St. Matthew and St. Mark and the General Epistles

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The Modern Reader's Bible

New Testament Series

St. Matthew
St. Mark
An Epistle to Hebrews
The Wisdom of St. James
The General Epistles of St. Peter
The General Epistle of St. Jude
THE MODERN READER'S BIBLE
A SERIES OF WORKS FROM THE SACRED SCRIPTURES PRESENTED
IN MODERN LITERARY FORM

ST. MATTHEW AND ST. MARK

AND

THE GENERAL EPISTLES

EDITED, WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

BY

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INTRODUCTION

The series of books which make up the New Testament group themselves into a clear and interesting unity.

The Acts and Sayings of Jesus
(Gospels)

The Acts of the Apostles
The Sayings of the Apostles (or Epistles)

The Prophetic Vision of the New Testament

This last, by its revival of the form and matter of ancient prophecy in application to the Christian dispensation, makes a link binding together the Old Testament and the New. The gospels, moreover, are for their age a sacred history like the historic books of the Old Testament; and the epistles, like portions of The Chronicles, may be regarded as documents illustrative of the history. But such a description of them would obviously be inadequate. Indeed, it is extremely difficult to fit the gospels into any literary classification: from the point of view of literature,
no less than of theology, they are a class of works that stand by themselves. They are our historic authorities for the most important of all events; yet the purpose of their authors is not to write history. Though they are concerned solely with the life of Jesus, yet they would be imperfectly described as biographies. They treasure up every saying of the Master, as certain books of the Old Testament collect the sayings of the wise; yet but small portions of the gospels have any resemblance to wisdom literature. It would be easier to associate them with the prophetic books of the Old Testament. But the prophets use every variety of literary form to emphasise and recommend the message from above of which they are interpreters; Jesus Christ is himself the authority of the message he brings, and those through whom we learn of him are anxious to record and not to interpret. Moreover, an examination into the literary form of the gospels would be inextricably interwoven with another kind of enquiry: the close resemblances between these books, and their not less interesting differences, necessarily raise the question of their mutual relations, of their authorship, and possible connection with a common original. Such questions as these cannot be discussed here: not only do they belong to the domain of history rather than literature, but they are, of all historical questions, the questions on which there has been the fiercest controversy, and the widest difference and fluctuation of opinion. The aim of the present series vi
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goes no further than the placing the New Testament before the reader in the form which will best enable him to read each book in the light that may be collected from itself.

In attempting thus to bring the New Testament works into the series of the Modern Reader's Bible, attention is attracted first by the Gospel of St. Luke. Not only does this more than the rest exhibit the character of ordinary history, but further it has a continuation in the Acts of the Apostles, carrying the history a generation later. I propose to include these in a single number of the series, the size of which will necessitate two volumes. Again, of the epistles, the larger number stand in the name of St. Paul, by far the most prominent of those engaged in extending the boundaries of the early church. It seems a convenient course to place these Pauline Epistles in the same number of the series as the history, each epistle inserted at the point of the narrative with which it appears to connect itself, though, of course, distinguished from the history by difference of type. Such arrangement will assimilate this number of the series to The Exodus, in which, by the plan of Old Testament writers, the constitutional documents are made to stand at those points of the historic narrative with which they are to be associated. In another important respect this double volume of St. Luke and St. Paul will be a counterpart of the earlier historic series: it will give the History of the New Testament Church as presented by itself. Again, without entering into disputed
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questions of authorship, it seems a natural arrangement to include in a single volume the writings attributed by long tradition to St. John. There remains the present volume—published by request out of its course—as a miscellany in which are contained the other works of the New Testament: the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Mark, and The General Epistles.

It is a leading purpose of the present series to use all devices of printing and page setting in order to assist the reader to catch the literary form of what he reads. The gospels have the twofold purpose of presenting alike the Acts and the Sayings of Jesus; I have thought it worth while, in this edition, to discriminate to the eye these two elements of the gospel narrative. But of course every word spoken by Jesus is not a 'Saying' in this sense. It would manifestly be improper to put forward as a 'Saying' of Jesus his words to the Canaanitish woman, "I was not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel": such words make only a stage in an uncompleted incident. It is the independent Sayings that I have distinguished by difference of type. No one will be misled into understanding such Sayings as more sacred or precious than other words of Christ; the words spoken on the cross, and in the institution of the Lord's Supper, are among those not so distinguished. The difference intended to be conveyed is merely that the Sayings printed in heavy type can be studied as independent wholes; other words
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of Jesus are merged in the incidents of which they form a portion.

Apart from this, the chief work of arrangement in the present edition has consisted in the division of each book into its proper sections, and the supply of headings. I believe that there are few things which assist intelligent reading more than the mere mechanism of division and subdivision, provided such arrangement is based upon independent study of each of the works so treated; the plan followed in old versions of a uniform division of chapters and verses for all books of Scripture alike carries its condemnation upon the surface. The notes will be few: they attempt neither theological nor historical discussion, but merely offer assistance towards catching the connection and emphasis of the writer’s thought. And the editor believes that no small number of his readers will welcome notes which make it their first aim to reduce the interruption of annotation to a minimum.

I

The Gospel of St. Matthew has two highly distinctive marks of individuality. One of these lies upon the surface. No one can read the book without perceiving that the author writes as a Hebrew to Hebrews; possibly he wrote originally in the Hebrew tongue. The Old Testament is continually before the eyes of Matthew as he composes the book with which the New Testament is to commence.
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Not only does he see in Jesus the fulfilment of Messianic prophecy, but the very phrases of the prophets come back to him with a new significance in the light of the story he is telling. The birth of Jesus from a virgin mother recalls Isaiah's sign of the virgin and her mystic son Immanuel. The words of yearning which Hosea puts into the mouth of God, *When Israel was a child I loved him and called my son out of Egypt*, are a reminiscence associated with the flight into Egypt and the return by warning in a dream from God. And Jeremiah's picture of Rachel weeping for her children, an item in his drama of Israel's restoration, is recalled to Matthew by the massacre of the innocents. There is again an idiosyncrasy of Hebrew style which in Matthew's gospel is found to have penetrated into the very scheme of his arrangement: the structure is continually based on the number seven. The collection of Christ's teaching which we call the Sermon on the Mount is arranged by Matthew in seven natural divisions; the seventh of these is a series of seven separate sayings, and the first section is a beatitude expanded into sevenfold illustration. Other evangelists speak of different expeditions of apostles sent out by Jesus, with brief instructions. Matthew gathers all these instructions together into a single sevenfold commission. All the writers make prominent the institution of the parable as a form of teaching: Matthew illustrates this section with exactly seven parables. The denunciations of Pharisaic hypocrisy are by