

Are we never jealous when our fellow-labourers obtain recognition which we deserve, and receive praise which in fairness ought to fall to our share? The Buddhist is always striving to "acquire merit." Not a few zealous Christians seem to feel that by their works of faith and labours of love they have *some-how acquired merit*. But He, who knows man's bias to self-flattery, warns us against this deadly snare. A modern teacher has paraphrased our LORD's stern warning:—"Performance of duty is no merit. Do faithfully and punctiliously all that God commands thee to do: and after thou hast achieved that which thou well knowest none save thyself has ever achieved, thou art nevertheless an unprofitable servant. *Thou hast not exceeded thy duty*. Nay, if thou indeed believe that thou hast performed thy *whole* duty, thou art judged already: for thou hast judged thyself."

In a few brief years we shall have forgotten to care about men's dispraise or misjudgment. After a little while prophecies will fail and tongues will cease and knowledge will vanish, and our institutions and organizations will melt and disappear with the rest of time's dreams. But one Presence abides and will never vanish. One Love we can never lose. That good part which by God's grace belongs to the humble heart already, is so good because in God's mercy it shall never be taken away.

## CHRIST IN THE FOUR GOSPELS

### II. The Four Gospels and their Writers

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A discussion as to the authorship and authenticity of the Gospels is irrelevant to the purpose of these studies. For us it is sufficient that from the second century onward they have been accepted as the genuine writings of the four men whose names they bear. In studying a book it is always helpful to ask, and try to find an answer to, such questions as—Who wrote it? For whom did he write? When and where was it written? And why and how? In the case of the Synoptic Gospels the time and place of writing cannot be determined with certainty. All three were written before the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. John's narrative came later, almost certainly in the last decade of the first century, and it was probably written at Ephesus.

A consideration of the other four questions above suggested is necessary if we would determine the viewpoint of each of the evangelists. In the first place, the personality of the writer throws much light on his writings. Plenary inspiration does not exclude this factor, but is compatible with personality. Personality is a wide term that covers all those elements that combine to make the man and his style.

*MATTHEW*, like John, the writer of the Fourth Gospel, was one of the twelve apostles. So far as we know, he was the only one of the twelve who was a tax-gatherer. As such, he was considered a renegade by his fellow-countrymen. In some respects he was, in the days antecedent to his becoming a follower of the Christ, a prophetic parable of his race, content to own subjection to a foreign power in return for the material prosperity that such a position made possible, yet possessed neither of true peace nor of spiritual blessings. The other Synoptists give him the name Levi which was doubtless that bestowed when he was circumcised, but the apostle himself prefers his other name 'Matthew', which means '*the Gift of Jehovah*'. He realized, when the Lord called him to follow, that his only hope lay in turning to Him who was truly 'the Gift of God' to Israel and the world. Matthew was a man of some education and was familiar with the Jewish Scriptures, which he quotes again and again to show that many were remarkably fulfilled in the advent of Jesus Christ the Saviour. The Prophet of Nazareth was to him "Immanuel", not only "the child born" but also "the son given" (Is. 9:6). We are not surprised, then, to find that the possessor of a name with such a meaning makes frequent reference to '*gifts*', both God's gifts to men and man's to God, in his Gospel. (Cf. 2:11; 5:23-24; 7:11; 8:4; 15:5; 28:18.)

Boycotted and execrated by all the religious leaders of the people on account of his obnoxious trade, Matthew had, in his turn, learnt to despise the Rabbis and Scribes for their unctuous hypocrisy, and so it was natural for him to give prominence to the *Lord's scathing denunciations of empty religious forms*. (Matt. 5:20; 6:1-18; 15:1-20. 16:1-12; 23:1-39). In Jesus of Nazareth he found One who was a Jew, a Rabbi and a Teacher in the synagogues, whose sincerity seemed only to aggravate their sanctimonious cant and whose words and deeds irradiated a power that contrasted singularly with their formal jingle.

In his business as a *tax-collector*, Matthew had undergone a

training that proved useful to him as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Trained to make rapid jottings of figures and details in connection with his profession, he employed his talents to record the golden words and glorious works of the Master who had won his allegiance. What impressed Matthew most in the Prophet of Nazareth was His kingly bearing and authority, and His power to emancipate men from the thralldom of sin and Satan. He recognized that Jesus was indeed a King with 'the kingdom of Heaven' as the centre of His message. He saw in Him a King whose laws insisted on truth and purity in the inward parts and who refused to accept mere lip-service or feigned allegiance. It is generally agreed that Matthew's call took place prior to the Sermon on the Mount, so the incidents and discourses recorded from Chapter 5 onward were actually seen and heard by the chronicler himself. When the time was ripe, the apostle, under the inspiration of God's Holy Spirit, arranged his daily chronicles in the form in which they have come down to us in the Gospel that bears his name.

The writer's profession is further reflected in his references to 'money', which are more frequent than in the other Gospels. In the Lord's address to His apostles when He sent them forth to preach, Matthew alone mentions all three metals used in the minting of coins:—"provide neither *gold* nor *silver* nor *brass*" (Matt. 10:9). He alone records the miracle of 'the piece of money' found in the mouth of a fish and gives its specific name a '*stater*', which was a silver coin in use in the Roman Empire. The word he uses for '*tribute*' in the same incident does not occur anywhere else in the New Testament. The two parables of the '*talents*' are peculiar to the Gospel of Matthew "who alone", as Dr. W. Graham Scroggie remarks, "would have handled large money". The talent was of great value and equivalent to over £180 sterling.

**MARK** was not one of the twelve, and therefore not an eyewitness of the things he recorded. It has been said that Peter's eyes and Mark's pen combined to give us the Gospel according to Mark. The early Christian fathers looked upon Mark as *Peter's interpreter* in the sense that he heard from the lips of Peter the facts concerning our Lord Jesus Christ and wrote them down. In his first Epistle (5:13) Peter writes of Mark as his 'son', and this relationship is to be taken in the same sense as Paul called Timothy his son. The Fourth Gospel contains clear evidences of an intimate friendship between Peter and John, but it is only

Mark who gives special prominence to Peter, as a 'son in the faith' might be expected to do.

In 1:36 he writes of "*Simon* and they that were with him" following Jesus: In 11:21 he tells us that it was *Peter* who drew the Lord's attention to the withering of the fig-tree that had been cursed: In the Olivet discourse, which Matthew and Luke show to be the Lord's answer to the disciples' questions, Mark definitely tells us that the questioners were *Peter*, James, John and Andrew, *putting Peter first*.

In the narrative of the Resurrection, Mark alone mentions that *Peter's name* was specifically included in the angelic command to the women at the sepulchre to make Christ's resurrection known to His disciples. Peter's influence is apparent also in the prominence Mark gives to our Lord's *Galilean ministry* for *Peter's home* was in Galilee.

The writer of this Gospel has, since the second century, been identified with John (Acts 12:12; 13:5, 13), called 'John whose surname was Mark' in Acts 15:37, and 'Mark' in Acts 15:39. Paul refers to him twice as Mark (Philemon 24 and 2 Tim. 4:11), and Peter, as we have already seen, once. His full name was therefore John Mark, John being Hebrew and Mark Latin. Mark or Marcus means '*a Hammer*': and the forceful, vigorous style of the narrative he has given us, with the abrupt transition from one incident to another, is suggestive of blows of a hammer. Like Peter, Mark seems to have been by nature impetuous and abrupt, and his personality has imprinted itself on his style. The Gospel of Mark is one of speedy action. It contains no introduction, no genealogy, no account of the birth of Jesus, no Sermon on the Mount and very few parables or discourses. Mark's style has also been described as "conversational, colloquial and concise".

In the several references to Mark in the New Testament, no secular calling is assigned to him. He was associated with Saul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey as an attendant or assistant, but we do not read of him taking part in the preaching of the Gospel. The word used of him in Acts 13:5 is *hupēretēs* an under-rower, as distinguished from a seaman. "The Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words" says that the word "came to denote any subordinate acting under another's direction." It is used in Luke 4:20 of the attendant in the synagogue service to whom our Lord handed the scroll after reading. By the end of Paul's missionary career the service of John Mark is described as

*diakonian* (2 Tim. 4:11) which, in that context, would imply spiritual service in the ministry of the Word of God. Mark's calling was therefore that of a servant, but he is never called a bondsman. Paul's disapproval of his conduct (Acts. 15:37) shows him to have been an unprofitable servant. In later days when, restored and revived in spirit, he became profitable and set about his task of writing the Gospel story, the aspect of our Lord he presented to the world was that of the *perfect Servant*. Doubtless Mark found encouragement in reading in Is. 42:3 of Jehovah's Servant, "A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench". Mark might have thought, 'I was the bruised reed and He did not break me: I was the smoking flax and He did not quench me'. The narrative in Chapter 7:31-37 of Mark's Gospel is peculiar to Mark. In it occur the words, "He hath done all things well". It is the tribute of the failing servant to the Infallible Servant whose every act was perfect. If Mark found his own failure brought home to him in Is. 42:3, he took pleasure in being permitted to portray Jehovah's Servant of whom Isaiah wrote in the verse that followed, "He shall not fail nor be discouraged". For 'fail' Isaiah used the Hebrew root *kalah* from which is derived the word *keleh* meaning 'feeble' or 'obscure' and translated 'smoking' in the previous verse: and for 'be discouraged' he employed exactly the same Hebrew word as that rendered 'bruised' in verse 3. So Mark might have added, 'But He of whom I write is no bruised reed and no smoking flax'.

Matthew, Mark and John were all Jews by birth. *LUKE* was a Gentile and a Greek. His uncommon name signifies 'light' or 'white'. He alone describes the Saviour's advent into the world as the promised visitation of "*the Dayspring from on high*" that was "to *give light* to them that sit in darkness", as expressed by Zacharias in his thanksgiving song. It is Luke only who quotes the words of Simeon describing the Lord Jesus as God's 'salvation' and as "*a Light to lighten the Gentiles*". Luke's is the Gospel of the Spotless One, the pure, holy, transparent Man, the 'Safed Christ'.

Only in this Gospel do we find events in the life of Christ and His apostles related to contemporary secular history. Luke makes frequent and precise references to emperors and prominent officials, and his historical details have been found to be absolutely reliable.

Luke was one of Paul's companions in some of his missionary travels as well as in his last imprisonment. Paul writes of him

in Col. 4:14; Philemon 24; and 2 Tim. 4:11. A man of erudition and culture, widely-travelled and conversant with the customs of many peoples, Luke, though not an eye-witness of what he records, has given us an account that is interesting, trustworthy, artistic and pleasant to read. Paul calls him "*the beloved physician*". Recent contacts with several medical missionaries who have all displayed considerable musical talent have convinced the writer that many physicians are also musicians. Luke was a *musician* too, and has preserved for us in his Gospel several *hymns* of the early Christian church. Bishop Keble, apostrophizing Luke, says,

"Thou hast an ear for angel songs,  
A breath the gospel trump to fill,  
And, taught by thee, the church prolongs  
Her hymns of high thanksgiving still".

In Luke's Gospel there are many traces of the *physician's touch*. It is the Gospel of tenderness, in which our Lord's compassion for the weak, the poor and the unprivileged is particularly emphasized. Three times in the earlier chapters of his book Luke refers to "*the physician*" and his work (4:23; 5:31; 8:43). Of the four Evangelists, only he tells of our Lord's quotation of the proverb, 'Physician, heal thyself' (4:23). In narrating the story of the healing of the woman with the issue of blood, Mark, not being a medical man, tells us she had "suffered many things of many physicians, and was nothing bettered but rather grew worse". Luke, being himself a doctor, writes that "she had spent all her living upon physicians, neither could be healed of any", which is tantamount to saying that she suffered from a disease that was beyond human skill. Luke's accuracy in describing the condition of the sick and diseased whom the Lord Jesus healed has often been pointed out. Matthew and Mark, in their account of the healing of Peter's mother-in-law, simply inform us that she was "sick of a fever". Luke writes more explicitly that she was '*taken*', or, more literally, '*oppressed*' (συνεχω) "*with a great fever*" (Luke 4:38-39). With like precision he adds that the man whom Matthew and Mark call simply 'a leper' was "*full of leprosy*" (Luke 5:12). Because of his profession Luke is meticulous in recording details which the other Evangelists omit,—e.g. the '*right hand*' (6:6) and the '*right ear*' (22:50). In recording our Lord's imagery of the camel going through the eye of a needle, the other two Synoptists use the ordinary household word for '*needle*'. Luke

uses the technical term for a surgical needle, and that is its only occurrence in the New Testament (Luke 18:25).

The Gospel according to Luke is the third in order in the New Testament books, and the *third Gospel*. Further, it comes third chronologically. There are very many triads in Luke's narrative.

In connection with the birth of Jesus *three hymns* are recorded in Chapters 1 and 2,—that of Mary, that of Zacharias, and that of the angels: *Three of the Chasidim* are specially mentioned by name in this Gospel, all looking for Christ's advent, namely Simeon (2:25), Anna (2:36-38) and Joseph of Arimathaea (23:51).

In Chapter 3, *three signs* are noted at our Lord's baptism. In Chapter 4, there are *three temptations* of our Lord. *Three disciples*, Peter, James and John, are present on three miraculous occasions,—at the draught of fishes, at the raising of Jairus' daughter, and on the Mount of Transfiguration. In Chapter 8, the names of *three of the women* who ministered to Jesus are given.

Prayer is prominent in Luke's Gospel, and *three verbs* are used for praying,—ask, seek, and knock (11:9). There are *three parables on prayer* (11:5-8; 18:1-6; 18:9-14).

The first of these three is a parable of *three friends*, one of whom importunately begs another to lend him *three loaves*. In other parables, too, notable triplets are found. In Chapter 10, in the Parable of the Good Samaritan, *three potential neighbours* passed along the road where the wounded man lay.

In Chapter 13, the owner of the barren fig-tree came vainly seeking fruit for *three successive years*. In Chapter 14, of those invited to the Great Supper, *three made excuses*. Chapter 15 contains a *triple parable* of a lost sheep, a lost coin and a lost son. In the *third* story of that chapter, the family seems to consist of *three persons* only, a father and two sons. No mention is made of a mother or other relatives. In his eschatological discourse in Chapter 17, the Lord Jesus mentions *three pairs* of people divided at His coming. In 22:35, we learn that, when Christ's disciples went out to serve, they were devoid of *three things* that men would deem essential,—purse, scrip and shoes,—yet lacked nothing.

Luke emphasizes the *three crosses* at Calvary, and he alone gives a detailed account of the conversation carried on by those

who were crucified there. The *three languages* used in the superscription on the cross of Jesus are also specified by Luke, but not by Matthew or Mark. John too tells us that the writing on the cross was in three languages, but, being a Jew, makes mention first of Hebrew, whereas Luke, being a Greek, puts Greek first.

(To be continued)

## THE JOYS OF BIBLE STUDY

HAROLD ST. JOHN

I was recently visiting a young university student and during my stay he took me into his study to show me his note books. I examined with pleasure some scores of neatly written little volumes representing months of careful research in biology, physics, chemistry, etc. After examination of these proofs of his industry I remarked, "and now show me your Bible Study books." To my surprise he looked embarrassed and replied, "I haven't any, and, indeed, I don't treat the Bible in that way, I should *not know how*!"

This incident gave me furiously to think—here was a young Christian man, with fine mental equipment, able to give hours daily to studies of *lesser* importance, and willing to register the results of such study with meticulous accuracy, and yet I found that occasionally he carelessly flung a few scraps of fag ends of time to the profoundest subject that can engage the human mind. No wonder that his spiritual life was fitful and unsatisfactory!

Fearing as I do that the experience of most young Christians is no more satisfactory than that of my friend, I would like to suggest a simple method by which we can at least mentally master the contents of a Book so marvellous that it cost the death of the Son of God to make its production possible; so powerful that by its teaching alone we can keep ourselves from the path of the Destroyer (the Devil).

The subject is especially urgent to those whose place is to minister God's Word in public. We have no right to condemn our audience to listen to ill-digested or intellectually impoverished preaching. If the preacher is not master of his Book he will merely fill up his time by the reiteration of stale and powerless