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THE FEEDINGS OF THE THOUSANDS: AN INQUIRY

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PRESUMABLY the last word has not as yet been said on the relationship between the two incidents known under this heading. Will it ever be said or written? Without presumptuously claiming to do either, this present paper is an attempt to move the controversy a step nearer finality. The effort will relatively be less arduous and, in the writer's judgment, certainly more profitable, than a thesis on the Antinomies of St. Paul, the Atonement of Christ, or the Eschatology of the New Testament. Exegetes will probably continue to discuss those matters with, as in the cases of the Revs. G. W. Wade,¹ J. M. Wilson,² and J. R. Cohn,³ more or less unsatisfactory results, whereas the theme it is here proposed to deal with furnishes conclusions which are neither indefinite nor unsettling. Moreover, it essays freshness if not novelty of treatment and eliminates the miraculous element as foreign to its scope.

The old-time and ever-recurring inquiries, therefore, which it is sought to supply with reasonably satisfactory replies, are these: Are the Evangelistic reports of the Feeding of the Five Thousand and Four Thousand respectively duplicates of one and the same fact, or are they separate accounts of two distinct occurrences? And if different are they related, and what is the *rationale* of their divergence and kinship? To these, as to all questions affecting New Testament problems, critics, to the instruction (or confusion) of their readers, differ amongst themselves in their answers. *Tot homines tot sententiæ*. This may be interesting, but it is deplorable; it may be magnificent, but it is not warfare—except in a Balaclava sense. Variety of view may prevent stagnation of thought, but it is precisely this that is needed here. Navigation is less difficult in placid than in tossing waters, and the desired haven is more

¹ "The Death of Christ in relation to Atonement," *The Interpreter*, April, 1912.

² *The Gospel of the Atonement*.

³ *St. Paul in the Light of Modern Research*.

securely gained. Stagnation, therefore, is the *terminus ad quem* of this paper.

Critics, then, are roughly divided into two hostile camps: advocates of the duplicate theory beneath one tent; defenders of the separate accounts under the other. Sheltered within the former are such names, eminent in hermenutics, as Weiss, Neander, de Wette, Holtzmann, Weizsäcker, and others; equally respectable and more weighty are the names of those grouped in the latter—Augustine, Trench, Slater, Salmond, etc. Meyer attaches himself to this group, but with the not very profound qualification that oral transmission had assimilated the two accounts. Even Strauss, through the haze of his Mosaico-prophetic double antitype theory,¹ saw (from Matt. xvi. 9–10 and Mark viii. 19–20) that “in both Gospels, reference is expressly made to the two narratives as relating two different events,” and owned that “this indeed can scarcely be an intentional imitation of the double narrative in the Old Testament [quails and manna],” but the haze deepens as his “told twice over” theory blurs his vision, and he stumbles into the self-contradictory contention that “the author of our first Gospel, as well as the compiler of the Pentateuch, found the same history in two different sources given with somewhat varying details and in a different connection, and took, in consequence, the double narrative of the same history for two histories, and placed them unhesitatingly close to one another.”²

The opinions, however, of commentators from either side are valuable only as representing their own investigations or particular bias. The Scriptural narratives must, after all, be the final court of appeal: Scripture must be her own interpreter. “*Scriptura per Scripturam interpretanda et concilianda*” (Bengel). It is a problem of values which the writers of the narratives can best solve; of adjustment of details which they can best provide. The art, as the duty, of the hermeneutist lies solely in a clear presentment of that solution and that provision. Hence fanciful glosses may be commentary, but they are not art. *Quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus* is art precisely because it reveals, in this

¹ Edersheim (Vol. I, 677) has a pregnant note on this Precedent Theory: “The appeal to the precedent of Elisha is the more inapt, that in common Jewish thinking he was *not* regarded as specially the type of the Messiah.”

² *Life of Jesus* (Vol. II, 252).

connexion, the mind of the narrators, which modernist theories fail to do, obscuring the way thither by uncritical methods of exegesis. Strauss' paradox as quoted above is a fair sample of these methods. The basal canon of exegetic art or scriptural criticism is at once negative and positive: not to read meanings into the text which are textually foreign to it, but to extract those therefrom most germane to its letter and its spirit. This is to lay bare the mind of the inspired author and make (or let) him be his own interpreter, and this I purpose attempting in the cases of the Feedings of the Multitudes. I pluralise the nouns, be it observed, not to start this inquiry with a *petitio principii*, but on the ground that there are two stories (as all must hold) distinct in number if (as some hold) not in character.

These two stories are, then, our *terminus à quo*, the first of which is supplied by all four Evangelists, the second by two only. Before instituting a parallel between them it will serve for clearness to compare beforehand the several narratives in each instance.

A. The Feeding of the Five Thousand (Matt. xiv. 13-21; Mark vi. 30-44; Luke ix. 10-17; John vi. 1-13). St. Mark's account is at once the longest and most graphic, with touches here and there that reveal the unconscious but supreme craftsman and picture the scene vividly to the reader.¹ Thus he only of his three co-Evangelists observes (39-40) the verdant freshness of the grass (*ἐπὶ τῷ χλωρῷ χόρτερι*) and the division of the multitude into companies and ranks,² whereas Matthew has simply *ἐπὶ τοὺς χόρτους*, and John (a trifle more descriptively) *χόρτος πολλὸς*, Luke making no allusion to the latter, though he notes the *κλισίας ἀνὰ πενήκοντα*.

The remaining apparent discrepancies of detail and varieties of style, whilst emphasising the independence of each separate record, when dovetailed or harmonised present a complete scene of dramatic vividness and picturesqueness. Take the phases of place and time. Strauss, with his usual jaundiced ingenuity, reads the one backwards into the Mosaic past and projects the other

¹ Merely my own view. Dr. Sanday (*Fourth Gospel*, 121) thinks otherwise: "For the rest, the superiority in distinctness and precision is all on the side of St. John."

² "Marc décrit d'une manière dramatique le ravissant spectacle que présentaient ces troupes régulières formées chacune de deux lignes égales et échelonnées sur la pente de la colline. La steppe était alors dans toute sa splendeur printannière, et Jean et Marc se rencontrent de nouveau ici pour faire ressortir la beauté de ce tapis naturel."—Godet.

forward into the Christian future. Both efforts are as futile as they are fanciful. Parallels from or between facts in either Testament are spurious arguments if meant to establish suggested duplicates. Types the older facts may have been, and actually were, in prefiguration, of the newer ones, but not in the sense that the latter are, *mutatis mutandis*, mere consciously concocted duplicates of the former.¹ Such reasoning is a pure *gratis asseritur*, and therefore devoid of either interest or force. Of more profit is it, as a mental exercise, to co-relate or co-ordinate the two phases in their respective fourfold presentment with a view, as with the pieces of a jig-saw puzzle, either to interlace or disintegrate them. If the former (as obtains here) result, a perfect picture will ensue. Thus, as to the *locus in quo* of this incident, the four narrations stand so—placed side by side:—

Matthew xiv. 13. <i>εἰς ἔρημον τόπον.</i>	Mark vi. 32. <i>εἰς ἔρημον τόπον.</i>	Luke ix. 10. <i>εἰς τόπον ἔρημον πόλεως καλουμένης βηθσαιδά.</i>	John vi. 13. <i>εἰς τὸ ὄρος.</i>
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As the three Synoptists, independently and without collusion, use the same expression—"a desert place"—in their description of the locality, attention need only be directed to the additions by St. Luke, and the variant phrase of St. John. On these chiefly critics, hostile and friendly, expend much ingenuity, finding a stimulus also, either to destructive or constructive textual criticism, in a collation both of superficially mutually corrosive MS. readings and of the "Textus Receptus" (Elzevir, 1633) with the editions or readings of Stephens (1550), Beza (1598), Griesback (1805) and Scholz (1830),² etc. So, too, we are invited to compare the variants of St. Luke's additions thus: "Textus Receptus" (*ut supra*) and fourteen (out of forty-four) greater or Uncial MSS. (*ut supra*), up to the tenth century; \aleph^a (Codex Sinaiticus), B (Codex Vaticanus), L (Codex Paris), X (Munich MS.), Z (Ξ in Tischendorf, Codex Zacynthius): *πόλιν καλουμένην βηθσαιδά*; the Peshito, Vetus Itala, and Vulgate (Jerome): *τόπον ἔρημον κολουμένον βηθσαιδά*; \aleph^* (primitive text) and Syr^{cur} (Syriac Curetonian ver-

¹ To search for or institute comparisons or resemblances between the two sets of facts is both inevitable and legitimate, unless it be undertaken either in the spirit of Strauss or in that recorded in John vi. 31—to belittle one in collation with another.

² The T.R. is also used in the "Novum Testamentum Græcum juxta Exemplar Wetstamii, Glasguæ impressum, curante Gulielmo Whitfield Dakins, LL.D., 1812."

sion, older than the Peshito) : *τόπον ἔρημον* simply. Godet's commentary on these seeming discrepancies is worth reproducing here :—

“ La leçon du T. R. : *en un lieu désert de la ville appelée Bethesda*, est la plus complète, mais par là même aussi la plus suspect, comme étant probablement composée au moyen des autres. Celle des principaux alex, *dans une ville appelée Bethesda*, omet la notion, importante dans ce passage, de *lieu désert*, probablement parce qu'elle paraissait contradictoire avec l'idée d'une *ville*, et spécialement de celle de Bethesda, où Jésus était si connu. La leçon de N et de la traduction syriaque de Cureton : *en un lieu désert*, est séduisante par sa brièveté. Mais d'où serait venue, dans toutes les autres variantes, la mention de Bethesda ? Des deux notions contradictoires, le désert et Bethesda, cette leçon a sacrifié le nom propre, comme la précédante avait sacrifié le désert. La vraie leçon me paraît donc être celle qui s'est conservée dans la version syriaque de Schaaf et dans l'Itala : dans un endroit désert appelé Bethesda. Cette leçon maintient les deux idées dont la contradiction apparente a motivé toutes ces altérations du texte, mais sous une forme plus concise et en même temps plus correcte que celle de la leçon reçue. Elle mentionne comme but non une ville, mais une contrée inhabitée sur les bords du lac, désignée du nom de Bethesda. Si, par cette expression, Luc avait voulu désigner la ville de Bethesda, entre Capernaüm et Tibériade, sur la rive occidentale du lac, la patrie de Pierre, d'André et de Philippe, il serait en contradiction manifeste avec Matthieu, Marc et Jean, qui place la multiplication des pains sur la côte orientale, puisque, chez tous trois, Jésus repasse la mer le lendemain pour revenir en Galilée (*dans la contrée de Génézareth*, Matt. xiv. 34 ; à *Bethsaida*, sur la rive occidentale, Marc vi. 45 ; à *Capernaüm*, Jean vi. 59). Mais Luc se mettrait, dans ce cas, en contradiction avec lui-même aussi bien qu'avec les autres syn. Car la Bethesda, voisine de Capernaüm, étant située au centre du théâtre de l'activité de Jésus, comment le Seigneur pourrait-il s'y rendre dans l'intention d'y trouver une retraite, un lieu désert ? Le sens du nom de Bethesda (*endroit de pêche* [Anglicè Fisherton]) fait naturellement supposer qu'il existait le long de ce lac poissonneux plusieurs localités de ce nom-là. Le terme Bethesda de Galilée, Jean xii. 21, confirme cette supposition ; car cette épithète devait servir à

distinguer cette Bethesda de quelque autre. Enfin Josèphe (*Antiq.* xviii. 2-1; *Bell. Jud.* iii. 10, 7) et Pline (v. 15) mentionnent expressément une autre Bethesda, située en Gaulonitis, à l'extrémité nord-est de la mer de Galilée, au-delà de l'embouchure du Jourdain. Le tétrarque Philippe avait fait bâtir (probablement dans le voisinage d'un hameau de cette contrée appelé Bethesda) une ville qu'il avait nommée, du nom de la fille d'Auguste, Bethesda-Julias, et dont Pococke croit avoir retrouvé les ruines sur une colline dont le nom (*Telai*) paraît signifier : *montagne de Julia* (*Morgenl.* ii. 106; Winer, *Realwörterbuch*). C'était là que Jésus pouvait trouver le plus facilement l'isolement qu'il cherchait."

A veritable piece of clear reasoning, of skilful harmonising of the variants, and of admirable compression of much in little of which, notwithstanding Bishop Westcott's adverse estimate of its author's textual criticism,¹ I share the preference for the *τόπον ἔρημον καλουμένον βηθσαιδά* as suggesting a desert region or district (rather than a village) designated as Bethesda, and so reconciling the two expressions and without conflicting with the two Bethsaiidas of Mark and Luke. "The coincidence of the two Bethsaiidas," notes Dr. Smith ("D. B." *sub voce*) "occurring in the one narrative, and that on the occasion of the only absolutely certain mention of the Eastern one, is extraordinary," but it ceases to be "extraordinary" in the light of the readings of the Peshito, Itala, and Vulgate,² and yet more so if we accept Thompson's very plausible utterance (*The Land and the Book*, p. 373): "I am of opinion that the *invention* of a second Bethesda is wholly unnecessary. Reland, who first started the idea, confesses that he has no authority for it, but merely resorts to it as an *ultimum refugium* to solve an otherwise invincible topographical difficulty. . . . I believe, therefore, that there was but one Bethesda at the head of the lake, and that it was at the mouth of the Jordan."

Then, of the divergent accounts of Christ's movement towards the locality of the incident, he says, with the eye of an observant

¹ At least in his *Commentaire sur St. Jean*. "I feel that I owe most to Godet, whose commentary, except on questions of textual criticism, seems to me to be unsurpassed."—*Introduction to St. John's Gospel*, p. xcvi.

² The Clementine Vulgate, adopted by Stien in his "Tetraglotton," has: "in locum desertum, qui est Bethesda"; and Beza: "in locum desertum urbis quæ vocatur Bethesda." And Dean Stanley (*Sinai and Palestine*, p. 374): "Bethsaida Julias would give its name to the surrounding desert tract."

traveller : " A vast amount of learning and critical research has been expended in efforts to reconcile the different directions given (or supposed to be given) to the disciples by our Lord, and to make the entire narratives accord with the topography of this region. According to John the disciples went over the sea toward Capernaum, while Mark says Jesus constrained them to get into the ship and go to the other side before into Bethsaida. Looking back from this point at the south-eastern extremity of the Butaiha, I see no difficulty in these statements."

Of the *εἰς τὸ ὄρος* of John it is sufficient to remark with Lange, " this standing phrase is accounted for by the character of the Palestinian landscape " ; and, with Westcott, " the use of the definite article [as in R.V.] implies an instinctive sense of the familiar landscape, the mountain range closing round the lake ; and it appears from v. 15 that the Lord came down from the mountain before the miracle was wrought ! "

I turn now to the *chronology* of the four narratives which consists of two distinct and complementary phases : the period and the hour. St. John (vi. 4) fixes the former definitely—*ἦν δὲ ἑγγύς τὸ πάσχα*, and the statement is singularly corroborated by St. Mark's *ἐπὶ τῷ χλωρῷ χόρτῳ* which Edersheim was not slow to perceive : " It [the narrative] contains two distinct notices as to time, which enable us to fit it exactly into the framework of this history. For, the statement of the Fourth Gospel that the ' Passover was nigh,' is confirmed by the independent notice of St. Mark (vi. 39), that those whom the Lord miraculously fed were ranged *on the green grass*. In that climate there would have been no ' green grass ' soon after the Passover. We must look upon the coincidence of these two notices as one of the undesigned confirmations of this narrative."

Exactly ; it is a signal instance of Scripture interpreting itself, in the face of which it is as difficult to account for Dr. McClymont's singular commentary that " the reason for this observation [John's] is not quite clear," as it is to understand the perversity of, in Bishop Westcott's words, " Irenæus (?) and some moderns [who] have taken it ['was nigh'], 'lately past.'" The "singular commentary" is all the more extraordinary as it supplies its own refutation by solving its own difficulty.

" The mention of the feast in this verse was probably intended

to explain the concourse of people in the next verse, who were mostly pilgrims to Jerusalem, as distinguished from the multitude in verse 2, composed of those of whom many 'ran together on foot from all the cities' (Mark vi. 33) and were waiting for Jesus on the other side of the lake before He had arrived."¹

"The perversity of 'some moderns,' who insist in construing "was nigh" by "lately past," merits nothing more serious than this record of their contumacy. But the thrice repeated ἡ ἑορτὴ τῶν Ἰουδαίων calls for a more lengthened word. The first use of the expression (v. 1) has been the despair of commentators from early times, and is commonly known as "the unnamed feast." Yet attempts, laudable but futile, have been made to identify it with the Passover (Irenæus, Eusebius, Lightfoot, Neander, Greswell), Pentecost (Cyril, Chrysostom, Calvin, Bengel), Tabernacles (Ewald), Atonement (Caspari), Dedication (Petavius), and Purim (Wieseler, Meyer, Godet); and the presence (in *N*, C. L. and early Egyptian versions) or absence (as in ABD, Origen, etc.) of the definite article ἡ ἑορτή ("added," says Bishop Westcott, "as soon as the second century") has further been adroitly seized as authoritatively clinching the discussion. Thus Bishop Westcott, while admitting (at

¹ Dr. McClymont is not alone in his bewilderment. Bishop Walsham How (*ad versum*) asks: "Why is it mentioned here at all?" and (Q.E.D.) connects it with "the great event which took place at the next Passover, when so new and bright a light was thrown upon the dark and mysterious words of the present chapter concerning eating and drinking Christ's flesh and blood." And Archbishop Trench (*Notes on the Miracles*, 282) offers a still more startling explanation: "St. John's apparently casual notice of the fact that *the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh*, is introduced, some say, to explain from whence this great multitude came. But what should they have done in that remote region? St. John accounts in another way for their presence. They were there, 'because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased.' The mention of the Passover here, if it is to find an explanation, and is anything more than the fixing of a point in the chronology of our Lord's ministry, must be otherwise explained." I can only regard this passage as a lamentable confusion both of fact and thought. The *ὄχλος πλῆθος* of verse 2 was clearly distinct from the *πλῆθος ὄχλος* of verse 5 (as Dr. McClymont points out, *ut supra*). To say, therefore, that the latter group was "there because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased" is to transfer to it a qualification which belongs solely to the former. A blending of the "great multitude" and the "great company" would result from their conjunction, but the second group was composed of Passover pilgrims drawn aside from "the usual lines of communication," not because they had *witnessed* but had *heard* of the miracles. The Archbishop is nearer the truth in his closing sentence. It was plainly "the fixing of a point in the chronology of our Lord's ministry" that accounts for St. John's mention of this particular Passover. Godet (quoted with approval by Trench) sees in this record of it Christ's celebration of a Passover of his own, debarred as he was from attending that at Jerusalem.

v. 1) that "the evidence for the identification of this unnamed feast is very slight," yet (at vi. 4) claims that "the phrase, when it stands alone [as it does at v. 1] signifies the Feast of Tabernacles, 'the one great national feast,'" although in "Additional Notes" to v. 1 he says doubtfully, "if the definite article were authentic the reference would be to the Feast of Tabernacles, which was emphatically 'the Feast of the Jews,' and not, as is commonly said, to the Passover."¹ I fear that mere grammar will never settle this point with which I am no further concerned here, and regard it as does Bishop Drury (l.c., p. 21): "We do not seem to have sufficient data to enable us to locate it, all we can say for it is that it followed the second miracle at Cana and was before the miracle of Feeding the Five Thousand. St. John does not define it either by name or by season of the year, and we must be content on the whole to leave it where he does."

The second use of the phrase (vi. 4) has, as has been seen, also engendered much "darkened counsel," of which the instances adduced are the reverse of exhaustive. For, in addition to those, even the τὸ πάσχα is believed by some ingenious scribes to be an early interpolation, while others equally sapient have discovered that chapters v. and vi. have been "accidentally transposed"—a euphony for careless bungling. Bishop Westcott disposes easily of both contentions.² The τὸ πάσχα qualifies and locates this second use of the phrase, "explaining," as Bishop How observes, "to Gentile readers that the Passover was 'a feast of the Jews.'" It would be Christ's fifth Passover (including the Unnamed Feast), a year before His Passion (A.D. 28), at the close of the Central Galilean ministry.

The third occurrence of the phrase (vii. 2) in this Gospel, being qualified and located by ἡ σκηνοπηγία, affords no scope for interchange of exegetical amenities and can, accordingly, be dismissed with the solitary reference thereto.

Next, as to the hour question, the four reckonings stand thus:—

¹ Bishop Walsham How is as emphatically convinced that, definite article or no definite article, "it is best to understand it of the Passover, in which case it would be the second Passover since our Lord's Baptism."

² "Against (1) (Browne, *Ordo Sæclorum*, pp. 84, ff.) it must be urged that all direct documentary evidence whatever supports the disputed words . . . The transposition. (2) (Norris, *Journal of Philology*, 1871, pp. 107 ff.) in the absence of all external evidence cannot be maintained."

Nor, further, for the above reasons, could there have been any difficulty 'manufactured, nor any seeming difference detected "between the two verses, even had verse 23 occurred in another Gospel and not in this," and though they referred to two (as they do in both cases) distinct events. But this is not all. The Bishop, of course, knows the Jews' division of their evening, yet, in his comment, he accounts it "strange to find the same expression as to the hour used both here [verse 15] and in verse 23, after the miracle was over and our Lord had retired into a mountain to pray," but adds in a note, "the occurrence of the same expression both here and in 23 may help to soften many of the little difficulties which are sometimes felt as to the differences in the different Gospels." Both statements appear to me to be alike mutually destructive and devoid of force.

And again. The same author concludes his note with the not very happy remark: "So too we can hardly doubt that, had this miracle and that of the Feeding of the Four Thousand been recorded only in *different* Gospels, they would have been declared by many to be only different accounts of the same miracle, and have been used as an argument against the perfect truth of God's word."

But the fact that they have been recorded in the *same* Gospels, the first in four and the second in two, has not saved them from such arguments. The hypothesis would merely have rendered them more acute but certainly not more conclusive.

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(To be concluded.)

indications of free transcription from a common source. On the first line, $\delta\psi\iota\alpha$ = evening, stands abreast of $\acute{\omega}\rho\alpha$ $\pi\omicron\lambda\lambda\acute{\eta}$ = a late hour; $\pi\omicron\lambda\lambda\acute{\eta}$ referring to the greatness of the number, drawing near to the twelfth hour. I would suggest that in the first line the original was ערנית שעת ערנית = And it was the hour of evening, or, the hour of evening prayer. This Luke freely renders 'when the day began to wear away.' In the last line we read in Matthew 'the hour (of prayer) has already gone by,' ינדר שעתא ענרת, the verb ענרת being 3 s. f. pret. of ענר, which in Aramaic as in Hebrew means to go by, to go past; whereas the reading in Mark requires שעת עונת וכו' = already it is the evening hour, a late hour."

Dr. Marshall's contention for an Aramaic original of the Gospels though apparently strong and advocated by a few German scholars still leaves the problem of the unmistakable originality of the Greek MSS. unsolved.

