

third century papyrus, containing part of the first chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel, encourages the hope that the sands of Egypt may yet restore to us manuscripts of earlier date than any now in our hands. And the remarkable collection of "Sayings" ascribed to our Lord, which excited so much interest on its publication in 1897, although it may not rank as an original "source," but must be regarded as a mere compilation made for pious uses, shows that as early as the second century men were interested in grouping together striking words ascribed to the Lord. More important, probably, in its ultimate results than either of these is the discovery of the apocryphal Acts of Paul, which has recently been made. This remarkable work is a product of the second century, and was widely accepted in the third century as a trustworthy narrative. Portions of it had long been in our possession, but we have now recovered the entire work in Coptic. It is very difficult in a book of this sort, in which fact and myth are blended into a picturesque romance, to discriminate at every point between the historical and legendary elements; and it must be confessed to be somewhat startling to find so much in the book that must be untrue. But at least upon one point of historical importance its witness is of value. It relates the return of Paul to Rome, and his martyrdom at the hand of Nero. Hence it affords additional corroboration to the tradition of the Church in two points: (1) that St. Paul was released from his first Roman captivity, and (2) that he was martyred in Rome. It thus supplies a link in the chain of evidence which enables us to defend the Pauline authorship of the Pastoral Epistles.

It is coming to be generally recognised that the first stage in the interpretation of the words of our Lord and of his Apostles must be the determination of what they meant to those who heard them first. And this we can only learn by a study of the contemporary Jewish literature, as revealing Jewish habits of thought on theological subjects. What is the net result of this minute scrutiny of the background of the New Testament upon critical views of the date and authorship of the New Testament books? Instead of attempting an answer of my own to this large question, let me read some words of one of the most distinguished of living critics, Professor Harnack, of Berlin—a scholar