

## CHAPTER V.

A GOSPEL COLLECTION—MURATORIAN  
FRAGMENT AND TATIAN.

FROM Irenæus, who is well able to testify to the usage of the Church of Rome in the decade 180-190 A.D., we pass to a document still more directly representing the mind of the Roman Church about the same time. This is THE MURATORIAN FRAGMENT, so called from the Italian scholar Muratori, who extracted it from a manuscript collection of miscellaneous pieces found in the Ambrosian Library in Milan, and published by him in 1740. The manuscript from which this extract is taken had originally belonged to the famous Irish monastery of Bobbio, and had itself been copied in the eighth century. The copy must have been made from what was even then a mutilated exemplar, for it begins in the middle of a sentence, and, as it is also defective at the end, it is properly called a fragment. It is in

Latin, and appears to be a badly done translation of a Greek account of the Canon. "Its evidence," says Dr S. P. Tregelles,<sup>1</sup> one of its most careful editors, "is not the less trustworthy from its being a blundering and illiterate transcript of a rough and rustic translation of a Greek original." It has been attributed to Caius the Presbyter, about 190 A.D., and also to Hippolytus, but the authorship remains uncertain. It professes to have been written by a contemporary of Pius, the tenth Bishop of Rome, for referring to the 'Shepherd of Hermas' the Fragment declares it was written "very recently in our times in the city of Rome by Hermas while his brother Pius sat in the chair of the Church of Rome." The episcopate of Pius is regarded as having lasted from 139 to 154 A.D., but as to this there is divergence of opinion among ecclesiastical historians. There is an undoubted reference to Montanism towards the close of the Fragment, which would put its production nearer the close of the second century, if not with Zahn<sup>2</sup> into the beginning of the third. But the date commonly assigned to it, 170 A.D., is quite consistent with the Fragment itself, and may be accepted approximately as the time which it represents. That it was written in Rome, or in some part of Italy, is established by the internal evidence, and if it were

<sup>1</sup> Canon of Muratori, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> GK. ii. 136.

original and not a translation from the Greek it would be the earliest ecclesiastical writing we possess in that tongue. As Westcott says,<sup>1</sup> however, "the recurrence of Greek idioms appears conclusive as to the fact that it is a translation, and this agrees well with its Roman origin, for Greek continued to be even at a later period the ordinary language of the Roman Church."

The testimony of the Fragment to the Four-fold Gospel, bearing in mind its mutilated character, is unmistakable. It begins in the middle of a sentence, and its opening words are: "But at some he was present and so he set them down" ("aliquibus tamen interfuit et ita posuit"). As the next sentence refers to "the third Book of the Gospel, the Gospel according to Luke," and as the writer goes on to give an account entirely his own of the composition of St John's Gospel, we are led to conclude that the opening words are part of his account of the second Gospel, the Gospel according to St Mark. It is true we cannot assume as certain a codex containing the Gospels in the order to which we have become accustomed. At the same time, out of all the arrangements of the order of the Four Gospels which have been found, the order Mark, Matthew, Luke, John, is without example. It is a fair inference that we should regard the refer-

<sup>1</sup> Canon, p. 216.

ence of the writer in the opening words as being to the Gospel according to St Mark. On this assumption a difficulty arises as to what is meant by the expression, "at some he was present." It might refer to incidents or discourses in the life of Jesus at which the writer of the Gospel was present, and which he set down of his own knowledge. This, however, could not be said of St Mark. It is doubtful whether he was ever in our Lord's company at all, although he has been with some reason identified as the young man without a name whom he introduces into the narrative of the Lord's betrayal (Mark xiv. 51, 52). How, then, are the words to be explained consistently with this fact? St Mark has always been regarded as St Peter's interpreter,—as having received the materials of his Gospel from St Peter,—and it is to this source that we attribute the numerous autoptic touches with which his Gospel abounds. Moreover, it was the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, which was the favourite resort of the disciples of Jesus after the Ascension, where discourse would often turn, in the hearing of St Mark, on the mighty works and the wonderful words of Jesus. Bearing this in mind, it seems quite permissible, as Westcott holds,<sup>1</sup> to regard the expression as referring to con-

<sup>1</sup> Canon, p. 543 n. Cf. Zahn, *Einleitung*, ii, 428, 429.

versations with St Peter at which St Mark and others were present, in which the chief Apostle of the Lord gave reminiscences of His divine life and ministry and death and resurrection. This explanation appears to be entirely satisfactory, and we need have little hesitation in regarding the opening words as a testimony to the second Gospel.

That the list of books of New Testament Scripture in the original of our mutilated extract began with St Matthew is the irresistible inference. What the Fragment has to say of "the third" and "the fourth" Gospel makes us regret that we are not in possession of the whole. "The third Book of the Gospel," it goes on to say, "that according to Luke, was compiled in his own name by Luke, the physician you know of (iste), from what he heard from others when, after Christ's Ascension, Paul had taken him to be with him as a companion in travel. Yet neither did he see the Lord in the flesh; and he, too, as he was able to ascertain events, so set them down, beginning with the birth of John (the Baptist). The fourth of the Gospels was written by John, one of the disciples. When exhorted by his fellow-disciples and bishops, he said, Fast with me this day for three days; and what may be revealed to any of us let us relate it to one another. The same

night it was revealed to Andrew, one of the Apostles, that John was to write all things in his own name, and they were all to certify it. And, therefore, though various elements are taught in the several books of the Gospels, yet it makes no difference to the faith of believers, since by one guiding Spirit all things are declared in all of them concerning the Nativity, the Passion, the Resurrection, the conversations with His disciples, and His two comings—the first in lowliness and contempt, which has come to pass, the second, glorious with royal power, which is to come. What marvel, therefore, if John so firmly sets forth each statement in his Epistles too, saying of himself, What we have seen with our eyes, and heard with our ears, and our hands have handled, these things we have written unto you? For so he declares himself not only an eyewitness and a hearer, but also a recorder of all the marvels of the Lord in order."

There are several points of interest in this statement.

(1) The author of the fourth Gospel is here said to be one of "the disciples" of the Lord. This does not distinguish him from "the Apostle," but rather describes John in his quality as an eyewitness and competent narrator of the work and teaching of his Master. The Fragmentist is not

so much concerned about the apostolicity of the Gospels as about their trustworthiness as a record of Christ and His redemption. Irenæus, as we shall see, who had no doubt of the identity of John with the Apostle, also calls him the "disciple of the Lord."

(2) The compiler of this list of the books of New Testament Scripture knows of Four Gospels, and only Four. Mention is made of the Shepherd, and also of an Apocalypse of Peter, as books to be used at least for edification. But no Gospel is mentioned as in any way coming into competition with the Gospels which are named, and which are the Four Gospels of the Catholic Church to-day.

(3) These Gospels have attributed to them the inspiration of the Divine Spirit, which breathes through each, and binds them all together as one whole.

(4) In their totality, as Zahn points out,<sup>1</sup> the Four Gospels contain all that is requisite, so that as one whole they set forth the Nativity, the Passion, the Resurrection, and the Second Coming, even though the second and the fourth Gospels contain no account of the Birth of Jesus. It is a significant tribute to the growth of the combined authority of the Gospel quartette that already, at this early date, and at all events within

<sup>1</sup> GK. ii, 41.

the second century, the essential harmony of the Gospels was discerned and practically applied.

Despite the uncertainty as to the precise date of this valuable relic of early Christian antiquity, we may regard it as directly representing the mind of the Church of Rome, and showing the Gospel Collection of Four established even before the time of Irenæus.

It is a far cry from the Church of Rome to the Church of Syria, with its two great centres at Antioch and Edessa, but here also we have testimony to the existence and authority of a Fourfold Gospel as explicit and weighty as that which has just been considered. Whilst we have in the Syriac version a witness for the Syrian Church from a very early date, we have in TATIAN an individual testimony of no ordinary value. It was not at Antioch but at Edessa that the Syriac Scriptures were chiefly in circulation. Antioch, the capital of the great Empire of Seleucus, was a Greek city, and the Gospel did not require to change its Greek dress in the city where the disciples of Jesus were first called Christians. It was different with Edessa, the flourishing capital of the Syrian principality of Osrhoene, which preserved its independence of Rome well into the third century of our era. Here, on the boundary-line between Greek and Persian civil-

isation, still flourished a large amount of Semitic culture unaffected by Hellenic cosmopolitanism. When Christianity set foot on this soil it could not help assuming a national form, and the necessity arose early of possessing the written Gospel in the vernacular. Singularly enough, it is the Fourfold Gospel rather than individual Gospels which arrests attention here, in the Diatessaron of Tatian.

The personality of Tatian is not very clearly revealed, but there are some points of interest regarding him. Born, probably of Greek parents, in Assyria, as he tells us in his 'Address to the Greeks,' he travelled much in pursuit of rhetoric and philosophy. He found his way to Rome, as did most of those in that time who had any special need to be supplied, or any special remedy for human ills to make known, or any special discovery in truth to publish abroad. In Rome he came under the influence of Justin Martyr. Under the teaching of Justin he embraced Christianity somewhere about 150 A.D., when he was already in middle life. The particulars of his career after his conversion are not clear, but he seems to have left for the East and devoted himself to the defence of Christianity, of which he became one of the most strenuous and able apologists. In opposition to Zahn, who considers that he was but once in Rome, and that he

became a Christian in the East, and ended his life there, Harnack maintains that he made a second visit to Rome, became eminent as a teacher in the Church, but after the death of Justin fell into heresy of an ascetic and Encratite tendency, and broke with the Church in 172 A.D., returning finally to his native land and there spending the remainder of his days. The peculiarity of some of Tatian's views caused him to appear to Irenæus a specially obstinate heretic, but he seems never to have separated himself from the Catholic Church nor to have founded a sect or party. He was still honourably named in Rome at the beginning of the third century as a champion of the orthodox doctrine of the divinity of Christ. Clement and Origen controverted his views, but did not refer to him as the leader of a party. His apologetic treatise continued to be held in honour in the Greek Church after he had passed away. In it, and in what remains of his other writings composed in Greek, he is entitled to bear witness to the condition of the Church Catholic in the period 150-170 A.D. and onwards.

Eusebius tells us that he left a great many writings,<sup>1</sup> but the only two he names are 'The Address to the Greeks' and that "combination and collection of the Gospels, I know not how, to which he gave the title Diatessaron." It is this

<sup>1</sup> H. E., IV. 29.

work—*εὐαγγέλιον Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τὸ διὰ τεσσάρων*—which gives him the place he occupies in the history of the canon. Eusebius is the first Christian writer to notice the Diatessaron, but the vagueness of his description shows that he had never seen it, and that he only knew it by hearsay. Epiphanius seems to have had still less acquaintance with it, for, referring to Tatian, he remarks: "People say that the Diatessaron Gospel, which some call the Gospel of the Hebrews, originates with him." It is still more noteworthy that Jerome is wholly silent regarding it, mentioning from among "the endless volumes" of Tatian only the one "*Contra gentes florentissimus liber.*" This goes somewhat against the contention of those who, like Harnack, believe that the Diatessaron was compiled from the Greek and afterwards translated into Syriac; for if there had been a Greek Diatessaron in circulation some of those writers would have been likely to know it. Professor Gregory<sup>1</sup> has little doubt that the Harmony was originally Greek. The Arabic translation of the Diatessaron calls the Harmony the work of Tatian "the Greek." But he holds it to be an altogether possible thing that it should at an early date have been translated into Syriac. That it was composed in Syriac at a very early period, and obtained a sure place

<sup>1</sup> *Canon and Text*, p. 399.

in the affections of Syrian Christians as a compendium of the life and teaching of Christ, accounts sufficiently for the ignorance of early historiographers, and also for its long-continued use in the Syrian Church.

Its existence is well attested in the Church of Syria. The so-called 'Doctrine of Addai,' whether we assign it with Zahn to the second half of the third century or with Harnack to about 400 A.D., testifies that at Edessa the Diatessaron was used in public worship in place of the individual Gospels, and passed for Holy Scripture. Aphraates, about the middle of the fourth century, in his Homilies, treats the Diatessaron as Holy Scripture. Ephræm, who died in 373 A.D., knew the individual Gospels, but used the Diatessaron exclusively as Holy Scripture. It was the Commentary of Ephræm upon the Diatessaron, preserved in an Armenian translation, and translated from Armenian into Latin by Mechitarist Fathers in Venice, which gave to modern scholarship the first really accurate and reliable account of the contents of this work. It was then seen to follow the narratives of our Four Gospels, according to a plan conceived by Tatian, and to contain nothing, speaking broadly, that is not to be found in them. It is from Theodoret of Cyrrhus that we have the most explicit account which Christian antiquity supplies of this remark-

able treatise. Writing in 453 A.D., he says<sup>1</sup> at the end of his chapter on Tatian, "He also composed the Gospel which goes by the name of Diatessaron, having cut out the genealogies and all that shows our Lord to have been of the seed of David according to the flesh. And it was in use not only by those who were of that way of thinking, but also by those who follow the Apostolic doctrines, not being aware of the wickedness of the compilation, but using it in more simple fashion as a convenient epitome. I found more than two hundred such books held in honour in our Churches, and I collected them and put them out of the way, and substituted for them the Gospels of the four Evangelists" (*τὰ τῶν τεττάρων εὐαγγελιστῶν ἀντεισήγαγον εὐαγγέλια*). By this time the individual Gospels had gained the upper hand, and the Diatessaron disappeared from the public services of the national Syrian Church; but it continued to be used by scholars for purposes of study, and from a manuscript, copied as late as the ninth century, an Arabic translation of the Diatessaron was executed in the eleventh century. Of this an example has been found and published, with a Latin translation, by the Italian scholar Ciasca. The career of the Diatessaron was not at an end when it disappeared from the Churches of Syria. As it was the instrument in

<sup>1</sup> In his *Ἐπιτομή αἰρετικῆς κακομυθίας*, i. 20.

the hands of Syrian missionaries from the second century for the evangelisation of dwellers on the banks of the Euphrates, so, centuries later, it became the instrument, in a Latin translation, of the evangelisation of the dwellers in Central Europe and on the banks of the Rhine. The manuscript known as 'Codex Fuldensis,' which Victor of Capua, about 546 A.D., put in circulation, and which was the Gospel-book employed by Boniface, the Apostle of the Germans, is found to have the Gospels arranged continuously, in the same order as the Diatessaron. Thus, far from the scenes of its origin and earliest use, and after it had disappeared in the original Syriac altogether, for no manuscript of the original is known to survive, the work of the Assyrian orator and scribe exercised an influence which was continued in such works as the *Heliand* at a still later time. The work has been translated in the Supplementary Volume of Ante-Nicene Fathers, and its contents can be examined in Hemphill's 'Diatessaron' and in Mr Hamlyn Hill's 'Earliest Life of Our Lord,' where an English translation is also given. Zahn has also published an elaborate attempt to reconstruct it from the Commentary of Ephræm and the Homilies of Aphraates, which it is interesting to compare with the contents of Ciasca's Arabic-Latin version.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Forschungen*, i, 112 ff.; cf. *GK.* ii. 530 ff.

We now know enough of the Diatessaron to be certain that it is not a distinct evangelical narrative, nor yet identical with the Gospel according to the Hebrews, as Epiphanius supposed it to be. The author of 'Supernatural Religion' is one of the very few critics who uphold the former view. It has been carefully dissected and analysed, and no doubt can remain in any unprejudiced mind that we have before us the work of which Theodoret withdrew two hundred copies from his diocese,—a work manifestly compiled from our four canonical Gospels, and consisting almost wholly of familiar evangelical materials. It begins with St John's prologue: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The genealogies are omitted, but it gives the story of the birth of the Forerunner as in St Luke, and of the birth of Jesus as in St Matthew and St Luke. His early ministry and His work in Galilee follow, and the later ministry, with parables and discourses, also finds a place. The record as given in the Diatessaron closes with the Lord's Supper, Gethsemane, the trials before the high priest and Pilate, the crucifixion, and the resurrection and ascension. There are considerable displacements of the Gospel narratives, such as a harmoniser could not help making; but scholars are of opinion that all through his work he was preparing rather a

companion to the Four Gospels than a substitute for them. There is an absence of extra-canonical matter which shows that he had written sources before him, and was not trusting to oral tradition. That the Four Gospels were in existence in the time of Tatian is an obvious corollary from what has been said; that they contained materials which were indispensable to the personal edification of Syrian Christians and to the evangelising of regions beyond, and so were regarded as part of an authoritative revelation, has now been put beyond question.

Tatian is credited with the framing of the first Gospel harmony, just as Basilides with the first quotation of the Gospels as Scripture, Heracleon with the first commentary, and Marcion with the first canon of New Testament Scripture. It is, however, scarcely probable that heretics were so far in advance of orthodox Christians in the consciousness and discernment of the separateness of these Scriptures from all other literature. There are traces of harmonising before the time of Tatian, and it is possible that he only extended somewhat the conception underlying the *Ἀπομνημονεύματα* of his master, Justin. "There is a tendency," says Dr Sanday,<sup>1</sup> "apparent throughout the later writers,—marked in Clement, very marked in the Didache, and marked also, as we

<sup>1</sup> Inspiration, pp. 301, 302.

overstep the limits of their period, in Justin,—to combine together phrases from these two Gospels, St Matthew and St Luke. So much is this the case that the hypothesis has more than once been thrown out that the writers in question, more particularly Justin, quoted, at least at times, not from our separate Gospel, but from a Harmony of the Gospels. That was not published till after Justin's death; but it would not be improbable that some sort of rough draft might have been used by both master and scholar before its publication. . . . Besides Tatian's Harmony, there was another, as we know, composed very soon after his by Theophilus of Antioch. This would show that the idea of harmonising or combining Gospels was in the air." If we hold that the Diatessaron was first compiled in Greek, we may see in that fact an evidence of the previous existence of a Harmony of the Four Gospels, such as the *'Απομνημονεύματα* may have been.