing dead birds, if one again examines and discredits the passage; but as the silence of Josephus on the subject which we are treating is a point on which it will be necessary to insist, we cannot omit as brief a discussion as possible of this celebrated passage.

The passage is first quoted by Eusebius (fl. A.D. 315) in two places,18 but it was unknown to Justin Martyr (fl. A.D. 140), Clement of Alexandria (fl. A.D. 192), [pg 004] Tertullian (fl. A.D. 193), and Origen (fl. A.D. 230). Such a testimony would certainly have been produced by Justin in his Apology, or in his Controversy with Trypho the Jew, had it existed in the copies of Josephus at his time. The silence of Origen is still more significant. Celsus in his book against Christianity introduces a Jew. Origen attacks the arguments of Celsus and his Jew. He could not have failed to quote the