

DISCIPLE-LOGIA.

By *Disciple-Logia* I mean words spoken by our Lord to persons offering or invited to become disciples, or whom He wished to instruct as to the conditions of discipleship.

The sayings of this sort recorded in the Gospels are usually dealt with separately, interpreters endeavouring to ascertain their meaning with little use of the comparative method. The main exception to this rule is supplied by the triplet of sayings addressed to the three aspirants of whom we read in Luke ix. 57-62, where one can hardly help comparing the three cases one with another, and studying the words of Jesus with a view to bringing out their appositeness to the respective cases as discriminated.

It is, however, intrinsically probable that there is something to be learnt from gathering this class of sayings into a group, and making them the subject of careful study with the purpose of discovering their common characteristics. There is every chance that thoughts will suggest themselves to one pursuing this method, which are not likely to strike us when we take the sayings one by one. It is even possible that a synoptic study may remove difficulties not easily surmountable by isolated consideration, and put into our hands a key to the meaning of sayings in the interpretation of which we have never been able to attain complete satisfaction, or lend credibility to words which, viewed apart, appear of doubtful authenticity.

The following list of relative *logia* is sufficiently full

for our purpose, if not exhaustive. As the sayings are familiar to all we give only brief catchwords :

1. Fishers of men.
2. Foxes have holes.
3. Let dead bury dead.
4. Putting hand to the plough look not back.
5. Take up the cross.
6. Hate father and mother.
7. Sell all that thou hast.

Most of these sayings, looked at singly, appear at first simply repellent, mercilessly severe, expressive of an un-social, unsympathetic, morose mood, as if the speaker did not want disciples, had no faith in the possibility of getting reliable followers, and used harsh phrases to express that scepticism and waive would-be disciples away. Consider, *e.g.*, that awful word about taking up the cross. What a terrific picture it would suggest to men familiar, through Roman custom, with the mode of execution pointed at—crucifixion, the most ignominious and the most cruel mode of putting criminals to death! Jesus and His disciples, a band of malefactors (as the world judged), marching to their doom in that horrible form, stooping under the weight of the cross which they carried, man by man, on their shoulders! What chance of getting men to become disciples after suggesting a picture like that? Did the person who so spoke really want disciples? Or rather, did Jesus ever really utter such dreadful words? Or, again, consider the *logion*, “The foxes have holes.” Taken in its surface sense as pointing to an itinerant life with no fixed abode, what appositeness has it to the case of the *scribe* to whom, according to Matthew, the word was addressed? What purpose does it serve beyond indicating a dry manner and an unwelcoming mood, as if to say, I do not want *you*. There is terror in the word

about the cross ; there is no great terror here for a scribe or for anybody else, but there is, so it seems, a new way of accomplishing the object served by the terror, that of keeping men at a distance and escaping intimate relations.

Looking at the group collectively, the impression of severity made by the *logion* concerning the cross is confirmed. All but the first wear a stern aspect, and even it might terrify simple fishermen by the glimpse it gave into an utterly unknown future involving possible risks for the fishers of *men*, much more serious than those experienced on the sea of Galilee with its sudden tropical squalls. But while the severity remains the idea that it was meant merely to repel is completely dissipated. We observe, for example, that several of the sayings express thought in figurative or symbolic language. "Fishers of men," Foxes have holes," "Putting hand to the plough," such words appeal to the imagination, and so fix themselves in the mind indelibly. Figures catch hold, and are unforgettable, and this is the reason of their use by the wise. But when once we perceive the purpose of a teacher in employing such poetic forms of language, it begins to dawn upon us that perhaps even his repellent severities are used for the same purpose. Figures catch the *fancy* ; what if severities are meant to catch the *conscience*, the heroic element that is latent in the heart of man, drawing while they repel, drawing in proportion to their repellent power ? Then there is another feature in some of these sayings which is obviously fitted to attract—their *appositeness*, not only to the idea expressed but to the persons to whom they are spoken. Kindly familiar words, charged with homely associations, are used to depict the new unfamiliar career to which those addressed are summoned. *Fishers* of men, hand to the *plough*. "Fishers" to fishermen, "plough" to ploughmen, who had turned over the soil of their little farms before they

began to work as husbandmen in the larger fields of the kingdom.

It thus results from this preliminary survey that in uttering these *disciple-logia*, so strange, hard, and repellent in their surface aspect, Jesus was but showing Himself an expert in the art to which He summoned Peter and Andrew, James and John, catching men on various sides of their nature by the words He spake to them at the crisis of their lives. This will appear more clearly from a fuller study of these words with reference to the uses they were fitted and designed to serve.

In these *disciple-logia*, then, Jesus seems to have had three ends in view: impressiveness, sifting, and confirmation of those not scared. All three ends were obviously important. Words, to have any vital effect, must first of all arrest attention. Words bearing on a new untried career should be vividly descriptive of its nature and conditions, so that men may enter on it with their eyes open and their minds made up. And it is well that words which sift and eliminate the unfit should also confirm the resolution of the fit, serving as inspiring mottos which appeal to and strengthen the heroic mood of disciples.

1. In one way or another all the seven sayings are *impressive*, some by figurativeness and appositeness, some by severity, all by originality and laconic brevity. The figure of fishing in the first appeals at once to the imagination and the heart of fishermen. The emblems taken from foxes and birds in the second invest the disciple-life with poetry and pathos, even when we do not clearly see where the exact point of the comparison lies. There is a ring of sternness in all the rest which must have made them fall with startling effect on the ears of those to whom they were addressed. "Let dead bury dead"—unreasonable, heartless, you think? That may or may not be, but you have at least noticed what He said.

“Take up the cross”—horrible! Good, you have at least understood His meaning. “Look not back when you have put hands to the plough”—what! not a fond regretful thought of home and friends? How unsympathetic! Be it so; meantime it is satisfactory that you comprehend the situation. “Hate father and mother”—revolting, impossible. Say you so? It is well, at all events, that you perceive what discipleship comes to; you might have missed the point had it been less rudely put. “Sell all that thou hast”—what, all? It takes one’s breath away to think of it. Yes, but it puts the alternatives unmistakably before you.

The seven sayings are all *original*, and therefore impressive. It is not necessary to maintain that nothing like any of them was ever uttered before. There are very few words spoken by the most original of men that are absolutely new. Proverbial sayings especially are apt to be of hoary antiquity, and to be at home in many tongues. The saw about not looking back when your hands are on the plough is as old as Hesiod. The seven words to disciples, nevertheless, were all probably new relatively, if not absolutely, for both speaker and hearers. In any case they possessed moral if not literary originality. There might be a maximum of moral originality when there was the smallest measure of literary originality, as in the case of the word spoken to the man who came enquiring about eternal life: “Sell all that thou hast.” From a literary point of view these words present nothing remarkable. If Jesus had aimed at literary originality and felicity, He might have couched the counsel in a parable like that of the precious pearl, with a “Go thou and do likewise” appended. But He spoke in plain terms as in the circumstances more likely to be impressive. In the prosaic realism lies the originality. He means literally what He says. Sell *all*; that is what has got to be done. The

boldness and peremptoriness of the demand reveal the unexampled spiritual insight of the Master.

It is unnecessary to dilate on the brevity of these sayings as enhancing their impressiveness. The brevity is apparent, and its virtue is attested by our own experience. What words of Jesus are better remembered? It is true that brevity has its drawbacks. It involves sometimes a sacrifice of clearness, and creates work for the commentators. "Let the dead bury their dead." A weighty counsel laconically expressed, but leaving something unsaid. Literally understood, the policy prescribed is impossible. Dead men cannot bury dead men. The word "dead" is used in two senses, wherein, doubtless, lies the *curiosa felicitas* of the saying. We perceive the meaning to be "let the dead in *soul* bury dead *bodies*." But even when we have understood this a scruple arises. Are the spiritually alive therefore justified in neglecting the last duty to parents? Explanations are obviously needed. But these may be left to the conscience of disciples, assisted, if needful, by commentators and casuists. The great Master must not dilute and weaken His words by qualifying clauses. It is His part to state strongly, briefly, memorably the main truth, which, in the case in question, is the urgent and paramount claims of the kingdom on men's devotion and service. That He has done to perfection.

2. That the seven sayings were fitted to perform a *sifting* function it is easy to see. That Jesus meant them to serve this purpose is very credible in view of the experience which lay before Himself and the men who were to carry on His work. He was not in the dark as to the general character of that experience, and He knew well that none but picked men of true sincere heart, firm will, and power to stand trial, could meet it without flinching. For such men He was ever on the outlook,

and among the methods He employed for insuring that only such should enter the disciple-circle was the use of sifting words addressed to volunteers. The words of this type which have been preserved were admirably adapted to that end. Not many would persist in seeking admission after the word about the cross had been spoken. The wonder is that any remained within the circle after hearing it, that the twelve did not desert in a body. The truth probably is that the eleven honest men did not take the saying in earnest, and that the one false man, more shrewd than the rest, did lay it to heart, and determined, as soon as convenient, to become a deserter. Fear of what was coming and the scramble for distinction within the disciple-circle, together, made Judas a traitor.

The one fault which may plausibly be ascribed to the seven sayings in reference to their sifting function is over-severity. Instead of merely dividing between reliable and unreliable, were not such stern words, it may be asked, fitted rather to scare all candidates for discipleship, indiscriminately, away? It is certainly true that many a man can endure in actual experience what he cannot stand in imagination. Why not then try to find out secretly who is to be trusted, and having arrived at a conclusion on this point, seek to win the approved by fair encouraging pictures of the future, rather than risk the loss of a faithful follower by too candid forecasts of the dark side of destiny? So raw recruits have sometimes been beguiled into enlisting for military service in the British army. Why not pursue a similar policy in procuring soldiers for the arduous warfare of the Divine kingdom? The suggestion is plausible, and it may be admitted that the policy sketched might conceivably be followed to a certain extent, not only with advantage, but without involving anything questionable on the score of morality. It is not necessary to say all at first, and what may wisely be said depends on the

temperament and moral state of the person dealt with. Christ's mode of treatment was not uniform. His word to the four Galilæan fishermen showed the bright side of the picture rather than the dark. It served to draw into His circle men of whom He had already formed independently a favourable judgment. Sterner words, for them and for all disciples, came later, when they were somewhat prepared to bear them and the hour for speaking them was seasonable. "Fishers of men" was the fit initial word; "take up the cross" was the appropriate watchword when the great day of battle was near. In other instances austere, repellent words had to be spoken at the outset. "The ploughman must not turn back" may seem a harsh, ungenerous, not to say gratuitous insinuation, spoken to one who merely asks permission to bid farewell to friends before entering on a career that is to separate him from them for ever. But what if the wish means reluctance to part, and saying farewell ends in staying at home? Then the candidate is really looking back, and the warning word will decide his fate. If he goes home, he goes never to return. If he stays, he ceases to look back and concentrates his thoughts on making a straight furrow. Another instance of a stern word spoken at the initial stage is that addressed to the man in quest of eternal life. "Go, sell all that thou hast": why make so inexorable and uncompromising a demand just then? Why not say to this man, as to Matthew the publican, simply "follow me," and leave all else to be understood, and to work itself out as the natural sequel of discipleship? Because this is no common man, but a man of great spiritual possibilities, a possible Paul or Barnabas. So much has been given him that much must be required of him. In a heroic career alone can he find the rest he seeks, and the sooner he understands that the better. The counsel to sell all he had simply shows him the door into the Blessed Life.

3. The disciple-logia were fitted and intended to *confirm* as well as to sift. To such as were not scared by their severity, they would serve for life as inspiring, exhilarating watchwords. This double function belongs to all words pitched in the heroic key, even to the names of battlefields on a regimental standard. To the novice these names may be words of terror, reminding him that the soldier's life means something more than regulation drill and barrack routine, even occasional, it may be frequent, exposure to danger in real grim warfare. But to one who has caught the soldier spirit they are words of inspiration thrilling his soul, whispering in his ear: Your comrades fought valiantly and won the day; go and rival the fame of the illustrious dead. Heroic words are awful while the heroic temper slumbers, but when the soul has once been roused, they become like military music, to which we march with light heart and nimble, elastic step. Deeds which inaugurate a new heroic career have the same magic effect. "'Tis done, the great transaction's done!" Awful to look forward to, a thing of terror while you hesitated, but joyful to look back upon; an event of eternal significance, never to be forgotten, never thought on without renewal of rapture. How full of meaning that perfect, *πέπρακεν*, "he hath sold," in the parable of the precious pearl! The thing is done once for all, it is an act which decides destiny. What joy would have come to the seeker after eternal life had he followed the pearl-merchant's example, joy which may be measured by the sorrow and depression arising out of unwillingness to take the decisive step. Such sorrow and such joy are the counterparts of each other, the sorrow being the penalty of shrinking from the heroic, the joy the reward of those who enter into the true blessed life by the door of self-sacrifice. Sell all, O aspirant, and thou shalt be blessed in thy deed, and ever after, the fateful word of counsel spoken by the Master will sound in thine ear like the refrain of a song.

The elation caused by spirit-stirring words spoken at a spiritual crisis is by no means imaginary. It is real, so real as to be a source of danger. It may foster pride, and so cause enthusiasm to degenerate into fanaticism. What said Peter shortly after the utterance of the "sell-all" *logion*? "Behold, we have forsaken all and followed Thee."¹ There, in the bud, is the spirit of proud self-consciousness, which reached its full blossom in an ascetism for which selling all and kindred acts became ends in themselves and constituted the essence of the Christian life in its highest phase. The risk of misunderstanding and abuse is very real, and very serious. Yet such words as "sell all" and that about eunuchism for the kingdom² must be spoken. They are necessary to awaken, stimulate, and sustain that heroic element in the human soul without which nothing great, memorable, and worthy of a place in the page of history or in song, has ever been done in this world. The hero has the faults of his qualities, but it is better far to have the hero with all drawbacks than to have nothing in human life that rises above prudentialism, commonplace, and humdrum. Would one not be the better of a few heroes in Church and State, even now, in addition to the crowd of men who are oppressively wise and prudent? But how are heroes to be reared? By the prophet of an age, if there happens to be one, having faith in the human soul, and speaking to it in heroic dialect, with a voice like the sound of a trumpet. That voice some of the dead will hear, and they that hear shall live, and they that live shall do valiantly. Nothing but the heroic word will serve. Echoed speech will fall flat, time-serving speech will get no serious attention. Even a mixture of the heroic and the commonplace will fail. If you want to rouse men to enthusiasm, ply them with heroic motives alone, and do not be afraid to place the ideal before them in the most

¹ Matt. xix. 27.

² Matt. xix. 12.

exalted form. Let duty appear as a great mountain, hard to climb, but fascinating by its very attitude.

It remains now to use the knowledge we have obtained concerning this class of sayings as a whole, and the purposes they were meant to serve, as an aid to the better understanding of any particular sayings which present special difficulty. The only one to which this description strictly applies is the second in our list: "the foxes have holes," but we may place beside it the fifth: "take up the cross." In the case of the former the question is one of interpretation, in the case of the latter it is a question of authenticity. Of the latter first and very briefly.

Could our Lord have uttered so *terrible* a word? that is the question. Doubt may arise on more general grounds. The reference to the cross may not unnaturally be held to presuppose that His own cross was present to the mind of the Speaker. Is this likely? Could Jesus know so long before the time in what form He was to meet death? Does it not appear from the successive announcements He made to the disciples that the details of His Passion became only gradually clear to His mind? First it is predicted in general terms that there will be varied suffering ending in death; next, that the victim will fall into the hands of His deadly foes through betrayal; finally, that the Gentile powers will have a share in the tragedy, and will consummate its indignities with mockery, scourging and crucifixion.¹ There is not much force in this argument. The gradual unfolding may indicate, not increasing insight, but considerate communication piecemeal of very unwelcome tidings. No great intervals of time elapsed between the successive announcements, so that there was little space for growth in insight. The probability is that the whole details of the passion were before Christ's mind from the

¹ Mark viii. 31, ix. 30, x. 32. Compare with the last-cited text Matthew xix. 19, where crucifixion is mentioned. "Killed" is the word in Mark.

first, if not as certainties, at least as likelihoods of the situation: betrayal by a false disciple already suspected, the inevitable intervention of Gentile authority, the manner of death, crucifixion, thereby virtually settled.

But, granting all this, is it likely that Jesus would utter that awful word about cross-bearing to men who knew from observation what crucifixion meant? Is it not more probable that the saying, in its original form, ran: "Who-soever will come after Me let him deny himself," and that the clause "take up his cross" was added after our Lord's death and resurrection, in the course of tradition, when the cross had become the symbol of suffering for Christ's sake, and had lost much of its terror for the Christian mind? The most that can be said for this hypothesis is that it is *possible*. There is no urgent need for any such supposition. The severity of the saying creates no demand for it. Severity, we have seen, was a part of Christ's method. The use of the cross, as a concrete symbol of the hardship of disciple-life, was perfectly natural on His part even though He was not thinking of His own cross at the moment. If the aim was to depict in vivid colours the hard lot appointed for the followers of a persecuted teacher, as involving a combination of cruelty and ignominy in the superlative degree, then no better symbol could be thought of. It said all in a single word.

Let us turn now to the *logion* concerning the foxes and the birds. The authenticity of this saying no one disputes, but there may be a very legitimate question as to its true interpretation. Taken in its natural surface-sense, as descriptive of a wandering life without a fixed abode, it seems to lack the *appositeness* characteristic of the disciple-logia. According to Matthew the word was spoken to a *scribe*, which may confidently be regarded as in accordance with the historic fact. Now wherein lay the suitability of the saying, taken in its surface-sense, as spoken to such a

person? Why tell a *scribe* more than any other man that the teacher he proposed to follow had no certain place of abode? Did he not know that already? And why should the fact scare him more than others? He was, we may suppose, a young man, not a master, only a scholar desiring to make himself acquainted with the secrets of wisdom. What terrors would an itinerant life have for a youth in quest of truth? Rabbinical students were, I presume, like other students, not effeminate and self-indulgent, but hardy, adventurous, romantic, capable even of finding pleasure in petty austerities connected with the scholar's vocation. In a sunny eastern land these could be nothing more than petty. A free, roving life under a blue sky would attract rather than repel a man with any poetry in him. Away from towns and crowds and social conventionalisms, amid the peaceful solitudes of hill and forest, with only the music of the birds and the brooks and the winds to break the silence, and the wild flowers to scent the air, who would not gladly follow the sage who offered to lead him thither, and in such sacred haunts to initiate him into the mystery of the Blessed Life?

But, suppose the physical situation—literal homelessness—to be an emblem of the spiritual situation—that of one who found no home for his *soul* in the religion of the time. And, to make that supposition probable, suppose further we place the incident in connection with the journey of our Lord northwards towards the borders of Tyre and Sidon, after, and in consequence of, the grave and ominous encounter with the scribes in reference to ceremonial ablutions.¹ We are free to place it as we please, for the historical setting is not clear in the evangelic tradition, Matthew connecting it with the excursion to the east side of the lake on the occasion of the encounter with the demoniac of Gadara; Luke with the final journey towards

¹ 1 Matt. xv.—20.

Jerusalem. Observe then: on that northward journey Jesus was not only a homeless wanderer, as on all His journeys, but a *fugitive* from His native land, driven thence by the bitter, deadly ill-will of religious adversaries, an exile on account of religion. How natural that in such circumstances the physical and the spiritual situations should be mixed up in His thoughts, and that words referring to the one should have latent reference to the other, and demand that reference as the key to their ultimate meaning. The natural and the spiritual always lay close together in Christ's mind, and very specially in moments of prophetic exaltation. The well of material water readily suggested the well of everlasting life, and the viands on the table the good part that could never be taken away.

What a deep, pathetic meaning the saying bears when read as a parable! "I am at present a wanderer, going to live among Gentiles—literally without a home. But that is a small matter compared to the spiritual state which is the cause of this homeliness, and whereof my homelessness is an emblem; that, viz., of one solitary, friendless, his soul in exile; nothing in common between Him and the scribes, in thought, belief, practice; no rest for His soul in their religious teaching and customs!"

Now the appositeness of the saying as addressed to a *scribe* is evident. It means: "I am a fugitive from Galilee because I am isolated in spirit. My thoughts about God, righteousness, the kingdom of God, the Messianic hope, are all different from those which prevail, and the religious leaders, your teachers, are intolerant of nonconformity. Are you prepared to break completely with old beliefs and customs and class prejudices, to separate yourself from old friends, masters, and fellow-scholars, and to become in My company an object of keen suspicion and inveterate, murderous ill-will?"

That is not so easy as to follow a wandering teacher, and sleep on the ground, and snatch a precarious meal from chance benevolence. Is the scribe equal to the heroic demand? Let us think of him as generously as possible. He is not yet, we will suppose, confirmed in the artificial ways of the scribes. It takes time to make an ingenuous young soul the absolute slave of an evil system, and the melancholy process, presumably, has not in this case reached its baleful consummation. The candidate for discipleship has still some open-mindedness, is still capable of being impressed by the wisdom and goodness of Jesus. His becoming a disciple of the great Outcast is not inconceivable. But it will be a momentous crisis in his religious history; nothing short of a moral and religious revolution. Jesus would have him understand this before he begins. Therefore he addresses to him this mystic, pregnant, parabolic word concerning the foxes and the birds.

But would the scribe perceive the deeper meaning of the saying, and, if not, must we not take it in the surface-sense it bore for him? Why, I reply, should the mystic import be hidden from him any more than from the man to whom Jesus said, "Let the dead bury their dead," a saying in which the natural and spiritual are confessedly blended? I apprehend that men accustomed to hear Jesus were on the outlook for latent spiritual meanings. His looks and tones in particular instances might hint that more was meant than met the ear. What met the ear had its own truth; "the natural interpretation"¹ is not excluded by the mystic; the only question is, Is that all? The very

¹ Shailer Mathews, of the University of Chicago, in his work *The Social Teachings of Jesus* (1897), p. 101, finds in the logion the idea that Jesus "was a man without a home"; and with reference to my view in the *EXPOSITOR*, October, 1896, calls this "the most natural interpretation." Of course it is. It is *the* natural interpretation, but it does not exclude mine.

manner of Jesus might indicate that it was not all. The circumstances, too, might quicken intelligence. If the historic occasion were the flight of Jesus to the North, a young scholar of the scribes, cognisant of what had recently taken place between Jesus and his masters, could hardly help reading between the lines, especially if, as we must assume, his sympathies in the quarrel went with the Wanderer.

The more I think of it the more I am convinced that the mystic interpretation of this most characteristic and pathetic *Logion* which I ventured to propound in the pages of the EXPOSITOR, October, 1896, is the true one.

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