

NOTES ON THE FOURTH GOSPEL.

XI. THE SABBATH CURE AT BETHESDA (v. and vii.
15-24).

(1) THE reason for transposing chapters v. and vi. and for adding vii. 15-24 to v. has been given in the previous article ; and the suggestion has been offered that the feast mentioned in v. 1 was Pentecost. As no disciples are mentioned, and the man cured does not know his benefactor, it is likely that this visit too, like the next at the Feast of Tabernacles, was made "not publicly, but as it were in secret" (vii. 10). The explanation of the troubling of the waters in verses 3 (last clause) and 4, which might be used to charge the evangelist with so ready a credulity, is absent from the best MSS. How Jesus knew that "he had been now a long time in that case" (verse 6) we are not told. We might suppose that here again the evangelist assumed supernatural knowledge, but *γινούς* is the verb used. It would seem that compassion moved Jesus spontaneously to offer the cure in awakening the desire for it. The warning in verse 14 indicates that Jesus had knowledge of the man's past, but how gained we are not told. That the act of cure on the Sabbath provoked hostility is entirely in accord with the Synoptic representations. Jesus' justification in verse 17 carries us into another circle of ideas than the defences of Sabbath cures afford in the Synoptic records ; but in vii. 22-23 the defence offered is of the same kind as was usual in Galilee. That Jesus claimed His Father's example, the constant beneficent activity of God in nature, as a justification of His own act is, however, not itself improbable, especially in view of the probability mentioned in the last article, that He in Jerusalem, in face of more violent embittered opposition, asserted His claims more openly and

persistently than He did in Galilee, when these claims being misunderstood might lead to an undesired Messianic movement. If the evangelist accepts the interpretation of the words which Jesus' opponents put on them, that in claiming to follow the Father's example Jesus was claiming to be equal with God (verse 18) the context itself justifies our refusing to follow him, for throughout the discussion which follows it is the Son's dependence on, and submission to the Father which is insisted on. If we find the *ὁμοούσιον* here our exegesis is dogmatic, and not historical. That the saying aroused so violent an outburst of hate shows that there must have been previous controversy, and that there was gathered fuel of hate, ready to kindle at the feeblest spark.

(2) Can we accept the discourse in verses 19 to 47 as an accurate report? What at once strikes us in reading the passage is the twofold mode of Jesus' reference to Himself. In v. 30-47 and in vii. 15-24 He speaks of Himself in the first person, and in verses 19-29, apart from the introductory formula, "Verily, verily I say unto you" (vers. 19, 25), He refers to Himself in the third person, except in verse 24, which, as faith is set forth as the condition of eternal life, presents no difficulty, and may be at once accepted as a saying suitable on the occasion. But is the exposition in these other verses of the intimate and absolute relation of the Father and the Son, with its reference to the future judgment and the future resurrection, at all likely to have been given by Jesus to His opponents? Even if less reserved in Jerusalem than in Galilee, is it credible that at this stage He so entirely cast off reserve, especially when such language could provoke only deeper misunderstanding and keener hostility? So apposite is Jesus' speech in the Synoptics, that we must suspect in the Fourth Gospel utterances which do not seem necessary or relevant to the occasion. Does not the use of the third person throughout

in the balancing of Father and Son in their mutual relation appear much more credible as a later doctrinal development, in reflexions of the evangelists, or, possibly, some reminiscences of intimate talk of Jesus with His beloved disciple at a later date than as a speech in public by Jesus Himself? Without assuming that verses 30-47 are a *verbatim* report, it seems to the writer we may accept them as a substantially accurate account of the controversy of Jesus with His opponents. The same assumption seems justified as regards the sequel of the controversy in vii. 15-24, which, however, need not have followed immediately, but after a short interval of time.

XII. THE CONTROVERSY AT THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES (John vii.-viii.).

(1) It has already been maintained that vii. 1 is the sequel to vii. 24, and that vii. 15-24 continues the story of v. 1-47. It was the attempt made on His life at the Feast of Pentecost in Jerusalem which led Jesus, not only to withdraw to Galilee (vii. 1), but also to abandon what seems to have been the usual practice of going up to the feast with the Galilean pilgrims (ver. 10); and the precaution was wisely taken, as His opponents were on the outlook for Him (ver. 11). The attitude of His brethren here described (vv. 3-8) is also attested by Mark iii. 31-35; and His refusal to be guided by their advice is exactly paralleled by His reply to His mother at the marriage in Cana (ii. 4), in which also His sole and entire dependence on God is asserted. An intimation of the divine will that He should go to the festival, accompanied doubtless by an assurance of the divine protection if He went, is probably the explanation of the change of plan. We cannot conjecture what change of conditions made it safer for Him to appear publicly at the middle of the Feast than at the beginning. Possibly the presence of

larger numbers of friendly pilgrims may have offered some security, and His non-appearance at the commencement may have for a time thrown His enemies off their guard, so that He gained His brief opportunity of appealing to the people before steps were taken to seize Him (see *vv.* 43-46).

(2) We seem in these chapters to be in the region of historical probability, and only a few matters claim closer scrutiny. We may note how carefully the writer distinguishes the different currents of opinion. In *vii.* 12 the phrase "among the multitudes" is used to describe "the different groups of strangers who had come up to the festival, and such as consorted with them" (Westcott's *St. John*, p. 117), and a conflict of opinion is here recorded. The Jews (*vv.* 11 and 13) are the openly and bitterly hostile party, described in verse 26 as *the rulers*, and composed, according to verse 32, of the *chief priests and the Pharisees*. "The combination occurs also in *St. Matthew* (*Matt.* *xxi.* 45; *xxvii.* 62). The phrase probably describes the Sanhedrin under the form of its constituent classes" (*ibid.*, p. 121). The Pharisees were the democratic party in close contact with the people, and so kept well informed of the popular opinions (*vii.* 32; *viii.* 13); and through them the aristocratic party of the priesthood was moved to action. In *vii.* 25 another group is mentioned, distinguished on the one hand from the multitudes, the pilgrims, and on the other from the members of the Sanhedrin, and described in the phrase *τινὲς ἐκ τῶν Ἱεροσολύμειτων*, citizens of Jerusalem "who were acquainted with the designs of the hierarchy, and yet not committed to them" (*ibid.*, p. 120). Probably the evangelist himself was in close contact with this group; and may even have been seeking to influence it to a favourable judgment. The opinions ascribed here would not be spoken openly; and how could one of the Galilæan disciples become aware of what was being thus

privately discussed? While the term Jews is usually applied to the hostile party of priests and Pharisees, in viii. 31 it is used of a group, whose hostility, if it had existed, had been so far overcome that they *had believed Him* (τοὺς πεπιστευκότας αὐτῷ Ἰουδαίους). But their belief is distinguished from the faith of "the number" who "believed in Him" (ver. 30), πολλοὶ ἐπίστευσαν εἰς αὐτόν, if we may assume that "the change in the construction of the verb" has some significance. According to Westcott, this group "acknowledged His claims to Messiahship as true, were convinced by what He said, but still interpreted His promise and words by their own prepossessions" (p. 133). In the warning Jesus recognises the imperfection of their faith; and their quick resentment at His speech shows the superficiality of the impression made on them (ver. 33). To the writer it seems incredible that if the evangelist was not an eyewitness, and had no concern for historical reality, he should so carefully have distinguished the varied and varying attitudes assumed towards Jesus, and have presented them with such striking verisimilitude.

(3) A second indication of trustworthiness is surely to be found in the figures in which Jesus made His appeal to the multitude. In vii. 37 He offers Himself as *the living water*; and in viii. 12 as *the light of the world*. The appropriateness of the first may be indicated in the words of Dods. "On each of the seven feast days water was drawn in a golden pitcher from the pool of Siloam, and carried in procession to the Temple, in commemoration of the water from the rock with which their fathers in the desert had been provided. On the eighth day, which commemorated their entrance into a 'land of springs of water' this ceremony was discontinued. But the deeper spirits must have viewed with some misgiving all this ritual, feeling still in themselves a thirst which none of these symbolic forms quenched,

and wondering when the vision of Ezekiel would be realised, and a river broad and deep would issue from the Lord's house" (*Expositor's Greek Testament*, vol. i., p. 767). As regards the fitness of the second figure, the same writer's words may be given. "Notwithstanding Meyer and Holtzmann, it seems not unlikely that this utterance was prompted by the symbolism of the feast. According to the Talmud, on every night of the feast the Court of the Women was brilliantly illuminated. . . . This brilliant lighting was perhaps a memorial of the Pillar of Fire which led the Israelites while dwelling in tents" (*ibid.*, p. 773). The evangelist was assuredly one who was thoroughly familiar with Jewish customs, and also with the mode of the teaching of Jesus, whose language was always appropriate to the occasion and to the environment, as the Synoptic teaching shows.

(3) In spite of these two indications of historical trustworthiness, it may be urged that the crucial test is the language put in the lips of Jesus; and on this question several considerations must be offered. (a) It is evident that short, crisp, and clear sayings, such as those given in the Synoptic Gospels, could be much more distinctly remembered than controversies such as are here recorded; and we cannot assume a verbal exactness, only a substantial accuracy. (b) The sharpness of the tone of Jesus, the severity of His judgment throughout this controversy does undoubtedly present a difficulty. Could these words fall from the lips of *the meek and lowly in heart*? The possibility must be admitted that the evangelist in his passionate devotion to his Master, and his no less vehement indignation against his Master's enemies, may have unconsciously exaggerated the polemic character of both the spirit and the content of Jesus' teaching. But it must also be remembered that Jesus combined severity with gentleness, and even of His

earthly ministry we might use the paradoxical phrase "the wrath of the Lamb." We must not forget His woes on Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum (Matt. xi. 20-24), and His terrible denunciation of the scribes and Pharisees at the close of His ministry (xxiii. 1-36); also His solemn warning about the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost (xii. 31-32). The hostility in Jerusalem was more persistent, vehement, and ruthless than any experience in Galilee. As it came from the rulers, the teachers, and the leaders of the nation, it was more fatal to the acceptance of Jesus as Messiah by the Jewish people. These enemies were responsible for the rejection of Jesus, and the doom which would fall on the nation. The lament over Jerusalem (Matt. xxiii. 37-39) follows the denunciation of the scribes and Pharisees; it was Jesus' compassion for the people which intensified His indignation against *the blind leaders of the blind*. We abstain from judging, because we know that we ourselves deserve to be judged. Surely the sinless and perfect had a right to condemn as no man has. His insight enabled Him to know the unreality both of the piety and patriotism under which pride, greed, conceit, censoriousness, self-indulgence and self-interest hid themselves. The Synoptic records leave unexplained the hatred that did Jesus to death; but John's record of the controversy in Jerusalem offers an intelligible explanation. Are we not, in finding a difficulty in the severity of Jesus, condemning our own moral and religious standpoint? Was not His burning indignation against falsehood, wrong and hate the reverse of the moral perfection of which passionate devotion to God, truth, and goodness was the obverse? Just because He as Son was so certain of God as Father could He be so confident in His judgment of those who not only rejected that Fatherhood in Him for themselves, but stood in the way of the acceptance by the people of the blessings of that Fatherhood.

(c) Just because in this controversy the final issue of His acceptance or rejection as Messiah was involved, Jesus now begins to lay aside all reserve and restraint, and uses the whole of His resources of argument, appeal, and authority. It is not improbable too that the more His claim of sonship was contradicted and challenged, the more distinct, confident, and dominant would His self-consciousness become. To the writer it does not seem at all improbable that the intuition of pre-existence, expressed in viii. 58, the certainty that His relation as Son to Father was not temporal but eternal, antecedent to the very beginnings of God's revelation to the chosen people, flashed upon Him as a gleam from heaven, when the shadows of unbelief and hate were gathering thick and close around Him (see for further discussion *Studies in the Inner Life of Jesus*, pp. 85-86). Accordingly the writer does not find in the reports of these chapters teaching about the person of Jesus which seems to go beyond what was possible and even necessary for the occasion.

(d) It is not necessary for the present purpose to discuss the passage vii. 53-viii. 11, as the generally accepted conclusion of scholars is unhesitatingly accepted; but it may be pointed out that the intrusion of a passage not authentic affords some justification for the assumption here being made, that there are displacements in the text of the Gospel, and that we may without rashness attempt to restore the order of the original document.

XIII. CONTROVERSY AT THE FEAST OF DEDICATION

(John ix. and x.).

(1) The incident recorded in the 9th chapter leaves a vivid impression of historical reality; the development of the faith of the man born blind, to whom sight was given, is described in a most convincing way. As the incident closely connects itself with the teaching given in chapter x

and the note of time in verse 22 fixes the date of that teaching, we may treat both chapters as an account of a visit to Jerusalem at the Feast of Dedication. The disciples mentioned in ix. 2 need not be the twelve, the companions of Jesus in Galilee, but may be Judæan disciples, including probably the evangelist, whose account here seems to be given at first hand. Dr. Moffatt, in his *New Translation of the New Testament*, makes a transposition which seems justified. He connects x. 19-29 directly with ix. 41. An appropriate comment on Jesus' action and speech in chapter ix. is offered in x. 19-21. Verses 22-29 follow quite naturally on 19-21; verses 26 to 29 continue the thought of verses 24 and 25, and very appropriately lead up to the teaching in x. 1-16. Also it seems more probable that such a declaration as "I and My Father are one" (ver. 30) would follow on the frank declaration of His intention to lay down and take up His life again (v. 18), than on the assurance of God's supreme power over all. Altogether there is a decided gain in the continuity of the teaching by this rearrangement.

(2) The passage in chapter x. 1-16 is interesting as an example of the allegory into which, according to the Fourth Gospel, Jesus expanded His metaphors. Doubtless it was of the blind man, who had fully and freely confessed his faith, Jesus was thinking when He spoke of the sheep who listened to His voice; and of the constancy of His sorely tried faith when He gave the assurance that no one could tear them out of His hand, because God's strength was His (x. 27-29). In the Fourth Gospel there are no parables exactly similar in structure to those in the Synoptic Gospels, and we may raise the question, whether and why Jesus avoided in Judæa a mode of teaching so attractive and effective? Is it not more probable that the evangelist, transforming reminiscence by reflexion, has changed parables into allegories. This at least is Wendt's opinion in regard to this

passage, for he finds here companion parables. "The first of these parables (*vv.* 1-5) describes how the sheep obey and follow only the shepherd who enters by the door into the sheepfold, while the one who breaks in by another way is a stranger and a robber, from whom the sheep flee. Its application, according to the explanation in verses 7-9, is that Jesus is the one essential Mediator of salvation for men: 'I am the door; by Me if any man enter in he shall be saved, and shall go in and out and find pasture' (*ver.* 9). But since this comparison of Jesus to the door of the sheepfold, which in a merely passive sense gives entrance to the flock, makes no account of the devoted care with which Jesus ministers salvation to His people, therefore this additional idea is brought out by a second parable (from *ver.* 10), in which the same figure of a sheepfold is employed in another relation. As the good shepherd, in contrast to the robber who will only injure the flock, and in contrast to the careless hireling who leaves it in the lurch in time of danger, devotes his life to the welfare of the sheep; so Jesus exhibits Himself as the true Saviour, in lovingly devoting His life for them" (*The Teaching of Jesus*, pp. 128-129). To this statement we must add that it is quite probable that *verse 9* is a genuine logion, but from another context. Would not Jesus have confused His hearers, if, just after calling Himself the Shepherd, He had called Himself the door also? The transition from the one parable to the other must be conceived differently from Wendt's suggestion. The first parable is that of the sheep in relation to the shepherd; the second of the shepherd in relation to the sheep. Wendt does not point out clearly enough how the evangelist has altered the parabolic form; probably in the original form the first personal pronoun was not used, as in *vv.* 10-11, 14-15; but a description of the Good Shepherd's ways was given in the third person; and the evangelist has blended explanation

and parable. So restored, the companion parables would fall into the first of the two classes which Wendt distinguishes, that which gives "a rule in frequently recurring cases" (p. 117).

(3) The intimation of the voluntary sacrifice (x. 17, 18) follows easily and simply on the teaching about the Good Shepherd, and is appropriate to the occasion. His enemies were purposing and intriguing for His death. Jesus admits to them that they will accomplish their end; but He is concerned to make plain to them that the death they are seeking to inflict will nevertheless be a voluntary sacrifice on His part in loving obedience to God and loving solicitude for man. There is nothing incredible in such teaching at this time. Nor is the declaration, "I and My Father are one" (v. 30) improbable, if we do not impose on it the doctrine of difference of person in unity of substance; but understand it as the context indicates. It is unity of purpose that is primarily referred to, whatever metaphysical inferences may or may not legitimately follow. The Son's obedience to the Father's commandment makes Him one with the Father. His opponents were not sound Christian theologians. He did not make Himself God in the sense they meant. He does not place Himself merely on an equality with *the persons to whom the word of God came*; but it is as *sanctified and sent into the world* that He claims to be the Son of God (vv. 34-36). The mutual indwelling of Father and Son (ver. 38) is not unity of substance. It is not the correctness or otherwise of the orthodox formula which is in question here; but the historical exegesis of the passage. The claim rightly interpreted is not historically improbable.

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