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An Unknown Gospel.¹

BY THE REVEREND C. A. PHILLIPS, M.A., BOURNEMOUTH.

THE more important part of this latest discovery and publication from the British Museum presents the oldest extant piece of Christian literature. It consists of two papyrus leaves, with two tiny fragments, from an Unknown Gospel, dating at least from the middle of the second century (some letters look earlier, and one expert would say from the early part of the century), that is, about a hundred years earlier than the Chester Beatty Gospels, and belonging to the period before the Canonical Gospels had fully established their authoritative position among the many Gospel writers² or Irenæus could write his famous passage on the essential congruity of Four Gospels and four only.

The leaves come from a codex, thus pushing back still further the evidence of the early Christian preference for the book to the roll: the writing is in a single column; the margins half round both leaves are lost, and there are several lacunæ in one, and a central slit in the other, but three-quarters of the text can be more or less confidently restored with the help of parallel passages in the Canonical Gospels. The general verdict of the editors is that they can more surely state what these leaves are *not*, than what they may be; they do not come from a Gospel Harmony, or from a mere collection of sayings, like the famous Logia, nor probably from any known Apocryphal Gospel (if from any, the Gospel of the Egyptians seems the only possible one). They contain incidents, which, as far as it is fair to judge from two leaves only, might well belong to a complete Gospel: the style and diction of the greater part have all the simplicity and directness of the historic Gospels: we may well have here leaves from one of those local Gospels which ceased to be copied after the Four became authoritative.

The outstanding feature of the text is the parallels with S. John, and it is here that the unique value and importance of this new discovery will lie, though there are several other fresh bits of interesting matter. Among the latter, the eye catches perhaps first of all the unusual abbreviation of

¹ *Fragments of an Unknown Gospel and other Early Christian Papyri*, edited by H. Idris Bell and T. C. Skeat, London, Trustees of the British Museum, 1935.

² Cf. Lk 1¹.

the sacred name, ΙΗ (common in the Chester Beatty Papyri, but only known in two places elsewhere), and with it our Lord is twice addressed as διδασκαλε εη. It must have been quite natural for strangers or opponents to have addressed Him as Rabbi Jesus, though the addition of the personal name to Rabbi or Master does not actually occur elsewhere in any other known Greek text. The nearest parallel is in the address of the Ten Lepers in Lk 17¹³, 'Jesus, Master,' where the Peshitta with the Arabic Diatessaron invert the order, and actually read 'Rabbi Jesus, have mercy on us.'

The first leaf finds our Lord in some controversy with the lawyers and rulers of the people, and He rebukes them for treating Him as if He were a transgressor and law-breaker; and then follows the passage which shows the way in which the Johannine parallels occur:

And turning to the rulers of the people he said this word: *Search (ἐραυνᾶτε) the Scriptures in which ye think that ye have life: ³ these are they which testify of me (Jn 5³⁹). Think not that I am come to accuse you to my Father; there is one that accuseth you, Moses, in whom ye have set your hope (Jn 5⁴⁶). And when they said, We know well that God spoke to Moses; but as for thee, we know not whence thou art (cf. Jn 9²⁹). Jesus answered and said to them, Now is your unbelief accused. . . .*

On the other side of the leaf, which in all probability is the next page, the rulers begin to lay hands on Jesus to take Him and deliver Him to the people to be stoned.

And they could not take him (πιδοῖαι⁴) for the hour of the betrayal (τῆς παραδόσεως⁵) had not yet come. But the Lord going forth himself through the midst of them,⁶ conveyed himself away (ἀπένευσεν)⁷ from them.

Then follows immediately a story of the cleansing

³ Two of the earliest Old Latin versions add this rendering as a 'doublet' to the ordinary one: it was probably in the margin of their exemplar and derived from this form of the text.

⁴ Johannine word only.

⁵ Only used in the Gospels as a substantive for 'tradition': here is one hint that the leaf is a part of the full gospel story.

⁶ Cf. Lk 4³⁰, Jn 8⁵⁹.

⁷ Cf. Jn 5¹³.

of a leper, evidently to be identified with the one in Mt 8, Mk 1, Lk 5.

And behold a leper came to him and saith, Master Jesus, while travelling with lepers and eating with them in the inn (πανδοχείω¹), I too myself became a leper: if therefore thou wilt, I am cleansed. Then the Lord (ὁ δὴ κύριος) said to him, I will; be thou cleansed; and immediately the leprosy departed from him (ἀπέστη² ἀπ' αὐτοῦ). And the Lord said to him, Go thy way [shew thyself] to the [priests].

The second leaf begins with a passage somewhat similar to that in Mt 22^{16f.} and parallels—some question over the payment of tribute.

They come up to him (παραγερόμενοι³) and begin to tempt him with test questions (ἐξεταστικῶς), saying, Master Jesus, we know that thou art come from God,⁴ for the things which thou doest bear witness⁵ above all the prophets. Tell us therefore: Is it lawful to render unto kings that which pertaineth to their rule (τὰ ἀνήκοντα τῇ ἀρχῇ)? [Shall we render unto them] or not? But Jesus, knowing their thought, being moved with indignation (ἐμβριμησάμενος⁶), said unto them, Why call ye me with your mouth Master, when ye hear not what I say?⁷ Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, This people honour me with their lips, etc.

This quotation from Is 29¹³ occurs in quite a different context in Mt 15^{7f.}, Mk 7^{6f.} in a form less close to that of the LXX.

The impression given by these three pages is that the author, whether he knew the Canonical Gospels or not, was certainly not working from copies before him. We have on the one hand the constant occurrence of passages or phrases that are found in the Gospels, but in another context; and on the other hand those small independences in the narrative, or in the diction, which would be meaningless if the 'received text' was under his eye. The graphic touch at the opening of the leper's story is quite on the lines of some other second-century survivals, and may well be historic and betray the same laxity in the observance of the Mosaic precautions, that we find in the ordinary text where the leper comes within reach of Jesus. The editors suggest, though very diffidently, that it was this carelessness which caused Jesus's displeasure.⁸ In the Synoptists this incident comes

¹ Cf. Lk 10³⁴.

² Cf. Lk 5¹³ (ἀπῆλθεν): ἀπίστημι is also a Lukan word.

³ Lukan word. ⁴ Cf. Jn 3². ⁵ Cf. Jn 10²⁶.

⁶ Here this difficult word clearly means indignation; for its N.T. uses cf. Mt 9³⁰, Mk 1⁴³ 14⁵, Jn 11³³ 38.

⁷ Cf. Lk 6⁴⁶.

⁸ Mk 1⁴³ and in v.¹¹ the 'Western' reading ὀργισθεῖς.

quite early in the ministry and is associated with Galilee or one of the towns; this leaf may also have come early in the book, and the other events on it are not necessarily in Jerusalem: but it may be remarked that the old Syriac Gospel Harmony evidently had it much later, inserting it as the only incident⁹ between Jn 4 and Jn 5. But the great question of this first page will be—what is its relation to S. John?

(1) Is our author quoting from S. John?

(2) Is the Unknown Gospel one of the sources of the Fourth Gospel?

(3) Do they both use a common source?

As may be expected from the observations already made, the editors incline to (2) or (3), preferably the latter, that the Unknown Gospel may give us for the first time a glimpse into some of the sources of S. John. And here they quote the following passage from Streeter's *Four Gospels*, p. 397: 'John, the preacher, the thinker, the mystic, aiming avowedly at writing not a biography, but a message meant to burn, was not likely to write, like the other Evangelists, with a copy of Mark or any other document in front of him. The materials he used have all been fused in the crucible of his creative imagination, and it is from the image in his mind's eye far more vivid than the written page that he paints his picture.'

The other side of the second leaf contains an entirely new incident: it is unfortunately more defaced than the rest, and there is no help here from the Gospels; hence its restoration is less possible and certain. Jesus has been asking a strange question about something shut up in (a) place, and the weight unweighed (τὸ βάρος ἄστατον¹⁰):

And when they were perplexed at his strange question, Jesus, as he walked, stood still on the brink of the river Jordan, and stretching forth his right hand he [?] filled it with wheat and scattered it (κατέσπειρεν) upon [?] the river]. And then [?] he sprinkled the sown water [on the earth] and it [filled?] before them, and sent forth fruit.¹¹

The language here is less simple, and there seems to be a thaumaturgic element more akin to an apocryphal gospel than to an historic. The new incident does not give, as we might have hoped, a new 'saying,' only a new symbolic act, intended

⁹ This is its place in Ephrem's Commentary, and in the Arabic Diatessaron.

¹⁰ i.e. perhaps, its abundance unascertained, uncertain.

¹¹ Only ρ as third letter is certain here, so χόρτον (the blade, cf. Mk 4²⁸) is as possible as κάρπον.

to convey similar teaching perhaps with that of Jn 12²⁴, 'Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit.'

The edition provides plates, a diplomatic transcript of the text, the full Greek text as it can probably be supplied or restored, a list of the texts of the Gospel parallels, translations, and a commentary with discussion of the problems involved. The editors expressly state that the latter lays no claim to be exhaustive or expert: as in the case of the Chester Beatty Papyri, they feel it their first duty to make the text of these fragments available as quickly as possible; but we have already here some careful and minute study, a sure touch and shrewd insight, much of which the Biblical expert will probably endorse.

The other early Christian papyri give fragments of two leaves of an early third-century commentary, a third-century leaf from 2 Chronicles, and a leaf from a fourth or fifth century Liturgy. The text of the 2 Ch. fragment seems unimportant (in one place it shows that an obvious error in Cod.

Alexandrinus, *Ιούδα* for *Ιδοῦ*, may be nearly two centuries old). The commentary is unknown, but may come from the pen of Irenæus or Theophilus of Antioch, or Heracleon. A mystical interpretation of the Holy City is a central theme, and though there is here no Gnostic teaching, it may well come from Heracleon. It contains nine Biblical quotations, including three from S. Matthew, three from S. John, and one from 2 Timothy, only one of these gives a variant (grammatical only) which supports the Textus Receptus against the great Uncials and 'Cæsarea.' The wording of the Liturgy is largely that of Biblical Greek, though it contains only one actual quotation, 'the sheep of thy pasture'; but it has also a number of unusual epic words, e.g. *ἄφθιτε* for Immortal. This bit of the liturgy is chiefly a prayer of penitence; the appeal in Wis 11²⁸ to *δέσποτα φιλόψυχε*, may be recalled by *φιλόανθρωπον ἔχοντες δεσπότην σε . . . ἱκετεύομεν*. Among the restorations of the text, here is a happy one:

Thou art the only physician of our ailing souls:
Keep us in Thy joy.

In the Study.

Virginibus Puerisque.

A JUBILEE ADDRESS.

The Threefold Secret.

BY THE REVEREND CHAS. M. HEBURN, B.D., MOULIN,
PITLOCHRY.

'And all the people shouted, and said, God save the king.'—I S 10²⁴.

THAT was a great day in the story of Israel. They had never had a king before, and they wanted one badly. That day their wish was gratified. Saul was anointed king by Samuel. And when he stood up tall and handsome, head and shoulders above all around him, all the people shouted, and said, 'God save the king.'

That was what our people were saying twenty-five years ago to-day, before any of you smaller folk were born. It was the day on which our present King, King George V., ascended the throne. Unlike King Saul, our King has a long royal line

behind him. But our nation has never had a king who was so much the People's King, so greatly respected by one and all, or of whom we have had better cause to be proud.

There is a story told of another king, a King of Belgium. In some ways perhaps he was a great king, but no one could call him a noble king. He did not win his people's regard. Once at Antwerp at a great festival he was driving through the crowd, when a few onlookers raised a shout of 'Vive le Roi,' 'Long live the King.' When the King heard it he turned with rather a twisted smile to some one beside him in the carriage and made the remark, 'I seem to have heard that cry once before.' Such a welcome, it seems, was somewhat unusual. Generally arrangements had to be made to give him a cheer. But the cheers were hollow ones, for they did not come from the hearts of the people. That is not the case with our King. To-day when he goes through the streets of London on his way to St. Paul's, they will be lined with eager crowds saluting him as he passes