

the disregard of Scripture, and the official discouragement of free inquiry and of the free exercise of the intellect, and that conversely the Nonconformist bodies in general appear studious to disregard the essentials of Apostolic tradition, and to set no limits upon the exercise of private eccentricity in matters of intellectual truth. It surely is not Apostolic, not in accordance with the whole teaching of the New Testament and the spirit of early Christianity, either to force people to believe any new dogma that a majority of the authorities may choose to promulgate, or to allow people, while remaining members of a Christian body, to believe or disbelieve at will, without any necessary regard to the historic creed, in which the essentials of the Christian revelation are summed up.

(To be continued.)



The Time of Communion at Troas.

BY THE REV. W. S. HOOTON, B.A.

IT is an admitted fact that in the earliest times the Holy Communion was administered in the evening, and the service at Troas, which is described in Acts xx. 7-12, might naturally be regarded as a plain enough example of the custom. Opponents of Evening Communion have generally sought for their main arguments in other directions, and into these it is not possible now to enter. But there has been manifested in some quarters a tendency to seek for a different interpretation of the passage just mentioned. Perhaps the force of the evidence which is supplied by Apostolic times in favour of administering the Communion in the evening has been felt to be so overwhelming as to call for some attempt to undermine the strong Scriptural position of those who maintain the practice.

Nothing, of course, can alter the fact that all other indications in Scripture point to the evening hour. What, then, can

be said upon the opposite side in the case of Troas? There are, apparently, three alternatives :

1. It may be questioned whether it is ever really seriously urged that St. Paul deliberately extended his discourse so that the actual Communion should take place after midnight. This argument would be so obviously against the tenor of the narrative, and so ridiculously puerile—moreover, it would be such a plain sign of weakness, and so clear an evidence of the straits to which its upholders were put—that it would not be fair to suggest that it has often, if ever, been seriously used. It must be noticed as an alternative—an alternative, too, which may have been adopted occasionally by irresponsible and hot-headed partisans—but it need not be further considered.¹

2. An interpretation which tends rather in this direction has, however, been maintained upon learned authority. The Bishop of Salisbury gives expression to it in "The Ministry of Grace" (pp. 315, 316). To avoid any possibility of unfair representation, and for the sake of clearness, it is necessary to quote the whole paragraph. "The first indication of this new arrangement," he says (*i.e.*, the transference of the service from evening to the following morning) "meets us in the account of St. Paul's travels after he had 'set in order' the troubles at Corinth, which had in some degree been connected with misbehaviour at the Eucharist. When he wrote the First Epistle to the Corinthians, the 'Lord's Supper' or Agapé still formed one whole with the Eucharist. It took place, we may presume, like the Paschal Supper, at the beginning of the meeting, and was a scene sometimes of profane and unseemly confusion. But when he came back from Greece by way of Troas, a year or two later, we find him holding an all-night service on the first day of the week, of which the breaking of bread formed a part² (Acts xx. 7-12). The day began, as St. Paul's usage elsewhere implies, at sunset on the evening of the Sabbath. The preliminary

¹ The writer may perhaps be permitted to refer to what he has said upon this point, and also upon the whole case of the service at Troas, in "Turning-Points in the Primitive Church," pp. 173-178.

² N.B.—It was the main purpose of the gathering. See ver. 7.

service, including the Apostle's preaching, continued till midnight. Then followed the accident to Eutychus and his revival : and then at last came the 'breaking of bread,' followed by the meal. Whether the 'setting in order' at Corinth had anything to do with this arrangement or not, it is striking that the only account we have of the hour of a Eucharistic service in the Acts puts it after midnight."

We must pass over, for the present, the statement that the Lord's Day began at sunset, because it forms the central feature of the next interpretation to be noticed. But we observe that the Bishop definitely admits that Evening Communion was presumably the rule prior to this date, and also that he does not go so far as to state in terms that the alteration was due to the disorders at Corinth,¹ though he would apparently incline to trace such a connection if he could feel the evidence sufficient. What he does positively suggest, however, is that it was the Apostle's definite intention to hold an all-night service, the preliminary part of which was to continue till midnight ; indeed, it seems to be implied throughout the section in which he deals with the subject that such an arrangement was probably the custom at an early period in the Church's history. Space is lacking for full quotation, but these implications are to be found on pp. 304, 310, and 312-315. Moreover, it could scarcely be thought "striking that the only account we have of the hour of a Eucharistic service in the Acts puts it after midnight," unless it be presupposed that matters were definitely arranged with a view to Communion at that time. But, it may be asked with all respect, does not this come perilously near the first alternative already considered ? The key to the whole narrative is that the sermon was unexpectedly prolonged ;² in fact, it seems to have been a conversational discourse rather than a

¹ The Bishop of London recently implied this, and drew from the Rev. Dr. Griffith Thomas in the *Churchman* (May, 1910, p. 324) the statement that "there is nothing whatever in the New Testament to justify the conclusion."

² Ver. 9 says, "διαλεγόμενον . . . ἐπὶ πλείον"—R.V., "discoursed yet longer." Dr. Weymouth renders it : "preached at unusual length."

sermon (see ver. 7, *διελέγετο*—so also ver. 9 : the Revised Version brings out the sense well in both). There was, in all probability, an element of homeliness about it. The converts, having St. Paul among them, seized the opportunity for discussing questions till late in the night. The discussion was greatly prolonged, as his departure was imminent.¹ Such a case might happen in the mission-field to-day, and can easily be imagined. The room was, perhaps, crowded and hot (see ver. 8), and Eutychus fell asleep. Indeed, the testimony of the incident in favour of Evening Communion is immensely strengthened by the fact that it is, to all appearances, not so much intended to give an account of a service as to relate the miracle performed. This seemingly undesigned evidence, throwing light upon a difficulty which was to be felt acutely after so many centuries, if not before, is very forcible.

Once again, even if it could be assumed that an all-night service had been planned on this occasion, it certainly could not be maintained that such was the custom without the strongest evidence. It might conceivably have been arranged on so interesting and special an occasion, though the trend of the narrative is distinctly in the other direction, and it would not under such circumstances be possible to regard it as a "striking" indication of any tendency with reference to the hour of the service. But a weekly gathering extending over so many hours is wellnigh incredible. The case of Eutychus itself affords some evidence that Christians, like other people, were usually asleep at such a time. And when we examine the Bishop's line of discussion, we find, indeed, several interesting suggestions of reasons why an all-night service would be likely to appeal to early Christians (especially with reference to the expectation of the Lord's Advent), but no direct evidence whatever in support of the view, except the assumption that the Troas incident is to be so understood. That is, of course, the very point under discussion.

¹ Perhaps it would not be lawful to assume, from the statement of Acts xx. 23, that the little Church realized that they had an opportunity which would never recur. But it is a tempting conclusion. Cf. ver. 25, 38.

It could not even be argued that the meeting had been arranged a few hours *earlier* than usual, in view of the departure of the Apostle in the morning; for it seems only to be urged that the case of Troas marks a transitional tendency,¹ not that the transition had already taken place whereby the service was customarily held in the early morning (as described by Pliny in his letter to Trajan). Besides, St. Paul did not leave till after daybreak (ver. 11), which would possibly have suited even Pliny's description ("ante lucem"), or at any rate would have made so early a gathering unnecessary. No doubt, as the Bishop seems to grant, the service began soon after sunset. Is it not unnatural to regard it otherwise than as a parallel case to other records of Evening Communion in Scripture?

3. The third alternative is expressed in a few words in a book lately published, "The Church of England as Catholic and Reformed," by the Rev. Canon W. L. Paige Cox. On p. 222 he says: "Amongst the Jews the ordinary day began at sunset, and the argument from the evening hour of the institution of the Sacrament really applies now to the propriety of an early-morning celebration, or at the most to one on Saturday evening, not on Sunday evening. Bishop Wordsworth, in his "Ministry of Grace" (second edition, p. 318), says: 'Of Communion on Sunday afternoon or evening there is, I believe, no trace'—that is, in the records of the Apostolic or Primitive Church."

It will be noted that the writer refers to the Bishop of Salisbury with reference to the point already reserved for discussion, and that his statement referring to the institution obviously covers other Scriptural indications of Evening Communion.

Now the main purpose of this view is to turn the argument from Scripture completely round, and to make it appear that, owing to the different methods of reckoning time, Scripture favours early Communions. The service, it is contended, was the first of the day; the day then began at sunset on Saturday;

¹ See p. 316: "The usage here exactly recorded is the natural transition to the custom described by Pliny."

it now begins at midnight ; therefore an early service is the most Scriptural. Let us examine the grounds upon which such a theory must rest, together with a few of its consequences, if correct.

It assumes that the service at Troas (like other similar gatherings) began on Saturday evening, not on Sunday ; and it may be granted that this view in itself seems reasonable, and has great authority behind it. But certain points do not seem to have been sufficiently considered.

(i.) The analogy of Luke xxiv. 36 and John xx. 19, 26, would appear to be strongly against it. The Bishop of Salisbury says (p. 312) : " The key to most of the early developments of the Eucharist is to be found in the Christian conception of the Lord's Day as a weekly commemoration of the Resurrection—that is, as a sort of minor Easter Day." Now the above passages record the first appearances of the Risen Lord to His assembled Church (*cf.* Luke xxiv. 33), and it is indisputable that they occurred on the *Sunday evening*. The Greek in John xx. 19 gives a peculiar emphasis to that fact, as the Revised Version suggests ; though it is also quite obvious otherwise, from the context. Moreover, it is wellnigh certain that they took place *after sunset*, which would be Monday, not Sunday, in Jewish eyes (though it is true that the Bishop says that St. John adopts the Roman day ; see further below). For it cannot credibly be argued that Luke xxiv. 36 and John xx. 19 refer to different occasions ;¹ and the notes of time and distance in Luke xxiv. 13, 29, 33, make it plain that the return journey of seven or eight miles from Emmaus was not begun till an hour which would practically fix the arrival at Jerusalem after dark.² When we remember the Bishop's connection of the primitive observance of the Lord's Day, and especially the

¹ Dr. Bruce and Dr. Marcus Dods (*Expos. G. T. : St. Luke and St. John*) both assume their identity, and Dr. Plummer (*International Crit. Comm. : St. Luke*) at any rate does not deny it. As the Bishop of Durham says (" Jesus and the Resurrection," p. 84), the appearance in St. Luke's Gospel is " certainly identical " with the other.

² *Cf.* Bruce, *Expos. G. T.*, Luke xxiv. 33 ; and the Bishop of Durham as above.

Holy Communion, with the Resurrection, is there not a distinct presumption that the gatherings of early Christians would have taken place at the hour when the Risen Lord Himself first appeared to His assembled servants ?

(ii.) Certain phrases in the narrative of Acts xx. seem most naturally to agree with such a presumption. From ver. 7 we learn that St. Paul intended to depart "on the morrow." If this necessarily meant "the next day" (however reckoned), it would be conclusive—for it would mean Monday; and as the departure was not long after daybreak (judging from ver. 11), the service must have been on Sunday evening, to bring it to a different day. Under Jewish reckoning, the departure was on *the same day* as the service, so that Roman reckoning alone would satisfy the conditions. But the Greek phrase τῇ ἐπαύριον in ver. 7 would probably be used in accordance with Greek ideas, whether the reckoning was Jewish or Roman; so that it would not be wise or fair to claim so easy a solution. There are, however, other things to be considered. The Bishop himself claims that the adoption of the Roman civil day was a factor in the change to Morning Communion (p. 315); he also considers that the gathering at Troas was "the first indication of this new arrangement" (*ibid.*); how, then, can he be sure that the influence of the Roman reckoning was not (under his theory) already beginning to be felt? It appears, he says, to have been recognized in Pliny's district early in the second century (p. 316)—and Bithynia was not very far from Troas, and was even farther from Rome than Troas was: is there any proof that it was not in use at a much earlier date? And would not this be natural in a Church which would probably be composed chiefly of Gentile converts?¹ Moreover, he points out that St. Luke's custom varied between the Jewish and Roman usages in describing days (p. 305). Now St. Paul's habit of speaking in the Jewish fashion (*ibid.*) would surely not be conclusive proof that the Roman day was not adopted at Troas at this time, as the Bishop seems to suggest

¹ Cf. "Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels," ii. 68.

(p. 316; see the long quotation early in this paper). St. Paul never refers to this occasion, and his custom in speaking would be merely the force of Jewish habit. But St. Luke's *variation of custom* is to some extent in favour of a growing adoption of Roman usage; and where, in face of this variation, he employs a term which seems to suggest that usage (*τῆ ἐπαύριον*, ver. 7) it cannot safely be assumed that he means readers of Acts xx. to understand the observance of the Lord's Day at Troas to have been after the Jewish fashion. Yet again: "St. John in his Gospel," says the Bishop, "shows a knowledge and acceptance of the Roman civil day" (p. 305; xx. 19 is mentioned, with other passages, in a note); and in his case, as we have seen, it is not that he had become accustomed to a mere manner of speech under Roman influence, but xx. 19, and presumably also 26, fix the hour of the meeting of the Saviour with His followers by clear notes of time. To say the least, where there is so much difference of custom, is it safe to take anything for granted without corroborative evidence, and do not John xx. and Luke xxiv. supply at any rate a very likely key to the solution of the problem? If the service was held on Sunday evening after sunset, and the Apostle left on Monday morning, everything is in harmony, and the most natural interpretation of the language of Acts xx. is satisfied.

(iii.) If, on the other hand, the Christians assembled on Saturday evening, and St. Paul left, as it would appear (ver. 11), soon after daybreak, he undoubtedly travelled on Sunday. Dean Plumptre, who took this view, was conscious that the difficulty might be felt, but disposed of it by the doubtful expedient of suggesting that the Apostle would not have held strict ideas upon the subject (quoting passages which at least require a more careful exegesis), and that, even if he and his friends had possessed such unlikely scruples, the ship would not have waited for them.¹ We cannot possibly enter now upon

¹ See his note in Bishop Ellicott's Commentary. His view is expressed in carefully-chosen terms; but if the above is not a true representation of it, it is difficult to see what is the meaning of a somewhat dangerously worded comment.

the many points of discussion that are suggested by so highly controversial an answer ; and it may be granted, perhaps, that the problem might not have been so pressing in that early age, when the transference of Sabbath observance from Saturday to Sunday may have been less complete, and when circumstances were so different. Even if we were forced to accept the theory, we should not therefore be driven to conclude that St. Paul was one of the first of those who hold an "early celebration" to be all that is required for the due observance of the Lord's Day. But, unless we were forced, many of us would prefer to doubt that an Apostle would have adopted a precedent liable to be quoted as an excuse for laxity in a later age, and also that, had he innocently done so in the different circumstances of the time, an inspired Evangelist would have been suffered to include such a fact in a history which is evidently made up of incidents selected under Divine guidance precisely because they contain high principles of action for the Church in all ages. But why should we be forced to accept it? Other reasons to the contrary have already been given, and they are strengthened by the inherent doubtfulness in this matter.

(iv.) Not the least remarkable feature of the theory is the apparent absence of direct evidence for it. It seems to rest chiefly upon this particular interpretation of Acts xx. Suggestions are made which would be likely enough if direct evidence were given ; but this is just what is difficult to discover in the Bishop of Salisbury's comments. Apparently the only reference to an ancient source of information (and this in a somewhat incidental manner) is to Socrates (H. E., v. 22), who speaks of traces of Communion "at the beginning of the night before the Sunday . . . even in the fifth century" in parts of Egypt (p. 317). Worded thus, the reference does at first sight look like a relic of an ancient custom. But how does Socrates himself word it? According to Dr. Zenos's translation : "For although almost all churches throughout the world celebrate the sacred mysteries on the sabbath of every week, yet the Christians of Alexandria and at Rome, on account of some

ancient tradition, have ceased to do this. The Egyptians in the neighbourhood of Alexandria, and the inhabitants of Thebais, hold their religious assemblies on the sabbath, but do not participate of the mysteries in the manner usual among Christians in general: for after having eaten and satisfied themselves with food of all kinds, in the evening making their offerings they partake of the mysteries." A note by the editor explains that "the sabbath" means Saturday, and that Sunday is never so called by the ancient Fathers and historians, but "the Lord's day" (*κυριακή*). Let it be carefully observed, however, that the Bishop is not strictly accurate in representing the weight of this testimony as if it could be referred to the beginning of Sunday's religious observances. It was, it is true, on "the night before the Sunday," but it is definitely regarded as *the close of Saturday's celebrations*. Socrates is comparing the custom of these particular Egyptians with that of other Churches with reference to the observance of *Saturday* as a liturgical day. The Bishop himself uses this very passage (p. 330) as an evidence of variation of custom in this respect in the Churches of Egypt, taking these particular cases as a contrast to the general Western rule of treating Saturday as a fast and non-liturgical! How can he then, on p. 317, consistently treat them as if they could be confidently regarded as a relic of an early custom which would include them in Sunday's services? It is plain that the emphasis of Socrates is on the fact that the observance in these instances was *later* than in other Churches (apparently chiefly Eastern; see "Ministry of Grace," p. 330), not that they were a few hours earlier than the Sunday celebrations elsewhere.

Were it necessary to labour the point further, it might be suggested that this solitary exception would be a slender thread upon which to hang so heavy a burden—even if it could be applied in the sense supposed. Such an exception might have arisen from other causes, especially as it is evidently considered so peculiar; and there is almost more than a suggestion that the objection to it had to do with the tradition of fasting,

to which reference will presently be made. But seeing that its very application seems to have been overstrained, what need is there to go farther?

(v.) Very briefly, it must at least be pointed out that learned authority is not unanimous in regarding the service at Troas as a Saturday evening gathering. The first article on the "Lord's Supper" in Hastings' "Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels," by the Rev. Dr. Falconer (ii. 68), assumes as a matter of course that it took place "on Sunday night."

In view, then, of all these considerations, is it not very far from certain that the Holy Communion at Troas took place on a Saturday evening? Yet, even if the point were established beyond doubt, it would not follow that it, and similar cases, fixed for all time the custom of celebrations early in the day's observances. But this would lead us to the consideration of other arguments for and against Evening Communion, upon which we have not space now to enter. The fact can therefore only be noted; and it should further be observed, with like brevity, that the theory, if true, would at least give no support to fasting Communion. It is, indeed, adopted by those who attack Evening Communion on other grounds. But there are still many on both sides¹ who hold that the main objection to the practice is that it makes fasting reception impossible.

One or two points must be noticed in conclusion. First, the theory would tell almost equally against Communion at midday. It is only a question of degree—viz., how far the time is shifted from the opening of the Lord's Day. But the Prayer-Book plainly contemplates that the Holy Communion should follow Morning Prayer (see the evidence of the Bishop of St. Albans before the Royal Commission on Ecclesiastical Discipline, vol. iii., especially Answers 21513, 21596 to 21600,

¹ The *Church Times* (May 16, 1910), referring to the *Churchman's* remarks alluded to above (upon the Bishop of London's view of Evening Communion) says: "We agree with our contemporary in its view that the real reason for communicating early is that the rule of fasting may not be broken." (The "rule," of course, is imaginary; nor was the view of the *Churchman* expressed in those terms!)

21648 to 21651). The Bishop of Salisbury suggests authority for "9 a.m. on Sundays as the 'canonical hour,' Mattins having been said previously" (p. 318). Whether such an arrangement could have been contemplated in the sixteenth century or not, it can surely be scarcely thought practicable now.

Again, Canon Paige Cox, in the passage quoted above, suggests that it might at least be possible to apply the Scripture examples to Saturday evening Communion. Does this mean that if, in view of our contention of the necessity of Evening Communion in our time, we were to arrange such services on Saturday instead of on Sunday, the opponents of the practice would be obliged to admit that we had Scriptural authority? If so, it would surely be a *reductio ad absurdum* of their objections! For which is better, a Communion when (at any rate in our altered conditions) the mind is distracted and the body wearied at the close of the busiest day of the week, or after the peace and quiet of Sunday? For it is certainly a day of comparative peace and quiet, even for those who cannot leave their homes in the morning, particularly when we remember the rush and bustle of Saturday for exactly this class of people. Indeed, they are just those who probably could not come on Saturday evening at all. Such an arrangement would, after all, only be another illustration of that bondage to tradition which characterizes so many of the objections to the Scriptural and primitive custom of Evening Communion. But would even such a concession meet with more than a most grudging assent? For is it not true that the main objection is to Communion *in the evening*? Yet there can be no doubt of the Scriptural authority for this.

To sum up, may it not be respectfully asked, even in the face of weighty and learned authority for one or two of the alternatives, Should we ever have heard of either of the three of them if there had been no special theory to defend? Once more let us press the inquiry, What is the *natural* interpretation of the incident at Troas?