

ART. IV.—NOTES AND COMMENTS ON JOHN XX.

No. III.

WE arrive at ver. 3, and address ourselves to consider some verbal details of the text in that verse and some verses which follow, and then to pause for reflection on their contents.

It may be noticed in passing that the Greek text before us in this neighbourhood is remarkably free from various readings—at least, from such various readings as in the least degree call for comment in such a study as this. The margin of Scrivener's Testament shrinks to a narrow compass here, giving only seven variants, none of them of the least practical moment for our purpose, through the first twelve verses of the chapter. This is a relief to the reader who is, above all things, looking for spiritual edification. Not that even the minutest details of a critical "apparatus" are to be despised or regarded with impatience from another view point; they are witnesses to the mass of material which exists for the determination of the text of the New Testament, a mass (need I say?) incomparably greater than that which survives in the case of any classical author. Still, it is not unwelcome to find that our examination of some passage of peculiar sanctity and glory need not be interrupted by the note which registers some itacism, or the presence or absence of a subscript iota, or the like.

Ver. 3. *So Peter went out* (ἐξῆλθε). That is, he left the house where he was lodging, or he left the city gate, or the word very naturally includes both. The gates of Jerusalem were not shut, apparently, at the time. The Master and His followers had found no difficulty in leaving the city on the night of Thursday, though undoubtedly it was late when they walked to Gethsemane. The vast concourse of the Passover necessitated such laxity.

If ἐξῆλθεν includes a reference to the *house*, that house very probably was the Passover-abode of St. John. Not that it would be a house of his own; that would be a possession most unlikely in the case of a Galilean countryman. But St. John's connection with Jerusalem had something special in it; he was "known" (γνωστός) to the high priest (xviii. 15), and it is at least very possible that near kindred of his were domiciled at Jerusalem, and that, if so, he lodged with them on his visits there.

So Peter and his friend *went out*, and now *they were coming to the tomb* (ἤρχοντο εἰς τὸ μνημεῖον). The Greek tense and preposition indicate that they were on the way, and now nearly there—not merely in a direction to reach the place, but

almost arrived. They had left the northern gate, and were perhaps not a hundred yards on the road from that "green hill" which to us is "far away," but close to which was the Arimathean councillor's garden wall.

Ver. 4. *So they were running, the two together* (Ἐτρεχον). Either they had been going at full speed all the way, or the nearness of what they craved to see now quickened their pace; but the former alternative is more likely. And now, near the goal, the other disciple προέδραμε, ran in advance, took a start forward (we observe the aorist, of course) *quicker than Peter*. We do not read the reason why, though it is he who writes. "Because he was the younger man" is an account sometimes given; but we know nothing at all of the ages of the Apostles relatively to one another. Tradition and pictures commonly make St. Peter an elderly man beside the Lord Jesus and beside St. John; but it is at least as likely that the company were much of an age with one another and with their blessed Leader. In xxi. 18, if I have at all read aright the bearing of the words there, "when thou wast young,"¹ Peter is regarded by his Master as a young man still. Did not the feet of Peter flag because his heart was heavy and his conscience heavy-laden? It was less easy for him than for John to hasten to that tomb to which he had, so it might have seemed to his troubled soul, almost betrayed his Lord. However it might be John outran his friend, *and came first to the tomb*—to the scene which still, no doubt, bore traces of the presence and then of the flight of the sentinels, who not very long before, perhaps not an hour before, had been so sorely scared by the rocking of the ground and by the angel's glory, and had rushed in confusion into the sleeping town. All was silence now. And now, *stooping from the side* (παράκλυσας), *he sees lying the linen cloths*.

Such a *sideway* stooping is implied by the structure of the sepulchre. It would be the only way of looking into a horizontal cavity, through a low orifice, without so placing the body as to get in the observer's own light. As it was, he got a view of the interior, and this was what he saw, in the twilight of the cell, doubly dusky in the early morning shadows: τὰ ὀθόνια κείμενα, the long folds, or strips, of fine, white linen (ὀθόνη) lying in the grave-niche. This was not what should have been had the sacred Body been still there. *Then* he would have seen a solid white mass, an ample roll; *now* he found a length of laid-off linens, thin and empty. And here, of course, was part of the mystery and surprise: the Body was gone, but the winding-sheet was left!

¹ See the CHURCHMAN of April, 1891.

Of this Mary had said nothing; her eyes and mind had observed only the removal of the stone, and her account would prepare them to find merely a vacant grave. So it was an unlooked-for riddle, what was there, as well as what was gone; and with that sight and its perplexity there stole perhaps the first subtle ray of resurrection hope into the mind of John. It was indeed a disappearance, but not a mere disappearance—certainly no hurried “snatching” of the elaborately enfolded corpse. The long, long linens had been disengaged completely, and left in the place where what they held had been.

He did not go in, however. Why not? There is not much need to ask anyone who has ever looked into or even upon the coffin which conceals a beloved form, or has visited the recent grave which has received that coffin. No commentary is wanted by such readers to explain St. John's look, but refusal to step, into the tomb of his lost, dear Lord and Friend. But with that simple reason of the bereaved heart others no doubt mingled. John was in a conflict now of grief and *wonder*, and thought as well as sorrow may have preoccupied him and left him motionless for the moment. But however, he *says* nothing about his reasons, and how can we analyze them all? Very subtle is the influence of character or circumstance; we should need to know John's character and Peter's far better than even we do to be able quite to tell what checked the one and what impelled the other at that narrow door. But none the less important is it to take note of these unexplained details, just because they are unexplained. Coming one after another as they do, set down thus so simply and without anxiety, yet minutely, they carry the very tone and accent of the eyewitness. We seem to stand there watching; the whole motion of the scene is before us; all is near, real, natural, visible. And then we remember that this fourth Gospel (whoever wrote it) is no piece of modern literature, written in our age, when imagination has trained itself, more or less consciously, into an almost morbid activity, not least in the way of reconstructive narrative. It is the work of a far simpler and less self-conscious age, written (as we remarked in a previous number) centuries before the art of successful imitation of fact in fiction had developed itself, even in the centres of human culture. This quiet, while emphatic, minuteness of detail in a scene which yet the writer regards as vastly important would be, if I judge in the least aright, a literary impossibility in the first or second century, even for a trained *littérateur*, if the writing were not a record of observed fact. As it is, it is just the diction of him who knows that “that which our eyes have seen, and our

hands have handled, concerning the Word of the Life, *that we declare unto you*" (1 John i. 1, 3)—and for a reason which lifts a narrator to a very different moral level from that of calculated fiction—"that your joy may be full; that ye may believe that this Jesus is the Christ, and that, believing, ye may have life in His Name."

Ver. 6. *So Simon Peter comes, following him, and went into the tomb.* Perhaps only a few minutes or even moments intervened. The backward Apostle cannot have been far behind his friend, who probably, as we saw, had run in front only when both were near the garden.

And now, at once, Peter stoops and enters. Again we conjecture the motive. Why did he pass in, and leave John at the door outside? There was something characteristic in the motive, for we remember the parallel action, xxi. 7, where Peter is the disciple to hurry to the shore. In this case was not the heart whose intensity of emotion checked the feet on the way, just the heart to find itself unable to linger a moment when the feet had reached the goal? However it may be, here again is the touch of historical, not poetic or constructive, detail.

And he views the linen cloths lying. He takes his view, he gazes: *θεωρεῖ*, far more than *βλέπει* (ver. 5), means a deliberate look—the look of one who is taking in the scene and something of its significance. And what does he say about it? For indeed we seem to hear him speaking from within the cavern, and telling his friend outside, point by point, what he finds. "Yes, here are the winding-sheets as you saw them; and here, too, what you did not see, is the napkin, the *sudarium*, which was fastened round His head. It is put here, or left here, apart, by itself; not thrown on the rest, but rolled up (*ἐντετυλιγμένον*), in a separate place (*εἰς ἓνα τόπον*)."¹ *He views the linen cloths lying, and the napkin that was over His head, not lying with the linen cloths, but apart, rolled up, and put in a separate place.*

Here were fresh signs of something very different from what they and Mary had feared. Here was no hostile invasion of the grave, no rough and careless removal; rather all the marks of order and attention—we might almost say of neatness. If, in that moment of profound feeling, there was time to think (and thought often goes quickest at such times), John might have thought how entirely unlike this was to the work of enemies, and that to remove the body at all was extremely unlike the work of friends. Who would have done it? Joseph of Arimathea—the very man who had laid the shrouded body

¹ Literally, of course, "into one place;" brought to it, and laid in it.

there with such reverent pains? Any other members of the circle of disciples or supporters? Such a thought as this last most certainly would not have occurred to John, in the entire absence of probable motive. All alike were unexpectant of a resurrection; all alike were in the depth of distress and disappointment, and probably also in much alarm for their own safety. All, if they had leisure or courage for much such reflection, must have been thankful that their beloved Master had found (by no means of theirs, for they had none) an honourable burial. Certainly, in any case, *they* would not have stripped the cloths away.

Enemies had not so gently unwound the corpse. Friends would not have unwound it at all.

Ver. 8. So, with the dawn of a blissful hope in his soul, and probably with a sudden throng of memories in his mind—memories of words spoken by Jesus, and of prophecies He had half explained—the *other disciple, who came first to the tomb, went in.*

And he saw (εἶδε). Here is a third verb, with βλέπειν and θεωρεῖν. And it is used in its proper place: ἰδεῖν tends to indicate a sight which is also intelligence. He saw the facts and their meaning.

And believed. Here was infinitely more than an empty grave, an absent corpse, an unused winding-sheet, a folded napkin. Here was—resurrection. He believed, he accepted without direct sight the certainty that there was life here, after death. He believed the *fact* that Jesus lived again, and he believed the *truth*; he recognised a Divine fact, a fact of prophecy. For how does he proceed?

Ver. 9. *For not as yet did they know the Scripture, that of necessity He would rise from the dead;* that by a supreme necessity, in the predestination of the eternal plan of Messiah's work, He would die and rise again.

The Scripture (τὴν γραφήν), a singular which seems almost always in the New Testament to refer to some one *passage* of the Old. We are not told what "scripture" to St. John just then shone out as *the* Resurrection promise *par excellence*; but as we read the Pentecostal sermon of his friend (Acts ii.), we may well suppose that Psalm xvi. may have been the place.¹ But whatever "the scripture" was, "they" had not understood it. But now John—at least John—did. The ray of fulfilment lighted up the prophecy. The fact, once seen, began at once

¹ The "Scripture" for a *third-day* resurrection is undoubtedly, on our Lord's own testimony, the narrative of Jonah. But the third day is not immediately in view here.—The testimony of this brief passage to the apostolic belief in definitely predictive prophecy is very impressive, by its very passingness.

to kindle into the glorious truth. The grave was vacant, and so vacant that Jesus had not been lifted away from it by other hands; He had *left* it. And so at once the strangely-hidden secret was solved; the impossible, the incredible, the unwelcome had become the glorious truth of life. Jesus, the dead, was risen.

He believed with a faith decisive and new, as an experience in his mind. What a wonderful candour there is in the admission, "as yet they knew not"! This aged saint and prophet does not shrink from telling the world that for three long years, spent in his Saviour's company, he had laboured under an immense mistake about that Saviour's work. He had laid his head upon the breast of Jesus Christ, and yet had never understood that He had come on purpose to die and to rise again. This is no ordinary frankness; it is, in fact, nothing less than the simplicity of transparent truth, the truthfulness of a man to whom the reality, the glory, the blessedness of his Master are so precious that he cannot pause a moment to think of his own reputation in telling his Master's story. Rather, he is glad to recall the contrast, because it was even more happy than humbling—the contrast between his own strange blindness in the old days and the sunrise of joy and life upon which he now entered, and which he owed entirely to his Lord. We are welcome to know anything, everything, about John's slowness, dulness, oblivion, ignorance, about his poor insight into Scripture, his earthly view of the Kingdom, his temporal ambition, his unbelieving despair, if the contrast may only lead us, for whom he writes, and whom he loves by anticipation as fellow-believers, to a full view of the sacrifice, the victory, the life, the love of the Lord Jesus Christ. "He knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe."

So, with all the quiet simplicity of truth, he closes this part of the story. Ver. 10: *So the disciples went away again to their own abode* (πρὸς ἑαυτοῦς). That was all—all, at least, that we are to know for the present. We have seen them in the moment of their first faith long enough to confirm our faith; but how they felt, what they said, on the way home and at home, what Peter said to John about the denial in this new light, and what John said to Peter, what Mary felt and said when they met her beneath the roof of John's abode, all this we do not know. It is all written, not for effect, but for fact; for truth, for faith, that we too might believe.

For my own part, after tracing out again the details of this section of St. John's story, one thought comes uppermost in the mind—the thought how invaluable to the inquirer after Jesus Christ, and also, at least as much, to the believer in Him, are the strong, definite lines of the *narrative* of His

triumph. Here we have been standing almost entirely aside from explicit Christian doctrine, and looking simply at events. Some of them have been very small events in themselves: the grief and hurry of one affectionate woman; the actions of curiosity and search on the part of two perplexed and anxious men; and then the fact that they had mistaken certain venerable writings; and then their quiet retirement to their abode again. No instruction; all narrative.

For that very reason, how invaluable it is in its proper place! How good it is for me, for many reasons—for reasons the very deepest—to be able to touch this paragraph, and handle it, and feel in it the texture of mere fact; to find myself in contact, not with a poetic cloud, however coloured, but with the angles of the Rock of Ages! The material is hard, for it is solid—hard with a hardness which sustains, not wounds. It is the rock—it is indissoluble fact. I take no pains to make it stronger; I neither can nor need; it is *fait accompli*; Jesus is risen.

Why is this fact-character of the Gospel so very valuable to me?—this objectivity, this view of spiritual truth as bound up for ever with events which really happened in time and place, quite external to me and independent of me?

It is so because, on the other hand, my need of the Gospel is a thing so profoundly *internal*. I know, with the most direct of all sorts of knowledge, I know as an inner fact, my essential need of a SAVIOUR. I know my sin, and I know my want. There is that in me which asks, and must ask till satisfied, for pardon and for holiness. And this asking is prompted by more motives than one. First, as regards the question of pardon, there is the conviction (very plain, stern, and unpoetical) that without pardon there is danger—danger of an indefinitely awful sequel to the fact of unforgiven sin. And then, in a similar way, the desire for victory over sin, and the liberty of holiness, arises in part from a very plain, stern source—from the fact that sin met with compromise and surrender is a hopeless bar between me and the possession of the peace of God. And then, in harmony with these inner facts, springing up with them, yet from an even greater depth, there are other reasons. Somehow I know that I, am made to know God and to love Him, and that the heart will not rest until it rests in Him.¹ It stands to reason, in the deepest sense of reason. What but the Maker Himself, for the thinking thing which He has made, can be the point of rest, the ultimate centre, the never-disappointing satisfaction, the spring never dry, the tree which bears fruit every month?

¹ Augustine: *Confessiones, ad init.*

Positively or negatively, the human soul is always athirst for God, for the living God. Probably we, writer and reader, have known more or less of both phases of that thirst; the negative consciousness, as we get conscious of the insufficiency of anything less than Him for rest and joy; and then the positive consciousness, when grace shows us that the Lord God, known, trusted, embraced, is "all our desire"—our joy which cannot waste, our pure and purifying happiness.

So the soul asks, implores, the pardon which it knows it will never merit. It asks, it thirsts, for the knowledge of the eternal holy and happy One, and, in that knowledge, for a joy which is absolutely unattainable elsewhere.

Now, the very fact that these realities of the inmost heart of man are what they are, *internal* facts, is what gives its peculiar preciousness to the objectivity of the Gospel, to its character as a compact mass of *external* events, achievements, done apart from us, done for us, by Another.

When the soul cries out for God, it implores not an echo, but an answer. A mere series of impressions roused by another series will not satisfy. No webs woven out of "inner consciousness" will bear the strain of the consciousness of conviction. No Saviour constructed out of the elements of self can be the Saviour from self, from the sentence hanging over it, from the bondage of sin within it.

Here the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ comes in as it is. From the exactly opposite quarter it comes to meet me at the precise point of my need. It is not aspiration or emotion. It is fact—outside, objective, the work of Another; done in history; done without thought, or choice, or leave of mine; while I was non-existent; while I was yet to be, and was foreseen as to be, in my sinfulness and extreme unworthiness of such benefits. And this work of Another, what is it? It is the death and triumph of the eternal and incarnate Son of God.

This is history, recorded and attested event. It no more depends on me for its truth than does the history of Cæsar, or of Cromwell. External to me stands this wonderful fact, Jesus Christ, slain and risen. I do not make it, but I take it.

He is, indeed, "the thing that I long for"; the propitiation for my sin, proved to be such by His resurrection after His altar-death; the adequate Cause, wholly by Himself, why even I, touching Him, united to Him, should be not only forgiven but accepted with Divine joy by the Father who infinitely loves Him.

He in His Person and Character is indeed competent to fulfil my heart's desires for a satisfying Object of pure and worshipping love—"chief among ten thousand, altogether lovely."

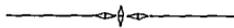
And this wonderful and all-blessed Lord thus satisfies the human soul because He is not the echo but the answer. He is not a splendid figment of speculation. He is revealed through events of history; in lines of fact which do not depend on our moods, and cannot change. He is revealed in a historical though supernatural birth, a historical though sinless life, a historical while propitiatory death, a historical while supremely miraculous resurrection. As He is history, He stands clear of this sinful, anxious, inner world of mine; and He is therefore able, as He is the Truth, to be its refuge and its peace. Jesus Christ, immovable in Himself, is my point of rest, my spring of life.

Such are some of the thankful thoughts with which we may stand by the empty sepulchre while the Apostles walk away to their own homes. The garden, the rock, the cave, the winding-sheet, are no scene of romance; they are historical: "Handle them and see." Jesus Christ has actually suffered and risen again in anticipation of my needs, and of my complete incapacity to meet those needs out of the resources of self.

Let us often walk to Joseph's garden accordingly. When the heart is heavy and weary, casting about for peace, or when it is preoccupied and earthly, and refuses to attach itself in conscious, affectionate faith to its one and perfect hope, Jesus Christ, then let us not go deeper into the heart, for it will only disappoint us, but let us return to the facts—to the Person who is our Life. Let us stand again beside the open and vacant sepulchre, and see again and trust again the risen Son of God. There let us leave behind alike self's sinfulness and its imagined righteousness, and calmly give thanks for His great glory and accomplished work, joining Bonar as he sings:

"Thy works, not mine, O Christ,
Speak gladness to my heart;
They tell me all is done,
They bid my fear depart."

H. C. G. MOULE.



ART. V.—THE SERVANT OF CHRIST.

NO. I.—PRUDENCE.

IT may be taken for granted that all sincere Christians are eager to seize hold of our Lord's own words as the simple rule of their life. They know, of course, that what has, in the providence of God, been handed down to them of His discourses does not represent the hundredth or even the