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A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

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ART. III.—SAINTS' DAYS IN THE CHURCH'S YEAR.

IV. APRIL. ST. MARK THE EVANGELIST.

A. CHARACTERISTICS OF ST. MARK'S GOSPEL.

“The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”—MARK i. 1.

THE figure of St. Mark being that which stands in the memorial-niche of the present month,—and St. Mark, besides being a Scripture character delineated for our religious benefit, being also an Evangelist divinely appointed for the perpetual instruction of the Church, it is obviously natural to consider, in the first place, the characteristics of the Gospel which bears his name.

Though the shortest Gospel in length, yet in another sense, and a very true sense, it is the most copious of the four. No explanation of its character could be more inadequate and incorrect than that which used to be accepted, and which indeed was sometimes set forth in books published for the use of the Clergy, namely, that St. Mark's Gospel is an abridgment of St. Matthew's. Its tone—its temperament, so to speak—is different; and even an attentive listener in Church to the reading of the Lessons must be conscious of this, though he may not be able at the moment to state the reason for this impression. Some part of the explanation of this impression may now be given—very briefly indeed, yet so as to be clear and conclusive.

In the first place, there is a quick determined movement in this Gospel—a rapidity and energy, not to say impatience, which becomes apparent on close examination. In a case of this kind much may depend upon a single word. Now there is in the original text of this Gospel a phrase perpetually recurring, and denoting promptitude and immediate action, which only is not perceived by the English reader because it is translated differently (to take instances merely out of the first chapter) by the phrases “straightway,” “immediately,” “anon,” according to that unfortunate fancy of the translators, which led them to think that variety would be always desirable, even when the absence of variety in the original was characteristic. To say that the phrase in question occurs in St. Mark's Gospel far oftener than in all the other Gospels put together, would be much below the truth.¹ Other illustrations could be given of

¹ The exact statistics of the case may be conveniently seen in Bruder's “Greek Concordance,” who prefixes here to his list of references the expressive words, “Marco frequentissimum.” In St. Matthew the phrase *καὶ εὐθὺς* is used 9 times; in St. Matt., 29 times; in St. Luke, 3 times; in St. John, 3 times.

this peculiar characteristic of St. Mark's style; but strict brevity being imposed upon us here, it may be well to pass at once to another point.

This is what may be termed a general liveliness of narration—as though the writer were speaking to us, while we read his sentences. This is a feature kindred to the former, but not quite identical with it. Only one exemplification shall be given here, but it is a very solemn one. St. Mark notes the gesture, the manner, the countenance of Christ in a degree which is by no means observable in the other Evangelists. He "took" the little children "in His arms" when He blessed them;¹ when the rich young ruler came to Him, He " beheld " him; when He admonished His disciples of the danger of riches, He "looked round about" upon them; when the woman who touched His garment was healed by the way, He "looked round to see her that had done this thing."²

Once more, there are minute touches in Mark's narrative which we do not find in the other Gospels. It is as though the presence of an eye-witness were with us while we read. Thus, to take the last four chapters, he alone names Andrew as being present on the Mount of Olives, when the Lord's discourse concerning future judgment was spoken.³ He alone quotes at the end of the discourse the searching words, "What I say unto you I say unto all, Watch."⁴ We may remark, by the way, for a reason which will be seen presently, that Andrew was Peter's brother, and that the admonition to watch was specially applicable to Peter at this time; again, in the account of the Passion, Mark alone names that strange incident of the "young man" with the "linen cloth" about him, who fled in the crowd;⁵ he alone says that Simon the Cyrenian, who bore the cross, was "the father of Alexander and Rufus."⁶ And with the same kind of result we might turn to the first four chapters. Here only we find the phrase "stoop down" when John the Baptist expresses by a lively image his lowness in his Master's presence;⁷ Mark only it is who says Jesus, when tempted in the wilderness, was "with the wild beasts."⁸ In "the house of Simon and Andrew," when the sick woman was raised from the fever, it is he only who says that Jesus "lifted her up" by the hand; and be it remarked that this sick woman was the

¹ Mark x. 16. See ix. 36.

² *Ibid.*, x. 21, 23; v. 32. See iii. 5; viii. 33.

³ *Ibid.*, xiii. 3. ⁴ *Ibid.*, xiii. 37.

⁵ *Ibid.*, xiv. 51, 52. Surely the only satisfactory solution of the difficulties which arise here is in the belief that the "young man" was St. Mark himself.

⁶ Mark xv. 21. See Rom. xvi. 13. ⁷ Mark i. 7.

⁸ *Ibid.*, i. 13.

mother of Peter's wife.¹ When the healing of the paralytic at Capernaum is described, with the story of the letting of the sick man down through the roof, it is here only that we learn that he was "borne of four."² And when they entered into the ship, after the long teaching by parables, here only we are told that the disciples took Him into the ship "even as He was," that when the storm was at its worst, He was asleep "on a pillow;" here only are words quoted which probably none but Peter would have dared to utter: "Lord, carest Thou not that we perish?"³ And let it be noted that in this scanty enumeration only half of St. Mark's Gospel has been touched, that eight chapters still remain; and it may confidently be stated that a similar examination of them would bring precisely the same feature to view.

Now all this points to one conclusion—to the presence of an eye-witness, pervading, if we may say so, the composition of this Gospel. Surely it is not so much Mark that speaks to us in these pages as Peter. Already some observations have been made which lead our thoughts to this conclusion; but in proportion as this theory is put to the test by minute examination, the evidence becomes more conclusive. This evidence divides itself into two sections. First, there is a tendency in this Gospel to sink, or to hide, what is creditable to St. Peter, and to call attention to that which is humiliating; and secondly, circumstantial facts appear in this narrative which, in the most natural way, bring Peter before our thoughts. Thus, as regards the former class of evidence, in the account of the memorable conversation at Cæsarea Philippi, the glorious testimony to Peter's confession is omitted, and the severity of the rebuke he received is made conspicuous.⁴ It is in this Gospel too, and in this only, that the information comes to us that the cock crowed twice.⁵ Under the other head we may just note these two circumstances, that here only, in the account of the Transfiguration, we find the words, "*He wist not what to say;*"⁶ here only the words of the angel at the empty sepulchre, "Go, tell His disciples *and Peter* that I go before them into Galilee."⁷ Internal evidence comes abundantly out of this Gospel to meet the wide-spread tradition of the early Church. There is really no doubt of the meaning of the phrase in Eusebius, which has led to so much discussion: "Mark was the interpreter of Peter."⁸

¹ Mark i. 31. See ix. 27. ² *Ibid.*, ii. 3. ³ *Ibid.*, iv. 36, 38.

⁴ Compare Mark viii. 27-33 with Matt. xvi. 13-23.

⁵ Mark xiv. 30, 68, 72. ⁶ *Ibid.*, ix. 6. ⁷ *Ibid.*, xvi. 7.

⁸ It is important to observe that, as regards the relation of Peter and Mark, the accord of tradition comes from without in the most decisive manner to meet the strength of internal evidence.

B. THE OPPORTUNITIES OF YOUNG MEN.

"Take Mark, and bring him with thee : for he is profitable to me for the ministry."—2 TIM. iv. 11.

If a very strict order were followed, this paper on St. Mark ought to have preceded the other. The man comes logically before the writing. But this is not a case where chronology need be very exactly observed. Each of the present series of short essays is intended to have a distinct topic of its own ; and there is some advantage in turning back to consider what manner of man St. Mark was, after having carefully noted some characteristics of the Gospel which he was inspired to write. Let us now, therefore, very briefly follow the footsteps of his biography, as given to us in the New Testament, keeping in view one particular aspect of the subject which may serve as a very useful and suggestive thread for binding the whole together.

The two earliest occasions on which St. Mark appears before us in the sacred narrative, convey, beyond any doubt, the impression that he was then *a young man*. The first is in the twelfth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, where we find a large body of the early Christians assembled in his mother's house, at an anxious time, and engaged in prayer. St. Peter had been put in prison, and was in danger of execution. He was delivered, as we remember, by an angel ; and on being thus rescued, he proceeded "to the house of Mary, the mother of John, whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together in prayer."¹ The mother of Mark, then, was a religious woman : the house in which he was brought up was a house of prayer ; it was a place, too, where help was given to others at a season of distress and trouble. To Mark it was a great blessing to belong to such a household. He was surrounded by good influences in his early days ; and, of course, for his use of this advantage he was responsible. And surely it should be suggested to young men, when they read this passage of Sacred History, that all who dwell in religious homes, especially all who have had godly mothers, that this is an infinite blessing—that they cannot value it too highly—that they ought to pray for grace to use it fully—that God will hold them accountable for so great a benefit. "To whom much is given, of them shall much be required."

The next passage to which reference is to be made, is in the latter part of the twelfth chapter, taken in conjunction with the earlier part of the thirteenth ; and here again the distinct impression is conveyed that St. Mark was a young man. We

¹ Acts xii. 12.

now see him in association, not with St. Peter, but with St. Paul. That Apostle, along with Barnabas, had been on a charitable errand to Jerusalem; and when they returned to Antioch, where very active preaching of the Gospel was taking place, they brought with them—no doubt with his mother's full approval—“John, whose surname was Mark.”¹ Presently Paul and Barnabas were sent forth from Antioch on the first Christian Mission to the Gentiles. They proceeded to the island of Cyprus; and there it is said, they had John “for their minister,” or assistant.² Now, therefore, we can see this son of a religious mother appointed, at a very critical moment in the history of the Church, to a most important post, viz., to help the first Missionaries that ever went out to preach the Gospel in the Gentile world. No doubt St. Mark's position was subordinate. But he had a great opportunity of gaining experience; and he had a great opportunity too of being useful. And when we consider all that required attention on the Mission, in making arrangements for addressing public audiences, in instructing those who anxiously inquired concerning the Gospel, and in baptizing new converts, we feel sure that he was very useful, to say nothing of the comfort his presence afforded to his older companions. And to young men it should be said very firmly that they will have (and possibly may very soon have) opportunities of being thoroughly useful. They will be able to afford help and comfort to those who are older than themselves. Hence they should be urged in one sense—not in every sense—but in a very true sense, to believe in their own importance. They will have power to be useful; and in endeavouring to be useful they will gain experience that will be of value during their whole future lives.

But when the Missionary party leaves the island of Cyprus, a sudden change comes over the prospect, a cloud falls upon this fair promise of a young man's usefulness. We are now thinking of the thirteenth verse of the thirteenth chapter. Paul and Barnabas were proceeding to the mainland, and preparing to enter upon longer journeys; and at this point it is said, that “John departing from them returned to Jerusalem.”³ It is evident from what follows that Mark was to blame. But the journeys in prospect were fatiguing and dangerous; and probably some ship sailing for Syria presented to him an opportunity for returning home, and so he went. He gave up this enterprise which he had begun; he left Paul and Barnabas without the help which he was able to give, and which they so much needed. No doubt this was

¹ *Acts* xii. 25.

² *Ibid.*, xiii. 5.

³ *Ibid.*, xiii. 13.

very natural ; but it was not very spirited conduct on his part. We should expect a young man to have more courage, to say nothing of the duty of abiding by an undertaking, if it is a good undertaking, to which we have once committed ourselves, especially if our devotion is likely to involve serious inconvenience and discomfort to others. To young men we therefore say, " You too will probably be placed—in fact you are sure to be placed—in a position where you will be tempted to inconsistency and weakness, and when, if you yield, you will be very much ashamed and the cause of great harm."

Now let us note part of the harm that did result in this instance. Paul and Barnabas completed their first Missionary journey—returned to their starting-point—and then proposed to enter on a new Missionary journey. This we find recorded in the fifteenth chapter of the Acts : " Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark ; but Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them, and went not with them to the work ; and the contention was so sharp between them that they departed asunder one from the other."¹ Now we need not inquire whether Paul or Barnabas was in the right. Perhaps they were both, more or less in the wrong. The point for us to observe at the moment is that Mark was the cause of this contention and separation, and that this contention and separation was a very great evil. When good men publicly disagree, much harm commonly results. Thus Mark's weakness and inconsistency led to scandal in the Church, attenuated the force of Missionary operations, and produced coldness between two warm friends. Such is the mischief that may be done by a young man without the commission of any positive crime. Many a misunderstanding has been caused among elder people (and good people, too) by the misconduct of those who are younger ; and such misunderstandings are lamentable events.

We now lose sight of Mark for several years. How he was employed during that interval we do not know. He may have suffered much from that loss of character, that forfeiting of confidence, which is the proper penalty of those who have failed to act with courage and firmness at a critical time. We begin, however, to obtain some information concerning Mark again in Epistles written by St. Paul from Rome, at the close of that voyage which is related near the end of the Acts of the Apostles. St. Paul tells Philemon that " Mark, his fellow-labourer, salutes him."² From the Epistle to the Colossians we learn something more. Here he speaks of Mark as one of those " fellow-workers unto the kingdom of God, which had been a

¹ Acts xv. 37-39.

² Phil. 24.

comfort to him."¹ Thus it is evident that Mark was at this time with St. Paul in Rome, and that he had returned to his old office of helping the Apostle, and of being a really useful and serviceable man ; and that St. Paul now placed full confidence in him once more. It was one of those cases of recovery over which we always rejoice, because we recognise in them the action of the grace of God.

We must pass over several years again before we come to the next, and the last, information in Scripture concerning St. Mark. The latest letter which St. Paul wrote was the Second to Timothy ; and the verse prefixed as a motto to this paper makes known to us what he said of Mark then. He sends for him, with a special desire to have him near himself, because of his great power of being useful. "Take Mark, and bring him with thee ; for he is profitable unto me for ministering."² Thus we see that Mark was now consistent; that with the continued supply of God's grace he remained steady in his duty, and was trusted by St. Paul to the very last.

J. S. HOWSON.



ART. IV.—COWPER'S LETTERS.

Letters of William Cowper. Edited with Introduction by the Rev. W. BENHAM, B.D., F.S.A., Rector of Edmund the King, Lombard Street. Macmillan and Co. 1884.

WE have to thank Mr. Benham for this compact edition of Cowper's Letters. He has given us in this little volume all that is best worth preserving in the correspondence of the poet of Ouse and Olney. There is not a letter in this book that is not worth reading, and that will not repay the reader. We are all familiar with Southey's judgment of Cowper as a letter-writer. "He was," he says, "the best of English letter-writers"; and certainly his letters are as charming as they are delightful. They are as artless as they are graceful ; as humorous as they are varied in matter, and clear in style. They combine with a keen sense of the ridiculous and with a deep knowledge of human nature, a transparent simplicity which reveals the goodness of the poet's heart, and his singleness of purpose in lashing the vices, and satirizing the follies

¹ Col. iv. 10, 11. In these two passages the original word translated "fellow-worker" and "fellow-labourer" is the same ; and it is worth while to observe that it includes the significant word "work" which we find in Acts xv. 38.

² 2 Tim. iv. 11.