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## Recent Foreign Theology.

### Naville on the Pentateuch.<sup>1</sup>

IN spite of his years Professor Naville's literary activity and logical acumen remain undiminished. His last production is a reply to Professor Humbert's defence of the so-called 'critical' theory of the Pentateuch, in which the veteran Egyptologist maintains its Mosaic origin and authorship, and subjects the arguments of his opponent to a remorseless criticism. As he says, pertinently enough, there are two methods of studying an ancient document or ancient history; one of these 'is essentially German: in the study of a document what is right is not what the document itself says, but the idea or theory which it has suggested to the student.' It goes without saying that in the domain of Egyptology and Oriental archæology he gains an easy victory over his antagonist.

'An ounce of fact is better than a ton of theory,' and the German critics and their disciples would not unfrequently have been the better for a little knowledge of the facts both of archæology and of ordinary Oriental life. Professor Naville has no difficulty in showing how impossible it is to harmonize the theory of the Sacerdotal Code and the late Redactor with the facts of history and common sense. 'Admettant même qu'il se (le rédacteur) soit mis à l'œuvre très vite après l'achèvement de mosaïque en un temps extraordinairement court, et en outre il faut qu'il ait réussi à faire adopter par les prêtres de Jérusalem son texte de Pentateuque comme le texte sacré qui sera désormais la loi, et auquel aucun changement ne doit être apporté. Puis il faudra que les Samaritains en prennent connaissance et l'adoptent aussi comme leur text sacré. Auraient-ils reconnu l'autorité d'un loi toute récente et qui aurait été imposée aux Hébreux on ne sait pas par qui et à quelle occasion?' A. H. SAYCE.

Oxford.

### Are the Gospels in Verse?

WE bring to the notice of students of the N.T. a remarkable theory of the literary structure of the four Gospels, advanced in April 1921

<sup>1</sup> *La Haute Critique dans le Pentateuque*, by Ed. Naville. Attinger, Paris, 1921.

by P. W. Schmidt, a corresponding member of the Vienna Academy of Science (*Der strophische Aufbau des Gesamttextes der vier Evangelien*, Vienna, 1921). He claims to have discovered that the whole of each Gospel is written in *strophes*; that the *strophes* are artistically arranged in *pericopes*; that in their turn the *pericopes* form groups; and that each Gospel is an architectonic structure of such groups. The two last points have yet to be thoroughly investigated, but of *strophes* and *pericopes* the author has no doubt.

That portions of the Gospels admit of strophic analysis was maintained already by such scholars as P. Legrange (1906), D. H. Müller (1908), P. Szczygiel (1911), and E. Norden (1915). They, however, found strophism only in the discourses or sayings. In 1920 R. Schutz pointed out that often the narrative portions could be similarly analysed, and H. J. Cladder and P. Rohr worked at the same idea. But all these based the determination of the *strophe* on parallelism in the subject-matter of the passage.<sup>2</sup> Schmidt thinks he has found and can demonstrate the objective characteristic and formal identification-mark of the verse, independent of the thought-content altogether.

In considering the strophism which Schmidt has discovered, we must dismiss from our minds all thought of what constitutes 'verse' according to Western ideas. It is not a matter of rhythm. It has absolutely nothing to do with regularity of length of line. We have all noticed rhythmical passages in the N.T., but rhythm has really nothing to do with the Schmidtian *strophe*.

The important question is the determination of the unit, namely, the line. What constitutes a line? According to Schmidt the line is marked by a verb or verb-equivalent, although in certain cases there are lines constituted by nouns, and by phrases without an expressed verb. In general it is the verb that is the constitutive element of a line. A series of substantives, even grammatical 'subjects,' may appear in one line; on the other hand, a verb by itself, even if it have the same subject as the preceding verb, constitutes a new line. But note some exceptions. Prosthetic verbs are taken to make with the main verb only one

<sup>2</sup> Schmidt is apparently unaware of the important English work of Dr. Briggs on this subject.

line. So with verbs which are synonymous or in their combination express only one idea. So with the common collocations 'he answered and said,' 'he spake saying,' and the like. The introductory 'and it came to pass' does not make a line.

A line may thus be either a clause or a single verb. Nouns constitute lines though there is no verb when they are—(a) vocatives forming no real part of the succeeding sentence; (b) lists of personal names arranged in pairs; (c) very emphatic and admitting of consideration as elliptical sentences. Participles are difficult. Schmidt lays down that a participle constitutes a line when it is not the subject of the sentence and has true verbal force; that one participle dependent on a *verbum sentiendi* does not make a separate line; but that if there are more than one, each does so.

Phrases introduced by ἀλλά and felt to be elliptical clauses, and all introduced by εἰ μή, make lines. So do words in *oratio recta* though they include no verb, after a *verbum dicendi*.

Having thus determined what makes a line, Schmidt proceeds to describe the *strophes* into which such lines are formed. Distichs hardly occur at all. Tristichs are rare, but Mk 10<sup>19-16</sup> is a good example:

1. And they brought young children to Him,  
That He should touch them :  
And the disciples rebuked them.
2. But when Jesus saw it,  
He was much displeased,  
And said unto them :
3. 'Suffer the little children to come unto Me,  
And forbid them not :  
For of such is the Kingdom of Heaven,' etc.

Other two similar *strophes* conclude the *pericope*.

By far the most common *strophes* are the 4-line (frequent in Lk.) and the 6-line (common in Mt. and Mk.), while one of 7 lines is characteristic of Jn. Fairly frequent in Lk. is one of 8 lines. One of 9 lines is common in Mt. and Mk. in connexion with solemn occasions, e.g. the institution of the Lord's Supper. 5- and 10-line *strophes* are rare; 12- and 14-line examples occur.

There is a complication about 'compensation' into which we need not enter.

The results of this discovery, Schmidt thinks, are important. The whole Synoptic problem must be reconsidered. The historicity of the Fourth

Gospel is confirmed. There can be no interpolated clauses in our Text, for if you remove the suspects, you destroy a *strophe*.

Why were the Gospels so written? Well, the strophism served a mnemonic purpose, and it was a far more artistic way of helping to secure accuracy of reproduction than the other plan of counting words and letters.

What are we to think of it all? We must at any rate pay our tribute to the enormous labour and the great ingenuity of the discoverer. But we are not satisfied that the whole business is not more a revelation than a discovery—a revelation just of the author's ingenuity. Curious things have resulted before now from examination of the Gospel Text. By counting words, by attaching their numerical values to the letters, and so on, striking results have been attained in which we have no more faith than in the wonderful Baconian anagrams in Shakespeare. Is this discovery of that order? We are by no means prepared or even inclined to say so. We have before us only a preliminary sketch, and should like to see the thing more fully worked out than it is in the selected striking examples which Schmidt adduces.

The theory, we think, deserves serious attention and examination. Meanwhile we confess to considerable doubt.

1. The preface to Lk. is in classical Greek, but admits of strophic analysis. We should say that it is not improbable that a goodly part of other classical Greek would be just as likely to prove to be strophic. Seeing that the line is indifferent to the number of words it contains, that rhythm and regularity do not matter, that the *strophe* may consist of any number of lines from 2 to 14,—and there is no reason for stopping there,—and that the *pericope* may contain variety of *strophes*, we can see nothing to prevent the strophic analysis of any prose written in simple straightforward style without parentheses or involved structure. We have made an experiment, and beg to announce the discovery that the first paragraph of *The Pilgrim's Progress* consists of seven tristichs! Nay, more:

Let our readers make an experiment for themselves;  
Let them write a few plain sentences  
Such as might form part of an ordinary letter.

They will probably find to their surprise  
That their prose may be analysed into Schmidtian *strophes*,  
Just as ours here is in tristichs.

In the actual examples given we note a rather tell-tale inconsistency. 'He will come and destroy the husbandmen'—in Mk 12<sup>9</sup> these words are treated as one line, the same words in Lk 20<sup>16</sup> are taken as two lines. Is a verb prosthetic or not just as the *strophe* requires?

2. That such strophism as this was a Semitic notion of verse-form is a big assumption. That the Evangelists deliberately introduced this Semitic conception into a Western language and into books read mostly by people whose ideas of verse were totally different, that such strophism would ever be recognized by any but a few of the readers and the transcribers of the Gospels—all this is an hypothesis which seems to us very improbable. It appears to us that the theory requires us to believe that our Greek Gospels are nothing but close translations of four Aramaic Gospels, and this not merely necessitates reconsideration of the Synoptic problem, it makes it unthinkable.

3. As to how this discovery is to help N.T. criticism—that seems to us very questionable. Strophic criticism of the O.T. has been such that we doubt if it will impress any one as a welcome new instrument to apply to the Gospels. That it confirms the historicity of Jn. we fail to see. Rather do we feel that it reflects upon the historicity of all our Gospels. Did Christ and His interlocutors converse in *strophes*? In His discourses, answers, and prayers, was our Lord concerned not to spoil the *strophe*? If not, then on this theory we have nowhere *ipsissima verba*, but everywhere an artificial manipulation of them.

4. That such strophism as this could possibly help the memory of any human being is, we think, absurd.

5. Such are the difficulties which this theory suggests to our mind. Another, of course, lies on the surface—Schmidt himself is fully aware of it—How did it happen that this strophism lay unnoticed for over nineteen centuries? Eastern as well as Western scholars during that long period have minutely studied the Text. If this strophism be really a genuine Semitic verse-form, why has no Syrian ever been able to observe it? We are tempted to raise the question, Were the writers of the Gospels themselves aware that they were writing *strophes*? If they were, their literary fate has been one of the most tragic we know. This wonderful artistry of theirs aroused no interest, received no attention, evoked not a single comment; in short, was observed by not a soul, until, after ages had rolled, Schmidt arose to do them belated justice. This is not sarcasm. Schmidt deserves none. He is as modest as he is in earnest about his discovery. But, as he admits, the difficulty is there. If this strophism were ever intended and ever recognized, how did it become so immediately and so completely a hidden secret?

To avoid misunderstanding, let us state that we fully accept what is coming to be the generally held opinion, that behind our Greek Gospels there lie extensive Aramaic materials, and we think it not unlikely that some of this material may have had a certain strophic form. We quite admit that in the Gospels, as elsewhere in the N.T., there are strophic passages. What we doubt is that Schmidt's theory of the 'verse' is a tenable one, and that the whole of each Gospel is strophic.

W. D. NIVEN.

Aberdeen.

## In the Study.

### Virginibus Puerisque.

#### The Man of Perfect Service.

'I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.'—Jn 13<sup>15</sup>.

'Whatsoever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord.'—Col 3<sup>23</sup>.

Boys and girls, which do you prefer—a sermon or a story? I need hardly ask that question—need I?

Well, to-day I am not going to preach a sermon. I'm just going to tell you a story. I'm not going to give you even a text. That is to be your share of the programme. For, when you have heard the story, I want you to think about it, and after tea to-night, when everything is quiet and you have time to spare, I want you to get out your Bibles and hunt for the texts that fit the story. Perhaps I should warn you that there are several texts that