

CORRESPONDENCE.

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THE MAKING OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

No. 2.

To the Editor of the Church Guardian:

SIR,—The account given in the article on the "Making of the New Testament," of the composition and order of publication of the Gospels is certainly not the story of Papias, nor is it borne out by modern criticism. The best authorities agree that not St. Mark, but St. Matthew and St. Luke were written first, about A.D. 63. St. Mark was written later after the martyrdom of St. Peter and St. Paul which took place in A.D. 63. All were written independently of one another, and all before the Fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. This is the conclusion of Professor Salmon in his brilliant and invaluable *Introduction to the New Testament*. The story given in the article, of the Three Gospels being written in Latin, Hebrew and Greek, like the inscription on the cross, is a mere myth. There is not a particle of evidence of any value for St. Mark having been written in Latin. The sense given in the article to the word *interpreter*, when Papias speaks of St. Mark as the *interpreter* of Peter, is certainly wrong. The context shows that he meant that St. Mark by embodying Peter's teaching in his Gospel *interpreted* it to, that is, brought it within the reach of the world at large. "The passage in Papias," says Alf. Thompson's "describes a disciple writing down what his Master preached, and not an interpreter orally translating his words."

There is considerable evidence that St. Matthew wrote his Gospel in Hebrew, but it is not decisive. Dean Alford having at first adopted that view afterwards abandoned it. Professor Salmon, one of the greatest living authorities, writes: "When we examine more closely the evidence for a Hebrew original, we find that it melts away in a wonderful manner." And after sifting it carefully, he pronounces against the Hebrew and in favour of the Greek original. In any case it is certain that whether there was a Hebrew original or not our Greek St. Matthew is not a translation as the article says but an original composition of the Apostle. Our Sunday School children may still be taught with safety that the original texts of the Three Gospels are in our possession.

The main point however is, early circulation. It may be laid down as accepted by all conservative critics that our New Testament, including the Apocalypse but excepting the rest of St. John's writings, was completed and published within forty years of our Lord's Ascension: St. John's more mystical books, before the close of the century taking the place of his own personal authority and teaching, when he was about to depart. The article would have us believe that the Church was for a long period practically without any New Testament. The simple fact is, that while the Church possessed the personal guidance and teaching of the Apostles, to whom our Lord promised the Holy Spirit as their infallible Teacher, she did not need their writings; but that before the Apostles passed away she was put in possession of them.

But the article says "it was generations before the written gospels superseded the old methods of promulgation." Surely there is some confusion of thought here. The written Gospels never superseded the original methods of promulgation. The Church still delivers her message orally, appealing for its confirmation to the Book. The Church, the living living society of living men to which our Lord entrusted His Gospel, never dies, is living still; and, as that ever-living corporation, delivers

orally her testimony to "the faith once for all delivered." But that faith is also enshrined in an inspired Book, of which she is the witness and keeper, and to which the living society ever makes its appeal.

This, however, is not what the article means. It wants to prove that for a long time the Church had oral teaching alone and no book. It says that the N.T. Books "did not come into circulation for more than a hundred years after they were written." And yet Eusebius relates that Christian Missionaries in the reign of Trajan, (A.D. 98 to 117) carried with them and delivered to their converts "the Scripture of the Divine Gospels." This was barely thirty years from the publication of the Three Gospels, and probably within the lifetime of St. John. But we have even earlier evidence than this of their circulation. St. Peter in his Second Epistle refers to St. Paul's writings in a way that proves them to have been in general use even then, that is immediately upon their publication. Indeed St. Paul himself ensured this by requiring his letters to be read publicly, and at least in one case to be sent round from Church to Church. From Clement of Rome's Epistle, which Professor Salmon dates A.D. 96, it is evident that St. Paul's letters were then known and authoritative everywhere.

But there is a more decisive testimony still to the rapid circulation throughout the Church of the N.T. writings immediately upon their publication,—I mean, the *early versions*. Take first the Syriac Version. Of it Canon Westcott says, "The Peshito Syriac version of the separate books of the New Testament Canon was made in Palestine within the Apostolic age; and shortly after these were collected, revised and completed at Edessa."

This version, which remains the N.T. of the Syrian Churches to this day, contained all the Books of our N.T., except 2 and 3 John, 2 Peter, Jude and Apocalypse. Thus, the Syrian Church provided for herself an authorized translation of the New Testament (in use in her religious services within one generation of the writing of the earlier books and within the lifetime of St. John or immediately after his death. How does this agree with the assertion of the article that the N.T. Books "did not come into circulation for more than a hundred years after they were written," and how with the further assertion that "the idea of gathering them into a book did not for a long time occur to any one"?

An argument against early circulation is drawn from the natural impediment then in way. These, however, are much exaggerated. One is the bulk of the books. The writer tells us that so bulky was a New Testament in those days that "when fifty copies of it were made to the imperial order, it required two government wagons with six yoke of oxen each to transport them from Cæsarea to Constantinople." This statement carries absurdity on its very face. The incident referred to is found in Eusebius, and what he does tell us is as follows, which I take from Canon Westcott. One of Constantine's first cares after the foundation of Constantinople was to charge Eusebius with "preparing fifty copies of the Divine Scriptures (the whole Bible, not as the article says the New Testament) written on prepared skins, by the help of skilful artists accurately acquainted with their craft, and magnificently embellished." Orders had been issued to the Governor of the Province to furnish everything required for the work. And authority was given to Eusebius to "employ two public carriages for the speedy conveyal of the Books when finished to the Emperor." Eusebius relates how he at once caused the Books to be written, and "deposited in magnificent caskets" prepared for the safety and honor of the Divine Oracles during their journey, which was made as much as possible a triumphal procession.

How can any conjecture be hazarded respecting the bulk of cheap copies of the New Testa-

ment for ordinary Christians from the story of this princely gift? Mention indeed is made of two public carriages in the Emperor's letter (the "six yoke of oxen" is a purely modern embellishment); and though these were chiefly for display, the magnificent baskets might very well fill them up.

We have, however, the means within easy reach of satisfying ourselves as to the bulk of even these celebrated fifty copies. There is a very high probability that the famous *Codex sinaiticus* was one of those very fifty copies. We have a *fac simile* edition of it in our College Library; the Presbyterian College, Montreal, has also one. Let any person examine one of these copies, and he will easily satisfy himself that not twelve yoke of oxen, but a very light pony carriage could have carried them all.

But "Books then were rare and costly." Well, Canon Westcott in the first edition of his book on the Canon, says something that sounds like this. He says that "the means of intercourse then, compared with to day, were slow and precarious, and the multiplication of manuscripts in remote provinces tedious and costly." But in a later edition, he modifies this view, and adds, "This fact, however, has been frequently exaggerated. The circulation of the N.T. Scriptures was probably far greater than is commonly supposed." For proof he refers to Norton's *Genuineness of the Gospels*. Turning to Norton, we find an extremely interesting discussion of the question. "A common copy of the Gospels," Norton says, "was not a book of any great bulk or expense." As to cost, he quotes Martial as stating the selling price of the First Book of his Epigrams, but a costly edition, at about 72 cents of our money; and of his Thirteenth Book, an ordinary edition, containing about as much matter as our Gospel of St. Matthew, at about seven cents. At that rate, our Four Gospels would have cost in those days about 25 cents, and our whole New Testament about 50 cents. So much for the argument against circulation from bulk and cost.

HENRY ROM.

Bishop's College, 14th Nov. 1889.

SIR,—I beg to suggest to the clergy that they take advantage of the present jubilee season and revival in Church matters to lead their flocks to subscribe for good Church papers, so that each family may be supplied with choice religious reading and well informed as to the great progress of the Church. The following plan was adopted by your correspondent. He preached a sermon to his people urging upon them the duty of taking the *Canadian Church Magazine* and *Mission News* and at least one sound Church paper. About the same time he sent the names of the heads of families in his parish to the Editors of the C.C.M. and M.N., the *Church Guardian*, the *Dominion Churchman*, and the *Living Church*, with the request that specimen copies of each should be sent to each of the addresses furnished by him. There is scarcely a Methodist family which is not supplied with the *Christian Guardian*.

Our Church papers are second to none, and yet comparatively few Churchmen appreciate as they should the privilege of having good religious literature in their homes. Let the clergy do what they can to bring their people to a better mind. The present season of interest and excitement in Church circles is our golden opportunity. Do not let us miss it.

Yours sincerely,
(Toronto Diocese).

PANORMUS.

It has often been said that the chief characteristic of the epitaph is its lack of veracity, but it is perhaps better that it should err on the side of kindness rather than wound the living by a bitter truthfulness, as in the case of an inscription written for the tombstone of a lazy man by one who knew him well, "Asleep (as usual).—*Harper's Magazine*."