

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

When this book first appeared in German in 1919 its purpose was to introduce and establish the method of literary criticism which has since been called "Formgeschichte". As it stands in the present edition its purpose is to describe and develop this method. In Germany the principles and consequences of this book have been the subject of scientific discussion during the last fifteen years. I have also lectured upon them in England, in Oxford in 1926 and in Manchester in 1933. The positive and negative criticisms which I have received have forwarded my work and made a further development of the method advisable. It is therefore a great pleasure to me to be now able to address the English-speaking reader in his own language, and I should not like this translation of my book to be published without expressing my hearty thanks to Dr. Bertram Lee Woolf for all the care and attention which he has given to my work.

The method of *Formgeschichte* has a twofold objective. In the first place, by reconstruction and analysis, it seeks to explain the origin of the tradition about Jesus, and thus to penetrate into a period previous to that in which our Gospels and their written sources were recorded. But it has a further purpose. It seeks to make clear the intention and real interest of the earliest tradition. We must show with what objective the first churches recounted stories about Jesus, passed them from mouth to mouth as independent narratives, or copied them from papyrus to papyrus. In the same manner we must examine the sayings of Jesus and ask with what intention these churches collected them, learnt them by heart, and wrote them down. The present-day reader should learn to read the individual passages of the early tradition in the

way they were meant, before the time when, more or less edited, they were included in the Gospels.

The method of *Formgeschichte* seeks to help in answering the historical questions as to the nature and trustworthiness of our knowledge of Jesus, and also in solving a theological problem properly so-called. It shows in what way the earliest testimony about Jesus was interwoven with the earliest testimony about the salvation which had appeared in Jesus Christ. Thereby it attempts to emphasize and illuminate the chief elements of the message upon which Christianity was founded. Interest in these problems unites English and German research. I should like the English edition of this volume to be regarded as an expression of this fellowship.

MARTIN DIBELIUS.