

ARTICLE VIII.

CRITICAL NOTE.

BETHSAIDA.

THE seeming discrepancy between Luke ix. 10 and Mark vi. 45, in their diverse mention of the "city called Bethsaida," has occasioned considerable controversy first and last; which has been renewed by the recent Sunday-school lesson on the parallel passage in Matthew. The most common solution of the difficulty is, that two different cities of the same name are referred to by the two evangelists, cities not more than six or eight miles apart, on opposite sides of the Sea of Galilee near its head.

This will answer for an explanation, if no better can be found. But it is by no means fully satisfactory; and, since the Revised New Testament has opened up what appears to be a more probable solution, (which no one seems to have noticed,) I would here draw attention to it. A few facts must be taken into consideration.

1. The New Testament BETHSAIDA was in Galilee, on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, and very near Capernaum, at one extremity of it as it stretched along the lake; very likely just over the promontory of Capernaum, on its northern side, as long ago indicated by Dr. Robinson. It was a sort of suburb of Capernaum, where people, engaged in the fishery or other business of Capernaum, could have their homes, passing readily from the one place to the other. For,—

1. We read at John i. 44, "Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter." And it was "Bethsaida of Galilee," as said at xii. 21. For which reason, Peter was called a "Galilean," Mark xiv. 70; Luke xxii. 59. (As to Mark viii. 22, 27, in the continual crossings of the sea about that time, they may as well have passed from *their own home* Bethsaida, on to Cæsarea Philippi, as from the eastern side of the sea.)

2. At Mark i. 21 we read, "And they went into Capernaum, and straightway on the Sabbath day he entered into the synagogue and taught. Ver. 29, "And FORTHWITH, when they were come out of the synagogue, *they entered into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. But Simon's wife's mother lay sick of a fever.*" Ver. 32, "And at even when the sun did set,..... all the city [of Bethsaida] was gathered together at the door." Here plainly was a passing directly and at once from the synagogue meeting in Capernaum to their home, which we just learned was in Bethsaida. There was no great time spent on the way; nor did the Jewish law allow

much travel, for it was "on the Sabbath day," and no issue was as yet raised on Sabbath observance.

3. Christ's Galilean home, when driven from Nazareth, was evidently with these disciples, to whose house, he (and they) oft resorted. And this was what made the *adjoining* Capernaum (with its synagogue) so much the head-quarters of Jesus' preaching; as it made the suburb Bethsaida one of the chief cities upbraided, as where "most of his mighty works were done." (Matt. xi. 21; Luke x. 13.) The location of Bethsaida is therefore very evident.

II. There could not be a second Bethsaida *at the same time* in the near neighborhood,—so near that the people "ran afoot. . . . and outwent them," when passing from one to beyond the other. (Mark vi. 33.) No such confounding of neighborhood names could be tolerated or practised among any people, without some appended epithet of distinction. All will agree in this. But,—

1. It is true, that in times long before that, the *village* at the head of the lake, just east of the mouth of the upper Jordan, had been called Bethsaida. But some twenty or more years before those New Testament events, in the days of Augustus Cæsar, Philip, the ruler of that country east of Galilee, "advanced the village Bethsaida, situate at the lake of Gennesareth, unto the dignity of a city. . . . and called it by the name of Julius, the name of [Augustus] Cæsar's daughter." (Josephus, Antiq. xviii. 2, 1.) And afterwards, Philip "died at Julius." (4, 6.)

2. Doubtless, then or afterwards, Capernaum's suburb town (nearest to Julius) took up the relinquished name Bethsaida, (Heb. "the house of food,") as the eating and lodging place for Capernaum's overflow. But it is simply impossible that both places (so near together) should have and keep in use at the same time the same undistinguished name. The one expression in John xii. 21, which points out Philip as a Galilean, is not sufficient to set this difficulty aside.

3. It was thirty years later still when the Gospels were written, or more than fifty years after Julius had lost the name of Bethsaida; so that the title had been fully appropriated by the Galilean city, to which Luke and all the Gospels apply it without qualification. IT IS NOT LIKELY, that then the educated physician Luke would speak also of Julius by its ancient name Bethsaida, *without any qualifying word*, especially, as he takes pains to say "a city *called* Bethsaida," as though this were a new name applied; not "a city *once* called Bethsaida," as the theory in question would require. Why should he (or Mark) take pains to dig up an obsolete title, to confuse another city with the existent Bethsaida, so called by themselves?

III. Cannot a better explanation be found for Luke ix. 10? Look at the following:—

1. The new rendering of Luke ix. 10 is simply this:—"And he took them, and withdrew apart to a city called Bethsaida [*i. e.*, from Capernaum or elsewhere]. But the multitudes perceiving it followed him [*i. e.*, thither and thence]: and he welcomed them," *i. e.*, to the "desert place" subse-

quently reached (verse 12). This shortened rendering of verse 10 seems to be absolutely required by the preponderance of ancient manuscripts; and this is one of the places where no one disputes the correctness of the Revisers' work.

2. So, then, this "Bethsaida" of Luke no longer locates the "desert place;" his statement is of retirement to a *city*, the other writers tell of retirement directly to a *desert place*, quite a different affair. The fact opens before us, that there were *two stages* of withdrawal from the crowd, the first one here definitely named by Luke alone; though, for some reason, he fails to note clearly the transition between the first (or city) stage and the second (or desert) stage of withdrawal. They first sought refuge in the city of Bethsaida, their usual quiet home-resort (from Capernaum), at the residence of Peter and Andrew. They were trying to eat (Mark vi. 31), probably at Peter's house, where Jesus made his home. Just this seems to be the revised record of Luke, who says he "withdrew apart" or retired privately (Gr. *κατ' ἰδίαν*),—"took her *unto his own* (home)," it is rendered in John xix. 27.

3. But Jesus, finding there no privacy, because of the crowds that collected (Luke ix. 11), said to them (as in Mark vi. 31), "Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place and rest awhile. For there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat," even there at their own house in Bethsaida,—not referring alone to Capernaum, whence they may have first withdrawn. Whereupon, (verse 32) "they departed [thence, *Matt.*] into a desert place by ship privately [apart, *Matt.*]." The evangelist John (vi. 1) locates the desert, as "over the Sea of Galilee," thus explaining why it was by ship. When Luke says (in verse 10), they "withdrew apart TO A CITY called Bethsaida," how certain it is, that he is not here stating the *destination reached at last*, which was "a desert place" (verse 12), and not a *city*. They certainly did not go *to the city* of Julias at all; what "city" could it be they actually went to, but Bethsaida, their home?

4. At night (Mark vi. 45), Jesus "constrained his disciples to get into the ship, and to go before him, to the other side to Bethsaida" whence they had started out. (The expression here "to the other side" forbids the notion of some, that this desired sail was perhaps to be only along the shore to Julias, as the place meant by Bethsaida.) How plainly but one Bethsaida, namely, their home city, is in the narrative! with which *city* no "desert place" is here mixed up; (though there were, of course, retired spots about Bethsaida itself, Luke iv. 38, 42). And how beautiful the harmony thus brought out of the seemingly discordant narratives, proving them separately and wonderfully inspired! Here is one of the apparent "discrepancies" happily removed—an unwitting result of New Testament revision.

IV. The source of error.

1. In early times, readers imagined a difficulty (where there was none) merely because Luke had failed to mention the passage by ship over the sea; for he has not a word about either the going or the return. So they altered the text, trying to have Luke say, that his mentioned withdrawal, (which was only a first stage of the withdrawal,) was itself a passage over

the sea. They did not reflect, that if Luke had meant to speak of the trip over, he would certainly afterwards have spoken of the more striking trip back, and the miracle on the sea, which he entirely leaves out.

2. The spurious reading made itself manifest in A. D. 1590, in a map of the Sea of Galilee by Adrichomius, with Bethsaida rightly located near Capernaum on the western side, and with the "Desert of Bethsaida," and just back of it the city "Julias" on the northeastern shore. (Mark! "Julias," not Bethsaida there.) This is just as the corrupted text of our common version puts it: "—into a [desert place belonging to the] city called Bethsaida." (See *Sunday-School Times*, Dec. 3, 1887.) Not that the city Bethsaida itself was on the eastern side; but only a desert over there supposed to "belong" to Bethsaida. No one in the early days dreamed of the city Julias near that desert as being the city Bethsaida named by Luke. That map did not so claim it.

3. The earliest writer we know of as broaching such an idea, is referred to by Dr. W. M. Thomson in "The Land and the Book," where he speaks of "the invention of a second Bethsaida as the work of the geographer Reland, in the eighteenth century." No one doubts that there was another Bethsaida (with the name given up) at an earlier date; but Dr. Thomson, Major Wilson, and other critical scholars (including prominent members of the revision committee), do not believe there were two Bethsaidas at the same time, but a few miles apart, with no distinguishing affix to the name. Nor was this the meaning of the map referred to, nor of the interpolated reading of the received text on which that map was built.

4. That false reading, evidently a spurious enlargement by way of attempted explanation, is now happily ruled out by the Revised Version (not even leaving it in the margin); and it is seen that Luke's statement in verse 10 does not at all refer to the boat-trip or the desert place, but notes only a preliminary attempt at retirement in their home, which ended in a desert picnic (Luke does not say where). Why Luke does not mention the trip over the sea, which was all the stumbling-block that caused the spurious reading, we may not be able to explain. As Luke thus fails to notice this sea-trip and miracle, so John fails to notice the previous sea-trip and miracle which Luke does give (viii. 22-40).

5. Perhaps in Luke's case, it was because, in his order of narrative, this sea adventure comes so soon after the similar sea adventure of the previous chapter (the 8th), that in the abundance of material, (John xx. 30, 31; xxi. 25,) he for brevity made the omission. Or, as Luke received his instruction largely from Paul, and neither of them was an eye-witness, he was not impressed with the sea-miracle, as the other evangelists were, who were on board that storm-tossed boat; and so it was not called to his mind in connection with the mountain feast.

Upon the whole, is not this view of the history worthy of consideration, alongside the current theory, which certainly has some difficulties which it is hard to surmount?

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