

SYNOPTIC STUDIES.

II.

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES AND THE SAYINGS OF JESUS.

IN my first Study—which untoward circumstances have separated from this by too wide a gulf—I used the Epistle of James as a document from which we could deduce valuable independent evidence as to the earliest form of sayings of Jesus. But if we are to rely on the Epistle in this way, we must clearly have some sort of a theory as to the date of its composition and its essential character. I deviate into what may seem like a by-path because I believe it is possible to suggest a theory which will meet the central difficulty of the Epistle and at the same time encourage us to use it as a prime authority for the Logia. Perhaps if the personal touch may be allowed, I am all the more ready to digress—if it be a digression—because the Epistle has always been to me no *epistola straminea*, but a golden book to which I have turned sooner than to any of the Epistles except perhaps *Philippians*, a book the quality of which has been approved not by weight of other people's judgements, but by the irresistible appeal of an authority within it which I at any rate find it impossible to gainsay.

The son of Joseph and Mary—for such I take the author to be, while necessarily avoiding a restatement of reasons for adopting this side—James avows himself the “slave” of God and the Lord Jesus Christ, whose human brother he was well known to be. But having thus declared himself, he drops all overt reference to Christian faith, and only names the Master in a verse where the forced order of the words raises an extremely strong presumption of a gloss. He seeks a supreme example of Endurance in Job, instead of bidding his readers “consider Him that hath endured

such gainsaying of sinners against themselves." And yet his short pages are simply studded with quotations from, and allusions to, the Words of Jesus, so that the theory that we have only a Jewish work, doctored in one or two passages, becomes positively grotesque. Into what age of Church history are we to put a book which presents such contradictions? We might naturally take refuge in the view, ably presented by Professor Currie Martin in a recent *EXPOSITOR*, that the Epistle shows us little about Christ just because it is almost made up of His own words. But if it was known to be a collection of Logia, how could it fail to be widely known and eagerly read from an early date? The long and doubtful fight it made for inclusion in the Canon is not easily explained on this hypothesis.

And yet I venture to believe that Mr. Martin has come nearer to the truth than most of his predecessors in this complex critical investigation. Has anyone yet proposed to regard the Epistle as addressed *by a Christian to Jews*? The "Twelve Tribes of the Dispersion," of course, most naturally suggest such a destination. The "synagogue" of ii. 2 will then be Jewish, and the rich men who are so sternly denounced will be more easily found than if we have to seek them in a Christian community of any date prior to the age of Constantine. Now of all the Christians of the first century, who are known to us, James is the only one who had in any sense the ear of the Jews. The well known story of Hegesippus, improbable enough in its main features, may fairly be trusted in its picture of a man whose loyalty to the Law and the Temple, sanctity of life and faithful adherence to the Jewish ideal of righteousness, had long commanded the reverence of fellow-countrymen bitterly hostile to Christians of the Pauline type. Is it not wholly in character that he should endeavour to

plead with his countrymen abroad, waking afresh the tones of ancient prophecy and ancient "Wisdom" alike, and weaving in a whole fabric of ethical teaching that had fallen from the lips of the supreme Prophet? To name Him would have been to frustrate his whole purpose. Others might argue His Messiahship by appealing to the Scriptures, and when Jews were as candid and open-minded as those of Beroea such a method would be abundantly fruitful. But a far larger number would be deaf to all argument which even named the Crucified, and he who would reach them must try another way. Could there be a better than to write as a Jew to Jews, threading the pearls of Christ's own teaching on a string of miscellaneous exhortation, all tending to shame them out of a blind unbelief rooted in party spirit (*ἐπιθεία*)? Jews who would read this Epistle could often without great difficulty be led on to read such a book as our First Gospel, in which they would learn with surprise that many of the sayings they had accepted as heavenly wisdom, when purporting to come from a pious and orthodox Jew, were really due to Him whom all orthodox Jews had agreed never to hear.

Of course this theory involves rejecting as early Christian glosses the two passages which do name the Lord Jesus. In the address we may assume the writer calls himself simply "James, bondservant of God." In ii. 1 the Greek becomes clear and normal when we read "Hold not the faith of the Lord of Glory with respect of persons": cf. Psalm xxix. 3, xxiv. 7—not exact parallels, but near enough to suggest to the Jewish reader a perfectly natural and to him unobjectionable meaning, while retaining for the author a veiled allusion to Jesus.

The subsequent fate of the Epistle seems to become very much clearer on this theory. Among the Jews its chance of success would be ultimately barred by its author's

martyrdom as a Christian at the hands of Jews.¹ Among the Christians it never had a chance of popularity. The absence of specifically Christian doctrine in it, and the presence of doctrine which to superficial readers looked like an attack on Paulinism, combined to prevent its being much read. It would owe its preservation to the small and diminishing circle of Palestinian Christians among whom the memory of James was cherished: to them would be due the addition of the missing words in i. 1 and ii. 1 which James had in his heart but forced his pen to omit. Gradually, as relics of the Apostolic Age grew rarer and rarer, this gem emerged from its obscurity, and what may well be the earliest writing of the New Testament took its rightful place in the Canon.²

Before proceeding to apply this theory to some important passages in the Epistle, let me give a modern parallel which is worth recounting for its own sake. A few years ago one of the most learned of our missionaries in India, the Rev. Benjamin Robinson, of the W.M.S., sent in a Kanarese tract to a Christian literature agency with a view to its publication. Its purpose was to awaken the activity of Conscience, as the inward witness of right and wrong, the very name for which, as used in Christian Indian literature, was supposed³ to be a coinage of the missionaries. It reproduced a story from the Mahābhārata. King Duśyanta, hunting in a forest, fell in love with Çakuntalā, the adopted daughter of the hermit Kanva, and married her, with a pledge that

¹ Josephus, *Ant.* XX. ix. 1.

² I should note here that the first suggestion of this theory came to me from a question asked me in class by one of my students, Mr. Mountford. Mr. Robinson (see below) reminds one of a good parallel in what Schürer says (*Jewish People*, E.T., II. iii. 279 f.) about the Sibyllines and other "Jewish propaganda under a heathen mask."

³ Wrongly, as Mr. Robinson points out: the word (*manahāksi*, lit. "mind-witness") occurs in a version of the Rāmāyaṇa by Pampa, a Kanarese poet, born 902 A.D.

her son should have his throne. He went home and forgot her. When the boy was twelve years old, Çakuntalā went at Kanva's bidding to the king's court to claim his promise. The king recognized her, but denied her and bade her begone. She said :¹

“I am alone,” thou deemest. . . .

Sinning, one thinks “None is aware of me,”
 And the gods are aware of him, and the man within.
 Sun and Moon, Fire and Wind,
 Sky, Earth, Waters, Heart and Yama ;
 Day too, and Night, and both Twilights,
 And Dharma know the conduct of a man.

The subsequent history of Mr. Robinson's tract continues the parallel. One missionary to whom it was referred returned it with the comment that a Hindu might read it and worship in the nearest temple more devoutly than ever. Which was just what its author intended—a Hindu who had learnt from his own sacred books the idea of Conscience as the “inward man,” the witness of secret sin, was thereby nearer to the Kingdom of God and more accessible to the appeal of Christ. Happily the tract was published, and has its audience still. It is to be fervently hoped that the growth of the study of Comparative Religion will make Christian missionaries increasingly ready to adopt methods which were so conspicuously used by St. Paul—to bind up the bruised reed and fan to a flame the smouldering wick of pagan religion, assured that every glimmering light of Truth was kindled ultimately from Him who is the Light of the world and the only source of Truth. But this is by the way.

Let us now assume that the Epistle of James was a composition of this class, a Christian's appeal to non-Christians, which veils Christian terms and names in order to insinuate

¹ I give the passage as translated by a high authority, my friend Mr. F. W. Thomas, of the India Office Library.

Christian truth into prejudiced minds.¹ We will treat it as addressed to Jews of the Dispersion, though applicable in many ways to the conditions of Palestine, the author's home. At the outset we are confronted with social conditions which are natural enough in any Jewish community, but difficult to find among Christians during the ages of persecution. There is "the congregation of God's poor," oppressed by nominal co-religionists, to whom they are prone to show a grovelling deference whenever one of these plutocrats deigns to visit their synagogue. The teaching of Christ on the subject of riches and its possessors was wholly in the line of the ancient prophets' doctrine: respect of persons, the beatification of the proud and the wealthy, the lingering superstition that poverty and trial were proofs of Divine displeasure, all demanded readjusting to a right perspective by words of authority which set forth the will of Israel's God. For this and for the scathing of the wealthy tyrants who ground the faces of the poor while professing devotion to the Faith of Israel, there were sayings of Jesus in plenty ready to the hand of one who knew them well. James embedded them in kindred exhortations, drawn partly from Hebrew *hokhma*, and partly from the stores of a latter-day Amos whose indignation at social wrong had been kindled in the white flame of the wrath of Jesus towards everything that defied the "Royal Law."

"They say, and do not," was the burden of Christ's denunciation of the scribes. It could hardly be questioned that an enlargement on this theme would always be pecu-

¹ My friend Dr. A. S. Peake suggests a good parallel in Charles Reade's "It is Never Too Late to Mend." So in chap. xxxi:—"And then she secretly quoted the New Testament to him [the Jew Levi], having first ascertained that he had never read it; and he wondered where on earth this simple girl had picked up so deep a wisdom and so lofty and self-denying a morality." Cf. also pp. 236 f. (chapter xxxii.), "I will not tell you whence I had them," etc.

liarily appropriate before an audience of Jews. Keenly sensitive about orthodoxy, passionately dogmatic as to the monotheistic creed (ii. 19), which creed if a man held pure and undefiled, without doubt he should be saved everlastingly, the Jews assuredly needed the prophetic voice that told them a greater truth—that the hosts of hell were as orthodox as Jews ever could be, and that no orthodoxy was worth anything if it did not inspire a noble life.¹ How many Sayings of Jesus were used by James in enforcing this doctrine we cannot tell: we can recognize some clearly enough, and we know that in all the Master's teaching there was nothing so conspicuously reiterated as the great lesson of applied religion which closes the Sermon on the Mount. In driving home his antithesis of faith and works, James obviously means by faith not much more than mere belief.² Such a meaning was natural in

¹ This is quite consistent with the existence in Judaism of a strong tendency towards emphasizing "orthopraxy" beyond orthodoxy. Prof. Peake recalls what Mr. Herford says on this point in the introduction of his *Christianity in Talmud and Midrash*. An observer of our present-day religious conditions might find abundant evidence for asserting that we lay all the stress on creed, or on practice: it would depend on the circles he happened to visit, or the books he happened to read. And even one and the same teacher, if his sayings were isolated, might easily be quoted for both sides: we all tend to exaggerate the particular side of the truth for which at any moment we are pleading. This obvious consideration should be borne in mind when we try to estimate the prevailing trend of doctrine in another age, which like our own was profoundly interested in religious theory and praxis.

² I guard this in deference to Prof. Peake, whose opinion on such matters has peculiar weight. It seems to me that the meaning of *πίστις* in ii. 14-26 is mainly conditioned by verse 19. But the natural Jewish exegesis of Gen. xv. 6 (verse 23) has to be allowed its influence. The citations in Lightfoot's excursus (*Galatians* 158 ff.) show that in purely Jewish circles *belief* often came to include very much of the meaning *trust*, and that the faith of Abraham was interpreted by Philo and others in a sense not differing widely from Paul's own. May we say then that James starts with the idea of credal orthodoxy, but that his sense of the necessary consequences of this forces into the word, before the paragraph concludes, a decidedly deeper meaning? It was still not a meaning which would be unfamiliar in the Jewish schools.

purely Jewish circles. How could it ever be natural among those whose whole thought was shaped by the words of Jesus, for whom "faith" meant a childlike trust in a heavenly Father, too wise to err and too good to be unkind? If the Epistle is a late Christian writing, it is an all but incredible reversion to a pre-Christian type. Make it early, and addressed to Jews, and we can see clearly how the Christian teacher used the name as it was used in his audience, but strove to add to the narrow conception what would enrich it infinitely. Faith, orthodoxy, when demonstrated by practical holiness which sprang from it (ii. 18), was a grace Paul could bless as warmly as James. The use of *πίστις* in Paul and *Hebrews* belongs palpably to a later stage of thought, bearing the unmistakable marks of Christ's teaching. For Priscilla—if she be the great unknown—the child's trust in the Father becomes "the title-deeds¹ of things hoped for," the promises of One so implicitly trusted being treated as realized assets instead of possible futures. For Paul it was the almighty touch of life which made him one with Christ, a perfect trust producing a perfect fellowship that nothing could break or mar. The word has gone far indeed from the stage in which it was capable of being conceived as a possession of the very demons!

"Saying and Doing" is in another form the theme of the third chapter. Even the Twelve had needed to be warned against the ambition to be "called Rabbi," so ingrained in a people whose admiration for their teachers had been largely responsible for making the Pharisees into the pretentious humbugs they most of them were. James's sermon on the Tongue is very obviously based on his Master's teaching. The study of his words makes

¹ See my note, *EXPOSITOR*, VI. viii. 439 (Dec. 1903).

us feel at once that the Jewish world of his time was far more in need of such a warning than the Christian community. *Odium theologicum* always burnt fiercely in Jewish air; and when there were Christians to curse, as well as Jews of other parties, we may feel that James's remonstrance was very much to the point. The *εἰρηνοποιοί* on whom he pronounces afresh the Master's benediction were not mere good-natured flabby people whose motto was "anything for a quiet life." "Make peace; pursue peace"—treat it as the first of all God's demands, and use all your powers to secure the prize—such is the message of Inspiration to Zealots of the old time and Jingoës of the new, to Jews cursing Christians in the first century and Christians cursing one another in the twentieth.

The very climax of impossibility seems to be reached when we try to apply the fourth chapter to a Christian community of any earlier date than the fourth century. "You covet and possess not—then you do murder. You envy and cannot attain—then you fight and war." Are we to water this down to metaphor? To treat *φονεύετε* thus is hard enough; and if ever the principle of the *difficilior lectio* applied, it surely steps in here to bar the obvious conjecture *φθονέετε*, introduced by Erasmus for the first time and followed by Luther. And the picture of prosperity and worldliness, love of pleasure and giddy selfishness, which prompts the prophet's mingled tenderness and severity, is extraordinarily incongruous if it belongs to a sect which was everywhere spoken against, membership of which might any day involve martyrdom. Christians of *this* stamp were surely the proud product of Constantine's well-meant revolution, and not of any earlier conditions. There are many passages on which we might dwell in discussing this view of the Epistle, but we will be content with one more, v. 6. Can we take this as an allusion to "the

Righteous One, of whom the Jews had become betrayers and murderers" ? In our theory, of course, this must not be more than a particular application—albeit supreme in the writer's own mind—of a general charge which had very often justified itself only too completely. The verse is the echo of Matthew xxiii. 35.

A word may be added in conclusion as to the objections which Harnack raises against Spitta's theory. It does not at all follow that they will hold against the rather similar but vitally different theory defended here. We no longer have to remark on the absence of Rabbinical conceits and puerilities : the absence of obtrusively Christian doctrine and of the lower forms of Judaism comes alike from our postulate. Among the passages which Harnack regards as difficult to refer to a Jewish document there do not seem to be any which refuse to suit the other view. In i. 18, 25, 27, ii. 12 we may readily agree that the language is improbable enough on the lips of a non-Christian Jew. But so long as it did not repel the Jewish reader by suggesting that the doctrine was positively heterodox, one sees no reason why James should not use such words. The Parousia of the Judge in v. 7 ff. is a little more difficult. But the thought does not go one whit beyond what Amos had said centuries before. "Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel," is reiterated here with solemn emphasis ; and if the writer himself believes that Jehovah is coming in His Son, his language is absolutely capable of the Jewish connotation. Nor is Parousia a technical Christian term. The Petrie papyri have shown us that it was used two or three centuries earlier—without epithet or even article—as a sufficient expression for a *royal visit* ; and it is likely enough that a word suggesting such an idea would be used in Jewish circles to describe the "day of the Lord" for which the prophets had prepared them. And even if the

word had never actually been thus used, its application would cause no surprise. There remains one more difficulty, the use of *πίστις* in i. 3, "recognizing that what is genuine in your belief works out endurance." It does not seem necessary to assume here that the Jewish reader would see anything strange. True belief, a holding of the Creed of Israel as no mere formality, but a possession dearer than life, had worked out endurance of a very wonderful kind in the days of the Maccabees. See further above.

Our next task will be to see what form the Sayings of Jesus had in the source, written or oral, which was used by James.

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