

STUDIES IN THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

III. THE COMPOSITION OF A GOSPEL.

It has been more than once suggested—most recently by Professor Gwatkin in his valuable *Early Church History*—that something may be learned about the labours of those who composed our Gospels by studying the ways of the Moslem Traditionalists. These persons had not much to do with the text of their Sacred Book, which was written and fixed ; still they had to find out the occasions on which texts were revealed, as their theory put it. Otherwise it was their business to obtain as full and accurate knowledge as possible of what their master had said and done, since either counted as a source of law. And those who took their profession seriously travelled from country to country and from city to city, to hear the best authorities, and find out what chains of evidence were trustworthy. The author who acquired most fame in this line worked for sixteen years in this way, and is said to have rejected as unauthentic far more than nine-tenths of the matter which he had collected.

In the Preface to the Third Gospel the work done by previous writers as well as by the author is described as *re-arranging* the matter handed down by the original eye-witnesses and servants (preservers and translators) of the Word, and the writer declares that he has strictly traced every statement, in order that his reader (the typical Christian) might know the truth about what he had already been made to commit to memory. *Rearrangement* implies that the previous arrangement had been faulty. Probably this was due to the original teachers relating only words which they had actually heard, or scenes at which they had actually been present. The matter would then have

a tendency to assume what is technically called a *musnad* arrangement, i.e. in the order of the names of the original authorities. Rearrangement might then be either in order of subjects, or chronological order; and for the latter purpose the study of the occasion of delivery (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) would be required.

A Gospel-writer who did his work conscientiously (as we have every reason for believing that the author of the Third Gospel did) would then feel that each year that passed lessened the chance of his getting at the truth. His only way of obtaining it would be to travel to all the Churches where traditions were recited and committed to memory, and question all persons of authority as to the source of their information; imploring them to strain their powers of memory to the very utmost, to recollect the exact words in which they first heard the tradition which they handed on, whether in Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek. And in the course of the work, if diligently accomplished, the student would formulate a variety of criteria. He would dismiss all traditions traceable to particular names as unsound; while of the accuracy and faithfulness of certain others he would become convinced. In some cases he would require two witnesses, or even three, before he accepted a narrative as authentic. Probably he would be no freer than some of ourselves from bias, and so introduce criteria which others might not find convincing. Yet on the whole it is a true saying that what is sought is likely to be found. The writer who within three generations of the events pursued his inquiry regardless of time or cost, would certainly discover the truth in numerous places where those who rearranged it on *a priori* principles would have missed it.

When such a writer gives the world his authorities, they contain a partial record of the labour which he has spent; but even so the world knows nothing therefrom of the labour

which has produced only negative results ; and this may have been ten or twenty times as much as the other. Let us suppose, e.g., that " Luke " has been at pains to inquire into the authority on which the narrative of the Magi and the slaughter of the Innocents rested, and discovered it to be inadequate and untrustworthy ; such an inquiry might require distant travels, including consultation with Jewish historians (such as Josephus) as to visits of Magi to Jerusalem being recorded, or this particular atrocity being remembered among the many which blackened Herod's fame ; and if no confirmation could be found and the narratives in consequence were omitted from the final work, there would be no trace in the latter of all the trouble that had been taken. For the most conscientious historian may think that the best way of ending up a groundless assertion is not to repeat it even with the view of refutation.

Cases certainly may occur in which the less critical historian will be more helpful to posterity than the more careful. The latter will put nothing down which conveys no satisfactory meaning, while the former does not regard this as his concern. An illustration may be found in the treatment by our Evangelists of the saying (Matt. v. 15), " Neither do men light a candle and put it under the bushel, but upon the stand." Has every house then its *bushel*, i.e. its bushel measure, just as it has its lampstand ? Matthew does not help us any further ; Mark has a suggestion, (iv. 21), " under the bushel or under the bed "—the inconvenience of which is that the bed known to the Gospels is the sort which a man can take up and carry (i.e. some pieces of material spread on the ground) under which a lamp could not be put without being at once extinguished. Luke gives this saying twice : viii. 16, " covers it with a vessel, or puts it under a bed " ; xi. 33, " puts it in a crypt or under the bushel." In one of these versions the difficulty is solved by the inference that the

“bushel” meant some sort of hollow vessel; in the other we have an intelligible phrase, followed by what would by a modern writer be put in a note (*literally* “under the bushel”). It would appear then that Luke heard this tradition in some places *with* the article, in others *without* it; and this small matter would alter the sense. Without the article, it need not imply that every house had its “bushel” measure—the illustration would be merely drawn from a hollow vessel, capable of covering it. With the article, it implies that every house has this utensil, and the suggestion is that “under the bushel”—which might reasonably be expected to be erect, and filled with grain—was a proverbial phrase meaning “in the cellar.”

To the modern critic it is apparent that *the bushel* is a mistranslation of something, and that all the varieties which Mark and Luke exhibit are attempts at dealing with the difficulty noticed—viz., that a cornchandler would have a *bushel* in the sense of a vessel capable of holding a bushel, but no one else. Yet the mistranslation is easy to detect; the Syriac, *sata*, “bushel,” also means *mortar*, as Bar Bahlūl informs us; and it is identical with the Jewish Aramaic *āsīthā*. Even in the wilderness the Israelites had *mortars* with which they could grind the manna (Num. xi. 8). And every family or household “has one of these large stone mortars,” says Thomson, speaking of Syria.¹ There were also mortars of metal, e.g. iron, and one of them could be turned upside down to provide a standing-place for a speaker.²

LS has this word, which may mean “bushel” or “mortar”; CS alters it into the Greek word for “bushel”; PS restores the ambiguous word. In LS it may go back to the original tradition of the Gospel.

It is evident that the Evangelists had great difficulty in

¹ *The Land and the Book* (1879), p. 84.

² Levy, s.v. מִ'דָּבָר.

finding the occasion of this saying. And, as such a saying might well have been uttered many times, Luke needs no apology for repeating it.

In Matthew it occupies a place beside another aphorism—that about salt—which Mark and Luke also recorded; but in both cases Matthew only attaches the aphorisms to a description of the disciples as “the light of the world” and “the salt of the earth”—which we are surprised that the other records do not preserve—if indeed reference be to the disciples. For that they should be given so glorious a title before they had received any commission to preach, seems extraordinary. It may be then that this is not Matthew’s intention; for the theory that the Jews in general were the light of the world meets us in Midrashes, e.g. the Book of Wisdom xviii. 4, where the darkness of Egypt is said to be an appropriate punishment to those “who had kept thy sons locked up, through whom the incorruptible light of the law was to be given to the world.” The Targum of Isaiah xlix. 6 implies the theory that the nation rather than one member of it were to be the “Light of the Gentiles.”

In 15 there is a slight difference in the Syriac texts, which may prove to be of some importance. For “a city that is set on a hill” the older versions have “that is built on a hill, which is first accommodated to the Greek in SH. These two renderings represent rather different ways of interpreting the passage. “A city built on a hill” implies an assumption that the community to which reference is made are in that condition; they from their situation cannot escape notice, and are commanded to *shine*. “A city set on a hill,” on the other hand, implies that the setting corresponds with the setting of the light to which reference is made in the next verse, and brings the position on a hill-top within the sphere of the precept. We should, however, in this case expect the mention of a *beacon* rather than of a

city, which cannot be transferred from one situation to another without time and effort.

The rendering "built" then makes an assumption, whereas the rendering "set" implies a precept. The assumption that Israel was "a city built on a hill" might be based on various passages of the Old Testament, e.g. Psalm xlviii.

Once more, then, the First Gospel brings the saying about putting a light where it can be seen into relation with texts of the Old Testament, which the compiler of the Gospel assumes to have been the basis of the maxims, as would doubtless have been the case with the maxims of the Rabbis. The other Evangelists avoid this canon, and connect the saying with others on the subject of the eye, or of the tendency of what is hidden to come to light.

No less difficulty was clearly found in *rearranging* the saying about the salt which has lost its savour, which happens to be preserved in the Jewish Oral Tradition, though not quite correctly. For it seems clear that the original for "hath lost its savour" is the Mishnic word for "to be without salt"¹ as opposed to "being salted," which occurs first in Job vi. 6, where it clearly has this sense, while in Job i. 22 it means moral tastelessness, i.e. "folly," which is the representation of it in the Greek of Matthew and Luke. CS, as so often, gives a double rendering. In the Jewish Oral Tradition it is quoted as an example of the impossible; the reply to the question With what can it be seasoned? is: With something that is no more to be found in nature than savourless salt. Although the context in Matthew ("a city set on a hill cannot," etc.) might seem to favour this interpretation, what follows in both Matthew and Luke (xiv. 35) excludes it: for we are told in both cases what is done with salt of the kind; it is not then regarded as an unknown event that it should become tasteless. The

¹ לֶחֶם.

words of Luke, "it is neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill," are so difficult that it is not surprising that they disappear in the Matthaean recension; the words are not however, quite unintelligible, as the practice of sowing with salt, in order to sterilize, is alluded to in the Old Testament, and its use as a disinfectant seems to be recorded.

The context in which we should have expected this saying to appear would be where the case of the eye, which is the light of the body, becoming darkness, is considered (Matt. vi. 22, Luke xi. 34). In the case of Matthew we see that the subject is suggested otherwise by the context, and that it was perhaps regarded as a comment on Job vi. 6, the wording of which bears some resemblance to that in Matthew.¹ In Mark it is attached to a saying about salting, which naturally furnishes a context. Mark accommodates the wording to Greek usage by substituting "unsalted" for "turn foolish", which is the old idiom. He further introduces the saying with the aphorism "salt is good". In the case of Luke the saying is clearly not placed on *a priori* grounds, for the context does not suggest it. Apparently actual research of the kind described convinced him that Mark's introduction was genuine, and procured for him the valuable supplement to the saying which even Matthew abridges. How many journeys and consultations may have been involved by this slight piece of "rearrangement" is wholly unknown. But the underlying process appears to be scientific enough.

The written rearrangement must ultimately oust the Oral *musnad*, but the latter has a tendency to survive with some tenacity. The intentional as well as the casual alteration is more likely to occur in the latter than in the former, because what the memory reproduces is the personal or subjective interpretation of a saying rather than the saying itself.

¹ אכל. Compare σχυει.

Utilisation of written documents, while the oral tradition still exists, is very different from their utilisation after it has ceased. In the former case the written composition has no authority, as it is the business of the critic to get behind it, and test the basis whereon it rests ; for him the narratives still count as traditions remembered in certain areas and attributed to certain authorities ; their rearrangement is largely hypothetical. But when the written arrangement has ousted the oral tradition, criticism is apt to be silenced, because it cannot claim to go behind the material before it ; it can only harmonise or discredit, but cannot ascertain the point at which a discrepancy came in, or fix on the person responsible for a particular statement. We admire the modesty and self-sacrifice of those who, instead of flaunting their industry, allow a sentence to represent the work of a year ; yet a later age would often be grateful if they had not only published the result, but added something about the means by which it had been procured.

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THE METHOD OF STUDYING THE PSALTER.

III. PSALM CX.

THE Psalm, as is evident from the terms used, is written of some Israelite king. Like the other Psalms of the same type—the 2nd or the 72nd, for instance—it depicts, under a particular aspect, the ideal glory of the theocratic king. It represents him as marching out with his people against his foes, as victorious, with Yahweh's help, against them, and, what is especially remarkable, as not king only, but priest.

- 1 'Tis Yahweh's oracle to my lord :
 ' Sit thou at my right hand,
 until I make thine enemies thy footstool.'