

Bretschneider's Probabilities concerning the nature and origin of the Gospels and Epistles of John. This treatise contains the germs of the destructive criticism which have had such fruitful development ever since. The writer asserts that the Gospel was not composed by John nor any other companion of Jesus, but by some one who lived in the second century and used traditions written or unwritten. It has a polemic and apologetic purpose. It was written to refute the errors concerning Christianity which were propagated throughout the Christian world by Jews sent from Jerusalem in the second century. This accounts for the form of the dialogue, for the dogmatic argument, for the anti-Jewish rigour, for the choice of material, for the omissions. After him came Strauss, who, in 1835, published a life of Jesus which produced a panic in the theological world. He held that the Gospels are not historical, but a series of mythical narratives. There is no certain trace of them in their present form until the second century. His criticism was seen to be destructive of the Christian faith, though he had no suspicion that it would have this effect. His conviction was that though the form of the Gospels were shown to be mythical, the truths which they set forth are none the less precious and Divine. Then arose one of the most profound and learned theologians and critics of this century, F. C. Baur. He was gifted with inexhaustible intellectual energy. His industry was amazing. He made a minute study of the extant writings of the second century in order to solve the problem of the origin of the New Testament books. He admitted the authenticity of none but the Epistles to the Romans, Corinthians and Galatians, and also the Apocalypse. He held that there were two parties in the early Church contending for the supremacy. The Jewish Christians maintained that circumcision was essential to salvation, and opposed to them were those who argued that faith alone was necessary. Peter was the leader of the former, Paul of the latter. That such a conflict did rage and imperil the progress and even the very existence of the Church is clear from the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistle to the Galatians. Some of the books of the New Testament were written in support of the Petrine party, some in support of the Pauline party. Others were composed for the purpose of conciliating the two factions. The Gospel of John was written with this end in view about 160 A.D. Through its influence a reconciliation was at last effected.