

J. C. RYLE'S NOTES ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN
21:1-14

1. After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias, and in this way he showed *himself*. 2. There were together Simon Peter, Thomas called Didymus, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the *sons* of Zebedee, and two other of his disciples. 3. Simon Peter said to them, I am going fishing. They said to him, We are going with you also. They went forth and immediately got into a boat, and that night they caught nothing. 4. But when the morning had now come, Jesus stood on the shore; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. 5. Then Jesus said to them, Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No. 6. And he said to them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it in because of the multitude of fish. 7. Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, It is the Lord. Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on *his* fisher's coat (for he was naked), and plunged into the sea. 8. And the other disciples came in a little boat (for they were not far from land, but about two hundred cubits), dragging the net with fish. 9. Then as soon as they had come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid on it, and bread. 10. Jesus said to them, Bring some of the fish which ye have now caught. 11. Simon Peter went up and drew the net to land, full of large fish, one hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not broken. 12. Jesus said to them, Come *and* dine. And none of the disciples dared ask him, Who are you?--knowing that it was the Lord. 13. Jesus then came and took the bread and gave it to them, and likewise the fish. 14. This is now the third time that Jesus showed himself to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

The last chapter of St. John's Gospel requires a few preliminary observations. Certain very objectionable theories have been propounded about it. (a) Some, as Grotius, maintain that the chapter was not written by John at all, that his Gospel ended with the last verse of the 20th chapter and that the 21st chapter is the work of another writer, perhaps one John, an Ephesian presbyter! (b) Others do not go so far as this and yet maintain that the chapter must be regarded as a postscript or appendix to the Gospel, and was probably added as an afterthought by St. John himself some years after the rest of the Gospel. The chief ground on which these theories are built is the passage with which the 20th chapter ends. Men tell us that the two concluding verses of that chapter were evidently intended to finish and wind up John's narrative, and that the 21st chapter comes in awkwardly and abruptly.

From all these theories I entirely dissent and repudiate them altogether. I see no proof whatever that the two last verses of the 20th chapter were intended to be a winding up of the whole Gospel. To me they appear to be a characteristic comment of the Evangelist, such as he often makes, on the

account he has given in the chapter of our Lord's appearances to the disciples after His resurrection, and nothing more. To me it appears perfectly natural that he should go on writing and give a further account of our Lord's most instructive appearance at the sea of Galilee; and I see in the narrative no abruptness or awkward fitting whatever. On the contrary, I see a peculiar beauty in the selection of the matter which the 21st chapter contains. It seems to me a most fitting conclusion to the whole narrative of the Gospel to tell us our Lord's last sayings about two Apostles as Peter and John. Concerning Peter, it should be remembered that none of the Apostles had professed so much and yet fallen so sadly as he had. John takes care to tell us how graciously and emphatically Jesus restores him to his commission, and specially bids him feed His Church, and foretells his end. Concerning John, it should be remembered that he had been peculiarly mentioned as the disciple whom Jesus loved. He meekly tells us that the only prediction about himself, if it can be called one, was that his future end was left in obscurity by his Lord. And thus he concludes his Gospel. If anyone thinks that such a chapter comes in awkwardly and is not a fitting conclusion to John's narrative after the 20th chapter, I cannot agree with him.

Of evidence--whether external or internal--that the theories I have referred to deserve consideration, there is a conspicuous absence. There is not the slightest proof that any trustworthy ancient writer ever regarded the last chapter of St. John's Gospel as less genuine and less inspired than the rest of the book. There is nothing in the language or style of the chapter to create any suspicion that any other person than John composed it. Those who wish to see this subject fully investigated are advised to study Wordsworth's Appendix to St. John's Gospel, in his Commentary.

When I add to this statement the fact that in every age the wisest and holiest commentators have seen in this chapter several singularly deep and interesting types of the history and position of Christ's Church in the world, I think I shall have said enough to satisfy many readers that they may approach the last chapter of St. John's Gospel with as much reverence and as much reasonable expectation of getting benefit from it as any other chapter in the book.

1.--[*After these things.*] This expression is indefinite. It only means that the appearance of our Lord, about to be described in this chapter, took place after His appearance on the eighth day following His resurrection. The time therefore, in the verse before us, is some day between the eighth and the fortieth day, when He ascended up into heaven. But what precise day we cannot tell. One thing, at any rate, we may be sure of. It was not the Sabbath day, or else the disciples would not have gone fishing. Even on the day following the crucifixion, Christ's disciples "rested according to the commandment" (Luke 23:56).

[*Jesus showed Himself...disciples.*] A deep question naturally arises out of the expression before us. Where was our Lord on the days when He did not "manifest or show Himself" to His disciples? It is evident that He was not with them always, and that He only visited them at intervals. Where was He then in the meantime? Not in heaven, we may be sure, because He had

not yet ascended. But where was He on earth? I speak of course of His human nature. As God, He is everywhere. But where was He as a man? This is a mysterious matter, and one about which it is useless to speculate. Enough for us to know that our Lord was visible or invisible, and appeared suddenly in one place or another place, and assumed one form or another form at His own will, after a manner that we cannot understand. But it is quite plain that when we read the words in Acts, "being seen of them forty days" (Acts 1:3), we must not suppose them to mean that our Lord was seen every day. It only means that during forty days He was seen at intervals. Each appearance, we doubt not, had its own special purpose and intention.

Chrysostom remarks: "It is clear from the words 'showed Himself,' that Christ was not seen (after His resurrection) unless He condescended, because His body was henceforth incorruptible and of unmixed purity."

[*At the Sea of Tiberias.*] Concerning this remarkable piece of water, sometimes called the Lake of Gennesaret and sometimes the Sea of Galilee, I have already said something in my note on John 6:1. It is a freshwater lake, through which the river Jordan runs, twelve and a half miles long and six and three-quarters broad and remarkable in a geological point of view, being 655 feet below the level of the Mediterranean Sea (according to Tristram's "Topography of the Holy Land"). In a theological point of view it must always be most interesting to a Christian, because some of our Lord's mightiest miracles were worked on it, or close to it. Here our Lord walked on the waters and came to the disciples toiling in rowing. Here He stilled the wind and waves with a word. Here He granted to four of His Apostles a miraculous catch of fish. Here He provided payment of the tribute money out of the mouth of a fish which He commanded Peter to catch. On the banks of this lake He fed a multitude with a few loaves and fishes. On a high ground overhanging this lake He cast out the legion of devils and allowed them to drive 2,000 swine into the sea. In the towns upon this lake--Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum--He did some of His mightiest works. Sitting in a boat on this lake, He delivered the Parable of the Sower. In short, of all the districts in which our Lord preached and worked miracles, there was none that saw and heard so much as the district around the Sea of Tiberias.

Can we doubt, when we remember all this, that our Lord had a deep purpose and meaning in appearing to His disciples at the Sea of Tiberias? Can we doubt that He meant to remind them of all they had seen in former days of his wisdom, love, and power by the side of these well-known waters? He knew well the influence that scenery and places exercise over the mind of man. He would recall to the memory of His disciples all that they had witnessed in the early days of His ministry. Above all, He would stir the hearts of Peter, James, and John by saying some of His last things to them at the very place where He had first called them to leave their boats and nets to follow Him, and to become fishers of men. Where He had begun with them, there He would have one of His last interviews with them before leaving the world.

The exact spot where our Lord appeared at the Sea of Tiberias is, of course, unknown. But when we remember that Bethsaida, at the north end of the lake, was "the city of Andrew and Peter" (John 1:44), we may safely

conjecture that the scene of this chapter was somewhere near Bethsaida. The boat in which Peter went fishing would most probably either be his own boat or the property of some relative or friend in his native city.

[*And in this way He showed Himself.*] This is a somewhat curious sentence. It does not, I think, only mean "the manner of His appearance was as follows." I suspect that it was inserted emphatically in order to direct our special attention to all the little details of the occurrence, and to remind us that even the minutest parts of it have a deep spiritual meaning.

2.--[*There were together Simon Peter, etc.*] This verse contains the names of the seven witnesses before whom the remarkable appearance of Christ, about to be described, took place. Seven, we may remember, is the number of perfection, and the evidence of seven witnesses was regarded as the most complete evidence that could be given. Two of the seven, we shall observe, are not named, and we are left entirely to conjecture who these two were. Most commentators think they must have been Andrew and Philip--Andrew because he was Peter's brother, and Philip because he was an inhabitant of Bethsaida on the lake. But we really do not know, and it is useless to guess.

Why these seven *alone* out of the eleven were here, we are not told. But we need not doubt there was good reason. All the company of the Apostles, we may believe, went into Galilee when the passover feast was over, according to our Lord's command, and probably very soon after His appearance for the benefit of Thomas. But where Matthew, Simon, James the less, and Jude were on the present occasion, we do not know.

It is worth noting that this is the only place in St. John's Gospel where he mentions the name of his own father, Zebedee.

Why these seven disciples *in particular* were together is worth inquiry. The presence of Simon Peter, as he lived in Galilee and had a special message from our Lord that He was going into Galilee, we can understand. Thomas, once convinced that Jesus had risen, would very likely take care to stick close to Peter and John. Nathanael lived at Cana in Galilee, and was probably Bartholomew. Augustine, however, doubt this. The two sons of Zebedee were Simon's partners and are always found together with him on great occasions.

The message of our Lord about Galilee, we must remember, was "Tell my brethren that they go into Galilee; there shall they see Me" (Matt. 28:10). These were our Lord's own words. The angel also said to the women, "He goes before you into Galilee; there shall ye see Him" (Matt. 28:7). We might reasonably expect to find the Apostles in Galilee after this.

On Thomas being one of the party, Henry remarks: "Thomas is named next to Peter, as if he now kept closer to the meetings of the Apostles than ever. It is well if losses by our neglect make us more careful afterward not to let opportunities slip."

3.--[*Simon Peter said to them, etc.*] Some worthy commentators have presumed to find fault with Peter for going fishing. They say that he

showed a disposition to return to the world and to follow his worldly calling once more. From this view I entirely dissent. I see no harm whatever in Peter's conduct on this occasion. He and his companion were poor men and must needs work in order to provide for their subsistence. There was nothing wrong in the act of fishing, and it was only natural to take up the business with which they were most familiar. The great business of going out as our Lord's messengers to preach the Gospel was not to begin until His ascension, and in the interval it was better to follow an honest calling than to be idle. Neither in Peter's proposal nor in the simple frank consent of his companions can I detect a jot of proof that anything wrong was done. Idleness does Christians far more injury than work. Among the Jews, every man--whatever his rank or position might be--was required to learn a worldly calling.

Chrysostom remarks: "Since neither Christ was with them continually, nor was the Spirit yet given, nor they at that time entrusted with anything, having nothing to do they went after their trade."

Augustine observes: "The Apostles were not forbidden to seek their necessary subsistence by the exercise of their craft, a lawful and permitted one, if at any time they had no other means of subsistence." He also remarks that they were no more to blame than St. Paul was when he worked with his own hands as a tent-maker (Acts 18:3).

Calvin remarks: "Peter had not yet been enjoined to appear in public for the discharge of his office of teaching, but had only been reminded of his future calling (John 20:21-23), that he and others might understand that they had not in vain been chosen from the beginning. Meanwhile, they were to do what they were accustomed to do and what belonged to men in private life."

Ferus remarks that a lawful business is not sinful. If Matthew had gone back to a publican's life, it would have been a very different thing from Peter going to fish.

Stier remarks that this going to fish was only carrying out our Lord's words. "But *now*, he that has a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip; and he that has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one" (Luke 22:36).

The expression "a boat" should have been translated "the boat." Does not the use of the article show that this was that well-known boat that our Lord and His disciples had always used when they went on the lake?

In the fact that they caught nothing that night, there is nothing that would surprise a fisherman. Of all callings by which men earn their living, none is more uncertain than that of a fisherman (Luke 5:4). Night is the time when most fish are caught, as all who are familiar with fishing know. That there was probably a deep typical meaning in all this, I shall hope to show when I reach the end of the passage. I think it better to reserve all remarks upon that point until I can present them to the reader in one continuous form. For the present, both here and throughout the passage I shall simply comment on the facts as facts.

Burgon remarks: "One thing is certain, and the circumstance is full of interest. It must have been their *necessities* that sent forth the Apostles on this lowly errand of fishing. And yet these were they on whom the Church was to be built! These seven were among the names written on the twelve foundations of the heavenly Jerusalem."

Burgon also thinks that the words "went forth" point to the Apostles sitting together indoors, in the evening, and very likely on a Sabbath evening.

4.--[*But when the morning had now come.*] This probably means, "When the day began to break, so that an object at a little distance could be seen." As soon as there was enough light, through the gray dawn, the party in the boat saw the figure of a person on the shore. There is little or no twilight in countries so far south as Palestine. Night goes and day follows much more suddenly than with us.

[*Jesus stood on the shore.*] This reads like a sudden and instantaneous appearance, like that which took place when our Lord appeared the first time in the midst of the disciples. Just in the same manner, it seems to me, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, Jesus appeared standing on the shore of the lake. The risen body of our Lord, we must remember, appeared or disappeared, was present or absent, according to His will in a moment of time.

Grotius remarks that our Lord never went on the sea after His resurrection. (Comp. Rev. 21:1--"There was no more sea.")

[*But...did not know...Jesus.*] The disciples did not recognize our Lord, in my opinion, because He appeared in another form, just as He appeared to the two who were journeying to Emmaus. I reject entirely the idea that the dim light of the early morning was the reason why they did not know Him. It is evident to me that our Lord's risen body did not--on any occasion after He rose again, for some mysterious reason--look exactly like the body He had before His crucifixion. It was the same, and yet not the same, if I may so speak. Will it not be so with our own bodies when we rise again at the last day? We shall be the same, and yet not the same.

It is noteworthy that the Greek words here used were exactly those that were used about Mary Magdalene, when she thought the gardener spoke to her and "knew not that it was Jesus" (John 20:14).

5.--[*Then Jesus said, etc.*] We cannot suppose for a moment that our Lord did not know whether the disciples had any food, when He asked the question of this verse. It is clear to me that He asked it in order to raise attention in the minds of the disciples and to put them at ease in conversing with them. He appeared as a stranger, who was graciously pleased to say something familiar and friendly. Does it not remind us of the way in which He began conversation with the woman of Samaria and broke the ice, as it were, between Himself and her? "Give me a drink," He said (John 4:7). Nothing sets people so much at ease, when they meet as strangers, as courteous inquiries about the simple matters of daily life.

The word "meat" is a striking example of the change that comes over the meaning of English words in the course of time. It means literally "anything edible." Two centuries ago the word "meat" was a translation which no Englishman would misunderstand. Now, unfortunately, it is a word confined entirely to "flesh." No translation can ever be perfect. All require occasional reverent revision.

The context seems to me to show that our Lord's inquiry was specially meant to apply to the success of the disciples in fishing. "Have ye caught anything that can be eaten?" The disciples evidently took it in this sense.

It is worth noticing that our Lord must have spoken in a very loud voice when He addressed His disciples in this verse. We are distinctly told in the eighth verse that the boat was two hundred cubits (at least one hundred yards) from land, and there is nothing to show that the disciples put out further into the lake when our Lord told them to cast in their net again. I mention this because some, as Gerhard, Henry, and Besser, think that there was something curt, rough, and rather abrupt in the answer of the disciples. But they seem to forget that a conversation carried on over a hundred yards of water could only be carried on in very brief and abrupt phrases.

The word "children" in this verse, rendered "sirs" in the margin, is to my mind rightly rendered in the text. It is a familiar, friendly mode of address, like our English "boys" or "lads," not necessarily implying great youth in the persons addressed.

6.--[*And He said...Cast...find.*] Our Lord now goes a step further in order to reveal Himself to His disciples. He gives a command or counsel to cast their net, which they had apparently hauled into the boat, once more into the the water and upon the right side of the boat. Such advice and such a promise of success from a stranger could hardly fail to strike the disciples. Would it not raise in the quick mind of John a suspicion that this was no common stranger who spoke? Would not he and Peter both remember a former occasion, when they "toiled all the night and took nothing," and yet at the command of their Master had let down their nets again with marvelous success? I think they would.

To me it seems highly probable that the disciples had finished their night's work, had hauled up their net into the boat and were rowing toward home, tired of their profitless toil, when our Lord appeared and spoke to them.

[*They cast therefore...multitude of fish.*] In the fact that the disciples found a multitude of fishes in their net the moment they acted on our Lord's advice, there is, in one point of view, nothing extraordinary. Many fish swim in shoals, and it is quite a matter of common experience among fishermen that one boat may take nothing while a few yards off another boat has an immense haul. The miracle consisted in the perfect knowledge that our Lord possessed as to where the fish were, and on which side of the boat to cast the net. This alone proved that He was omniscient.

Whether it is likely that seven tired fishermen, after working all night and hauling up their net and stowing it away, would stop on their way home at the advice of a stranger and cast in their net once more in broad daylight, is a point that admits of question. My own impression is that a secret power and influence went with our Lord's words, and without knowing why, the seven disciples felt irresistibly constrained to do what the mysterious stranger advised.

7.--[*Therefore that disciple...the Lord.*] The first to recognize Jesus was the disciple who first believed the resurrection--the beloved disciple John--who as usual does not give his own name. With characteristic quickness and sensitiveness, he at once felt convinced that the mysterious stranger must be his beloved Master. Love is always keen-sighted. It suddenly flashed across his mind that the advice given by the stranger, and the result of following the advice, had been precisely the same three years before. The stranger must surely know what happened then, and must have been present! The stranger must be the Lord Himself! Thoughts such as these most probably passed through his mind far quicker than we can describe them; and at once he said to his friend Peter, who was most likely the leading man in the boat, "It is the Lord."

Rollock thinks it was the wonderful catch of fish that made John know it was the Lord. "He saw in it not only miraculous power, but wonderful bountifulness and liberality," just like His Divine Master.

[*Now when Simon Peter heard, etc.*] The conduct of the Apostle Peter here described is eminently characteristic of the man. It is just what might have been expected from the disciple who went out of the ship to walk on the water on a former occasion, and drew his sword and began to smite when our Lord was surrounded by His enemies. Fervent, warm-hearted, impulsive, impetuous, affectionate, thinking nothing of consequences, acting on the spur of present feeling, he at once plunges into the sea when he hears that his Lord is on the shore, and struggles to get close to Him. Whatever we may think of his hasty behavior, we must all admire his love. Zeal for Christ deserves respect, even when it leads a man into hasty action. Enthusiasm, even when it runs to seed, is better than indifference.

We should note how Peter rushed into action the very moment he heard the words "It is the Lord." He did not wait to see, like Thomas on another occasion, but was satisfied with a word from his brother John. A single spark is enough to kindle tinder, and a single word is enough to stir a heart, when its affections are deeply concerned.

The Greek word which is rendered "fisher's coat" is only found here in the New Testament. Theophylact says it was the upper garment of a Syrian fisherman. The context seems to show that it was a sort of garment which a fisherman laid aside when in the very act of handling his nets.

When we read that Peter was naked, I see no reason why we should suppose that he was entirely without clothes. I think the meaning is that he was *comparatively* naked, having laid aside all his looser garments, as a fisherman in that hot climate naturally would in order to be able to handle

wet nets and fish with greater convenience. And when we read that he girt around him his fisher's coat, I think it simply means that he took up the loose outward garment that he wore when he went on the lake to fish and girded it tightly around his waist before jumping into the sea.

When we read that Peter "cast himself into the sea," I see no reason for supposing that he swam to land. In order to swim, it is not likely that he would put on more clothes! I rather think that the water where he and his companions were was shallow, and that he waded to land. He knew that his large fishing boat drew too much water to get near shore, and he was too impatient to wait for the slow process of launching the little boat and coming ashore in it. I cannot doubt, as he jumped into the water, that he remembered going out of the same ship on a former occasion and walking on the water "to go to Jesus."

It is only fair to say that Chrysostom thinks that Peter swam. On the other hand, Brentius, Gerhard, and Archbishop Whately (see Bengel's "Gnomon," English translation), think that he walked on the water in a miraculous manner, as on the former occasion!

8.--[*And the other disciples came, etc.*] Here we see, placed in strong contrast with Peter's action, the way in which the six remaining Apostles came to land. They came in the boat ("a little ship" is a defective translation), which means the skiff or punt that most large fishing vessels have with them. The water was evidently too shallow for the large fishing vessel to get near shore. And they came slowly, we may be sure, because for two hundred cubits (one hundred yards) they had to drag behind their little boat a net full of fish. How heavy a drag such a net makes on a little boat's progress through the water, those only know who have had experience.

It is noteworthy that we are not told that Peter got to shore at all sooner than his brethren. This point is, singularly enough, passed over in silence. But wading through deep water is slow work, and the fact that Peter put his coat on before plunging into the sea is, to my own mind, strong indirect proof that he did not swim, but waded.

It is noteworthy that Peter forgot fish, net, boat, and everything else in his anxiety to reach Christ. It was like the Samaritan woman who "left her waterpot" (John 4:28).

9.--[*Then as soon as...coals...bread.*] I cannot doubt that this verse records a miracle. Our blessed Lord made preparation for the bodily needs of His wearied disciples, and mercifully "furnished a table for them in the wilderness" (Ps. 78:19). The burning fire, the fish lying on it, the bread, were all the creation of Him who had but to will a thing and it was done. Ever thoughtful, ever compassionate, our Lord thought good at this appearing to show His poor toiling disciples that He cared for their bodies as well as their souls, and remembered that they were men. Who can tell but this miracle took place near the very spot where He had formerly fed five thousand men with a little bread and fish? I cannot doubt that the bread and fish thus miraculously created would remind the Apostles of "loaves and fishes" multiplied. Once more they saw the same miraculous

food--*bread and fish*--provided by the same Almighty power of their Lord.

The Greek word rendered "fire of coals" is only found in two places in the New Testament--here and in the account of the scene in the High Priest's hall at our blessed Lord's examination before Annas (John 18:18). It was a "fire of coals" at which the servants of the High Priest warmed themselves and before which the Apostle Peter denied his Lord. Some think that our Lord had a special object in view by having a fire of coals in this place, and that was to remind Peter of his fall. But perhaps the idea is far-fetched.

Stier argues strongly, but needlessly in my judgment, that this provision of bread and fish was made by the angels. In any case, it was a miracle, and an act of creation.

Quesnel observes: Here are miracles upon miracles. The same power that filled the net with fishes in the midst of the sea created others upon land, to show His disciples that it was not from lack of power to give them fish that Christ asked for some and ordered them to fish for them."

10.--[*Jesus said to them, Bring, etc.*] In this verse our Lord calls on the disciples to bring proof that in casting the net at His command they had not labored in vain. It was the second saying that He spoke, we must remember, on this occasion. The first saying was, "Cast the net on the right side, and ye shall find." The second saying was, "Bring up the fish which ye have now caught," with a strong emphasis on the word "now." I believe our Lord's object was to show the disciples that the secret of success was to work at His command, and to act with implicit obedience to His word. It is as though He said, "Draw up the net and see for yourselves how profitable it is to do what I tell you." Fish for food they did not need now, for that was provided for them. Proof of the power of Christ's blessing and the importance of working under Him was the lesson to be taught, and as they drew up the net they would learn it.

11.--[*Simon Peter went up, etc.*] I see no reason for supposing in this verse that Peter alone drew up the net. I think it reasonable to suppose that he is named as leader of the party and captain of the boat. But I believe that all the others helped him. The "going up" must mean that Peter went on board the little boat.

Once more we see two miracles recorded in this verse. One miracle was the singularly large catch of fish which the net contained, a quantity evidently exceeding what was generally taken at one haul. The other miracle was the singular fact that in spite of this large quantity of fish the net was not broken. Miracle on miracle passed under the eyes of the astonished disciples. Can we doubt that their minds recalled the miraculous catch of fish on a former occasion when "their net did not break," and our Lord's words, "Fear not; from henceforth you shall catch men;" and also his original saying, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men?" And can we doubt that some of them remembered the parable of the kingdom of Heaven being likened to "a net cast into the sea" and finally drawn to shore? (Luke 5:10, Matt. 4:19, 13:47.)

Concerning the number 153, we know nothing; and it is useless to speculate. Some have thought that it refers to the languages, and some to the tribes or nations of the world--each, it is alleged, about 150 in number. But this is only guesswork. Yet it is worth remembering that the strangers whom Solomon employed in building the first temple were precisely 153,600. Let the remark be taken for what it is worth. (2 Chron. 2:17.)

Pearce calls attention to a remark of Jerome that Oppian (a Greek poet of Cilicia in the second century who wrote on fishing) "has given an account of the number of fishes known to him in his time, being exactly 153." This, at any rate, is curious.

Scott makes the remark that "this catch of fish might be sold for a considerable sum of money, which the Apostles would have need of on their return to Jerusalem before the day of Pentecost." There may be something in the idea.

12.--[*Jesus said...dine.*] The object of this gracious invitation seems to me to have been two-fold. It was meant partly to show our Lord's tender compassion for the weary bodies of His disciples. Though risen, He knew and felt for their needs, and would supply food for them when hungry and fatigued. It was meant partly to show that though risen from the dead with a glorified body, He would be on the same loving terms of familiarity and kindness as before with His disciples. They need not be frightened at Him. He had not forgotten them. He did not mean to keep them at a distance. He was still one who would eat and drink with them, as a man eats and drinks with his friends. It is written, "I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with Me" (Rev. 3:20). An old divine says, "Christ loves to deal familiarly with men."

The Greek word rendered "dine" does not necessarily mean a midday meal. Parkhurst shows, on the contrary, from Xenophon, that it may mean a morning repast. As things are in England now, the translation is a peculiarly unfortunate one. Two or three centuries ago, when people dined at eleven o'clock, the unfitness of it would not have been so remarkable. The meaning evidently is, "Come and partake of a morning meal."

[*And none...dared ask...Lord.*] These words describe the state of mind in which the disciples were at this moment. They all felt convinced and satisfied that the Person before them was the Lord. They felt no doubt; and no one was the least disposed to say, "Who are you?" Nevertheless, they all felt awed and solemnized by His presence. A deep sense of the mysterious nature of their Lord, in consequence of His resurrection, filled their minds with an indefinable sensation of mingled embarrassment, reverence, and fear. Surely we can all understand this! Even when Joseph spoke lovingly to his brethren and revealed himself to them, they were "troubled at his presence" (Gen. 45:3). To sit, eat, and drink in the company of one who had risen from the dead, and appeared and disappeared after a supernatural manner, was no light thing. Who can wonder that they felt awed?

Chrysostom says: "Seeing that His form was altered and full of awfulness, they were amazed and desired to ask something concerning it. But fear and

their knowledge that He was not some other but the same, checked the inquiry; and they only ate what He, with greater exertion of power than before, created for them. For here Jesus no more looked up to heaven, nor performed those human acts, showing that those also which He did formerly were done by way of condescension."

13.--[*Jesus then came and took, etc.*] This verse describes what took place at this meal, or as our Bible calls it, this dinner. Our Lord came forward as the host and entertainer of the seven astonished disciples and gave them bread and fish, as He had doubtless often done on former occasions and perhaps at the same place. He doubtless meant to give the disciples one more plain proof that He had risen from the dead. Alone by the Sea of Galilee, in the open air, far from the fear of interruption, in broad daylight, He eats and drinks at a social meal. Could these seven men ever doubt from that day, if they had doubted before, that Jesus rose from the dead? He meant, furthermore, to encourage them to continue looking to Him, as they had done before, as a loving, familiar, sympathizing friend. Though risen, He would have them see practical proof that He could be touched with the feeling of their infirmities and cared for their bodies as well as their souls. He meant, not least, to remind them of His great miracle of feeding the multitude with a few loaves and fishes. He would freshen their memory of that wondrous miracle and show them that He would continue doing for them what He had formerly done for those who followed Him in the wilderness.

Chrysostom here remarks that we are not directly told that Jesus ate with the disciples, but from Luke's words in Acts 1:4, that it is probable He did. "How," he remarks, "it is not ours to say. These things came to pass in too strange a manner. His nature did not even need food. It was an act of condescension in proof of the resurrection" (see Gen. 18:8).

14.--[*This is now the third time, etc.*] In this verse St. John winds up the wonderful story he has just told by one of his peculiar parenthetical comments. Concerning the meaning of the expression "third time," there has been, in my judgment, much needless dispute. No doubt it is perfectly true that this was not literally the third time that our Lord was seen by anyone after His resurrection. On the contrary, we know of at least six different appearances before this one: (1) to Mary Magdalene, (2) to Joanna and other women, (3) to Simon Peter, (4) to two disciples going to Emmaus, (5) to ten Apostles together, (6) to the eleven for the special benefit of Thomas. But it is no less true that this is strictly and literally the *third time* that Jesus appeared to any number of the disciples gathered together. And it is also the *third day*, as Augustine remarks, that our Lord was pleased to appear at all. The first five appearances were all on the very same day when He rose from the dead. The sixth was a week afterward, when He appeared to rebuke the unbelief of Thomas. And the appearance recorded in this chapter, though the seventh in number, took place on the third day only, that any one on earth saw Him after He rose.

The question now remains to be considered. Has the narrative contained in these fourteen verses any deep spiritual and allegorical meaning? Were we intended to read the passage simply as a description of one of our Lord's appearances after His resurrection and an account of one of His miracles?

Or is the narrative a typical one? Is the passage intended to convey, under figures and symbols, great prophetic truths concerning the work of the ministry and the history of the Church in every age until the Lord comes? The question is a serious one and demands serious consideration.

(a) On the one hand, there is undeniable danger in the habit of seeking spiritual and allegorical meanings in the plain historical facts of God's Word. We may go so far in this direction that, like Origen and too often Augustine, we may lose sight of the primary simple meaning of Scripture and turn the Bible into a mere book of riddles, which is useless to any common man and useful only to those who have very fertile and fanciful imaginations. In fact, if we are always extracting figurative meanings out of Scripture, we may destroy the usefulness of the Book altogether. There must be some limit to the system of figurative interpretation. As a rule, I shrink intuitively from putting any sense on God's Word that is not the obvious and plain sense of its language. Hooker's words are weighty and wise: "When a literal construction of a text will stand, that which is furthest from the letter is commonly the worst."

(b) On the other hand, it is impossible to deny that all Christ's miracles were meant, more or less, to teach great spiritual truths under allegories and figures; and the passage before us is a miracle. In addition to this, we must remember that the occasion of the miracle before us was a peculiarly solemn one--that the Apostles needed certain great truths to be impressed on their attention with peculiar force, by facts as well as by words--and that, on the eve of His ascension into heaven our Lord would be exceedingly likely to remind them of their duty and their position as ministers by things under their eyes as well as by instruction in their ears. Finally let us try to put ourselves in the position of the seven Apostles on the occasion before us, and try to imagine what they thought and felt about the incidents of this remarkable morning. It is very hard to imagine that they saw nothing but a simple miracle in all that happened. I cannot think so. I think their hearts must have burned within them, and old spiritual truths, which they had heard before, must have revived in their minds with fresh power and been written on their souls as with the point of a diamond, never to be effaced.

On the whole, then, I cannot avoid the conclusion that the familiar verses before us probably contain, under symbolical facts, great spiritual truths. I think we are fairly justified in regarding the passage as a great parable or vision or allegory, intended to convey to the Church of Christ lessons for all time. And I am strengthened in this conclusion by the remarkable fact that almost all commentators of every school and in every age have taken this view of the passage. Even Grotius, cold and rationalistic as his tone of exposition too frequently is, puts a figurative sense on several circumstances of the passage. Other expositors, of a more figurative and imaginative turn of mind, go into heights and depths where I cannot pretend to follow them. I shall content myself with pointing out the more obvious spiritual lessons which I think the passage was probably meant to convey.

(a) I think that Christ's remarkable appearance to the disciples, when they were in the act of fishing, was meant to remind them and the whole Church

of the primary duty of ministers. They were doing work which was strikingly emblematic of their calling. They were to be "fishers of men."

(b) I think the lack of success in catching fish, which the disciples had until the Lord appeared, was meant to teach that without Christ's presence and blessing ministers can do nothing.

(c) I think the marvelous success that attended the cast of the net, when Christ gave the command, was meant to teach that when Christ is pleased to give success to ministers, nothing can prevent souls being brought into the Gospel net, converted and saved.

(d) I think the drawing of the net to shore at last was meant to remind the disciples and all ministers of what will happen when the Lord comes again. The work of the Church will be completed, and the reckoning of results will take place.

(e) I think the dinner prepared and provided for the disciples, when the net was drawn to the shore, was meant to remind ministers that there will be the great "marriage supper of the Lamb" at last, when Christ Himself shall welcome His faithful servants and ministers, and "come forth and serve them" (Luke 12:37).

(f) I think, besides this, that the respective positions of the disciples and Christ, when they first saw Him, may *possibly* be intended to represent the respective positions of Christ and His people during this dispensation. They were on the water of the sea. He was looking at them from the land. Just so Christ is in heaven looking at us, and we are voyaging over the troublous waters of this world.

(g) Finally, I think that our Lord's sudden appearing on shore, when the morning broke, may *possibly* represent our Lord's second advent. "The night is far spent, and the day is at hand." When the morning dawns, Christ will appear.

With these conjectures I leave the passage. They may not commend themselves to some readers. I only say that they appear to me to deserve consideration and reflection.