

St. James was the standard of orthodoxy. The numerous oral traditions of the Founder were strongest there. It was the place to which Christians everywhere turned as their home. But now political evils and insurrections scattered them and rendered it dangerous for delegates from distant churches to visit their "mother dear, Jerusalem."

The other and great reason was that the Apostles and others who had been "eyewitnesses of these things from the beginning" were one by one falling by the way.

The first of the books to be written was the Gospel by St. Mark and it came about in this way. Papias, the Bishop of Hierapolis, who lived in the second century, tells us about it. Papias was a disciple of Polycarp, who was a disciple of St. John. He says that he himself knew St. John well and received the information from him. The information was this:

When St. Peter started on his missionary expedition he was ignorant of the Latin language; but he had to work among Latin-speaking people. He therefore called in Mark, whose mother tongue it was, to go with him as an interpreter. So Mark went with him on his journeys. Time and time again he heard and translated the same story of Christ's life, His words and His works, until he had them fairly learned by heart. After Peter's death, Mark from memory wrote them down for use of the Church in Rome. He made no pretence, Papias says, to arrange the story in the order in which the events occurred, but was only careful to set down as nearly as he could recall them the very words that Peter had used. This, then, was the first of the books of the New Testament—the "Gospel of St. Mark," so-called, but really the story of Peter, written down by his friend Marcus.

About the same time a persecution arose in Judea which scattered the Church once more. St. Matthew was driven away with the rest. But before going into exile he, being almost the only one surviving who was personally familiar with the facts, wrote down in Hebrew, the Gospel story for the use of those who could not fly with him. The Hebrew copy has been long since lost, but a Greek translation remains.

These two historical attempts seem to have given rise to many ill-advised essays on the part of others to do the same thing. But their so-called "Gospels" do not seem to have ever amounted to much, and in any case were lost hundreds of years ago. St. Luke refers to them rather contemptuously at the beginning of his Gospel:

"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, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the world; 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."

His Gospel was written in Greek, and is by far more full and detailed than either of the others.

Thus in the three great tongues in which the superscription over His head was written, the Gospel was set down in "Hebrew and Greek and Latin."

Next in order of time come the Letters of St. Paul. They are fourteen in number, arranged in our Bible not in the order in which they were written, but in the order of their length, beginning with the longest. The Epistle to the Hebrews was placed last, because there has always been doubt as to whether or not St. Paul wrote it. Each of these Epistles had its own occasion. They were the letters of a Bishop to his clergy, of a pastor to his people, of a friend to friends. Each one had its own special purpose. Sometimes it was to

correct a mistake; sometimes to instruct in doctrine; sometimes to give directions about affairs. It will suffice to examine one or two as samples. Let us take the one first written the 1st Epistle to the Thessalonians.

On one of his missionary journeys he visited the city of Thessalonica in Greece, and established a church there. According to his custom, as soon as it was well organized and able to go alone he left them and went on to another place. Many months after he visited them again along with his friend Timothy. Leaving his friend there he himself passed on to Corinth. There Timothy joined him after some time and brought a report of the Church in Thessalonica. In the main he gave a good account of them. They were earnest, active zealous, and, for the most part, set a good example to the people about them. But still there were several things to be regretted. In the first place, the high standard of personal purity which the Apostle had insisted upon seemed to some of them stilted and impossible. They had been reared in a society which looked very lightly upon sins of the flesh. While they gladly embraced the larger hope which the New Revelation brought them, they were inclined to quarrel with some of its restraints.

But another thing disturbed them, and this more than any thing else. Some of the brethren had died since St. Paul's departure. What was to become of them? How were they to be affected by Christ's second coming which they expected almost immediately? Were their friends to forfeit their immortality and their share in His glorious advent by their untimely death? They were very much disturbed, Timothy said.

So the Apostle sat down and wrote them a letter. He begins with what corresponds to "My dear so and so," the way letters have all ways been begun. He assures them how continually he has them always in mind, and how thankful to God he is for such fruit to his labor. Then he proceeds to his main purpose. Above all things he places the virtue of purity. He traces to their source the peculiar temptations by which they are assailed. His language is dignified, but most outspoken. Then as to the other matter which perplexed them, he tells them their trouble is all unnecessary.

He declares on the authority of the Lord Himself that death would not affect their status one way or another; that in the last great day, when the Lord shall come "with the voice of the archangel and the trump of God," the dead in Christ shall rise, and, together with those who remain alive, be caught up to meet Him, and be "forever with the Lord." As to when all this would occur.—well, St. Paul was too sensible a preacher to put dates to his prophecies. He held it to be always imminent, and that the proper attitude was that of sentinels watching against a surprise. There was one passage in his letter, however, which misled the good people of Thessalonica. They inferred from it that the second coming was to be during their own lifetime, and was likely to occur any day. At once they fell into the disorders and extravagances which "Second Adventism" has always produced. Why should they torment themselves, they ask, about the affairs of this world when the other was already in sight? Why should they plant and water when the great Reaper was likely first to gather His harvest? Why should they bring their affairs before distant or provisional when the great assizes of the universe was about to be opened?

When Paul heard of this outbreak of fanaticism and its disastrous practical consequences he sat down again and wrote his 2nd Epistle to the Thessalonians.

In it he tells them how they had misunderstood him before; how that he had not meant to assert either that the Lord would come during their lifetime, or that he would not. The particular day was concealed in order that they might live carefully every day. Then they

read his sober words, and went back to their work and their worship.

These two Epistles may stand as samples of all the rest. Each one had its own reason. The writers did not say to themselves "go to, now, we will write a Bible." They do not seem to have even suspected that they and their circumstances alike were being used by a higher power to write the Book which has moved the enthusiasm, guided the lives, and placed the sorrows of a hundred generations!

It must not be conceived, however, that these various documents came at once into circulation and use. They did not do so for more than a hundred years. The idea of gathering them into a book for a long time did not occur to anybody. Many had been written which were never gathered but have disappeared long ago. The thing depended upon yet was oral instruction. The pamphlets and letters were only supplementary thereto. Each little manuscript was the precious treasure of some particular Church, and was jealously guarded. It was passed about among a few reverent hands, and when it became worn and crossed was locked up among the muniments. To make copies was a tedious and expensive business which few of the poor churches could bear. There was no printing, no paper, no post office! A "Book" was a very different concern from the thing which we call by that name. It was made this way: For paper the writer used little leaves of leather about six inches square. He wrote only on one side of each leaf. He used a pointed stick for a pen. He made no punctuation marks and no breaks between the words. When he had done he took his pile of little leather leaves and gummed them together, the bottom of the first to the top of the second, and so on, making a long strip, six inches wide and from twenty to a hundred feet long, according to the size of the volume. This strip was then fastened at each end to a wooden roller as we mount maps. That was a "book," in Bible times.

Copying was usually done by slaves trained for the purpose, and hired from their owners. A slave who was a good copyist would fetch a very high price, and usually was not for sale. The books so made, if their contents were considerable, were very bulky affairs. So late as the time of Constantine, when fifty copies of the New Testament were made to the imperial order, it required two government wagons with six yoke of oxen each to transport them from Caesarea to Constantinople.

But though the process of copying and collecting the S. S. was long in being completed it was soon begun. In a few cases the writers enjoined that manuscripts should be sent from church to church.

The oldest list extant of the books of the New Testament was made in A. D. 170, and it is incomplete. It includes the 4 Gospels, 13 of St. Paul's Epistles, 2 of St. John St. Jude, and also the name of a book called "the Revelation of St. Peter," but it adds, "Some of our people will not have this book read in church."

But the time came when the Church must decide what books were "sacred" and what ones were not. In the fury of persecution it became the common test of the Christian to try if he would give up his "Scripture" to be burned. Some did so to save their lives, and for this were called by their brethren "traitors!"

Under stress of this peril the question had to be determined what books one might innocently give up, and which ones must be held on to at the cost of his life.

This was finally settled by the Council of Carthage, A. D. 397—three hundred years after the last of them had been written—and from that day until now the Church has never set on question the authenticity of the "New Covenant."

[To be continued.]