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NOTES ON THE GOSPEL OF MARK

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1. *A Literary Parallel to Mk 6 18.* In Dio Cassius' *History* LXV, xv, we read of the "incestuous queen" whose brazen amours called forth a well known allusion from Rome's greatest satirist, and provoked popular protest from Rome itself; not so much, doubtless, because of any still surviving virtue of ancient Rome, as because the woman was of Jewish birth, her paramour the conqueror of Jerusalem and prospective emperor. Cassius himself has little sympathy with the popular protest directed against the conduct of his hero Titus. The extent to which it represented Roman feeling generally may be judged from the fact that Titus himself found it expedient to yield. The following is Cassius' account of the scene in one of the theatres of Rome in the year 75 A. D.:

Bernice was at the height of her power and consequently came to Rome along with her brother Agrippa. The latter was accorded pretorial honors, while she dwelt in the palace and cohabited with Titus. She expected to be married to him and behaved in all respects as his wife. But when he perceived that the Romans were displeased at the situation he sent her away; for various reports were in circulation (cf. Juvenal, *Sat.* VI, 155 f.). At this time too certain sophists of the cynic school managed somehow to slip into the city: first Diogenes entered the theatre when it was full of men and denounced them (Titus and Bernice) in a long, abusive speech, for which he was flogged; after him Heras, who showed no greater disposition to be obedient,

gave vent to many senseless bawlings in the true cynic (dog-like) manner, and for this behavior was beheaded.

One can imagine that Christians in Rome in the year 75 would have had less contemptuous words by which to characterize the bold denouncers of imperial vice, the second of whom paid the penalty for his daring with decapitation.

Internal evidence and ancient tradition give many indications in common for the origin of the Gospel of Mark in Rome not far from this date. Among the elements which appear latest in the composition, and certainly have a highly legendary cast is the story of the martyrdom of John the Baptist, attached in parenthetical manner after the account of how the mighty works of Jesus came to the ears of Antipas, drawing from him the utterance "John, whom I beheaded, is risen again" (Mk. 6 17-29).

It would be superfluous to dwell on the notorious inaccuracies of this digression, which Holtzmann has called *Das Muster einer Legende*. We have no reason to question the substantial accuracy of Josephus' account of the same occurrence, according to whom it had none of the dramatic and spectacular features of the story of Mark, but took place far from Galilee, at Machaerus, near the scene of John's activities, simply as a precaution of "that fox", the Tetrarch of Galilee, against possible messianistic agitation. In the nature of the case the despatch of the prophet would be kept as much as possible from popular knowledge.

In raising the question whether in Mk. 6 18 we may not have a reflection of the Roman incident related by Cassius it is far from our purpose to deny the Old Testament basis of the story as a whole. It is undoubtedly Mark's object here as in 1 2, 6, to bring out the correspondence between John and Elijah. For this purpose he paints Herodias in colors appropriate to Jezebel, while Antipas plays the part of Ahab. The offer (impossible for Antipas to make, who was not a "king" but a mere tetrarch) of "half of my kingdom" to the "little maid (*κορδαίον*)" for her dancing (she was not Antipas' daughter, nor a "little maid", but a widow or divorcée of some 28 years, and later, if not already at this time, the wife of Philip, here

represented as husband of her mother), is a trait from the story of Esther (Esth. 5 3-6). It is at least possible that in the account of the "king's" keeping John safe and hearing him gladly we have a reflection of Paul's imprisonment by Felix, and his hearings before Festus and Agrippa II (Acts 24 24f.). But in none of these models does the particular trait appear of the denunciation of the royal couple for their adulterous union, and it is precisely this trait which is the most incongruous with the real vocation of the Baptist. What *also* in fact can we call it if not "unberufen" for the anchorite of the wilderness of Judea to leave his exhortations of his own people to prepare by repentance for the great Day of Jehovah and betake himself to Galilee to denounce publicly the Edomite-Samaritan tetrarch of the region for his illicit relations with his sister in law-niece? Surely if it was any business of the Judean prophet to superintend the morals of the Herodian family he had work enough at this alone, without the added responsibility of conducting a popular reformation near the mouth of the Jordan. We may well recognize the scene of debauchery in the palace at Tiberias (the guests are "the chief men of *Galilee*") as the handiwork of those Jewish word-painters who (as Josephus tells us) after the disaster to Antipas' army at the hands of the outraged father in law Aretas in 36 A. D. began to explain that "the destruction of Herod's army came from God, and that very justly, as a punishment for what he did against John, who was called the Baptist". The brush-strokes are of the true scriptural, Jewish-hortatory type. But it is doubtful if we can include among these conventional traits the particular feature of the prophet's denunciation of "the king" to his face for his adulterous union. Given the Roman incident of 75 A. D. and the probable origin of the Gospel at Rome shortly afterward it may be worth while to raise the question whether this particular legendary trait was not suggested by it.

2. *The 'Abridgment of the Days' in the Great Tribulation, Mk. 13 20.* The peculiar statement of Mark (omitted by Luke, modified by Matthew to the extent of reduction to the passive, impersonal form) that "the Lord shortened the days" of the

Great Tribulation on "those that are in Judea", brings to a close his description of this period in the account of 'the last things'. It is not a mere figure of speech. This is apparent not merely from the unusual term used to designate this "shortening" (*ἐκολόβωσαν*, that is "amputated", "cut short"), but from the fact of its reappearance in a later fragment of the *Enoch* apocalypses. In my commentary on Mark entitled *Beginnings of Gospel Story*, *ad loc.* reference is made to an earlier attempt to explain the origin of the conception by the use of Ps. 102 23 LXX published in *ZNW*. III, iv. pp. 280—285. As I am now disposed to regard this attempt as unsuccessful the note may here be reprinted:

The doctrine of the shortening (Gr.: "amputation") of the days of Messiah, i. e., reduction of the period of painful waiting, is referred to in *Ep. Barn.*, iv. 3 (ca. 135 A. D.) in a quotation from a lost portion of the *Enoch* literature: "As Enoch saith, 'For to this end the Master hath cut short the seasons and the days, that his Beloved might hasten and come to his inheritance'." It seems to rest on Ps. 102 23 (Greek version).

As explained in a footnote *ibid.* "Heb. 1 10-12 takes the passage Ps. 102 23 as addressed to Christ, rendering verse 23: 'He answered him in the way of his strength, tell me the fewness of my days', etc." But whatever the possible connection of the psalm with the *Enoch* doctrine, it is probable that we should rather look for its basis to some pseudo-Isaian apocalypse such as that employed by Paul in Eph. 5 14 and subsequently quoted by Justin Martyr (*Dial.* lxxii) and Irenaeus (*Haer.* III, xx, 4 and IV, xxii, 1). This is made more probable by the use of the messianic title "the Beloved" (cf. Eph. 1 6; Col. 1 13), which is uniform in the pseudo-Isaian literature as it has come down to us.

The idea as applied in Mk. 13 20 is clearly apocalyptic, as in the *Enoch* fragment. No doubt, however, this apocalyptic idea rests upon some Old Testament utterance capable of being taken in the apocalyptic sense. In Rom. 9 28 Paul makes a similar application of the passage Is. 28 22 LXX. Quoting first Is. 10 22f.: "If the number of the children of Israel be as the

sand of the sea it is (only) the remnant that shall be saved" (cf. Mark "no flesh would have been saved"), he adds from Is. 28 22: "For the Lord will make a reckoning upon the earth, accomplishing and abridging it" (*λόγον γὰρ συντελεῖν καὶ συντεμνῆναι ποιήσει Κύριος ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς*). The quotation itself is somewhat "abridged". Western and Syrian texts assimilate to LXX by adding after *συντέμνων*: *ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ· ὅτι λόγον συντεμνόμενον*. They probably understand *δικαιοσύνη* of the LXX (perhaps correctly) in the sense of "goodness", "mercy" (cf. Mt. 6 1; I Jn. 1 9). Sanday and Headlam (*ICC* on Rom. *ad loc.*) explain the variations of the LXX from the Hebrew in this passage by "inability to translate".

For 'a final work and a decisive, overflowing with righteousness', they wrote 'a word' (better 'reckoning'), accomplishing and abridging it 'in righteousness', and for 'a final work and a decisive', 'a word (reckoning) will the Lord do (make)' etc.

Except for their own translation of *ποιήσει λόγον* as "do a word", for which we have ventured to substitute "make a reckoning", the statement of the case by Sanday and Headlam appears to be correct. The LXX, followed by the Western texts, seem to have understood the passage as a promise that the divine "reckoning with the earth (*λόγον ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς*)" would be cut short in the mercy of God, so that a remnant might be saved. This appears to be in fact the sense in which it is also understood by Paul. The question for us to consider is whether it be not this same passage of Isaiah in the LXX rendering which underlies the apocalyptic utterance of Mk. 13 20 and the Enoch fragment of *Barn.* iv. 3. Let it be remembered that the application in Mark is as in Rom. 9 25ff. to the saving of a remnant from the multitude of Israel in the Great Tribulation on "those that are in Judea" when the Lord makes his reckoning with them.

For those days shall be tribulation such as hath not been the like from the beginning of the creation which God created until now, and never shall be. And if the Lord had not abridged (*ἐκόλῳβωσεν*) those days, no flesh would have been saved; but on account of the elect whom he chose out he abridged (*ἐκόλῳβωσεν*) the days.

3. *The Opening of the Prison-house to Them that were Bound.* In Mk 3 22-30 our evangelist interjects parenthetically into his account of the logion "My mother and brethren" an extract from Q. Such has been at least the general verdict of critics regarding this briefer version of the incident of the Blasphemy of the Scribes (Mt. 12 23-32 — Lk. 11 14-23; 12 10), though Wellhausen chooses this as one of the principal pillars of his peculiar theory of priority of Mark over the Second Source. According to Wellhausen the literary dependence is unmistakable, but is on the side of the Q material, which amplifies from Mark. The fact that this peculiar theory so largely depends upon the passage lends added significance to our enquiry.

The artificial character of the connection in Mark is not disputed. This is one of the most conspicuous of the many instances which justify the criticism of "the Elder" quoted by Papias regarding this Gospel that it was not "in (chronological?) order", but represented addresses of Peter "adapted to the (religious) needs" of his hearers. "The scribes who came down from Jerusalem" are really introduced to the reader as if for the first time in 7 1. It is a manifest disregard of chronological sequence to introduce them here. To say that Jesus "began to speak in parables" anticipates similarly 4 1-12, though less flagrantly. Inner connection between the parenthesis and its context is hard to discover. The motive for the insertion appears to be merely to offset the comparatively venial fault of Jesus' Mother and Brethren, who had "come forth to lay hold upon him, saying 'He is beside himself,'" by the "unforgiveable sin" of the scribes. Mark thus brings both classes of "outsiders" from whom the "mystery of the kingdom of God" was hid, according to the ensuing section, to the reader's apprehension. As usual in his borrowings of Q material this evangelist disregards the teaching, except in so far as it serves his purpose of narrative. The occasion which led to the blasphemy (marvel of the multitudes at the casting out of a "dumb devil") is omitted, also Mt. 12 27f. — Lk. 11 19f.: "If I cast out by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons exorcize? If contrariwise I cast out by divine power (Mt. "by the finger", Lk. "By the

Spirit of God"), then the divine sovereignty has overtaken you unaware (*ἄφθασεν ἐφ' ὑμᾶς*).

But it is just this passage which contains the essence of the teaching in Q. The dilemma compels the opposing scribes either to admit their own adherents to be guilty of the charge they bring against Jesus, or to recognize the truth of his message "The kingdom of God is at hand". We must turn presently to the nature of this argument from the mighty works to a present "sovereignty of God" as developed in the Second Source. For the time being we note only that it fails to appear in Mark save in a much altered form (Jesus personally as Son of Man exercises divine authority and power). Mark's interest in the anecdote of the Blasphemy of the Scribes does not extend to this teaching. He is only concerned to prove the heinousness of their offence in saying "He hath an unclean spirit" (verse 30). That which serves to show the divine commission and power of Jesus (not the presence of the "finger" or "Spirit of God"), and the unpardonable wickedness of the scribes is retained. That which would explain to us the motives for the utterances on both sides is discarded.

Wellhausen argued from verse 28, reproduced verbatim in Mt. 12 31 but omitted by Luke, in favor of his view that the title Son of Man was a mere mistranslation. As regards this theory the reader may consult the preceding volume of this Journal.¹ But even were this origin for the title granted it would be difficult to regard Mk. 3 28 as more original than its Q parallel Lk. 12 10 — Mt. 12 32. Here the same distinction is made as earlier in the same Q discourse between the significance of Jesus personally, and of his work. John, who has heard of his work, and who is granted new evidences of this, is bidden to disregard the personality of the agent, but to take note that the promises of Isaiah of healing, forgiveness, reconciliation, restoration to life, sent from Jehovah to a people poor, broken-hearted, "dead", but now penitent, are being marvellously fulfilled. If anyone asks "Art thou this or that?" tell him the things which ye see and hear, says Jesus, and

¹ Vol. XLI (1922), Parts I and II.

adds significantly, "Blessed is he who shall not be stumbled in me." For the incident of John's Enquiry is related only for the purpose of removing the objections of those who are in fact "stumbled", as the evangelist knows.

It is in the light of this all-important distinction between the agent and the divine Power which works through him, that the utterance about the "unpardonable sin" of the scribes becomes intelligible. Mark obscures this, thus showing his secondary form. The Q form of the logion makes it daylight-clear:

Mt. 12 32.

And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of Man it shall be forgiven him; but whosoever shall speak against the Holy Spirit it shall not be forgiven him either in this world or that which is to come.

Lk. 12 10.

And whosoever shall speak against the Son of Man it shall be forgiven him, but he that blasphemeth the Holy Spirit shall never be forgiven.

It is easy to see why Mark, habitually solicitous to prove the divine commission of Jesus and the unpardonable iniquity of the Jews in rejecting him, should change this doctrinally difficult saying into the form "All things shall be forgiven to the sons of men, whatever their sins or the blasphemies they have blasphemed, but whosoever blasphemeth against the Holy Spirit . . . Because they said 'He hath an unclean spirit'." If this Markan form was the original, transformation into that of Q as given above is inexplicable, even if we assume the title Son of Man to be a product of mistranslation.

But the really decisive consideration is the relation of both the Q logia to the Isaian prophecy on which they rest. For both the answer to the Baptist (not included in Mark) and that to the scribes which so closely follows it in Q, rest upon a Christology directly based upon the Isaian prophecies of redemption, particularly the prophecies of the Servant as quoted in Mt. 12 18-21 from Is. 42 1 ff. and Lk. 4 18 ff. from Is. 61 1 ff. In the case of the quotations from Is. 41 1 ff. and 61 1 ff. we are unfortunately unable to draw directly from Q, our first and third evangelists having adapted the material to their own

uses. Still the two passages stand in line with unquestionable Q material, and at least reflect the Second Source, if only indirectly. The poetry of this Source is unfortunately lost for the most part upon Mark, and is only recoverable for the modern reader as he restores it from the coincident fragments of Matthew and Luke, *comparing at the same time the Isaian prophecies in relation to which the evangelist wishes the career of Jesus to be understood.*

In the case of the Answer to the Baptist (Mt. 11 5 — Lk. 7 22) there is fortunately no dispute as to the underlying scripture. The phraseology of Is. 29 18f., 32 5f., 61 1 is so closely followed that all interpreters perceive that the author of the Second Source intends to represent Jesus' work of healing, forgiveness, and "glad tidings to the poor" as a fulfilment of the Isaian promise. To some extent the poetry of Q is lost through a disposition on the part of the canonical evangelists to present the concrete instance or otherwise to subserve special interests. Thus Luke introduces a resuscitation from the dead immediately before the utterance "the dead are raised up" (7 11-17; cf. verse 22 — Mt. 11 5). The real meaning of the Q logion is the resuscitation of Israel to new life as once more a people of God. This becomes apparent by reference to the context of Old Testament prophecy (Is. 9 2; 26 19; Ez. 37 1-14) and that of the logion itself, in which the "poor" who hear "glad tidings" are of course those of Is. 52 1-10, the "ransomed of Jehovah" who are restored by his forgiving loving-kindness. Contemporary Jews familiar with the prayer for national restoration in the *Shemoneh Esreh* could hardly mistake the sense:

Thou art mighty forever, O Lord; thou restorest life to the dead, thou art mighty to save; who sustainest the living with beneficence, quickenest the dead with great mercy, supporting the fallen and healing the sick, and setting at liberty those who are bound, and upholding thy faithfulness to those who sleep in the dust. Who is like unto thee, O Lord the Almighty; or who can be compared unto thee, O King, who killest and makest alive again, and causest help to spring forth? And faithful art thou to quicken

the dead. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who restorest the dead.

In like manner the beautiful story of the "Woman that was a Sinner", which Luke inserts at the end of the group, but which Matthew omits in accordance with his uniform practice regarding the heroines of the Special Source, exemplifies the "glad tidings to the poor". Luke has perhaps slightly displaced the incident, and has certainly embellished it with a few incongruous traits borrowed from the Anointing in Bethany which he omits, apparently taking it as another form of the same story. But the story of the Penitent Harlot displays the same characteristic distinction between Mark and Q. In Mk. 2 5-10 Jesus declares sin forgiven by virtue of his authority as Son of Man, not even waiting for evidences of penitence, and proves his claim by the exertion of miraculous power. In the story of the Penitent Harlot the announcement of the "glad tidings" is due to the evidence of grateful love. Jesus vindicates his right to proclaim forgiveness by this proof that the Spirit or "finger" of God is at work. "Simon", his Pharisee host, is "stumbled in him". He should take notice rather of what God's sovereignty is accomplishing among them (*ἐν ὑμῶν*). Seeing how "she loved much" Simon should feel no surprise at the "prophet's" declaration "Thy sins are forgiven". The key to the whole group of which the Penitent Harlot forms so characteristic a part, is this appeal to the Isaian prophecy of restoration.

Interpreters of the Blasphemy of the Scribes have failed to observe that it also responds to the same key. The deaf hear and the eyes of the blind see. The meek increase their joy in Jehovah, and the poor among men rejoice in the Holy One of Israel (Is. 29 18f.). These "sanctify the name of the Holy One of Jacob" (Is. 29 23); whereas "the scoffers, that cause men to stumble by their words, watching for iniquity, are cut off" (20f.). Thus Jehovah's Name is blasphemed continually (Is. 52 5). Such (in Isaian phrase) is the occasion of the Blasphemy of the Scribes, omitted by Mark, described in Mt. 12 22f. with combination of "blind and dumb", in Lk. 11 14 with mention of the "dumb" only, and the marvel of the

multitude, but with subsequent reference to the "lightening of the whole body" (verses 34f.). The scoffers, that "turn aside the just with a thing of nought", who were explicitly identified by the Nazarene Christians of Beroea with "the scribes",² oppose the work of the divine Wisdom among her "children" (Lk. 7 35 — Mt. 11 19). Jesus' reply to the charge "He casteth out by Beelzebub" is that the evil is spoken not against him personally, but against the "Spirit of God", and therefore on their own principles³ is unpardonable.

This, however, is only the negative side of the argument, a turning back upon the scribes themselves of their charge of impiety. The affirmative argument is the more vital, and its echoes do not cease to ring for centuries after, in the doctrine of the Opening of the Prison-house. It is set forth in the Parable of the Strong Man Armed, which Mark incorporates, apparently in the sense that Jesus personally is the victor who makes spoil of Satan's goods. At least Mark includes nothing more from the source than enough to prove the power by which Jesus operates superior to that of the demons; just as in 2 1-12 he disregards the distinction between the present working of God, and the authority of the Son of Man. But if we include the affirmative argument of Q "But if it be by the Spirit (or "hand") of God that I am casting out demons, then His sovereignty has come upon you already", immediately the force of the parable becomes apparent. It is an adaptation of the Isaian prophecy of the restoration (followed a few paragraphs after by a reference to the blaspheming of Jehovah's Name [52 5]) and forms a logical continuation of the Answer to the Baptist. This was, in substance: "Stumble not at me; but see how Jehovah is fulfilling his promise of redemption". The Isaian passage underlying the parable of the Strong Man Bound is connected linguistically both with Ia.

² So Jerome on Is. 29 18f., quoting Apollinarios of Laodicea.

³ See Schechter, *Some Aspects*, p. 328f. on The Unforgivable Sin. Five cases are enumerated, of which the last two are: "He who causes the multitude to sin", and "He who profanes the Name". With this compare Hermas, *Simil.* vi. No place of repentance is granted to those who "cause the Name to be blasphemed".

29 22f. ("He who redeemed Abraham", "sanctify the Holy One of Jacob", "stand in awe of the God of Israel") and with certain connected passages of Matthew. For Mk. 7 37 gives another version of the Exorcism of the Dumb, and is paralleled by Mt. 15 31: "The multitude marvelled beholding the dumb speaking, the lame walking, and the blind seeing, and they glorified *the God of Israel*". We may venture to place the prophecy side by side with the parable and its continuation in Mk. 7 31f.

Is. 49 24f. LXX.

Μὴ λήμψεται τις παρὰ γίγαντος (var. δυνατοῦ) σκύλα; καὶ ἐὰν αἰχμαλωτεύσῃ τις ἀδίκως, σωθήσεται; οὕτως λέγει Κύριος· ἐὰν τις αἰχμαλωτεύσῃ γίγαντα, λήμψεται σκύλα· λαμβάνων δὲ παρὰ ἰσχύοντος σωθήσεται. Ἐγὼ δὲ τὴν κρίσιν σου κρινῶ, καὶ ἐγὼ τοὺς υἱοὺς σου ρύσομαι . . . καὶ αἰσθανθήσεται πᾶσα σὰρξ ὅτι ἐγὼ Κύριος ὁ ρυσάμενός σε καὶ ἀντιλαμβανόμενος ἰσχύος Ἰακώβ.

Mk. 3 27.

Οὐ δύναται οἷδεῖς εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν τοῦ ἰσχυροῦ εἰσελθὼν τὰ σκεύη αὐτοῦ διαρπάσαι, ἐὰν μὴ πρῶτον τὸν ἰσχυρὸν δῆσῃ, καὶ τότε τὴν οἰκίαν αὐτοῦ διαρπάσει.

Mt. 15 31 = Mk. 7 37.

Ὅστε τὸν ὄχλον θαυμάσαι βλέποντας κωφοὺς λαλοῦντας καὶ χωλοὺς περιπατοῦντας καὶ τυφλοὺς βλέποντας· καὶ ἐδόξασαν τὸν θεὸν Ἰσραήλ.

We cannot here follow up the later echoes of the parable in the Pauline combination of it with the triumph-song of Ps. 68 18, and the later bifurcation into the neo-mythologic doctrine of the Harrowing of Hell, and the Pauline-Johannine of the Conflict with the Prince of This World. Both forms seem to have their origin in the parable, which is invariably taken by the earliest interpreters to refer to the deliverance of Satan's captives, the souls of men, whether here on earth, as the Gnostics understood Paul (Irenaeus, *Haer.* V. xxi. 3 and xxxi. 2), or (as Irenaeus himself understood, less correctly) in the prison-house of Sheol. As far back as First Peter this Deliverance of the Spirits in Prison by the Spirit of God which worked through Jesus becomes a theme of Christian poetry. The explanation of it lies in Jesus' application of the Isaian promise of Deliverance from the Captivity of the Strong,

by the Mighty One of Israel. When he "by the Spirit of God" opens the blind eyes and unstops the deaf ears, so that the children of God's redeeming Wisdom begin to "sanctify the Name", the scoffers, that watch for iniquity and cause men to stumble in their pleadings (for justice) are cut off. The incoming of light and truth through his glad tidings mark a victory for the Mighty One of Jacob, of which the expulsion of the demons is only a token and sign. The Glad Tidings to the poor is sanctioned not alone by the lame walking and the blind seeing through the gracious power of God, but also by the "opening of the prison-house to them that were bound" (Lk. 4 18). The loosing of a daughter of Abraham "whom Satan had bound, lo, these eighteen years" (Lk. 13 16), the loosing of the many that were held under demonic control, was to Jesus a token that the dominion of God was already in the world, that the promised deliverance of the Mighty One of Jacob was at hand.