

The Judaism of the First Gospel.

PROF. G. M. HARMON.

TUFTS COLLEGE, MASS.

WHATEVER one may think of the origin, sources, or integrity of our First Gospel, the general consensus of critical opinion stands on a single fact: that it was written by a Jewish Christian for Jewish Christians. The critics who claim that a Logia document in Hebrew underlies our Matthew, appeal to the general tradition of the church fathers that it was written for Hebrew believers in Christ. And the critics who protest that there is no valid historical evidence of an original Hebrew Matthew, and no definite ground which critics can agree upon for constructing such a document, declare that the tradition has its explanation in the Hebrew Gospel's being a translation from the Greek, and that the Greek Gospel was written by a Jewish Christian for Jewish Christians.

With this position accepted as fundamental by men of all schools, the next step to be taken should be to determine what kind of Judaism our Gospel contains and sets forth. We are confronted at this point with the theories as to sources and integrity; and have to consider the inquiry as to whether or not the foundation of our Matthew has served for the erection of a later structure, or more or less substantial additions to the original structure. Without attempting to deal directly with this somewhat intricate problem, a simpler inquiry may be pursued: What kind of Judaism is fundamental in our Gospel? And how thoroughly does it pervade and saturate the Gospel as a whole? It would hardly be claimed that an original Gospel could be so swallowed up, its contents assimilated and transformed by the writer of the secondary one, that the traces of the first would disappear. So this simpler inquiry is really the road of the best approach to the more complex and difficult. Moreover, it is a road that any conscientious and fairly well equipped student may pursue with profit. He may not traverse its entire course, he may not observe the full extent and content of the fields it crosses; but

he may gather here and there facts that may be of use in the final plotting and determining of the whole.

One cannot help noting the Judaism of the writer. He is acquainted with the Old Testament Scriptures; and whenever he makes a quotation from them to express an opinion of his own, he uses, with some significant exceptions, the Hebrew text. Even when he departs from the strict meaning of the original and does not touch the deep spiritual significance, the logical resemblance he does see is that which a Jew of his day might use. Compare Matt. ii. 23 with Gal. iii. 13. He is quick to seize upon all experiences of his nation to illustrate or sustain points in the life of his Master. He is touched by everything that concerns the welfare of the nation; and while he records the denunciations of its cities and its leaders, he clings to the great facts of the national life and experience as dear to God and revered by his Master. His Christianity has its basis in Judaism.

His aim in the writing is to show that Jesus is the Messiah of the Jews, and as such realizes and fulfils in his life the deepest expectations, the most vital experiences of the nation, the commands of its Law, the teachings of its prophets. The first two chapters of the Gospel are full of instances of Jewish thought and sentiment: the descent from Abraham through King David, the chief stages of national life lived through by the line of Joseph's ancestry, the angelic visitant, the dream, the fulfilment of Isaiah, the new Joshua, the reverence paid the King by the wise men of the East, and many other details beside, — all indicate the interest of a Jew, and the aim to show that Jesus was the Messiah.

And when the writer comes to deal with the material of the Synoptic tradition, and his personal opinion falls somewhat into the background, his aim still marshals and orders his material. The Forerunner comes in answer to the common expectation, to arouse the people to righteousness, and to induct the Messiah into his office. We see the typical time of trial in the wilderness, and hear from the mountain the giving of the new Law. In the works of the Kingdom the Messiah confronts the results of the kingdom of evil and casts them out. He chooses the twelve to build a new Israel, and with them he sets about the work. In that portion of his Gospel where the thought-order disappears and the order becomes of necessity the time-order of the common tradition (from chap. xi. to chap. xvi.), we get glimpses from many Jewish points of view: The coming of the Baptist in the spirit of Elijah (xi. 14); the appeal to the example of David and of the priests in justification of Jesus' treatment of the

Sabbath (xii. 3-5); the beloved servant of Jehovah (xii. 17 ff.); the seeking a sign by an adulterous generation (xii. 39); the utterer of dark sayings that had been kept secret from the foundation of the world (xiii. 35); the hardened generation fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah (xv. 7 ff.). From this point on we have the working out of Jesus' conflict with a disobedient and gainsaying people, his premonitions of the cross, the anticipated coming of the Kingdom in judgment and triumph, the consummation on the cross, and Jesus' entrance into the heavens through the gateway of the resurrection.

Turning now to the teaching of the Gospel somewhat in detail, we are faced on the threshold of our inquiry by the fact that the Gospel deals with a Jewish topic of thought: the Kingdom of the Heavens. We have the Jewish expression; do we have the Jewish idea? The bare use of the term does not settle the contention. Granting that the term has the same general significance as the term Kingdom of God employed in the other Gospels, we are not relieved of the inquiry why this term was preferred to the other. Granting also the claim that the term had formerly been employed to avoid the use of the sacred name, we are not justified in claiming that that was the reason why our writer so employed it; for he uses the sacred name freely even in connection with the word *βασιλεία*. We find the term in close connection with the conception of the Kingdom as superior to this world: something of the dualism of the Fourth Gospel is found in this as well. He deals with an heavenly Kingdom, not an earthly; and the word heavens in the plural form expresses the ascending realms of spiritual excellence and glory into which he sees the Kingdom reaching toward its fulfilment. The Baptist, whom Jesus declared to be less than the least in the Kingdom, made an ethical preparation for its coming necessary, and warned his hearers that their descent from Abraham did not admit them to its membership. How far Jesus exceeds the ordinary conception is seen by him who accepts the story of the temptation as expressing a genuine experience of the Christ, and who looks beneath its form to the subjective facts therein contained. He must be struck with the part that the Old Testament plays in this crisis in Jesus' life. It is as though its expressions had become inwrought with his deepest consciousness and embodied the suggestions that arose spontaneously in his mind. In Matthew's story of the third temptation we trace the rising of the thought that it was possible to assert his sway over the kingdoms of the world by the use of the power within his hands. Beneath this and in close connection with it is the thought that a

kingdom of God might be established by the use of worldly power. It is a thought that the best of the prophets did not transcend; but Jesus rejects it as Satanic, and puts the service of the Kingdom as due only to God; so at the outset separating the Kingdom of the Heavens sharply from the kingdoms of the world.

In the Sermon on the Mount, where the doctrine of the Kingdom is put into systematic form, the spirit of its membership is found in humility before God, in eager desire for God's righteousness, in kindness toward men, in purity of heart, and in a devoted consecration which lifts the soul above the things of this world. The keeping of its Law is to be found in a spiritual obedience to the commandments of God that rises to an unconquerable love of men. The transaction of its offices is to be made within the heart, and that is to be given to the eternal verities of God which will abide all shocks and overthrows. The foundations of the New Kingdom stand on the bed rock of the old Hebrew faith; but they are laid so broad that every soul of man can make his home upon them.

And this conception runs throughout the Gospel. The harvest of the Kingdom depends on the heart into which the word falls. Its judgments are made on ethical grounds. A striking instance of this is found in the great Parousia discourse, where the coming of the Kingdom is portrayed. All nations are gathered before the king, and he separates them from each other as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats; and he is represented as saying to them on his right hand, "Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was an hungered and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger and ye took me in; naked and ye clothed me; I was sick and ye visited me; I was in prison and ye came unto me." And to those on his left hand he says, Depart, because they did none of these things. So all through this Gospel we have this teaching to which no suspicion of universalistic tendency can be reasonably attached; but which opens the door to the faithful souls of all nations.

But is Jesus not dealing with the Jewish people only and demanding of them obedience to an ethical law, as did the prophets of old? Whom did he invite to become members of his kingdom? The choice of his apostles is significant to this point in only a modified respect. Though he chose twelve to represent the twelve tribes of Israel, we are not therefore permitted to argue that he so meant to confine the membership of his kingdom to the Jewish people. He plainly enough indicated that the foundation of the kingdom was to

be in Judaism and that the men who were to be his successors in his work were to be Jews. But we must reckon with some singular facts in this connection. Four at least of these men were engaged in the occupation of fishermen on the Sea of Galilee ; and so in all probability habitually associated in commercial transactions with the Gentile traders who conducted the transportation of the fish. And one of the apostles was a publican, and so an outcast from orthodox Judaism. It is impossible to reconcile Jesus' choice of his apostles with an assumed intention of building up a kingdom of exclusive Judaism. We must have at least the universalism of the prophets who bespoke the final conversion of the Gentiles to the worship of Jehovah.

In this connection we must take account of the fact that while the Third Gospel indicates an incipient mission among the Samaritans, and the Fourth Gospel directly asserts it, there is no reference to such a mission in this Gospel. So far as the writer records Jesus' movements he confines him to the Jews of Palestine. His journey to the north is towards (εις) the borders of Tyre, not necessarily across them. And this journey seems to have been undertaken to shake off the determined pursuit of his Judean enemies. In the incident of the Canaanitish woman, which took place on this journey, we have a significant announcement of Jesus' attitude regarding the question we are discussing. While he does not refuse to heal her daughter, he treats her petition at first with silent disregard ; and when his disciples beg him to put a stop to her importunities and send her away, he plainly declares that his mission does not require him to minister to the Gentiles. Thrust out from his chosen field of work, his thought is still busy with it, and his heart turns back to it. How deep a hold it had on his being we learn from the indications that unmistakably show us that shortly after this journey he went back to Judea with the certainty of death before him. We have in this incident a genuine expression of disinclination on Jesus' part to give his strength to a Gentile ministry. Still he does not send the woman away ; and when her faith has asserted its depth and strength he yields to her wishes and grants her request. The story has a single lesson at bottom. It is not Judaism against Gentilism, for then one part would contradict the other. Jesus insists upon the faith which is the condition of admission to his kingdom, and when he finds it in a heathen heart he recognizes it and rewards it. Entirely parallel to this is the story of the Centurion of Capernaum, except that Jesus does not resist the Centurion's request. Strangely

enough the universalist Luke tells us that the *πρεσβύτεροι* of the Jews were sent to intercede for him with the plea that he was worthy for whom this was to be done, that he loved the Jewish nation and had built them a synagogue. If now we grant that Jesus laid more stress upon the ethics of Judaism than on blood descent, we can, without surprise, hear him say, "Many shall come from the east and from the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the Kingdom of the Heavens."

But in chap. x., verse 5, we find Jesus giving a command to his disciples to go not in the way of the Gentiles, and not to enter any city or village of the Samaritans; but to go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. The interpretation which lays the emphasis upon the last part of the passage, and views the first as a foil for rendering the last especially emphatic, while not discordant with Jewish usage, leaves something unexplained, as the incident of the Canaanitish woman compels us to believe. We must look deeper for the meaning of the injunction. It is associated in our minds with passages in which the conduct and habits of the Gentiles are spoken of with disfavor by Jesus. He tells his disciples when they pray not to babble as do the Gentiles; and when he is telling them not to be anxious as to their food and raiment, he says, "For after all these things do the Gentiles seek." Another passage (xviii. 17) adds force to this aspect of Jesus' ministry. He is represented as telling his disciples to win an offending brother if possible; but if he will not be reconciled, to tell it to the church, and if he will not hear the church, then let him be as the Gentile and the publican. The recently discovered Syriac palimpsest has *synagogue* (*kenushta*) instead of church, which renders the passage all the more significant, and puts Jesus in even closer touch with the methods employed by the Jews in dealing with offending members of the synagogue.

What conclusion, then, must we draw from these and kindred passages? At a surface glance it seems as if Jesus had interdicted intercourse in religious matters with the Gentiles. But if we turn to the accounts of Paul's ministry in Acts, we find him almost invariably beginning his work with the Jews, and turning to Gentiles only when the Jews had rejected his teachings. And if that be taken as indicating the hand of an apologist for Paul's Gentile ministry, we have only to turn to his Epistle to the Romans to ascertain that the Gospel had gone to the Gentiles because of the obdurate unbelief of the Jews (Rom. x. 21; xi. 11, 25). Paul well understood the worth of the old Israelitish faith, as he shows when he dwells upon the true

Israelite as one who kept that faith in its spirit and not in its outward form. "He is not a Jew who is one outwardly. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly" (Rom. ii. 28, 29). And no one could have drawn the vices of heathen life with sharper hand than he has done in Rom. i. 18-32. So far as Eph. ii. 11, 12 represents the Pauline attitude, it is sufficiently determinative of what a universalist Christian thought of the Gentiles: "Wherefore remember that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh . . . that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenant of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world." These facts fairly parallel the seeming anti-Gentilisms of our First Gospel. But who dreams of showing a Hebrew kernel within the Epistles of St. Paul? If Jesus recognized in the substance of the Hebrew faith the essentials of his own Kingdom, he would naturally seek to lay the foundation of his church among the Jews. If he were to fulfil the promise made to Abraham, that in his seed should all the nations of the earth be blessed, he would of necessity make sure of a right and full beginning among the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Turning now to another class of passages that have been supposed to represent superimposed Gentile sentiments, we find them open to another interpretation. The caution of the Baptist, that the Pharisees were not to cherish the illusion that a physical descent from Abraham made them members of the Kingdom (iii. 9), is a typical case. In all parts of the Gospel the condition of admission to the Kingdom is an ethical keeping of its Law. Why then should not a Jew who failed to keep that Law by that fact be excluded? Jesus' statement with which he concludes his commendation of the Gentile Centurion's faith, that the children of the Kingdom should be cast out, expresses a natural result of their obdurate unbelief, and a result everywhere provided for in the Gospel, both in the conditions under which exclusion takes place and in the attitude of the ruling classes among the Jews. There is not a single passage in the Gospel where the author commends a Judaism based on blood divorced from ethics. The passage, xii. 21, where he quotes Isa. xlii. 4, is a happy case in point. It has been cited as showing a Gentile hand; but, though it treats the prophet's words in a liberal way, it does not transcend his thought, as the connection abundantly shows.

Again, the passage in chap. xii. 46-50, where Jesus declares that whosoever does the will of his Father is his real kinsman, has been cited as affording an instance of a universalistic working over of the

original Hebrew writing. But who has been able to point out even the relics of a statement that the Jews were regarded as members of God's Kingdom by hereditary right?

It is not difficult to point out indications of the sentiment that the Kingdom is to go to the Gentiles ; so apparently contradicting Jesus' command in x. 5. But these are all near the close both of Jesus' work and the Gospel itself. Such are xx. 1-16 ; xxi. 28-31, 33-43 ; xxii. 1-14. The very logic of events necessitated the record. The nation had rejected the Kingdom ; why should it not be taken from them? On what ground could the writer have made a different record? Have we not a fair parallel to the experience of St. Paul, stated in Acts xiii. 46? "It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you ; but seeing ye put it from you and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life ; lo, we turn to the Gentiles." If this be granted as a condition of Jesus' ministry also, the incongruity disappears, and the different elements of the narrative are taken up into a substantial unity. The ethical verities of the Hebrew faith become the foundation of the Kingdom of the Heavens. These are first offered to the Jews ; but their inherent universality renders the admission of the Gentiles possible ; and when they are rejected by the Jews they are carried by the natural course of events to the Gentiles.

The attraction toward the Hebrew faith which many earnest and right-minded Gentiles felt in Jesus' time received serious and embarrassing check in the stress laid upon the observance of the ceremonial law. Jesus could hardly have failed to understand this situation in religious life. His home was at Nazareth, on the great caravan road from the east to the seaport at Ptolemais ; and he must have come in contact with hundreds of good men who were seeking for the living truth of God. It is incredible that he made so clear and vital a statement of universal moral truths without recognition of the great need of these men. But how does he stand affected by the Law? In chap. v. 17 ff. he is represented as declaring that he had not come to destroy the Law or the prophets, but to fulfil them. Heaven or earth might pass away, but not a jot or tittle of the Law should fail till all had been fulfilled. Holtzmann finds an unhistorical element in this teaching, because no charge of violation of the Law had been raised at this time against Jesus. But if we have any reliable record of the nature of Jesus' teaching, he could not have done his work for a month or attracted any attention whatever without bringing such a charge from the Pharisees upon him. Moreover,

the attempt to show that Jesus has reference to the insignificant rites of the Law is plainly at variance with the connection, where he instances certain commands and traces them back to their moral fulfilment in the motives.

When Jesus sends the leper he has cured to the priest to make the offering that Moses commanded (viii. 4), it is not to be assumed that the regulation is without use, and therefore to be kept only upon traditional grounds. So when he tells the young man to keep the commandments if he would enter into life (xix. 17), he has the moral law in mind, as the connection shows. In this he is eminently true to the position everywhere assigned to Jesus in this Gospel: that of holding to the ethical substance underlying the Mosaic Law. In xxiii. 2 f. he is represented as saying that the scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat (as teachers of the Law), and as instructing his disciples to do all things they say, but not to do their deeds. The connection seems to make it plain that he has in mind their neglect of the moral law. We are therefore not justified in attempting to make *πάντα* cover all the meaningless rites of the ceremonial law as expounded by the scribes. In verse 23, however, of the same chapter he declares plainly that the scribes pay tithe of mint, and anise, and cummin, and ought to do so. This statement may stand within its own limitations without committing Jesus to the statement of a universal obligation to keep this part of the Law, or to an assertion of its permanence.

His attitude to things of this kind is not difficult of apprehension. It is perhaps best expressed by his attitude toward the Old Testament. He uses it as the word of God containing divine truth; and therefore an authority to the children of men and to himself as well; but in all cases he appeals to the truth of God within it; and he does not scruple to lift the substance above the form in which the substance is put, even when the result is the abrogation of the form, as in the teaching about divorce and retaliation. When he speaks about the rite of fasting he is equally explicit. He tells the disciples to fast in the secret place in their heart, where God alone can see them. So also in the teaching about prayer: It should be in the secret place. In these particulars it is plain enough that the stress is laid on the reality of the exercise rather than on forbidding the form. When Jesus is taken to task because his disciples eat with unwashed hands, he declares the moral indifference of the rite. It had become so divorced from its moral significance, and the claims of ethical purity were so clear and easily understood, that the

rite had become an excrescence to be cut away as worse than useless.

We will consider but a single other passage, that which refers to the flight of the Christians on the Sabbath at the great day of the Parousia (xxiv. 20). Holtzmann finds an unhistorical element in the passage, since it is added to the record in Mark, and because it seems to be impossible as a part of Jesus' teaching. He assumes that there is an implication of the traditional keeping of the Law about the Sabbath, which Jesus plainly disregards (see xii. 1 ff.). It may be observed in passing that we have not sufficient data to determine Jesus' attitude toward the Sabbath, except in so far as he abrogated all those provisions which forbade the doing of good on the day (xii. 12). But it is not necessary to determine Jesus' relation to the Sabbath in order to discuss this passage. The assumed implication of the traditional regard for the day is not a necessary one. The connection shows that Jesus is concerned about the dangers that were to surround his disciples. He had himself had a foretaste of them. By his disregard of the Pharisaic regulation of conduct for the day, he had drawn down upon himself their determination to take his life (xii. 14). And amid the maddened passions of the coming time, when the fanatic traditionalism and desperate counsels of the Zealots had swung the whole nation into headlong movement in fancied defence of their Law, the flight on the Sabbath by a Jew would be attended by very great danger. It was best that the Christian believers should not find the separation from their unbelieving countrymen made too difficult and dangerous. Moreover, such a passage has a place in a Gospel addressed to Jewish Christians that it could not have in one addressed to Gentiles, to whom the dangers would not be apparent.

There are many other passages whose discussion would throw helpful light upon our problem ; but the ones which have been dealt with in this paper are the principal ones that have been alleged as showing inconsistency in the teaching of our First Gospel ; and their examination seems to show conclusively that the inconsistency exists only because those who see it do not take account of the fundamental teaching of the Gospel. That seems to reveal substantial unity in the Gospel. What then is this teaching? We do not have on one side a narrow, exclusive Judaism, devoted to an external system of doctrines and ceremonies, and jealously sensitive to the welfare of a particular race of men ; nor on the other do we have a reaction from such an attitude. But we do have the acceptance of the substance of the

Hebrew faith embodied in laws, institutions, and customs, which are maintained till such time as their meaning can be fulfilled in the moral consciousness of men. We have the teaching that the people of the Hebrew race were the ones among whom and by whom the spiritual fulfilment of this embodied faith must be begun. But we have also the recognition of the historical fact that the Jewish spirit of separatism, the hatred of other races, the blind hardness to spiritual appeal, and the equally blind devotion to external forms, had caused the nation to reject the very Kingdom God had brought into the world by them ; and that they by it and from it were cast out. And finally we have a foresight of a great spiritual Kingdom based on the eternal principles of God's righteousness, and embracing all souls who in faith receive it and bring forth its fruits.