

THE PASSOVER AND THE LORD'S SUPPER.

IN the April issue of THE JOURNAL OF THEOLOGICAL STUDIES there appeared an article by the Rev. G. H. Box on 'The Jewish Antecedents of the Eucharist,' in which he advocated the theory that the real antecedent of the Lord's Supper was the weekly Kiddûsh and not the Passover. The theory is interesting as an attempt to derive some fresh light upon an obscure subject from Jewish institutional and religious history, a quarter which, as Mr. Box justly remarks, has been too much neglected of late, to the frequent detriment of critical conclusions. Mr. Box, however, is not quite correct in his surmise that the explanation he suggests is one which has hitherto been overlooked in all discussions of the subject, for in an article by Canon Foxley in the *Contemporary Review* for February, 1899, a similar suggestion was thrown out as to a connexion between the Christian Eucharist and the weekly Sanctification, or Kiddûsh, of the Jews¹. Canon Foxley, however, did not develop the idea; and, so far as we are aware, Mr. Box is the first to elaborate what may be called the Kiddûsh theory of the Supper.

I.

There can be little doubt that any theory which proposes to set aside the traditional view of the Church, that Jesus instituted the Supper at a paschal meal, must not merely show its own applicability to the historical situation, but first adduce very strong reasons against the tenableness of the ordinary opinion. Quite properly, therefore, Mr. Box begins his article by setting forth the grounds on which he has been led to the conclusion that the

¹ Cf. also Spitta, *Urchristentum*, p. 247; Drews, *Eucharistie*, in Hauck-Herzog, *Real-Encyc.* v 563.

Last Supper was not a Passover Supper. These grounds are all the more worthy of attention that they are fairly typical of those which have been urged, not infrequently of late, by various writers who have sought to maintain that no historical connexion can be established between the Passover and the Eucharist. In my opinion, however, it is precisely at this important preliminary stage that the weakest links in Mr. Box's argument are to be found. He does not do anything like justice to the Synoptic statements that Jesus actually observed the Passover on the night before He died.

1. In the first place, he rests his proof on the self-contradictory character of the Synoptic evidence, and in support of this refers specially to Chwolson's contention, in his *Letztes Passamahl Christi*, that the expression 'the first day of unleavened bread' has always been understood by Jewish writers, both ancient and modern, to refer to Nisan 15th, whereas the Passover lamb was always sacrificed on Nisan 14th, so that the words 'on the first day of unleavened bread when they sacrificed the Passover,' really contain a contradiction in terms. This argument Mr. Box holds to be absolutely decisive. But if all Jewish writers from the earliest times down to the present day have understood that the first day of unleavened bread was the 15th Nisan, it is very difficult to believe that in the Synoptic tradition, which comes to us from Jewish sources, so glaring and self-evident a blunder could be made. It is much more natural to conclude that the self-contradiction is due, not to the Synoptic tradition, but to a later error that has crept into the text. And this, be it remarked, is Chwolson's own view, for, though Mr. Box does not make this apparent, it is only the first half of Chwolson's argument that he quotes, while he arrives at precisely an opposite conclusion from that learned Hebrew scholar. Chwolson's point is that the phrase 'on the first day of unleavened bread' is a manifest textual blunder; and assuming that the narrative in Matthew is based upon an Aramaic source, he shows how, by the mere dropping out of one of two groups of four identical letters, which would be found in immediate conjunction in the Aramaic rendering of the statement, 'The day of unleavened bread drew near, and the disciples drew near to Jesus,' that statement would be transformed into what we now find in Matt. xxvi 17, viz. 'On the first

day of unleavened bread the disciples drew near to Jesus¹. And this simple explanation of the difficulty, he points out, is confirmed by the reading of the Sahidic Version of Luke xxii 7, which runs, 'The day of unleavened bread was near, on which the Passover must be sacrificed².'

2. Mr. Box's next ground is what he calls the 'significant' omission in all the Synoptic accounts of any mention of the paschal lamb. But is the omission in the least significant, after all? It would be so only on the supposition that the Evangelists would naturally have given some account of the progress of the Passover Supper, if it was a Passover Supper, out of which the Christian Sacrament sprang. But they had already indicated quite unmistakably that the meal to which Jesus sat down with His disciples was a paschal meal; and this being so, it was not necessary for them to give any account of the proceedings, since all Passover Suppers were perfectly alike. What they were concerned with, and what they reported, were those new and significant acts and words of Jesus by which He instituted that holy Sacrament, which sprang indeed out of the preceding paschal meal, and yet completely transcended it.

3. Further, Mr. Box draws attention to the fact that only *one* cup is mentioned in the accounts of the Supper, and that this cup was partaken of by *all*, whereas at the paschal meal each man had his own cup to drink from. But this objection, like the preceding one, appears to be suggested by a confusion between two things which, though closely related, are perfectly distinct—the Passover Supper and the Eucharist. If every participant in the Jewish meal did drink out of his own cup, that is no reason, surely, why Jesus in the institution of the Christian rite should not have taken one cup and passed it round to each of the disciples. The fact that it is called τὸ ποτήριον by St. Paul and St. Luke does not necessarily imply that only one cup was on the table, but simply designates this particular cup, from the point of view of the writers and their readers, as the familiar Cup of the Lord's Table.

¹ *Das letzte Passamahl Christi und der Tag seines Todes*, p. 11.

² Mr. Willoughby C. Allen, in a recent article in the *Expository Times* (April, 1902, p. 330), on 'The Aramaic Element in St. Mark,' agrees with Chwolson that it is probable that Mark xiv 12 and parallels present a corruption which is due to translation from the Aramaic.

4. The fourth ground of objection is the discrepancy between the Lucan account and that of the other Synoptists. But this discrepancy is arrived at only by means of the assumption that 'according to the true text' the shorter form of St. Luke's narrative of the Supper is the proper one, and that it 'is now generally agreed' that this is the case. It is hardly legitimate, however, to make such an assumption, although, no doubt, it is frequently made¹. The deservedly great authority of Westcott and Hort has certainly weighed heavily in this matter, especially with English students. But even Professors Sanday and Plummer, two eminent and careful English scholars who have recently discussed the question, while themselves deciding in favour of the 'Western' reading, do not go the length of describing it as the true text. Dr. Sanday says of the two types of text that there can be no doubt that both of them existed early in the second century, and adds, 'either may be original².' And Dr. Plummer does not go further than to maintain that, in any discussion of the accounts of the institution, the whole passage in Luke should be treated as doubtful³. In Germany, on the other hand, it is the marked tendency of recent critical opinion, especially in the case of those who have made a special study of the Lord's Supper, to go back to the reading of the *Textus Receptus* as the correct one after all. Jülicher regards the decision of Westcott and Hort as a mistake⁴, while Schmiedel describes the variant reading of the 'Western' text as 'an abnormality of no significance⁵.' And Lutheran, Neo-Lutheran, Roman Catholic and advanced critical scholars in the majority of cases now range themselves on the same side⁶, so that Professor Menzies is by no means over-

¹ Mr. Wright, for instance, in his *New Testament Problems* (p. 136), uses the very same expression as Mr. Box, 'according to the true text,' to describe the shorter reading of the Lucan narrative.

² Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*, ii 636.

³ *Ibid.* iii 146.

⁴ 'Doch halte ich die beiden Verse aus äusseren und inneren Gründen für echt lucanisch, und ihre Streichung für einen methodischen Fehler.' *Theologische Abhandlungen Carl von Weissäcker gewidmet*, p. 235.

⁵ *Protestantische Monatshefte*, 1899, Heft iv, p. 125.

⁶ Besides Jülicher and Schmiedel, quoted above, reference may be made to the following among recent writers: Cremer ('Abendmahl,' in Hauck-Herzog, *Real-Encyc.* i 33); Schultzen (*Das Abendmahl im N. T.* p. 112); Schaefer (*Das Herrenmahl nach Ursprung und Bedeutung*, p. 148); Clemen (*Der Ursprung des heiligen Abendmahls*, pp. 21 f.); Schweitzer (*Das Abendmahl im Zusammenhang mit dem*

stating the case when he says that criticism on the whole is inclined to decide against the reading adopted by Westcott and Hort¹. Undoubtedly it is true that, on grounds of pure text-criticism, there is a great deal to be said for the 'Western' reading, but the textual arguments against it are not less weighty. And when we fall back, as we are entitled to do in such a case, upon broader considerations of a contextual and psychological kind, it seems much more likely that the variant text represented by Cod. D is due to the error of a copyist, than that it is the original text of the Evangelist himself. If it is difficult, as Westcott and Hort insist, to see how a copyist, with the longer text before him, could produce the shorter form which we find in Cod. D, it seems much more difficult to explain how St. Luke himself could have given us an account of the Lord's Supper which differs so widely from the accepted tradition of his time, and especially from that form of the tradition which is represented by St. Paul.

II.

Mr. Box's negative criticism, then, is far from convincing; and when he comes to the more constructive side of his task, and endeavours in support of the Kiddûsh theory to give an explanation of the origin of the accounts of the institution of the Lord's Supper which we find in the first two Synoptists and St. Paul, he does not appear to be more successful. He admits that in the narratives of Mark, Matthew, and 1 Corinthians the paschal features are pronounced, but suggests that these features have been developed under the influence of the symbolism of the Passion. 'Christ being the Christian's true paschal lamb (1 Cor. v 7), the memorial of the Last Supper naturally developed into the Christian Haggada—the "showing" (A. V.) or "proclaiming" (R. V.) of the Lord's death till He come (1 Cor. xi 26).' But is there not here, to say the least, a possibility of circular reasoning? The fact that Christ is the Christian's true paschal lamb is assumed as the secret of the development of the idea that the Last Supper was a paschal supper. But how was it, we have to ask, that Christ came to be regarded so universally as the true paschal lamb? Was it not, above all, because under the symbols

Leben Jesu, Erstes Heft, p. 46); Berning (*Einsetzung der heiligen Eucharistie*, pp. 42 f.).

¹ *Expositor*, October, 1899, p. 243.

of the bread and wine He had set Himself, at the Last Supper, side by side with the symbols of the preceding paschal feast? This is a hypothesis quite as credible at all events as the other, and is not affected by the fact that according to St. John's narrative Jesus died at the hour when the paschal lambs were sacrificed in the temple, or by St. Paul's words, 'For our Passover also hath been sacrificed, even Christ' (1 Cor. v 7).

It is difficult, too, to see how the influence of the symbolism of the Passion, however that symbolism is to be accounted for, can have operated so powerfully within the very first Christian generation as to transform the historical tradition regarding a plain matter of fact. Mr. Box admits the marked paschal features of St. Paul's account of the Supper, though he suggests that 'the stereotyped character of the language—so unlike Paul's usual manner,' points to the conclusion that we have here, in fact, a citation by St. Paul of a liturgical formula already current when he wrote. It is extremely unlikely that there were any liturgical formulas, in the proper sense of the word, at the time when 1 Corinthians was written. But in any case, Mr. Box's supposition implies that when St. Paul wrote his narrative of the institution of the Lord's Supper, the tradition as to the paschal character of the preceding meal had already become definitely fixed. And how, we must ask, are we to account for the growth and prevalence of such a tradition at the very centre of primitive Christianity, and during the lifetime of those who had sat down with Jesus at the table in the upper room?

Still further, Mr. Box seeks to support the thesis that Kiddush and not the Passover was the antecedent of the Christian Sacrament by arguing that, both at the original institution and in the observance of the Lord's Supper in the primitive Church, the cup was passed before the bread, and also by maintaining that, in the 'bread-breaking' of the early Christian communities, the Eucharist preceded the Agape, and not the Agape the Eucharist, as is commonly supposed. With regard to the first point the New Testament evidence is certainly against him. Leaving out St. Luke's statement as doubtful, we have the Apostle Paul and the first two Evangelists all testifying quite expressly in their historical narratives of the original institution that the bread was passed before the cup. Against this it is vain to set the fact that in 1 Cor. x 16,

where he is not speaking of the order of the institution at all, Paul refers to the cup of blessing before speaking of the bread which is broken. This unusual arrangement may be held to be balanced by the fact that in the immediately preceding paragraph Paul puts the eating of the spiritual meat before the drinking of the spiritual drink (1 Cor. x 3, 4). And if a special explanation is required, it will be found naturally enough in the circumstance that he is about to trace a parallel between the celebration of the Lord's Supper and the sacrificial meals of the heathen, and that in the latter the blessing of the cup stood in the very forefront of the proceedings as the most significant act of all.

As for the view that originally the Eucharist took place at the beginning and not at the end of the common meal, it may safely be affirmed that the New Testament gives little support to it, and that it finds hardly any favour at the hands of historical scholars. Our historical critics are much divided at present as to whether or not there was at first any distinction between the Agape and the Eucharist, some holding with Jülicher and Spitta that there was no real distinction¹, others with Harnack and Zahn that there was². But those who distinguish between them almost without exception maintain, just as Bishop Lightfoot did, that the Eucharist came in as the culminating point of a preceding common meal. A quotation from Chrysostom as to the custom in his time is of little value as bearing upon the original practice, for by the fourth century the custom of fasting communion had taken firm root, owing to the gradual growth of the feeling that it was unbecoming to partake of the Eucharist after other food³. But it is difficult to see how, with the order of the original Supper before them, the apostles would place the Eucharist before the common meal. Is it not probable, too, that when Paul used the words *μετὰ τὸ δεῖπνῆσαι* (1 Cor. xi 25), he did so, not for historical reasons alone, but because the expression had a bearing upon the proper procedure in the observance of the Lord's Supper as he himself was familiar with it⁴?

¹ Jülicher, *op. cit.* p. 232; Spitta, *Urchristentum*, p. 246.

² Harnack, *Texte und Untersuchungen*, vii 2, p. 140; Zahn, *Brot und Weins*, &c. p. 20.

³ Cf. Keating, *The Agape and the Eucharist in the Early Church*, pp. 167 f.

⁴ See Meyer and Schmiedel (*Hand-Commentar*) *in loco*; cf. Keating, *op. cit.* p. 167.

III.

And now to come back to the problem of the apparent discrepancy between the Synoptic and the Johannine accounts; it seems better to be content, with Professor Sanday, to confess our ignorance than to adopt a theory which would involve the rejection of the Synoptic narratives as altogether unreliable¹. And if we are unwilling to rest in a mere confession of ignorance, there are provisional theories open to us, on the lines of a reasonable harmonistic, for which much more can be said than for any theory which has to begin by throwing aside the Synoptic evidence that the Last Supper was a Passover. To one of these, the theory of an anticipated Passover, Mr. Box refers, but says that it 'will not bear examination.' It is significant, however, that the two scholars who have most recently made a careful and scientific examination of the history of Jesus, Professor Sanday in England and Professor Zöckler in Germany, are by no means disposed to treat this theory so cavalierly. Professor Sanday's opinion on this point is of special interest, because, as his various writings show, his mind has been attracted throughout the whole course of his life as a critical student of the New Testament by the problems that surround the chronology of the Passion. And he says, in rejecting a view which at one time he was tempted to entertain, viz. that the Passover of which John speaks was not the Passover proper, but the eating of the Chagigah: 'It is more likely that for some reason or other the regular Passover was anticipated².' And Zöckler, again, adopts the opinion quite positively that the Last Supper of Jesus was 'certainly an anticipated passover-meal, resembling the ordinary Passover in form and order, but held a day before the statutory date'³.

There are still difficulties, however, attaching to this theory, although Chwolson seems to have removed the more serious objections to it⁴. And so it is interesting for those who, with Professor Sanday, are unwilling, until due cause is shown, to believe that the contradiction between St. John and the Synoptists is final to find that quite recently a solution of the problem has

¹ Hastings' *Dict. of the Bible*, p. 634.

² *op. cit.* ii 634.

³ Article 'Jesus Christus' in *Real-Encyc.* (Hauck-Herzog), ix pp. 32, 42.

⁴ *op. cit.* pp. 37 ff.

been proposed from the very quarter to which Mr. Box himself looks hopefully, the sphere, viz. of Jewish religious institutions. The Rev. Matthew Power, S. J.¹, has recently suggested a theory which, if established, would prove that while the Synoptists are correct in their statements that Jesus celebrated the Passover, St. John also is right when he represents that the Jews of Jerusalem did not keep the feast till the evening of the Crucifixion day; and yet neither was the Passover of Jesus an anticipated one, nor that of the Jews a postponed one, at least in the ordinary sense of the words 'anticipated' and 'postponed.' Mr. Power claims to have discovered the secret of the operation of that hidden rule of the Jewish Calendarists which is known as 'Badhu,' according to which the Passover never falls on a Friday (counted, i. e. according to the Jewish style of reckoning, from sunset on Thursday to sunset on Friday). Save for the furtive disturbing influence of this rule, the Passover would, of course, naturally fall from time to time on the *προσάβατον*; but, in point of fact, such a thing as a Friday Passover is unknown to Jewish history. The working of this rule, it would appear, has been kept a profound mystery by the Calendarists, in whose hands the appointment of the date of the Passover lies, the reason probably being that no Jew is willing to admit that there are any exceptions to 'the age-long boast of the children of Israel that the new moon is the sole ruler of their liturgical year.' But the rule, when discovered, is exceedingly simple. When it is foreseen that, without arbitrary intervention, the Passover would fall on the Jewish Friday, one day is added to the eighth month (Hesvan) of the preceding year, in accordance with the traditional prescription of 'Badhu,' and so the next Passover is transferred from the Friday to the Saturday. This was what happened in the year of our Lord's death. By strict chronology and in harmony with the Scriptural law, the Passover, Mr. Power seeks to prove, should have fallen that year on the Jewish Friday. But 'Badhu' forbade; and so it had been transferred by the rulers of the Jewish year to the Saturday, i. e. the Jewish Sabbath (cf. John xix 31: 'the day of that Sabbath was a high day'). But Jesus disregarded the arbitrary operation of the traditional rule, and kept the Passover on the proper Scriptural and scientific date, the real fifteenth moon of Nisan. Hence

¹ *The Anglo-Jewish Calendar for every day in the Gospels* (Sands & Co. 1902).

the Synoptists are right in affirming that Jesus kept the Passover on the night before He died, while St. John also is right in placing the general Passover observances a day later.

There are weak points in this theory, no doubt, even supposing that it should turn out that a real discovery has been made with regard to the rule 'Badhu.' But some of the difficulties that at first suggest themselves are such as have already been met by Chwolson, in his very able presentation of the case for the theory of an anticipatory Passover. On the other hand, the chief remaining objection to that theory, the fact, viz. that no ground can be discovered in Old Testament history for such a thing as an anticipated observance of the feast, if it is not solved by our Lord's spirit of freedom in dealing with the Old Testament Law, is met, according to Mr. Power's theory, by the claim that Jesus did not anticipate the Passover, but held it on the strictly legal date, while the Jewish authorities, by their manipulation of the Calendar, had transferred it beforehand to the day following.

The final explanation of the problem may still be to seek. But it seems, on the whole, more reasonable to look for it in some such direction as is suggested by Chwolson's theory when combined with Power's than in a theory which has to assume the worthlessness of the Synoptic evidence and to maintain that the Last Supper of Jesus was not of a paschal character. 'That it actually was,' says Weizsäcker, 'there is no doubt. It was on account of the Passover that Jesus went to Jerusalem that evening. It was the Paschal feast which was actually held that caused His death to be compared with the killing of the Paschal Lamb'¹.

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¹ *Apostolic Age*, ii 279.