

*THE EPISTLE OF JAMES AS A STOREHOUSE OF
THE SAYINGS OF JESUS.*

To the New Testament student the Epistle of James presents some most perplexing problems. Its date has been variously determined at all possible periods from that of the earliest to the latest book in the New Testament. The question of its authorship has been strongly maintained, on the one hand, as certainly in accordance with the statement of the book itself, and the James there mentioned identified as the brother of the Lord, while, on the other, it has been as confidently stated that the book is anonymous, and the traditional ascription to James purely apocryphal. As to the book's content and purpose, many various theories have been held, some seeing in it a careful and logical discussion of points of doctrine and practice, while others describe it as a mere haphazard collection of independent sayings on religion and morals. Similarly its destination and place of origin have been decided in very diverse ways.

There is, therefore, abundant room for suggestion and critical investigation in connexion with this book, and the very diversity of opinion that prevails among competent critics leads the student to think that the proper solution has not yet been arrived at.

In all probability the first feature that will strike a careful reader of the book is the strong similarity that many of its sayings afford to the sayings of Jesus in the Gospels, particularly in the Gospel of Matthew, and in that section of it known as the "Sermon on the Mount." This has been noted by every commentator upon the Epistle, and long and careful lists of parallels are found in many books, most fully perhaps in Mayor's exhaustive study (pp. lxxxii.-ciii.). Many conclusions have been drawn from this obvious

resemblance, the most frequent one being that the writer had himself been a hearer of Jesus, and is giving his reminiscences of the words that had fallen from his Master's lips. This is the point of view of those who regard the book as a very early one, while others consider that the dependence is rather upon the first Gospel, as we now have it. The difficulty in the latter case is to account for the variety of the form in which the sayings occur. But it is not only with Matthew's Gospel, but with the majority of the other books of the New Testament, that resemblances have been discovered and dependence either of this Epistle upon the other books, or of them upon this Epistle assumed. P. Ewald, for example, in his treatise, *Das Hauptproblem der Evangelienfrage*, maintains the strong resemblance between this Epistle and the Johannine writings, and though probably he pushes the proof of connexion too far, yet many of the parallels are very striking. Every one can see the resemblances to passages in Paul's Epistles, while the question of respective dependence becomes acute when we study this Epistle alongside 1 Peter. As regards the Epistle to the Hebrews, Professor Mayor firmly holds that the xith chapter of that Epistle was written with a knowledge, on the part of the writer, of the Epistle of James, and he thinks that other resemblances are to be discovered ; while Pfeiderer has pointed out several close resemblances between this letter and the letters to the Seven Churches contained in Revelation. The question arises whether the true inwardness of these resemblances has not been missed by those who have noted and discussed them. What if, after all, James is not reminiscent of Peter nor Peter of James, but that both depend upon a common source ? To try to discover the latter and to show how its discovery may simplify many of these problems is the object of the present article.

Let us return, then, to an examination of the Epistle itself. A casual reading of it will reveal the fact that at intervals there occurs the slightly varying form of address to its readers, "My brethren" (i. 2, ii. 1, 14, iii. 1, 10, 12, v. 12, 19); "My beloved brethren" (i. 16, 19, ii. 5); and "Brethren" (iv. 11, v. 7, 9, 10). On each occasion these addresses accompany words which are among the most close parallels to the sayings of Jesus found in Matthew's Gospel. For example: "Count it all joy, my brethren, when ye fall into manifold temptations" (i. 2; cf. Matt. v. 11, 12, "Blessed are ye when men shall . . . persecute you . . . rejoice and be exceeding glad"). "Be not many teachers, my brethren, knowing that we shall receive heavier judgment" (iii. 1; cf. Matt. xxiii. 8, "Be not ye called Rabbi, for one is your teacher, and all ye are brethren"). "My brethren, these things ought not so to be. Doth the fountain send forth from the same opening sweet water and bitter? Can a fig tree, my brethren, yield olives, or a vine figs?" (iii. 11, 12; cf. Matt. vii. 16, "Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?"). And, once more, "But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by the heaven nor by the earth, nor by any other oath: but let your yea be yea, and your nay, nay, that ye fall not under judgment" (cf. Matt. v. 34-37, "Swear not at all, neither by the heaven . . . nor by the earth . . . but let your speech be yea, yea, nay, nay, and whatsoever is more than these is of the evil"). It is noteworthy that in various books of the early Christian literature the same practice is observed, and the address "brethren" seems to be frequently used as a kind of "signpost" to indicate quotations from Scripture, or, more particularly, from the words of Jesus (cf. 1 Clem. xiii., xiv., xvi. *ad fin.*, lvi. *ad fin.*). This usage is very marked in the so-called Second Epistle of Clement; but there, of course, the formula of

quotation is much more definite, though it is not always present, as in the passage in the xith chapter, which has close bearing upon our present subject, and runs, "Wherefore, my brethren, let us not be double-minded, but endure patiently, in hope that we may also obtain our reward; for faithful is He that promised to pay to each man the recompense of his works. If, therefore, we shall have wrought righteousness in the sight of God, we shall enter into His kingdom, and shall receive the promises which ear has not heard nor eye seen, neither hath it entered into the heart of man." Even in the Epistles of Ignatius the same usage is discoverable; e.g., the Epistle to the Philadelphians, par. 3, reads: "Be not deceived, my brethren. If any man followeth one that maketh a schism, *he doth not inherit the kingdom of God.*"

If we regard these, with the suggested indication attached to them, as definitely being sayings of Jesus, and leave, for the moment, the question of their source undecided, we shall turn, in the second place, to another class of passages in the Epistle, about which we have indications of another nature that lead us to recognize them as being also sayings of Jesus. The first of these is i. 12, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he hath been approved he shall receive the crown of life which the Lord promised to them that love him." This saying is presented in the form of a beatitude, a form that was frequently upon our Lord's lips. The words find echo also in 1 Peter iii. 14, and iv. 14, and even more remarkably in 2 Timothy iv. 7, 8, and Rev. ii. 10 and iii. 2. All these well known references to the "crown of life," particularly where, as in Revelation, the words are put into the mouth of our Lord Himself, seem to point to a traditional saying of Jesus known to the early church; and this view is supported by the passage in the apocryphal

Acts of Philip, which runs : " Blessed is he who has his raiment white, for it is he who receiveth the crown of joy " (cf. Resch, *Agrapha*, p. 253); cf. also Tertull. de Bap. c. 20 : " Neminem intentatum regna coelestia consecuturum," a saying he attributes to Jesus. Another striking instance is found in chapter ii. 17, 26, " Even so faith, if it have not works, is dead in itself. For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, even so faith apart from works is dead " (cf. Rev. iii. 1 : " I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest and thou art dead "). This striking saying is in agreement with much of the teaching of Jesus recorded in the Gospels, such passages as " Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, etc., " and may easily be a record of a definite saying that is not found elsewhere. The striking reference to Rahab, as an example of faith, common to this Epistle (ii. 25) and that to the Hebrews (ii. 31), may very possibly be due to some reference to her made by Jesus. As it is, He is recorded to have used rather extraordinary examples from the Old Testament. Lot, Jonah, Solomon and the Queen of Sheba are not four we should have picked out as the most likely persons for our Lord to instance from the wide field of Jewish history, and it is quite probable that in Rahab also He found a lesson useful to His hearers. The striking passage on the use of the tongue, given in the third chapter of the Epistle, reads extremely like an utterance of the Master's, and we have at least two statements parallel to it contained in Matthew's Gospel, that about being called to account for every idle word (xii. 36), and the passage in the xivth chapter which describes the true causes of defilement. May it not be that the elaborate passage in James has preserved recollections of sayings that are not elsewhere retained, especially as we have already seen that it closes with a close parallel to a parabolic utterance related in Matthew? The teaching

on the proper attitude toward the morrow (iv. 13-17) has a certain connexion with the teaching as to the proper attitude toward the morrow contained in the latter verses of the vith chapter of Matthew, and the same passage closes with words which find echoes, not only in the recorded words of Jesus, but elsewhere in the New Testament, "To him, therefore, that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin." This reminds us of the parable in Matthew vii. of the two builders; of the words in Luke xii. 47, 48 about the servants who knew, and who did not know the Lord's will; in John ix. 41, of those who, because they say "We see," are assured that their sin remaineth. The immediately succeeding passage in reference to riches stands in close connexion with the verses in Matthew vi. 19-21 about the treasure on earth and in heaven, while Matthew vi. 22-24 finds its parallel in James iv. 4, 8.¹

Let us now turn to one or two passages which are cited as parallels between this Epistle and those of Paul, and consider what light they throw on our present argument. James ii. 5, the passage which we have already seen has the indication within it of being a quotation, reads, "Did not God choose them that are poor as to the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to them that love Him?" In 1 Corinthians i. 27 Paul speaks of the foolish things of the world putting to shame those that are wise, etc.—an idea that is also found in another form in James i. 9, "Let the brother of low degree glory in his high estate." The phrase in James i. 18, "the word of truth," is found nowhere else save in Paul's Epistles. A close parallel is to be found between the treatment of the law in James iv. 11, 12, and Romans ii. 1-3. Again, James i. 3-4 reads, "Knowing that the proof of your faith

¹ Cf. "The Lord's Prayer in the Early Church," by Dr. Chase, in *Texts and Studies*, i. 3, p. 47 f.

worketh patience. And let patience have its perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, lacking in nothing." Compare with this Romans v. 3-5, "Let us rejoice in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience probation, and probation hope, etc." Upon these latter words Professor Mayor remarks: "Here it is more probable that Paul is working up a hint received from James than that the less complete analysis should have been borrowed from the more complete," and he regards in a similar light James i. 18, 25, compared with Romans viii. 21, 23, and xi. 16. In a somewhat similar way he speaks of James i. 4, i. 14, iv. 6 as compared with Ephesians iv. 13, 14, and, again, Professor Mayor thinks that the passage in 2 Timothy ii. 12 may be derived from an "early hymn founded on the same original *agraphon* as the verse James i. 12." As over against these explanations of the passages referred to, and many others that might be quoted, it is surely easier and more natural to believe that both writers are dependent upon traditional sayings of Jesus, that each one of them has presented in a somewhat varying form; and if it be objected that neither in James nor in Paul is there the slightest indication that the words referred to are quotations, we find the practice of weaving in words, that were recognized as quotations, with the statements of the writer himself to have been a common one. An excellent instance of this is to be found in the opening paragraphs of the *Didaché*, which are too well known to require quotation here.

Another point of great interest with regard to this Epistle consists of the consideration of the many parallels that have been discovered between it and the two famous Jewish books of wisdom, Ecclesiasticus and the Wisdom of Solomon. The most famous of these is the passage on the tongue, which has many parallels in the former book. A

very striking parallel is that between James i. 12-15, and Eccus. xv. 11-20, a passage that begins, "Say not thou it is through the Lord that I fell away, for thou shalt not do the things that He hateth. Say not thou it is He that caused me to err, for He hath no need of a sinful man." One of the most striking parallels with the book of wisdom is the passage in the Epistle already referred to which contains the promise of the "crown of life." The words are found in Wisdom v. 16: "Therefore shall they receive the crown of royal dignity and the diadem of beauty from the Lord's hand." (For a full list of parallels see Mayor, pp. lxxiii. to lxxvi. *l.c.*) The importance of this latter class of parallels for the theory here maintained is, that we have not many references in the Gospels to our Lord's acquaintance with the extra-canonical books of wisdom, and yet we cannot but suppose that He was familiar with them. And if we can find here evidence that sayings of His have a strong resemblance to sayings contained in these books, we have the best possible proof that He not only knew, but Himself employed, their thought and language.

The question now arises as to how we are to relate all these isolated investigations as to individual verses into a theory about the construction of the whole book, and here we must first ask, with Harnack, is it an epistle at all? And the only answer that seems possible is, that it is not. Then, if it is not an epistle, what is it? It seems unlikely that it should be a mere collection of aphorisms, however excellent and however necessary for the guidance of those for whom they were designed. Nor is it easy to see how it can be a combination of letter, address, and exhortation; and yet it seems impossible to discover in it any definite logical system. We have already seen that in material, and sometimes in form of expression, it stands more closely allied to the Sermon on the Mount than to any other section

of the New Testament; but we may push that resemblance farther, and maintain that, in the form of its composition, it also bears close likeness to that passage of the First Gospel. It is notoriously difficult to find for the Sermon on the Mount any logical scheme of composition, and the most ingenious of systematic arrangements find every now and again great difficulty in bringing certain verses under their plan. Ideas of connexion may, indeed, have influenced the Evangelist as he wrote, but they are not easy to discover now. That the same thing is true of this Epistle causes us to ask the question whether the reason is not identical, namely, that the writer is also endeavouring to make a collection of sayings, all of which he values, none of which he wishes to lose, and yet he finds it extremely difficult to fit them into an ordered mosaic. In the case of the Sermon on the Mount, there are a good many verses which modern scholarship is inclined to doubt, at least in their present form, as authentic utterances of Jesus, which seems to show that the compiler may have used a good deal of freedom with his material, and have, in certain cases, either added notes of his own, or embodied reflections of some recognized interpreter, or of the Christian community, in his final revision of his material. Now, all this helps us in relation to the present book. Here, too, it would seem, if there is any truth in what has already been said, that we have a certain number, at least, of sayings of Jesus contained in these chapters. In moving from the better-known to the less-known, we have found that there are a large number of sayings contained in this writing which are paralleled in other writers of the New Testament, and that it is more probable that they all go back upon a common original than that the one should copy from the other. If these also are sayings of Jesus, this is perfectly natural and explicable. But it is quite clear that a large part of

the book cannot consist of sayings of the Lord, unless in an extremely modified and altered form. Comparison, however, with other books such as the *Didaché*, has shown us that it was no uncommon practice to mingle recognized sayings of Jesus with the thoughts and utterances of the writer, and this book appears to have been such a treatise, but one probably of a unique and special character. It seems to have been founded upon a collection of cherished sayings of the Master, and round these have been gathered other sayings perhaps not so well authenticated, with reflections upon them, and explanations of them, as given probably in the gatherings of the disciples. We seem thus to have here a combination of an early collection (perhaps one of the earliest) of the Lord's sayings, that may have been read in the gatherings of His followers, combined with reminiscences of the earliest applications of these sayings to the thought and needs of the first disciples.

But how, then, did this book come to bear the name of James? Because, in all probability, the collection of sayings was due to his hand. Who more likely than he to remember some words of his famous Brother, that other collectors had forgotten to record? Who would more probably cherish the sayings of a peculiarly Jewish caste, and those which were founded upon, or related to, the books of Wisdom, so beloved by himself and his co-religionists, than James? This fact may have been well known to the early Christian community, and that special collection of sayings may have been preserved and used in Jerusalem. When the city was destroyed, and the Christians fled, this manuscript may have been taken with them as one of their most valuable possessions. In the course of time the original words may, as I have hinted, have been mingled with many other teachings and reflections, until, finally, they came to form a short treatise of practical conduct,

a guide to the Christian life, a sort of "church members' manual," if we may be allowed a modern expression. Then the church (whether in Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, or in some unknown place, matters not) that possessed this valuable legacy, felt it was only right that it should share its privilege with its fellow-Christians, who belonged also to the Jewish race, and resolved to circulate it among the Christian communities of their fellow-countrymen throughout the world. They had no name to give to it, but they knew it depended originally on the great head of the Church at Jerusalem, and so they sent it out in the name of James. Thus we can account for the lateness of the book's appearance. Its circulation may well be quite late in the second century, and yet, on the other hand, the foundation of the book may be the very earliest of all the writings of the New Testament, and thus a point of union may be found between the conflicting theories of modern scholarship, and we may rejoice again in this exquisite little treatise, as in one of the most precious possessions of our Christian faith. We have often felt, in reading it, as a man feels, who has once listened to a wonderful piece of music exquisitely played, and in later days has heard haunting melodies that recalled now one strain, and now another, of the great work. He could not be sure whether they were extracts from it, imitations of it, or other compositions of the one master, but they awakened the same feelings of joy and brought back all the delightful memories. Thus is it, when we turn from the perusal of the Gospels to the pages of James; and what if the reason be that, in the main, the same Great Voice is speaking?

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