

Notes in St. John's Gospel.

IT is a standing rule of the British and Foreign Bible Society that its editions of the Scriptures should be issued "without note or comment." This rule is commendable for many reasons, but in spite of it there are plenty of notes in every Bible; thus, in St. John's Gospel alone there are something like fifty. This phenomenon is full of interest and deserves careful scrutiny.

We have to remember, in the first place, the appearance of the manuscript as it left the hand of the writer, whether it was on parchment or papyrus. There were no capital letters, no brackets or marks of parenthesis, no punctuation, and frequently no separation between word and word. Readers can see this for themselves in the British Museum, or in the Library of the Bible Society where the *Codex Zacynthius* is exhibited. The consequence is that the student of St. John's Gospel has to be led by his mind rather than by his eye if he wishes to detect notes, and he soon finds out that they are of different classes. In the second place, we must bear in mind that there is a distinction between the remarks and reflections of the narrator and the original utterances of the Personage Whose words he records, which may have embodied certain explanatory sentences. Then, thirdly, the scene of the Gospel is laid in Palestine, chiefly in Judea, and the people were largely bilingual, if not trilingual, so that the writer may have felt it desirable to give names in two languages. These linguistic elucidations, however, are not strictly archæological; they are adapted to the day in which the book was written, and may as well have been written by St. John as by anyone else. For archæological notes we should look at such a chapter as Gen. xiv., which contains seven notes giving more modern place-names for ancient ones.

1. The linguistic notes are *Rabbi* (*i.e.*, being interpreted, Teacher), chap. i. 38; *Messiah* (*i.e.*, Anointed, or Christ), i. 42; *Cephas* (which is, interpreted, piece of rock, or Peter), i. 43; I know that *Messiah* cometh (who is called Christ),

iv. 25—apparently the woman's own note; *Thomas* (who is called Twin, Didymus), xi. 16—repeated in xxi. 2; *Rabboni* (*i.e.*, Teacher), xx. 16.

There are also certain place-names: *Siloam* (which is, interpreted, sent—forth), chap. ix. 7; *Lithostroton* (Hebrew Gabbatha), xix. 13; place of a *cranium* (which is called in Hebrew Golgotha), xix. 17. The order of the words in these last cases is noteworthy. There has been much discussion as to St. John's interpretation of Siloam. Nehemiah (iii. 15) tells us that the Pool of Siloam was by the King's garden (compare ii. 14—the King's Pool). Perhaps St. John gives the word the natural Greek rendering, because he sees in this "conduit" a spiritual significance. The "Hebrew" here referred to was the current Jewish tongue in which Christ spoke to Paul, and Paul to the people (Acts xxvi. 14, xxi. 40).

Some words are not interpreted—*e.g.*, *Bethesda* (v. 2); *Hosanna* (xii. 13); the *Encenia*, or Feast of the Maccabean Dedication (x. 22); and *Satan*.

2. Notes of the second class are for the elucidation of the narrative. Thus, the Lord says to the woman, "Give Me to drink (for His disciples had gone away into the town to buy food);" in this way only could His request be accounted for (iv. 8). In the next verse there is a note explaining that Jews have no dealings with Samaritans. It might be the woman's remark, but it is probably John's. The note in chap. viii. 6, "this they said tempting Him," etc., is evidently John's. The same is the case with chap. vii. 5, which tells us of the unbelief of the Lord's brethren. Similarly there is a note on the conduct of the blind man's parents (ix. 22), which otherwise would appear rather hard and unnatural. In xiii. 11 we have St. John's comment on his Master's words, "ye are clean, but not all." Compare the note on the knowledge of the servants who drew the wine at Cana (ii. 9), and the distinction between the one Judas and the other in xiv. 22.

3. A third class of notes bears on quotations from the Scriptures of the Old Testament. Thus (ii. 17), "His disciples

remembered that it is written, Zeal for Thy house hath consumed me"; and again, with reference to the Lord's riding on an ass, John adds: "These things the disciples did not know at first, but when Jesus was glorified then they remembered that these things were written of Him, and that they did these things to Him." In xix. 24, where the casting of lots for the vesture is narrated, the fulfilment of Ps. xxii. 18 is pointed out; and, again, in the same chapter, verses 36 and 37 are marked as fulfilling both part of the Paschal ritual and also a sentence in Zechariah's prophecy.

Sometimes it is not St. John, but Christ Himself, who makes a direct quotation from the Old Testament. Thus, in xiii. 18: "I know whom I have chosen, but that the Scripture might be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with Me hath lifted up his heel against Me." So in xv. 25: "But that the word written in their law might be fulfilled, They hated Me without a cause." Again, in xvii. 12: "None of them hath perished (is lost) but the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled." In the light of these passages let us look at chap. xix. 28: "Jesus, knowing that all things were now finished, that the Scripture might be completed, saith, I thirst . . . when therefore Jesus had taken the vinegar, He said, It is finished." Was the reference to Scripture John's note? or was it intended to represent what was passing through the Lord's mind? He knew that all things which were written by the prophets concerning the Son of man were to be finished or accomplished (Luke xviii. 31), and that vinegar must be given Him to drink. This had not yet been done, and that it might be done He saith, "I thirst." St. Matthew tells us that the mysterious cry to God immediately preceded the giving of the vinegar (Matt. xxvii. 34). It may be taken as certain that the latter is the right view. The reference to Scripture was the Lord's. There is another note by our Lord which should be mentioned here—viz., chap. vii. 22—where, in referring to circumcision, He says, "not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers" (*i.e.*, the patriarchs). Doubtless the Jews needed to be reminded

of this important fact, which St. Paul made use of in later discussions.

4. Some of John's notes are references to previous words or incidents. Thus, when the Lord said, "Let these go their way," the writer adds, "That the word which He spake might be fulfilled, Of them that Thou gavest Me have I lost none"; and a few verses later, after naming Caiaphas, he adds: "Now Caiaphas was he who gave counsel to the Jews that it was expedient that one man should die in behalf of the people" (xviii. 14). Compare the reference to Cana (iv. 46) and to Nicodemus (vii. 50). In the case of Mary of Bethany (xi. 2), a note is added referring to an event which was to be described in considerable detail in the twelfth chapter, because of its bearing on the character and conduct of Judas Iscariot. In chap. xxi. 20 Peter sees the beloved disciple following, and John identifies him by a note as the one who had leaned on the Lord's breast, and had said, "Who is it that betrayeth Thee?" (xiii. 23).

5. Some notes of time and place are interesting, not only for their contents, but for the peculiar position in which we find them. John's theology merges into history when the Baptist comes on the scene. We have his testimony (i. 19); then a note as to the place where it was uttered—viz., Bethabara, or Bethany, across Jordan; then we are taken to "the next day," when the Lord is definitely pointed out as Lamb of God, Son of God, a Baptizer in the Holy Ghost; again, "the next day" certain seekers are invited to spend the day with the Lord, and John notes that it was about the tenth hour; once more we have a "next day," when the interview with Nathanael takes place. Here, then, we have four consecutive days, no years or months; three days afterwards we are at Cana, and John observes (ii. 11) on the beginning of signs, of its nature as a manifestation of the Lord's glory, and of its results, that His little group of disciples believed on Him. In chap. iv. 54 he speaks of a second sign which he had just recorded. From chap. vi. 59 we learn that part of a conversation which we could not otherwise have located took place while He was teaching in a synagogue in Capernaum.

Similarly, in xxi. 14 we are reminded that John had been referring to the third of the Lord's manifestations after His resurrection. In all these cases he first records the event, and afterwards indicates its position in the order of time.

6. We now come to a class of notes which help to elucidate statements not clear at the time.

The disciples (*i.e.*, the Apostles and others) had much to learn during our Lord's lifetime. When He spoke of the Temple being raised in three days (ii. 21), they did not understand; but when He was raised they remembered, and they believed the Scripture and the word of Jesus. We know from the other Gospels that this utterance of Christ played a great part at the time of His condemnation, and was twisted against Him; but its true meaning came to light afterwards. So when the Lord spoke of Lazarus sleeping they misunderstood (xi. 13); and with regard to the entry into Jerusalem we are told that the disciples did not understand at first, but when Jesus was glorified they remembered the things written (by the prophets), xii. 16. Again, they did not know what Christ meant by saying to Judas, "What thou doest, do quickly," and John gives two ideas which rose in their minds (xiii. 28, 29). Their ignorance of the Old Testament is referred to again in xx. 9. John also expounds the reference to Peter's death in xxi. 19, adding that Peter thereby should glorify God, while he corrects a current misapprehension concerning his own destiny (xxi. 23).

The note on our Lord's death through His being lifted up (xii. 33) is shorter than that on St. Peter's, but it illustrates two other passages in the Gospel (iii. 14 and viii. 28), and throws light on the double meaning of "lifting up" (see Acts ii. 33, v. 31). The brief note on Jewish ignorance of the fact that "He was speaking to them of the Father" (viii. 27) indicates the writer's desire to make things clear to his readers; and the same is the case in vii. 39, where he expounds our Lord's world-wide invitation to the thirsty: "This He said of the Spirit which they who believed on Him were to receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet, for Jesus was not yet glorified." Our

mind naturally travels to Acts xix. 2 : "Have ye received the Holy Spirit since ye believed? . . . We know not if the Holy Spirit is." Neither of these passages could signify a doubt as to the existence of the Holy Spirit, for it had been plainly taught by the Baptist that the Son of God was to baptize with the Holy Spirit. The mission of the Spirit would be in a special sense the result of the mission and glorification of Christ. Along with these notes may be mentioned the postponement of the seizure of the Lord because "His hour was not yet come" (vii. 30, viii. 20), and the singular elucidation of the utterance of Caiaphas in which he acted unwittingly as a prophet. Jesus was indeed to die, and in behalf of the Jewish race, but His death would tend to unify God's scattered children.

How the writer entered into the mind of Christ is shown not only by the way in which he depicts the Lord's mental disturbance (xi. 33, xii. 27, xiii. 21), but also by the deliberate utterances concerning Christ's knowledge of all things about Himself and His relationship with the Father and the disciples (xiii. 1, xviii. 4).

Such are the notes and comments contained in this precious Gospel. Can it be said that in permitting them to appear John exceeded his duty as an historian? It was his business to write down the things which were impressed by the Spirit on his own mind, and they were written "that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life in His name" (xx. 31). If it be asked, How is it that the Jews did not believe in Jesus in spite of all? he answers in a long section (xii. 37-43) : it was owing to the hardness of some hearts, and to the lack of courage and single-mindedness in others.

Those to whom John wrote seem to have been Greek rather than Hebrew. Perhaps their home was in Western Asia. Did any of them doubt the authority and trustworthiness of the writer? His personality is only slightly veiled. He wrote of what he had heard and seen and his hands had handled (see 1 John i. 1). He occupied a peculiar position both with regard

to his Master, whom he probably attended on the most private occasions referred to, and with regard to Jewish officials, such as the High Priest (xviii. 15); and his testimony was endorsed by others (xxi. 24). The readers must have known much of Christ from other sources, but they welcomed fresh light, and the notes made things clearer. Strike them all out, and you will have lost much. Some readers would have preferred more rather than fewer comments, and we sympathize with them; but John wrote under a sense of Commission. There is only one note which he could not well have written—viz., the last referred to (xxi. 24): "we know that his testimony is true." This voucher must have been added by the elders of whom we read in the Muratorian Canon and other early Christian writings.

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