

gospels were written by the men whose names are attached to them, rests on the acceptance of that view by Christians of the third and subsequent centuries. But even their verdict was by no means unanimous, credulous and uncritical as they were. Some, we are told, disputed the apostolic authorship of the Fourth Gospel. Dissentients, however, were soon branded as heretics, and for more than a thousand years it was all a man's life was worth to handle a question concerning the authenticity of one of these writings, fairly, fearlessly, and with the single aim of finding out the truth. The general consent of the Church, therefore, is entitled to no weight in this matter.

Thus the case stands as to the four gospels. They are without exception documents written in the second century. That there existed older writings from which these were made, is certain; and the general concurrence of the Synoptics strengthens the opinion that they follow the oldest tradition. The wide divergence of the Fourth Gospel, however, rather weakens this opinion without establishing confidence in its own report; and we are compelled to say that for the facts of the life of Jesus the evidence is scanty and weak. It is adequate to ground a belief in the reality of incidents not in themselves improbable; it leaves us no reason to doubt that he lived and taught; that he was a man every way superior to his disciples; that, after a brief public career, he was taken and put to death by his enemies. This much, not antecedently incredible, it is necessary to suppose to account for re-