

St. Matthew and the First Gospel.

I.

[We much regret to state that since these papers on St. Matthew and the First Gospel were written, the writer, the Rev. Arthur Carr, has passed away. His death is a great loss to Biblical Scholarship.]

IN the course of His solemn high priestly prayer on the night of the Last Supper, Jesus Christ uses these words: "Neither for these only do I pray, but for them also that believe on Me through their word" (*διὰ τοῦ λόγου αὐτῶν*) (St John xvii. 20). These words would be felt to convey to the listening Apostles an impressive injunction to preach the Gospel, and to preach it convincingly. Is it not then highly probable *a priori* that one, or more than one, out of that listening group should have left a written memorial of "all that Jesus began to do and to teach" during His ministry? Throughout the Christian centuries, until a comparatively recent date, it has been constantly and continuously believed, that three out of the four Gospels are directly or indirectly grounded on Apostolic evidence; that they are, in fact, "the word" of which Jesus spoke through which men believed. St. Luke's Gospel, as stated in the Preface, was confessedly not written by an eyewitness. It was written on the report of eyewitnesses, and carried with it the authority of St. Paul. Its authenticity is now definitely established, and it only indirectly enters into that aspect of the synoptic problem, which we are now considering. But St. John was among those who were listening to our Lord on that memorable night, and great issues depend on the authenticity of the Gospel attributed to him. This, however, is also a question which does not immediately affect the subject of this argument, except so far as the earliest sources of evidence are concerned. It will suffice to note that the preponderance of modern opinion is in agreement with Professor James Drummond, of Manchester College, Oxford, who says, "On weighing the arguments for and against to the best of my power, I must give my own judgment in favour of the Johannine authorship." To the same effect, Sir W. Ramsay, in an incisive criticism of Dr. Moffatt's speculation as to the origin of St. John's Gospel, defends in his vigorous way the authenticity of what he calls "the most

wonderful book that ever was written.”¹ Another Apostle, who listened to these words of Jesus, was St. Peter. And though no genuine Gospel according to St. Peter has been delivered to the Church, the tradition is generally accepted, that St. Mark was the disciple and interpreter of St. Peter, and that the second Gospel was written by his inspiration and under his instruction. St. Mark’s Gospel was, says Dr. Swete, “ saved from exclusion, and perhaps from oblivion, by the connexion of its writer with St. Peter.” Such Apostolic connexion, it may be remarked in passing, seems to have been the decisive factor in determining the Canon. It certainly had its due weight in the primitive tradition, which assigns the first Gospel to the authorship of St. Matthew, who was also not only a receptive and intelligent hearer of our Lord’s words, but also one who was qualified by his experience and training, to commit to writing in orderly fashion the message of the Gospel which he was commissioned to give.

We may go even further. It is clear from the division of the Apostolic College into groups of four, that there must have been some purpose of distinction in work underlying that division. Each one of the twelve may be presumed to have had his special prerogative and function in the spread of the Gospel. And St. Matthew, from his position as tax-gatherer and collector of customs, would necessarily be skilled both in Greek and in the current Aramaic vernacular. He may well have been called to be in a special sense the chronicler of the Acts of Jesus.

In any case, we learn from the Acts of the Apostles that the disciples of Jesus were not slow to obey their Master’s commands. In that extremely important passage, Acts ii. 42, we are told that the converts to the faith “ continued steadfastly in the Apostles’ teaching ” (τῇ διδασχῇ τῶν ἀποστόλων). That teaching must have consisted, for the most part, in a narrative, as St. Luke expresses it, of all that Jesus “ began to do and to teach,” a narrative, in fact, answering very much to our Synoptic Gospels.² This is not mere conjecture. For we have outlines, both in matter and form, of this early Gospel teaching. Of these, the first, and by far the most

¹ *The First Christian Century*, p. 122.

² “ The facts were necessarily taught to all candidates for baptism ” (Dr. J. A. Robinson, *The Study of the Gospels*, p. 7). In this teaching lies the germ of a catechetical order, and selection of incidents observable in the Synoptic Gospels.

important, is the converse between our Lord and the two disciples on the way to Emmaus.¹ In that discourse, Jesus first drew from His companions a narrative of events, from the appearance of the Great Prophet down to His Passion and the rumours of His Resurrection. He then shows how groundless their unbelief was, how false their preconception, and how completely the facts of His own suffering and death corresponded with the word of prophecy, rightly understood.

In verses 44-47 of the same chapter, Jesus further prescribes the form in which the Gospel should be preached: "And He said unto them . . . witnesses of these things."

From these discourses summarized by St. Luke it may be inferred that the primitive presentation of the Gospel would dwell (1) on the revelation of the Christ in the Old Testament; (2) on the fact of the Resurrection; (3) on the preaching of repentance and remission of sins; and (4) on the extension of the Gospel to all nations. Here it is sufficient to note that these are points more characteristic of the Gospel according to St. Matthew than of any other. It is also worthy of note that here also Our Lord emphasizes His commission to the eleven, that it is they who are in a special way to be "witnesses," and therefore evangelists. In the first deliverance of the Gospel on the Day of Pentecost it is possible to trace the same structure which is common to the three Synoptic Gospels, the beginning of that catechetical form, and similarity of arrangement, which is often unnecessarily attributed to St. Mark's Gospel exclusively.

In Acts i. 16, St. Peter's words are, as it were, caught from the lips of Christ: "It was needful that the Scripture should be fulfilled." Comp. St. Luke xxiv. 26.

The Gospel as delivered by St. Peter: Acts ii. 22-36. "Jesus of Nazareth"—i.e. the Gospel of the infancy—"approved of God unto you by mighty works and wonders and signs"—i.e. the miracles of the Gospel narrative, *v.* 22; the Sacrifice on the Cross, foretold and fore-ordained, *v.* 23; the Gospel of the Resurrection, foreseen by David and attested by chosen witnesses, *vv.* 26-36. Compare with this St. Peter's Gospel to the Gentiles addressed to Cornelius, the Roman centurion and his friends, Acts x. 34-43; where, much on the lines of St. Luke's Gospel, the baptism of John

¹ St. Luke xxiv. 13-32.

is named as preceding the advent of Jesus, the miracles and good works of Jesus ; His Death and Resurrection and the proof of them, and the remission of sins through the name of Christ, to which the prophets bear witness.

The Gospel as delivered by St. Paul at Antioch in Pisidia : Acts xiii. 16-39. Israel a chosen race, 16-21. David, the man after God's own heart, of whose seed Jesus was born, according to promise, *vv. 22, 23* (the genealogies are an expansion of this statement). John the Baptist, the forerunner—the preacher of a Gospel of repentance—*vv. 24, 25.* Comp. Matt. iii. and *foll.*, Mark i. 2, Luke iii. 3 and *foll.* Jesus put to death by the rulers of the Jews in ignorance of the prophet's meaning, but in fulfilment of prediction, *vv. 21-29* ; and raised from the dead as attested by His Witnesses, *vv. 30, 31.* The good tidings of the promise fulfilled through the Resurrection. Psalm ii. quoted in support of this and explained, *vv. 33-37.* Forgiveness of sins through Christ, *vv. 38, 39.*

These Gospel summaries enable us to understand with some precision what is meant by the teaching of the Apostles (*ἡ διδαχὴ τῶν ἀποστόλων*) both in regard to its subject-matter, and to the form in which it was delivered ; and, due allowance being made for difference of place and circumstance, a similarity will be noted of method in presenting the facts, and in demonstrating the truth of the Gospel, which may well have taken shape in a recognized form of catechetical instruction.

Compare with these examples from the Acts the summaries of Gospel teaching in Romans i. 3, 4, 5 ; 1 Corinthians xv. 3, 4, and warnings against false gospels, founded on different models, 2 Corinthians xi. 4 ; Galatians i. 6, 7, and 1 Tim. vi. 20. The significance of this Apostolic teaching at Jerusalem, and the results which must have followed, have been too much ignored in discussing the synoptic problem. It is, indeed, chiefly in laying emphasis on the importance of this Apostolic " teaching " and on its results, that this contribution to the synoptic question may be thought to claim consideration. The number who listened to this proclamation of the Gospel, must have far exceeded the 3,000 mentioned on the Day of Pentecost. They were listeners inspired by a keen enthusiasm, and among them there were doubtless scribes and scholars of cultivated intelligence and skill. The powers of memory

were developed to an extent hardly conceivable in our day and under modern conditions. And ¹ it is also possible that some system of shorthand was practised. It was one of the subjects taught in schools among the Romans at that date. The Emperor Titus was said to be an expert. And, as is well known, Cicero's freedman, *M. Tullius Tiro*, produced a system of shorthand known as *Not Tironianæ*.

However this may have been, we may be sure that as a result of the Day of Pentecost, apart from the stores of recollection, thousands of notes of the Apostolic lectures would be dispersed throughout the habitable world! So that before a generation passed it became possible to speak of the Gospel as having ² been "preached in all creation under heaven" (Col. i. 23).

Dr. Sanday has remarked on the special facilities for the rapid spread of Christianity in the circumstances of the times, "the absence of barriers, the freedom of traffic, general peace, light taxation and advantages of language, and a common Government were all most favourable for spreading a new religion." How enthusiastically the first evangelists took advantage of these facilities of travel is described by Eusebius (H.E. iii. 37). They were anxious, he tells us, to preach Christ to those who had not heard tidings of the faith, and to deliver to them the message of the divine Gospels in writing.

The last phrase is suggestive of notes taken at the Apostolic lectures in Jerusalem.

One result of this would be a wide diffusion of the Gospel throughout the different parts of the Roman Empire, and varying versions of notes from the Apostolic lectures would appear in widely separated regions. These notes would bear to one another very much the same relation which we find existing between the Synoptic Gospels in their mutual resemblances and differences. They would, in

¹ In the passage from Clement of Alexandria (*Hypotyp.* on 1 Peter v. 13) describing the origin of St. Mark's Gospel, we read that the knights attached to the Imperial bodyguard (*Caesarianis Equitibus*) asked Mark to write down what he remembered of St. Peter's recollections, that they might commit to memory the things which were spoken: "ut possent quae dicebantur memoriae commendare." See on this, Zahn, *Introd.* Vol II, 448, Note 9. In this connexion it is interesting to note that there was in the imperial household an official named *Magister memoriæ* who presided over slaves employed in recording important acts of Imperial administration.

² *Comp. Eus.* iii. 37.

fact, be not unlike the notes taken in the lecture rooms of Oxford or Cambridge Colleges. In some cases a striking word or phrase would be found in every copy. One hearer would reproduce a phrase in the lecturer's own words, another would amplify or abridge.¹ These are phenomena to be borne in mind when we come to the larger question.

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(To be continued.)

¹ This, I find, has been anticipated by Witzel, who, making the same suggestion, says: "This explains the agreements among the Gospels: the differences, on the other hand, are exactly such as exist at the present time among the notes made of Academic lectures." (Quoted Zahn, ii. 410.) In any case these notes and reminiscences of Apostolic teaching must be taken into account in forming a theory of the origin of the Gospels.

