

CHAPTER IX.

ST MATTHEW.—II.

ABOUT the same time as Aristides there is testimony to St Matthew from Phrygia, in Asia Minor, which is of special interest and significance. It comes from PAPIAS, the Bishop of Hierapolis, who in a fragment of his 'Expositions of the Oracles of the Lord,' which Eusebius has preserved, expressly designates Matthew the author of a Gospel. Irenæus,¹ in referring to his great work in five books, calls him "an ancient man"—"a man near to the beginning" (*ἀρχαῖος ἀνὴρ*)²—a hearer of John the Apostle and a companion of Polycarp. He was a man whose early career belonged to the Apostolic age and the beginnings of Church life in Asia. Eusebius questions the statement of Irenæus that Papias was a hearer of John the Apostle, and the subject

¹ *Adversus Hæreses*, v. 33. 4; cf. Euseb. H. E., III. 39.

² See Zahn, *Forschungen*, vi. 110 ff.

is one of the most intricate and perplexed in early Christian literature. But the testimony of Irenæus, who was himself a hearer of Polycarp, is to be preferred in a matter of this kind, especially as Eusebius is not without a certain bias against Papias for his millenarianism, and has, as we shall see, an interest in making him out to be the disciple of another John. Papias, at any rate, was in a position to ascertain and to record particulars relating to the Apostles and early founders of the Church. At Hierapolis there lived apparently to a long age Philip and his daughters. Whether this was Philip the Evangelist, whom St Paul found at Cæsarea on his last journey to Jerusalem, and who had four daughters possessed of prophetic gift (Acts xxi. 8, 9), as ancient writers assert; or Philip the Apostle, who ended his days in Hierapolis, and had three daughters, one of whom "lived in the Spirit,"¹ is of little consequence, because in either case particulars such as Papias is represented as obtaining from them went back to the earliest days of the Church. In his 'Expositions,' which may be referred to about 125 A.D., Papias incorporated many incidents and particulars which he had gathered through a long life, and which bore upon the Gospel histories. If only this treatise were to come to light like the 'Didache,' the

¹ Euseb. H. E., III. 39.

'Gospel of Peter,' the 'Apology of Aristides,' and other valuable finds of recent years, we should obtain the solution of problems and difficulties which the fragments of it have raised for the critic and the historian.

The question as to the precise character of these 'Expositions' (*λογίων κυριακῶν ἐξηγήσεις*) has produced a large controversial literature. In his brilliant 'Essays on Supernatural Religion'¹ the late Bishop Lightfoot brought his great learning and keen historical imagination to the examination of this subject. Against his opponent, who held that Papias had no knowledge of our Gospels, he established to the satisfaction of many scholars that the work of Papias consisted of three strata: (1) a written text, in all likelihood comprising our Gospels; (2) interpretations explaining the text and forming the main object of the work; and (3) oral traditions illustrative of these interpretations, which Papias had made it his aim, evidently for a long time before writing, to gather from the elders, and followers of the elders, and survivors of the Apostolic age; "for," he explains, "I did not think that what was to be obtained from books would profit me so much as that which came from a living and abiding voice."² He mentions Gospels by St. Mark and St. Matthew,

¹ See the *Essays on Papias of Hierapolis*, pp. 142-216.

² Euseb., III. 39. 4.

and there is good reason to believe that he was acquainted with those by St Luke and St John. They would lie at the basis of his work. An extract from the work of Papias is given by Irenæus¹ with reference to the millennial reign: "As the elders who saw John the disciple of the Lord relate that they had heard from him how the Lord was wont to teach and speak of those times: Days will come when vines will grow each having ten thousand shoots, and on each shoot ten thousand branches, and on each branch ten thousand twigs, and on each twig ten thousand clusters, and in each cluster ten thousand grapes, and each grape when pressed shall yield twenty-five measures of wine. . . . These things Papias testifies in writing in the fourth of his books. And he added, saying: These things, however, are credible to them that believe. And when Judas, the traitor, did not believe, but asked, How shall such growths be accomplished by the Lord? Papias says the Lord said: They shall see who shall come to those times." It is such traditions passed from mouth to mouth which Papias uses to illustrate his expositions and prefers to the productions of Gnostic writers like Basilides and Valentinus already in circulation, which are "the books" he evidently has in view.²

His testimony to St Matthew is as follows:—

¹ *Adversus Hæreses*, v. 33. 3.

² Lightfoot, p. 161.

“So then Matthew compiled his oracles (τὰ λόγια) in the Hebrew tongue, and every one interpreted them as he was able.”¹

The following considerations may help to elucidate this difficult statement:—

1. On one particular amid many points of diversity there is unanimity among scholars. When we find the word Hebrew employed we may be sure that Aramaic is meant—the dialect of Hebrew which was vernacular among the inhabitants of Palestine in the time of our Lord—the original language of the Gospel, inasmuch as it was the language in which He uttered the discourses recorded in the Gospels and all the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth.

2. A question as to which there is still great divergence of opinion is the precise meaning of “compiling his oracles.” Schleiermacher suggested that it meant a collection of our Lord’s discourses and sayings which St Matthew had put together. This view has been adopted by scholars of eminence, and in the “criticism of sources” which is presently so much in vogue it occupies a conspicuous place. It is held that this collection of discourses made by the Apostle Matthew, and described by Papias, is one of the most important sources of the First Gospel, and that from it the

¹ Euseb. H. E., III. 39. 16.

Gospel takes the name of St Matthew. Professor Burton of Chicago finds certain longer discourses which have no parallel in either St Mark or St Luke, and certain shorter sayings of Jesus, comprising together about 230 verses, or a little over one-fifth of the whole Gospel of St Matthew. "The comparison of the Gospels," he says,¹ "certainly suggests that these passages constituted a source of our Gospel of Matthew. It is in favour of the supposition that they in fact were contained in, or constituted, the original collection of sayings of Jesus to which Papias refers, that it conforms to this ancient and undisputed tradition, and that it explains, as no theory which makes the *Matthæan Logia* a source of both Matthew and Luke or of all three Synoptists can explain, how the present Gospel of Matthew obtained the name. On this view the present Gospel naturally took the name of that old document which it alone, of our present Gospels at least, reproduced, and of which it might almost be considered an enlarged edition."

This hypothesis has found favour with critics of opposite schools, but it has serious difficulties to encounter. First, there is no clear trace in early Christian antiquity of any such collection existing by itself, and independently of St Matthew's

¹ *Principles of Literary Criticism and the Synoptic Problem*, p. 41. Compare W. C. Allen's '*St Matthew*,' p. lvi. ff.

Gospel.¹ And secondly, τὰ λόγια cannot be restricted to discourses or sayings alone. In the Epistle to the Hebrews (v. 12) τὰ λόγια τοῦ Θεοῦ stands for the entire revealed word of God, embracing history and narrative as well as Divine utterances and words. In Romans (iii. 2) St Paul uses τὰ λόγια τοῦ Θεοῦ to describe the whole Divine Revelation which was entrusted to the Jews.² Lightfoot³ concludes a careful examination of this point with the assertion that "the oracles" (τὰ λόγια) can be used as co-extensive with "the Scriptures" in the time of Papias. And Hilgenfeld,⁴ who would not be swayed by bias in a matter of this kind, declares

¹ Professor Harnack, in his recent contribution to New Testament Introduction ('Sprüche und Reden Jesu,' p. 172), after having carefully and skilfully extracted from St Matthew and St Luke the non-Marcian document common to them, which consists wholly of discourses with no narrative, and is now generally known as Q, thinks the Matthean Logia of Papias may probably be that source, but he considers that both Eusebius and Papias understand by Matthew's Logia our St Matthew. The subject is ably discussed by Professor Sir William Ramsay, 'Expositor,' May 1907.

² The title Λόγια Ἰησοῦ, 'Sayings of our Lord,' is not to be applied to those remarkable collections which Messrs Grenfell and Hunt have discovered at Oxyrhynchus, first in 1897 and again in 1903. In the second instalment of these texts the opening formula is not τὰ λόγια but οἱ λόγοι—οἱ τοιοῦτοι οἱ λόγοι—οὗς ἐλάλησεν Ἰησοῦς—suggesting Acts xx. 35 and 1 Clement xiii., where we have the same formula, "remembering the words of the Lord Jesus (τῶν λόγων τοῦ Κυρίου Ἰησοῦ) how He said."

³ Essays on Supernatural Religion, p. 176.

⁴ Einleitung in das Neue Testament, p. 456.

that of a mere account of the sayings of Jesus Papias has no thought: "Not a mere collection of sayings, but a complete Gospel is what Papias regards Matthew as having written in Hebrew."

3. There is now the question whether any such Gospel, written in Hebrew, was known in early Christian antiquity. Papias is not our only authority for the existence of a Hebrew Gospel of Matthew. Irenæus, who knew the Four Gospels so well, and held them to be of exclusive authority, traces them back to the Apostles themselves, and says of St Matthew:¹ "Matthew published his Gospel among the Hebrews in their own language while Peter and Paul were preaching and founding the Church in Rome." Whether the account of Irenæus was exclusively dependent upon Papias we cannot tell, but Origen, whose writings show not the slightest acquaintance with the work of Papias, speaks of a Hebrew Matthew with as much confidence as Irenæus, who had read Papias's book. Eusebius² records the journey of Pantænus to the East and his discovery among the people of India—possibly the people of South Arabia—of a Hebrew Gospel of Matthew, which had been left to them by Bartholomew the Apostle; and in another place³ he states that "Matthew, who had at first preached to the Hebrews, when he was

¹ *Adversus*, iii. 1. 1.

² *H. E.*, V. 10. 3.

³ *H. E.*, III. 24. 6.

about to go to other peoples committed his Gospel to writing in his native tongue, and thus compensated those whom he was obliged to leave for the loss of his presence." Jerome and Epiphanius recognise the existence of the work, although when Jerome speaks of the Hebrew original of St Matthew as a book in his possession he means rather the Gospel of the Nazarenes; and Epiphanius appears to be under the influence of a similar confusion. That there had been a Gospel, bearing the name of Matthew and circulating in Aramaic in the early days of Christianity, is witnessed by a continuous tradition from Papias to Eusebius.¹

4. This early Aramaic Gospel of Matthew was apparently no longer in existence in the time of Eusebius. If there had been a copy extant anywhere, it surely would have been in the library of Pamphilus, which was at the historian's service. Even in the time of Papias it was probably no longer in use, for Papias refers to the time when each one translated it as already lying in the past. That this translating referred to written translations or revisions of St Matthew's writing does not require to be supposed. It is much more in accordance with probability that oral translation is what Papias had in his mind. But what is here in view is that Christians who had know-

¹ Cf. Zahn, 'Das Evangelium des Matthäus,' pp. 18, 19.

ledge of Aramaic and Greek endeavoured to make the contents of this Aramaic Gospel intelligible to congregations with little or no knowledge of this language. Zahn¹ considers that it was never the book of Matthew which was translated, but always and only single sections from it, and, what was the chief point for Papias, always a portion of the Lord's sayings (*λόγια κυριακά*). And he says it was not Christian worship as conducted in his younger years which Papias describes,—“In this case he would have used the imperfect (*ἤρμηνευε*) to express the fact that the reading of sections of Scripture in Greek was exchanged for the translation of Hebrew passages. Neither does he describe a condition of things in existence at the time when he wrote (*ἐρμηνεύει*), but employs the aorist (*ἤρμηνευσε*) to indicate that it was something belonging entirely to the past. It was so once; when Papias wrote it was no longer necessary.”² By this time the Greek Matthew with which we are familiar had taken its place. From the ‘Didache,’ from the ‘Epistle of Barnabas,’ and from Polycarp’s ‘Epistle to the Philippians’ we know that the Greek Matthew was already widely known and circulated. How the transition was made from the Hebrew Matthew to the Greek is one of those questions upon which we have no

¹ *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, ii. 510 (Eng. trans.)

² *Ibid.*, p. 514 (Eng. trans.)

information. But it must have been made early, and the Greek Gospel must have always been held to be a complete substitute for the Hebrew book, and never bore any other name than that of St Matthew.

5. Professor Zahn¹ is of opinion that the transition was made through the Aramaic Matthew being translated by some unknown hand, or, as with the Targums and the Latin Bible, a succession of hands, at a very early period into Greek, which soon achieved a wide circulation. There need be no prejudice against such a translation, which is intrinsically probable. As Jesus made use of Aramaic in preaching to the people and instructing His disciples, all the discourses of Jesus, and the words spoken by Him to the Jews who had intercourse with Him, had to pass through a process of translation in order to be recorded for us in our Greek Gospels. Not in St Matthew alone, but in St Mark and St Luke as well, commentators refer words of Jesus from time to time to an Aramaic original in order to understand them fully, or to explain the different forms in which they occur in the tradition. In his learned 'Commentary on St Matthew,' Professor Zahn makes this assumption of translation a cardinal point in his exegesis; and Wellhausen, in his Commentaries on the Synoptic Gospels,

¹ *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, ii. 515 (Eng. trans.)

goes back also to the Aramaic foundation of portions of the narrative.

That the Gospel according to Matthew appeared at first in an Aramaic dress seems to be established by the testimony of Papias, corroborated by other witnesses whom we have adduced. That the Greek *St Matthew* is substantially identical with this Hebrew Gospel of Matthew known to Papias appears to me in the highest degree probable. There are, however, drawbacks which must leave our conclusion short of certainty.

(1) It cannot be affirmed with any strong show of evidence that our present *St Matthew* reads like a translation from Aramaic into Greek. It has, in the judgment of many scholars, all the marks of an original and independent composition. The latest English commentator of note¹ asserts that "our First Gospel was not originally written in Hebrew, nor is it likely that in its present form it is the work of an Apostle." So important a witness as Dr G. Dalman, in his 'Words of Jesus,' casts the weight of his name into the scale against the view that there was an Aramaic Gospel of Matthew.

(2) It is difficult to account for the similarities found in the Marcan sections of *St Matthew* on the assumption that *St Matthew* wrote in

¹ W. C. Allen, 'International Commentary,' on *St Matthew*, p. lxxx.

Hebrew, and that his Gospel was not translated into Greek till, say, 85 A.D., as Zahn maintains. But until we are better able to estimate the influence of oral tradition in the making of our Gospels, and until the relations between the Synoptic Gospels are more satisfactorily cleared up, it is premature to press for a final solution of a literary question like this.

It is a great deal to be assured that by 125 A.D., and on any view of the fragment of Papias, a considerable time before, the Gospel according to Matthew was in circulation among the churches of Phrygia as an authoritative record of the Life and Teaching of Jesus, and bearing the name of the Apostle called from the receipt of custom to follow Christ.

That the Greek St Matthew was in existence from a very early period is clear from the testimony of the Apostolic Fathers. Passing from Papias, the first witness to be considered is one whose period overlaps that of the Phrygian Bishop, POLYCARP of Smyrna. As a personal hearer of St John, along with Papias and others who had seen the Lord, he is able to attest the harmony between the reminiscences of those early disciples and the written records of the Lord's miracles and teaching. "I am able to describe the very place in which the blessed Polycarp sat as he discoursed, and his goings out and

his comings in, and the manner of his life, and his physical appearance, and his discourses to the people, and the accounts which he gave of his intercourse with John and with the others who had seen the Lord. And as he remembered their words, and what he heard from them concerning the Lord and concerning His miracles and His teaching, having received them from eye-witnesses of the Word of Life, Polycarp reported all things in conformity with the written records," is the testimony of Irenæus¹ regarding one whom he revered as a father in the Gospel. That "the written records" thus referred to were the Gospels is questioned by Professor Harnack,² who regards the expression as meaning the Old Testament Scriptures, but on grounds which are unconvincing. The testimony of a personality situated as Polycarp was is specially valuable. We have from his own hand only a single letter written 'To the Philippians'; and we have also the 'Martyrdom of Polycarp,' probably from a contemporary hand, giving particulars of his death. The letter to the Philippians, however, was written long before his martyrdom. Its purpose was to acknowledge receipt of letters from the Philippian Christians relating the behaviour of Ignatius as he passed

¹ Letter to Florinus, Euseb. H. E., V. 20.

² See above, p. 63.

through Philippi, along the *Via Egnatia*, on the way to martyrdom at Rome. It must, therefore, date somewhere between 107 A.D. and 117 A.D., the limits within which the martyrdom of Ignatius is believed to lie. Polycarp has in all between thirty and forty coincidences with the language of New Testament Scripture, although the number of cases in which he refers to Old Testament Scripture is small. Of the Evangelists we can be fairly sure that he was acquainted with St Matthew. He quotes¹ as follows from the Sermon on the Mount: "Remembering what the Lord said as He taught—Judge not that ye be not judged; forgive and it shall be forgiven to you; have mercy, that ye may obtain mercy; with what measure ye mete, it shall be meted to you again. And, Blessed are the poor, and the persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. v. 3, 7; vii. 12; cf. Luke vi. 20, 36-38). And again,² "Praying the All-seeing God with supplications not to lead us into temptation (Matt. vi. 13), as the Lord said, The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak" (Matt.

¹ Ep. to Phil., c. ii. 3. The first clauses here have parallels in Clement of Rome and in Clement of Alexandria, but there is no ground for believing that they came from any other record than our Gospels. See Westcott, 'Canon,' p. 62; Stanton, 'The Gospels as Historical Documents,' pp. 25, 27.

² C. vii.

xxvi. 41). These references which we claim for St Matthew show affinities sometimes with St Mark and sometimes with St Luke; but though they do not absolutely infer quotation from any one of them, they at least suggest the knowledge in the Philippian Christians of a body of truth like the Sermon on the Mount as it is recorded in St Matthew. Having evidence of the existence of St Matthew's Gospel from Polycarp's contemporary, Papias, we naturally assign the quotations which have a certain measure of verbal agreement, and entire agreement with its contents, to that Gospel. The Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians is very brief, and allows but little scope for quotation; and yet into its texture are woven unmistakable allusions to 1 Peter, 1 John, and more than one Epistle of St Paul. "St Matthew," says Professor Stanton,¹ "is the only one of the Synoptic Gospels, the signs of the use of which in the sub-Apostolic age are really impressive." It is just this Gospel which the critics at the present time are least disposed to acknowledge as the work of an Apostle, and these early references to it are the more welcome.

¹ The Gospels as Historical Documents, p. 17.