

NOTES AND STUDIES

OUR LORD'S TEACHING IN ST MARK'S GOSPEL.

It is usual to speak of the teaching of our Lord in St Mark's Gospel as small in quantity and somewhat fragmentary. 'This comparative scarcity of recollections of the Lord's teaching is consistent with the statement of Irenaeus that St Mark reproduced the preaching of St Peter. The primitive preacher would doubtless limit himself to anecdotes and brief sayings, leaving to the catechist the transmission of the Master's discourses' (Swete *Studies in the Teaching of our Lord* p. 40). It may be useful to call attention to the fact that the discourse-material of Mark constitutes more than a third of the Gospel, and is evidently chosen with considerable care. It is true that Mark shews our Lord in action; but the incidents are often chosen and grouped for the purpose of setting forth particular aspects of His teaching. If, as is probable, the Gospel took shape at Rome, it would have in view the needs of churches in which Gentiles formed an important element, and would bring into prominence those aspects of our Lord's life and teaching which looked especially towards the opening of the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers. It would be, in no controversial sense, Pauline and universal.

In a brief analysis I shall attempt to demonstrate the substantial quantity and distinctive quality of the Marcan teaching, and then to compare it with the body of teaching usually assigned to Q.

The Gospel begins with a summary of the preaching of the Baptist. Then after an account of the Baptism of Jesus and the Call of His Disciples, we are told the story of the Opening of the Ministry at Capernaum, in which the amazing power of our Lord's teaching is set forth. 'They were astonished at His teaching: for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes' (Mk. i 22). In ch. ii that teaching is shewn breaking the barriers of Jewish tradition in all directions. In ch. iii we have the Lord's defence against the scribes' ascription of His power to a satanic source. In ch. iv specimens of parables are given. After instructions to the Disciples in ch. vi, we have in ch. vii the teaching in which the Jewish distinctions between clean and unclean meats are abolished, and so a complete rupture with the old system brought about. The central division, chs. viii 27 to x 52, is largely taken up with reiterations of the Doctrine of the Cross, preparatory to the Passion-Story of the last chapters.

A fairly full summary of the Marcan teaching is here appended, that its comparatively considerable amount may be the better realized.

Most of the sections noted contain nothing but discourse. Those set in indented lines have a narrative element, more or less, but are evidently selected and grouped in order to shew the character of the teaching of Jesus. In quantity, as we have noted already, these sections comprise well over a third of the Gospel.

- i 2-8 The Preaching of John.
 ii 1-12 Healing the Paralytic.
 vv. 5-10 on the Forgiveness of Sins.
 ii 17 The Whole do not need a Physician.
 ii 18-22 The Fasting of His Disciples.
 ii 25-28 The Question of the Sabbath (also iii 1-6).
 iii 22-30 Discourse about Casting out Devils.
 iv 1-34 Teaching by Parables.
 vi 4 A Prophet is not honoured at Home.
 vi 7-13 Instructions to the Twelve.
 vii 1-23 The Question of Clean and Unclean Meats.
 viii 11, 12 The Pharisees demand a Sign.
 viii 15-21 The Leaven of the Pharisees.
 viii 27-ix 1 The Christ and His Cross.
 ix 9, 10 The Resurrection.
 ix 11-13 The Coming of Elijah.
 ix 30-50 On Humility, Offences, &c.
 x 1-12 On Divorce.
 x 14-16 On Receiving Children.
 x 17-22 The Young Man who had Great Possessions.
 (On Winning Eternal Life.)
 x 23-27 The Danger of Riches.
 x 28-31 On Forsaking all for Christ.
 x 32-45 Self-Sacrifice, Greatness in the Kingdom.
 xi 20-26 The Withered Fig-Tree (Faith in God).
 xi 27-33 Jesus's Authority challenged.
 xii 1-12 The Rebellious Vine-Dressers.
 xii 13-17 Question of the Pharisees on Tribute.
 xii 18-27 Question of the Sadducees on the Resurrection.
 xii 28-34 Question of the Scribe on the Great Commandment.
 xii 35-37 Christ's Counter-Question on the Son of David.
 xii 38-40 Denunciation of the Scribes.
 ch. xiii The Coming Judgement.
 xiv 17-21 The Traitor denounced.
 xiv 22-26 Institution of the Eucharist.
 xiv 27-31 Prediction of the Desertion of Disciples and Denial by Peter.

To some extent the discourse-material of Mk., as one would expect, covers the same ground as in Q. All presentations of the teaching of Jesus, if accurate, would be likely to include a certain amount of identical or closely similar material. Such overlapping passages can be sifted out with some certainty in the case of Mk. and Q (see *J. T. S.* Jan. 1920 pp. 133 ff). The major passages are the Teaching of the Baptist, the Discourse about Casting out Devils, the Instructions to the Twelve, and the Scribe's Question. Lesser passages are the sayings about the Sign from Heaven, and the Leaven of the Pharisees, with several others collected in the article just cited. It is interesting to note that in the passage about Casting out Devils, Mk. does not record the miracle which gave rise to the controversy, though Mt. and Lk. (and so probably Q) refer to it. To what extent Mk. and Q cover the same ground in the recording of parables, it is most difficult to decide. The only parable of Mk. iv which must certainly be assigned to Q also is that of the Mustard Seed.

We shall now briefly review the series of Marcan discourse-passages, in view of their fitness for the needs of churches containing a considerable Gentile element.

The Teaching of John is important historically, and also because its subject-matter is repentance. A call to repentance is a necessary preliminary to the Gospel-message, among both Jews and Gentiles.

In chs. ii 1-iii 6 we have a series of decisive words and works, shewing how Jesus claimed for His disciples complete liberty from the bondage of Jewish caste and tradition, and even from the Law of Moses itself, at some points. Jesus will welcome to His fellowship men and women of every social grade, and He does not require them to take a double yoke. The whole section might well illustrate Paul's words, 'For freedom did Christ make you free'. Here social convention, tradition, the Law itself, in fact the whole realm of spiritual life and its external safeguards are placed under the authority of Christ, whose claim, so far from being arbitrary, is justified to all with spiritual insight by the very form in which it is made.

The whole section may consist of incidents chosen to illustrate our Lord's powerful handling of these questions during the first phase of His Galilean ministry, though not necessarily in exact order of time. One is surprised to see the most critical incident, the claim to forgive sins, recorded first. But how well this suits the needs of Gospel preaching! We are taken straight from John's call to repentance to our Lord's offer of forgiveness. How suitably the recital of the incident would follow Paul's first recorded missionary sermon, at Pisidian Antioch! See Acts xiii 38 f.

The discourse about the source of *Christ's Power over Demons* would

be relevant and important both in Jewish and Gentile surroundings, and is naturally found both in Mk. and Q.

In the treatment of the *parables* it is not easy to compare Mk. and Q, since we have almost no certainty in the identification of Q-parables. If, however, we compare the parables of Mk. iv with those in Mt. xiii, we notice, in the former case, one main guiding purpose. The subjects are specially suited for missionary work—the Sowing of the Seed (in many sorts of soil), the patient waiting for the Harvest, and the World-wide Extension of the Kingdom. These parables are also given a doctrinal setting in which the responsibility of the hearers is emphasized. As Bacon points out (*Beginnings of Gospel Story* p. 46), this has the same point of view as that of Paul in Rom. ix–xi, and is complementary to his argument there. The parallel group of parables in Mt. is of a more miscellaneous character. The eschatological parables of the Tares and the Draw-net are introduced, also the pair about the Pearl and the Hidden Treasure, whilst Mark's parable of the Seed Growing Secretly is omitted. Here the unity of subject has been lost. Mt. is giving, as usual, a comprehensive selection, to illustrate the subject in hand.

The *Instructions to the Twelve* are common both to Mk. and Q. As was pointed out in a former article (*J. T. S.* Jan. 1920 p. 139), Mk. has notes of a later date than Q. The *forbidding* of staff and sandals would only apply to special mission-journeys to no great distance. In Mk. they are expressly permitted. Here Q seems to have been much fuller than Mk., and this is a case in which, if Mk. was acquainted with Q, as is probable, we should have expected him to have made use of the fuller material.

The Discourse about Clean and Unclean Meats. Here Jesus, dealing with a complaint that He defies tradition, defends Himself, and then goes on to a discourse in which He not only sweeps away the traditional 'fence' about the Law, but the Law itself, in this connexion. By this teaching the greatest barrier between Jew and Gentile is broken down. It points clearly to the conclusion brought home to Peter by the vision at Joppa, that no *man* should be called common or unclean. Here we have the main ground for Paul's strong action (as in Gal. ii), and his insistence on Gentile freedom in these matters. As the healing of the Syro-Phoenician woman's child is the natural sequel to the discourse, it is surprising that Lk. omits the incident. It may be that, being restricted in space, he considered the story of Peter's vision at Joppa and the baptism of Cornelius as even more important examples of the application of these principles in the history of the Church. He might also wish to avoid the apparent harshness of the reference to Gentile 'dogs'.

The Way of the Cross. In Mk. viii 27-x 45 the Teaching of the Cross is fully brought out. Three times a definite announcement of the coming doom is made (Mk. viii 31, ix 31, and x 32). The confession at Caesarea Philippi leads to the illumination of the Disciples upon this matter. The Transfiguration attests our Lord's renewed acceptance of His vocation, and a corresponding spiritual preparation and endowment. The call to the Disciples to follow their Master in the way of obedience and sacrifice is reiterated and illustrated in various ways. The significance of this central part of the Gospel is well brought out by Bacon in the *Beginnings of Gospel Story*, and there is no need to deal more fully with it. We have to note that whilst Mk. evidently builds up his whole Gospel round this main idea, verifiable Q is only represented here in the slenderest way. Thus in Mk. the Cross is central as in all the Apostolic teaching, and more exclusively so, we may venture to say, than in any other Gospel.

In the later chapters of Mk. there is a group of passages corresponding in some respects to the group of chs. ii 1 to iii 6. The earlier belongs to the Galilean ministry, the later to the Judaeen. As Mk. has no other place for the Judaeen incidents, they are all inserted in the account of the Last Passover; but they may not all have happened in that week. All these incidents are recorded for the sake of the teaching they bring to light. As in the Galilean group, they deal with matters connected with the scope and authority of the Jewish Law, and they touch very important subjects and wide issues. Amongst the Christian churches of the Roman world such questions as those concerning the authority of the Sanhedrin, the authority of the Imperial system, the truth of Immortality, and the Lordship of the Risen Christ would be of great importance for Christian missionaries everywhere.

In ch. xiii we have the *eschatological prophecy*, which is the longest of Mk.'s purely discourse-sections. Into its meaning and relations it is quite impossible to enter in a short note. When the Gospel was published, no doubt this subject was of the greatest moment in all the Christian churches, both in Judaea and beyond.

The result of this hasty survey of the teaching of Jesus as recorded by Mk. is to establish the probability that it was selected and presented largely in view of the needs of churches which were being founded all over the Roman empire, on lines similar to those followed by Paul. It may be objected that there is here some exaggeration of the theological purpose of the Gospel. The reply would be that this aspect is emphasized, not exaggerated. Those traits that most immediately attract attention, the vivid, picturesque style, the *élan* of the movement, the probable dependence of many of the incidents upon

the witness of Peter, are not incompatible with the main purpose as here set forth. In order to apprehend the meaning of the Gospel we must keenly feel that we have in it much more than an artless reproduction of those events of our Lord's ministry which happened most to impress His disciples as they passed through them.

Consideration of some of the outstanding features of Q will serve still further to make evident the comparatively advanced theological position of Mk.

It is in connexion with the *Sermon on the Mount* that the contrast of the spirit of Mk. and Q comes out most clearly. We suppose that most scholars will allow that most of Mt., chs. v-vii, is taken from Q, whatever may be the original form of the Sermon on the Mount. Now whereas in Mk. we have a great polemic against such interpretation and practice of the Jewish Law as would enslave the souls of men and restrict the range of the Gospel, in the *Sermon on the Mount* we have an idealization of the Law and a new interpretation of its range and meaning. In Mk. we have the vindication of Gentile liberty, in Mt. an appeal (especially to the Jew) to a more spiritual apprehension of his own Law, which is not to be superseded in any of its great essentials. Bacon (*Beginnings of Gospel Story* p. xxvii f) goes so far as to say that the division on the Doctrine of the Cross is Mk.'s Sermon on the Mount. 'We have no Sermon on the Mount, but we have its equivalent here in practical application. What "they of old time" said is illustrated in the Pharisees' question concerning divorce, with Jesus's answer setting man's putting asunder with God's joining together. What the "righteousness of God" entails over and above that of the scribes' "keeping of the commandments" is illustrated in the enquiry of the rich young man, "Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus's answer approves his having "kept the commandments", but points to God as the sole standard of "goodness" and inculcates the renunciation exemplified by Himself and His followers and their treading the way of the cross as the only avenue to "eternal life".' Bacon consistently interprets the whole Gospel on these lines, and I consider he has well established its Pauline outlook, though I should not follow him in his theory of pragmatism, which appears to me somewhat arbitrary. Just as the attitude of Q towards the Law suits the conditions of the Palestinian work primarily, so it suits in relation to the work of the *Baptist* and the *Pharisees*. In Mt. xi and the Lucan parallels we find Jesus vindicating His unity with His great forerunner, whose work He takes up and carries to greater issues. The arraignment of the Pharisees in Mt. xxiii and Lk. xi is complementary to the vindication of the Law in the Sermon on the Mount. The Pharisees have missed the spirit of the Law in meticulous attention to its forms. Because

they are blind to its highest aims and truths they fail to recognize the Messiah Himself.

Much further detailed illustration of these points might be given, but they are very well expounded by several writers. Harnack (*Sayings of Jesus* p. 248) says that in Q 'the influence of "Paulinism" which is so strong in St Mark is entirely wanting'. Again (p. 171) he says that Q has 'an horizon which is as good as absolutely bounded by Galilee, without any clearly discernible bias, whether apologetic, didactic, ecclesiastical, national, or anti-national'.

This absence of any bias in the direction of definitely Christian theology makes it certain that in Q we have a body of teaching of the most primitive order. Ramsay says (*Luke the Physician* p. 98): 'We have in it the contemporary notes of a person in immediate personal contact with Jesus, fascinated by His personality as a living man and as a great Teacher and Prophet, not thinking of His death and of what was to ensue thereon.' And again (p. 89): 'On the one hand, it is a document practically contemporary with the facts, and it registered the impression made on eyewitnesses by the words and acts of Christ. On the other hand, it was written before those words and acts had begun to be properly understood by even the most intelligent eyewitness.' All this throws into relief the great didactic importance of Mark's Gospel.

The result of this rough comparison is to place Mk. and Q in very strong contrast, almost into opposition; yet to leave the matter so would create a wrong impression. The two pictures are complementary rather than mutually inconsistent. Both reflect vitally important aspects of our Lord's teaching. To expound (positively) the true spirit and scope of the Law leads naturally to an attack on every practice that obstructs and limits it. Moreover the prophetic ministry inevitably precedes the priestly and redemptive, and prepares for it. At the same time we must remember that some of the most characteristic sayings of Jesus according to Mk. were also found in Q. This may be allowed by those who (like the present writer) strongly maintain the literary independence of the two sources. There are several places where the overlapping of the sources can be detected; but there may be other cases (for instance the Parable of the Sower) where there is no literary overlapping to give the clue, and yet both lines of tradition have the same material. This hypothesis is carried very far by some scholars, as for example by B. Weiss.

Thus Q may have been in circulation from the very first amongst the Palestinian churches, where the tradition of our Lord's ministry and of His passion and resurrection was so fresh as to be taken for granted. Hence, as Harnack remarks (*Sayings of Jesus* p. 235), it may

have been 'intended solely for the Christian community and was addressed to those who did not require the assurance that their Teacher was also the Son of God'. The Marcan Gospel would represent the earliest exposition of the main facts of our Lord's ministry and passion and resurrection, together with such a selection of His teachings and works as would establish the central doctrine of the Cross, and free the Gospel from all exclusive Judaistic interpretations. This body of tradition would take shape later than Q, and its authors would be well acquainted with that work; but having a purpose in view which it did not meet at all adequately, they went on quite independent lines. Naturally it was not long before the two main groups of tradition were drawn together, as we have them in Mt. and Lk. Harnack compares the two, much to the disadvantage of Mk. He says (*Sayings of Jesus* p. 250 f): 'The tendency to exaggerate the apocalyptic and eschatological element in our Lord's message, and to subordinate to this the purely religious and ethical elements, will ever find its refutation in Q.' On both points I should venture to disagree. It is the doctrine of the Cross that is central in Mk., rather than any apocalyptic strain of teaching. It is in the light of the Cross and resurrection of the divine Saviour that the teachings of the inspired prophet receive their true colour and perspective. The ethical teaching would be useless without the dynamic of the Cross and resurrection. It may be freely granted that this teaching is of such unsurpassed beauty and value that it has somewhat drawn away our attention from the very great didactic importance of Mark's Gospel.

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