

II.

THE GOSPEL OF MARK : ITS LITERARY ORIGINALITY.

*Marcus . . . Euangelium . . . scripsit, ostendens in eo quid et
generi suo deberit et Christo.*

ANY estimate of the effect of the Gospels upon the early Church and upon later ages must almost inevitably begin with a statement about the date, literary origin, and historical value of the Gospels; and these are questions of such importance and complexity that a statement of conclusions alone would not carry sufficient weight. It will be necessary, therefore, first to consider the Gospels at some length as literary and historical documents, and afterwards, with the help of the results thus attained, to examine their influence upon the Church and their place in the development of the Christian religion.

The four Gospels are not by any means four independent literary works. The Fourth Gospel is most conveniently treated apart. But the three

THE GOSPEL HISTORY

Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, and Luke, obviously have something in common: they must either copy one another or make use of a common source. The first question is whether this source or sources be written or oral. All kinds of answers have been given in the past, but I have no doubt at all which answer is correct. I am fully convinced that the main common source of the Synoptic Gospels was a single written document.

In the first place, the common matter is not mere floating tradition, the property of all the Christian community. Had it been this, I cannot but think that the incidents identically related by Matthew, Mark, and Luke, would have been to a larger extent the critical points of the Ministry, and not a capricious selection of anecdotes. The story of the Resurrection, the words from the Cross, the narrative of the Last Supper,—in these we might have expected all our authorities to agree, even in detail; but they do not agree. On the other hand, the parenthesis which explains that Jesus turned from addressing the Pharisees to say to the sick of the palsy, 'Arise,' is found in all three Synoptic Gospels; all three insert the statement concerning Herod's alarm about Jesus at the same point, and Matthew and Mark go on to

ONE WRITTEN COMMON SOURCE

relate, so to speak in a footnote, the circumstances of John the Baptist's murder; all three inform us that the Pharisees, when they asked about the tribute-money, began by assuring our Lord that He taught the way of God in truth. These points are matters of secondary detail; an oral teaching or a catechetical tradition which contained them must be held to have had singular consistency. And if our Evangelists had worked upon a fixed oral tradition of this definite sort, I cannot imagine how they dared to take such liberties with it. An oral tradition which is definite is authoritative: can we conceive of an oral tradition which accurately distinguishes between the *baskets* (κόφιναι) of fragments taken up after the feeding of the 5000, and the *creels* (σφυρίδες) taken up after feeding the 4000, but which left the details of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection vague?

A written source, on the other hand, is perfectly definite, but not necessarily authoritative. When the Evangelists simply copy their common source they agree, whether the point of agreement be important or unimportant, while at the same time the existence of the written document did not prevent the use of other documents or of any oral information which might come to hand. There was nothing in the nature of things to