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*THE HISTORICAL VALUE OF THE FOURTH  
GOSPEL.*

III. THE BETRAYAL.

It has been explained in the first of these papers that it is our purpose, first of all, to examine those sections of the Fourth Gospel which cover ground already traversed by the Synoptists, in order to decide whether the narrative is consistent with the Synoptic narrative, and whether the differences and additions are such as to justify the tradition of the Christian Church that the fourth Evangelist was a personal disciple of Jesus. In the preceding paper we have applied our method to the story of the ministry of the Baptist.

We now pass over the whole story of the public ministry of Jesus, because the points of view of our Evangelist and of the Synoptists are so widely different in regard to it. In the present paper we shall consider the account, given us in the Fourth Gospel, of the Betrayal of Jesus.

The fourth Evangelist agrees with the Synoptists in representing the death of Jesus to have been brought about through the treachery of Judas. He does not, however, record the actual covenant of betrayal made with the chief priests for thirty pieces of silver. But, like Mark and Matthew, he reports the anointing of Jesus at Bethany, upon which, according to these other Evangelists, the agreement made by Judas with the chief priests followed closely. This anointing evidently took place when Jesus was reclining at the table. This is explicitly stated by Mark and by the fourth Evangelist. We find in the Fourth Gospel more particularity of statement than in the other Gospels, and names are given. It is true that it does not mention by name Simon the leper, in whose house, according to

Mark and Matthew, the event took place, but it mentions Martha as serving, and Lazarus as one of the guests at the supper; and whereas Mark and Matthew speak, without naming her, of a woman who came and anointed Jesus, our Evangelist tells us that this woman was Mary, doubtless intending the sister of Martha. With these two sisters he has already made us familiar in the story of the raising of their brother Lazarus. The expression used by the Evangelist to describe the ointment is much the same as that employed by Mark (John—*μύρου νάρδου πιστικῆς πολυτίμου*, Mark—*μύρου νάρδου πιστικῆς πολυτελοῦς*), the epithet *πιστικός*, here applied, being of uncertain meaning. There is a difference between our Evangelist and the other two, in that he speaks of the anointing of the *feet* of Jesus, they of that of His *head*. The former seems more probable when once the feast had begun. The Evangelist specially emphasises that it was the feet, for the order of his words is: “She anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped with her hair his feet.” He adds the little touch, suggestive of his own presence on the occasion, that the house was filled with the odour of the ointment.

Mark and Matthew tell us that there arose a murmuring among some present that the ointment should be thus wasted, instead of being sold and given to the poor. The fourth Evangelist says that this complaint came from Judas Iscariot. Nor is he likely to be wrong in this, for the other two Evangelists place the going away of Judas, to sell Jesus to the chief priests, in close juxtaposition with this incident. Our Evangelist gives us information, peculiar to him, about Judas Iscariot, namely, that he had the money bag, which fact is repeated in xiii. 29. This is a fact—supposing it to be a fact—which would hardly be known outside the circle of the disciples.

We see, then, that this section of our Gospel which records

the anointing of Jesus in the house at Bethany abounds in particularity of detail. The author writes as one who either knew the details or pretended to know them.

We come now to the story of the actual betrayal in the garden of Gethsemane. The intervening events, namely, the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the visit of the Greeks, and the Last Supper, will come before us in later papers.

Our Gospel agrees with the Synoptists in making the arrest of Jesus take place outside Jerusalem. The name Gethsemane, which Matthew and Mark give to the spot is not found in the Fourth Gospel. But the Evangelist calls the place "a garden" (*κηπος*), and tells us that Jesus passed to it with His disciples after crossing the brook Kidron. He adds that it was a place whither Jesus often resorted with His disciples, and this was how Judas knew it. This is a detail that would be known to the select circle, and the mention of it is intelligible if the writer belonged to that circle.

It is a striking fact that no mention is made in the Fourth Gospel of the Agony in the Garden. It is the more striking, as, according to the Synoptists, John was himself one of the three chosen by Jesus to watch while He went further on to pray. We cannot, however, argue that what a writer does not mention he does not know of. Possibly our Evangelist felt that he had nothing to add to what was already written in the other Gospels on the subject, and he may characteristically have chosen not to mention an incident to which his own name attached in the other Gospels.

We come now to the arrival of Judas Iscariot upon the scene. According to the Synoptists, he was accompanied by a multitude (*ὄχλος*) armed with swords and staves, and coming from the chief priests and elders. There is no explicit mention of the presence of soldiers. In the Fourth Gospel, however, it is distinctly stated that there were sol-

diers : Judas having received (1) the band (τὴν σπεῖραν) and (2) officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees. There can be no question that "the band" was one of soldiers, and they were led by an officer called in v. 12 a Chiliarch. A clear distinction is made between the band of soldiers, which would, of course, be supplied by the Roman governor, and the "officers" who were from the Jewish authorities. Our Evangelist tells us that they came with lanterns and torches and weapons (ὄπλων). It may be remarked in passing that the mention of lanterns and torches, of which nothing is said by the Synoptists, suggests that we have here the evidence of an eye-witness. These lights would give a character to the scene which would impress one who was there.

But exception has been taken to the presence of the band of soldiers in the Fourth Gospel. The objection is really a twofold one. First it is said that it is not likely that there were any soldiers at all ; and secondly it is contended that, even if there were some, there could not be so many as the term σπεῖρα, here used, implies.

In answer to the first objection it may be said that not only is it *a priori* probable that there would be soldiers, but also their presence seems to be required by the Synoptic account. Westcott says very pertinently : " It is difficult to suppose that the priests would have ventured on such an arrest as that of Christ without communicating with the Roman governor, or that Pilate would have found any difficulty in granting them a detachment of men for the purpose, especially at the feast time. Moreover, Pilate's early appearance at the court, no less than the dream of his wife, implies some knowledge of the coming charge." Westcott further adds : " Perhaps it is not too fanciful to see a reference to the soldiers in the turn of the phrase ' twelve legions of angels ' (Matt. xxvi. 53)."

According to the Synoptists, the multitude, which came to take Jesus, was equipped with swords and staves. It is very unlikely that the Jewish "officers" who formed the temple guard or police would be permitted by the Roman authorities to carry arms. And if this be so, there must have been Roman soldiers in this "multitude." It is likely enough that the Jewish "officers" had power to effect an arrest in the temple itself, but it may be questioned whether any such power would have been allowed them outside. If the armed power of Rome had been called in, we can well understand the protest made by Jesus (Mark xiv. 48, 49): "Are ye come out as against a robber, with swords and staves to seize me? I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and ye took me not."

I do not think, then, that exception can reasonably be taken to the presence of the soldiery, in the Fourth Gospel, among those who came to arrest Jesus. But then it is urged that the term *ἡ σπεῖρα* which the Evangelist uses proves the narrative to be quite unreliable. For *σπεῖρα* is the Greek equivalent of the Latin 'cohors,' which denotes the tenth part of a legion. It is true that *σπεῖρα* is used in Polybius (11, 23) to denote a maniple, which was only the thirtieth part of a legion, but the use of the term Chiliarch (v. 12), which was the Greek equivalent of 'tribunus,' the commander of a cohort, seems to require us to take *σπεῖρα* in this context, as equivalent to 'cohors,' which would be a body of six hundred men.

Now it certainly does not seem at all probable that so large an armed force as this would have been employed for the arrest of an unarmed man; and if the narrative of our Evangelist made it necessary for us to understand it so, there would be a considerable shaking of our faith in his reliability.

It is possible to take up the position that the Evangelist

does not use the words *σπεῖρα* and *χιλίαρχος* in their technical sense. A serious objection, however, to this is the use of the definite article with *σπεῖρα* the first time the word occurs, for we read : "Judas having received *the* band," etc. If *σπεῖρα* be not used technically, the force of the article could not well be anything but 'the band necessary for his purpose'; that is to say, the band needed to effect the arrest. This interpretation seems unsatisfactory, and it is more natural to adopt the technical meaning of *σπεῖρα*. The force of the article would then be 'the cohort garrisoned in Jerusalem,' in the tower of Antonia. We find the same definiteness with apparently this meaning in Acts xxi. 31, where we read : "Tidings came to the chief captain of the band (*τῷ χιλίαρχῳ τῆς σπείρης*) that all Jerusalem was in confusion."

But it cannot for a moment be supposed that the whole garrison would turn out to effect the arrest of Jesus. There is, however, no difficulty in supposing that a detachment was sent. A detachment acting for the whole might be spoken of as if it were the whole, in much the same way as we, in English, speak of 'the police.' By this term we sometimes mean the whole body of the police, but such a statement as "the police have made an arrest" would be understood to mean that *some* of the police had done so. If we read in a book that a person having got the police went off to effect an arrest, we should not suppose that every policeman in the place went with him. And in the passage before us we need not understand that the whole body of Roman troops stationed in Jerusalem went with Judas.

If, then, we once admit that the Synoptic narrative does not exclude, even though it does not explicitly mention, the presence of Roman soldiers among those who came with Judas to take Jesus, there does not appear to be anything extravagant in the statement of the fourth Evangelist.

We shall now pass on to our Evangelist's story of the arrest. We mark that he does not say anything of the kiss of Judas, which the Synoptists tell us was the sign by which those who were to make the arrest might know which was the person to be taken. The account of the matter in our Gospel is as follows: "Jesus therefore knowing all things that were coming upon him went forth, and saith unto them, Whom seek ye? They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth (*Ἰησοῦν τὸν Ναζωραῖον*). Jesus saith unto them, I am he. And Judas also, which betrayed him, was standing with them. When therefore he said unto them, I am he, they went backward, and fell to the ground. Again therefore he asked them, Whom seek ye? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered, I told you that I am he: if therefore ye seek me, let these go their way: that the word might be fulfilled which he spake, Of those whom thou hast given me I lost not one."

Then follows the incident of the cutting off of the ear of the high priest's servant. Our Evangelist here, according to his usual habit, gives names. He tells us that it was Peter who thus drew the sword, and that the servant's name was Malchus. These are details unknown to the Synoptists, or, at any rate, unrecorded by them. They are details which would be known to the writer, supposing him to have been present at the scene, and also to have been known to the high priest (xviii. 10).

But the historical probability of the scene as described by our Evangelist has been strongly controverted. Schmiedel<sup>1</sup> considers that a book in which, as he says, the meaning of the Eucharistic supper is given a year before it took place, in which five hundred if not a thousand Roman soldiers go backward and fall to the ground before Him, whom they were to arrest, at the words "I am he," and in which a

<sup>1</sup> *Das vierte Evangelium gegenüber den drei ersten*, p. 107.

hundred pounds of spices are applied for the embalming of the body of Jesus, should for these reasons alone be saved from any such misunderstanding as that it is a report of actual events.

We are only concerned here with the second of these objections. We may at once put aside "the five hundred, if not a thousand Roman soldiers," for we do not suppose that the Evangelist means that the whole cohort of soldiers was employed. But Schmiedel would probably still object to the account given by the Evangelist, even if the number of soldiers were reduced to one of not more than two figures.

Now I do not see how it can be reasonably denied that the behaviour of Jesus as represented here is just what the perfect unselfishness and general considerateness of His character would have led us to expect. We see Him ready to give Himself up to the authorities, who demanded His arrest, and to save His disciples from all molestation. There is certainly nothing in the statement made by the Evangelist, that Jesus knew all things that were coming upon Him, that is at all improbable, for the Synoptists report in clearest terms that He had foretold to His disciples His crucifixion and that He had a clear foreknowledge of the treachery of Judas. It is going beyond all reasonable criticism to say that the Evangelist is here making Jesus less human than do the Synoptists. And the scene is certainly graphically depicted, so much so that if the Evangelist be not recording that of which he had had actual experience, we must allow that he was indeed a consummate artist.

We see Jesus first of all coming forward and asking—possibly addressing Himself to the Chiliarch in command of the soldiers—Whom seek ye? This was not a superfluous question. For though Jesus knew the meaning of the kiss of Judas, this was nevertheless no straightforward answer to His question, for Judas had merely greeted Him

as a friend, pretending still to belong to the circle of disciples. There had been no proper statement made which would render the question of Jesus inappropriate. The answer, then, is given: Jesus the Nazarene. And Jesus said: I am He. And then the Evangelist adds: "And Judas also which betrayed him was standing with them." This is a statement which appears at first sight superfluous. But if the writer be describing an actual scene of which he had been the witness, we can understand the impression that must have been made on his mind when the treachery of Judas was thus proved. The kiss which Judas had given his Master could tell the disciples nothing. It was calculated to make it appear that he was still one of themselves, but he is now seen standing with those who have come to take Jesus. He is proved to be a traitor.

And now comes the statement of the Evangelist: "When, therefore, he said unto them, I am he, they went backward and fell to the ground." Now this either took place or it did not. If it did, there must have been some reason for this conduct though we may not be able to discover it; if it did not take place and the Evangelist is only inventing particulars, then this particular invention must have had a reason. And what satisfactory reason, we may ask, can be assigned? The only reason suggested is that it is a design of the Evangelist to extol Jesus and to heighten in some way the dignity of His person and of His commanding presence. This indeed is a fault which is thought by opponents of the historical worth of the Gospel to pervade the whole book. Well, they may be right, but the present instance is a very unconvincing proof of this tendency.

The character of Judas is one of the strangest puzzles in the New Testament. He does not appear to have wished that Jesus should be condemned to death. It has been thought that his purpose was to force Jesus to declare Him-

self, and there may well have been some subtle design, as hard for us to read as the character of Judas himself, in this conduct on the part of those who had come to arrest Jesus. Judas, who, as we read, was standing with them, may have taken the lead in his strange behaviour which the others may have followed without quite knowing why. But the point to observe is that whatever its purpose, Jesus, according to the narrative, was impatient of it. He asked them again : " Whom seek ye ? " And when they repeated their answer, " Jesus the Nazarene," He replied with an obvious tone of just impatience : " I told you that I am he : if therefore ye seek me, let these go their way." If the Evangelist meant to represent this act of the soldiers and of the officers of the Jews as one of homage to Jesus, he strangely contradicts himself by making it very unacceptable to Him to whom it was offered. The rejection of it would imply that it was no true homage ; and if it is no true homage, it can in no way add to or heighten the dignity of the Christ. It seems far more likely that this conduct savoured of an excessive politeness, wholly inappropriate to the occasion and utterly distasteful to Him to whom it was offered ; for plainly He rejected it. I can see no evidence here of any such design on the part of the writer as is attributed to him.

We need not surely lose patience with our Evangelist because he records a fact which we find it hard, if not impossible, to explain.

Again, it cannot fairly be argued that the readiness of Jesus to surrender Himself, as this is exhibited in our Gospel, is out of accord with the mental struggle which the Synoptists depict in what is usually called the Agony in the Garden. For this struggle was over before Judas appeared upon the scene. Jesus knew now that the cup must be drunk ; and the words which the Fourth Gospel puts into His mouth in

His reproof of Peter for using the sword—"The cup which the Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?—are reminiscent of the struggle through which He had passed.

We may remark that our Evangelist, who is thought by those who regard him as unhistorical to carry miracle to excess, says nothing of Jesus healing the ear of Malchus. If he were wanting in this passage to lay emphasis on the divine power of Jesus, as is contended by those who object to his representation of the conduct of the men in going backward and falling to the ground, he loses his opportunity in omitting to mention a proof of it which lay ready to his hand in the pages of St. Luke. Apparently the underlying thought of this section of our Gospel is not the miracle-working power of Jesus, but His perfect self-surrender and readiness to bear all that was destined for Him by the will of heaven. He is ready to bear all Himself, and shows Himself eager to spare His disciples all share in the persecution which He Himself was to undergo. And if it be said that the freedom He gives to His disciples renders nugatory the statement of the Synoptists that they all forsook Him and fled, the answer will be that the freedom extended to them laid upon them the responsibility of the choice between withdrawal from Him and following Him with their sympathy. While He was anxious to spare them persecution, they were only too ready to desert Him through fear of consequences to themselves. Not that we are in a position to judge them. Their conduct was very human, while His was divine.

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