

*NOTES ON THE FOURTH GOSPEL.*

XVI. THE UPPER ROOM (John xiii.-xvii.).

IN these chapters, there emerge a number of questions. Is the record of the washing of the disciples' feet historical, and why does the Fourth Gospel alone contain it? Why is this Gospel silent regarding the institution of the Lord's Supper, and at what point in the narrative should it be inserted? Is the discourse assigned to Jesus authentic, and is the present the original order?

(1) As regards the first question, not only is the action characteristic of Jesus, but the details bear all the marks of the eyewitness. The introductory verses (1-3) give the evangelist's interpretation of the consciousness of Jesus in performing this service, and have his theological peculiarity; but even here his insight seems to deserve our trust, as the contents of the discourse which follows afford a solid foundation for such an interpretation. The writer in his *Studies in the Inner Life of Jesus* (351-355) has suggested that the Fourth Evangelist was himself the householder, who provided the Upper Room. (i.) The absence of a slave to perform the menial office assumed by Jesus was a failure in hospitality (cf. Luke vii. 44) which Peter, though prominent in the incident, did not report, as that would have appeared "as a censure of a fellow-disciple, and one whom, owing to his position in Jerusalem and influence with the priesthood, it was desirable not to offend," and which the evangelist records as a personal confession. For, even if there may have been danger in introducing a slave into the room, the host ought to have assumed the task himself. (ii.) The reference in verse 23, "there was at the table reclining on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved," is also probably to the host. "Would this not be the place for

the host, even if he had surrendered to Jesus the presiding function? Might not his claim for that favoured position explain the jealousy of the other disciples?" (*op. cit.* p. 351), and so have aggravated their disinclination, due to conflicting ambitions, to render this humble service? It is a common assumption, due to transferring to the ministry of Jesus the ecclesiastical traditions of a later age, that only the twelve can have been present with Jesus in the Upper Room, and that accordingly the reference must be to John the son of Zebedee. "Had this disciple been John, the son of Zebedee, known as one of the apostles, such an allusion would seem an affectation; but if the disciple was known as such only after many years to the circle of his own disciples, whose reverence and affection conferred on him the distinctive title 'the disciple whom Jesus loved,' it seems natural." In dealing with the connexion of the evangelist with the high priest, the question will be raised, why his personality is thus shrouded in secrecy. It is also probable, as has been already suggested, that the description is not the evangelist's, but his disciple's. (iii.) In verse 28 the evangelist asserts that none of the disciples knew why Jesus gave Judas the sop, and sent him on his errand of treachery. Evidently he is himself an exception. "The beloved disciple alone heard Jesus' words, and probably by sign Jesus had made him understand that the secret was to be kept, especially from inquiring Peter, who, had he known, would probably never have allowed the traitor to escape alive" (p. 359). May we not add the name of John the son of Zebedee, who was ready to call down fire on the inhospitable Samaritan village (Luke ix. 54)? The evangelist himself had learned from Jesus the truth of the necessity of His death, and thus in submission to the Master's teaching did not seek to hinder the departure of Judas. It is probable that he was not an eyewitness of Gethsemane because when he left the Upper

Room it was to go to the High Priest's house to be better informed of the plans of the enemies of Jesus, who had now got a tool in Judas. It is possible to find an intelligible consistency in the allusions made in the narrative to the evangelist.

(2) Turning now to the second question, why is the Lord's Supper not recorded? the following reasons for the evangelist's silence may be suggested. (i.) He wrote at a date long after the apostolate of Paul, and in a community, and to communities, to which Paul had ministered, and to which Paul's account of the Lord Supper, as found only in 1 Corinthians, but as probably given to all the churches to which he had delivered his Gospel, was thoroughly familiar. There was no need of repeating an account which had become a part of the order of worship of the Churches. (ii.) It may be even that superstitious ideas were so attaching themselves to the ordinance, that the evangelist was unwilling to give them any sanction. May not his attitude be represented in this matter by the logion of Jesus (vi. 63), whatever may have been the occasion of its utterance? If verses 53-56 in chapter vi. contain an authentic explanation of the significance of the words of institution by Jesus Himself to the beloved disciple, it may not have been by accident or by association of ideas alone that the passage drifted to its present context; but the evangelist may intentionally, to avoid misunderstanding, have detached the saying from any connexion with the supper in the Upper Room. There was some reason why he did not, because he felt he could not make use of this incident for the purpose of his Gospel; and this seems as likely a suggestion as any which can be offered.

(iii.) It has been suggested that verse 34 refers to the institution of the Lord's Supper. "It has been conjectured," says Westcott (*St. John*, p. 198), "that the 'new command-

ment is the ordinance of the Holy Communion which was instituted to the end that Christians might love one another' by recalling in that the crowning act of Christ's love. If this be so, the words, *that ye love one another*, give the purpose and not the substance of the commandment. It is however difficult to suppose that such an institution would be spoken of as a 'commandment' (ἐντολή, 1 John ii. 7; iii. 22). Westcott's objection seems altogether insufficient, and the suggestion is most attractive. If we accept it, then the departure of Judas was prior to the institution of the supper, and he took no part in it. Matthew and Mark both place the announcement of his treachery before, and Luke alone after, the supper. If we may here appeal to psychological probability, it is more probable that the spirit of Jesus was oppressed by the presence of the traitor, that only when he had gone there came to Him the exaltation of spirit indicated in verses 31 and 32; and that it was in this mood that the new commandment was given. Do not these words imply the accomplished sacrifice and salvation of which the supper is the memorial? Although it is but a conjecture, yet it is probable that the institution of the supper is to be placed in this context.

(3) Many who have difficulty about accepting some of the teaching of Jesus presented in the Fourth Gospel hesitate about challenging the authenticity of the discourse in the Upper Room; Wendt, for instance, is prepared to accept the discourse with the exception of the passages referring to the betrayal by Judas, and the closing words of John xvi. 13: *καὶ τὰ ἐρχόμενα ἀναγγελεῖ ὑμῖν* (*St. John's Gospel*, p. 163); and the writer himself feels warranted in regarding the discourse as a whole as more fully an authentic report of Jesus' teaching than appeared probable when he dealt with the subject in his *Studies of the Inner Life of Jesus*. (i.) The considerations there advanced, that the characteristic

vocabulary of the evangelist appears in the reproduction of Jesus' teaching, that reminiscence passes over into reflexion, that germinal thoughts of the Master's have been developed in the experience of the disciple, that sayings from another context have been attracted by association of ideas—must still be maintained; although it now appears to him that probably the teaching has been less modified by all these influences than at any one time seemed certain to him.

(ii.) It is altogether likely that Jesus in the Upper Room said a great deal more to His disciples than the Synoptists record, that the evangelist, with keener personal sympathy and finer spiritual discernment, was more deeply impressed by, and so was more thoroughly retentive of, this teaching than the others who heard it, and that all unwitting he wove into the texture of the discourse teaching which Jesus had given to himself in private converse on other occasions. This last statement demands some justification as regards the two points assumed. The writer, some years ago, dealt in public discourse with a theological topic of considerable difficulty, and afterwards in private converse with one of his hearers explained, illustrated, and justified his previous utterance. In the report which this hearer afterwards sent to a paper the private talk was blended with the public speech. The case of Mary of Bethany (Luke x. 39), who "sat at the Lord's feet and heard His word," and who by her deed of love showed an insight which Jesus did not find in the company of the twelve, raises the presumption that outside of that circle there were intimates of Jesus to whom He could lay bare His heart as He could not to others.

(iii.) In the report of the discourse—the announcement of the betrayal by Judas, the words of comfort, the calls to faith, the command of love, the demand for fruit, and the promise of a speedy reunion, and of the other Paraclete, the assurance of the advantage to Himself as well

as to them of His return to the Father—there is nothing which can be regarded as beyond the circle of Jesus' interest and knowledge in the Upper Room. It is the familiar filial consciousness which finds expression. The announcements of the Passion in the Synoptists were always accompanied by the assurance of resurrection; and this implied a renewed intercourse, if under other conditions, with His disciples (cf. Matt. xxviii. 20). The Baptist declared that the Messiah would baptize, not with water only, but with the Holy Ghost, and with fire (iii. 11). And Jesus recognised the operation of the Spirit in His own ministry (xii. 28), and promised His disciples the Spirit, who would speak in them in times of persecution for their defence (x. 20). After the Resurrection the disciples were expectant of the power from on high, the descent of the Spirit (Luke xxiv. 49; Acts i. 4, 5). If the Spirit's operation in the apostolic Church presents a double aspect, the abnormal spiritual gifts (including the prophetic referred to in xvi. 13) and the inward enlightening and renewing influence, it is not at all improbable that the latter conception was present in the teaching of Jesus as well as the former. Wendt's objection to the last clause of xvi. 13 seems invalid. The prediction of Judas' betrayal, to which he also takes exception, is paralleled in the Synoptics. While we must admit a theological pragmatism in the Gospel, it is not necessary to find in xiii. 21-30 the "purpose to lay an express emphasis on the fact that Jesus was not deceived and outwitted by the traitor" (*op. cit.* pp. 161-2).

(iv.) Recognising that there are probably various strands in the discourse, it must be admitted that after rearrangement of several of the passages there is a continuity and consistency in the argument which makes it impossible for the most part to offer any detailed analysis; but there are verses here and there which do not fit into their context,

or betray so distinctly the evangelist's rather than Jesus' own standpoint, that we may with a certain measure of confidence affirm that they did not belong to the original discourse. In chapter xiii. verse 19 betrays the writer's pragmatism, as does xiv. 29. Is it likely that Jesus explained to His disciples that He had uttered the prediction, not because it was rooted in, and grew up out of, the occasion, but in order that in the future the fulfilment might confirm their faith? Possibly in both cases the evangelist's explanation was changed from the third to the first person, and so made to appear a saying of Jesus (such explanations are found throughout the Gospel; e.g. ii. 21, 22; xii. 33). Wendt connects verse 20 with verse 17, and gets rid of the intervening verses as an interpolation; but the connexion he suggests is rather far-fetched; and if we regard verse 18 as authentic, verse 21 should immediately follow it, and verse 20 must appear the interpolation. Not only is it inappropriate to the context, but it is similar to the saying, Matthew x. 40, which is in what seems the proper setting. Verses 34 and 35 might appear an intrusion also, as Peter's question in verse 36 seems to follow on Jesus' declaration in verse 33; but it is probable that it took Peter some time to realise the import of Jesus' words, and he interrupted at a point unsuitable for his question. In chapter xiv. verse 21 takes up the thought of verse 15, and the intervening verses seem, if not an interpolation, yet a digression. Similarly verse 26 breaks the continuity of verses 25 and 27; so also xvi. 1 attaches itself naturally to xv. 25, and verse 16 to verse 6. These four passages about the the Spirit (xiv. 16-20, 26; xv. 26-27; and xvi. 7-15) may possibly have belonged originally to another context, and have been inserted here where there were points of contact. The question does obtrude itself, would Jesus give the whole company of disciples teaching about the Spirit so much in

advance of what we find afterwards current in the apostolic Church? Regarding the expanded metaphor or allegory in chapter xv. 1-8 we may ask, as we have already done in regard to x. 1-16, whether it may not have been originally in the parabolic form. It is probable at least that the figure and the interpretation were not so blended together in Jesus' utterance as in the evangelist's report. (v.) The high-priestly prayer of chapter xvii. also presents some difficulties. It is not impossible, or even improbable, that, when the company had risen from the table, Jesus did pray aloud, and so seek to strengthen the disciples for what was awaiting them. The language of the prayer is more like that of a soliloquy in God's presence with no reference to the presence of others than that of public devotion; but we cannot deny the possibility that, moved by His deep feeling, Jesus did lay aside all reserve, and did lay bare His heart before His disciples. We cannot assume, however, that we have the *ipsissima verba*, unaffected altogether by the channel of their transmission, the reflective mind of the evangelist. Yet the prayer does resume the varied teaching that had just been given; and if we can accept that as authentic, we need not hesitate about the genuineness of this utterance. One verse there is, which must be regarded as a gloss of the evangelist's. The writer cannot believe that the theological definition of verse 3 can have fallen from the lips of Jesus. Could He have used of Himself the title Jesus Christ? MacGillivray (*Expository Times*, April, 1914, p. 333), after referring to his personal experience in interjecting an idea suggested by a speaker into rough notes of his speech, concludes, "John, in recording the prayer, must have enjoyed intense spiritual elevation, and it may be this sentence, which ordinarily would be placed in the margin as a pious ejaculation, was from the very beginning a part of the text."

(4) While, with these qualifications, we may accept the report as a whole as authentic, there is very good reason for maintaining that there have been considerable displacements, and that to restore continuity to the teaching we must rearrange a number of the passages. In his *New Translation of the New Testament* Dr. Moffatt inserts chapters xv. and xvi. in the middle of verse 31 of the thirteenth chapter. Chapter xiv. follows xiii. 31b-38, and is followed by chapter xvii. He offers an explanation in his *Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 556. (i.) The words in xiv. 31, "Arise, let us go hence," were a summons to the disciples to rise from supper, and to start for the garden of Gethsemane. While it is probable that as the whole company stood Jesus did offer the prayer contained in chapter xvii. it is extremely improbable that He would then deliver the discourse contained in chapters xv. and xvi. The passage xiv. 25-31 sounds like the conclusion of the discourse. Is it likely that Jesus would have uttered the reproach in xvi. 5, "None of you asketh me, Whither goest Thou?" after Peter had asked the question in xiii. 36, "Lord, whither goest Thou?" or Thomas had made the inquiry in xiv. 5, "Lord, we know not whither Thou goest; how know we the way?" The perplexity expressed by the disciples in xvi. 18 seems incongruous after Jesus' declaration in xiii. 33 and xiv. 18, 19. There is general agreement that chapters xv. and xvi. should precede chapter xiv.; but there is difference of opinion as to the place in chapter xiii. where they should be inserted. (ii.) There are three theories current. Wendt (*op. cit.* p. 101 ff.) would place these chapters between verses 35 and 36. This suggestion ignores the incongruity of having xvi. 18 after xiii. 33, although this is not an insuperable difficulty. The allegory of the Vine in xv. 1-8 follows very appropriately on verse 35; and Jesus' mood of exaltation in verse 31 can be very fitly explained as due to the relief He experienced

when the traitor departed and He was left with faithful disciples. A serious objection, however, is that 36 links itself so closely to verse 33, as has already been indicated. It also "reduces xvi. 29-33 and xiii. 36-38 to the level of mere episodes between xiv. 1-2 and xvi. 27-28" (Moffatt). Bacon places the two chapters between verses 20 and 21; but also puts verses 36-38 after xvi. 31-33. But, unless with Wendt we treat verses 21-30 as an interpolation not belonging to the source, it properly follows verses 18 and 19 (the interruption of the sequence by verse 20 having been already explained); and it is probable that the departure of the traitor did take place before Jesus began fully to unburden His soul to His disciples. The severance of verses 36-38 from verses 31-35 is a further objection. Moffatt's arrangement—chapters xv. and xvi. between 31a and 31b of chapter xiii.—is the same as Spitta's. One objection to this arrangement is that the mood of exaltation which is uttered in verses 31-32 seems probable as an immediate reaction from the withdrawal of the traitor, but it fits into the context given to it in the rearrangement. In favour of it are the following considerations. The incongruity of xvi. 18 after xiii. 33 and xiv. 18, and the introduction of xvi. 5 after xiii. 36 or xiv. 5-6 is avoided; the sequence of xiii. 21-30 and 18-19, and also 36-38 and 31-35, is maintained; the declaration of xiii. 31b, 32 follows fitly on the confidence of the Father's presence and victory over the world expressed in xvi. 32-33, the prediction of Peter's denial appears more probable in the closing conversation than before the more formal discourse.

To the writer accordingly Moffatt's rearrangement commends itself as the most probable. His summary of the discourse as thus rearranged clinches his argument. "After the withdrawal of Judas, Jesus in view of the wine at table (Mark xiv. 25, Luke xxii. 18, Didaché ix. 2) utters the

parable of the Vine (xv. 1 f.), beginning with a special and warning allusion to the recent apostasy of his friend (an unfruitful branch, xv. 2 = xiii. 30-31, xv. 6 = xiii. 27), and urging brotherly love as the bond of life (xv. 9 f., carrying on xiii. 14 f.; cf. also xiii. 10-11, echoed in xv. 2-3, xiii. 17-18 in xv. 4-5, xiii. 18 in xv. 16, and xiii. 16 in xv. 20). The connexion of thought between xiii. 1-30 and xv. grows in fact more vivid as the two passages are set in juxtaposition: thus the love of the disciples suggests to Jesus (xv. 18 f.) the hatred shown them by the outside world, whose persecution forms the next topic (xv 18-xvi. 3), passing over into the compensations for the bodily absence of Jesus from His afflicted followers (xvi. 4-xvi. 33). This stream of counsel and warning closes with a word of triumph (xvi. 33 = xiii. 31b.-32), which runs out into a renewed appeal for mutual love among the disciples. Then follows Peter's protest (xiii. 36-38), exactly as in the Synoptic tradition (Matt. xxvi. 31-35), after Christ's mournful anticipation (xvi. 32). The final discourse of xiv. ends in the prayer of xvii. (cf. xiv. 30 = xvii. 1, xiv. 6 f. = xvii. 2 f., xiv. 13 = xvii. 4). In the solemn pause before the exit—a pause too short for such a discourse as that of xv. and xvi.—Jesus utters this sublime rhapsody of faith, and then (xviii. 1) leads the disciples out to face the end." (*op. cit.* p. 557).

(5) This discussion suggests three considerations of a more general character. (i.) The Gospel so often presents Jesus in a polemic and assertive attitude that it is an immeasurable gain to be able to regard this discourse as for the most part authentic, and thus to become acquainted with Jesus in His more tender, gracious, consolatory and attractive aspect. We may claim that the present object of Christian faith was then all He now is, in historical reality. (ii.) While the discourse would have value "as the Evangelist's inspired interpretation of his real experience of the indwelling and

inworking of the living Christ by His Spirit just as the Apostle Paul's exposition of the Gospel of the grace of God in Christ Jesus." (*Studies in the Inner Life of Jesus*, pp. 372-3), yet it is for the confirmation of faith to be able to regard that experience as the fulfilment by the living Christ of promises, assurances and comforts, given by the historical Jesus. Could there have been such fulfilment in the experience had there not been the prediction in the history? (iii.) Even had John, the son of Zebedee, as presented in the Synoptics, been capable of apprehending, appreciating, and appropriating, and thus preserving and transmitting such teaching, would he, as the close companion of Peter, not so have influenced him as to make impossible the partial presentation of the teaching and work of Jesus, for which Peter as the source of Mark was responsible? Two close companions could not have been the sources of two so divergent streams of tradition.

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