NOTES ON THE FOURTH GOSPEL.

VI. The Interview with Nicodemus (iii. 1–2).

In this narrative there are two issues quite subordinate for our present purpose and one of primary importance: (1) Nicodemus has often been regarded as an individual anxious inquirer; but Jesus does not treat him with the gentleness that in such a case we might expect; and He addresses him as representing a class, while Nicodemus passes from condescension to incredulity. It is probable that Nicodemus was sent by a section of the Pharisaic party, who, as religious leaders of the people, felt their influence imperilled by the growing popularity of the new Teacher, and thought it might be for their advantage to come, if practicable, to some sort of understanding and alliance with Him. Jesus sternly rejects the proferred patronage, and severely demands an entire change of attitude as the first condition of understanding or taking part in the movement. As He had tested the Sadducees by the cleansing of the temple, so He tested the Pharisees by the demand for the new birth, or the birth of water and the Spirit; and both parties failed to stand the test, even as the people failed to offer the belief which He desired.

(2) If our exegesis is to be at all historical, we cannot find in Jesus' words about the new birth, or the birth of water and the Spirit, any allusion to the ecclesiastical dogma of regeneration, to the Christian ordinance of baptism, or to the Christian experience of the descent of the Spirit at Pentecost. For Jesus was not speaking to Nicodemus in riddles. His reference was to the baptism of repentance John administered, and the gift of the Spirit which John announced as the Messiah's prerogative. Let the Pharisees come to Him in penitence, and with expectation of blessing,

and they would both see and enter into the kingdom. The teaching here is in no way in truth at variance with, although in terms it may be different from the Synoptic; and in this interview with Nicodemus one feels oneself on the solid ground of reminiscence.

(3) But it is generally acknowledged that reminiscence passes soon into reflexion, although there is difference of opinion as regards the exact point of transition. (*a*) The Revised Version begins a new paragraph at verse sixteen, and the writer welcomes the opportunity of quoting so conservative a scholar as Westcott in support of this view.

"This section," he says, "is a commentary on the nature of the mission of the Son, which has been indicated in Christ's words (*vv.* 13, 14), and unfolds its design (16, 17), its historic completion (18, 19), the cause of its apparent failure (20, 21). It adds no new thoughts, but brings out the force of the revelation already given in outline (1–15) by the light of Christian experience. It is therefore likely from its secondary character, apart from all other considerations, that it contains the reflections of the Evangelist, and is not a continuation of the words of the Lord. This conclusion appears to be firmly established from details of expression" (*Gospel of St. John*, p. 54). The case need not be argued further. (*b*) The writer is convinced, however, that the narrative of the interview with Nicodemus does not extend to verse fifteen. Is it at all likely that Jesus would have spoken to Nicodemus about His heavenly descent, or His heavenward ascent by way of the Cross and the Resurrection, when He even with His disciples exercised such reserve of utterance? There seems no doubt that at least verses thirteen to fifteen must be excluded from the story of the meeting with Nicodemus. But are they to be at once reckoned to the evangelist's reflexions? To use Westcott's phrase, "details of expression" bar this hasty judgment. The Son of Man is a

term used of Himself in the Gospels by Jesus only; the evangelist speaks of the Son as the Son of God (*vv.* 17, 18). If Jesus did speak of pre-existence at all, it is not improbable that He described the entrance into the world as a descent from heaven. "Many ancient authorities omit *which is in heaven*" (R.V. marg.), and, whatever may be the balance of the textual evidence, if we are to accept the saying at all as an authentic utterance of Jesus, these words must manifestly be rejected as a gloss, as they are entirely inconsistent with Jesus' conception of His earthly life as relatively a separation from His Father, and His death and resurrection as a return to His Father (John xiv. 12, 28; xvi. 5–7, etc.). The descent is contrasted with the ascent in the lifting up. And the whole thought is quite congruous to the other teaching of Jesus. It bears a resemblance in idea to the saying in i. 51. We may conclude that here we have a genuine *logion* of Jesus, but belonging to another context, at a later stage of the ministry, which has been attracted to this place by association of ideas with the reference in the preceding verse to the earthly and heavenly things. (*c*) Do verses eleven and twelve belong to the story of the meeting? The question in verse ten would form a deserved dismissal of Nicodemus. It is true that the plural is used in verse seven, so that Nicodemus is treated as representative of a class; but in verses 3, 5, 7, 10, the singular is used. Accordingly, these verses in their whole tone, as well as mode of address, seem more appropriate to a public discourse than to an individual interview. If without any irreverence the illustration may be used, we may recall Queen Victoria's complaint that Mr. Gladstone addressed her as if she were a public meeting. A similar incongruity seems to obtrude itself here. That the words are authentic utterances of Jesus need not be doubted, only by an association of ideas not hard to discover they have been attracted

here from some other context. We may summarise the results of our inquiry thus: the interview with Nicodemus is reported in verses 1–10; sayings of Jesus from another context have been attracted by an association of ideas in verses 11–15; the evangelist offers his comments on his report in verses 16–21. This is one of the most helpful passages for the study of the mode of composition of the Fourth Gospel.

(4) Accordingly, at this point we may digress from the detailed discussion to a general statement as to the way in which we may correctly represent the growth of the Gospel. (*a*) It has already been suggested, and reasons have been offered for the suggestion, that the Gospel is a scholar's report of the teaching of the evangelist. Either in a small band of disciples, or in the public assembly of the Christian community, the evangelist dealt with the life and teaching of Jesus. He began with an account of events or report of discourses, just as the modern preacher starts with his text; and then he went on to comment on what he had reported. We cannot throughout the Gospel analyse this teaching or preaching into its components, as we have been able to do in this passage, but we may assume a similar process of composition even where the analysis cannot be made so distinctly and confidently. It is quite probable that neither the hearer nor even the speaker was aware of the passage from reminiscence to reflexion. The scholar reporting his teacher would feel no need for indicating the points of transition; and his conscience would not trouble him for thus blending, or, as the modern critic conscious of his own integrity would possibly say, confusing history and doctrine. So much in extenuation of the reporter's offence, if offence it be; what of the evangelist himself? (*b*) We may conceive the process in his mind as follows: He had not merely a retentive memory, but also an active intelligence; he meditated on

what he remembered; and so gradually, inevitably, and insensibly reflexions attached themselves to, or even modified reminiscences. A non-thinking person is more likely to retain the *ipsissima verba* of a remembered conversation than a thoughtful one; the more active the intelligence, the stronger the influence of meditation on recollection. It is quite credible that when preaching or teaching the evangelist could not always have distinguished the original germ of reminiscence from the subsequent development of reflexion. (*c*) Would he have made the attempt or felt any obligation to make it? He was not a modern scholar, aiming at historical accuracy, but an ancient teacher, conscious of the guidance into all the truth of the Spirit of God, promised by the Master. His reflexions would be to him as much part of the given revelation as His reminiscence. He would confidently claim with Paul that he had the mind of Christ. And great as for us is the significance of the earthly life of Jesus, can we confine the divine revelation through Him to His spoken words alone? We must include the experience of His truth and grace through the Spirit, which has been given to seers and saints. The value of the revelation of Christ in the evangelist is fully tested by the influence the Fourth Gospel has exercised on Christians of all lands and ages. If we may make a comparison, we may confidently affirm that it has probably been more of a spiritual treasure than any of the others have been. We can recover, if not with absolute certainty, yet with adequate accuracy, the history, and we can retain the theology as a valid interpretation of the history of the Word who became flesh.

VII. The Second Testimony of the Baptist (iii. 22–36).

This section requires only a few words. The interview with Nicodemus shows that the need of penitence as a pre-

paration for the blessings of the kingdom had not been adequately recognised; and it is probable that Jesus did at first continue the work of His forerunner, although the actual baptizing may have been done by the disciples. It is also probable that the success of Jesus in attracting the multitudes would arouse the jealousy of those disciples of John, who had not left him for Jesus. Whether his second testimony is given *verbatim*, or has been a little coloured by the channel of its transmission, the mind of the evangelist, there is nothing in his words inconsistent with what we know of him from the other sources. For a former disciple of the Baptist, the renewed witness to Jesus would be of special interest; and his former associates may have been ready to convey it to him. The Revised Version in the division of the paragraphs recognises that at verse 31 the reflexions of the evangelist begin, and both as regards the thought and the language there seems to be no doubt as to the necessity of that conclusion. The Baptist's testimony to the superiority of the Christ, and his consequent greater success, naturally suggests these reflexions on the greater value of the witness of Him Who has descended from heaven than of any earth-born. While the thoughts are the evangelist's, they are rooted in and draw their nourishment from the truth as it is in Jesus; the self-witness of the Son is their source and warrant.

VIII. The Journey Through Samaria (iv. 1–42).

(1) The narrative of the journey through Samaria bears all the marks of verisimilitude. If it is not a record of fact, it is a masterpiece of literary realism. The conversation moves from point to point naturally. The great truth about the universal spiritual worship of God (*vv.* 21 and 23) arises in the mind, and falls from the lips of Jesus almost inevitably in the reaction of His spirit against the religious exclu-

siveness of the woman (and it may be, of His own disciples, who may have expressed some hesitation about taking this route to Galilee, to which, though shorter, some very strict Jews took exception). The declaration in verse 22 is not an instance of Jewish exclusiveness, but an appeal to the woman to recognise the inferiority of her own religious standpoint, of which she was so confident, so that she might be prepared to receive the instruction which Jesus, whom she had repelled as a Jew, desired to impart to her. Since the woman, with her countrymen, thought of the Messiah as the "Converter" or the "Guide," and did not, at the time at least, seem to cherish the political expectations of the Jews, Jesus could reveal Himself to her as the Messiah without fear of the political complications that such an avowal would have involved in Judæa and Galilee. Josephus does tell us (*Ant.* xviii. 4, 1) of a subsequent Messianic insurrection on Mount Gerizim; but that fact does not prove that the conditions were the same at the earlier and the later date.

The way in which the narrative passes from one circumstance to another as determining Jesus' spirit and action shows that a ministry in Samaria was as remote from His purpose as a mission to the Gentiles, not, as the words here (confirmed elsewhere) show, because of Jewish exclusiveness, but because He was dominated by the consciousness of His vocation as the Jewish Messiah, through the fulfilment of which alone He could reach forth to the wider function of the Saviour of the world. Accordingly, He does not embrace the opportunity which Samaria offered, but leaves it to His disciples to enter afterwards into the harvest of which His ministry now was the seed-sowing (*see* Acts viii.). Ready as had been the response to the Samaritans, Jesus had the insight to perceive that the soil was not so well-prepared for the seed of the Word as in Judæa or Galilee among those who were waiting for the consolation of Israel.

The historical probability lends support to the trustworthiness of the record before us.

(2) There are, however, a few points demanding explanation. (*a*) As Jesus was alone with the woman, the record of the conversation may have come to the evangelist either from Jesus, or from the woman; or it may be the evangelist included parts of the story the woman was so eagerly telling in the instruction Jesus Himself repeated to His disciples as the explanation of His unusual action, and its still more surprising results. In verse eighteen there is a statement which raises a difficulty. Moral and spiritual insight, however exceptional, does not include the knowledge of a fact such as that the woman had had five husbands. Jesus was doubtless aware, as He spoke to her, of her moral degradation, and the discomfort that on account of it she may in His presence have been feeling, since her frank confession, "I have no husband," shows that her conscience had been stirred; but the ability to know how often she had been divorced does not seem to fall within the scope of His supernatural endowment. Possibly the evangelist, having afterwards learned the fact from the woman herself may have quite unconsciously, under the influence of his tendency to emphasise the supernaturalness of Jesus' knowledge, repeated this later information as part of Jesus' own speech to her. Or, more probably, the woman herself in her excitement may have failed to distinguish what Jesus said, and what her own conscience spoke in His presence. His words in verse twenty-nine show that she thought Jesus had laid bare all the secrets of her life. (*b*) While verses twenty-one and twenty-three, as also twenty-two, arise spontaneously from the context, the more abstract statement in verse twenty-four, which does not add anything to the substance of Jesus' teaching, may be a reflexion of the evangelist's. Further, the title *the Saviour of the World* used by the Samari-

tans (verse 42) goes beyond anything that the previous record has prepared for us, and may well reflect the faith of a later age and not of this historical occasion.

IX. The Second Visit to Cana (iv. 43–54).

(1) This passage calls for little comment. (*a*) Does verse forty-four mean that Jesus Himself quoted the proverb, "A prophet hath no honour in his own country," as a reason for leaving Judæa, and going to Galilee, or did Jesus' action in the judgment of the evangelist in so doing confirm the truth of the proverb? In other words, are we to interpret the proverb from the standpoint of Jesus or the evangelist? If from the former, the conclusion would be inevitable that Jesus meant by His own country Galilee, but that would be a reason for leaving Galilee, and not for returning to it; and so the saying would not suit the context. If from the latter, then the proverb reveals the evangelist's conviction that as Jewish Messiah Jesus, wherever His early home may have been, properly belonged to Judæa; and this intensified the tragedy of His having to turn from Judæa to Galilee. A parallel thought is in i. 11: "He came unto His own place (τὰ ἴδια) and His own people (οἱ ἴδιοι) received Him not." Does not this standpoint suggest a Judæan rather than a Galilæan author? (*b*) There is no need of assuming that the story in verses 46–54 is a variant tradition of the healing of the nobleman's son (Matt. viii. 5–13= Luke vii. 2–10), as all the details are so different; nor is there any ground for the suggestion that the evangelist is exaggerating the supernaturalness of the cure by representing it as at a distance. If Jesus wrought His miracles in dependence on God, if not always with explicit prayer to God (xi. 41–42), His bodily presence or absence does not affect at all the credibility of the narrative. It is assuredly the modern scholar's standpoint, and not the evangelist's, for

which the one kind of cure would appear more miraculous than the other. (*c*) The answer of Jesus to the request (verse 48) suggests that He was unwilling to repeat in Galilee the kind of ministry which had proved so fruitless in Judæa, the working of miracles which evoked an untrustworthy belief. If we now turn to Mark i. 14 for the continuation of the story after verse 54 in this chapter, we may infer that Jesus' plan was to avoid the working of miracles as far as possible, and to undertake with a few chosen companions a preaching tour in the synagogues of Galilee. For this work the two pairs of brothers were first called, and then Matthew.

(2) We may at this point ask, if John the son of Zebedee was the beloved disciple (the fourth evangelist), and accordingly had been with Jesus in Jerusalem and Samaria, an eye-witness of the ministry there, and had come back to Cana on this second visit, how is it that he was only now called (Mark i. 19–20) from his fishing and his home to follow Jesus and become a fisher of men? Is it not much more probable that one of several Judæan disciples went with Jesus to Cana in Galilee, and remained with Him as long as his companionship was needed; but, when the Galilæan disciples had been called to help in the work of Galilee, returned to his own home to continue the work begun in Galilee, and rejoined the Master only when He came up at the feasts to Jerusalem? (*a*) It is to be noted that while "disciples" are mentioned in chapters two, three and four, no names at all are given, and it is only in chapter vi., when we are in Galilee that the familiar names, Philip, Andrew, Simon Peter (of chapter one) occur. If that fact does not warrant us in confidently asserting that these "disciples" did not include any of the twelve, it forbids our confidently assuming, as is usually done, that they must have been some of the twelve. It is possible that all these were Judæan disciples, who afterwards, except one, fell from their faith, or at least shrank

back from continued companionship, and that the one "faithful among the faithless" in lovingkindness and tender mercy made no mention of their names. Let these suggestions not be dismissed as rash conjectures; for the call as recorded in the Synoptists is unintelligible if it was addressed to men who had for months been close companions. The truth is that we have formed our conception of the disciple company from the Synoptic records, and when we come to the Fourth Gospel we assume without any warrant in the narrative itself, and contrary to the plain meaning of the Synoptic story of the call, that the disciples there mentioned must be some of the twelve.

(2) (*b*) To maintain the historical accuracy of both the Johannine and the Synoptic records, it seems to me necessary to venture on the following historical reconstruction. The ministry of the Baptist had attracted the Galilæans mentioned in chapter i. By their contact with Jesus they had been won to a measure of faith in Him sufficient to detach them from the Baptist, and to attach them to Him. The unnamed disciple was the evangelist. Other disciples there may have been brought in the same way; but these only are mentioned by name because they were afterwards included in the chosen company of the twelve. This first call was to a less constant companionship than the call recorded in the Synoptics. While it is probable that all these men were included in the company who went with Jesus to the marriage at Cana (ii. 2), it is possible that the Galilæans went to their homes. It is to be observed that while "His disciples" are mentioned as going down with Jesus to Capernaum (verse 12), where we meet the two pairs of brothers in the beginning of the Synoptic story, only Jesus is mentioned as going up to Jerusalem for the passover (verse 13). Must the phrase "They abode not many days" necessarily include Andrew and Peter (Philip, Nathanael),

and must they too necessarily be included in "the disciples" mentioned in verses 17 and 22? Is it not possible that they remained in Capernaum, and only rejoined Jesus when called to constant companionship, as recorded in Mark i. 16–20? During this interval of time, between the first visit to Capernaum (John ii. 12) and the second (Mark i. 14) the evangelist and other Judæan disciples alone may have been Jesus' companions, and may have left them when He decided on Galilee as the scene of His further ministry. Does not this help to explain what otherwise is so inexplicable, on the one hand the silence of Mark (with Peter as his teacher) regarding the early Judæan ministry, and on the other the silence of the Fourth Gospel regarding most of the Galilæan ministry, and its almost exclusive attention to work in Judea?

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CONDUCT AND THE KINGDOM

IN these modern times, when the presentation to the mind of striking alternatives as regards contrasted or complementary aspects of New Testament doctrine has become familiar, there seems to have grown fashionable—especially abroad—an exaggerated tendency to look upon the teaching of Jesus recorded by the evangelists as *either* eschatological *or* ethical. It is the purpose of this paper to demonstrate that in a far greater number of references than is generally realised the ethical significance is dominant; in other words, the eschatological idea is spiritualised, and new content is given to popular apocalyptic forms of expression by the introduction direct or indirect of moral conditions.

"The Gospel of the Kingdom," as we may call it with the first age of the Christian Church (Matt. iv. 23), constituted the main theme of the teaching of our Lord. Its purport was wholly, or almost wholly, eschatological—