

ARTICLE VI.

BIBLICAL NOTES.

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"Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father" (Λέγει αὐτῇ ὁ Ἰησοῦς· μὴ μου ἅπτου· οὐπω γὰρ ἀναβέβηκα πρὸς τὸν πατέρα μου) John xx. 17.

These words form part of the Saviour's address to Mary the Magdalene (the article always inserted in the Greek) at the sepulchre, on the morning of the resurrection. The meaning, it is well known, is very obscure, and has given rise to various explanations. It is impossible within our limits here to enumerate the different interpretations, and still less the grounds on which they have been maintained or opposed by commentators. The reader will find ample information of this nature in the writings of Lampe, Lücke, Stier, Luthardt, and others.

The view perhaps which has found most currency among general readers is, that Mary at that moment was on the point of embracing the knees or feet of the risen Saviour, as a mark of affection or an act of divine homage. But our Lord, anxious that the fact of the resurrection should be known to his disciples as soon as possible, refused the proffered demonstration, and instead of allowing Mary to consume time in this way, bid her depart at once, and inform the others that he had risen and had appeared to her.

But here the main difficulty of the passage presents itself; namely, how we are to regard our Lord's saying, "For I am not yet ascended," etc., as a reason (γάρ) for his forbidding Mary to touch him. He was standing in person before her, and how, with that evidence of her senses, could she need the assurance that he was not in heaven? The reply to this question has usually been, that he wished to console her for her present disappointment. Although, it is true, he was about to ascend to the Father, as she well understood, he had not yet ascended; and hence, in the interval, she would have other opportunities for testifying her love and devotion to him in the manner now denied to her. But in this case we certainly read into the words much more than they directly or naturally express. It appears singular too that the Saviour should refuse to allow Mary on this occasion to do that which he permitted the other women to do, to whom he showed himself on their return to the city (Matt. xxviii. 9). He gave a similar command to them to go and report his resurrection, and yet did not on that account forbid them to worship or detain him. Further, the language which he addressed to Mary is not μὴ κράτει or μὴ προσκύνει as we might expect on that supposition of the meaning, but μὴ ἅπτου, a variation of

itself suggestive of a different purpose on the part of Mary in offering to touch him, and on his part in interrupting the act.

Meyer, in the later editions of his Commentary on John, proposes another explanation which deserves to be known. It is a different one from that which he adopted in his earlier studies. It is to be observed that this form of the negative imperative implies an incipient act from which the doer is called upon to desist, or one which he shows by some look or gesture that he is about to perform. Mary, it may well be supposed, was in the same perplexed state of mind on the appearance of Christ to her, which was evinced in so many different ways by the other disciples after the resurrection. She had already, it is true, exclaimed in the ecstasy of her joy, "Rabboni," but she may not yet have been certain as to the precise form or nature of the body in which she beheld her Lord. It is he, the Great Master, verily, she is assured; but is he corporeal having really come forth out of the grave? Or is it his glorified spirit, having already gone up to God, but now having descended to her in its spiritual investiture? In this state of uncertainty she extends her hand to assure herself of the truth. She would procure for herself by the criterion of the sense of touch the conviction which the eye is unable to give her. The Saviour knows her thoughts, and arrests the act. The act is unnecessary: his words are a sufficient proof of what she would know. He "had not yet ascended to the Father," as she half believed, and consequently has not the spiritual body which she supposed he might possibly have. He gives her by this declaration the assurance respecting his bodily state which she had proposed to gain for herself through the medium of sense. Her case was like that of Thomas, and yet unlike his; she wished, like him, to touch the object of her vision, but, unlike him, was not prompted by unbelief.

SELF-COMMENDATORY ALLUSIONS IN JOHN'S GOSPEL.

Under this title we refer to the well-known instances in John's Gospel in which he mentions incidents or events that took place which imply something honorary or complimentary in relation to himself, and which call attention to him in that light. It is true, the evangelist does not speak of himself by name in these cases, but since at the time when John wrote every one in the circle of his readers must have known who was meant, the personal reference could hardly have been more explicit if the writer had actually spoken in the first person instead of the third. In addition to the notoriety which the facts of the Gospel history had acquired among Christians near the close of the first century, this fourth Gospel itself furnishes the means of identifying the anonymous beloved disciple with the writer of the Gospel; for the writer mentions this identification in express terms in xxi. 20, 24. For this reason, too, it is not very pertinent to say that John suppressed his name in these passages, altogether out of modesty; for, though it may have been slightly less obtrusive to withhold the name,

it is evident that his connection with the acts or words referred to was not thereby concealed, and hence that he was not kept by fear of this publicity from making such allusions to himself. This freedom on the part of John appears at first sight to be at variance with the usual reserve of the New Testament writers. Nor, so far as respects this particular aspect of the question, would the case be different if it be thought that John, in speaking of himself so often as the favored disciple, adopted here a designation which originated with others, and was current before it appeared in his writings.

On examining more closely this class of passages, it will be found in every instance, it is believed, in which John makes the so-called complimentary allusion to himself, that he does so for the sake of explaining something relating, not so much to himself, as to others, or to the course of the history apart from himself, which would otherwise be obscure to the reader. In this fact we have perhaps an adequate explanation of the peculiarity which has been pointed out.

John states, for example, that at the last supper the disciple whom Jesus loved reclined on the bosom of the Master, the place of the highest honor; and the reader understands that John is meant as readily as if he had named himself. But this notice evidently is not for its own sake. That the reader may know how Peter could beckon to John, and John in compliance with that intimation could ask Jesus who was to be the traitor and receive an answer without being heard by the others, it must be stated how the parties were arranged on this occasion. Hence the evangelist mentions that in consequence of a special affection which the Saviour was known to entertain for him, it was his privilege to be reclining at table directly in front of Christ (*ἐν τῷ κόλπῳ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ*) and therefore, by simply throwing back his head upon the breast of Jesus (*ἐπιπεσὼν δὲ ἐκείνος ἐπὶ τὸ στῆθος τοῦ Ἰησοῦ*), he could ask the question and be answered without its being noticed by the other guests. The fact of John's occupying this place, it is true, might have been stated without assigning the reason for it; but the *why* in this instance was almost inseparable from the fact because we need to know why John was the only one of the disciples through whom Peter could gain the information which he sought.

John brings himself to view in a similar manner in reporting the words which the Saviour spoke from the cross relating to the care of his mother: "When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home" (xix. 26, 27). In all probability Joseph the husband of Mary was no longer living. It is certain, however, that Mary had other sons, step-sons at all events, who under ordinary circumstances would have been her natural guardians, and Jesus had other disciples, who, though scattered in that hour of peril, were still devoted to him, and would have been not unworthy of such a charge. Yet passing over all these, the

Saviour selected John as the one of this entire number to whom he committed the heart-stricken mother, in words so full of tenderness and love. It was "the disciple whom Jesus loved," we are told, on whom he conferred this responsibility and honor; and how readily do we think of that love as the ground of this distinction, and as the evangelist's own recognized reason for his being so preferred to others. With any other view the more obvious statement would have been simply that Jesus saw John, or saw one of his disciples, standing near the cross on that occasion.

Again we read in John xx. 1, 2, that Mary the Magdalene on coming to the sepulchre, and finding the stone which had closed its mouth rolled away, hastened "to Simon Peter, and the other disciple whom Jesus loved," in order to inform them of what had taken place. It does not appear that she went to any of the other disciples at this time. The eminence of Peter among them explains why she sought him thus promptly, and certainly the well-known affection of Christ for John would be a reason for carrying the important news also to him. It is impossible not to feel that the evangelist, in this reference to himself, was thinking of Mary's motive for coming to him with her tidings, arising out of her knowledge of Christ's special friendship for him. This tacit explanatory force of the clause makes it altogether pertinent here. In fact some of the interpreters admit it in this instance who overlook or deny it in other places.

The example of this usage in John xxi. 7 may seem to be more doubtful. The Saviour standing at a distance on the shore of the sea of Galilee showed himself to his disciples as they were fishing on the lake by night; but he was not at once recognized by them. The first who made the discovery was John; and that is stated by saying "the disciple whom Jesus loved [as if endowed with some power which the others did not possess] saith unto Peter, It is the Lord." Peter, then, with characteristic eagerness, leaped into the sea, and swam or waded to the shore where Jesus was. Did the Saviour reveal himself in a special manner to John at this time? And does John mean to intimate by speaking of Christ's love to him, that it was on this account that Jesus granted to him this more speedy recognition of the common Lord and Master? Or is it possibly a finer thought still which has introduced the parenthesis here? Love is quick-sighted, as well as strong: the love here was reciprocal. That it should be John whose eyes made out the loved form through the darkness sooner than the others might almost be expected, from the union of soul and spiritual affinity between them. In John's writings, above all others in the New Testament, such a thought may be allowed to be not out of place. One has to choose between some such explanation as this and that of an almost unmeaning, not to say egotistical, repetition of the phrase.

The passage in which John makes his own personality most prominent occurs near the end of the Gospel. The scene brings us again to the shore of the lake. Jesus and his disciples are there. Three times (answering to the number of the denials) the Lord has put the question to Peter:

"Lovest thou me?" And Peter has replied to each question: "Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee"; with an appeal at last to Christ's omniscience that he was sincere: "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." Peter was sincere, but must be admonished that severer trials of his fidelity awaited him, and he was to be prepared for them. In enigmatical terms the Saviour held up to him a confused vision, in which old age and febleness are seen struggling in vain against violence and power, and instruments of torture and chains and a martyr's death are shadowed forth to him. "Verily, verily I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God" (xxi. 18, 19). Just then, with his mind full of such images, it is related that Peter, happening "to turn about, sees the disciple whom Jesus loved, following; which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee? Peter seeing him, saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do" (xxi. 20, 21)?

At first sight it might appear as if this minute account of John's personal relations to Christ was without pertinence or interest in this connection. But does it not throw light on the spirit of Peter's abrupt inquiry respecting the fate of John, and explain to us also why the Saviour replied so sharply to his question? "If I will that he tarry till I come," was the Lord's answer, "what is that to thee? Follow thou me." This allusion by John to the marks of special favor by which Christ had distinguished him — does it not read out to us certain unuttered thoughts in the mind of Peter at that moment, serving to account for John's apparent digression, as well as the severity of Christ's answer? Such, then, is to be my sad experience — may have been Peter's silent reflection, — but this favorite of the apostolic circle, who has enjoyed such distinctions, is the same partiality to follow him and exempt him from trials? It is evident that our Lord rebuked Peter's question as one of impertinent curiosity, and certainly it deserved that censure the more if mixed with it there was some feeling of jealousy towards John.

ARTICLE VII.

NOTICES OF RECENT PUBLICATIONS.

GERMANY IN THE LIGHT OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD.¹ — Whatever judgment may be formed of individual parts or of the general tendency of the work whose title is given below, every one must be surprised at the

¹ Deutschland Einst und Jetzt im Lichte des Reiches Gottes. Von Dr. W. Hoffmann. • Berlin: Stilke und van Muyden; London: Asher and Co., Trübner and Co. 1868. Price, 2½ thaler.