

WHEN JESUS THREW DOWN THE GAUNTLET.

PART II.

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IT is perfectly clear what was to be expected as the first outcome of the attack of Jesus. The chief priests would hurry to the scene in order to arrest and punish the reckless offender who had denounced them before all the people as robbers. They had at their disposal a well disciplined temple police that, under ordinary circumstances, would not hesitate to execute the commands of their superiors and avenge the dignity of the priests. An attack upon priests in the temple, while they were performing their sacerdotal duties, was not a matter of slight importance. A personal encounter between Jesus and the chief priests could have been avoided only if the former had turned to flight and left the temple and the city before the latter could arrive. By doing so, however, he would have condemned himself; and his deed would have been judged the thoughtless act of a fool. But Jesus did not flee; he had not acted upon the spur of the moment. What he had done, had been considered carefully in all its details and consequences. For that reason, the account of the cleansing of the temple, provided it has been handed down to us complete, requires a continuation. The only question is where to find it.

The immediately following words of the First Gospel: "And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple; and he healed them." (Matt. xxi. 14) cannot be that continuation. The words are found only in Matthew and, thus, do not belong to the original Synoptic source. The people indeed may and must have recognized in what Jesus did a Messianic or, at least, a prophetic manifesto. Those who were present have certainly told afterwards their friends and companions who had not witnessed the act what they had seen and heard. But quite a time must have passed till the rumor of the great event reached the lame and blind and led them to Jesus. For the time being, all the eye witnesses would stay and await further

developments. The men who had been driven away were bound to hasten to the chief priests, report what had happened to them, and ask for assistance.

Verse 15-17 is likewise a fragment unconnected with the context. The statement is found only in the First Gospel. The words: "And when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did and the children that were crying in the temple" refer partly to the healing of the lame and the blind; but otherwise the passage deals exclusively with the children that were shouting Hosanna. The question asked of Jesus is: "Hearest thou what these are saying?" Therefore, the words "saw the wonderful things that he did and" must be stricken from the text as an editorial addition and be replaced by the verb "heard." The original text read: "But when the chief priests and the scribes heard the children." The verses under discussion belong probably to the Matthew version of the Triumphal Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem and the temple, forming its end. They join verse 11 or rather the first sentence of verse 12 "and Jesus entered into the temple of God." Either these words displaced a similar statement introducing the cleansing of the temple, or the latter obliterated the former.

Mark xi. 18 we read: "And the chief priests and the scribes heard, and sought how they might destroy him: for they feared him, for all the multitude was astonished at his teaching." These words are certainly intended to close the cleansing episode, but fail to do so. Grammatically the absence of the direct object of "hearing" is suspicious although our translations supply that want by adding "it." But even if the Greek text contained the equivalent of that pronoun, we should expect the chief priests to enter in person. What is still more important, only the teaching of Jesus is mentioned. The cleansing of the temple cannot be called "teaching"; it was decidedly a valiant deed, an attack on the priests. Thus Mark xi. 18 in only an unsuccessful attempt of reconstructing the missing conclusion to verse 15-17.

The Fig Tree of Matt. xxi. 18-22 and Mark xi. 19-25 does not refer to the cleansing of the temple and is missing in Luke. Besides, what happened according to Matthew the morning after, occurred according to Mark partly before the cleansing of the temple. (Mark xi. 12-14 and 19-25.) Verse 19-25 by the way contain sayings of Jesus which were pronounced according to the other Gospels at a different occasion and are not connected with the withered fig tree.

Luke xix. 47-48 reads: "And he was teaching daily in the

temple. But the chief priests and the scribes were seeking to destroy him and the principal men of the people; and they could not find what they might do; for the people all clung to him listening." Here again a stylistic incongruity has to be noticed. The last group of people who are the subjects of the first sentence, the principal men of the people, stands in the wrong place. Our translations have corrected that anomaly, which indicates the hand of a glossator. But apart from that, the passage does not refer to the cleansing of the temple but to the daily teaching of Jesus.

Not before Matt. xxii. 23-25, Mark xi. 27-33, and Luke xx. 1-8 do we come upon a paragraph which may resume our interrupted narrative. In the first place, all three Gospels present unmistakable parallel accounts which agree to a large extent verbally.

Matt. xxi. 23 in its present condition is connected with the immediately preceding statement. It says: "And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? And who gave you this authority?" But that question could not have been prompted by the teaching of Jesus. For the Jews at that period enjoyed that perfect religious liberty which enabled anyone to express his religious convictions even in the synagogue and the temple no matter whether those in control at those places agreed with them or not. When a Jewish stranger entered a synagogue on a sabbath, courtesy required the officers of the synagogue to invite the visitor to deliver a religious address. (Comp. Act. xiii. 15.) In the same way, the halls of the temple were at the free disposal of any Jewish teacher who could attract and hold an audience. That privilege was the great inheritance left the Jewish nation by their prophets. That alone, combined with the corresponding eagerness of the Jews to listen to religious discussions, enabled Jesus as well as after him his apostles to accomplish the prophetic part of their task. The chief priests not less than the rulers and members of the synagogues might reject certain teachings; the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees in general did so when the apostles proclaimed the resurrection of Jesus in the temple. Yet they could not prevent them from going on with their preaching. (Act. iv. 1ff.) Under these conditions, the question "By what authority doest thou these things?" cannot refer to the teaching of Jesus. He was not expected to possess a license to preach.

This conclusion arrived at with regard to the Matthew version

is true also with respect to the parallel Luke text: "And it came to pass on one of the days as he was teaching the people in the temple and preaching the gospel, there came upon him the chief priests and scribes with the elders." One expects rather to find the participles of the Greek text, which in our translation are rendered as temporal clauses, not in the genitive absolute, but in the dative case. For the verb meaning "come upon" requires the dative. The tautology of "teaching the people" and "preaching the gospel" is likewise apt to arouse suspicion. Both things suggest the hand of an editor or compiler.

Mark xi. 27-28 has a different introduction, confirming thereby the impression, gained so far, that these introductions do not belong to the original Synoptic text. It reads: "And they came again to Jerusalem: and as he was walking in the temple, there came to him the chief priests and the scribes and the elders; and they said unto him, By what authority doest thou these things? or who gave thee this authority to do these things?" It is hardly necessary to point out how little the occasion accounts for the question. To take a walk through the temple, with the exception of the part reserved for the priests, was the right of every Jew.

Consequently we cannot doubt but that the original Matthew version was: "And the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him and said, By what authority does thou these things? and who gave you this authority?" Mark read: "And the chief priests and the scribes came to him and said, By what authority doest thou these things? or who gave you the authority to do these things?" Luke found in his source: "And the chief priests and scribes came upon him and said, Tell us by what authority thou doest these things? or who is he that gave you this authority?" All three versions are derived evidently from a common source and all refer to what Jesus was doing just at that moment. As our Gospels tell of no other deed of Jesus except the cleansing of the temple, the question of the chief priests and the answer of Jesus must be the looked for continuation of that episode.

The double question of the Synoptic tradition is significant. There were two possibilities; Jesus either was acting on his own initiative; or he was executing the orders of somebody else. In the first case, his interlocutors wanted him to prove his right of interfering with their business or suffer the consequences. In the second case, they wanted to identify the person who had commissioned Jesus to attack them in order to get hold of the real culprit. Jesus

apparently avoided to answer that question. He said according to Luke xx. 3-4: "I also will ask you a question, and ye shall tell me, Was the baptism of John from heaven or from men?" The meaning of those words is determined easily enough. First of all, Jesus assumes full responsibility for what he had done. There was no man higher up. Furthermore, John the Baptist had come as forerunner of the Messiah. He had announced the latter's near arrival, and his baptism of his chosen ones in the Holy Spirit whereas his adversaries were to be baptized in fire. All who believed the message of the Baptist, were baptized by him in water and thereby were assured of belonging to the kingdom of God and His Messiah provided they brought forth fruit worthy of repentance. The priests could not misunderstand the meaning of the counter-question. Jesus claimed, while not expressly, yet very distinctly to be the Messiah of John the Baptist. The priests disdained to answer the question of Jesus. They were not prepared to discuss their ideas of the Messianic kingdom with him nor to admit the divine character of the baptism of John. To deny the latter in the face of the multitude that listened with the keenest attention to the bandying of threatening and defiant questions, would have exposed them to the danger of being stoned on the spot. So they preferred to keep their peace and leave the last word to Jesus.

The Mark and Matthew versions agree in all essential details with that of the Third Gospel. The statement "and I will tell you by what authority I do these things" (Mark xi. 29 comp. Matt. xxi. 24) is superfluous in view of the parting shot of Jesus (Matt. xxi. 27, Mark xi. 33, and Luke xx. 8) and only obscures the actual significance of the question of Jesus.

The words: "And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say, Why did ye not believe him? But if we shall say, From men; all the people will stone us: for they are persuaded that John was a prophet," must not be taken too literally. They are a comment of the author, who in my opinion was an eye witness and one of the disciples. But as to the thoughts of the chief priests, he could venture only a guess. He knew, of course, what Jesus would have said if they had admitted the heavenly character of John's baptism; and what the people would have done if they had denied it. Jesus, by the way, may have said, "Why do ye not believe him?" Hebrew and Aramaic have no present, past and future tenses; thus the tense one chooses in translating a Semitic verb into an Indo-Germanic language depends to a

large extent upon what the translator thinks the text ought to say. If Jesus, by asking the priests for their opinion about the baptism of John, intended to intimate to them that he was the Messiah, he would have used the present tense: "Why do ye not believe?" As a matter of fact, the answer of the priests was "They knew not whence it was." That was, however, dictated less by fear and diplomacy than by anger and disappointment. They had hastened to the scene with their guards to arrest and to punish the impudent intruder who had dared to disturb the peace of the holy place. Their intention was not to argue with him whosoever he might be. But the people whom they found with Jesus in overwhelming numbers and ready to defend him against anybody, compelled them to hide their discomfiture behind a gruff question and cover their retreat with a surly reply.

The account of the cleansing of the temple is interrupted a second time at Luke xx. 8, Mark xi. 33, and Matt. xxi. 27. The parable of the Two Sons (Matt. xxi. 28-32) cannot belong to it, as little as that of the Wicked Husbandmen of all the three Gospels. The first parable is not an integral part of the oldest Synoptic source because it occurs only in one of the Gospels. A second reason for removing both parables from their present position is furnished by the circumstances under which they would have been told where they now stand. Since the chief priests were not disposed to argue with Jesus, they would not care to linger and listen to his speeches. They might order some of their agents to remain and report what Jesus would say and do. But their personal importance and dignity would not permit them to expose themselves to any further criticism by their aggressor.

The parable of the Two Sons treats of the attitude of the Pharisees towards the publicans and sinners. Jesus defends the latter because they had accepted the message of the Baptist while the former had paid no attention to John's call to repentance. It is this reference to the prophet which caused the compiler of the Gospel to insert the parable in its present place. As a matter of fact, it must belong to the very first days of the ministry of Jesus when he still had to plead the cause of the Baptist instead of having to defend himself.

The parable of the Wicked Husbandmen is found in all three Gospels in the same place and must have been combined with the oldest Synoptic source at a very early date. It is not necessary to examine it in all its details. It is sufficient for our purpose to call

attention to a few prominent facts. We possess three to some extent different versions of the same parable. That of Luke is the shortest and from an artistic standpoint the most perfect of the three. Everything added to it in Matthew and Mark is immaterial and even retards the progress of the parable. For that reason the Luke edition represents in all probability the original parable as long, at least, as we have to claim for a masterful allegorical narrative a mastermind as author.

The point of the parable is easy to determine. The beloved son who is killed by the husbandmen is Jesus, the Messiah, himself. But the purpose is not to render the idea of the violent death of the Messiah familiar to the hearers. The latter are evidently supposed to know what the fate of the son had been. The object of the parable is to announce the punishment which God has decreed for the murderers of Jesus. Strange to say that punishment is not inflicted upon his mortal enemies, the chief priests and the elders of the people, but upon the Jewish nation. It consists in the rejection of the people of Israel and the adoption of another nation by God. That is stated directly Matt. xxi. 43: "Therefore say I unto you, The Kingdom of God shall be taken away from you, and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." That was not a new idea. John the Baptist had pronounced it already when he warned his hearers not to trust in their descent from Abraham but to bring forth fruit worthy of repentance; for God was able to raise up children unto Abraham of stones. (Luke iii. 8.) The parable of the Great Supper (Luke xiv. 16-24) expresses a similar thought. Because the murder of the Son is treated as an accomplished fact, and because the whole nation and not the actual criminals are punished for it, the parable does not fit into its present place. It is even doubtful whether Jesus can be the author of the parable. It almost looks as if it belonged to the apostolic age, the time when the controversy between Judaistic and Gentile Christianity was at its height. In any case, it interrupts the pericope of the Cleansing of the Temple where it now appears.

There must be a closing sentence which informs us that the chief priests and their companions attempted to arrest Jesus but had to desist on account of the hostile attitude of the people. That conclusion is found in the First Gospel Matt. xxi. 46. Verse 45 "And when the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them," was added by the compiler to connect the parables with what we read in verse 46. That is

confirmed by the term "the chief priests and the Pharisees" which occurs in all only twice in the Synoptic Gospels. The same is true of Mark xii. 12 where we read: "For they perceived that he spake the parable against them," and of Luke xx. 19 where the same words are used. In these last two instances, the statement is entirely at odds with its context. The whole Mark passage is:

"And they sought to lay hold on him:
and they feared the multitude;
for they perceived that he spake the parable against them;
and they left him and went away."

Luke has: "And the scribes and the chief priests sought to lay hands on him
and they feared the people; in that very hour;
for they perceived that he spake this parable against them."

The third clause in Mark as well as in Luke ought to occupy the first place. For it does not furnish the reason why the enemies of Jesus feared the people; but could explain only why they sought to lay hands on him. The original ending of our narrative must therefore have read Matt. xxi. 26: "And when the chief priests and the elders of the people sought to lay hold on him, they feared the multitudes, because they took him for a prophet"; Mark xii. 12: "And they sought to lay hold on him; and they feared the multitude; and they left him and went away." Luke xx. 19: "And the chief priests and the scribes sought to lay hands on him in that very hour; and they feared the people."

It is worth while to combine the three fragments of our pericope in, at least, one of the three Gospels and thus restore the complete text. The Luke version consists of Luke xix. 45-46 and xx. 1-8 and 19.

"And he entered into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold, saying unto them, It is written, My house shall be a house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of robbers. And the chief priests and the scribes came upon him, and they spake, saying unto him, By what authority doest thou these things? or who is he that gave thee this authority? And he answered and said unto them, I also will ask you a question; and ye shall tell me, Was the baptism of John from heaven or from men? And they reasoned with themselves saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say, Why do ye not believe him? But if we shall say, From men; all the people will stone us: for they are persuaded that John was a prophet. And they answered, that they knew not whence it was. And Jesus said

unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things. And the chief priests and the scribes sought to lay hands on him in that very hour; but they feared the people."

Before closing this investigation, we have to examine the remainder of the Johannine account. In verse 18 "the Jews" ask Jesus: "What sign showest thou to us, seeing that thou doest these things?" That differs considerably from the Synoptic tradition. The men who address Jesus thus seem willing to recognize him as Messiah, as whom he had designated himself by calling the temple his Father's house, provided he could prove his claim by a miracle. The answer of Jesus is still farther removed from the Synoptic answer. He offers them a sign in saying: "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." There has been some discussion whether those words have to be taken in their literal or in a figurative sense. There are scholars who insist on the literal meaning. They point to the answer of the Jews: "Forty and six years was this temple in building; and wilt thou raise it up in three days?" But if the opponents of Jesus had been sure that Jesus meant the real temple, they would hardly have returned that answer. They would rather, as I am inclined to think, have denounced his proposition as a sacrilege and demanded sufficient guarantees. Therefore, the Jews must have misunderstood the words of Jesus on purpose in order to ridicule his apparently foolish boast. But Jesus never posed as a wizard who could erect gorgeous palaces over night by his magic art or the help of a jinnee as that is done in fairy tales. For the reason, the words ascribed to Jesus must have a figurative sense just as are told in verse 23: "He spoke of the temple of his body."

The answer of Jesus to those who wanted to be shown a sign means in other words: Take my life; you cannot kill me anyhow; in three days I shall rise again from the dead. But such a reply would fit into the situation only if his opponents had first threatened him with death. But such a threat is not mentioned. Therefore verse 18-22 does not continue the story of the cleansing of the temple. That conclusion is corroborated by the testimony of the Synoptic Gospels. For Jesus cannot have spoken the words recorded there and those of John ii. 18ff. at one and the same occasion.

There are a few more observations, pointing to the same fact. The Synoptic Gospels speak also of the craving for a sign, or a sign from heaven. (Comp. Matt. xii. 38f., xvi. 1-4, Mark viii. 11f., Luke xi. 16, 29f.) But Jesus refuses outright to give such a sign.

To quote the last passage, he said: "This generation is an evil generation: it seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it but the sign of Jonah. For even as Jonah became a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man be to this generation." If Jesus refused invariably to give a sign, how can he have promised a sign John ii. 19? Of course, Matt. xii. 40, the attempt is made to explain the sign of Jonah in such a way as to make it a counterpart of the resurrection of Jesus. But verse 41-42 as well as the above quoted Luke passage prove that the sign of Jonah was simply his message to the people of Nineveh. Verse 40 is a gloss as appears even from the fact that Jesus is said to have been three days and three nights in the heart of the earth while, as a matter of fact, he was raised from the dead within a little more than twenty-four hours after his burial according to Matt. xxviii. 1ff., Matt. xxvi. 61 Jesus is accused of having said: "I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days." Mark xiv. 58 the temple is modified, first, as made with hands and, second, as made without hands. These modifiers, of course, must have been added later on in view of the Matthew and John text. There is, however, one more important difference between the Synoptic and Johannine versions. According to the first, Jesus said: "I will destroy," according to the second, "Destroy ye." There exists probably some relationship between the two. But whether the Matthew and Mark passage is based upon John ii. 19 or the latter has been derived from the first two Gospels is hard to decide. It does not belong in any case to the oldest Synoptic source; for it does not appear in Luke.

One thing seems to be clear; the original continuation of the story of the Cleansing of the Temple in John was lost when that gospel was compiled; and therefore the compiler himself may have written John ii. 18-22 to round out his incomplete narrative. Echoes of the original end of the Johannine account are possibly found in several statements of John vii. as in verse 30: "They sought to take him: and no man laid his hand on him," verse 32: "and the chief priests and the Pharisees sent officers to take him," and verse 45-49: "The officers came to the chief priests and the Pharisees; and they said unto them, Why did ye not bring him? The officers answered, Never man so spake. The Pharisees therefore answered them, Are ye also led astray? Hath any of the rulers believed on him, or of the Pharisees? But this multitude that knoweth not the law are accursed."

A strange spectacle has been revealed unto us. The most

prominent men of the Jewish nation, the hereditary priests and the learned scribes, join forces for the purpose of annihilating Jesus. For he had exposed the latter as false prophets and the former as robbers. Jesus stands forth as a hero because he had not hesitated to challenge both powerful groups of people for the sake of truth and righteousness although he was fully aware of what they could and would do to him. It seems strange how history repeats itself. It was the sale of indulgences for the benefit of the chief priests of Rome, the people objected to in the age of the Reformation. That protest led to their rejecting some doctrines of the Church which had been designed to hold the nations under the yoke of Rome. At present our own Protestant Churches appear to be infected with the germ of greed. They vie with each other which organization can raise the largest amount of money for the furtherance of their own ends, as if the service of God were identical with the worship of Mammon. There is but one difference between the age of Jesus and our own times. At that period the chief priests and the scribes formed two independent bodies. To-day the chief priests of the golden calf hold also the office of the scribes and are therefore more powerful than ever before.