

ARE THE GOSPELS INSPIRED ?

BY

MAULVI SADR-UD-DIN, B.A.

www.aaiil.org

PRINTED BY

UNWIN BROTHERS, LTD.

WOKING AND LONDON.

March 1920.

Price 2s. 6d.

ARE THE GOSPELS INSPIRED ?

IN the following pages I propose to discuss the authenticity of the gospels, the creed as propounded therein, and the most salient points about the life of the holy prophet Jesus (may Allah bless his soul). It is no spirit of hostility that inspires me to deal with these problems, but it is the sincerest desire of rendering service to mankind in general that animates me to take it in hand. I have accordingly drawn upon the works of devout and devoted Christians rather than of those who belong to the hostile camp. My experience has made it clear to me that the laity in Christendom are generally as ignorant with regard to these vital questions as non-Christians to whom the Christian literature is inaccessible in the main. Under the circumstances, a brief account of these questions of vital importance is likely to be of interest and use to both.

INSPIRED BOOKS

It is necessary for the reader to know at the outset what inspiration means, and where lies the difference between a "revealed" and an "inspired" book. For it is important to know whether the Christian gospels were "revealed" or "inspired," or neither. The word "in-spire" means breathe into, as our Creator inspired into man an active soul and breathed in a living spirit. Or, as Job xxxii. 8 illustrates it: "But there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding." This is the literal as well as physical meaning of the word, which has gradually assumed a spiritual aspect. We are inspired or moved by the Spirit to undertake a task. Sometimes we do not need a spirit to inspire us. Scenes or circumstances have often inspired or moved people to take in hand what otherwise could not have been thought of. In these days the exhibition of films has inspired many a young man to commit a murderous crime or a felony which in the ordinary course of events he could not conceive. Love and enmity inspire us, and the downtrodden condition of the people inspires us. The physique of the Germans inspired Sandow to invent a system which is supposed to be well adapted to develop the body. Books and articles inspire us with thoughts and actions. It was a similar inspiration that was granted to St. Luke, who wrote an account of the life of the holy prophet Jesus. See what he says in the

ARE THE GOSPELS INSPIRED?

introductory remarks. It was not the Holy Ghost that moved him to write, neither was it God Who inspired him to pen a brief biography of Jesus. But it was the example of other writers that inspired him with the desire of sketching the life of his master. We read his own words to this effect:—

“Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us,

“Even as they delivered them unto us, who from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word;

“IT SEEMED GOOD TO ME ALSO, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus,

“That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed.”—*St. Luke i. 1-4.*

St. Luke has very plainly set forth the factors of his inspiration, i.e. (1) the example of other writers of Jesus' life; (2) his consciousness of possessing “perfect understanding of all things from the very first,” and (3) to impart reliable information to Theophilus with a view to establishing him in the faith. This shows that he did not stand in need of any verbal inspiration from God, as he was already in possession of “*perfect* understanding of *all* things from the very first.” It was also love for his rich convert, who was also a literary patron of the Evangelist, that inspired him to compile his gospel like the earlier gospels that were already in existence. He does not call his gospel a Divine Gift, but he claims for it, on the other hand: (1) diligence in collecting all available material, (2) fullness, (3) careful investigation, (4) orderly arrangement, and (5) accuracy.

The Rev. Grieve, M.A., D.D., Principal of the Congregational Hall, Edinburgh, and a joint Editor of Peake's famous *Commentary*, explains Luke's preface in the following words:

“I. 1-4. PREFACE. The writer, *influenced by the attempts* of others to record the primitive tradition of Christianity *as it was handed down* by the first generation of disciples, essays the same task, and having taken pains to collect, examine, sift, and arrange the contents of the *written and oral tradition*, presents the result to Theophilus, a Roman official of some standing—a literary patron of the evangelist's—who needed fuller acquaintance with the historic basis of the oral teaching about Christianity which he had received.”—*Peake's Commentary*, p. 725.

God reveals books for the guidance of a nation or nations, as the case may be, but St. Luke has been inspired to write primarily to “catechize” a single pupil. God cannot be thought to have dedicated His book to the “**MOST EXCELLENT THEOPHILUS.**” It is derogatory and blasphemous. The apostle's love for his officer pupil and the patronage of the latter became the parents of the dedication and the following

discourses. The method and form of dedication have been suggested or "inspired" by the Greek literature, with which St. Luke was thoroughly conversant. He has been regarded as "the most literary of all the New Testament authors." The Rev. Dummelow, M.A., tells us in his popular *Commentary* to the same effect: "To write a preface to a history is not a Jewish, but a classical custom, and by following it St. Luke shows himself a true Gentile, trained in Greek culture and *imitating* classical models. Here he *affects* classical elegance and correctness of expression, but in the course of his Gospel he generally *imitates* the simpler synoptic style" (italics are mine throughout the references made here and above).

The *Encyclopædia Biblica* likewise throws light on this dedication. "*The dedication of Luke.*—The dedication (i. 1-4) shows that we have passed into a new literary province. The Muratorian fragment calls attention to the fact that the author writes '*in his own name*,' a novelty among evangelists. He also dedicates his work to someone who, if not an imaginary 'God-beloved,' would appear to be a patron, a man of rank. The apostles—the (i. 2) 'eyewitnesses and ministers of the word'—appear to have delivered their testimony by *oral tradition*, and to have passed away. To supply their places (i. 1), 'many' had attempted to draw up a formal narrative concerning the matters fully established in the Church. These writers had clearly not been eyewitnesses, nor were they, in Luke's judgment, so successful as to make unnecessary any further attempts. Apparently they had failed in the three points in which he hopes to excel: (1) they had not traced everything up to the source, and this (2) 'accurately,' and (3) they had not written 'in order'" (p. 1790). The same book further discusses the point whether or not the work justifies the claims of the Apostle. "We are led to the conclusion that, though Luke attempted to write 'accurately' and 'in order,' yet *he could not always succeed*. When deciding between an earlier and a later date, between this and that place and occasion, between metaphor and literalism, between what Jesus himself said and what he said through his disciples, he had to be guided by evidence which sometimes *led him aright, but not always*." His partial failure has evidently been ascribed to his attempts being human, and his sources mortal, which could "*not always*" guide him aright. If his work had been revealed he could not have been accused of having omitted some incidents of a very serious nature. "Luke's absolute omission of genuine and valuable traditions—especially in connection with Christ's appearance to women after the Resurrection and with Christ's promise to go to 'Galilee'—... seriously diminishes the value of his work. It is probably the best adapted for making converts. But if bald bare facts are in question, it is *probably the least authoritative of the Four*"

ARE THE GOSPELS INSPIRED?

(*Ency. Biblica*, p. 1793). That his sources were human and not Divine is again illustrated by a statement made by the Rev. Dean Farrar, D.D., F.R.S., in his famous *Life of Christ*, which "has long since become a standard work." Delineating minor incidents of the nativity of Jesus, he remarks that "St. Luke describes them more fully than others, and the singular sweetness of his narrative, its almost idyllic grace, its calm tone of noble reticence, seem clearly to indicate that he *derived it*, though but in fragmentary notices, *from the lips of Mary herself*. It is, indeed, *difficult to imagine from whom else it could have come*, for mothers are the natural historians of infant years; but it is interesting to find, in actual style, that 'colouring of a woman's memory and a woman's view' which we should naturally have expected in confirmation of a conjecture so obvious and so interesting" (p. 12). A cursory consideration of the quotations cited above will lead to the conclusion that the Christian gospels are but human attempts to draw up accounts of the life of Jesus, and as such are neither complete nor satisfactory. Revelation alone can make a recipient immune from error; for it suspends for the time being all mental activity of the person upon whom the Word of God descends. His Word and will were revealed to holy prophets like Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Mohammed. But the followers of Jesus were animated or inspired to compile what was already known to them. Their endeavours were active and not passive. They had to collect, sift, and arrange the material which was in the possession of the people. As such the works of the Apostles are necessarily characterized by mortal shortcomings. Even the devoutest Christian scholar admits it, and is ready to bear testimony to the fact that the record of the gospels is not altogether complete and reliable. I cannot do better than quote some of the most scholarly and popularly admitted opinions which carry weight and conviction with regard to the question under discussion. What does Rev. Dummelow, M.A., say?—

"Speaking broadly, the Christians mean by their inspiration an impulse from God causing certain persons to write, and directing them how to write, for the edification of others. Though it is closely connected with *revelation*, it is not identical with it. By *revelation* God makes known to a soul truths which were unknown to it before. But it is not at all necessary that an *inspired* writer should receive any new truths by way of revelation. Thus St. Mark was inspired to write his gospel, but he was inspired to *write down truths which were already familiar to him and to others* through the instruction given by St. Peter."—Rev. Dummelow's *Commentary*, p. cxxxi.

The chief source of Matthew and Luke was St. Mark.

ARE THE GOSPELS INSPIRED?

“ St. Mark is the oldest of the Synoptists,¹ and has been used by St. Matthew and St. Luke, who have incorporated the bulk of his gospel into their own with comparatively few alterations ” (Dummelow's *Commentary*, p. lxxxiii). It thus becomes plain that no Christian scholar of sacred literature claims divine origin for Christian gospels. They, on the other hand, admit that the books were compiled by men who were by no means experts. They were consequently liable to mistakes. I quote Rev. Dummelow once more on the point : “ We must not regard the Bible as an absolutely perfect book in which God is Himself the author, using human hands and brains only as a man may use a typewriter. . . . Their inspiration did not involve a suspension of their natural faculties, nor abolish the differences of training and character ; it did not even make them perfectly free from earthly passion. Therefore we find that *their knowledge sometimes is no higher than their contemporaries*’, and their indignation against oppression and wrongdoing sometimes breaks out into desire of revenge. It surprises us in the Bible, *because of our false preconception ; because of our false theory of Verbal Inspiration*.” Read a learned contribution to Peake's *Commentary* by Canon Streeter, and see how he enlightens us : “ We come to the conclusion that the first three gospels, though independently written, *cannot be treated as entirely independent biographies* of our Lord, but that each of them must obviously have drawn much of his information from a *source or sources* also accessible to one or both of the others.” And the same *Commentary* further throws light upon the insufficiency and incompleteness of these sacred records, and thus precludes any chance of their claiming Divine origin. “ To-day we realize that the life of Jesus can never be written. The material is wanting. Neither in quality nor in extent do the gospels satisfy the requirements of a modern biography. At best they offer us certain memorabilia of the public ministry of Jesus, hardly adequate to construct the story of the year or years during which he evangelized his people, and barely sufficing to mirror the chief features of his message. Where the modern mind is most curious, the gospels seem to be least communicative. Men would fain trace the development of innermost convictions which condition his activity as a prophet. But the facts that the gospels tell us little or nothing of the early life of Jesus, and that almost every story consists of a simple record of outward act and utterance, with few hints as to inward feeling or historical setting, seem at first sight to defeat the hopes of analysing motive and tracing growth.” Similarly a cry of disappointment goes forth from the *Encyclopædia Biblica* when it sets itself

¹ St. Mark was a disciple of St. Peter, whose preachings in Rome were embodied in Mark's gospel.

ARE THE GOSPELS INSPIRED?

the task of depicting the life of Jesus. Writing on sources, by which is meant the four scriptures of the Christian faith, it comments thus: "These documents are of varying value from a historical point of view. Critical opinion is much divided as to the fourth, that which bears the name of John, the judgment of many critics being that it is the *least trustworthy as a source, whether for words or for the acts of Jesus*. By comparison, the first three, from their resemblances called synoptical, are regarded by many as possessing a considerable measure of historical worth. But even these, from a critical point of view, are not of equal value, nor do the contents of any one of them possess a uniform degree of historical probability. They present to the critic a curious, interesting, and perplexing problem still far from final solution. By their resemblances and differences, agreements and disagreements, they raise many questions as to origin, relative dates, and literary connections, which have called forth a multitude of conflicting hypotheses and a most extensive critical literature."

The passages quoted above leave no room for further discussion or doubt as to the human origin of the gospels and the inadequacy of their information about the words and works of the holy prophet Jesus. In the opinion of the best English scholars of the New Testament, the gospels are not to be looked upon as revealed books, whose sole source should have been God and not man. But they are to be regarded, on the other hand, as inadequate attempts made by pious but not talented followers of Christ at the description of his life. It is a great pity that the world never availed itself of the collection of those beautiful and life-inspiring words that fell from the lips of the holy prophet of Nazareth. Piety and veneration joined hands, and for a long time assured the credulity of the early Christians that the scriptures revealed the Word of God, and in consequence were infallible. There was a time when every article¹ of it was firmly and reverently believed to have

¹ Many scholars believed at one time that even the vowel-points in the Hebrew Bible were communicated by God. In 1675 A.D. some Swiss Protestants made it a principle of their belief to hold that vowel-points were revealed by God. Similarly the figures numbering the verses were held to have been revealed and dictated by God. The oldest Greek manuscripts of the New Testament are found to have been written in what are known as *uncial* letters—in large capitals—without division of words or punctuation, and in general without accents. Attempts at punctuation and division of continuous masses of written matter were made in the fourth and fifth centuries. It was as late as the thirteenth century that Cardinal Hugo prepared our present verse divisions, which first appeared in an edition of the Latin Bible—the Vulgate—printed by Robert Stephens in 1555. It is interesting to know what Dr. Philip Schaff wrote on this question. Dr. Philip Schaff, it must be remembered, expressed his views as President of the American Bible Revision Committee. He is thus a positively reliable, devout, and conservative authority. He says:

directly proceeded from God. In short, what had been written by man passed for the word of God. This is clear to those clergy who have undergone university training. But the pity of it is that they have not the moral courage to enlighten their congregations on the subject. They fear that the already loosening hold on the mind of those that are still attending churches and chapels will part for good. Pious anxiety therefore dictates that a character of infallibility should still be given to what has been written by human hands, and that crude attempts at the biography of the prophet of Nazareth should continue to be believed to have been revealed and dictated by God Himself.

What scholarship and research have brought to light now was revealed over thirteen centuries ago in the Muslim gospel—the Holy Qur-án. The word God revealed to the holy prophet Jesus was lost, because it was handed to a heedless people who were marked by want of understanding, and who bore the stamp of “a faithless generation.” As the following text of the Holy Qur-án shows, the lost word was collected and put together by human hands, and it was given out to have proceeded directly from the mouth of God. The text is this:—

“Do they not know that God knows what they keep secret and what they make known; and there are among them ignorant, who know not the Book but only idle stories, and they do but conjecture; woe, then, to those who *write the Book with their own hands* and then say, This is from God, so that they may obtain therewith a small gain; therefore woe to them for *what their hands have written*, and woe to them for what they have earned.”—*The Holy Qur-án*, ii. 72, 73, 74.

THE SOURCES OF THE GOSPELS

A careful inquiry into the history of the New Testament has made it clear that of the four gospels St. Mark was written first. Many authorities date it as late as 66–70 A.D., relying mainly on Mark xiii. 14. Ancient witnesses, on

“Even if we had the apostolic autographs, there would be room for verbal criticism and difference in interpretation, since they, like other ancient books, were probably written as a continuous whole, without accents, with little or no punctuation, without divisions of sentences or words (except to indicate paragraphs), without titles or subscriptions, without even the name of the author, unless it was part of the text itself. The ‘spirit’ may be the human spirit or the divine Spirit (the Holy Ghost), and the distinction which we mark by capitalizing the first letter cannot be decided from an uncial manuscript, where all letters are capitals. The punctuation, likewise, can be determined not by manuscript authority, but only by the meaning of the context, and is often subject to doctrinal considerations, as notably so in the famous passage affecting the divinity of Christ (Rom. ix. 5), which admits of three, if not seven, different punctuations and constructions.”—*Companion to the Greek Testament and the English Version*, pp. 88, 89.

ARE THE GOSPELS INSPIRED?

the other hand, are divided as to whether the gospel was written before or after the death of St. Peter (64 or 67 A.D.). The oldest witness, Irenæus (177 A.D.), says: "After the decease (of Peter and Paul) Mark, the *disciple and interpreter* of Peter, himself also delivered to us in writing the substance of Peter's preaching." Another equally ancient witness, Clement of Alexandria, says: "When Peter had preached the Word *publicly in Rome*, his hearers, who were numerous, exhorted Mark, as one who had followed him a long time, and *remembered what was said*, to *write down his word*. Accordingly *Mark composed the gospel*, and circulated it among those who asked him to write it. When Peter heard of it, he neither hindered nor encouraged the work." These quotations reveal the following facts:—

(1) The first gospel, that is, St. Mark's, was not written down by the holy prophet Jesus.

(2) It was written by Peter's convert, St. Mark, who was the former's interpreter.

(3) It was written neither at the scene of the ministry of Jesus nor in the language which was spoken by the prophet nor by any of his disciples.

(5) It was written in Rome from memory by St. Mark, who was "exhorted" to do so by "his hearers," and among whom it was circulated.

(6) It was written in Greek, and not in Aramaic, which was spoken by Jesus.

These facts, which are familiar to every scholar of the sacred history, should convince the lay reader that the gospel of St. Mark was neither revealed nor inspired. There was, in fact, no need for any inspiration or revelation. Mark jotted down from memory what he had heard St. Peter preach to the Jews in Rome.

In order to convince the reader further with regard to the truth of what has been stated above, I prefer to reproduce some of the scholarly opinions. Dummelow's *Commentary*, in its introduction to St. Mark, says:—

"St. Mark was not a follower of Jesus, but a convert of St. Peter." "St. Mark became the interpreter of St. Peter. St. Peter, in all probability, was not a very good Greek or Latin scholar. Preaching in Aramaic, he required the services of an interpreter to translate his sermons clause by clause into Greek or Latin, as the case may be, and also to conduct his correspondence."

The fact that Mark was St. Peter's interpreter is also borne out by St. Peter's own epistle written in Rome:—

"The Church that is at Babylon (i.e. Rome), elected together with you, saluteth you; and so doth Marcus, my son." (Marcus, i.e. Mark; "my son," a usual expression in the East for "my convert.")

The same *Commentary* goes on to explain that the gospel

by St. Mark—who neither heard the Lord nor followed him—is to all intents and purposes a reproduction of the sermons and discourses of St. Peter; and that Peter used to adapt his preaching to the requirements of his audience. In other words, neither the sermons of Peter nor their reproduction by Mark represented a faithful record of the words of Jesus. Mark's gospel was "in ancient times alluded to as the 'memoirs of Peter,' or 'Peter's gospel,' it being the common belief that St. Mark did no more than *reproduce the substance* of St. Peter's preaching." The most ancient witness, the apostolic presbyter, whose sayings are recorded by Papias about 130 A.D., gives the following important testimony: "Mark having become (or having been) Peter's interpreter, *wrote all that he remembered* (or all that Peter related); though he did not (record) in order that which was said or done by Christ. For he neither heard the Lord nor followed him; but subsequently, as I said, (attached himself) to Peter, *who used to frame his teaching* to meet the (immediate) wants (of his hearers); and not as making a connected narrative of the Lord's discourses."

This famous testimony of Papias (Bishop of Hierapolis in Asia Minor) is also quoted in Peake's *Commentary*, in which it is further pointed out "that some of the material comes from Peter is not improbable, since the narrative only becomes detailed when Peter appears on the scene." Lucid and graphic descriptions having become public property, the compiler never required the aid of inspiration for their collection and reproduction. What was left for Mark to do was simply to commit to writing what had been heard by him in common with others.

Peake does not agree entirely with Papias' statement that Mark wrote down everything that he remembered, "without recording in order what was either said or done by Christ." He says: "That the gospel lacks in order is *only partially true*." "Papias' informant is so far right that we cannot claim chronological accuracy for Mark in detail."

While proving the priority of Mark's gospel to the other three, Peake makes a statement which reveals the fact, now conceded by more learned Christians, that a great deal of pruning and trimming was freely done by the three evangelists, who used Mark's gospel as their chief source and incorporated most of its material into their books. "The numerous disparaging references to the disciples in Mark, which are either toned down or omitted in the other gospels, also point to the priority of Mark" (see Mark iv. 13, vi. 52, viii. 17 f., ix. 10, 32, 34, with parallels, and see note on iv. 13, p. 681, column 2, para. 1).

Dr. Weymouth, to whom we owe a splendid translation in modern speech of the New Testament, writing an intro-

duction to Mark, observes that: "This is the 'Gospel of Peter,' and its admitted priority to Matthew and Luke affords substantial reason for the assumption that it is to some extent the source whence they derive their narratives, although Papias distinctly affirms that Mark *made no attempt* at giving a carefully arranged history, such as that at which Luke confessedly aims."

Incidental observations in the *Encyclopædia Biblica* throw a good deal of light on the question under discussion. "Papias apologizes for Mark ('he was not *in fault*'). He 'committed no fault' (not, 'he made no mistake'). Papias is defending Mark against the very natural objection that he did not do the Apostle justice in writing down oral or casual (or at all events extempore) teaching, unchanged, in a permanent book. The style that suits the former is often unsuitable to the latter. The Muratorian Fragment appears to be apologetic ('he was present only at some discourses'). Both imply that Peter was dead when Mark wrote, so that the latter could not have the Apostle's supervision. Irenæus says that Mark wrote after the decease of Peter. Clement, on the other hand, says that Peter lived to know what had been done by Mark, yet so far retains the apologetic as to add that Peter neither hindered nor incited the composition. Lastly, Origen says that Mark wrote as Peter suggested. The investigation may stop here. Later writers have no further evidence, and can but exemplify the tendency of tradition, even among honest and able men, to exaggerate or to minimize, in the supposed interests of a good cause."

We also learn from the *Encyclopædia Biblica*, as well as Commentaries on the New Testament, that one of the signs of "early composition is the rudeness of Mark's Greek." Thus it is pointed out that Mark and not God is responsible for the rudeness of its language, for the lack of order, for omissions, such as Christ's birth or childhood, and the most important account of the resurrection, because he himself was neither an eyewitness to those incidents, nor were they witnessed by Peter himself. In a word, nothing more is revealed to Mark than what is actually observed by Peter, who used to describe his observations, through his interpreter Mark, to his audiences in Rome. It is thus conclusively shown that Mark's gospel is but a human attempt at writing down in Greek what was preached by Peter in Aramaic to his Roman audiences, and that it is in no sense an inspired or revealed book. Even Peter does not lay claim to inspiration for the substance of his preaching. On the contrary, he confesses that he narrates only those incidents of which he was an eyewitness, and as such he needed not the help of any inspiration.

SOURCES

Having established the fact that Mark's gospel is nothing more than an account of some of the incidents concerning the life of the prophet Jesus as observed and taught by Peter, and as reproduced and published by Mark, I propose to show that this gospel has been incorporated into their gospels by SS. Matthew and Luke. To prove that SS. Matthew and Luke used Mark's gospel and copied it at times word for word, and sometimes with slight modifications, is to prove that the gospels written by them are not at all inspired, much less revealed.

Let us see in the first place what light is thrown on the subject by the gospels themselves. St. Luke's gospel tells us in its dedication that as many attempts had been made to draw up a narrative of the events of the life of Jesus, he also resolved to write a complete and connected account. It is worth while to reproduce here the actual words which embody the confession that the record that has been handed down by him is an improvement upon those which were before him. The confession lies in the following words:—

Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us,

2 Even as they delivered them unto us, who from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word ;

3 It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus,

4 That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed.

Dr. Moffat's New Testament puts the same in plain modern English, which it is interesting to reproduce here:—

“(1) Inasmuch as a number of writers have essayed to draw up a narrative of the established facts in our religion (2) exactly as these have been handed down to us by the original eyewitnesses who were in the service of the gospel message, (3) and inasmuch as I *have gone carefully over them* all myself from the very beginning, I have decided, O Theophilus, to write them out for your excellency, (4) to let you know the solid truth of what you have been taught.”

This “dedication to his Excellency, Theophilus” (to use the words of the *Twentieth Century New Testament*) reveals that many earlier gospels already existed when Luke was compiling his gospel, and a careful study of them prompted him to produce an improved version, with claims to comprehensiveness and chronological order. In the light of this confession on the part of the author of Luke, it seems needless to make further attempts at proving that the gospel is a product of the labours of a mortal. It

repays, however, to accumulate for the reader details which bear out what has been acknowledged by St. Luke himself. That one of the sources from which St. Luke derived his information is Mark's gospel will be established by a comparison of some of the texts given in the two. But in order that these comparisons should not become too elaborate, it is better to confine them to a few verses, as illustrations. One thing more. As St. Matthew also draws upon the same source—St. Mark's gospel—it will be better if a three-fold comparison is instituted at the same time.

MARK iii. 19.

LUKE vi. 16.

MATTHEW x. 4.

And Judas Iscariot, which also betrayed him.

And Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him.

And Judas Iscariot, which was the traitor.

“Who also betrayed him” and “which was the traitor” and “which also betrayed him” are explanatory notes which display concurrence of all the three compilers at the same point. While enumerating the disciples, it does not appear necessary to stigmatize Judas. If it is out of place in Mark, one can excuse him under the plea that his style was primitive and did not affect any literary merit or form. But in the case of Matthew, and more especially Luke, who claims literary elegance, nothing but reverent imitation can account for a remark at a point where its fitness is not warranted.

A similar concurrence which can only be put down to copying is visible in the following, which describe the arrest of Jesus :—

MARK xiv. 10.

LUKE xxii. 3.

MATTHEW xxvi. 14.

And Judas Iscariot, *one of the twelve*, went unto the chief priests.

Then entered Satan into Judas surnamed Iscariot, *being of the number of the twelve*.

Then *one of the twelve*, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests.

It is needless to remind the reader that events like those mentioned above had no necessity to be inspired or revealed. They had become public, and could be found even on the profane record of the Roman Government who persecuted Jesus.

Another illustration :—

MARK v. 24.

LUKE viii. 42.

MATTHEW ix. 19.

And he went with him, and a great multitude followed him and they thronged him. And a woman, *which had an issue of blood twelve years*, and had suffered many things of many physicians, etc.

And as he went the multitude thronged him, and a woman *having an issue of blood twelve years*, which had spent all her living upon physicians, etc.

And Jesus arose and followed him, and so did his disciples, and behold a woman, *which was diseased with an issue of blood twelve years*, etc.

ARE THE GOSPELS INSPIRED?

It is of interest to note that all the three compilers leave off the story of the daughter of "a certain ruler," Jairus, exactly at the same point to mention the cure of the woman with an issue, who, they agree to say, had been ill *twelve years*. This is but blind imitation, for which only piety and reverence for the sacred record can be responsible.

Another illustration:—

MARK i. 22.

And *at even*, when the sun did set, they brought unto him all that were sick and them that were possessed with devils.

LUKE iv. 40.

And when the sun was setting, all they that had any sick with divers diseases brought them unto him.

MATTHEW viii. 16.

And when even was come, they brought unto him many possessed with devils.

Mark's version of the event contains two expressions descriptive of the close of the day, i.e. "even," or "evening," and "when the sun did set." St. Luke copies down the latter, and St. Matthew the former, conclusively proving that both were making use of Mark's gospel.

Instances of a similar character can be multiplied to show that historical incidents which obviate the necessity of inspiration have been borrowed by St. Luke and St. Matthew from St. Mark, whose account is primitive, but rich in details.

Below are given a few texts from St. Luke and St. Matthew in which there are clear indications of copying from a common source.

LUKE xiii. 14.

But when ye see the abomination of desolation standing where he ought not (*let him that readeth understand*), then let them that are in Judæa flee unto the mountains.

MATTHEW xxiv. 15.

When, therefore, ye see the abomination of desolation, which was spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy places (*let him that readeth understand*), then let them that are in Judæa flee unto the mountains.

Besides other phrases which point to borrowing and imitating from a common source, the comment within brackets, which is evidently a transcription word by word, has been introduced by each of the compilers exactly at the same point. Nothing but copying can explain the insertion at precisely the same point of expressions which are identically the same.

Another illustration which reveals blind imitation:—

MARK vi. 16, 17.

But Herod, when he heard thereof, said, John, whom I beheaded, he is risen. For Herod himself had sent forth and laid hold upon John, and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife.

MATTHEW xiv. 1, 2, 3.

At that season Herod the tetrarch heard the report concerning Jesus, and said unto his servants, This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead, and therefore do these powers work in him. For Herod had laid hold on John and bound him, and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife.

A total disregard has been shown to historical setting by both the compilers, who introduce the incident of the death of John the Baptist at the same place, and thus afford ground for conviction that pious but blind copying was at work in the compilation of these so-called sacred books. One more illustration will suffice on this point :—

MARK i. 16.

And passing along by the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon, and Andrew the brother of Simon, casting a net in the sea ; *for they were fishers.*

MATTHEW iv. 18.

And walking by the sea of Galilee, he saw two brethren, Simon who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea ; *for they were fishers.*

The italicized sentence with which the narrative concludes in each of the texts is a significant example of how an editorial remark had been made by one and faithfully copied by the other. They could not possibly have thought of offering a verbally identical comment exactly at the same point without having recourse to transcription.

The Rev. Dummelow, whose *Commentary* enjoys more popularity and merits more literary respect than any other, in his discussion of the sources of the gospels uses the following words :—

“ Prolonged investigations, extending over more than a century, have not yet reached final results, but a considerable consensus of opinion inclines to the following conclusions :—

“ (1) That St. Mark is the oldest of the synoptists, and has been used by St. Matthew and St. Luke, who have incorporated the bulk of his gospel into their own with comparatively few alterations.

“ The evidence for this is very strong: the whole of St. Mark's gospel, except from thirty to forty comparatively unimportant verses, is contained either in St. Matthew or St. Luke, and most of it in both.

“ The close resemblances between St. Matthew and St. Luke are generally confined to the incidents which they record in common with St. Mark.

“ (2) The version of St. Mark used by St. Matthew and St. Luke was probably the present Greek gospel. References have been made in Church literature to the ‘ original Mark.’ But recent research has demonstrated that this ‘ original Mark ’ resembled the present St. Mark so closely that the simplest view is to suppose them identical, as accordingly is now very generally done.

“ (3) Oral tradition probably exercised some influence over the composition of the synoptic gospels. But the principal source cannot be mere oral tradition. The ‘ original Mark ’ was certainly written, for the author of it once addressed his readers (Mark xiii. 14), and St. Luke refers to numerous written sources (Luke i. 1).

“ Besides St. Mark's Gospel, the following sources were utilized by St. Matthew and St. Luke : (1) oral tradition ; (2) in the case of St. Luke, at least, personal researches and inquiries in Palestine ; (3) earlier documents which, though numerous, were probably rather fragmentary (Luke i. 1). Matthew is said to have compiled ‘ the oracles.’ The exact meaning of the oracles is doubtful, but the tendency of modern criticism is to suppose that St. Matthew's ‘ Logia ’ was a collection of our Lord's discourses, rather than a continuous narrative. These ‘ Logia ’ of St. Matthew, in the form of a Greek translation, were probably used by the author of the First Gospel, perhaps even incorporated entire, *so that it is not without reason that the present gospel is called ‘ according to Matthew.’* ”

“ St. Matthew and St. Luke have about two hundred verses common to them alone.”

The general characteristic that marks the method of copying employed by St. Matthew and St. Luke may be summed up in the Rev. Dummelow's words : “ When they copy St. Mark they preserve, as a rule, not only his words, but also his order and text, but when they are supposed to copy ‘ Logia ’ (or other sources) they deal much more freely with the words, and, as to the order and context, they either take no account of them at all or differ from each other.”

All this discussion, which has purposely been quoted mostly from Dummelow's *Commentary*, is emphatically positive on one point—that St. Matthew and St. Luke are compilations pure and simple, and that they cannot be believed to be inspired or revealed books. St. Mark has already been shown to be a crude mortal attempt at giving an account of only some of the incidents of the life of Jesus. The bulk of this incomplete human labour has been shown to be incorporated in St. Matthew and St. Luke. Thus, it becomes obvious that these gospels, which are known as synoptical on account of their resemblances, are the products partly of human brains and mostly of human hands.

The Rev. Dummelow is no mean authority on the scriptures. His opinion commands respect. His *Commentary* therefore should have sufficed to convince even the most devout person that the scriptures are the outcome of human labours. But to show that his opinions are shared and confirmed by other commentators, I deem it expedient to cite one or two more authorities on the point. Canon Streeter, contributing a special article to Peake's *Commentary*, says :—

“ What is the Synoptic Problem ?¹ A problem exists when—

¹ *The Synoptic Problem.*—The problem that arises from the resemblances and common matter in the gospels of St. Matthew, St. Mark, and St. Luke. Their many agreements in subject-matter, order, and language have presented a problem as to their origin and relations to one another. It has naturally led to several hypotheses, the most commonly believed being that Mark has been copied by Matthew and Luke.

ARE THE GOSPELS INSPIRED?

ever there is a set of facts which have something about them which seems to call for special explanation. In the case of the first three or synoptic gospels, this 'something' is the nature of their parallelism with one another. In the different biographies of the same person it is only natural to find that a good many incidents or sayings are given by more than one of them, but *the remarkable thing about the first three gospels is that whenever they give an account of the same incident they commonly do so in language which is often almost word for word identical*. Now, if this identity or close resemblance of wording occurred only in the reports of sayings of our Lord, it might possibly be accounted for by supposing it to be due to the fact that the sayings were accurately remembered and reported by the several biographers—though even in the case of reported sayings of great men there is usually considerable divergence in the accounts of different reporters. But where incidents or scenes are described, it is a fact of universal experience that no two persons will describe the same event, or set of events, in identical or anything like identical language. Thus, for instance, when one reads in two different newspapers accounts of the same battle or of the same football match, even when the main facts recorded are much the same, the minor details noticed by the two reporters are very different, and the language chosen to describe the whole set of circumstances is still more so. If, on the other hand, we see in two papers a report of the same event in substantially the same terms, we at once take it for granted that both papers are using the same reporter or the same news agency. Now, although each of the first three gospels gives sayings, incidents, and details of incidents not given by the others, such passages amount to less than one-third of the total number of those which occur in more than one gospel. In fact, resemblances between the synoptic gospels are exactly of that character which, if they occurred in three different journals, we should attribute to the fact that these had one or more special correspondents in common, whose contributions had been somewhat freely edited. Accordingly, we are driven to the conclusion that the first three gospels, though independently written, cannot be treated as independent biographies of our Lord, but that each of them must obviously have drawn much of his information from a source or sources also accessible to one or both of the others. The question, therefore, of how many and of what nature were these sources, and whether it is possible for us in any way to reconstruct them—a question of great historical as well as literary importance—forces itself upon the attention of all close readers of these gospels, and constitutes what is known to scholars as the Synoptic Problem.

“There is an almost universal agreement that the greater

part of the resemblances between the first three gospels is due to the fact that Matthew and Luke, working independently, incorporated into their gospels, with omissions and slight modifications, the gospel of Mark, or a document closely resembling Mark. But it still remains an open question whether the document they used was a copy of the gospel of Mark which differed from our gospel only in a few variant readings, or whether it was an earlier and slightly shorter edition of Mark, or *Ur-Marcus*, as it has been named by German scholars.

“(1) The substance of approximately two-thirds of Mark is reproduced by both Matthew and Luke, and the remaining one-third, except for thirty verses, is reproduced alternately by either Matthew or Luke. The only passages of Mark which are absent from both Matthew and Luke are as follows : ii. 27, iii. 20 f., iv. 26-29, vii. 3 f., vii. 32-37, viii. 22-26, ix. 29, 48 f., xiii. 33-37, xiv. 51 f. ; total thirty verses. The only other passages of Mark which are absent from Matthew are as follows : i. 23-28, 35-38, iv. 21-25, vi. 30, ix. 38-41, xii. 40-44 ; total, twenty-five verses, and these are all present in Luke. Thus the whole of Mark, except fifty-five verses, reappears in Matthew.

(2) With regard to language : “ Similarly, if we take any one average incident which occurs in all three gospels and underline in red (say Mark ii. 13-17, xi. 27-33, and parallels) words which occur in all of them ; in blue, words occurring in Mark and Matthew only ; and in black, words occurring in Mark and Luke only, we shall find that *most of the actual words used by Mark occur in both Matthew and Luke.*

“(3) Again, if we observe the order of incidents, we note that, in general, the Marcan order (i.e. order in Mark) is preserved by both Matthew and Luke, but whenever Matthew departs from Mark, Luke supports Mark ; wherever Luke appears to depart, Matthew supports Mark.

“(4) A close study of the actual language of the parallel passages in the gospels shows that there is a tendency in Matthew and Luke, showing itself sometimes in one, sometimes in the other, and often in both, *to improve upon and refine Mark's version.* This points to the conclusion that the Marcan form is the more primitive. The force of this argument depends upon the cumulative effect of an immense mass of small details, such as those collected and tabulated in Sir John Hawkins' *Horæ Synopticæ*, pp. 117-153. Some of these small variations amount to a toning down or removing of phrases which might cause offence or suggest difficulties ; e.g. what does Mark vi. 5 become in Matthew xiii. 58 ?—

He <i>could</i> do there <i>no</i> mighty work.	He <i>did not</i> there <i>many</i> mighty works.
---	---

What does Mark x. 18 become in Matthew xix. 17 ?—

Why callest thou me good ?	Why askest thou me concerning good ?
----------------------------	--------------------------------------

“The net result of the facts and considerations is to put it beyond doubt that Matthew and Luke must have made use of a source which in content, in order, and in actual wording was extremely like Mark. But, if so, the most obvious inference is that this source was no other than Mark.”

The discussion of the problem, coming as it does from no less an authority than Canon Streeter, is so elaborate and convincing that a better treatment cannot be conceived. It leaves no room for any doubt as to the fact that the gospels written by Mark, Matthew, and Luke are but short biographies of Jesus. All three worked like historians, collecting oral and written traditions and accounts of the life of their Lord. St. Matthew and St. Luke incorporated unto their own the bulk of Mark, selecting from it all that seemed to them important, improving upon phrases which did not suit their faith or which formed stumbling-blocks, omitting passages which they considered either unimportant or objectionable.

The truth forces itself upon us that what was written by the hands of men was given out to be the inspired or revealed Word of God, as it was revealed in the Holy Qur-án¹ over thirteen centuries ago, when neither libraries nor the idea of scholarly research existed :—

“Woe, then, to those who write the Book with their own hands, and then say, This is from God.”—*Holy Qur-án*, ii. 73.

As the subject is of vital importance, I cannot feel content with drawing on one or two authorities only. I am quite convinced by the conclusions reached by Dummelow and Peake, for they are as devout and orthodox Christians as they are scholarly. In fact, those two are the most prominent and popular authorities on the Bible. But with the view of convincing the lay reader of the fact that the views established above are held by the leading and eminent writers on the sacred literature, I feel constrained to refer to more than one. It would be a wicked shame if a straggling quotation were availed of and a lay reader imposed upon. Fair play does not allow it, neither does the sense of propriety and reverence with which the discussion of gospel literature should be handled. The one purpose of the present article is to make the views professed by the leading men of Christian religion accessible to the general public, who will naturally like to hear about the opinions of several authorities, and not to be pinned to one or two. Regarding it as a just and necessary measure, I have made it a point in this treatment

¹ As to the authority of the Holy Qur-án, the reader is referred to the introduction to the Qur-án by Maulvi Mohammed Ali, M.A., LL.B. (published by the authorities of the Mosque, Woking, England). The treatment is as elaborate as critical, and constitutes a unique production of scholarly research in the history of sacred literature of the world.

of the subject to quote freely and profusely, and to confine my quotations to the apologists and those who champion the cause of Christianity, rather than those who belong to the hostile camp or those who apply the test of rationalism to the gospel writings. Pursuing this policy, I desire to acquaint the reader with the belief of a few more scholars and doctors of the Christian faith. Dr. Murray's illustrated *Bible Dictionary*, which is a valuable commentary or an encyclopedia, enlightens us thus:—

“GOSPELS.—The first point which attracts our notice in reading the gospels is that the first three gospels are distinct from the fourth. The first three gospels confine themselves almost exclusively to the events which took place in Galilee, until Christ's last journey to Jerusalem. If we had three gospels alone we could not definitely say that our Lord went to Jerusalem during his ministry until he went there to die. The difference in character is no less than difference in scene. Further, the synoptists do not claim to be eyewitnesses of our Lord's ministry, and Luke implicitly disclaims any such authority. Because they give a common outline or synopsis of our Lord's work, the first three gospels are usually called the synoptic gospels.

“How did the gospel story arise? ‘Gospel’ seems to signify a written account of the ‘good news’ brought by Jesus Christ. Exactly when such accounts began to be written we cannot tell. A need for something written would begin almost as soon as missionary work began. The absolute necessity for it would be acutely felt at the time when the first generation of eyewitnesses was passing away. As a matter of fact, it seems to have been just at this time that all three synoptic gospels were written. The same universally felt need was answered by the same kind of literary enterprise. It is not clear that St. Paul, whose conversion took place in 35 A.D., used a written gospel. His source was not necessarily independent of human means. This means was oral. St. Paul himself uses the word ‘gospel’ as meaning the substance of the message which he preached (Gal. i. 11, ii. 2; Rom. ii. 16). This must soon have been written down. His friend St. Luke shows how the transition began (Luke i. 1, 2). Those who had been ‘eyewitnesses and ministers of the word’ ‘delivered’ unto others the things most surely believed. Many of these drew up narratives of such things, and St. Luke followed their example. *The written gospels therefore arose from an effort to put down what the apostles and their companions taught*, and many such attempts had been made before St. Luke wrote, i.e. probably before 70 A.D.

“It is obvious that not only all three synoptic gospels differ from John, but they differ widely from each other. The account of the birth and infancy of Christ in Matthew

differs widely from that in Luke. The incidents of the temptation of our Lord are recorded in a different order in Matthew and Luke, and the temptation is recorded without these incidents in Mark. All three gospels give a slightly different account of the inscription on the cross, and the words spoken by the centurion at the death of Jesus vary in Luke from the words in Matthew and Mark. Also the language differs, and differs in a very singular manner. All three gospels are written in Greek, which is far from being classical, and plainly shows the influence of the Aramaic language of Palestine. Mark is in the roughest Greek, and represents the language of an ordinary Jew of the first century A.D. who had intercourse with the outside world. Luke could write the best Greek of the three, but in places he uses strongly Aramaic idioms, some of which *appear to indicate that he drew upon written documents for information*. Matthew is similar. It was long ago noticed that the quotations from the Old Testament which Matthew has in common with Mark or Luke are from the Greek version, while those which are peculiar to himself are nearer to the Hebrew.

“There is another important fact. When Matthew and Luke narrate the same things as Mark, they both use their own favourite expressions less often than in those passages which are peculiar to themselves. If we put aside the discourses of Christ which occur in all three, also all passages which simply narrate our Lord’s doings and the account of the Passion, there remain 168 verses which Matthew and Luke have in common. In these verses there is, on an average, less than one characteristic phrase of Matthew in each verse, whereas in 190 verses peculiar to Matthew there are five characteristic phrases to every four verses. In Luke the 168 verses contain about three characteristic phrases in every four verses, whereas in 164 verses peculiar to Luke there are about four characteristic phrases to every three verses. The same phenomenon occurs when we examine the discourses and narrative which are not peculiar to Matthew and Luke, but belong also to Mark. Here again they show a more sparing use of their favourite expressions than in portions that are peculiar to themselves. These facts make it practically certain that Matthew and Luke did not simply take up the usual oral teaching given to converts. The oral teaching, as Luke tells us, had been already to a great extent written down. And Matthew and Luke differ from Mark, both because they wished to supplement Mark and because they copied certain documents which Mark did not possess.

“How were the synoptic gospels composed? We have shown reasons for believing that the divergencies of Matthew and Luke are partly caused by their use of certain written records. We must soon discuss what these records were.

ARE THE GOSPELS INSPIRED?

In the meantime we have to account for the resemblances of Matthew and Luke to Mark. *On the whole these can best be accounted for by the theory that they both used Mark, and used it as written in Greek, and not in Aramaic.* Except about 30 verses, all the narrative in Mark is found, and in the same order, in Matthew or in Luke or in both. St. Matthew and Luke correct the style and grammar of St. Mark. The similarity of Matthew and Luke to Mark even extends to rare Greek phrases; quotations from the Old Testament are sometimes found in two or three gospels with the same variations from the original (e.g. Matt. iii. 3, Mark i. 3, Luke iii. 4). Again, in Matt. xxvi. 47, Mark xiv. 43, Luke xxii. 47, all three explain, apparently without any necessity, that Judas was one of the twelve. It is only by a minute examination of the text that the question can be determined, but no theory at present accounts for the origin of Matthew and Luke so satisfactorily as the theory that both used Mark. Mark is not based upon any written document, so far as we can discover. The primitive tradition preserved by Papias is that Mark, 'having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately *everything he remembered.*' Our second gospel supports this tradition satisfactorily. The other written sources used by Matthew and Luke comprised a writing to which Papias also alludes. He says: 'Matthew then composed the Logia (or Oracles) in the Hebrew tongue, and everyone interpreted them as he was able.' St. Matthew originally wrote a collection of discourses in Aramaic, and this was soon translated into Greek. A similar but not identical collection was used by Luke."

This instructive discussion in Dr. Murray's *Bible Dictionary* carries weight and conviction in making the fact clear that Mark wrote down from memory what he had heard from Peter, and, except 30 verses, his biography was incorporated by St. Matthew and St. Luke into their more detailed sketches of the life of Jesus. It also tells us that St. Matthew prepared something in the form of notes, known as "Logia," which was translated into Greek and used by the author of Matthew's Gospel, which is consequently designated as "The Gospel according to St. Matthew," and not the gospel by Matthew himself. A similar collection, we are told, was made use of by St. Luke, who was a pupil and companion of St. Paul, as Mark was of Peter.

I shall now reproduce some of the remarks made on the subject in the *Encyclopædia Biblica*, with which I propose to conclude the discussion on the sources of the Christian gospels. It says:—

"Roughly it may be said that, of the synoptists, Mark exhibits the acts and shorter words of our Lord, Matthew a combination of the acts with discourses of the Lord, the

ARE THE GOSPELS INSPIRED?

latter often grouped together, as in the Sermon on the Mount ; Luke, a second combination of acts with discourses, in which an attempt is made to arrange the words and discourses chronologically, assigning to each the circumstances that occasioned it. A comparison shows that Matthew and Luke, where Mark is silent, often agree with one another. This doubly attested account—for the most part confined to discourses, *where the agreement is sometimes verbatim*—may be conveniently called ‘the Double Tradition.’ Where Mark steps in, the agreement between Matthew and Luke is less close ; and a study of what may be called ‘the Triple Tradition,’ i.e. the matter common to Mark, Matthew, and Luke, shows that Matthew and Luke, as a rule, *contain nothing of importance in common which is not found also in our Mark* (or rather in an ancient edition of our Mark, containing a few verbal corrections for clearness). This leads to the conclusion that in the Triple Tradition *Matthew and Luke borrowed (independently of each other) either from our Mark or (more probably) from some document embodied in our Mark.*

“ In considering the attempts to solve the synoptical problem by literary criticism, we begin most conveniently with what is the simplest hypothesis : that of a primitive gospel handed down solely by oral tradition. This tradition was reduced, in course of time, to writing, upon which each evangelist drew directly without any acquaintance with the written work of the other.

“ A very strong argument for the priority of Mark is the fact that, with the exception of some 30 verses, his entire material reappears in both Matthew and in Luke, or at least in one or other of them, and that, too—what is even more important—in both, or at least in one, in the same order as in Mark.”

Having shown that the material for Mark’s gospel was supplied by St. Peter’s preachings, that it reappeared in the form of “the original Mark,” or “the present Mark,” and that Mark was freely drawn upon by Matthew and Luke, and having thus established that the synoptical gospels are compilations pure and simple, it remains to be shown how “John” came into existence. It must be remembered that John wrote, if the earliest possible date that is assigned to it may be accepted, between 90 A.D. and 110 A.D., when written records of the life of Jesus were available. He made use of those documents with a view to commenting upon them rather than recasting them. John is, in fact, a commentary on the synoptists. It thus stands in a contrast to the other three gospels. The three synoptists attempted to preserve the words and acts of the prophet, without expressing their views on them. But John interprets almost every word and every saying of the master, mystifying rather than

ARE THE GOSPELS INSPIRED?

clearing it up. He displays excessive passion for the figurative and the allegorical instead of the simple and the plain. He saw something sublime in every simple word and act of the teacher, and was thus led to place such interpretations upon them as were suggested to him. In short, the gospel written by John formed the earliest commentary on the scriptures, which comprised the record shorn of all exposition. We should naturally expect John to expound the scriptural texts according to his own understanding and sense of appreciation. St. John's gospel cannot therefore be looked upon as more than a particular view adopted by an individual who was most devotedly in love with a being whom he believed to be God. It is, in other words, an expression of the reverence in which words and acts of Jesus were held by John. This view about John is held by writers of repute in general. Here are the opinions of some of them.

Dr. Murray holds that "It is generally agreed that the fourth gospel was written after the other three; not so much to supplement them, as to present the Person of the Lord from another point of view. The fourth gospel is essentially a prophecy: not in the sense of prediction, but as showing the eternal significance of the events of time."

The *Twentieth Century New Testament* offers the following remarks on John:—

"The writer apparently proposed to himself to illustrate the spirit of the 'Gospel of Love' by such incidents in the life of Jesus as best suited his purpose. There is no attempt at a regular connected narrative; and the writer allows himself such freedom in commenting upon the teaching of Jesus that it is not always easy to tell where that teaching ends and the writer's comment begins. It is to the great struggle between Light and Darkness, Death and Life—words much in use and much debated in the current philosophy of Ephesus—that the writer devotes his attention, rather than to the external incidents of a story *which has already been told, and which is plainly viewed by him from a greater distance of time than is the case with the compilers of the three other gospels.*"

Another eminent authority like Dr. Weymouth, in his introduction to John, observes:—

"It must be owned that although the fourth gospel makes no assertion which contradicts the character of Teacher and Reformer attributed to him by the synoptists, it presents to us a personage so enwrapped in mystery and dignity as altogether to transcend ordinary human nature. This transcendent Personality is, indeed, the avowed centre of the whole record, and his portrayal is its avowed purpose."

In his contribution to Peake's *Commentary*, Dr. A. E. Brooke tells us that it was well known in Alexandria that

ARE THE GOSPELS INSPIRED?

“the ‘spiritual’ gospel was written later, when the ‘bodily’ events had been recorded in the first three.” “The method of the synoptic teaching, by parable, and the subject, the kingdom, have almost disappeared. Their place is taken by discourses and controversies, mainly on Christ’s claims and relation to God. His pre-existence and sonship are assumed. And what the synoptists represent as uttered only occasionally, in moments of exceptional exaltation, here becomes normal. The question of the Messiahship is differently treated. In the synoptists, Jesus publicly claims the title only at the end, and it can be plausibly maintained that the disciples recognize him as such only late in the ministry, recognition being at first confined to demoniacs. In John, the Baptist, the earliest disciples, and others all recognize the Messiahship from the beginning. The gospels, not the Marcan gospel alone, are John’s sources of information. Its transformation of style and context of the Lord’s teaching in the light of later reflection and experience, the imperceptible transition from speech to comment, till the original speakers disappear, are now more fully recognized.”

The Rev. Dummelow tells us in his popular *Commentary* that “The gospel is not only a history, but an allegory. It is the work of a mystic, trained in the allegorical method of interpreting the scriptures, and expecting his own work to be interpreted in a like manner. He sits down to write, not a biography, but an interpretation of the life of Christ, and since his method is that of allegory we are justified in seeking a mystical meaning not only in every saying and in every incident, but even in minute details which at first sight seem trivial.”

These quotations point very clearly to the fact that there is a general agreement as to John having played the rôle of an interpreter or a commentator of the other three gospels. There is not an allusion or a reference made to John having received a revelation from above or John having been inspired to furnish us with an explanation of the doctrines of Christ. We learn, on the other hand, that while the authors of the other three gospels compiled the incidents of the life of Jesus, John gave a mystical meaning to them. He himself does not lay claim to revelation or to consequent perfection. He has, on the contrary, confessed the imperfection of his attempts to depict the incidents of the life of Jesus. Likewise he admits that he is but a recorder of incidents or signs. “There were also a great number of other signs which Jesus performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these have been recorded in order that you may believe that he is the Christ, the Son of God, and that, through believing, you may have life through his name” (John xx. 30 f.). This text, which reveals the object of the fourth

ARE THE GOSPELS INSPIRED?

gospel, announces that this is a partial record of some of those signs which Jesus performed before his disciples. To record events or signs which are known to many or all of the disciples and others does not require the aid of revelation, which supplies information which is not already in the possession of human beings. The fact is forced upon us that John is not an inspired or revealed book, any more than the other scriptural compilations are. The truth of the words of God revealed in the Holy Qur-án comes home to us in the light of the knowledge which has been now presented to the reader:—

“Woe to them that write the Book with their own hands, and then say: This is from God.”

TENDENCIES AND OBJECTS

In this section I desire to show further that each evangelist had a particular object to accomplish in preparing a short biography of the holy prophet Jesus. That object influenced to a great extent the shaping of the material and the bringing out of themes and doctrines. The people for the enlightenment of whom a gospel was brought into existence had much to do with the tone and the general trend of its theology. The personal taste and training of each individual compiler would naturally be expected to leave an impress on his production, and so it did. For want of information one cannot blame any of them. But each rejected or corrected any incident that had been recorded by his predecessor because it was either incorrect or required to be brought into accordance with the purpose of his gospel. Each had a different arrangement and order of incidents, and each supplemented the other consciously or unconsciously. Human as they were, their compilations were liable to errors and discrepancies, some of which are very serious. All these features will be illustrated in order that the reader may judge for himself and satisfy himself as to the truth of the remarks.

MARK

Mark, it must be remembered, was not one of the disciples or followers of Jesus. He is not therefore expected to have either heard Jesus or followed him. He attended Peter, who required an interpreter for his Roman audiences. After the martyrdom of Peter, or during his imprisonment, Mark was requested by the people to commit to writing the preachings of Peter. He complied. “His work, therefore, may very well be a record of preaching.” And Peter, like every missionary and preacher, is reported by an ancient authority, Bishop Papias, of Hierapolis in Asia Minor, to have “adapted his instructions to the needs of his hearers,

ARE THE GOSPELS INSPIRED?

but had no design of giving a connected account of the Lord's oracles." Mark, therefore, could reproduce the adapted account of Peter. Now, adapted accounts are far from being anything like the original. The account that reappeared in Mark was not prepared under the supervision of Peter. Even those who allege that it came to the notice of St. Peter confess that he kept quiet and did not pass any remarks on it. St. Peter must have regarded it as a report of his instructions, and as such expected it to have undergone modification. But as it never pretended to be an inspired report, much less "a word of God," why should Peter or anybody else have bothered as to the faithfulness of what had already been altered by Peter himself?

There is another point of considerable interest to be remembered about Mark. Mark, who was a convert of St. Peter, who called him "Mark, my son" (1 Peter xv. 13), was also for some time in the company of St. Paul. It is probable that he was more in sympathy with the Jewish party led by St. Peter than with the Gentile party of Paul. As a consequence he had to part from Paul. This is confirmed by Acts xiii. 13. We learn in Acts xii. 25 that Barnabas and Paul had brought Mark from Jerusalem to Antioch and selected him to officiate as their "minister"—ministerial work not being ordinarily done by the apostles themselves (1 Cor. i. 14-17)—on their first missionary journey (Acts xiii. 5). But after passing through Cyprus, Mark left them and returned home, which distressing incident is mentioned in xiii. 13. The causes of this rupture were partly personal and partly doctrinal. Mark "resented the growing ascendancy of St. Paul over his cousin St. Barnabas," and most of all he could not relish Paul's treatment of "uncircumcised Gentiles as the equals of circumcised Jews." He therefore elected to fall back upon "the thoroughly Hebrew Church of Jerusalem." A warm dispute is referred to in Acts xv. 37. This account shows, however, that previous to the disunion there existed a good deal of accord between the views of the two that held them together. Mark chose to work as Paul's subordinate and a representative of his doctrines. As a minister at Antioch he was catechizing the converts in the faith as professed by Paul. Except for the few points of disagreement, he was in general unison with the conceptions of Paul. When he left him to join Peter and act as his interpreter, he could not possibly have left behind all that was Pauline.

His Pauline impressions were with him when he was appointed as an interpreter by St. Peter. As a preacher and recorder he was obviously under the influence of two apostles who were opposed to each other. He could not preach in Rome exactly what he had taught at Antioch. But we can trace Pauline influence in his gospel, which was

ARE THE GOSPELS INSPIRED?

better known to ancients as "memoirs of Peter" or "Peter's gospel."

Mark's description of the twelve is inspired by an undue bias in favour of the Apostle Paul. Charges of dullness and "no faith" are heaped upon the disciples with a view to elevating the thirteenth Apostle, who had never seen, or sat at the feet of, Jesus. There are numerous disparaging references made to the disciples in iv. 13, 40, vi. 52, vii. 18, viii. 17, 33, ix. 10, 32, 34. "Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all the parables?" "How is it that ye have no faith?" "for their heart was hardened," "are ye so without understanding?" "perceive ye not yet, neither understand? have ye your heart yet hardened?" "he rebuked Peter, saying, Get thee behind me, Satan," etc., etc. Their failure to understand what was explained by Jesus seems to have annoyed him repeatedly and called forth severe accusations. Is this meant to elevate Paul, or "is it an attempt to give effect to a dogmatic assumption that Jesus called exceptionally wicked and foolish men to follow him"? (to use the words of Peake's *Commentary*).

This affords an illustration of the influence exercised on the gospel record by the prejudice or idiosyncrasy of the compiler. It will be noticed how this picture of the disciples is either overlooked or toned down by the other gospels. One is struck with bewilderment as to which is faithful and which is otherwise.

Mark as a primitive writer is characterized by the love of the miraculous and an overzeal for the detailed stories of casting out devils.

It may also be remarked again that Mark wrote in the roughest Greek, for which God could not be held to be the source. Matthew and Luke, who drew their material from it, have corrected his grammar and expressions.

These considerations individually point in the direction that Mark is but an outcome of a human attempt at depicting Jesus' life, bearing the stamp of his bias, his want of capability, his personal motives and his tendencies.

MATTHEW

It has been conceded on all hands that St. Matthew must have written down some notes known as "Logia," and that "Logia" was subsequently used by the unknown author of the present Matthew, which is, as already stated, not without reason called the gospel "according to St. Matthew." The main interest of this gospel is, like Mark and Luke, biographical and not theological. Matthew wrote for the Jews, and thus had a special object to accomplish in fitting his narrative, derived from "Logia" and Mark, to their tradition. He presents the claims of Jesus to the throne of David, and

very carefully explains his attitude towards the Jewish Law. Jesus has been presented to the Jews in such a way as is best fitted to harmonize with their views. As fundamental importance attaches to the descent of the promised Messiah from the house of David, Matthew is at pains to trace the descent of Jesus from David. To establish the Davidic sonship is to establish for the Jews the truth of the claim of Jesus. Now, it was very difficult to do so, if Jesus was to be presented as born of Mary alone, for Jews took no account of female descent. His foster-father, Joseph, is therefore introduced, and the question of virgin-birth waived. "And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ." (Christ means "anointed one," which is the literal translation of "Messiah.") All this was calculated to satisfy the Jews, among whom "The SON OF DAVID" was a standing title for the Messiah. It was said: "The Son of David cometh not until that wicked empire (Rome) hath extended itself over the whole earth." "If the Israelites shall keep the sabbath even for a single day as they ought, the Son of David will come" (Ps. cxxxii., Isa. xii, Jer. xxiii. 5). Matthew proved the Davidic sonship of Christ only because it appealed to the Jews. For the same reason he carries the genealogy to Abraham, unlike Luke, who, writing for the Gentiles, carries it right back to Adam, and thus emphasizes Paul's view that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile.

But it must be admitted that Matthew introduces into his genealogy, contrary to Jewish custom, four women—Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba—who were Gentiles and sinners, three of them being guilty of gross immorality. The apologists have essayed to give a special meaning to it. One of the purposes said to have been served by the names of these women is to retort on the Jews themselves a reproach that had arisen against Mary. With a royal house having such a history, they could not throw stones at the Christians.

The whole genealogy¹ was drawn up to meet the objec-

¹ The two genealogies drawn up by Matthew and Luke afford a bewildering contrast. Their lists do not agree, and present very serious difficulties to the apologist. According to Matthew the father of Joseph is Jacob, and according to Luke, Heli. This is only the second step of the pedigree. Many different names are to be met with in the two lists. Omissions of links are obvious, more especially in Matthew. Matthew's list comprises a genealogy in name. It is an attempt to construct a list of successive heirs to the throne of David, and so to give to Joseph, the legal father of Christ, the character of the rightful King of Israel. The apologists are faced with difficulties when they seek to account for the different names on the lists of Matthew and Luke. No wonder they are unanimous in pronouncing a judgment that "the genealogies are not inspired documents," and that "the genealogies warn us not to worship the letter of scripture."

It may be interesting to notice that the reckoning is not quite accurate. For the first series (vv. 2-6) needs both Abraham and David,

tions of the Scribes that Jesus could not be the Messiah, as he was not descended from David.

It was a matter of dispute (Jer. xxii. 28, xxxvi. 30) whether the Messiah would descend from David through Solomon, or, owing to the curse on this line, through Nathan (1 Chron. iii. 5). Accordingly, Matthew traces Christ's descent through Solomon, Luke through Nathan.

Matthew makes it a point that every incident of the life of Jesus is to be explained in the light of the Old Testament prophecy, bringing out that Jesus came in fulfilment of the aspirations and ideals of the Jews. The effect of prophecy is manifest even in the introduction. "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matthew i.). This is the introductory verse. "The book of the generation" is a phrase from Genesis v. 1—"This is the book of the generation of Adam." It is evidently not at all a suitable title for the whole gospel, nor even for the Nativity, but only for the pedigree, which extends over the first seventeen verses. Nothing but blind imitation of Jewish scriptures, as alluded to above (Genesis v. 1), could account for it, Matthew thus trying to bring his narrative into accordance with Jewish scripture. The subject-matter is likewise derived from the Old Testament. Compare "The angel of the Lord appeared unto him (Joseph) in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou *son of David*, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife. . . . She shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus. . . . Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God be with us." This is taken from Isaiah vii. 14—"The virgin shall be with child and bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Emmanuel." This was regarded as having been fulfilled, not by the birth of Isaiah's son, but by the birth of the Messiah. From the start to the finish, Matthew lays stress on the fulfilment of some prophecy or other in order to win over Jewish readers.¹

The Sermon on the Mount corresponds to the Law given on Mount Sinai, and the strong condemnation of him who (Matthew v. 19) breaks, or teaches others to break, "one of and the third (vv. 12-16) both Jechoniah and Christ, to make up the number fourteen, and yet the second series (vv. 6-11) must count either David or Jechoniah over again, without which it contains but thirteen names. Luke inserts a name, Rhessa, between Joanan (according to the Authorized Version; and Joanna according to the Revised Version) and Zorobabel. Nobody has ever been able to explain it aright.

¹ Matthew xv. 24, lost sheep of Israel; xix. 28, twelve thrones; x. 5 f., not into way of Gentiles (v. 18, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in nowise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled); Matthew xxv. 34, 40, "The kingdom of the heavens" is the title used for the oft-repeated topic of the Messiah's kingdom.

the least of the commandments," and several other features, suggest that the gospel was compiled to enlighten the Jews.

One feature of this gospel is its Old Testament quotations, which are often introduced with the words "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken." This, again, speaks of the purpose which has affected the treatment of the narrative of this gospel.

Another distinctive feature. The arrangement of the material is not chronological, as it is met with in Luke. Matthew is in the habit of collecting similar material into great masses, which is well adapted to create a strong and vivid impression on the reader. The Sermon on the Mount is an accumulation of various lessons imparted to the disciples, as is represented in Luke. It was not a public sermon. On the other hand, it was nothing more than instruction given in private to the disciples on a hill. But for Matthew's anxiety to bring Jesus into close resemblance with Moses, he would have entitled it "Instruction on the Hill." But for his desire and method of massing together material of a similar nature, he would have scattered the subject-matter of the Sermon over space and time that occasioned it. Order and arrangement in Matthew do not follow historicity or chronology. A number of miracles have been grouped in one place (viii., ix.), instructions given to the twelve on various occasions have been crowded into one chapter (x.), seven parables into another (xiii.), and denunciations of Pharisees occupy yet another (xxiii.). This arrangement has served a very useful purpose indeed. It is suited to missionary work. But it has nothing in common with historical setting. Credibility as to the natural order in which incidents took place and as to the circumstances which called them forth is altogether out of question. The author of Matthew must have worked hard to recast the material of Mark and "Logia," and to bring the incidents in line with the prophecies recorded in the Old Testament.

LUKE

As has already been stated, Luke was a follower and companion of St. Paul (Gal. iv. 13). His work bears the stamp of Pauline doctrines. This is acknowledged by Paul himself, who goes so far as to identify himself with it. See Romans xvi. 25, where, "according to my gospel" has been taken to mean "according to St. Luke's gospel." Irenæus, an ancient authority of great repute, says: "Luke, the companion of Paul, put down in a book the gospel preached by Paul"; and this has been acknowledged by Luke in his introduction, where he says that he compiled his gospel from the narratives of eyewitnesses and ministers of the message. He wrote in literary Greek with greater

pretensions to style than any other New Testament writer. This is justified more particularly by his introductory remarks, which form a dedication to his Excellency Theophilus. He also claims accuracy and order, due to his diligence and thorough investigation, combined with "perfect understanding of all things."

His purpose in the first place was, as declared by himself, "That thou (Theophilus) mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed" (i. 4). He felt the need of a compilation which would arrange incidents in their chronological order, after being thoroughly examined and sifted. He thus implied two things: (1) that the narratives were already current in their oral and written form; and (2) that they were not entirely reliable in respect of "accuracy," "comprehensiveness," and "chronological order." Accordingly his gospel attempts to show the connection of its history with contemporary events; he corrects Mark before incorporating its material into his own account, and gives a different conception of Christianity from what had been given either in Mark or Matthew.

He wrote for the Gentiles, as against Matthew, who wrote for the Jews. The different purposes have resulted in different treatments. If in Matthew the pedigree of Jesus concludes with David and Abraham (the Jewish progenitors), in Luke it is traced right back to Adam, in order to establish that the message of Jesus was meant for all mankind. If Matthew confines his ministry to the Jews and condemns the Gentiles and the Samaritans, Luke holds that the mission was to be carried to the Gentiles as well, his number of the disciples grows from twelve into seventy (x.), and he administers rebuke to the Jews for their intolerance (ix.), and extends the praise of Jesus even to the Samaritans (x. 33). All this shows that Luke had a clear-cut design before him, different from the one followed by Matthew. His work was an outcome of human labour controlled by his linguistic taste, liberal conception of theology, and universal sympathies which will be searched for in vain in the others.

As was mentioned under Matthew, Luke has scattered Matthew's discourses over a large space, associating them with circumstances which brought them forth. This contrast between the accounts of the two evangelists is singularly striking. It robs either of reliability and authenticity. The occasions on which Matthew makes Jesus speak have been rejected by Luke as wrong and replaced by others.

Luke has similarly modified sayings in Matthew in order to serve his own ends. A striking instance is afforded by—

LUKE vi. 20.

Blessed are ye poor.

MATTHEW v. 3.

Blessed are the poor in spirit.

Luke restricts the meaning of the beatitude by wealth and poverty, while Matthew preserves a comprehensive view. "The poor in spirit" is applicable to a person of means and a destitute one; while "ye poor" makes a definite reference to those who are not in possession of worldly riches.

The churches for which Matthew and Luke compiled their narratives had widely different traditions, and that led to the divergent versions of the two evangelists.

DIVERGENCIES OR DISCREPANCIES

When we know that the gospels are not inspired documents, it becomes easy for us to understand why their versions should be divergent. Mark's picture of Jesus is conspicuously primitive, shorn of all artificial colouring. Matthew, and more especially Luke, being cleverer, tone down what seems to them offensive or not in accordance with decorum and veneration due to Jesus. A considerable improvement has been effected by them on the unassuming statements of Mark, with the object of raising Jesus to the plane of divinity. As to divergent conceptions of Christianity, Peter and Paul must be held responsible. The three synoptists can be divided into two in respect of their theology. Peter's views are represented in Mark and Matthew, while Luke expounds Pauline doctrines. John provides a mystical exposition or rather allegorical view of the incidents given in the synoptists. As to other accounts, which are in some cases different in the extreme, no better explanation can be given than the assumption that they used various sources in the shape of oral and written traditions. In the last-mentioned case we should be prepared to make allowances for them, as we do for the different biographers of the same personality, or for the historians, who must use their discretion in selecting material that suits their purpose and in rejecting what seems to them unimportant or undesirable. To put the whole in a nutshell, the four gospels, coming as they do from the pens of mortals, must be liable to discrepancies, from which only revelation can be immune.

Below I shall give some of the striking discrepancies which discredit the gospel narrative, even to those not disposed to do so.

THE BIRTH OF JESUS

1. The birth of Jesus is given only in Matthew and Luke. Mark and John do not regard it as miraculous or important, and leave it out. The genealogies preserved by Matthew

ARE THE GOSPELS INSPIRED?

and Luke are already shown to be so conflicting as to shake our faith in them. The accounts of the birth as described by Matthew and Luke are likewise divergent. Study them in the following passages :—

MATTHEW ii.

Jesus born in *Bethlehem* (1); his divinity attested by "*his star*," which went before the wise men till it came and stood where the young child was (9); and the Magi worshipped him (11).

LUKE i.

Jesus born in *Nazareth* (26); his divinity is attested by the *angel* (ii. 9); adoration offered by *shepherds*.

One does not find a trace of any agreement on such an important event as the birth of Jesus. The versions handed down to us by Matthew and Luke are irreconcilably contradictory. It would be sinful to ascribe the authorship of these books to God, Who is All-Knowing. John, who aimed at writing a theological exposition of the three gospels before him, seems to have been in hesitation as to which account should be drawn upon. Having met with despair, he struck a different note in writing out a mystical prologue,¹ describing Jesus as having been born in heaven in place of Bethlehem or Nazareth. These methods have robbed the gospel literature of reliability and historical value.

THE DEATH OF JESUS

Take now the account of the death of Jesus. No better fate will await the reader here. The accounts are differently reported in all the four gospels.

MARK xv.	MATT. xxvii.	LUKE xxiii.	JOHN xix.
(1) Simon bore the cross for Jesus.	Simon bore the cross.	Simon bore the cross.	Jesus himself went forth bearing his cross.
(2) It was the third hour when they crucified him.	*	*	It is about the sixth hour.

The inscription on the cross :

(3) THE KING OF THE JEWS.	THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.	THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS (in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew).	JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS (in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin).
---------------------------	-------------------------------------	---	--

¹ This prologue in John is based on Prov. xviii. 1-36, Job xxviii. 12-28, and Psa. lxxxv. 9-11.

ARE THE GOSPELS INSPIRED?

MARK xv.

MATT. xxvii.

LUKE xxiii.

JOHN xix.

Words on the cross:

(4) Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani. Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani.

(a) Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.

Addresses his mother:

(a) Woman behold thy son (i.e. John), and commending his mother to the care of John, he addressed him: Behold thy mother.

Addressing one of the malefactors crucified along with him he said:

(b) "Verily I say unto thee, to-day shalt thou be with me in paradise.

(b) I thirst.

(c) It is finished.

(c) Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit.

(5) Mary Magdalene and Mary mother of James witnessed crucifixion (two women). Many women, among whom was Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James, the mother of Zebedee's children.

The women that had followed him from Galilee stood afar off.

Mother of Jesus and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene (four women).

The attendant phenomena:

(6) (a) The veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom.

(a) The veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake; and the rocks rent, graves were opened, bodies of the saints that slept arose, and came out of the graves after the resurrection of Jesus.

The veil of the temple was rent in the midst.

Nil.

(b) Nil.

Nil.

There was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. And the sun was darkened.

Nil.

The remark of the centurion:

(7) Truly this man was the Son of God.

Truly this was the Son of God.

Certainly this was a righteous man.

Nil

ARE THE GOSPELS INSPIRED?

MARK xv.	MATT. xxvii.	LUKE xxiii.	JOHN xix.
Remark of Pilate :			
(8) Pilate marvelled if he were already dead.	Nil.	Nil.	Side was pierced, and forthwith came there out blood and water.

As can be seen, each of these eight points finds a varying version in the four gospels. It becomes all the more astonishing when we remember that these divergent descriptions are about one and the same event—an event which has an important bearing on the Christian faith, and an event whose details were made vivid and unforgettable by the pathetic suffering and the tragic end. To ascribe such a hopeless confusion to revelation from God is to make it appear worse than ever. It is safer and more reasonable to admit that the account of these incidents cannot be traced to eyewitnesses even, and that, in some cases, reverent imagination seems to have been at work. This alone can satisfactorily account for it, if any explanation is possible.

(1) It is amusing to find that Matthew and Luke, together with Mark, from whom they borrow their material, describe Simon as carrying the cross for Jesus, while John represents him as doing so for himself. How the mistake arose cannot be accounted for. It is very bewildering.

(2) The crucifixion took place, according to Mark, at the third hour. Matthew and Luke consider it wrong and correct it by omission, while John corrects it by stating that it took place about the sixth hour, i.e. about noon. Most astounding!

(3) Undoubtedly there was but one inscription placarding the accusation against Jesus. Even such a fact that was before the public in black and white, and thus stood no chance of being modified, has been transformed into four different expressions by the four evangelists. Luke and John, who claimed universality for the gospel message, have in their passionate eagerness given here a colour of catholicity even to the inscription by asserting that it was not confined to any one language, but was universally represented in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin.

(4) The words that Jesus uttered in his agonies should have been engraved on the hearts of the eyewitnesses. They seem, on the contrary, to have fallen on indifferent ears and callous hearts. They fairly resemble each other in Mark and Matthew; while Luke is led away by his Pauline ideas and is found dwelling on wholesale forgiveness being extended to sinners and Gentiles: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." One of the malefactors who were crucified with him is given assurance that he shall be that very day in paradise in the company of Jesus.

ARE THE GOSPELS INSPIRED?

John, who presents nothing in common with any of the three, represents Jesus commending his mother to the beloved disciple, who is alleged to have taken her home and given her shelter.

(5) The number of women who beheld the heart-rending disaster is not the same. Only John mentions the presence of the mother of Jesus.

(6) (a) "The veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom" in Mark and Matthew, but it was rent just "in the midst" in Luke. Matthew gives a vivid and detailed picture of the earthquake with which the death of Jesus was attended, but John keeps silent, and thus rejects it as a fabrication. Matthew excels Luke in magnifying the event in the act of borrowing, and has consequently made himself flagrantly ridiculous beside the other three evangelists, who were reverent enough not to underrate or minimize a miraculous occurrence of such a character. Fancy bodies of saints coming out of the graves and walking into the city unnoticed by the disciples!

(b) Luke relates another phenomenon, the eclipse of the sun, which betokened heavenly mourning for the sad and untimely loss of Jesus. But it is a pity that even a heavenly sign of an unprecedented description—*total eclipse of the sun for three hours*—should have been ignored by the rest of the recording disciples. It is difficult to charge them with blindness, or any motive for withholding such a testimony. One concludes that Luke, the sole witness, must have been too imaginative.

Such an occurrence—eclipse of the sun for three hours—is neither known to history nor can it admit of any scientific explanation. The duration for which the sun is alleged to have been obscured is at once impossible and incredible. It involves another blunder which is more puzzling. An eclipse of the sun cannot happen on the 14th or 15th of a lunar month (the Passover fell either on the 14th or 15th of Nisan), for it is possible only at the period of new moon, i.e. shortly before the 1st of Nisan. We can easily excuse the evangelist of such a mistake, realizing that he was unaware of the phenomena of eclipses. But to claim that a gross misconception of this sort is a revelation shows a total want of respect for God. Some pious Christians, however, have attempted to offer an explanation that it was the moon that was eclipsed, quite forgetting the fact that a lunar eclipse could not darken the whole earth at *midday*, and not remembering that St. Luke has explicitly committed himself to the expression, "*The sun was darkened.*"

(7) The remark of the centurion, as reproduced by the three compilers, is expressive of varying conceptions of the divinity of Jesus. Mark identifies this (good) man with the Son of God. Matthew takes offence at it and modifies it. Luke confirms Mark by regarding him as a righteous man,

which is an interpretation of the phrase "son of God." John preserves no record of the remark.

(8) The remark of Pilate is met with only in Mark. His opinion was expert—Jesus could not have died so soon on the cross. He knew very well that a person takes a few days and not a few hours to die on the cross. He was, therefore, positive that Jesus had been taken down alive. Now this demolishes the whole fabric of the Christian faith. Matthew and Luke have therefore pitied the simple faithfulness of the account of Mark and thought it expedient to leave it out. John tells us that blood and water came out of him when his side was pierced, pointing to the fact that he was alive.

Even if we confine our consideration to the two most important events, such as the birth and death of Jesus, the fact will force itself upon us that his life from the cradle to the grave is a mass of conflicting and unreliable records, for which only heedless compilers could be held responsible.

THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

The accounts of the resurrection are still more confused.

MARK XV.,
xvi.

A stone was rolled unto the door of the sepulchre (which was a chamber on the surface of the earth in a garden). Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary beheld where Jesus was laid. Marys visit the grave on Sunday *very early*, at the *rising of the sun*. They found the stone rolled away, entered the sepulchre, and found that Jesus had disappeared. They saw a *young man* there in white robes.

This young man consoled them, and informed them that Jesus had

MATTHEW
xxvii., xxviii.

A great stone rolled unto the door; Mary Magdalene and the Mary sitting there to watch. On Sunday the two Marys return to see the sepulchre *as it began to dawn*; a shock of earthquake was felt; an *angel descended, rolled back the stone and sat on it*. The angel consoles the Marys and says, "Tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead, and behold he goeth before you *into Galilee, where ye shall see him*." They departed. Jesus met them *on the way*, and they held him by

LUKE xxiii.,
xxiv.

Women beheld the sepulchre and saw where the body was laid. *Very early in the morning* of Sunday they bring spices with certain others. They found the stone rolled away. They entered in, and found not the body of Jesus. They beheld *two men* in shining garments, who said, "Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, he is risen." They returned and told these things to the eleven and to all the rest. Their words seemed to them as idle tales.

JOHN xx.,
xxi.

Only Mary Magdalene visited "*when it was yet dark*," and seeth the stone taken away. She informs Peter of it, who accompanied by the other disciples, visited the sepulchre. Peter went in, saw *linen clothes* lie, and the *napkin* that was about his head lying by itself. The other disciple also entered. As yet they knew not the scripture that he must rise again from the dead. They went home, but Mary stood without the sepulchre. She seeth *two angels*, who said,

ARE THE GOSPELS INSPIRED?

MARK xv.,
xvi.

risen, and said, "Tell the disciples and *Peter* that he goeth before you *into Galilee.*"

Jesus made three appearances:—

1. To the two Marys.

2. To the two travellers.

3. "Appeared unto the eleven, upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart."

MATTHEW
xxvii., xxviii.

the feet. Jesus bids them to go and tell his brethren that they go *into Galilee.* Jesus appeared in Galilee, was seen and worshipped by them. (Only two appearances.)

LUKE xxiii.,
xxiv.

Then *arose Peter*, and ran into the sepulchre, beheld linen clothes laid by themselves and departed.

Two of them went the same way. *Jesus drew near and went with them.* Their eyes were holden that they should not know him. He rebuked them, "O fools, and slow of heart to believe." They drew nigh unto the village and *he made as though he would have gone further.* But he *tarrying with them.* He sat at meat with them. They recognized him, and he vanished. They joined the eleven at Jerusalem, and while giving an account found *Jesus in the midst* of them. They doubted him. Hands and feet were shown to them. Then he said, "Have ye here any meat?" He took fish and an honeycomb, and did eat before them.

Two appearances:—

1. To the two travellers.

2. To the eleven.

No appearance to women.

JOHN xx.,
xxi.

"Woman, why weepest thou?" She turned and *saw Jesus by her side.* She supposed him to be the gardener. Jesus saith unto her, "Mary." She recognized him and addressed him. "Rabboni." Jesus said unto her. "*Touch me not.*" Go to my brethren and say unto them, *I ascend unto my Father and your Father; and to my God and your God.*" Mary delivered the message. The doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, and *Jesus stood in the midst.* The disciples were glad when they *saw the Lord.* After eight days *Jesus came*, when the doors were shut, for the sake of Thomas, who was absent on the first occasion, but was now there.

After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples at the sea. "*This is now the third time that Jesus showed himself.*"

ARE THE GOSPELS INSPIRED?

The time of the visit to the sepulchre of the women is stated to be "very early in the morning" (Luke), "as it began to dawn" (Matthew), "when it was yet dark" (John), and yet according to Mark it was "at the rising of the sun." John mentions the visit of only one woman.

The women conveyed no message of the angels to the disciples (Mark); they told the eleven everything (Luke). The women (Mark, Matthew) are commanded by the angels to bid the eleven *to go to Galilee*; they reminded (Luke) them of what Jesus *had done in Galilee*; Mary brings no message from the angels, but from Jesus himself (John).

The angel was *one* (Mark, Matthew); but in Luke there are *two men*, and in John *two angels*.

The eleven were to go to Galilee, where they would see Jesus (Mark, Matthew); but they saw him in Jerusalem according to Luke and John.

Luke describes Peter as returning without having entered the tomb, but John makes him enter it.

Mary was not to touch Jesus (John) before he had ascended; yet (Matthew) the women held him by the feet, though he had not ascended at that time.

In Mark the disciples do not believe the report that Jesus is risen, while in Luke they declared "the Lord is risen indeed." According to Luke the disciples were terrified, but according to John they rejoiced.

According to Mark, Jesus appeared to the women, to the two travellers, and to the eleven; according to Matthew, to the women and to the eleven; according to John, to Mary, and *thrice* he appeared to the disciples. But Luke's omission of Christ's appearance to women, which is reported by the other evangelists, diminishes the value of his work. The reports are all at variance with one another, and reflect on the genuineness of the versions submitted by the compilers.

SOME IMPORTANT DISCREPANCIES

The list of discrepancies being too long, consideration must of necessity be confined to those words and works which have undergone considerable changes. Changes are, in some cases, drastic and radical, reflecting the views of the evangelist rather than the original exponent of Christianity. Let us look at the picture of Jesus as drawn by St. Mark in respect of his knowledge, his power, and the views propounded by him. Then place beside it another picture drawn by those who came later, and deemed it necessary to improve upon, rather than to preserve it. It was not any want of respect for the original sketch that inspired them to do so. But it was the sense of decorum, and the increasing reverence, that grows with the passage of time, that compelled them to do away with the original attempt which

ARE THE GOSPELS INSPIRED?

depicted Jesus in his native simplicity. SS. Matthew, Luke and John have exaggerated their reproductions, just as window-panes in European churches and chapels have transformed the Eastern features of Jesus and Mary into blue eyes and golden hair, with halos encircling the heads and royal robes on the bodies of those who prided themselves on their humility. Below is given a comparative study.

I. VIEWS ABOUT THE VIRGIN-BIRTH.

(a) Matt. xiii. 55: "Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas?"

(b) John vi. 42: "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? how is it then that he saith, I came down from heaven?"

(c) Luke iv. 22: "Is not this Joseph's son?"

(d) Mark vi. 3: "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him."

Only one of them calls him the son of Mary, three admitting that he is the son of Joseph and Mary. Two of them shrink from calling him the carpenter or the carpenter's son, simply because it was deemed derogatory to the reverence that should be due to the divinity of Jesus. The law of evolution is seen in progress when these texts are examined.

II. RESPECT COMMANDED BY HIM.

(a) Mark iii. 21 f.: "His friends went out to lay hold on him," for they believed and said, "He is beside himself." That is, they confirmed the scribes' accusation of Jesus, who said, "He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils casteth he out devils." Matthew and Luke discard it as incompatible with the divinity with which Jesus should be invested.

(b) Jesus said unto them (who took offence at him and who were not prepared to recognize his claims simply because he was a carpenter's son and had other humble ties): "A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house" (Mark). This is curtailed by Matthew, and still more by John. But curtailment of humiliation or its modification could not satisfy Luke, who ignored it altogether.

(c) "But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father" (Mark xiii. 32). As this text embodies a confession by Jesus so eloquent of his limited knowledge and avowed ignorance, Matthew and Luke do not relish it. The former therefore omits the words "neither

the Son " (Matthew xxiv. 36), while the latter will not have anything to do with such a humiliating reference to the divinity of Jesus. John follows in the footsteps of Luke. Rev. Dummelow's *Commentary* makes the following remark on "NEITHER THE SON": "This is the true reading not only here (in Mark), but in Matthew xxiv. 36, where it has been altered in many MSS., probably as being a difficulty to faith." Peake's *Commentary* offers the following note on it: "Mark xiii. 32.—This is one of Schmiedel's 'pillar-passages' (E.B., Col. 1881). A passage admitting a limit to Christ's knowledge must be trustworthy history, according to Schmiedel. Certainly later commentators found the verse difficult."

(d) The overwhelming grief of Jesus, that showed itself at the approach of his arrest in the words "My soul is exceeding sorrowful" and in the restless movements (Jesus could not help coming outside to watch the Roman officials appear), reached its climax in the despondent words which he uttered on the cross—"My God, my God, hast Thou forsaken me?" (Mark xv. 3). These words have been copied by Matthew only. The other evangelists could not reproduce them to frustrate their own object. For these words not only picture his inborn weakness and unwilling submission, but also want of faith. While experiencing the acute agonies and bitterness of death, and keenly realizing his utter helplessness, he felt himself thrown into the depths of despondency and deserted by God. These expressions of his human nature were unworthy, in the opinion of Luke and John, of record.

(e) Mark viii. 12: "There shall no sign be given unto this generation." These words contain an emphatic refusal on the part of Jesus to work any miracle for any part of that generation. And Mark vi. 5 tells us that "He could there do no mighty work." These confessions of Mark have been either left out by the other evangelists or distorted. John omits to touch upon these stumbling-blocks, while Matthew and Luke add the phrase "except the sign of prophet Jonas" to the refusal of Jesus, and "on account of their unbelief" to the statement of Mark.

MARK.

There shall no sign be given unto this generation (viii. 12).

He could there do no mighty work (vi. 5).

MATTHEW.

There shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas. For as Jonas spent three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth (xii. 39 f.).

He did not many mighty works there (xiii. 58).

LUKE.

There shall no sign be given it, but the sign of Jonas the prophet. For as Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man be to this generation (xi. 29 f.).

(Omitted by Luke and John.)

ARE THE GOSPELS INSPIRED ?

The above-mentioned texts furnish examples of distortion on the part of Matthew and Luke. According to Mark, Jesus was determined *not to show any* sign, and he *could* there do *no* mighty work ! But these texts have been advantageously tampered with by Matthew and Luke.

These are the fundamental pillars of the life and teachings of Jesus, and it is in vain that we look to the Gospels for any agreement even on them. Likewise, such an important theme as the " Lord's Prayer " has been *taught* to the *disciples on a plain*, according to Luke, in words and number of verses different from those that are met with in Matthew, who alleges that it was *preached* to the *multitude* on a *mountain* (Matthew, being anxious to satisfy the Jews, likened Jesus to Moses giving the Law on the Mount). Mark, which represents Peter's preachings, does not concern itself with the Lord's Prayer, for the simple reason that Peter's church did not use it. It is difficult to say what led John to omit it. Only Matthew and Luke record it. Knowing that the former was in the habit of accumulating similar discourses at one place at the expense of historical setting, the latter has assigned it chronological order and described the circumstances that occasioned it. Luke's version, therefore, is more reliable. But it is not in vogue. It is astonishing how the less reliable has superseded it. It is Matthew's prayer and not Luke's that has passed into general use in the churches throughout Christendom. Having drawn attention to some of the most significant examples of discrepant and divergent accounts of the most important factors of Christianity, I had better leave the rest for the reader to study for himself.

JUST A FEW INTERPOLATIONS

Of many interpolations, mention will be made here about a few of them.

(a) John vii. 58 and vii. 1-11. That is, the last verse of the seventh chapter, with its continuation in the first eleven verses of the eighth chapter, which comprise the story of an adulteress, is an interpolation. This is admitted universally. Rev. Dummelow's *Commentary* has the following observation on it : "**The woman taken in adultery.**—All modern critics agree that this section (vii. 53-viii. 11) is no original part of the fourth gospel. It is not in the author's style ; it breaks the sequence of our Lord's discourses, and is omitted by most of the ancient authorities. Probably it is an authentic apostolic tradition inserted here to illustrate the principle of viii. 15. Some MSS. place it at the end of the gospel. The incident probably took place in Holy Week, and is therefore appropriately inserted by some MSS. after Luke xxi. 38.

ARE THE GOSPELS INSPIRED?

"The narrative interrupted by the interpolation vii. 53-viii. 11, is resumed viii. 12."

Peake's *Commentary* does not recognize the claim of these verses to retain their place in the scriptures. Accordingly it expunges it, and comments on it at the end of John. "VII. 53-viii. 11, **Jesus and the woman accused of sin.**—The well-known story of the woman taken in adultery has no claim to be regarded as part of the original text of this. It breaks the close connection between vii. and viii. 12 ff., and in style and vocabulary it is clearly synoptic rather than Johannine. It is supported by no early Patristic evidence. The evidence proves it to be an interpolation of a 'Western' character."

Dr. Weymouth's *New Testament in Modern English* marks the section as an interpolation. Similarly Dr. Moffat marks it as such in his *New Translation of the New Testament*. *The Twentieth Century New Testament* has excised it, and placed it in such a place as indicates clearly that it has no connection with John. It is there only because its existence must be preserved. In the same way *The Complete Bible in Modern English*, which we owe to Ferrar Fenton's labour of love, extending over forty years, expels it from the place it has defiled for such a long time, giving his reason for so doing in a footnote: "The narrative of the sinful woman (chapter vii. 53 to chapter viii. 11) is rejected by the most competent authorities as a spurious interpolation. The question will be found fully discussed in the introduction to the larger edition of Westcott and Hort's *Greek New Testament* (p. 290, section 388); and it is given as their opinion that this particular passage 'has no right to a place in the text of the four gospels.' The language of the MSS. containing the passage varies considerably; but the generally accepted reading I have added at the end of this gospel, *where it is placed as an appendix for reference, but not in any way as a part of the sacred text*" (italics are mine).

(b) Before referring to Mark xvi. 9-20, which is another unanimously acknowledged interpolation, it seems fit to pass a few remarks on the 21st chapter of John. Commentators and other writers all agree that it is an appendix, if not an interpolation, added at a later time. In the opinion of Rev. Dummelow, the last two verses at least—24 and 25—are really doubtful, and they "may have been added by the Ephesian elders, who first put the gospel in circulation after the death of the Apostle, and who wished to testify to its genuineness and trustworthiness. The main object of the appendix is to correct a popular belief that the beloved disciple would not die before our Lord's Second Advent."

Peake's *Commentary* states that in the light of the present ending of Mark (Mark xvi. 9-20 will be shown later on to be an interpolation) it becomes difficult to accept the view

that John's appendix formed part of his gospel at the time when Mark's appendix was compiled. Mark's appendix "may be based on xx. (20th chapter of John), but it shows no knowledge of xxi." The same *Commentary* adds that "the relation of this chapter—xxi.—to Luke v. is also difficult to determine."

A glance at the two endings is of great interest :—

JOHN xx.

30 And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book :

31 But these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God ; and that believing, ye might have life through his name.

JOHN xxi.

24 This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things : and we know that his testimony is true.

25 And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written.

The two verses which conclude the 20th chapter form a definite and suitable ending, reflecting the author's modesty in his apology for the biography being incomplete, succinctly reviewing the contents and recapitulating the purpose of the work. The clumsy conclusion comprised by the last two verses of chapter xxi. is therefore a useless repetition. Verse 24 bears a testimony to the identity of the author and the credibility of his report. This cannot have been written by the author himself in self-praise. "We know that his testimony is true" reveals that this endorsement was appended to the book by Ephesian elders, "who first put it in circulation." This plural phrase—"We know"—is again followed in the next verse by the singular "I suppose." Verse 23 is but a gloss or editorial note aiming at contradicting a view held by a certain party that John the beloved disciple should not die.

The verse runs thus :—

"Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die : yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die ; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee ? "

This verse has been dictated and incorporated into the appendix by jealousy, which stands condemned by Jesus' words, "What is that to thee ? " Verses 20-24 describe the beloved disciple—John, the author of this gospel—in the third person, while verse 25 makes him put in an appearance all of a sudden, speak for himself, and state : "I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written."

These considerations show that the last six verses are a confused mass, lacking elegance, order, and grammatical sequence, and such a jumble cannot be imputed to the author of St. John's gospel.

ARE THE GOSPELS INSPIRED?

The popular belief that the beloved disciple would not die was not supplanted by these insertions. It "still persisted. One story was that he was translated like Elijah, another that he still breathed in his grave, a fable which even St. Augustine was inclined to believe" (Dummelow).

(c) Mark xvi. 9-20 is another interpolation like those mentioned above. But a milder word like "appendix" is often used by Christian writers, without much altering the reality. Dummelow's *Commentary* observes that "Internal evidence points definitely to the conclusion that the last twelve verses are not by St. Mark." It further provides interesting and enlightening information. "The most probable account of the literary history of the section seems to be the following. The Gospel of St. Mark, being the first extensive and authoritative account of our Lord's life as distinguished from his discourses, attained at its first publication (55-60 A.D.) a considerable circulation, first in the West and afterwards in the East. *At that time it concluded with an account of the Galilean appearance, which is now only to be found in St. Matthew* (Matt. xxviii. 6) [italics are mine]. The subsequent publication of the first and third Gospels, which incorporated practically its whole subject-matter, and were far more interesting as containing discourses, practically drove it out of circulation. When at the close of the apostolic age an attempt was made (probably in Rome) to collect the authentic memorials of the Apostles and their companions, a copy of the neglected second gospel was not easily found. *The one that was actually discovered, and was used to multiply copies, had lost its last leaf*, and so a fitting termination (the present appendix) was added by another hand. A recently discovered Armenian MS. (1891) definitely ascribes the appendix to Ariston, i.e. probably Aristion, 'a disciple of the Lord,' mentioned by Papias (130 A.D.)."

The unanimous verdict given in the New Testaments of Dr. Weymouth, Dr. Moffat, Ferrar Fenton, and in *The Twentieth Century New Testament*, is that Mark xvi. 9-20 is an addition. Peake's *Commentary* and *Encyclopædia Biblica* pronounce the same judgment on it.

Peake and Dummelow give a second termination to Mark, met with in an uncial MS.—Codex W, the Detroit MS. of the gospels—and it is this:

"But they gave Peter and his companions a brief account of all that had been enjoined. And after that Jesus himself sent out by means of them from east to west the sacred and incorruptible preaching of eternal salvation."

Dr. Moffat reproduces in his New Testament both termini, and inserts between verses 14 and 15 a third passage, which, he states, originally belonged to the longer appendix which is extant. In a footnote, he says that the "appendix represents a couple of second century attempts to complete

ARE THE GOSPELS INSPIRED?

the gospel. The passage within brackets (the passage inserted by him between verses 14 and 15, vide p. 67) in the first of these epilogues originally belonged to it, but was excised for some reason at an early date. Jerome quoted part of it, but the full text has only been discovered quite recently in Codex W, the freer uncial of the gospels."

It must be noticed here that the appendix discovered recently contains no mention of Jesus' ascension to heaven. And the older appendix describes it in these words, "After the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven," whose effect is spoiled and genuineness discredited by the addition of "and sat on the right hand of God," which may represent the fervent faith of the writer, and by no means a testimony of an eyewitness.

Some authorities are of opinion that the gospel originally concluded at xvi. 8.

(d) Luke xxiv. 51 is another interpolation which is conceded on all hands. It elicits the following comment from Rev. Dummelow: "A few ancient authorities omit these words. If they are omitted, *it is possible to regard this event, not as the ascension, but as a miraculous disappearance of Jesus at the end of the interview begun in verse 36.*"

Peake's *Commentary* makes similar remarks. "The words 'and was carried up into heaven' are omitted in some of the best MSS., and have probably crept in from Acts i. 9 f."

The New Testaments, like *The Twentieth Century New Testament* and that of Dr. Moffat, mark it as an interpolation.

It seems advisable to reproduce the verse in its context, in order that the reader may see for himself that the interpolation has not been cunningly inserted, and that the context condemns it as foreign and extraneous matter.

50 And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them.

51 And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven.

52 And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy.

The intervening verse serves to put verses 50 and 52 out of joint. It is most amusing to find verse 52 state that "they worshipped him" when he had vanished and been "*carried up into heaven*" (verse 51). It becomes still more amusing to those who are acquainted with the import of the word "worship" as understood in Eastern lands where Jesus lived. The word "worship" is taken to mean to show reverence or to pay homage. This signification has been adopted by Ferrar Fenton in his *Bible in Modern English*,¹ and also by *The Twentieth Century New Testament*.² In the

¹ "Then, having paid him homage they returned to Jerusalem" (p. 123).

² "They bowed to the ground before him and returned to Jerusalem full of joy" (p. 162).

ARE THE GOSPELS INSPIRED?

light of this translation of the word, it looks strikingly ridiculous to state that when Jesus was carried up into heaven the disciples bowed to the ground before him and returned to Jerusalem.

The fact that St. Matthew does not mention the ascension strengthens the fact that verse 51 in Luke is an interpolation. For Matthew, who, like Luke, derived his material from Mark, cannot be believed to have left out such a wonderful miracle as the ascension; and St. Luke, who is the most literary of all the New Testament writers, cannot be conceived to have stifled an exceptionally important occurrence like the ascension, and spoiled the context by placing an incidental assertion in a wrong place.

ASCENSION

It becomes very easy to see that the ascension was neither believed nor preached by the evangelists. Matthew and John never believed it and never mentioned it in the gospels prepared by them. It has also been conclusively shown that Luke did not mention the ascent of Jesus, and that he cannot be held responsible for the extraneous insertion which now occupies an inappropriate place. It has also been shown above that the ascension which is mentioned in the appendix of Mark cannot be ascribed to St. Mark. Moreover, if Mark had described the ascension originally, Matthew and Luke, who borrowed their accounts from Mark, could not have omitted the most wonderful phenomenon of the ascension. Their silence speaks eloquently of the fact that Mark neither believed nor recorded it. It thus becomes plain that all the four gospels are unanimous in discrediting the story of the ascension. And in the words of the Prayer Book of the Church of England, "whatever is not read therein (i.e. Holy Scripture), nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the faith." If Jesus never ascended, it is unreasonable to expect him to descend. It is a pity that pious people at Jerusalem are in vain straining their eyes to watch Jesus come down from heaven.

DEATH OF JESUS DID NOT TAKE PLACE ON THE CROSS

Logical arrangement required that ascension should have formed a sequel to the death of Jesus; but a discussion of some of the interpolations could hardly be treated without reaching the conclusion that the ascension never took place. It was needless to withhold the question of "ascension," to appear after "death," when it was irresistibly coming to the foreground. The natural order had to be reversed.

ARE THE GOSPELS INSPIRED?

The death of Jesus on the cross, being the basic principle of the Christian creed, should be subjected to the searchlight provided by the gospel narrative itself. The narrative is reproduced below with a view to enabling the reader to discover for himself that Jesus, who is made out to be dead, does not suffer cursed death on the cross. It was a Jewish plan to discredit his claims to Messiahship by crucifixion, which was, according to their scriptures, a sure sign of a false prophet. But God was with His holy prophet Jesus, and He saved him from that disgraceful death.

The description in the gospels of the terrible and heart-rending incident of the crucifixion is as follows:—

And straightway in the morning the chief priests with the elders and scribes, and the whole council, held a consultation, and bound Jesus, and carried him away, and delivered him up to Pilate.

And Pilate asked him, Art thou the King of the Jews? And he answered him and said, Thou sayest.

And when he was accused of the chief priests and elders, he answered nothing.

Then said Pilate unto him, Hearest thou not how many things they witness against thee?

And he answered him to never a word; inasmuch that the governor marvelled greatly.

Then said Pilate to the chief priests and to the people, **I find no fault in this man.**

Now at that feast the governor was wont to release unto the people a prisoner whom they would.

And they had then a notable prisoner, called Barabbas.

Therefore when they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them, Will ye that I release unto you the King of the Jews? **For he knew that for envy they had delivered him.**

When he was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him.

But the chief priests and elders stirred the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus.

The governor answered and said unto

Innocent as Jesus was, a verdict of "not guilty" was returned by Pilate.

Pilate's wife warned against punishing "that just man."

The governor inclined to exonerate and release Jesus.

Pilate washed his hands of the guilt of having to sentence Jesus.

them, Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you? They said, Barabbas. Pilate said unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ? They all say unto him, Let him be crucified.

And the governor said, **Why, what evil hath he done?** But they cried out the more, saying, Let him be crucified.

When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but rather a tumult was made, he took water, and **washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person :** see ye to it.

Then released he Barabbas unto them : and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.

Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers.

And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe.

And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand : and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews !

And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head.

And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him.

And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name : him they compelled to bear his cross.

And when they were come to a place called Golgotha, that is to say, a place of a skull,

They gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall : and when he had tasted thereof he would not drink.

And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots : that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots. And it was the third hour ; and they crucified him.

And sitting down they watched him there ; And set up over his head his accusation

I.e. at 9 a.m. According to John xix. 14, the crucifixion took place at 12.

written, **This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.**

Then there were two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left.

And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads,

And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.

Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said,

He saved others, himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him.

He trusted in God; let Him deliver him now, if he will have Him: for he said, I am the Son of God.

The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth.

From noon, which is the sixth hour, till 3 p.m., the ninth hour.

Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the earth unto the ninth hour. And the sun was darkened. And **about the ninth hour** Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani, that is to say, My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?

Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, This man calleth for Elias. Let us see whether Elias will come to save him.

The commander of the company of soldiers is in sympathy with Jesus, looks upon him as innocent and not deserving death.

The Jewish Sabbath commences Friday evening, when no bodies should be left on the cross.

Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. Now when the centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, **Certainly this was a righteous man.**

The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath day (for that Sabbath day was an high day), besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away.

Then came Joseph of Arimathæa, a councillor of honourable estate, who also himself was Jesus' disciple, but secretly for fear of the Jews, and besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus.

ARE THE GOSPELS INSPIRED?

Expert opinion that Jesus could not die on the cross in a few hours.

It was an established fact that nobody could die on the cross in a few hours.

The influence of the sympathetic commander had effect. He knew that Pilate was also in his favour.

Blood rushed out—a sure sign of life. The thrust of the spear was inspired by God to set blood in circulation.

The spacious and ventilated sepulchre was nigh at hand, prepared purposely by Joseph *in his own garden on the surface of the earth*, and not under the surface.

The Jews had realized the serious error that had been committed in sparing the life of Jesus, his rich disciple, who was also an honourable councillor, having brought his influence to bear upon it.

And Pilate marvelled if he were already dead, and Pilate gave him leave.

Then came the soldiers, and brake the legs of the first and of the other, which was crucified.

And when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs.

But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and **forthwith** came there out blood and water.

Joseph came and took the body of Jesus, and wound it in a clean linen cloth with the spices.

And he laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock (now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid), and rolled a great stone to the door.

Now the next day the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, saying, Command that the sepulchre be made sure, lest his disciples come by night and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: **so that the last error shall be worse than the first.**¹

And when very early on the first day of the week they came to the tomb they found it empty. Jesus had escaped in the guise of a gardener (John xx. 15). He is seized with fear, which quickens his pace, and while fleeing to Galilee he meets his disciple and another traveller on the way and disguises himself, "but their eyes were holden that they should not

¹ This is confirmed by the Holy Qur-án: "And they did not kill him nor did they crucify him to death, but to them he looked like it (i.e. he looked like a crucified person), and most surely those who oppose the view are but in a doubt about it; they have no knowledge respecting it, but only follow a conjecture, and they killed him not for sure and certain" (chap. iv. 157).

ARE THE GOSPELS INSPIRED?

know him " (Luke xxiv. 6). He visits the eleven when the doors are shut, shows his wounds, enjoins secrecy on them, and then disappears in the mountainous country.

This description of the incident of the crucifixion of Jesus does not require any elaborate comment to establish that he did not expire on the cross. Everything is in favour of the safety of Jesus. The governor knows full well that he is innocent, and that it is wrong to crucify him. He is accordingly anxious to release him. His wife is also warned in a vision that her husband should not make himself accountable to God by sentencing him to death. The commander of the guard was pathetically moved at witnessing the tragic scene, and later on showed his sympathy and anxiety to save him. It was through him that Jesus was delivered alive to Joseph, and it was through his influence that the soldiers did not break his bones; and in their anxiety to dispose of him, one of them pierced his side with the point of his spear. This was a godsend. It set his blood in circulation and contributed to revive him. He is not buried. He is placed in a chamber above the surface of the earth in Joseph's own garden. The natural and inevitable result is that he recovers, and loses no time to clear away very early in the morning to escape notice.

Pilate, whose opinion, based as it was on experience, was sound and expert, declares that Jesus could not die on the cross in so short a time.

The Jews, who were very keen on crucifying Jesus, became reasonably suspicious. They knew that death could not occur on the cross in so brief a space of time. Their view was confirmed by the soldiers having smashed the bones of the robbers who were crucified with Jesus and taken down at the same time with him. Their suspicion that it had been designed to save his life was strengthened by the soldiers having spared the bones of Jesus and entrusted him to an influential disciple who had previously made arrangements to take him away alive and place him in a chamber, fairly well ventilated, in his own garden. They are very emphatic on making amends for the serious mistake that had been made. But nothing avails. Jesus escapes the dishonourable and cursed death, and makes haste to vanish out of the territory where he stood every chance of being re-arrested and more carefully crucified, and where there was no prospect of his safety and no hope of the spread of his teachings.

It is strange that the Christians should have founded their creed on an incident like the death of Jesus, and that that incident should turn out to be such as would not support the fabric that has been raised on it. Why cannot the

ARE THE GOSPELS INSPIRED?

Christians base their creed on the principles propounded by the holy prophet Jesus, instead of an uncertain thing like this incident, which has proved false to-day, and which cannot avail them, even if it were to retain the nature that has been assigned to it? The incident of the crucifixion or martyrdom is not peculiar to Jesus, any more than it was to John or the two malefactors who shared the same fate with Jesus. What has the crucifixion to do with the exercise and development of man's physical, mental and moral powers? All happiness depends upon a harmonious development of our faculties, the chief source of happiness being a rightly developed heart. The dogmatic belief will not have any congenial effect upon a person whose organs of the body, or the faculties of whose mind and heart, are out of accord. He experiences the veritable hell on this earth, and his dogmatic faith is of little help to him. He requires guidance well adapted to evolve his organs and to make them fruitful. This is the natural goal of his life, and the attainment of the natural ideal must be attended with the highest pleasure. The holy prophet of Islam set before the world an ideal in these words: "Try to liken your qualities to those of God," or "Imbue yourselves with the divine attributes." The realization of this ideal is an unending source of all felicity and happiness. The holy prophet Jesus was also explicit, and gave a similar instruction in these words: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." No better ideal can be conceived. It has nothing in common with the doctrine of atonement, which is unintelligible, unjust, and cruel, and unworthy of the God of love and mercy, the God who is forgiving and long-suffering. The former doctrine is divine, while the latter is not even human. It is absolutely unfair and brutal, and is only calculated to exercise a very wicked influence upon mankind. The beautiful words that fell from the lips of Jesus, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God," and that "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall *in no case* enter into the kingdom of heaven," are true, because they are in perfect consonance with our nature, and because they ennoble and elevate us, and because they can, if lived up to, produce real bliss for us. If they are true, the mythical doctrine of the atonement must be false, because it is unnatural, and because it does not offer to uplift human morality. If it does anything, it debases morality, and insults God and man alike.

If the holy prophet of Islam inculcated the principle of "cherishing the profoundest reverence for God's commandments, and displaying the tenderest love for God's creatures," and if he called it the essence of Islam, the holy

ARE THE GOSPELS INSPIRED?

prophet Jesus also taught us that we should love our God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our might, and that we should love our neighbour as ourselves. If the prophet of Islam provided a wider scope for our generous activities by enlightening us that our tenderest love should be extended to all the creatures of God, Jesus also meant by "neighbour" all mankind at least. These truths are the common property of all mankind, and these truths will most certainly work out the salvation of any individual or nation if they are carried into practice. Why, therefore, should Christians not follow what forms the plain and sound teaching of Jesus in preference to those absurd and useless dogmas which are later additions to Christianity? Muslims are proud to follow the holy prophet Mohammed, who aimed at making them reasonable and sound, and who made them inheritors of all truth and wisdom that has ever been revealed through the holy prophets like Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. Like the Muslims, why should not the Christians learn to revere all the prophets, to believe in all the heavenly books, and to believe that salvation is open to everybody who follows right principles of belief and conduct.

CONCLUSION

If according to Christ and Mohammed (peace be upon them and all the other prophets) the essence of religion lies in perfect love of God, which can only be manifested in our willing obedience to His Divine Will, we must be assured as rational beings of the genuineness and credibility of God's message as much as of the soundness of the truth that it reveals. It is this natural craving that has led to what is known as the higher criticism of the Bible. A similar test has been applied to the Holy Qur-án as well, to which reference has been made previously. The result of the higher criticism of the four gospels has partially been presented in this treatise, with the object of making the laity and non-Christians in general acquainted with it. In doing so I have purposely refrained from quoting the opinions expressed in the learned commentaries of the nonconformists and in the books issued on the subject by the Rational Press. I have, on the contrary, restricted the treatment to the views expounded by the clergy of the Church of England in the main, and to the views of those who are rather conservative. I have also deliberately overlooked the question whether we can ascribe with certainty the authorship of the gospels to the evangelists whose names they bear now. All the commentaries are agreed upon the fact that the original copies of the gospel were without any names. It was guessed later who could

ARE THE GOSPELS INSPIRED?

be the most probable writers of them. The probable conjecture has not yet reached certainty. The authenticity of the names to which the gospels are attributed is open to doubt, as can be seen by referring to any commentary.

What we have learnt with respect to the origin of the Christian gospels and the creed preached therein can be recapitulated in a few words. Mark was the first gospel, and not Matthew, as is generally indicated by the present arrangement of the four books. Mark, who was a convert and interpreter of St. Peter, penned at the instance of "his hearers" what St. Peter adapted and preached to his Roman audiences. Mark has been incorporated into Matthew and Luke. But Matthew has represented the words and works of Jesus as fulfilling prophecies of the Old Testament. No less than sixty-five references have been made to Old Testament texts to establish that the advent of the Messiah was in strict accordance with the Jewish ideals. This conception and purpose pervade the whole of Matthew and distinguish it from the other three. Luke represents St. Paul's views, which are in conflict with St. Peter's. Thus we have in Luke an altogether different point of view. It opposes Matthew and Mark most boldly, and places its liberal and catholic description of Christianity in a striking contrast to Matthew and Mark, who confine God's blessings and ministration to the elect alone. John strikes an entirely different note. It offers to interpret Christianity for us. We may respect his opinion as an individual opinion, and as different from the other three; but we cannot be assured that his vague and mythical representation of Christianity is identical with the definite and plain teachings of the holy prophet Jesus. In a word, the gospels are as divergent in expressing the Christian doctrines as their versions are discrepant in the reproduction of the words and works of Jesus. They have not been safeguarded against mistakes and interpolations. On the contrary, they are replete with extraneous matter. Sometimes glosses and editorial notes have been absorbed in the body of the book, and sometimes irrelevant additions have been made. Matthew and Luke have either toned down or omitted¹ what they deemed objectionable in Mark. They do not teach that, because deepening anxiety of Jesus, in alliance with a fear of treacherous betrayal on the part of some of his disciples, led to his sudden and skilfully planned disappearance, we should therefore believe that he soared upwards to heaven. Their accounts of the incident of the crucifixion show that God

¹ There is an amusing omission of the word "not" in John viii. 31. The context requires the negative, but it seems to have "been omitted from the text by some early copier," and nobody has ever since ventured to restore it (*The Complete Bible in Modern English*, Ferrar Fenton—footnote to John viii. 31).

ARE THE GOSPELS INSPIRED?

saved Jesus from the cursed death on the cross. The plain and useful teachings of Jesus, as propounded in the gospels, make the belief in the atoning and propitiating powers of the crucifixion unnecessary. His disciples also betray total ignorance of such a dogma as the vicarious atonement. Jesus himself believed in one God, worshipped Him, and prayed to Him, and laid all possible stress on good living and cherishing love for the neighbour.

This brings the treatment to a close, with my sincerest hopes that it will be of some interest and benefit to God's people.