

# The International Critical Commentary on Matthew's Gospel.<sup>1</sup>

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THE 'International Critical Commentary' has established itself on a sure basis. In the judgment of all competent critics, it represents the high-water mark of English and American scholarship, and holds the same place among English-speaking students that is held in Germany by such standard works as Nowack's *Hdkom. z. A.T.* or the *Kurzer Hdcom. z. A.T.*, and in the department of the N.T. by the more recent editions of Meyer or the *Kom. z. N.T.*, edited by Zahn. Every one is familiar with what has been done for the O.T. by men like Driver and Moore and Briggs (the second volume of whose admirable Commentary on the Psalms has appeared with surprising and gratifying promptitude). Of the Commentaries on the N.T. that have been issued in this series, it may be safely said that none surpasses in ability, interest, and importance the latest publication, namely, Mr. Allen's *St. Matthew*. We are at present in the very thick of the discussion of problems affecting the origin, authorship, date, and historical value of the Synoptics; and it is a most fortunate circumstance that so competent and sane a scholar as Mr. Allen has been entrusted with the task of pointing out to us what appear to be the conclusions towards which research is guiding us.

In his Preface, Mr. Allen does not underrate the difficulties of a modern commentator on the Gospels. The qualifications he demands are such as can hardly be expected to be all united in one man. And we can imagine some readers feeling a little disappointed at the emphasis which our author lays upon his aim to discover and set forth *the meaning which this particular Gospel had for the Evangelist and his first readers*. They would fain have something more objective. Yet we are persuaded that Mr. Allen's method is correct, and the student of his Commentary will find that by that method the historical value and the permanent objective message of the Gospel are reached and

more firmly established than they could otherwise have been. In this connexion attention may be called especially to the valuable 'Note on the Gospel as a contribution to our knowledge of the Historical Life of Christ,' p. 309 ff.

As to the sources of the First Gospel, Mr. Allen recognizes: (1) that the editor of the book used St. Mark's Gospel in Greek; (2) that he used a Greek translation of the Matthæan *Logia*; (3) that he borrowed from a collection of Greek translations of Messianic passages from the O.T.; (4) that he had before him one or two narratives, in particular that of the centurion's servant, in a Greek form almost identical with the form in which they occur in the Third Gospel; (5) that he had access to a series of Palestinian traditions chiefly about Christ's birth and infancy, but including also one or two relating to the period of His Galilæan ministry.

Believers in the Virgin-birth of our Lord will derive satisfaction from our author's discussion of the origin and date of the narratives in Mt 1 and 2. We feel perfectly sure that, whatever be the source of these narratives, Mr. Allen is thoroughly successful in repelling the notion of Usener (*Encyc. Bibl.*, iii. 3350) and others, that in the story of the supernatural birth 'we unquestionably enter the circle of pagan ideas,' and that 'the idea is quite foreign to Judaism.' We are not sure that we should be prepared to go quite so far as our author in dismissing very lightly the silence of St. Paul. We can hardly conceive that, if the Apostle was acquainted with the tradition, there should be not the faintest allusion to it [none of the supposed allusions strikes us as anything but fanciful] in any of his writings. But we would not base on this any argument against the truth of the story itself. The Virgin-birth may quite well be a fact, although, fortunately we think, it played no part in the development of Christian doctrine in N.T. times.

The Plan and Characteristics of the Gospel and its Theology (under the headings Christology, Kingdom of the Heavens, Son of Man, the Church) are described in pp. lxiïi—lxxvi. The Jewish-

<sup>1</sup> *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Matthew*. By Willoughby C. Allen, M.A. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1907. Price 12s.

Christian character of the *Logia* and of the Gospel are clearly detected by Mr. Allen. As to the *author* of the First Gospel, it is shown, we think quite satisfactorily, that he was a Palestinian, but not the Apostle Matthew, whose own work was composed in Hebrew or Aramaic. The name 'Matthew' came readily to be transferred from the original Apostolic work to our present canonical Gospel. The *date* is fixed by Mr. Allen within a few years before or after the fall of Jerusalem (70 A.D.).

As to the Commentary itself, the purpose of our author, as explained at the outset, namely, *to make clear the conception of the Evangelist*, has necessitated a somewhat different procedure from that to which we are accustomed in some other commentaries, both ancient and modern. The crucial instance of this difference, selected by Mr. Allen himself, is Mt 16<sup>17-19</sup>, where he seeks to discern not what Christ meant by the words attributed to Him, but what meaning they had in the mind of the Evangelist when he placed them in their present position in his Gospel. At the same time, here as elsewhere, Mr. Allen gives more than he promised to do. In regard to the 'Baptismal formula' of Mt 28<sup>19</sup>, it is interesting to note that our author

declares that 'the conclusion that the formula as here recorded marks a developed and late stage of doctrinal belief and ecclesiastical practice, is unjustified.' The objection to the early date of the verse derived from the early Christian practice of baptizing simply 'in(to) the name of Christ' is set aside with the remark that the editor may not have wished to represent Christ as having prescribed a fuller formula, but have simply intended to sum up in a phrase the end and aim of the Christian life into which the convert entered at baptism.

Mr. Allen naturally places a higher value on the account of our Lord's doings as reproduced in the Second Gospel than in the narratives as edited in Matthew. Regarding the former, he says:

'I believe that the simple reader who accepts the Second Gospel as a narrative of literal fact, is nearer the truth than the critic who starts heavily handicapped by hard-and-fast conceptions of the limitations of personality, and who distorts narratives, which on all other evidence are proved to be early, into late and legendary growths, because they contain a record of facts which his theories will not allow him to credit as historical' (p. 312, note).

We take leave of Mr. Allen's Commentary with the feeling that it is strictly scientific in its methods and most reassuring in its results.

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## Mohammedan Conversions.

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By Mohammedan Conversion is not here meant conversion from Christianity to Mohammedanism, or *vice versa*, but those spiritual crises which take place *within* Mohammedanism, as within Christianity, by which the soul is stung as with a regenerating shudder, to use George Eliot's phrase, to rise from a notional to a real belief in God. Mohammedan theologians are as aware of this distinction as Christian ones. Thus Al Ghazzali, in his *Revival of the Religious Sciences*, is very sarcastic on the indulgence in the common expletive, 'We take refuge in God,' by Mohammedans without attaching any real meaning to it. He says: 'If you see a lion coming towards you, and there is a fort close by, you do not stand exclaiming, "I take refuge in this fort!" but you get into it. Similarly, when you hear of the wrath to come, do not merely say, "I take refuge in God," but take refuge in Him.'

This transformation of a notional into a real belief has proved the crisis in the lives of many of the saints and mystics of Islam, without, as far as it appears, any contact on their part with Christianity. Thus, Ibn Khalliqan, in his great Biographical Dictionary, tells of Al-Fudail, a celebrated highwayman, who, one night, while he was on his way to an immoral assignation, was arrested by the voice of a Koran-reader chanting the verse, 'Is not the time yet come unto those who believe, that their hearts should humbly submit to the admonition of God?' On this he exclaimed, 'O Lord! that time is come.' He then went away from that place, and the approach of night induced him to repair for shelter to a ruined edifice. He there found a band of travellers, one of whom said to the others, 'Let us set out'; but another answered, 'Let us rather wait till daylight, for Al-Fudail is on the road and will stop us.' Al-