Tracts on
Common Prayer
No. 4.

THE
NEW TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

BY

W. SANDAY, D.D., F.B.A.

AND

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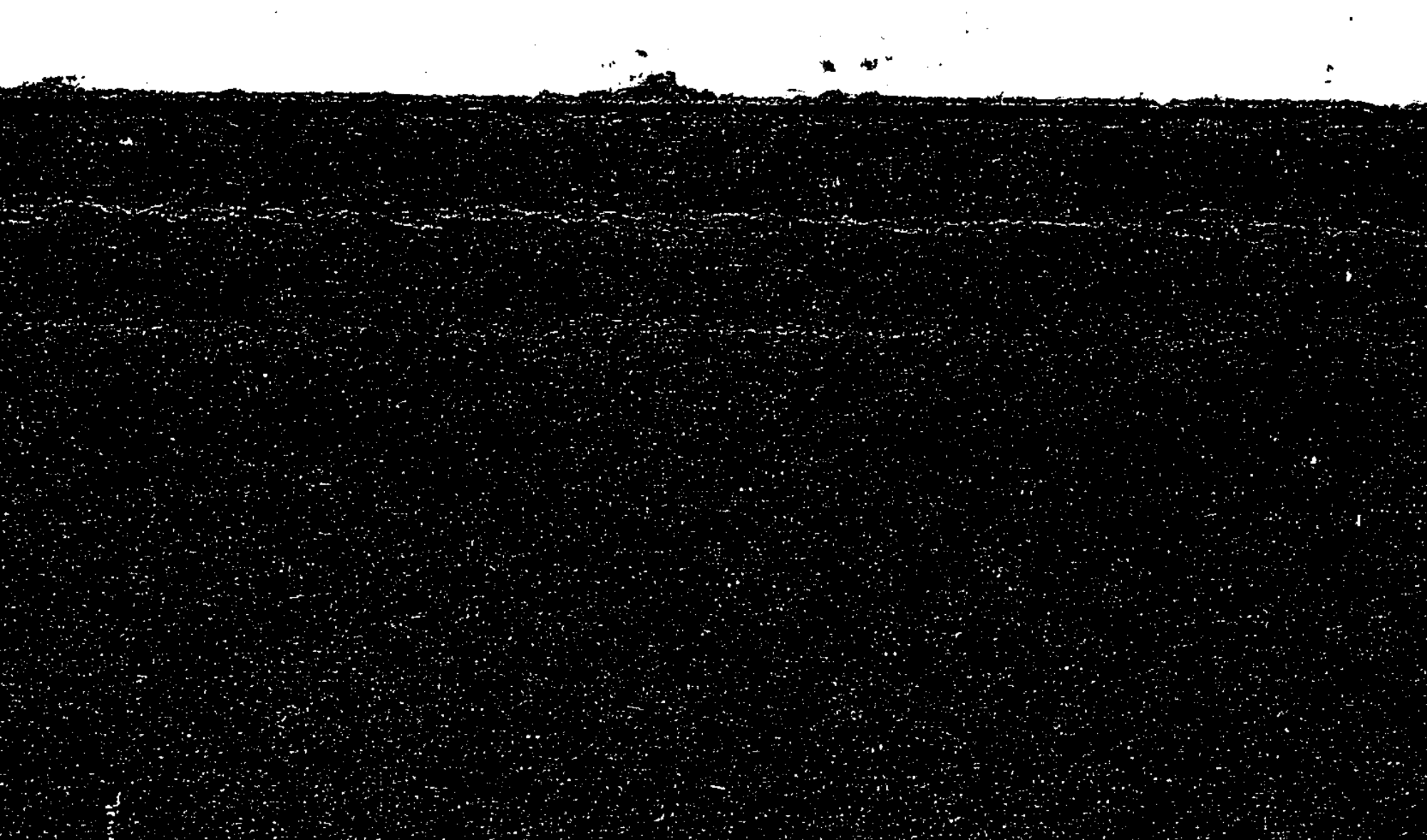

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THE
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THE GOSPELS
(W. SANDAY.)

WE call this little book *The New Testament Background*. If it is asked, 'Background of what?' the answer, in accordance with the general title of this series, must be 'of Common Prayer'. The reading of the Bible enters into and plays an important part in our Common Prayer. But by the necessity of the case the readings from the Bible are scattered and out of order. We want to know what is the continuous history that lies behind them; and we want to be able to look at this history as we look at the events which have happened in our own day, and to put them into their proper place in relation to each other: in other words, to make them real to ourselves. If we can succeed in doing this, we shall have not only the background for the reading of the Lessons but also what might be called a 'Background for Christian Belief'.

Background of what?

We are writing for the plain man and the plain woman, the plain boy and the plain girl, who desire to look at things just as they are without any assumption for which a reason is not given. In the past it has been the custom to dole out information about the

A sketch without assumptions.

Bible with a rather sparing hand. A great process of study and inquiry has been going on; and until this process had settled down to fairly clear and definite results, it was perhaps natural that what the teacher had to say should be partial and not very coherent or well thought out; he could not give more than he had been able to take in and digest himself. But now the time seems to have come when an attempt should be made to present the new knowledge in as connected a form as possible. This does not mean that the results obtained, or that seem to be obtained, are fixed and final; but a point has been reached at which it is possible to look round and take stock of what has been gained. We can only promise to do this according to the best of our ability and the best light that we have from without. Both method and results may be improved in the future; and yet we may feel that there is solid ground beneath our feet and that we are not likely to find ourselves very far wrong. And there will be at least this advantage that we are not knowingly suppressing anything or keeping back anything, and that we do not claim any monopoly of knowledge, but only ask to have our conclusions believed so far as they can be proved by the ordinary methods of human reason.

Our endeavour will be to carry the reader as far as we have been able to go ourselves; to help him to see what are the questions that arise, and what they look like in relation to such other knowledge as we possess of the times and circumstances to which they belong.

Difference of times.

It is also necessary to remember that in many ways these differ very considerably from our own, and that allowance has to be made for the difference.

Scantiness of our knowledge.

A case in point meets us at the outset. Not many years ago the question was seriously raised whether our Lord Jesus Christ had ever lived at all. The one fact which made such a question possible for a single moment was that the century in which He lived, and in particular the part of the century in which He lived, is a time about which our knowledge of details is very limited. We are apt unconsciously to judge it by the standards of our own day when the knowledge of what is going on all over the world comes pouring in upon us every morning, when the printing presses are sending out newspapers and books in great profusion from almost every country under the sun. Under such conditions as these it would be strange if an important series of events escaped without mention. But the chances of mention must always be in proportion to the amount of literature in which an allusion to the events might be looked for. In view of the conditions which prevail now, it may well be difficult for us to realize what they must have been in a century of which all the literature that has come down to us might be got on to a single small bookshelf, and all the historical literature into quite the half of that. The first century of our era happens to be rather specially meagre in this respect. The century before was much more prolific, and a much larger proportion of the works that it produced has been preserved.

In the non-Christian literature of the first century A.D. there is only one clear and unambiguous reference to the founding of Christianity. But it happens that this one reference is very clear and direct, and satisfactory so far as it goes; and it agrees well with all that we know from Christian sources. The Roman historian Tacitus, in speaking of the great fire at Rome in A.D. 64, says that the suspicion of having caused it was thrown by Nero upon the unpopular sect of Christians; and he adds that Christ, the founder of the sect, had been put to death by the procurator Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberius.

External evidence.

That distinctly corroborates our Christian books, and is enough corroboration for them. But, apart from this, the Christian books bear their own witness to themselves. It is often possible to tell, without going outside it, whether a book is telling a true story or not. The early Epistles of St. Paul are specially of this character. Take, for instance, the two Epistles to the Corinthians. No one could read these without seeing that they describe a bit of real life and very intense life. It is no fancy picture. Some parts of it are rather sordid. The Corinthian converts have just the weaknesses that men lately converted might be expected to have. Among them St. Paul appears as a very earnest shepherd of souls. We see him becoming all things to all men in order that he might by all means save some. He does not in the least gloss over his failures. We see him at work; and we see the immense difficulties of his work (1 Cor.

Internal evidence of St. Paul's Epistles.

2. 3–5; 4. 11–13; 15. 30–32; 2 Cor. 1. 5–10; 4. 7–18; 6. 3–10; 11. 23–33; 12. 20, 21). There can be no doubt that all this is a chapter of real testimony.

If these two Epistles stood alone we could reconstruct a great deal of what Christianity is from them.

What these Epistles imply.

As St. Paul stands behind his converts so the figure of Christ his Master stands behind his own. We see there where he got his motive and his inspiration. Indeed, the whole workings of the apostle's mind are laid bare to us with extraordinary clearness. Even about Christ Himself we learn much; we learn what was the kind of impression that He made upon men (2 Cor. 10. 1); we learn about His crucifixion and the place which it held in the apostolic teaching (1 Cor. 1. 13, 23; 2. 2); we learn in full and close detail about His resurrection (from the famous passage 1 Cor. 15. 1–9). And then we can see how even at this early date—less than thirty years after His death—a whole 'theology', as we should call it, had been built up round His Person (1 Cor. 1. 23 f.; 2. 2; 8. 12; 10. 16 f.; 11. 26; 12. 13; 15. 1–4, 16–19, 22–26, 28, 57; 2 Cor. 3. 17 f.; 4. 5 f., 14; 5. 10, 14 f., 17–21; 13. 4, 14).

We must be thankful for what we have—and it is a great deal to have—that the chief of missionaries, and perhaps the chief of saints, should have left us all this wealth of material from his own hand. How we wish that it had pleased Almighty God that His Blessed Son, the Captain of our Salvation, should

No autograph of the Lord.

have done the same—that He too should have allowed us to converse with Him directly at first hand and not through any medium!

This privilege has not been granted to us; what we know of His words has come to us through a medium; we have not the absolute guarantee of their authenticity that we should have had if they had come to us with His own signature. Still it is much that we should know what we do of His words and of His life through the agency of others.

What are we to think and to say about the Gospels? We no longer take them for infallible records. We no longer think that any record that comes to us at second or third hand can be infallible. But, short of infallibility, a record may come to us with great weight of trustworthiness and authority. And, at least as regards the words of our Lord, the record in the Gospels does come to us with this. The claim may be made for the words, more completely than for the record of the acts, on the one broad and simple ground that the words as they come to us are, speaking roughly and approximately, beyond the reach of invention. In this general sense they hang together so well that we may take them in the main with a high degree of confidence. We cannot say quite so much for the record of the acts. In regard to both of what we believe to be the fundamental documents there is fair reason to connect the documents with an eyewitness—not indeed in the higher degree but in a lower. In any case we have to account for the way in which the name of 'St. Matthew' came to be attached to the First Gospel. And it is not difficult to

construct a theory that will do this. But 'proof' would be too strong a word to use about it. Again there is a certain presumption that the 'young man' mentioned in Mark 14, 51, 52 was St. Mark himself; and a good early tradition connects the origin of this Gospel with the preaching of St. Peter at Rome. There is no reason why we should not accept this tradition. But it would be hazardous to say more than this. And it should further be remembered that those who wrote the Gospels did so, not in the spirit of what we should call critical historians, but with their minds full of the ideas current among the Jews of that generation. Allowance has to be made for this.

The first three Gospels—how related to each other.

It is well to take the first three Gospels together, and separately from the Fourth. The reason for this strikes us at once when we come to examine the relation in which the three Gospels stand to each other. That relation is soon found to be very peculiar. If we take the main body of the narrative as it stands in the Gospel of St. Mark, cutting off the first two chapters of St. Matthew and St. Luke and comparing the rest of the Gospels with each other, we find that there is a great amount of resemblance between them. Beginning (as the Gospel of St. Mark begins) with the account of the ministry of John the Baptist and the Baptism of our Lord, and following the main thread of the narrative to the discovery of the empty tomb (St. Mark 1. 1—16. 8), it appears that nearly the whole of this material is reproduced in the other two Gospels. The

most probable explanation of this is that the writers of those Gospels had before them the actual Gospel of St. Mark and made use of its contents to supply a framework for the story as they tell it themselves. The incidents which they choose to relate are substantially the same; and the order in which they are related is also substantially the same. At least two out of the three Gospels usually go together; in the earlier portion of the history, where St. Matthew somewhat diverges, St. Mark and St. Luke agree, and in the later portion of the history, where St. Luke to some extent diverges, St. Matthew and St. Mark agree. In other words, St. Mark is the connecting link or common foundation of the three Gospels. And the same observation holds good for the substance and wording of the successive sections of narrative that holds good for their order. The larger proportion of the common material is found in St. Mark; where St. Matthew differs, St. Luke very often agrees; and where St. Luke differs, St. Matthew very often agrees.

The inference that we draw from this rather strange relation of the three writings is that the other two evangelists both had access to a Gospel that was practically identical with our St. Mark, and made use of this Gospel independently of each other. In this way almost the whole of the substance of the Second Gospel became incorporated in the First and Third. The writers of those Gospels reproduced, not slavishly but freely, what they had before them in the work of their colleague. St. Mark in this

The fundamental Gospel, St. Mark.

respect comes first in order of time; the other evangelists are both later and base their work upon his.

This seems to be the account that ought to be given of the matter that is common to all three Gospels. It comes in the first instance from our St. Mark. There are some very small differences to be accounted for; but they practically do not affect the main proposition. We observe, however, that each of the other Gospels is considerably longer than St. Mark's. They each contain other matter that has no parallel in his. This non-Marcan matter is found on examination to be of two kinds. In respect to some of it there is substantial agreement between St. Matthew and St. Luke. Speaking generally, the double matter that is found in these two Gospels and not in the third may be said to be mainly of the nature of discourse. It consists for the most part of more or less scattered *Sayings* of our Lord. It contains the nucleus of what we call the Sermon on the Mount, of a considerable portion of the Charge to the Apostles, of the Discourse on John the Baptist and other similar discourses. The only complete incident, in which there is as much of narrative as of discourse, is the Healing of the Centurion's Servant in St. Matt. 8. 8–12 and St. Luke 7. 2–10. The simplest way of explaining this group of facts is to suppose that the First and Third evangelists had access to a second writing that was not used by St. Mark.

The common matter of St. Matthew and St. Luke.

But, besides this double material in the two longer Gospels, each of them has a good deal of matter

peculiar to itself, and therefore presumably the special property of the single writer who has it. The first two chapters of St. Matthew and St. Luke would come under this head. The rest of the peculiar matter in the two Gospels has something of a common character running through it in each case, and may therefore have a common origin, written or oral. St. Luke's peculiar sections seem to have three noteworthy features about them: (1) that they include a number of Parables (the Good Samaritan, the Importunate Friend, the Rich Fool, the Fig Tree, the Prodigal Son, the Unjust Steward, the Rich Man and Lazarus, the Unjust Judge, the Pharisee and the Publican); (2) that not only some parables but several incidents relate specially to Samaritans; (3) that the source from which they are derived seems to have stood in some special connexion with the court of the Herods. The peculiarities in St. Matthew, or at least some of them, have more the look of having been handed down by word of mouth. To these (such as the details in Matt. 27. 19, 51 f., 62–66) a high value cannot be attached. Others (like the sections without parallel in Matt. 25), which appear to rest on a more solid basis, are of deeper import.

The peculiar matter of St. Matthew and St. Luke.

Thus it would seem that our first three Gospels, when analysed into their component parts, are made up of material of three kinds: first there is the Gospel of St. Mark, which at once forms a Gospel to itself and also served as a common basis and framework

Summary analysis.

for St. Matthew and St. Luke; then there is that other primitive writing, which did not enter into the substance of St. Mark, but contributed a number of Sayings sometimes lightly prefaced by narrative by the two Gospels; and, lastly, there is the residuum of unparalleled matter in St. Luke and St. Matthew.

The succession and relative dates of these different strata are important. There can be no doubt that the oldest to be committed to writing was the little discourse-document which has been mentioned second on the list. This was just a brief manual for missionaries, put together in Palestine and taking its shape from its surroundings, laying stress upon the ministry of the Baptist and his relation as forerunner and witness to our Lord because in Palestine his followers were still frequently to be met with. It also gave an outline of the Master's teaching, in contrast to that of the Pharisees and Jewish Rabbis with whom His disciples were often brought into collision. And it further maintained His authority as the expected Messiah and was careful to indicate the many ways in which He fulfilled the prophecies that pointed to Him. A writing like this clearly belongs to the first phase of missionary effort, dating from the time when the disciples were dispersed by the persecution which led to the death of St. Stephen (Acts 8. 1–5). It might be placed approximately in the decade A. D. 40–50, in other words, not more—or hardly more—than from ten to twenty years after the Crucifixion.

The oldest document.

Next in order would come the Gospel of St. Mark. There is good reason to think that this Gospel was written under quite different conditions, not in Palestine among Jews, but among Gentiles at Rome, somewhere about the middle of the decade A. D. 60–70. An express statement has come down to us which is worthy of credence, that St. Mark wrote his Gospel on the basis of the preaching of St. Peter, though not until after St. Peter's death and in any case without direct assistance from him. This Gospel is much more like a Life of our Lord, written for the instruction of those who knew little or nothing about Him. In Palestine where He had worked, and within the first twenty years after His death, this kind of information would not be needed. But at Rome, in the far West, the whole story had to be told. A special stress was laid on the circumstances of the Passion and Resurrection which were leading points in the apostolic teaching. On the other hand it was less necessary to enlarge on the ethical and religious teaching of Christ, which had been already summarily described in writing, and could so be put into the hands of converts.

St. Mark.

The impulse given by the Gospel of St. Mark soon gave rise to more extended works, such as we have specimens of in the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Luke. Both of these might be called expansions of St. Mark by combining with the substance of his Gospel, more or less abbreviated, the main substance of

St. Luke.

the other earlier writing, and any other stray documents or traditions that the later evangelists in the course of their wanderings could find. We may well believe that the additional material in the Gospel of St. Luke was collected by that writer during the two years in which he would seem to have been in the company of St. Paul at Caesarea (Acts 24. 27). Caesarea was the regular seat of the Roman government, and it would be easy to acquire information there about the Herodian dynasty. The Gospel of St. Luke corresponds quite well with what might have been expected from 'the beloved physician', the companion of St. Paul. It is not likely that it was written much later than A.D. 80, and it may perhaps have been written considerably earlier. It is right to mention that in recent years the opinion has gained ground among scholars that the Book of Acts was written about the time when its narrative breaks off (i.e. about the year A.D. 64). A good many questions that may be raised would be satisfactorily answered if that were so; the chief difficulty on the other side is that the antecedent processes involved, especially in the composition and publication of the Gospel of St. Mark, would have to be somewhat compressed and hurried.

St. Matthew.

What the Gospel of St. Luke was for the later first or second generation of Gentile converts, that the Gospel known to us as St. Matthew's would seem to have been for the second generation of Jewish converts—more probably of the Dispersion than of Palestine.

One of the nearer cities of mixed population like Damascus, or possibly the more distant Antioch, would suit the conditions. If the author of the Third Gospel was a cultivated and liberal-minded Gentile, the author of the First Gospel might be described as a liberal-minded Jew who was also well read in the sacred books of his fathers. We might call his Gospel a developed and enlarged edition of the missionary tract which opened the series. The considerations which help us to fix a date for this Gospel are not certain; but they would suggest a date not very long after A. D. 70.

The Record of Words and of Deeds.

Such would seem to be in broad outline, so far as it can be recovered, the kind of history which we may believe lies behind three out of the four books which we call the Gospels. The important question for us to ask is, What sort of guarantee does such a history give for the general truth of the record as it has come down to us? There is a rather different measure for Words and for Deeds. We shall have probability with us if we say that the more important Words of our Lord Jesus Christ became fixed in writing within an interval of hardly more than twenty years after they were spoken, and that the more important of His Deeds were set down within an interval of thirty to forty years after they were done. Different people may estimate differently the exact amount of assurance that this will give them. But we may be thankful on the whole that it is not less than it is.

There is one further consideration that ought to be

mentioned. In all testimony as to facts there is always a double element: there is what the mind receives through the senses and what it gives out from itself. Every statement of fact involves something also of interpretation. The fact must be related to other facts and at the same time to a certain attitude towards those facts. As this varies in different ages so will the resultant conception of the facts vary. Now in the first century of our era the dominant influence in Jewish circles came from the Old Testament; there was an antecedent tendency to think of religious events happening at the time, so far as they were at all parallel to events recorded in the Old Testament, more and more in language modelled upon the Old Testament description. The picture called up by the older narrative presented itself before the mind of the later narrator and helped to shape the forms of his own description. In our present century quite different influences are at work. The scientific habit has become widespread, and it is natural to think of everything that happens as happening in accordance with the laws of science. Hence the difficulty which arises when we have to translate, as it were, a story told under one set of conditions into a language suited to the other set of conditions.

Influence of the Old Testament.

Influences at work in our own day.

The evidence is decisive that wonderful things happened in connexion with the ministry on earth of our Lord Jesus Christ and His disciples. We cannot doubt that spiritual forces were at work in

those days in a higher degree than they have ever been at work either before or since. And yet we are justified in believing that, in the light of the further revelation that God has given us as to His own ways and methods of working, events would present themselves to us in a manner somewhat different from that in which they presented themselves to the forefathers of our faith nearly nineteen hundred years ago. They described things in one way, and we (if we could change places with them) should describe them in another. The events were the same; and in either case their general effect was the same—viz. to bring home to the minds of men that Divine forces were at work in a special and peculiar degree. But we should describe the operation of these forces under certain restrictions and cautions which did not exist for those who originally bore witness to them. We should do our best to tell over again the story of the Gospels; but we should not tell it in quite the same way.

Different attitude towards wonders.

If what has just been said applies to the first three Gospels, it applies still more strongly to the Fourth. The studies of nearly a century have affected the view that is taken of this Gospel. In any case it is considerably later than the other Gospels, and it was written under different conditions. It has become difficult now to think of it as the actual work of the son of Zebedee. There were two Johns who played a prominent part in the Church of the first century,

The Fourth Gospel.

one in the middle, and the other (who may have been a disciple of the first) at the end. This second John was a reverend figure which loomed large in the sight of the generation of Christians who followed him. He would seem to have carried on the tradition of the 'beloved disciple'; but that tradition blended with and was absorbed in thoughts of his own. These thoughts belong, not to the early preaching of the Gospel, but to the time when, largely under the influence of St. Paul, a more mature and penetrating theology was forming. The problem was how to find the deepest and most fitting expression for that which was Divine in the Person of Christ. St. Paul had been in search of this; and he gave the result of his search most fully in the passage Col. 1. 13–20. This passage is the most complete; but it had been led up to by many briefer hints in the earlier Epistles; and the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews had been working upon similar lines in Heb. 1. 2–4. In both these cases the writer had the Life of Christ behind him, and put upon it the best interpretation that he could, suggested by the richest philosophy of his day. The writer of the Fourth Gospel must have done much the same thing; but he reverses the method of presentation. He begins from the philosophy as supplying a key to the Life. He grasps this key with a firm hand, and he uses it in developing his sketch of the Life. The solemn and impressive phrases with which the Gospel opens embody the maximum of truth that the deeper thinkers of that day could understand and assimilate. They culminate

in the announcement that 'the Word (i.e. the expressed Mind of God) became flesh, and tabernacled among us (and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth' (St. John 1. 14). This is the concise formula in which the evangelist describes what we call the Incarnation. To see it in its full setting it should be taken with the verses which precede. The philosophy from which the language is taken is no longer exactly in vogue; and yet to this day the sentences as they follow each other are wonderfully illuminating.[1] We do not go to the Gospel so much for new facts as to help us to find the meaning of the facts. What the writer gives us is a series of pictures—dissolving views, we might call them—as he himself saw them, and taking their colour from his inward vision.

The earlier Gospels are a simpler product, but not so profound. As compared with the Fourth Gospel, they give the portrait of the Christ 'in his (outward) habit as he walked'. It is such a portrait as would serve best to represent Him to us now. They help us to see Him as nearly as we can by the shore of the

The Divine Birth.

[1] To appreciate this, the reader would do well to take the opening verses as they stand in the Poet Laureate's Anthology, *The Spirit of Man*—a book which is now to be found in many households—No. 42, along with the note on the passage and in connexion with the other pieces which precede and follow.

lake, teaching on the hill-side, going about doing good. They too (the earlier Gospels, or at least two out of the three) have their own way of bringing out His Divine nature. The First Gospel and the Third each devote two chapters to the Nativity and Infancy of the Lord. Both stories must be regarded as poetry and not prose.[1] Both are attempts to come a little nearer to the expressing of the inexpressible—the entrance of Deity into manhood. The Matthaean version centres in the prophetic phrase, 'Immanuel, God with us' (Matt. 1. 23). The Lucan version cul-

[1] The psalm that we know as the *Magnificat* is modelled upon the Song of Hannah in 1 Sam. 2. 1–10. It is hardly possible to think of it as an impromptu arising directly out of the events just narrated. The Song of Hannah itself (as may be seen from the reference to 'the king' in 1 Sam. 2. 10) was not originally composed for the place in which it is found. And there is much reason to think that the whole group of Canticles in St. Luke 1, 2, though earlier and more primitive than the rest of the Gospel, was not composed until long after the date with which they are associated. The collection came to St. Luke probably in writing, and gives a beautiful and essentially true picture of the kind of atmosphere and circumstances which surrounded the Birth of our Lord; but it cannot be taken as literally accurate history, as history would be written now. Much the same must be said of the first two chapters of St. Matthew; it is more likely that the contents of these came to the Evangelist orally than in writing. The free introduction of the ministry of angels and of supernatural communications by means of dreams are further indications that these narratives cannot be incorporated with our own beliefs simply as they stand. In idea and spirit they aim at expressing a profound truth; but the forms in which they are worked up belong to that day, and not to ours.

minates in the verse which describes that operation of the Holy Ghost whereby the Holy Thing which was to be born should be called the Son of God (Luke 1. 35).

The Son of God.

If we are asked what warrant we have for our belief in this Divine Birth, our answer must be that our ultimate warrant and our best warrant is that our Lord Jesus Christ believed in it Himself. He has not indeed anywhere defined or described the process by which this Incarnation, or embodying of Godhead in the form of manhood, took place. He speaks of it by the result, which appears in His own consciousness of Sonship. We look on from without, but we are permitted to see what was within. The secret of His being—the central point of consciousness which dominated all His life as man—was His sense of standing in a unique relation to God, the relation which He expressed both to Himself and others by the word 'Son'. We have just said that this sense of Sonship dominated the whole course of His human life. We are given a glimpse of it in the one anecdote that has come down to us from His Childhood (Luke 2. 49). Already as a Boy, going up to worship with His parents in the Temple, He felt that the place where He communed with His Father had a unique claim upon Him. His communing was not intermittent and distant like that of others, but intimate and constant in a supreme degree. We are never left in any doubt that He who trod the soil of Palestine was truly and fully Man. But we are no more left in doubt that He was at the same time and all the

time of the same essence with His Father in heaven. Once and again this pervading consciousness is confirmed by some special revelation, as at the Baptism (St. Mark 1. 11, &c.), at the Transfiguration (Mark 9. 7, &c.); and the same consciousness enters into the last scene and last words of all (St. Luke 23. 46). We are certainly meant to infer that the filial trust of the Son in the Father was unclouded and unbroken from the beginning to the end; even the cry of agony in Mark 15. 34, &c., does not mark any real severance.

In a human life we must needs think of human feeling as uppermost. At the same time, in the Gospels we get the impression that there is always a vaster consciousness waiting to break through. We are always being prepared for the message sent to the disciples through the Magdalen, 'I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and my God and your God' (St. John 20. 17). The immortal Spirit 'cabin'd, cribb'd, confin'd' in its house of clay looks forward to an infinite expansion. While it is in the flesh it is checked and restrained, but a boundless range of activity lies before it.

Another great belief came in to supply matter for the sense of Sonship to work upon. How was the Son of God to employ Himself? What was to be His mission? What use was He to make of this unique endowment of His—so much in Him of God, so much in Him of Man? Could it not be made a blessing to the whole human race? There was no need to seek for an answer; it lay close at hand.

Under the influence of their spiritual leaders there

had grown up among the people a hope which had hardened into an expectation. Some day there would arise a perfect King, a perfect Prophet, a perfect Priest. The common name which embraced these different aspects was the Messiah or Anointed One, i.e. One specially endowed and commissioned by God, One empowered to represent the people before God and God before the people. The Messiah bore the name of Son. Hence it was an easy step that one who felt Himself to be pre-eminently the Son should also feel that He united in His own Person the complex mission of the Messiah. He felt that He was called to do God's work in the world on a scale on which it had never been done before. And—paradox of paradoxes—this work was to be done primarily by a supreme humiliation. The Lord of all the world was to take upon Himself the very extreme of indignity, suffering and death.

The Messiah.

Here was a new element added, a new and unheard-of characteristic of the Messiah. One drawback to the Messianic Idea, as it came down to our Lord with the imprint of the past upon it, was that it was so closely bound up with the fortunes of the Jewish people. Sometimes that people itself seemed to be invested with the character of the Messiah. When that was so, it was the people as triumphant, as leading the way for all other peoples to God. Small and insignificant as the Jewish people was, it

A Jewish title

never lost its high self-consciousness. In spite of all its misfortunes it never let go the proud confidence that it would one day tread upon the necks of its enemies. This confidence repeatedly inspired the fierce insurrections in which it turned round upon its oppressors. The first two centuries of our era are full of them.

This was just the time when the Christian Messiah was born, and lived and died. But from the first and always, He cut Himself off from this side of the Jewish expectation. He in fact gave it an altogether different turn. In a sense Jesus of Nazareth was the Jews' Messiah; but He was the Jews' Messiah with a large slice of His characteristics taken out and a wholly different character substituted for them. This explains why it is that there should be so much controversy as to the Messiahship of Jesus even to the present day. In one sense He was the Messiah because He inherited so much that was most essential in the functions and vocation of the Messiah. But in another sense He held aloof from that which the Jews themselves regarded as most distinctive of the Messiah.

but with a new sense.

This ambiguity called for a new name. And our Lord Himself, while He accepted the designation of Messiah, preferred to use another name. It was not wholly new. It was a recognized, though subordinate, synonym for the Messiah. Our Lord rarely spoke of Himself as the Messiah. And, while He

The Son of Man.

often spoke of God as 'My Father', He would also seem to have avoided referring to Himself as 'Son of God'. The title that He preferred to use was 'Son of Man'. This title, in the original Greek, is rather irregular and peculiar in its form. But there can be little doubt that it was the favourite name by which our Lord spoke of Himself. And the reason evidently was because it brought out and emphasized that aspect of His character and mission which was new and most clearly distinguished Him from the Messiah of the Jews' expectation. The name Son of Man laid stress upon all that He had in common with man. 'He made Himself of no reputation.' So far from making claims, He rather suppressed them. He was content to go through life as a homeless wanderer, mingling chiefly with the common people, and rather courting hardship and suffering than avoiding it. He did this because 'it behoved him in all things to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people' (Heb. 2. 17). This is only a more theological expression for the words of the Gospel: 'the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many' (St. Mark 10. 45).

This changed emphasis in the idea of the Messiah goes far to explain and to set in its right place what may be called the latest phase in the study and criticism of the Gospels. For some time

past this phase has seemed to have a rather unsettling effect; but the excitement which it caused at first is now subsiding, and—as on so many previous occasions—when the balance of results comes to be struck, it is found that new light is thrown upon the facts and we are enabled to see them in juster proportions. Soon after the beginning of this century it came to be observed, more than it had been before, that the language of the Gospels and their chief centre of interest lay more in the future than had been supposed. The treatment of the Gospels had in the past been what is often called 'static': i.e. it took them as something fixed and final; it did not allow for much movement. In the newer view we get this sense of movement, of an onward march of events towards a goal. There is to be a great consummation, the end of one age of the world's order and the beginning of another.

A doctrine of last things.

What about times and seasons? The Lord Himself frankly confessed that He did not know (Mark 13.32). As Son of Man, identified as He was with all that is human, He was in this too made like unto his brethren. He came to earth to fulfil a certain ministry; but the conditions in time and space of the fulfilment of that ministry were kept by the Father in His own power.

When is the end?

There is a great and fundamental distinction between the outward 'shows of the world', which are shifting and variable, and the deep inner realities

which, if they move, move by a law of their own which is not apparent upon the surface. It is like the clouds drifting over a landscape and imparting to it the play of light and shade and the more permanent features of the landscape itself. So in history: there is the region of atmosphere, of fleeting shapes and shadows; then there is also the region of hidden forces, which come not with observation. The 'time-setting' belongs to the first and not to the second, and the mind of man is always seeking to penetrate through the one to the other. It never, in this dispensation, wholly succeeds; but little by little it approaches nearer than before.

A secondary question

It may help us perhaps to think of what is written about the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ on some such lines as these. The subject certainly falls within the limits of that which is shifting and variable, where the

which leaves the bases of morals unchanged.

> '. . . margin fades
> For ever and for ever as we move'.

But beneath this world of passing clouds and fading margins there is another which has to do more with the essence of things that do not pass and fade. The mistake that people have made has been that of confounding the two. When attention was first called to the extent to which the language of the Gospels has been affected by the current doctrine about future things, and especially by the doctrine of

the near approach of the end, some students fell into the error of supposing that the basis of morality must needs be changed. They began to talk about 'interim' morals, which only held good for the interval between the First and the Second Coming supposed to be near at hand. And it is true that there is one passage in the writings of St. Paul (1 Cor. 7. 25–40) in which the apostle does distinctly contemplate a change in the balance of expediency as affecting certain relations of life; but he was far from regarding this as involving any revolution in the fundamental ideas of right and wrong. Perhaps, if St. Paul had been as severely logical as some thinkers aim at being, he might have been equally misled to his own undoing. But it has been well pointed out that the real effect upon him of contemplating the nearness of the end was just the opposite of this. The moral that is drawn at the close of the great chapter 1 Cor. 15, in view of the thought that 'we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed', is to be increased steadiness and concentration: 'Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord'. And this is the general teaching of the New Testament: e.g. 1 Thess. 5. 6; 2 Thess. 3. 11 f.; 1 Pet. 4. 7–9; 2 Pet. 3. 11–13. It is characteristic of the new heavens and new earth that 'therein dwelleth righteousness' (2 Pet. 3. 13), and that everything that runs counter to righteousness is severely excluded (Rev. 21. 7 f., 27; 22. 14 f.). If

such was the goal, such was bound to be also the way to the goal, whether short or long. At no point or period of time could there be any weakening or suspension, but only an intensification, of ordinary morals.

The distinctive note of Christianity.

And yet Christianity has its own special note. When the Lord Jesus Christ announced that the Kingdom of God was at hand, and when He taught His disciples to pray that the Kingdom of God might come, He was careful to explain what He meant. He let it be understood that He was not content with the current conception of the Kingdom. He was not come to relax the current ideal, but rather to strengthen and deepen it (St. Matt. 5. 17–20); the righteousness of His disciples was worthless if it did not exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees, the recognized religious leaders of the day. The first requirement was that the Christian righteousness should be something more real and inward, something more genuinely religious, not an external round of practices and ceremonies, but a movement of the heart and conscience. Where such a movement was at work, the self-complacent attitude of the Pharisee became impossible; it must needs find expression in humility, like that of the Publican in the parable. It involved a change, a change of heart, which could not rest upon the surface. Hence the demand for Repentance and Conversion, the mark of which was to be a spirit like that of a little child. And though, in laying down this as a law for His

followers, the Master was not called upon to include Himself, yet His own character corresponded to it in type. It was not at random that St. Paul appealed to the 'meekness and gentleness of Christ' (2 Cor. 10. 3). The old law left open the rule of retaliation; the new law laid down the command, Love your enemies.

Even at that time there was something in all this of a counsel of perfection. The disciples of Christ were a small minority, who aimed at something higher than the world around them. And to this day the ideal as an ideal abides, though it would necessarily be much longer before what was a law for the Christian could be made a law for all mankind. Hence the difficulty and dilemma in which the Christian is apt to find himself placed. More especially when might is pitted against right he cannot be content to be passive and neutral.

It follows that the Christianity of the Gospels cannot in all respects be consistently carried out so long as the world remains as it is. We must rather think of it as a leaven working and destined to work 'until the whole be leavened'. There is truth in the view that the Christian rule of turning the cheek to the smiter, as at first promulgated and even till the present day, cannot be universally acted upon, but must be taken with a limited application to the method by which Christianity itself is to be spread and propagated. We can only hope that the worst infringements of this rule, like the Great

A leaven at work.

War, may prove the strongest impulse towards its acceptance.

The future great but vague.

Going back to the Person of our Lord Himself: when at last He set His face to go down into the valley of the shadow of death, it is difficult for us to form an exact picture of what was in His mind. We cannot easily distinguish between words that were actually His own and words attributed to Him by His disciples and the Early Church. There was a similar ambiguity in the language of the Church and His disciples. All minds were looking forward—eagerly and hopefully forward—but they did not know which of the roads open before them they should follow. They did not know how far they ought to choose what was called the language of apocalyptic about the Messiah descending upon the clouds of heaven, and how far they ought to throw the stress upon what is described in the Fourth Gospel as the mission of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter. But there was no doubt that something great was coming. There was no doubt that a new era was about to begin. There was something in common between the state of things then and the state of things in respect to the fate of nations now. We also feel that vast changes are before us; but it is beyond our power to guess what form they will take. We may be sure that our Lord knew that the future turned upon Him. But it was another thing to forecast that future in definite terms of concrete history; and we are not in a position to

say how He did so far forecast it in His own mind. No clear saying of His on the subject has come down to us in terms that we can verify as His. We must be content with the same kind of vague and cloudy outlook of which we have just spoken; but the essential point in our own outlook, as in so much as we are able to reconstruct of His own words, is that whatever the future had in store would certainly centre in Him.

The Resurrection.

The crisis came. The Son of Man died, by voluntary submission, upon the cross. It was the last and crowning evidence of His complete and absolute self-surrender to the will of the Father. For the moment it seemed as though His mission had failed. His disciples were scattered or in hiding. His work seemed brought to naught. He Himself slumbered in the grave. And then, suddenly, all was changed. Not as in one form of the tradition (St. Matt. 28. 2–4) by any great earthquake and dazzling apparition from heaven, but in the quietest of ways; now here and now there; first one individual or small group and then another found the Master they had lost in their midst or at their side. And similar experiences were repeated more than once over some time.

It is a very subordinate question to ask 'In what body did He come?' Different conceptions of resurrection and the resurrection-body were current in the apostolic age; and we can afford to leave this question unanswered. What is really important for us to grasp is that the belief in the Resurrection was

no mere imagination of excited minds but an epoch-making Divine act, the assurance of triumph over death: 'I am he that liveth, and was dead: and behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen, and have the keys of hell and of death' (Rev. 1. 18).'

The Ascension.

In the Old Testament period the idea had grown up that an eminent saint or man of God ought not to die the death of all men but that God would in some special and direct way take him to Himself. The oldest example is that of Enoch: 'Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him' (Gen. 5. 24); the most conspicuous, the assumption of Elijah in 2 Kings 2. These models shaped the outward form of the accounts (confined to the Lucan writings) of the removal of the Lord Jesus Christ from the earth. But the interior truth for which they stood was the final Return of the Son to the Father.

THE ACTS AND THE EPISTLES

(C. W. EMMET.)

THE books of the New Testament were all written for some purpose of the moment with no thought of literary effect or long survival. It has come about that they have been collected together and form the most widely read and the most sacred volume in the world. The fact of their apparently accidental origin does not in any way lessen their value. It is, on the contrary, of great significance, since the estimate in which they have come to be held is directly due not to any deliberate intention but to the instinctive verdict of the religious consciousness of the Christian world. Here, it has been felt, are writings which, whatever the purpose of their authors, whatever the absence of literary form, are in fact the classical expression of Christian faith and aspiration. But, on the other hand, it does mean that they cannot be fully understood unless we think ourselves back into the circumstances and mental atmosphere of the age in which they arose. We must constantly ask ourselves what the writers meant to convey, what were they

The importance of understanding the Background.

understood to mean, why did they write, what were the actual problems and difficulties which they had in mind—in a word, what is their background.

This is perhaps even more necessary in the case of the Epistles than with the Gospels. For the Epistles are letters, real letters. We must not indeed exaggerate and regard them as hastily written on the spur of the moment with the idea they should be cast into the fire as soon as read. The letter was in antiquity a recognized means of conveying ideas to a large circle in a way which should not be so formal or literary as a book. But with regard to the Epistles of the New Testament, the important point for our purpose is that not only were they written at a particular period of the world's thought, using the language and ideas proper to that period, but that they were addressed to particular circles, dealing with the perplexities and circumstances of those circles. Much of the difficulty we find in understanding some parts of the Pauline Epistles arises from the fact that we do not now know what these circumstances were. St. Paul knew, and his readers knew, and therefore he took them for granted, just as in correspondence with our friends we refer casually to events with which we and they are familiar, or to points arising out of previous letters. The casual reader picking up the letter cannot always understand it because he has not the key. We often find this in the published correspondence of famous men in spite of a certain

The Letters of the New Testament.

amount of explanatory letter-press. With regard to the correspondence of St. Paul we have no contemporary explanations. We are listening to a conversation in which we only hear what is said at one end of the telephone, and we have to guess at what is said on the other side.

Sometimes this matters comparatively little. The little letter to Philemon explains itself sufficiently for our purpose, though we should give much to know the account Onesimus had given to St. Paul of the reasons for his running away, and perhaps still more for a possible answer from Philemon giving his version. A great part of 1 Corinthians consists of answers to a series of questions submitted to St. Paul from Corinth. We can see fairly well what they were. Ought the Christian to marry (1 Cor. 7. 1)? Might he eat food that had been offered in an idol temple (8. 1)? What were the most important spiritual gifts (12. 1)? Was it true that, though Christ had been raised from the dead, we should not be raised (15. 12)?

On the other hand, a great deal of 2 Corinthians must always remain obscure because St. Paul is referring to a series of previous letters, messages, conversations, and events to which we have lost the key. Again, in Galatians, Romans, and parts of Philippians he is constantly taking up and answering the arguments of his Jewish opponents. We cannot always be sure what it was they had said, and for that reason we cannot always be sure of the exact

point of St. Paul's arguments in reply. In the case of the Epistle to the Hebrews we do not even know who the writer was, what readers he was addressing, where they lived, or what was the precise nature of the backsliding to which they were liable. We are almost equally ignorant in the case of most of the 'catholic Epistles' (the name given to the Epistles of James, Peter, Jude, and John), but this does not matter quite so much since, though they were probably all intended for a particular circle of readers, they do not deal quite so directly with their special circumstances.

It is therefore more than ordinarily desirable that we should get to know as much as we can of 'the background of the New Testament'.

The beginnings of Christianity.

There is no doubt that most of us would find it very difficult to sketch the outline of the first two generations of Christianity and to fit the various books of the New Testament into their appropriate place. The reason lies both in the scanty nature of our material and in the difficulty of dating and placing even what we have. Outside the New Testament there is very little which bears on the history of the Church, and the New Testament itself consists, as we have seen, of occasional writings. Putting aside the Gospels, the only exception is the Acts of the Apostles, and this is very far from being a formal or complete history. So far from its being an account of the Apostles in general, it only tells us in any detail of the doings

of St. Paul, and to a lesser degree of St. Peter. The opening chapters do indeed sketch the history of the first years of the Church, but this is done by a series of more or less disconnected pictures, with no clear dates and many gaps. And when we ask what is the precise evidence for the facts narrated, we are bound to acknowledge that it is not so good as in the second half of the book, where St. Luke speaks from personal or first-hand information. For the earlier part he had to depend either on written sources, of the origin of which we must remain ignorant, or on information gathered some time afterwards from members of the Church, such as Philip the Evangelist (see Acts 21. 8). We must therefore, as in the case of the Gospels, allow for a margin of uncertainty, with a feeling that a modern observer would have narrated the same facts in a somewhat different manner.

Certain points, however, stand out with sufficient clearness. The first impetus to the new religion was given by the belief in the Resurrection coupled with the conviction of the presence of Christ through His Spirit. When we ask, as we are bound to ask, what was the origin and justification of that belief, we cannot say *less* than that it must, as a matter of history and psychology, have had an adequate cause. And we have every reason for the firm conviction that such a cause can only be found in the continued personal activity of the living Christ Himself. Pre-

The Resurrection and the coming of the Spirit.

cisely how this activity was manifested is another question. Even if we should hold that the appearances after the Resurrection were not quite of the quasi-material character often supposed, this need not imply that they were unreal or imaginary. The essential point is that they were not due to the Apostles' desire to believe, or to the unaided workings of their own minds, but were the direct result of the personal action of Him whom the pains of death had not been able to hold. The Master was indeed alive, present with His followers to teach, to inspire, and to work through them. The descent of the Spirit at Pentecost with the power of convincing speech (Acts 2. 37, 4. 33), the gift of miracles wrought in the name of the same Jesus (3. 16, 4. 10), and the new heroism and readiness to suffer (4. 19, 5. 41) were further manifestations of the same fundamental fact. And so, as St. Luke implies when he describes his Gospel as the record of 'all that Jesus *began* both to do and to teach' (Acts 1. 1), the book of Acts with the rest of the New Testament, and indeed the subsequent history of the Church, is simply the story of the continued activity and teaching of the same Jesus. He is working Himself, but He is working with earthen vessels, and so the record is one of mingled success and failure, of truth and error. Yet through it all there is real progress and development, rising by stage to stage to a final victory which is still in the future.

The clearest evidence of such development meets us from the first. Christianity began as a Jewish religion; the Christian Church, as we find it in the opening chapters of Acts, was a kind of party or school within the Jewish Church. It consisted of those who taught that the Messiah had come, that he was none other than Jesus of Nazareth, and that he would shortly return. And so they attended the Temple services, and St. Peter can still hope that the mass of the nation will recognize the awful mistake their leaders have made in crucifying the Messiah and will now accept him (Acts 3. 17 ff.). Gentiles would presumably then come in on the same terms as proselytes. But this stage quickly passed away, apparently largely through the teaching and death of St. Stephen. He boldly proclaimed that the Jewish nation with its special privileges was to be superseded. The logic of facts worked in the same direction. As the Brethren travelled about, whether for business or in flight from their persecutors, they became missionaries, informal and unofficial, but enthusiastic and successful. Many who were not Jews were interested in the new religion, and Antioch came to be a second centre of the faith, giving it its new name of Christian (Acts 11. 19 ff.).

Christianity and Judaism.

These developments brought to the front new problems. The first was the position of the outsider, the Gentile. The difficulty in its original shape does not trouble us to-day, but it runs through a large

part of the New Testament and it must be understood, while the underlying principles are valid and important for every age.

The position of the Gentile.

What we may call the conservative or traditionalist party, including a large number of the original followers of our Lord, held that Gentiles could indeed enter the Kingdom, but they must be circumcised and submit to the yoke of the Law. The incidents of the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch by St. Philip (Acts 8. 26 ff.) and of the Roman Cornelius by St. Peter, under the guidance of a special revelation, represent isolated breaches in this position, but the main change came from the unofficial Antioch missionaries and the work of St. Paul. Gal. 2 probably indicates an informal working arrangement which made the first Missionary journey a possibility. But when the general principle had been conceded, there were still many of the rank and file, especially among those who had been Pharisees, who were not ready to accept it; and there still remained the further question whether, though the Gentile might be saved by Baptism and faith in Christ, he did not remain on a lower level than the Jewish Christian who accepted the whole scheme of God's revelation. Could the Jew compromise his principles by admitting him to full fellowship (Gal. 2. 11 ff.)? Must not the Gentile be content with a kind of 'uncovenanted mercy'? The Council of Acts 15 is the official decision on the whole question.

We do not always realize how strong were the

arguments on the side of the Jewish party, and we therefore fail to do justice to the great service rendered by St. Paul, their chief antagonist. The Judaisers could appeal to the whole tradition of their Church and to its Scriptures. They had a definite revelation and clear commands, regarded as coming directly from God, as to circumcision and the Law. Nowhere was it said that the Jew was ultimately to lose his position of privilege, or that the rites and ceremonies of the old revelation were to be superseded. What is more, if Christ had given hints in this direction, they were at best obscure and ambiguous. It is abundantly clear that the liberal party could not appeal to any definite pronouncement from Him. Let us note in passing the significance of this fact as showing that our Lord did not come to lay down a new code of religious regulations, or to bring a completed and external revelation which was simply to be accepted and preserved unimpaired. Even this crucial question of the position of the Gentiles He left to His Church to think out for itself under the guidance of His Spirit. It did so by appealing to the underlying principles of Christianity, liberty, progress, the equality of all men before God, and above all the actual experience of the working and presence of the Spirit in the lives of the new converts.

This discussion may seem to have led us rather far afield, but it is important as showing us how the New Testament itself justifies us in applying its principles boldly to new circumstances as they arise,

while it is also the key to the understanding of a good deal of its language. The question is the background to the controversial passages of Galatians, and Romans, and to a lesser degree of 1 and 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, and Revelation, while one purpose of Acts is to show the stages by which the Church was led to a right decision on this fundamental point.

Other problems quickly arose from the relation of Christianity to the religions of the Graeco-Roman world. Of these one in particular has lately been the subject of much discussion. When Christianity came to Antioch, even before the period of St. Paul's activity, it found itself at once in an atmosphere where the religions of Greece and Rome had mingled with those of the nearer East. A special feature of the resulting amalgam was what are known as the Mystery Religions. In all of these initiation into rites at once secret and sacred promised new birth, salvation from sin, protection from evil powers, and a blessed immortality after death. They had their sacramental rites, washings with water or with blood, sacred meals, and ceremonies in which the initiate, sometimes at least, shared the experience of a God who was dramatically represented as dying and rising again, and attained to a mystical union with him. Our knowledge of these religions in detail is tantalizingly fragmentary, and there is some uncertainty with regard to the dates at which they flourished, but there is no doubt that in their main

Relation to heathen religions.

features they were widely spread over the Mediterranean world during the first century A. D. There are striking resemblances between them and some of the doctrines of Christianity, coupled with no less striking differences, particularly in the constant stress laid by the latter on morality. There is, however, no evidence that St. Paul 'borrowed' from them in the sense that any of their doctrines were deliberately adopted or imitated. But many of the Gentile converts must have come to Christianity from them. They found in the new faith what they had sought and failed to find, at least in any fullness, in these other rites. But they would not altogether cast off the ideas and way of speaking with which they had been previously familiar. These were in fact part of the religious atmosphere of the world of the day, exactly as Evolution and kindred conceptions now form part of the common heritage even of those who have had no special scientific training. So, for example, in 1 Cor. 10 St. Paul seems to be arguing against a mechanical view of the sacraments which would be readily entertained by those who had come to them from the mysteries. It might be held that they had magical results apart from the faith and conjuration of those who received them. And so the Corinthians are reminded that not all who were 'baptized' in the cloud and in the sea, or who partook of the spiritual meat and drink in the wilderness, found salvation in the promised land. In other cases he does seem himself to adopt certain of the ideas derived from the mysteries and some of their

phraseology, perhaps almost unconsciously, though, as has been already pointed out, there are always differences which leave quite unimpaired the distinctive character of Christianity.

The details and exact extent of any such influence still await full investigation, but it will help us to keep to the right point of view if we bear in mind that the pagan religions at their best were part of the preparation for the Gospel. We can no longer put on one side the Jewish religion as a direct revelation, and on the other the remaining religions and philosophies as mere expressions of human error. Whatever in these was good and true, whatever ideas they had developed of duty or love, whatever longings found expression in them for the divine, were due in the end to the same Spirit who 'spake by the prophets', and to the one God who had always been revealing himself to man in divers measures and in divers ways.[1] And so it was part of the purpose of God that their best features should find their place in the growing faith and be 'baptized into Christianity', though we must also allow that from time to time they brought in other elements which have not been an unmixed gain.

To pass to matters of secular history, the whole

[1] Though this truth has sometimes been forgotten, it has been constantly taught by much of the best Christian theology. Justin Martyr insisted that the 'Logos', or Word, was in Socrates and Plato and the wisest of the heathen thinkers before Christ, and the Alexandrian school of Clement and Origen emphasized the same point of view.

world with which we come in contact in the New Testament was part of the Roman Empire. This had established a very real 'Roman peace', by which law and order were secured, and intercourse, commerce, travel, and exchange of ideas were easy. It has been said that it was then safer and quicker to travel in Asia Minor, at least along the main roads, than in any subsequent period until the coming of the railway. Further, this world was held together by a common language. It is true that in a moment of excitement the Lycaonians revert to their own patois, as might the Welsh under similar circumstances (Acts 14), but Greek in a popular and colloquial form was understood by practically all except quite country people. The missionary could speak in Greek wherever he went; whether he wrote to Palestine, to Galatia, to Greece itself, or even to Rome, Greek was the common means of communication. Here was a 'gift of tongues' which made possible the spread of the Gospel and the writing of the New Testament.

The Roman Empire and the common language.

It is worth noting, especially at the present time, one of the results of those historical conditions. The difficult and anxious problems connected with war, nationality, and patriotism did not exist for the New Testament age. Independent nationalities in the modern sense were impossible under the Roman Empire. The last thing Christianity wished to encourage was any desperate attempt on the part of

Nationality and war.

the Jew to recover his independence by the sword. The Christian of Corinth was not called on to consider what was his duty to his fellow-Christian of Ephesus in the case of war between the two, since any such event was outside the range of practical politics. Hence the silence of the New Testament on those problems which vex us so much to-day. We must not therefore expect to find in its pages any direct answer to them; we must be ready to apply the principles of Christ under the leading of His present Spirit, precisely as the early Church applied those principles to the problems of their own age.

Persecution.

The time was to come before long, and indeed we have reached it in the later books of the New Testament, when this widespread secular power was to be the persecutor of the Faith. But at first it was not so. It was rather the impartial guardian of order which stood between the Christian and his Jewish opponent. In 2 Thessalonians, one of the earliest of the Epistles, it is the power which 'letteth', or hinders, the manifestation of lawlessness. St. Paul, himself a Roman citizen, regularly speaks with respect of the established authority of the State (Rom. 13. 1), and he is followed by St. Peter (1 Peter 2. 13), though in this Epistle persecution has reached the stage where it is dangerous to bear the name of Christian. One of the leading ideas of Acts is to show the impartiality and friendliness of the Roman authorities in contrast to the unrelenting hostility of the Jews; so far as its story goes, nowhere is

St. Paul, or Christianity, condemned by the Roman. The book was probably written at a time when this attitude had given way to one of persecution, and it may have been intended as a kind of 'apology', reminding the Roman world of its earlier and fairer point of view. On the other hand, in Revelation the Roman Empire has become the godless 'Babylon', drunk with the blood of the Saints, prepared for war to the uttermost, and doomed to speedy and complete destruction. We have here a later stage in the relation of the Church to the civil power.

The work of St. Paul.

With regard to the story of the spread of Christianity, our knowledge, as has been already pointed out, is disappointingly small. We have one or two pictures of the early activity of Philip (Acts 8) and St. Peter (Acts 9. 32 ff., 10, 12). Then the interest is centred on St. Paul (Acts 9, 11. 32 ff., 13 ff.). We cannot here attempt any sketch of his career. His conversion may be understood as a great inward spiritual experience; it marked the close of a period in which he had been 'kicking against the pricks', influenced in part, at least, by the questionings aroused by the teaching and example of St. Stephen. He saw the risen Lord, as the disciples had seen Him (1 Cor. 15. 8). The Jesus whom he had believed to be an impostor, executed according to due sentence of the law, was alive and claimed his whole allegiance and devotion. The importance of his work lies in the fact that, accepting Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah, he grasped the universality of Christianity, and, on

the basis of the religious experience of himself and his converts, brought out explicitly what was involved in it as a religion of redemption and new life. As a missionary he 'thought imperially'; he realized the importance as strategic centres of the great towns lying on the main roads of communication, and pressed on from one to the other through Asia Minor, and then through Greece, always with the ultimate objective of Rome before him. Many hints, both in the Acts and the Epistles, become luminous so soon as this is understood (Acts 19. 21, Rom. 15. 23). He actually reached Rome as a prisoner, and at this point the story of Acts breaks off abruptly, though with a note of triumph, 'preaching the Kingdom of God . . . with all confidence, no man forbidding him'. Almost certainly he was released, though our knowledge of what happened afterwards is almost entirely derived from hints in the Pastoral Epistles.

The writings of St. Paul.

A large part of the New Testament consists of letters written by St. Paul; it was in fact in early times divided into the Gospels and 'the Apostle'. They fall into four well-marked groups:

(1) 1 and 2 Thess. These belong to the second missionary journey, and show us St. Paul's missionary teaching in a simple form, untroubled by serious controversies. He insists on the Resurrection and the nearness of the second coming, and exhorts his converts to endurance under persecution and to an unflinching opposition to

the gross sins of the heathen world in which they live.

(2) Galatians, 1 and 2 Cor., and Romans. Of these the last three belong to the third journey, and the majority of scholars date Galatians from the same period, though the present writer with some confidence ascribes it to the period covered by Acts 15. 1 (i. e. the close of the first journey). In this case it becomes the earliest of the Pauline Epistles. But on either view, in subject it goes with the second group. Here St. Paul is occupied with the conflict between Christianity and the Law. He brings out the supreme significance of the death of Christ, while in 1 and 2 Corinthians we realize the various problems of faith and practice which arose in the primitive Churches. They are a warning against attributing an imaginary perfection to early Christianity.

(3) Philippians, Colossians and Philemon, and Ephesians. These are known as 'the Epistles of the captivity', and probably belong to the time when St. Paul was in prison in Rome. In these the main themes are the Person of Christ in relation to the universe of things visible and invisible, and the Church as His Body. At the same time great stress is laid on the conduct of its members in the social relationships of life.

(4) 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, or the 'Pastoral Epistles', were apparently written after his release. They are addressed not to the Churches but to Timothy and Titus as their overseers, and are

concerned with the duties of ministers (or 'pastors'), with questions of organization, and with the reply to be made to various types of false teaching.

The authorship of all these Epistles is not quite equally certain. There is a solid core of practically undisputed letters in 1 Thess., Gal., 1 and 2 Cor., and Romans, nor is there any serious doubt with regard to 2 Thess., Philippians, Col., and Philemon, though Ephesians is not quite certain. The Pastoral Epistles represent a problem which is not yet fully solved. There are certainly Pauline touches and fragments of genuine biography. But the language is distinctly different from that of the undisputed Epistles, characteristic ideas are absent, and the stage of Church life implied perhaps points to a later date. On the other hand, none of the attempts to disentangle an original Pauline nucleus are very convincing. The question must be left open, with the reminder that these Epistles can only be used as authorities for the life and teaching of St. Paul with some reserve.

The Twelve together with other missionaries must have been no less active than St. Paul, but no record has survived of their doings. Towards the close of the first century we catch glimpses of the aged Presbyter, John, at Ephesus, and round him centres the group of writings known as 'Johannine'. The Fourth Gospel has been already discussed;[1] the three Epistles of John belong to it in thought and theology, and

Other books of the New Testament.

[1] See p. 18.

probably also in authorship. The problem offered by Revelation is still unsolved; it is safest to regard it as a document coming from the same Ephesian circle. It stands alone in the New Testament as an example of what is called 'apocalyptic literature', or books dealing with the future, and especially the end of all things, in the form of symbolic visions (cp. Daniel in the Old Testament). Its leading idea is the triumph of Christ and His Church over the persecuting Babylon, and the future reward of the martyrs and Saints. It is a mistake to press its varied figures and images too closely as pictures of the other world, and still more to look in it for cryptic predictions of historical events.

The remaining writings of the New Testament may be looked at as illustrations of the varied missionary activity of the first century. Hebrews stands alone; it has points of contact with the letters of St. Paul on the one hand and with the Alexandrian school of Philo on the other. The belief that it was written by St. Paul is almost universally abandoned, and both the author and the destination remain unknown. James, whether its date be early or late, represents a Jewish and practical form of Christianity reminding us of the prophets with their insistence on social ethics; 1 Peter is Pauline in tone, though with significant differences. Jude and 2 Peter are protests against types of false teaching, and embody many of the apocalyptic ideas of which Revelation is the supreme type.

With regard to this group of books the same

question arises, as with some of the Pauline Epistles, Were they actually composed by the writers whose names they bear? The answer in each case depends on indications of date and of general probability, estimated on the principles of literary criticism. It is, for example, very difficult to suppose that 2 Peter was written by the Apostle. It uses the Epistle of Jude and refers to the Pauline Epistles in a way which the Apostle would hardly have done; these features, together with the general point of view, point to a date after his death, and the style and language are very unlike the first Epistle. Further, it is very little quoted by early Christian writers and grave doubts were soon felt as to its authorship. This is merely an illustration of the sort of lines on which such questions must be argued. It would be impossible here to go into each case in detail, but a few general remarks may help to give the right point of view. In modern times great importance is attached to questions of authorship, whether of books or of speeches. We like to know that we have the exact words of the speaker, and an historical writer is expected to show clearly whether he is quoting literally or merely putting words into the mouth of another as a dramatist or writer of fiction might do. To mislead in this respect is regarded as a grave fault. But both among the Jews and among the Classical writers of Greece and Rome the case was quite different. It was usual to compose speeches which were put into the mouth of historical characters. Sometimes

The question of authorship.

they were expansions of some actual record of what they had said; at others they were free compositions expressing the kind of arguments or feelings which the writer considered to be appropriate. Thucydides, who is regarded as standing in the front rank of historians, explains this perfectly clearly: 'I have put into the mouth of each speaker the sentiments proper to the occasion, expressed as I thought he would be likely to express them, while at the same time I endeavoured, as nearly as I could, to give the general purport of what was actually said.'

Again there was a tendency to group writings, of which the authorship might be unknown, round some well-known name, ascribing them, e.g., to Plato or Aristotle. Or, with more justification, a pupil would expand notes of lectures or speeches, or a later disciple would attribute his own ideas to his master, as expressing his mind and the spirit of his teaching. We have numerous examples of all this both in Classical literature and in the Old Testament and Apocrypha.[1] The custom was not due to any intention to deceive, but rather to genuine admiration and self-effacement. In the case of the New Testament books we should not deny the supposed authorship without good grounds, but it will be seen from what has been said that the alternative 'either this must have been written by the man whose name it bears, or it is a deliberate forgery' is really out of place. We remember too

[1] The Apocalyptic books which are regularly ascribed to some great one of the distant past, such as Enoch or Esdras, rest on a different principle.

that in the last resort we value the New Testament on account of the inherent truth of its teaching and not because of the particular names it bears.

The experience of Christ as Lord.

We see then from many points of view that it is a mistake to look at the New Testament as though it were a formal handbook of systematic theology. None the less it is by far the most important document of Christianity. It shows us the new religion in its earliest growth. The centre of that growth is the relation of the believer to Christ, and in the background stands a fresh and vital religious experience. Both in common worship and in the experience of the individual He was felt to be present and active as the 'Lord'. This is indeed His distinctive title. He is set over against the 'lords many' of the Graeco-Roman world, whether the deified Emperor or the divine beings of the Mystery Religions. In this title a means was found of meeting the outstanding problem of early Christianity and indeed of all Christian thought. The unity of God must be safeguarded (to the pious Jew it was axiomatic), and Christ was realized as having the value of God, as His supreme revelation. He could indeed be given no lesser place. So He is the Lord, the Son of God, the image or revelation of God, the Logos or Word, as well as the Christ or the Messiah. The Holy Spirit too is gradually distinguished from Him, though in St. Paul the distinction is not always clear; God is felt to be working in man and in the Church in a way which is not quite identical with the working

of the historic Christ. And so under the pressure of actually felt experience we trace the beginnings of that doctrine of the Trinity which was afterwards to be clearly formulated. But in the New Testament the two things—the oneness of God and the Divine nature of Christ and the Spirit—simply stand side by side with no attempt to unravel the philosophical and metaphysical problems involved.

The work of Christ, especially in St. Paul, is almost exclusively connected with His death and resurrection, which are both the central facts of the world's history and also mystical experiences to be reproduced in the life of the believer; with a few exceptions the stress we rightly lay on His general example and ethical teaching is curiously lacking. Here too the starting-point is the fact rather than the 'how' of the fact. The New Testament contains all the elements from which later doctrines of the Atonement were developed, but they are hinted at rather than explicitly stated. St. Paul's doctrine of faith and justification works up to his great conception of the mystical union of the believer with Christ. And we shall find it a great help in all discussions on this subject if we hold fast to the fundamental principle that what Christ has done for us can never in the end be separated from what He does in us or from what the Christian does in Him.

The development of theology.

When we pass to later books of the New Testament, such as Colossians or Ephesians, we find an increasing stress on the corporate conception

of the Church. The believer is a member of the fellowship of the redeemed; he draws his life from Christ through the society and has special duties towards his fellow-members. The very purpose of God looks not so much to the perfecting of each individual in himself as to the growth of the society as a whole. This is the real Kingdom of God, all-embracing and extending after death—'that they without us should not be made perfect'.

Something has already been said of the way in which the original expectation of an early return of Christ passed into a truer and deeper conception of His work and constantly repeated coming. This changed view is most clearly expressed in the later Epistles of St. Paul and in the Gospel and Epistles of St. John, with their emphasis on the abiding presence of Christ through His Spirit and on 'eternal life' as something which begins now and is independent of death.

The New Testament then is the supreme illustration of the principle 'I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now; howbeit, when he the Spirit of truth is come, he shall guide you into all the truth'. But in using the New Testament we must not tacitly assume that this promise ceased to hold good after the first century. It is a promise both to the Church and to the individual for all time. The lines of development are marked out in the New Testament and we use it as a standard or canon by which we may test fresh developments. But all through our aim is so to train and open our ears by

its use that we too may 'hear what the Spirit saith to the Churches'.

While, however, we recognize to the full the importance of the New Testament as marking out the lines which were to be followed by later Christian thought and theology, we must never forget that to the individual its primary purpose is to be a means of personal religion. We shall never get all we might from it so long as we think of it as merely telling us truths *about* God. It was the work of men who had come to know God through Christ; as we read it, we may not only see what they found or thought; we may share their discovery and experience. Following in their footsteps and guided by what they have told us of that experience, we can ourselves enter into that personal fellowship with God and Christ which is at the heart of Christianity under all the varieties of its doctrine and organization. These things are written that we too may have life through His name, and this is life eternal that we may come to know Him, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent.

APPROXIMATE CHRONOLOGY

W. S.

THE main object of this sketch is to give a general idea of the relation of the literature to the events, and so of the kind of evidence on which our knowledge of primitive Christian History rests.

It is not possible to date many of the events exactly. At the same time the researches of the last fifty years enable us to put approximate dates to most of them. The Table given below represents the rough results of a collation of the evidence and the views of modern scholars. Where the dating is given without qualification or comment it may be assumed that it is not likely to be wrong by more than a year or two on one side or the other. Where the margin of error exceeds five years the date is always given with a query (?).

Events are printed in ordinary type, literature in italics, Roman emperors in small capitals. In one or two cases where an alternative view to that preferred is held with substantial support, it is given in square brackets.

AUGUSTUS, emperor of Rome . . .	27 B.C.–14 A.D.
Herod the Great, king of Judaea . . .	37–4 B.C.
BIRTH OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST .	8–6 B.C.
Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee . .	4 B.C.–39 A.D.
TIBERIUS, emperor	14–37 A.D.

Pontius Pilate, Roman governor of Judaea	26–36 A.D
PUBLIC MINISTRY OF CHRIST	27–29
THE CRUCIFIXION AND RESURRECTION	29
CALIGULA, emperor	37–41
St. Paul at Damascus (Acts 9. 19–25; 2 Cor. 11. 32, 33)	37–40
Herod Agrippa I, king of Judaea	41–44
Oldest Christian writing, a collection chiefly of Sayings of our Lord, attributed to St. Matthew	40–50?
CLAUDIUS, emperor	41–54
First draft of St. Luke 1, 2	50?
Conference at Jerusalem (Acts 15) [*Gal.*]	49–50
St. Paul at Corinth for more than eighteen months (Acts 18. 1, 11, 18)	50–52
Earliest group of Epistles: 1, 2 Thess.	49–52
NERO, emperor	54–68
St. Paul at Ephesus for three years (Acts 19. 8, 10; 20. 31)	52–55
Second group of Epp.: [*Gal.*], *1, 2 Cor., Rom.*	55–56
St. Paul's arrest at Jerusalem	56
St. Paul at Rome (Acts 28. 16)	59–61
Third group of Epp.: Phil., Col., Eph., Philem.	60–61
Pastoral Epp. (*1, 2 Tim., Tit.*)	61–64?
Ep. of St. James	60?
1 St. Peter	62?
Burning of Rome and Neronian Persecution	64
Death of St. Paul	64–65
Death of St. Peter	64–65
[Harnack's date for *St. Mark*, 60; and *Acts*, 62]	
Gosp. of St. Mark	65
Ep. to Heb.	65?
Civil Wars: GALBA, OTHO, VITELLIUS	68–69
Alternative date for letters to seven churches in *Rev. 2, 3.*	69?
VESPASIAN, emperor	69–79
Siege and Fall of Jerusalem	70

St. Matthew	70 A. D.
St. Luke	75–78?
Acts	78–80?
TITUS, emperor	79–81
DOMITIAN, emperor	81–96
Johannine writings:	90?
Gosp. and Epp.	90?
Rev. of St. John	96
NERVA, emperor	96–98
TRAJAN, emperor	98–117
St. Jude	?
2 St. Peter	?

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