

## *A SURVEY OF THE SYNOPTIC QUESTION.*

### III. POINTS PROVED OR PROBABLE (*continued*).

WE have seen what a large consensus there is of scholars, approaching the study of the Synoptic Gospels from very different directions, in favour of some form of the theory which postulates as the foundation of our present Gospels two main documents, which, although arrived at by critical analysis, and not by external testimony, are yet found to correspond sufficiently well with the two works described by Papias, the "Notes of the Preaching of St. Peter" put together by St. Mark, and the "Collection of *Logia*"—oracles or utterances—of the Lord set down in writing by St. Matthew.

Taking the first of these two documents, we have seen that the statements of Papias as to its origin agree with the facts; that they explain a certain partial, onesided, individual character which it has, distinguishing it from the main body of evangelical tradition, and proving that it is not a direct product of the central and collective action of the Church. We have seen, however, that, although the main outlines of our second Gospel are thus traceable to St. Peter, it still remains an open question whether or not there is another element in the Gospel as well; and it is a question that must also be regarded as open, how far the Gospel as we have it bears marks of editorial revision and additions.

We now come to the second document, and we have to ask ourselves a similar series of questions. As to the detailed structure of this document, how much can we regard as proved, and how much as probable?

We cannot, I fear, go so far in our affirmations about this source as about its companion. There certain main

lines stood out broadly and clearly. That the document was in writing, that it closely resembled our St. Mark, were points about which it seemed that not much remained to be debated. But in regard to this second document, the case is less clear even for its very existence. Yet when we find that in two of our Gospels, the first and third, there is contained a large element of discourse common to both, that one of those Gospels bears the name of the apostle St. Matthew, and that one of the earliest of Church writers is said to have stated expressly that St. Matthew left behind him a collection which may be reasonably interpreted as consisting mainly of discourse, then the conclusion lies near at hand, and has commended itself to the great mass of recent inquirers as probable, that the discourses and sayings which our first and third evangelists join in reporting are derived from the work attributed to St. Matthew.

For this at least is a point on which there is increasing unanimity, that the apostle St. Matthew did not write the whole of the first Gospel as we have it. That he wrote a section of it so important that his name passed from that to the whole, is by most writers willingly conceded; but analysis reveals the composite nature of our Gospel too clearly for it to be probable that we have in it the original work of our apostle as it left his pen. Let us hear Mr. Wright on this subject.

“We have the apparently independent testimony of three witnesses in the second century—Papias, Irenæus, and Pantænus—that St. Matthew wrote in ‘Hebrew.’ Nor is there any ancient authority to the contrary. The Fathers of the Church are agreed that it was so, and only since the Reformation has the fact been seriously, and, as I think, most unjustifiably, called in question.

“Nevertheless the Fathers, as far back as we can trace their opinions, unreservedly accept our first Gospel, which is in Greek, as St. Matthew’s work. While they uphold the Aramaic or ‘Hebrew’ (as they call it) original, they equally uphold the Greek representative as though it

were an exact translation, made either by St. Matthew himself or by some authorized interpreter. And it is in my opinion impossible to ignore this consensus of belief.

“And yet upon close examination nothing appears more certain than that our first Gospel is not immediately a translation. In the first cycle, which it gives almost complete, not only is St. Peter’s narrative adopted, but the most numerous and minute agreements prove that St. Mark’s version has been used. In the second cycle also the same Greek text is followed which we find in St. Luke. And even those parts which are peculiar to the first Gospel do not (like St. Luke’s two preliminary chapters) read like a direct translation from the Aramaic. They are a translation, as indeed the whole Gospel is, but a translation which has been rounded and smoothed by passing through a long line of Greek catechists.

“Our first Gospel therefore is a composite work. St. Peter must be called the author of a considerable part of it. St. Matthew cannot have written down this part—I mean the first cycle—unless we are to suppose that he, an apostle and eyewitness, set aside his own recollections and went to school for his facts with the later Hellenic catechists. Even if he had done this, he would be the editor, rather than the author, of that considerable portion, which indeed forms the historical framework of the whole.”<sup>1</sup>

I do not know that Professor Marshall has declared himself on this head, but all the other writers whom I have named as representing recent opinion on the subject would entirely agree with Mr. Wright. This I think we may set down as another point gained, that the first Gospel, like the third, is composite in its origin, secondary, and not primary.

If however it bears the name of St. Matthew, it does so with good reason. It does so because the contents of a work really from the pen of St. Matthew have passed into it. It has incorporated with it that collection of *Logia* which has contributed so prominent and valuable an element to the companion volume by St. Luke.

The problem then before us is to reconstruct from our present Gospels the original collection of *Logia*. Here

<sup>1</sup> *Composition of the Four Gospels*, p. 60 f.; cf. pp. 133–135.

we enter upon a task of great difficulty, and one which, although a quantity of honest and scholarly labour has been expended upon it, is still some way from having reached a definitive conclusion. A number of questions arise. What was the extent of the *Logia*? Were they pure discourse, or was discourse at all intermingled with narrative? In which of the two Gospels, St. Matthew and St. Luke, are the *Logia* preserved more nearly? Does either Gospel represent them accurately? In what relation do the versions which we now possess stand to the original?

1. On the first point some progress has been made. It used to be keenly debated whether the *Logia* admitted any element of narrative; now this is practically not denied. The conversion of Holtzmann was significant. He now allows that the discourses of which the *Logia* were mainly composed may have had brief historical introductions, such as are frequently assigned to them in St. Luke. Such, for instance, would be the introduction to the model prayer, which was given, as St. Luke tells us, in reply to a request from the disciples that they too might be taught a form of prayer as the disciples of the Baptist had been.<sup>1</sup> Such again would be the story about the Galilæans whom Pilate's soldiery slaughtered in the very act of sacrificing;<sup>2</sup> and the mention of the murmurs of the Pharisaic party which were answered by that succession of beautiful parables—the lost sheep, the lost drachma, the lost son.<sup>3</sup> It does not follow at once from this that all these little introductory notices would be accepted as of equal value. Some would seem to belong, not to the document quoted, but to the evangelist, and to be his inferences as to the occasion of parable or saying, drawn from the parable or saying itself. For instance, the parable of the importunate widow seems to

<sup>1</sup> St. Luke xi. 1.<sup>2</sup> St. Luke xiii. 1.<sup>3</sup> St. Luke xv. 1, 2.

have had in the first instance quite as much to do with the nearness of the *parousia* as with the duty of perseverance in prayer to which it is referred.<sup>1</sup>

2. However this question as to the fragments of connecting narrative which link together the discourses is not of any large dimensions. It is a more important matter to determine where we are mainly to look for the *Logia*, whether in our present St. Matthew or in our present St. Luke. In the choice of these alternatives opinions are greatly divided. This is the state of things. In St. Matthew we have a number of well compacted and neatly arranged blocks of discourse: the sermon on the mount (v.-vii.), the instructions to the twelve (x.), the chapter of parables (xiii.), the invectives against the Pharisees (xxiii.), the eschatological discourses (xxiv., xxv.), besides certain smaller sections interspersed among these. It has been frequently observed that these masses of discourse are in many cases rounded off by the formula, "When Jesus had ended these words," or the like.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, the corresponding matter in St. Luke is found in a far more dispersed condition. For instance, St. Luke furnishes parallels to rather more than half the verses of the sermon on the mount (at a rough reckoning 64 verses out of 107); but these parallels are scattered over no less than ten distinct contexts, and even within those contexts with considerable disturbance of order.<sup>3</sup>

We ask then, which of these two arrangements is nearer to the original? And we cannot be surprised if the balance of probability has been often thought to lie on the side of

<sup>1</sup> St. Luke xviii. 1-8. Cf. Holtzmann, *Einleitung*, p. 352.

<sup>2</sup> St. Matt. vii. 28, xi. 1, xiii. 53, xix. 1, xxvi. 1. See Weizsäcker, *Apost.-Zeitalt.*, p. 387; Holtzmann, *Einleitung*, p. 351, etc.

<sup>3</sup> We might assign these contexts roughly thus: (α) St. Luke vi. 20-49; (β) xi. 1-4, 9-13; (γ) xi. 34-36; (δ) xi. 47-49; (ε) xii. 22-36; (ζ) xii. 57-59; (η) xiii. 23-27; (θ) xiv. 34, 35; (ι) xvi. 13; (κ) xvi. 17, 18.

St. Luke. On the one side we have unity, aggregation, compactness, which has very much the appearance of being artificial. On the other side we have dispersion, disorder, confusion, which looks more like the state of nature. "Which is in itself more probable," asks Holtzmann, "that Luke has wantonly destroyed these imposing structures, and scattered the ruins of them to the four winds, or that Matthew has built up his stone-heaps into walls?"<sup>1</sup> Still it is not maintained that the dispersed sayings in St. Luke are all exactly where they should be. Here, for instance, is a graphic image which the writer just quoted adopts from Strauss: "The hard grit of these sayings of Jesus (*die kernigen Reden Jesu*) has not indeed been dissolved by the flood of oral tradition, but they have often been washed away from their original position, and, like rolling pebbles (*Gerölle*), have been deposited in places to which they did not properly belong."<sup>2</sup> "Erratic blocks," Holtzmann elsewhere calls them. And it must be confessed that this view has at first sight much to recommend it.

It has been a natural form for the theory which goes to St. Luke for the reconstruction of the *Logia* to take, to find a representative section of this primitive document in what is often called "the Great Interpolation or Insertion (*die grosse Einschaltung*)," the long passage which breaks the continuity of the Petrine memoirs as we have them in St. Mark, between Luke ix. 51-xviii. 14. This view is expressed most simply and directly by Wendt, who says that, while St. Matthew has in the main combined together that which is allied in subject, St. Luke has inserted the mass of the *Logia* into the narrative of St. Mark in two great connected portions (Luke vi. 20-viii. 3, and ix. 51-xviii. 14).<sup>3</sup> A simple and happy solution of the problem indeed if only

<sup>1</sup> *Einleitung*, p. 352.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Lehre Jesu*, i., p. 46.

it would fit the facts when closely applied to them; but it is the fate of the critic to find first this and then that attractive theory break down under his hand, when it comes to be applied in detail.

This "Great Insertion," or "Journal of Travel" (*Reisebericht*), or "Peræan Section," or "Samaritan Section," as it has been variously called, is seen on examination to be also composite in its structure. It contains material which is common to all the Synoptics; it contains material which is common to St. Luke with St. Matthew; but a large proportion of it is peculiar to St. Luke alone. Can we assign the whole of this diverse matter to a single source, the *Logia*? Is it not at the outset strange that the Gospel which has embodied so much of the *Logia* as to have appropriated the name of its author, has nevertheless omitted fully one half of its contents—and that a half which certainly does not yield in interest and attraction to the rest?

But in addition to this, Dr. Ewald, following partly in the steps of Wittichen, adduces an elaborate linguistic argument to show that the peculiar portions in these chapters of St. Luke, while they have all the characteristics of the evangelist's own diction, have also certain special characteristics of their own, presenting, as he thinks, points of contact with the story of the infancy (chaps. i., ii.), and also (*e.g.*) with St. Stephen's speech in the Acts.<sup>1</sup> On the strength of these phenomena, Dr. Ewald postulates a new document, which he calls "R" (*Reisebericht*). I am not sure that the arguments are convincing, but there is nothing improbable in the conclusion: at least, I doubt very much if the whole, or even the greater part, of the long section, Luke ix. 51–xyiii. 14, came from the *Logia*.

Another observation Dr. Ewald has made which seems

<sup>1</sup> Pages 237, 238.

to me of decided importance. It is this: that the resemblance between the first and third Gospels in passages which might be supposed to be taken from the *Logia* is very much closer in some places than in others. Dr. Ewald gives lists which will be well deserving of the student's attention on this head. As his book is not likely to be translated or to circulate much in this country, I shall venture to give the reader the benefit of them. They do not profess to be exhaustive, but only to serve as illustrations. For identity of expression he notes the following:

Luke iii. 7-9, 16, 17	=	Matt. iii. 7-12.
Luke vi. 41, 42	=	Matt. vii. 3-5.
Luke vii. 22-28, 31-35	=	Matt. xi. 4-11, 16-19.
Luke ix. 57-60	=	Matt. viii. 18-22.
Luke x. 2	=	Matt. ix. 37, 38.
Luke x. 12-15	=	Matt. xi. 21-24.
Luke x. 21, 22	=	Matt. xi. 25-27.
Luke xi. 24-26	=	Matt. xii. 43-45.
Luke xii. 22-31	=	Matt. vi. 25-33.
Luke xii. 39-46	=	Matt. xxiv. 43-51.
Luke xiii. 34, 35	=	Matt. xxiii. 37-39.
Luke xvi. 13, etc.	=	Matt. vi. 24, etc.

A greater amount of variation is perceptible in

Luke xi. 2-4	=	Matt. vi. 9-13.
Luke xii. 2-9	=	Matt. x. 26b-33.
Luke xiii. 58, 59	=	Matt. v. 25, 26.
Luke xv. 3-7	=	Matt. xviii. 12-14.
Luke xvii. 1-4, etc.	=	Matt. xviii. 8, 7, 51, 21, etc.

Lastly, there are some longer discourses in which resemblance and difference are strongly mixed. So conspicuously the sermon on the mount (Luke vi. 20-49 = Matt. v.-vii., with the exceptions noted in the first list above), the discourse against the Scribes and Pharisees (Luke xi. 39-52 = Matt. xxiii., also with exceptions); and among shorter passages Luke xiv. 25-27 = Matt. x. 37-39.



Dr. Ewald rightly observes, and it is, in fact, very remarkable, how the identity of language in the first set of passages only serves to throw out into stronger relief the little touches of individuality in style and turn of phrase which betray the hand of the evangelist. We can see from such examples how he is in the way of treating his sources. The alterations which he makes are only literary, and do not go deep into the grain.

These phenomena make it strange when we turn to the other set of passages, which, if the same document has still been used, imply a far freer and more masterful handling. The difficulty has been for some time present to my own mind, but Dr. Ewald has certainly advanced the subject a considerable stride by the definiteness which he has imparted to it. Let us endeavour to realize this greater definiteness by setting before ourselves one or two concrete examples. And, first, let us see how closely the evangelist is capable of adhering to the document he is using. The words common to the two Gospels (*i.e.* to the original of both) are printed in roman type; those peculiar to either Gospel in italics. The comparison is based upon the Greek, which underlies the English version.

ST. MATTHEW iii. 7-9.

“Ye offspring of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruit worthy of repentance: and *think* not (*μη δόξητε*) to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And even now is the axe laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.”

ST. LUKE iii. 7-9.

“Ye offspring of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and *begin* not (*μη ἀρχησθε*) to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And even now is the axe *also* laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.”

Here we have two and a half verses which are *verbatim* the same, not only in words, but in the order of the words, with the very slight exceptions of a plural for a singular, an additional conjunction (*καί*), and a single change of phrase, the motive of which is evidently literary.

Now let us set against this the opening of the sermon on the mount, still representing coincidences by roman type and peculiarities by italics. Familiar as the passage is, it will on this very account bring home with greater effect the point we are illustrating.

ST. MATTHEW v. 1-12.

“ And *seeing the multitudes*, He went up into the mountain: and when He had sat down, His disciples came unto Him: and He opened His mouth, and taught them, saying,

Blessed are the poor in spirit . . .

Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek: . . .

Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness: . . .

Blessed are the merciful: . . .

Blessed are the pure in heart: . . .

Blessed are the peacemakers: . . .

Blessed are they that have been persecuted for righteousness' sake: . . .

Blessed are ye when men shall reproach you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for so is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.”

ST. LUKE vi. 17-26.

“ And He came down with them, and stood on a level place. . . . And He lifted up His eyes on His disciples, and said,

Blessed are ye poor . . .

Blessed are ye that hunger now: . . .

Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh.

Blessed are ye when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you [from their company], and reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the same manner did their fathers unto the prophets.

But woe unto you that are rich! . . .

Woe unto you that are full now! . . . Woe [unto you] ye that laugh now! . . . Woe [unto you] when all men shall speak well of you! for in the same manner did their fathers to the false prophets.”

It needs no emphasis to bring out the deep-seated divergence of these extracts—the strange inverting of circumstances in the introduction: the ascent, the descent; the mountain, the plain (or, at least, flat ground); the attitude—sitting, standing; the gesture selected for notice—opening the mouth, lifting the eyes; the audience, in the one case (so far as it appears) stationary, in the other drawing near; and then, in the discourse itself, the aphoristic form of the one version, couched in the third person, the direct address of the other couched in the second; the addition of woes to blessings, with the omission of so many of the latter in St. Luke's version; the different degrees or stages of inwardness from the standpoint of which the two versions appear to be written. When we consider all this, the old historical question, Can we have before us the same discourse? remains indeed, but retires behind the newer critical question, Is it possible that both accounts should be drawn from the same document?

It is obvious to deny this; but, again, we cannot do so with an easy conscience. The two accounts are both introduced at what is really the same point in the history; they both begin in the same manner; they both end in the same manner; and when we pass a little farther down in the discourse (*e.g.* to Matt. vi. 25–33, Luke xii. 22–31), we find ourselves in the presence of a much closer verbal resemblance.

It is difficult then still to shake ourselves free from the *Logia*. But it is doubtless phenomena such as these which have led scholars like Wendt to suppose that, while the *Logia* were used by both evangelists, they had not really the written document actually before them, but quoted from it *memoriter*. That again conflicts with the alternation of exactness with freedom in the method of quoting. And even if we have recourse to the hypothesis of Simons, that the coincidences between our first and third Gospels are

due not only to the use of the same fundamental document, but also to the direct dependence of the one upon the other, still even this does not give a completely satisfactory explanation of the varying degrees of approximation and divergence which prevail in different parts of the two versions.

It is natural that, amongst other hypotheses, recourse should be had to that of a Hebrew or Aramaic original. And it has occurred to me that this might perhaps explain one of the principal difficulties. There appears to be a Hebrew word which has just the required shade of ambiguity between "poor" simply and "poor in spirit,"<sup>1</sup> and which we can easily imagine susceptible of both renderings. It is a word too which comes into one of those central passages of the Old Testament which our Lord took up most directly into His own teaching. It will be observed that, in the Revised Version of Isaiah lxi. 1, the old rendering is retained: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the *meek*"; but "poor" is given as an alternative for "meek" in the margin; and in the quotation of this passage in St. Luke iv. 18, "poor" is the rendering both in the Greek and in the English. In Psalm ix. 18, "The expectation of the poor shall not perish for ever," the Revised Version has "poor" in the text, "meek" in the margin. There can be little doubt that the Hebrew (or Aramaic) corresponding to this was the word originally used in the first beatitude, and that the evangelist has represented it to us by an apt and just paraphrase.

It will be observed that the idea of "comfort to the mourner" occurs in the same context, Isaiah lxi. 2, "To comfort all that mourn," where the idea of mourning also

<sup>1</sup> I am put upon this track by Holtzmann, *Die Synoptiker*, ad loc.

may well be taken in a wider spiritual sense (*οἱ πενθοῦντες οὐ τῇ ψυχῇ μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ τῷ πνεύματι*).

Again, many of the variants in the last beatitude—"hate" or "separate" . . . "persecute"; "cast out your name as evil" . . . "speak all manner of evil"; "leap for joy" . . . "be exceeding glad"; "so" . . . "in like manner"—one might well believe arose from difference of translation.

Still the hypothesis of a Hebrew or Aramaic original, though it may explain some of the phenomena in question, is not capable of being carried through. For instance, it is refuted, not only by passages like that previously mentioned—Matthew vi. 25-33=Luke xii. 22-31, which lie outside the immediate context of the sermon as St. Luke gives it, —but also by passages like Matthew vii. 3-5=Luke vi. 41, 42, which lie within it. And even if it were possible to suppose that the two evangelists were giving independent versions of a common Semitic original, even that would not explain the whole of the facts. It would bring us no nearer to understanding why St. Matthew should have a series of eight beatitudes and St. Luke substitute for this four pronouncements of blessing and four of woe.

And yet I hesitate equally to think that the difference is due merely to a free handling of a common original by either of our evangelists. We have seen that there are many places in which St. Luke keeps closely enough to his text; the changes which he introduces into it are not of so far-reaching a kind. But apart from that, we can ill afford to lose either of the two versions; on neither can we lay the hand and say, This is unworthy of the author to whom it is ascribed. In regard to both we have the same difficulty in supposing that any one but Jesus could have so spoken. They present truths complementary to each other—truths allied in their essence, though seen, as it were, from a different angle.

The conclusion therefore to which I incline is that which I understand to be also favoured by Dr. Ewald. I believe that the beatitudes originally stood in the *Logia* in a form not dissimilar from that in which we have a Greek version of them in St. Matthew. I believe that St. Luke also had access to the *Logia*; and I find it hard to doubt that in some places, at least, if not in this, he had access even to the same Greek version.<sup>1</sup> But I suspect that here, and very probably elsewhere, he also had before him some other document—entirely independent of the *Logia*—which contained a discourse spoken originally on some other occasion, but yet so like the sermon on the mount as to be identified with it by St. Luke. That evangelist seems to have given us, not either discourse singly or separately, but the two fused together, the language and expression of the discourse peculiar to himself predominating.

It is at least conceivable that St. Luke's enlarged version of the call of the four apostles (v. 1-11) may be a combination of the Synoptic narrative with a tradition similar to that of St. John xxi. 1-11. No doubt the two accounts read now as if they referred to different events; but we may imagine St. Luke partly drawing upon written documents, partly collecting by word of mouth stories detached from their context, and not always perhaps quite at first hand. Among these latter there came to him one which seemed to fit in with the call of the apostles; and he placed it there, interweaving it with the framework supplied to him by St. Mark.

I would not say more than that this is a *conceivable* explanation. How far it is also *probable* will depend upon the conclusion we are led to form as to St. Luke's historical method generally—a conclusion which would be better

<sup>1</sup> So too Wendt, *Lehre Jesu*, i., p. 45.

reserved until we have reached a further point in the study of the Synoptic problem than we have at present. As yet we do not deal with assured results, but only with working hypotheses.

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