

THE "LOGIA" AND THE GOSPELS

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IN the following remarks I wish to express the opinion which I have formed of the importance of the new discovery of *Logia* in the criticism of the Gospels, both as regards their text and their composition. I shall not attempt at the present time an exhaustive treatment of a subject which is already provoking an astonishing diversity of opinion. My object is simply to draw attention to the fact that this single page of *Logia* is in evidence for the disputed question of the influence of extra-canonical texts upon the readings of the New Testament, and that our existing Gospels occupy a subordinate position relatively to some such extra-canonical texts as we get a glimpse of in the fragment of *Logia*.

In order to make this statement, it is not necessary to discuss the various hypotheses which are current with regard to the origin or interpretation of these curious sayings. If, for example, it should be maintained, as by Dr. James in the *Contemporary* for last month, that the *Logia* in question are a series of excerpts from one or more uncanonical Gospels, I shall not spend time in confuting the statement (though I do not believe it to be a correct one), because Dr. James concedes the vital point of the existence of non-canonical sources of the evangelic tradition, though the concession is slightly veiled by the suggestion that the *Logia* are only a series of excerpts. As they are not excerpts from any known or authorised Gospels, we are introduced by them into the lost evangelical literature of the early Church, for either the *Logia* are themselves a part of that literature, or are derived from some unknown branch of it. And this is a vital concession in view of the steady contradiction of the existence of such literature by the great representatives of orthodox criticism.

Neither do we discuss in detail the conflicting interpretations of the several *Logia*, except so far as is necessary to vindicate their extreme antiquity and the correctness of their ascription to Jesus Christ. We shall do this for a single *Logion* which has been the subject of the worst misunderstanding. For example, with regard to the "Fast and Sabbath" *Logion* (if I may give it a name), I find in recent journals such decided statements as the following. The *Athenaeum* of August 7, in a review whose author is somewhat difficult to recognize, declares that:

"The second fragment states that *unless you fast you will not find the kingdom of God, and unless you keep the Sabbath you will not see the Father*. The Therapeutae fasted every day and the whole day, and they were rigid in the observance of the Sabbath. They believed fasting essential

to salvation. They were bound to carry on the contemplation of God during the daylight, doing nothing else; thinking that all the deeds of the body, such as eating and drinking, should not be begun till darkness came on. The fragment has the words . . . [the world] added to . . . [unless ye fast], which makes no sense. The editors try to force a sense into them. The reading may originally have been . . . [until sunset] If our conjecture were correct, then the saying would embody exactly the rule of the Therapeutic. The great object of the Therapeutae was to see the Father, to attain to the vision of God.”

And the same opinion is expressed, without any reference to a possible Therapeutic origin for the *Logia*, by an able American writer (Dr. B. W. Bacon) in the *New York Independent* for July 22. He says:

“It is well known that a number of reported sayings of our Lord were rejected by the consensus of the early Church as not genuine, although they were current in early circles; and the second of these sayings may very well be of this character. *It imposes the duty of fasting and the duty of keeping the Sabbath under penalty of rejection from the kingdom of God.* There is nothing like this in the Gospels, and nothing like it in any of the Epistles,” &c.

The remarks which follow will show that the words underlined in the two extracts which I have given are a misapprehension of the meaning of the *Logion*.

I shall also, in the second place, explain more fully what I apprehend to be the general effect of the new discovery upon the Higher Criticism, as well as the Lower Criticism, of the New Testament. With regard to the latter, it is, indeed, easy to see that the recovered *Logia* confirm Resch's view as to the genesis of variants in the New Testament by extra-evangelic influences. The Oxford editors have drawn attention to one striking case. But Resch is not merely a “lower” critic busied with readings of the existing Gospels; he is a “higher” critic occupied with the genesis of all Gospels out of their primitive deposit. And if Resch is right in supposing that there was a primitive, oft-translated Hebrew book of *Logia*, or *Ur-Evangelium*, we shall many of us have to abandon the theory, defended so zealously by Lightfoot and Westcott, that our Gospels are themselves the primitive deposit.

Here, for the first time, we are definitely introduced to a new stratum in the history of the evangelic literature, which may be only separated from the lowest stratum of the deposited tradition by the fact of a translation from Hebrew into Greek. That is to say, *We are behind the Gospels*. Once again the higher critics have turned out to be right and the conservatives wrong; for the latter have steadily ignored the existence of written documents underlying our Canonical Gospels, while the

former have recognised their existence, and have used the critical art to recover them. Yesterday there were no *Logia* in the minds of the majority of English-speaking critics; to-day every one is talking *Logia*. And when one reads over, in the light of the present discovery, the laborious attempts made by Westcott, in his "History of the Canon," to prove that the variations in the evangelical quotations of the Fathers are not due to the use of extra-canonical sources, the conviction is overwhelming that he was defending an untenable position. We cannot any longer say, with the easy confidence that Westcott does, that "Papias bears direct testimony to our Gospels,"* nor can we assent, without grave reservations, to the statement that Papias tells us the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Mark were current in his time, and that of the *former* Papias says, "Matthew composed the Oracles in Hebrew; and each one interpreted them as he was able." It may be so, but it does not any longer seem likely. And when, in a footnote, Westcott goes so far as to say that "the sense [of this passage in Papias] would be best expressed by the translation, 'Matthew composed his Gospel in Hebrew,' giving to the word its necessary notion of scriptural authority," it is difficult to be patient with the apparent *petitio principii* involved in the substitution of "Gospel" for "*Logia*," and the attempt to limit the authority of the New Testament Scriptures to their canonical form.

We are told, further, that "it has been shown that the use of *ru Aoyto* for the Scriptures generally is fully established," and Westcott is "not aware that *X6yia* can be used in the sense of *Xoyoe*, discourses." The interpretation, however, which Westcott rejects is rendered peculiarly attractive by the repeated "Jesus says" (*Xey«*), which is so striking a characteristic of the new document.

Now, perhaps, some one will say, "We readily concede that the •existence of collections of Christ's sayings is demonstrated and must be allowed for in the criticism of the existing Gospels. In this sense, then, the *Logia* of Jesus are behind the Gospels, and are an earlier stratum. But does it follow that the recovered *Logia* have come down to us without contamination and without accretion; and may we not, -even in this single page, be in danger of ascribing too high an authority to sayings which perhaps do not belong to the primitive tradition at all?"

To such an objection it would be well to give heed, and perhaps the best way to make a test of the matter is to examine one of the difficult non-canonical sayings in the *Logia*, determine its true meaning, and see whether it lies before or after some landmark in the literature of the New Testament.

We will take, then, as a specimen, the curious *Logion* No. 2, to which we referred in our opening sentences:

“Except ye fast to the world, ye shall in no wise find the kingdom of God; and except ye keep the Sabbath, ye shall not see the Father.”

Here a superficial criticism detects the influence of the fourth Gospel in the phrase “see the Father,” and concludes, therefore, for the lateness of the *Logion*. But let us examine the matter more carefully. The *Logion* is in the form of a Hebrew parallelism, and we infer that the expression, “see the Father” is another way of saying “find the kingdom.” It is to be compared with the expressions “theirs is the kingdom,” and “they shall see God,” in Matthew. There is no necessary connection with the fourth Gospel.

(The equivalence of the phrases referred to can also be seen from* such a passage as this from the Acts of Thomas, “Blessed are ye meek, for God has counted you worthy to inherit his kingdom; . . . blessed are ye meek, for ye shall see the face of your Lord.”)

Next we ask, What is the meaning of the expression “Fast the world,” with its harsh grammar? On turning to Clement of Alexandria (Strom. iii. p. 556) we find him discussing a passage in Isaiah (lvi. 3-5) in which the Lord promises a special blessing on those eunuchs who keep His Sabbaths. Clement explains that *they keep the Sabbath by refraining from sins*, and that, having thus cut themselves off from all sin for the kingdom of heaven's sake, they are blessed in that they fast from the world . . . Here, then, is the very expression which puzzled us in the *Logion*, only the grammar, or perhaps the Hebraism of the language, has been corrected. Note the connection between the two ideas of *keeping the Sabbath* and *fasting the world*. Evidently our *Logion* is a true case of Hebrew parallelism, both members of which are in Clement's mind.*

Next turn to the seventh book of Clement's " Stromateis "" (Strom. vii. p. 877), and we find him discussing the character of the Gnostic, as he loves to call the spiritual man. He tells us that this Gnostic understands the meaning of the two fasting-days in the week p for the Wednesday and Friday are the days of Mercury and Venus. Now Hermes is the covetous nature and Aphrodite the sensual, and the true Gnostic fasts with regard to the life that loves greed and * We owe this reference to Dr. Joseph B. Mayor.

Please note. He fasts according to the law from base actions, and according to the Gospel from wicked imaginations. And Clement goes on to say that such a one, having carried out the command according to the Gospel, *makes a Lord's day* of that day in which he casts away the base imagination, he glorifies the Lord's resurrection in himself, and when he receives the comprehension of the intellectual vision, he reckons *to see the Lord* as he directs his eyes towards things

invisible. Note the connection of ideas; *he fasts, he keeps a spiritual Sunday, and he sees the Lord*. We are very near indeed to our *Logion*.

Turn, in the next place, to the Prophetic Eclogues of Clement (p. 992), (a passage which we again owe to Professor Mayor), and we find Clement discussing again the nature of fasting. He shows it cannot be the mere absence from meat, for meat does not commend us to God. It must then be understood mystically; fasting is a form of dying, and so we are to *fast to worldly things* in order that we may die to the world, and after that may partake of heavenly food and live to God.

So here we have another enforcement of the doctrine that we are to fast to the world. We may be sure that Clement knew the *Logion* and that he interpreted both parts of it, the fast and the Sabbath, mystically. So the expressions are justified and the meanings are also clear. *It has nothing to do with fasting or keeping the Sabbath in the common sense*.

We shall see this still more clearly if we recall the fact that all the primitive preaching about which we know anything involved a proof from the Old Testament that God was going to make a new covenant. And this involved also, as the controversies and books of testimonies' against the Jews show, the doctrine of a new law, new baptism, new circumcision, new fast, new Sabbath, new sacrifices, &c.

Now this doctrine of the new fast was usually grounded on a passage in Isaiah lviii.: "Is not this the fast that I have chosen," &c., Accordingly, Justin says in his dialogue with Trypho, the Jewish Rabbi (c. 15), "Now learn to fast *the true fast* which Isaiah speaks, in order that you may please God." And again (c. 12): "The time is come when you need a new circumcision and you vaunt the old one in your flesh. The new law commands you to Sabbathise continually, and you think yourselves pious if you are idle for one day, not understanding the reason why it was appointed; and if you eat unleavened bread, you say you have fulfilled the will of God. The Lord our God delights not in these things. If there is among you a perjured person, or a thief, let him cease to do such things. If there is an adulterer, let him repent, and thus he has *Sabbathised the true* and delightful Sabbath of God." Here the very expression is found concerning which* the Oxford editors ask, . . . "It is curious that in quoting from* this chapter the obligation of a perpetual Sabbath, they missed the answer to their question about the meaning of the *Logion*."

But was it an ancient one? We may admit that it is involved in the teaching of Clement and Justin. But does it explain anything in the New Testament? We say it does. For this doctrine of "fasting the world" underlies such an expression as 1 Pet. ii. 10, "Abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul." If this at first sight seems a little remote, it ceases to be so when we notice the

form which the same sentiment takes in the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, " *Abstain* from fleshly and *worldly* lusts." So we can from one single and spiritual *Logion* trace the language of the first Epistle of Peter, and of the Teaching of the Apostles as well as the later explanations of Clement and Justin.

The antiquity of the *Logion* is, therefore demonstrated; and we do not hesitate to state our belief that it is a genuine saying of Jesus Christ.

Nor is it without interest that Clement of Alexandria, with his, at first sight, peculiar mysticism, turns out to be the best exponent of the mind of the Master. Between Christ's time and Clement's, the doctrine of the Real Abstinence had been replaced by a Holy Wednesday and Friday; the True spiritual Rest had suffered also from the accretion of a fresh sacred feast-day. But Clement brushes these on one side, as Christ had brushed away the Monday and Thursday fasts of the Jews, and says we fast to Mercury and we fast to Venus, we die to desire of gain and we crucify the flesh with the passions thereof. And his interpretation was Christ's, which he had rediscovered and reapplied to the religious practices of his own day.

We have now examined carefully into the meaning of this *Logion*, and we have concluded it to be just as primitive as any of those its companions that go under the name of Canonical Gospel. The idea that it involved the obligation of fasting and Sabbath-keeping is the exact opposite of the truth.

Now the effect of this discovery of the antiquity of the recovered matter upon the criticism of the Gospels cannot fail to be great; for we find not only that we are behind the Gospels, but that *there is more in the sources of the Gospels than is conserved in the Gospels themselves.*

The next thing that is clear is that we have to do with something more than an oral tradition preceding our Gospels. We shall prove this by actually recovering by critical methods the opening sentences of the *Ur-Evangelium*, in one at least of its primitive forms.

The general consent of critics has recognized in Acts xx. 35 a true *Logion* of Jesus Christ, either oral or written.

It is introduced by the remark that "we ought to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, It is more blessed to give than to receive." Here there is a suggestiveness about the intruded words, "how He said." They remind one of the recurring "Jesus says" of the recovered *Logia*.

Now let us turn to the Epistle of Clement of Rome (c. 13), and we find the writer advising us "to be

mindful of the words of the Lord Jesus which He spake when teaching sweet reasonableness and long-suffering, for thus He said:

Be merciful that ye may obtain mercy: Remit that it may be remitted to you: As ye do, so shall it be done unto you: As ye give, so shall it be given unto you: As ye judge, so shall it be judged unto you: As ye are kind, so shall kindness be done to you: With what measure ye mete, it shall be meted to you."

Now, these are certainly *Logia*, but they vary from the existing *logia* of the New Testament in such a way as to preclude the thought that they are a free reminiscence of Matthew and Luke. And these *Logia* are introduced by a statement similar to that in the Acts, that *we are to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, for thus He said*. The same seven *Logia* recur with hardly a variation in Clem. Alex. (Strom. ii. p. 476), where they are introduced by the words, "the Lord says." There is no reason to suppose one Clement is quoting the other.

Further, in the 46th chapter of the same epistle, we find Clement of Rome saying, "*Remember the words of Jesus our Lord, for He said*, Woe to that man; and it were good for him if he had never been born, than that he should offend one of my elect: it were better for him that a millstone should be placed about him and he be drowned in the sea, than to offend one of my little ones."

Here again we find the saying repeated by Clem. Alex. (Strom. iii. p. 561), and introduced by the words, "the Lord says."

Here, then, is another combination of *Logia*, and it is certainly *not* from the Canonical Gospels, though Westcott will have it to be a recollection of these. And this Gospel extract of Clement of Rome is again introduced with the words which enjoin the recollection of Christ's sayings.

Next turn to the Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians (c. 2), and we find him enjoining upon us "*to remember the things which the Lord, said in His teaching* :

Judge not that ye be not judged: Remit and it shall be remitted to you: Be merciful that ye may obtain mercy: In what measure ye mete, it shall be measured back to you: and that Blessed are the poor, and those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of God."

Here we have the same peculiarity—viz., a quotation of *Logia*, not from our Gospels, with a prologue about the remembrance of what He said. And we have noticed the phenomenon four times. We conclude that it was the introductory formula of the book, which must have been something like this:

“We ought to remember what things our Lord said in His teaching, for He said ...”
and then probably follows the first *Logion*.

How ancient this collection must have been, if we find it quoted by Paul, by Clement of Rome, and by Polycarp!

The critical importance of this attempt to restore the opening of a primitive collection of *Logia* is very great. On the one hand, it gives us the suggestion of an earlier Gospel or Gospels than any of our existing volumes. On the other hand, it prevents our quoting Clement and Polycarp as attesting the antiquity of the Canonical Gospels. And this means a possible lowering of our idea of the antiquity of the extant Synoptists. We conclude, moreover, from a study of the variants in the recovered *Logia* that there is reason to believe not only in the existence of much pre-canonical evangelic matter, but also (we refer especially to the reading, “a city *built* on a hill,” in the seventh *Logion*, whose origin Kesch divined so acutely) in the influence that the extra-evangelic documents have had on the transmission of the text of the canonical Gospels.