

In the second part of the work, an exhaustive criticism of the first three or Synoptic Gospels, as they are usually termed, appears. The writer's object is to show from the 'silence' of all the early writings of the Church, that these Gospels, at least in their present form, were unknown before the end of the first century, or perhaps well on in the early part of the second. Considering that this portion of *Supernatural Religion* occupies no less than three hundred and fifty pages, closely printed, it will manifestly be out of the question to attempt a comprehensive survey of what consists in great part of verbal or textual comparisons between primitive Christian literature and the passages in the Gospels to which reference is apparently made. Still some idea of the scope of the work may be given by particular examples. First of all, however, it may be well to offer a few preliminary observations, suggested by an attentive perusal of this part. It appears to us that the author has overlooked some important facts, which should receive due weight in a judicial view of the question. In order to establish the fact that there are many other Gospels of equal authority with those which remain, the notable words are quoted from the prologue of the Third Gospel in the received Canon: 'Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us,' &c., 'it seemed good to me also' to write out in order the sacred narrative for the benefit of Theophilus. (Luke i, 1-4.) Now whilst we freely admit that the words of the Evangelist exclude all notion of verbal or even plenary inspiration in any sense, because no writer consciously under the direct and unerring guidance of the Divine Spirit could have used such language, it is not difficult to gather much more from this opening dedication than our author cares to find there. The writer of the Gospel, whether St. Luke or another, does not write to correct, but merely to confirm by repetition the facts 'even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eye-witnesses, and ministers of the word.' And the reason why he added another to the many Gospels, was not because they erred by excess or defect, but that 'having had a perfect understanding of all things from the first,' he might cor-

roborate the universally received account of the Lord's life, ministry, death and resurrection, as it was obtained from 'eye witnesses.' It requires but a very slight reference to the state of that age, to see the eminent propriety of such a course. Where a particular Gospel had gained special authority or currency as that according to the Hebrews is said to have secured amongst the Ebionites, copies would, of course, be made in the painfully slow and laborious way necessary before the invention of printing. But where a disciple had peculiar facilities for learning the facts from 'eye-witnesses,' instead of copying other narratives, he would naturally compile one himself; and thus each original Gospel would form the fruitful nucleus from which in time a progeny of copies would issue. Thus every fresh manuscript would be an independent means of propagating the story and the faith transmitted from the Apostles. Now that there should be omissions in some of these accounts supplied in others, is very natural. We may even go further, and concede the probability that in Oriental versions of the history there would be much imaginative colouring; and such appears to have been the case with the Ebionitish Gospel, which, with many others, perished according to the principle of natural selection—'the survival of the fittest.'

Our author, strange to say, takes no account of the marvellous agreement between the Christian writings which quote sayings of our Lord, and the same sayings as they are recorded in our extant Gospels. Considering that in the early centuries, writers were eminently uncritical, and quoted from a variety of accounts written by individuals widely diverse in memory, ability, temperament and methods of treatment, and separated by distance, at a time when steam, electricity and printing were unknown, the concord of tradition and patristic literature with the Gospel story, as it now stands in the New Testament Canon, is one of the most striking proofs that we have in substance now, what the writer of the third Gospel says was 'most surely believed' amongst the contemporaries of the Apostles from the beginning. That there should be some variations in statement was inevitable, considering the circumstances under which the various accounts were com-