

The Last Twelve Verses of St. Mark's Gospel.

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THE time has now arrived, one imagines, when readers of the Revised Version might fairly be made acquainted with the meaning of the gap they find occurring there between the eighth and the following verses of the last chapter of St. Mark. The marginal note is hardly sufficient to enlighten them. It even suggests additional difficulties to unlearned readers. It tells them that the oldest manuscripts have no such verses at all, and that other authorities have a different ending for this Gospel; but as to what the ending is, and what its value, there is nothing said.

It is not the easiest thing in the world to condense and popularise the evidence and the reasoning which at once warrants the rejection of these verses as the *original* ending of St. Mark, and yet retains them in even a *revised* version of his Gospel as canonical and trustworthy; but the attempt will here be made.

I. The main facts of the case stated:—

- (1) The two oldest and best extant MSS. are without those twelve verses, yet, by leaving a blank space, indicate their own incompleteness; and also that the true, but then lost, ending was not supposed to be lost beyond the power of recovery. It might still be found, and room was left for its insertion in both MSS.
- (2) The still older MSS. from which Vaticanus and Sinaiticus, for so they are named, were respectively copied, and also those by which they were corrected, must also have ended in the same abrupt manner, namely, at ver. 8.

We thus seem to know of at least *six* MSS., the two extant ones of the fourth century, and the others, no one can tell how much earlier, which never contained the passage. This inference, for it is only an inference, is supported by what we know of the habits of scribes, or copyists, whose besetting weakness was to insert in their copy everything they found in their originals, marginal notes, and everything else, and never to omit anything. Moreover, such critical skill on matters of style and language could hardly be theirs as to

lead them to omit verses of the kind before us, had they been before them, because of some supposed lack of suitability. They evidently knew nothing of their existence; for it is really the fact that, though leaving room for the missing ending, neither of the scribes left room enough to contain these twelve verses.

- (3) Many MSS. known to Eusebius, and to which he gives the preference, and many known to Jerome, both of them scholarly men, ended the Gospel in like manner at the eighth verse. This, of course, implies that their other MSS. did contain our last twelve verses.
- (4) One MS. of the old Latin version gives a different ending, and one valuable Uncial MS. of the eighth century, L, gives two endings, the one in question, and the "different" or shorter ending. The latter runs thus: "And all that had been enjoined on them they reported briefly to the companions of Peter. And after these things, Jesus Himself, from the east even to the west, sent forth by them the holy and incorruptible preaching of eternal salvation." This may be at once dismissed. Mark never wrote it. It is open to all the objections we shall have to make to the other and, we may say, received ending. It also assumes a position much later than that of Mark (who was a contemporary of apostles) or of the writer, whoever he was, of the rest of the Gospel. And the words "holy and incorruptible preaching of eternal salvation" are very unlike the evangelists, or indeed any New Testament writer.
- (5) The *sentence* or paragraph (Mark xvi. 1-8) is quite certainly unfinished at ver. 8. No Greek sentence or paragraph could end with a mere particle, γὰρ. An accident must have befallen either the evangelist or, much more probably, his book at this place. A leaf most likely was lost, and very early indeed lost.
- (6) The *narrative* also is incomplete at this point. An empty tomb, and the testimony

of a "young man clothed in a long white garment" to the resurrection of Jesus, could not be the completion of the narrative, because, first, the whole tenor of the rest of the Gospel prepares for, and leads us to expect, a more explicit statement and direct evidence of the resurrection. Attention must be given to the following passages: chapter viii. 31, 38, ix. 9, 10, 31, xiv. 28, 58, and xv. 29. And, secondly, because if there were no more to tell, the evangelist was morally bound to have said so.

- (7) Yet adverse to the received view, viz. that these twelve verses came from the pen of him who wrote the rest of the second Gospel, though most (but not all) of the foregoing facts undoubtedly are, nevertheless the verses are found in *every extant MS., uncial and cursive*, with the above exceptions. In two instances, perhaps more, both endings are found; and what is of even greater weight, as they go back so much earlier, the verses are found in the Old Latin, in the Syriac, and some other ancient versions; and, finally, as indicated partly already, they were known to Justin, Irenæus, in the second century; and to such later authorities as Eusebius, Jerome, and Augustine.

In this conflict of testimony it is evident that the question, if to be decided at all, must be determined by the character and cogency of the internal evidence presented by the verses themselves. The whole question thus comes to be:—

II. Do these twelve verses perfectly supply the defect occurring at the abrupt ending at verse eight? And this is equivalent, for all practical purposes, to the question, Are they Mark's?

- (1) They *do complete* the foregoing Gospel narrative, but not (in every respect, literary and historical) with perfect adaptation to what had immediately preceded, and to the expectation aroused in the reader of the rest of the story: *e.g.*, ver. 7 finds nothing to correspond with and complete it; we are not told of any appearance of the risen Lord in Galilee (cf. xiv. 28). Again, the flight and fright of Mary are followed, without sufficient explanation or preparation, by the appearance made to her.
- (2) The verses do not complete the sentence or paragraph left unfinished at ver. 8, for the following verse is a new beginning, not the completion of the broken or unfinished sentence.
- (3) The verses have a completeness of their own, which is quite independent of the rest of the narrative so far as their form goes. They seem taken from some other narrative of the resurrection rather than are the original completion of Mark's.
- (4) The statement made in vers. 12 and 13 almost imply an acquaintance on the part of the writer with the fuller narrative contained in Luke xxiv. 13-33.
- (5) But the verses, none the less, possess remarkable originality and power, are consistent with the statements in the other evangelical narratives, have the very air of truth and imprint of inspiration, and are entirely trustworthy and entitled to the place they hold in the Canon of New Testament Scripture. But they are not Mark's own; they are a true and original and very early tradition of the manifestations of the risen Lord, with which Mark's own, but lost ending, would, it cannot be doubted, have substantially and very closely agreed.

Contributions and Comments.

Christ and the Old Testament.¹

As you lay some stress on what appears to be a change in regard to a view previously expressed by me, I ought perhaps to explain that I was not

¹ From a letter to the Editor, quoted by permission.

conscious of any such change; and although I can understand the impression made on you, I do not think that the two views are really inconsistent with each other. It is true that they are independent, and were arrived at in following different lines of thought, but the two opinions are (so to