

CHAPTER II

THE VITAL AGE

WE know how joyful, how rapid, was the spread of the influence of Jesus Christ in the first hundred years after his death. In the teeth of cruel persecution, in spite of slow travel and slow transcription, what Jesus called "the good news" lifted the crippled civilisation of the Latin world, and sent it forward leaping and walking and praising God. There have been many explanations of that first sudden growth and expansion of Christianity and of its subsequent checks and periods of stagnation. All these explanations have probably some truth. It only concerns us here to observe that, as regards the authority on which our faith rests, we have much in common with the Christians of that most vital period. Because the problems of scholars have to-day escaped from the schools and gone abroad, the authority of our sacred writings has become very much what that of the oral and written report was in that most ardent time. We, like the early heathen inquirers, find a tradition of the sayings and actions of "the Lord" which we would fain believe to be historical. If historical,