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WHAT MUST HAVE BEEN

TRADITIONAL sites in the Holy Land are generally of doubtful authenticity. Indeed, unless they have the testimony of history and inherent probability behind them, they are to be altogether rejected. The method according to which they may have been manufactured is well illustrated by the answer given me by a Roman Catholic priest on my expression of certain doubts, and indicating disagreement of the sites with the New Testament. "You do not quite appreciate the situation. In the Middle Ages the pilgrims wanted to visit every place. There were often difficulties and impossibilities in the way, but the monks were very accommodating, and simply transported the sites." Such a statement clears the ground, and leaves us free, allows us to examine the incidents in the light of the land, and decide on the probabilities and even necessities in each individual case; indeed, in many instances to determine "what must have been."

For this purpose nothing is more satisfactory than to go over the ground, say, at the north end of the Sea of Galilee, "the cradle of Christianity," with a Greek Harmony of the Gospels in hand (we still prefer Tischendorf, with slight alterations), noting the individual words and movements as recorded in succession. Such procedure brings clearness and conviction of the truth of the Gospel story.

Tell Hum has now been satisfactorily fixed as the site of Capernaum, and starting from that base we have little difficulty in determining the Mount of Beatitudes, the scene of Christ's Sermon, and the place of the choice and ordination of the Twelve. We read in Matthew v. 1: "He went up into the mountain" (*ἀνέβη εἰς τὸ ὄρος*), while in Luke vi. 17 it is stated: *καταβὰς μετ' αὐτῶν ἕστη ἐπὶ τόπου πεδινῶν*—"descending with them he stood on a level place."

At first sight, these two statements seem mutually exclusive, but the site being determined independently, the difficulty vanishes. We cannot accept the traditional site at Kurn Hattin. The distance of twelve miles by road is too great for the narrative, and the company was back in Capernaum before night. The definite article, "the mountain," really indicates the mountain

in relationship to Capernaum, or in fact the ridge extending parallel to the sea between Tell Hum and et-Tabigha, or Capernaum and Bethsaida of Galilee. And here the conditions required by both Gospels are met as nowhere else. The Lord Jesus and His companions went up the gentle slope from Capernaum till the top of the ridge was reached. There the Twelve were chosen, and the Sermon was preached on the level a little way lower down. Matthew walked up with the crowd, and to him that day it was a hill. Luke came down from Cæsarea to view the scene he was to describe, and was impressed with the "level place" on which he looked down from the Roman highway on the adjoining height. Strange to say, the whole ridge is 150 feet below the Mediterranean Sea level, but at the same time 530 feet above the level of the Lake. Another point of note is the fact that some distance further up these undulating hills we find a number of trees designated "asjar el-barakat," or "trees of blessings," but there is no tradition associated with them. Further, it is extremely satisfying that since we indicated this as the true site, even the Roman Catholic guide book has abandoned the traditional Kurn Hattin, and adopted our identification.

With this site once determined, others fall into line. In Matthew viii. 1 and Luke v. 12 we read: *Καταβάντι δε αὐτῷ ἀπὸ τοῦ ὄρους, and ἐν μιᾷ τῶν πόλεων*—"descending from the mountain," and "in one of the cities" there met Him a leper. Now that city was not Capernaum, for they came to it later in the day. They must accordingly have gone down, not the east, but the west side of the mountain, and the town indicated could be no other than Bethsaida of Galilee, or the present et-Tabigha. Was there any special reason for the leper being found there? The site itself answers "yes." The modern name, "et-Tabigha" is simply an Arabic corruption of the Greek *ἑπτὰ πηγαί* or "seven springs." These springs are warm, and to them people come to bathe, seeking cure for skin diseases. At the close of the war we saw crowds living there in tents, having come from various parts for this very purpose. The poor leper would find the waters soothing and comforting, and to some extent he might forget his disease, but a cure these waters could never give him. His disease was more than skin-deep. Alas, we have here a picture of man's treatment of sin to-day—skin-deep! Only where the leper found it is there healing now. He must have met the Lord just at the foot of the mountain, where the road that enters the

village crosses that leading eastward to Capernaum, and along which the company must have passed.

Another "must have been" is associated with the same warm waters. It is set down in Matthew iv. 18, that when Peter and Andrew got their first (or was it their second—John i. 40-42) call, they were casting the "amphiblestron" into the sea. Now this is the circular hand-net, weighted all round, and which when thrown out expands and, falling down, covers the fish. It can only be used where there is good ground, shallow water, and where the fish are fairly numerous. Now the only convenient spot to the west of Capernaum at which this net can be conveniently used is where the fish come in shoals to the warm water flowing into the sea from these springs. The same kind of net is used at the same place even now every afternoon. Besides Peter and Andrew were here at their own home. This was the special fishing ground of their village. Here we can say, "this must have been." Let us further note here that, when we pointed this out to a distinguished New Testament authority, he remarked: "You see what you can get from one word. Had 'amphiblestron' not been named, you could never have told."

When this is accepted, we can then with almost equal certainty decide upon the site of the call of James and John. In Mark i. 19, it is said that "having proceeded a little" (*Καὶ προβῆς ὀλίγον*), the call was given to the brothers. They were mending their nets. Now this is not done in the open sea, and they were near their companions. It was in some sheltered creek, and exactly what is required is found in the first small bay to the east, on the way to Capernaum. Every necessity is met there, and the spot is so fitting for the work and the Gospel narrative, that every visitor is convinced of the accuracy of the inference. This must have been.

Passing eastward, we come in sight of Capernaum, and at the same moment we are arrested by the view of a large circular bay. On our first visit, many years ago, we declared it to be "an ideal out-door kirk." We tested the acoustics, as many have done often since, and found them perfect. Far up the hill the natural tones of a speaker in a boat could be heard with perfect clearness. Then the whole material of the parables spoken, as in Matthew xiii., was spread out before the eyes. Capernaum was near enough for the crowds to come, and at the same time conveniently distant to free speaker and hearers from the bustle

of the city. Here then, Christ must have preached the Sermon from the boat. Every Bible student who has visited the scene is satisfied, and one has actually given it the name of "Christ's Amphitheatre."

We now come to the entrance of Capernaum itself. Just on the shore, a number of large eucalyptus trees are seen. In virtue of the persistent malaria associated with the marshy land at that spot they were planted. When that work was being done, traces of the harbour works of Capernaum were found. If the stones could have spoken they would have told many a tale of cheating, disputing, quarrelling, cursing. It was here, on the harbour steps at Capernaum, that Peter learned to swear. When he landed with his fish, there sat Matthew the publican, demanding his tax of one from every five. "The Galileans were disputatious" (B. Nedarim 48a). Quiet work was never done, especially when both sides were out to cheat. The publicans were considered to be robbers (B. Shevuoth 39a), and tax avoidance was declared to be lawful (B. Nedarim 27b, 28a). And if ever cursing was justifiable, it was when such as Peter the fisherman cursed Matthew the publican. Both, however, learned their lesson in the School of Christ. Matthew was impressed by the teaching "Swear not at all" (v. 34) and passed on the message, and Peter surely gave it up after his great fall and restoration. It is Mark's, or rather Peter's own Gospel, that in this very matter paints Peter in blackest colours. Christ changed them both, and we can even think of Peter and Matthew, after the dinner in Matthew's house (Mark ii. 13, etc.) walking up the hill of Ordination together, and descending the other side arm in arm. These things must have been. They are but a few examples of the light the Land can give on the Old Book.

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